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現代化的尅公：歷史、象徵，及非人能動性

Modernizing Ang Kong: History, Symbolism, and Non-Human
Agency

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Abstract

In Taipei, Taiwan, an agrarian ritual for a local deity, called Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields, has been revitalized in recent years through a partnership between local business, government, and a small temple community. The god, Ang Kong, brought to Taipei in the eighteenth century by his worshippers from Fujian, China, was an instrumental factor in shifting the commercial and political center of Taiwan from the south to the north in the mid-nineteenth century. Tea farmers relied on his protection to expand their landholdings and protect their harvests. The nineteenth century international tea trade helped propel Taiwan to development and modernity through export-led growth. After a succession of regime changes and the gradual marginalization of the deity, Ang Kong has returned to claim his place as an important founding deity of Taipei.

In the past, Ang Kong and his worshippers reshaped the landscape for commercial agriculture. Moving to the present, the post-industrial urban economy expands through real estate development. The revived Welcoming Ang Kong ritual consciously recalls Taipei's agrarian past and draws attention to its present state. Presented in this way, Ang Kong worship, like agriculture, is made into a historical appendage which is preserved as a cultural symbolic resource. In contrast, many within the temple community address Ang Kong as a person who has helped them with practical matters in their life. Their livelihoods are largely no longer based on farming but on real estate and services, and Ang Kong now intercedes mainly on these issues.

Keywords: Taiwan, folk religion, ritual, non-human agency, history, personhood, new animism, Ang Kong, Baoyi Daifu

中文摘要

近年來，一個名為「尪公巡田園」的宗教農業活動，在臺灣臺北重新得到人們的關注。這個活動是由當地企業、政府機關，以及傳統寺廟合作舉辦。在十八世紀時，來自中國福建的移民將神明「尪公」帶到臺北。早期的移民們往往會祈求尪公的庇佑，以擴大他們的土地開墾面積，並保護農作收成。到了十九世紀中葉，臺灣的商業、政治中心漸漸從南方轉移到北方，尪公信仰在當時顯得愈發重要。隨著十九世紀的全球茶葉貿易熱潮，臺灣以出口導向為主的茶產業推動了臺灣的發展，並走向現代化。經過政權更迭，臺灣當地神明一度被邊緣化，然而時至今日，尪公又重新成為臺北重要的開基神祇。

在過去，尪公和祂的信眾們塑造了農業和商業的盛況。如今，後工業時代下的城市經濟主要是透過房地產開發而活絡。近年來重新舉辦的「尪公巡田園」活動，不僅讓人們得以回顧臺北曾經的農業發展，也引起人們開始關注當地農業的現況。以這種方式呈現的尪公信仰，就如同臺北的農業一樣，成為了歷史的一部份，並以文化資產的形式保存下來。另一方面，如今仍然定期參拜尪公的當地信眾，則認為尪公是幫助他們解決生活中實際問題的神明。雖然這些信眾不再仰賴農業維生，而大多是從事房地產開發或是服務業。在他們心目中，尪公仍然能夠協助人們解決現代社會中的種種問題。

關鍵字：臺灣、民間宗教、儀式、非人能動性、歷史、人格性、新泛靈論、尪公、保儀大夫

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Research Background

In the southeast corner of Taiwan's capital city, Taipei, in an area known as 木柵 Muzha, an agricultural god survives even though Taipei's farmers have mostly disappeared. In recent years, this god, known as 尪公 Ang Kong has reappeared on the scene as an integral part of Taipei's recently recovered cultural heritage, but he has long remained a powerful agent sought out by local worshippers to help them with a variety of problems more pertinent to their livelihoods than agriculture. He is enshrined as the primary deity in a dozen or so temples around Taiwan, and a minor deity in uncounted others, but his sphere of influence is located primarily in the Taipei Basin.



Figure 1 Taipei City, Taiwan

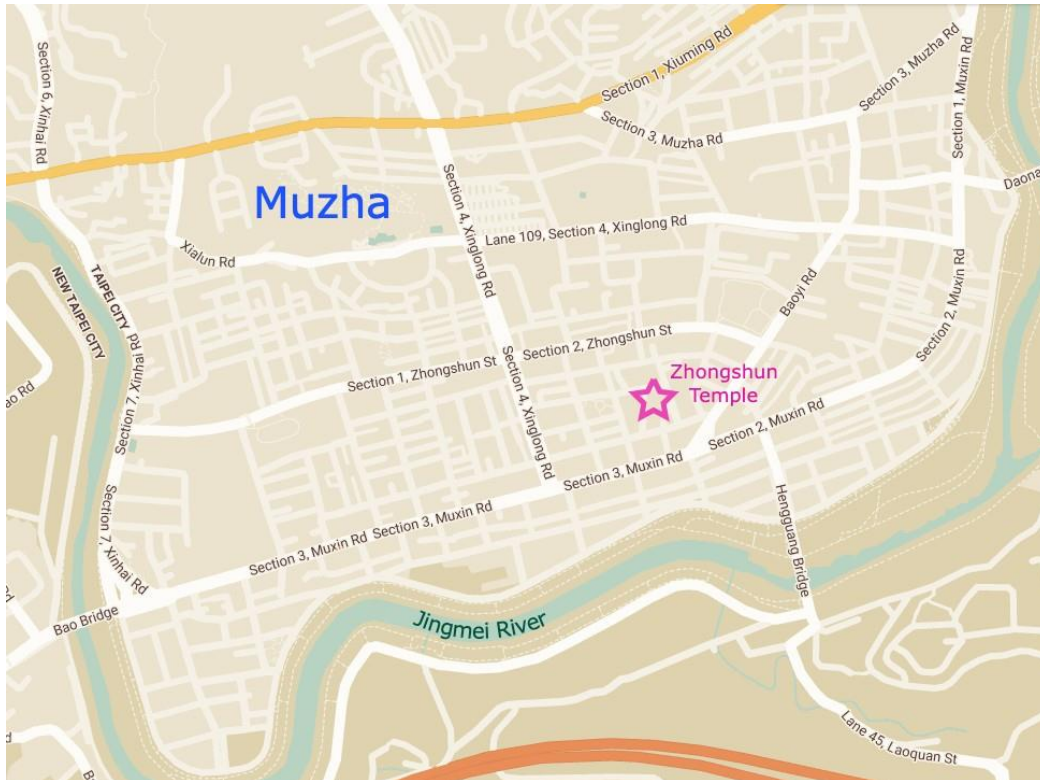


Figure 2 忠順廟 Zhongshun Temple, 木柵 Muzha (Southeast corner of Taipei City)

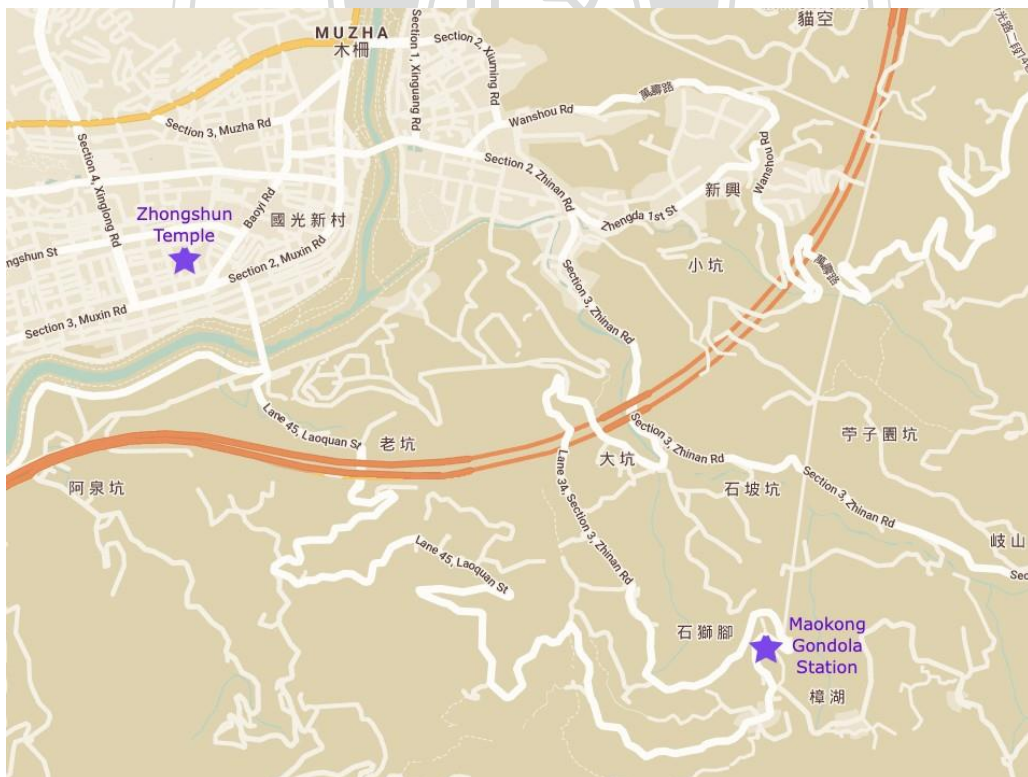


Figure 3 貓空 Maokong, Muzha (Mountainous area of Taipei City)

Although historically known as the god worshipped by farmers, Ang Kong has played many roles over the years. In the mid-eighteenth century, newly arrived migrants from China's Fujian area brought him to the Taipei basin. It was during the mid-nineteenth century that Ang Kong's cult expanded in Taiwan alongside of the development of the commercial tea industry in the North and the influx of its associated migrant workforce who mainly arrived from Anxi County. It was due to this that the practice of Ang Kong worship in Taiwan became oriented toward a general public rather than remaining strictly a family affair.

During the beginning of the tea boom, slope land which was suitable for tea farming had not yet been claimed or developed by Han migrants for commercial agriculture. As a result of the desire for this newly profitable land, land grabbing and conflict between settlers and Atayal and other aboriginal groups or even other Han migrant groups was common. Ang Kong's earliest miracles in Northern Taiwan are nearly all related to conflicts between Atayal people and Han farmers. These were not the only ethnic conflicts on Taiwan as battles between migrant groups from different points of origin in China marked the frontier period with violence. When migrant groups from different counties or provinces in China fought each other, it was a common practice to bring their god statues into battle with them, burn or otherwise destroy each other's temples, and expect back-up in battle from their god's spirit soldiers (Lamley 1981). Ang Kong's procession into the tea fields today, while officially known as "Welcoming Ang Kong into the Tea Fields" still recalls this martial character, as the formal name of the ritual is 放軍 *fang jun*, or stationing soldiers. The fact that these Ang Kong-worshipping migrants ended up with so much land in Northern Taiwan led to an increase in prestige for the god, evidence of his power.

French colonial scholar Paul Mus identified some characteristic features of development in the region he termed Monsoon Asia, specifically that worship patterns of local cults had a

cadastral and territorial function and were governmental, and that imperial states co-opted their forms and power (Mus 1976 [1933]). Courtney Work investigates the way that this Monsoon Asian development is conceived through the lens of modernization; political-economic systems relied on harnessing or negating spiritual power, which colonial scholars went to pains to strain into a separate system known as religion. The local cults, although buried under layers of empire-building and modernization projects, still exert power over local life (Work 2019). Through the deity, Ang Kong, migrant settlers navigated and negotiated their power over the land and its residents, and through or with him, they also interacted with the productive power of the land and global markets. Mus showed the spirit beliefs of Monsoon Asia to be connected to land tenure and the land as a space for sustenance and accumulation, as a resource to build civilizations (1976 [1933]). The connection with the god of the land (whatever appellation that god was known by) was a deployment of legitimacy in establishing the claims of settlers. In the case of Ang Kong, his abilities and purpose shifted to support the new political-economic circumstances, and this can explain how in different regions the god is known for different actions; in Kinmen Island, Ang Kong was responsible for keeping pirates at bay, but in northern Taiwan, Ang Kong is a frontier god, responsible for claiming and purifying land for his worshippers, expelling the unclean energies of the former residents (Lin 2007). Stories of miracles performed that solidified the claims of settlers made Ang Kong's status and personhood apparent. Not long after clearing frontier land for tea farming, the fields were stricken with pests, and Ang Kong was able to clear the fields of these pests. This act spread his renown and gained him many devoted worshippers all over Northern Taiwan.

Ang Kong was the god of frontier newcomers as well as people with large, established families. Power was circulated at a distance from the formal government. Additionally, at the

time when the miracle in the pest-stricken tea field occurred, the formal Qing Dynasty government in Taiwan was at its weakest point after suffering losses from the Opium Wars. The Qing Dynasty did attempt to introduce some modernization-oriented reforms at the end of its rule over Taiwan, including banning certain rituals which were deemed to be too violent (Weller 1987). However, their influence was weak, and Ang Kong remained an integral part of the local political-economic system. Not long after this period, the Japanese government colonized Taiwan, and although they were initially lenient towards local practices, they later began to try to reduce and alter ritual activities (Dawley 2019). The Nationalist-ruled Republic of China government which took over in 1945 instituted even more drastic changes, limiting the amount of money that could be spent on rituals and reducing the number of rituals that were performed (Katz 2003; Hatfield 2019). Since Taipei was the center of the government, Northern Taiwan felt the full force of these rules. Rituals for Ang Kong were among those targeted for elimination and reduction (Ahern 1981). The promotion and adoption of conventional agriculture also made Ang Kong's visit to the tea fields unnecessary, so many farmers stopped requesting the ritual, which had been a contract service.

Rituals decreased, and local networks were drained of much of the power and capability to influence their territories. The Nationalist government was able to monopolize much of social and political life in Northern Taiwan, but not totally. Local influence slowly began to creep back into the formal government around the time of Taiwan's democratization. After years of suppression, worship of minor spirits, such as the local, unknown dead exploded in the 1980s (Weller 1987). At the same time, the then Taipei mayor, Lee Teng-hui, headed a plan to revitalize the Maokong, Muzha's tea farming region, which was in deep decline more than a

century after its period of prosperity. There was a slow buildup toward a trend of Taiwanization of politics, economy, and culture. This all set the stage for Ang Kong's return.

In 2006, a long-abandoned ritual for the god called “Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields” was first revitalized as a joint project between several groups, but in the beginning, it was a part of a revitalized ritual for another, more popular goddess, 媽祖 Mazu. It was not until 2016 that Ang Kong became the primary focus of the event. A temple to Ang Kong in Muzha, called 忠順廟 Zhongshun Temple, agreed to organize the ritual. The district and city government helped in marketing and promoting the event to the public and provided some resources and funding. An association known as the 木柵青農會 Muzha Young Farmers' Association, primarily made up of the adult children of Maokong tea farmers and roasters, organized rest areas where they were able to promote their tea and other products. Tourists from all over Taipei were able to join the ritual, which took the form of a roundtrip walking procession from the Muzha valley up into the mountains and back. While hundreds of pilgrims walked alongside, temple volunteers carried the oldest Ang Kong statue into small temples, tea fields, and temporary roadside altars along the way.

This revitalized procession aims to memorialize a historical form of worship from an enchanted pre-modern time that is thought to no longer exist, a simpler time when people believed that a god was capable of repelling pests and protecting disputed territory. The present ritual is not performed for these reasons, to provide pest relief, but it is considered to work as a generic blessing of peace and safety. On the one hand, this revitalization is seen by some participants as legitimizing a local practice, of righting a historical injustice in which rituals, local customs, and relationships were forcibly suppressed. On the other hand, it can also be seen as creating a stricter division between the pre-modern past and modern present, since many of its

organizers consistently point to its memorial function, a preservation of heritage. More than that, it also reflects a long-standing trend within the move toward localization, that of harnessing any markers of locality for wealth creation through the culture industry. The current Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual has these functions and these features, but within Zhongshun Temple, Ang Kong himself never fully lost his power and personhood in the community. His power is not tied to a single action, like ridding tea fields of pests, and so he has remained and continued to act in other ways to help local people, in ways that are more relevant to their lives. Modernization is tied together with disenchantment as co-processes, but in the selective modernization that occurred in Muzha, the zones of enchantment and disenchantment have shifted. While it could be argued that tea agriculture was disenchanted as a whole and that many tea farmers, due to the use of conventional pesticides, began to adopt a secular view of Ang Kong worship, other Ang Kong worshippers began to see evidence of his power in the real estate and development boom that has been taking place in Muzha for the last several decades. The renewal of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, which focuses on a more completely modernized space, draws attention away from the fact that those who worship Ang Kong today have almost the same relationship to him and the economy that those memorialized nineteenth century tea farmers did. Ang Kong worship is better understood as a series of shifting enchantments. When one becomes irrelevant, another becomes significant. Worshippers continue to see Ang Kong as an actor who has strong protective power and influence over his domain and has helped them miraculously prosper, and where this influence makes itself felt changes along with the material basis of people's lives.

Problem Statement

An important characteristic of modernity is the creation of a definitive break between the traditional past and the modern present. Once a line is crossed into the present, the systems of the past can never be recovered. Modernization is the process of creating this strategic division. In modernization campaigns in Taiwan during the late Qing dynasty, Japanese colonial era, and early Chinese Nationalist (KMT) rule, family structure, housing arrangements, and ritual practices were among some of the targets of state modernization campaigns. A division between traditional and modern practices was institutionalized. Whereas, in the distant past, it may have been common for gods to appear on earth and influence events, as a human being or as a giant who appears in the sky, in a modern period, these events should not occur. A goal of modernization is the process of gradual disenchantment, in which practices such as deity worship are revealed as false beliefs and the system called religion is exposed as a false science. However, in practice, ritual and customs were forcibly suppressed, rather than atrophying because they were no longer necessary.

According to early theorists, modernization and disenchantment are co-processes which should proceed hand-in-hand, but this has rarely happened anywhere in the world, and the narrative of disenchantment has proven more powerful than its reality (Josephson 2017). More than a century after the modernization process was first set in motion, total disenchantment has not occurred. In Taiwan, many, if not most, people still appeal to gods for direct aid, or see the presence of gods and spirits in the workings of events or within objects. At the same time, certain ritual expressions in Taipei have disappeared or lessened. Some of these disappearances are top-down, due to a legacy of governmental interference, as Taipei has been the seat of the government for more than a century and has borne the brunt of policies targeting the reduction of

ritual performance and expense. Others have been driven from the bottom-up, and they are responses to systemic changes in the environment and the economy that make previous ritual expressions obsolete; rituals for agriculture make little sense in an urbanized area. The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was revitalized out of a desire to correct a previous government's unjust repression of ritual and local life in Taipei, but largely out of a desire to use an authentic local custom in order to boost tourism in the tea farming area in the mountainous area of Muzha. This area, known as Maokong, is one of the last remnants of the city of Taipei's agricultural past, and it has been part of the state's concern since the 1980s.

The loss of an agricultural ritual, that of Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields, appears as a casualty of modernity. Reviving it is to retain a bit of local color in an area which is slowly becoming a mere suburb of Taipei. This is the approach taken by the local government workers who help to spread knowledge of this practice to tourists and newer residents. It also exemplifies a secularist approach that marks a ritual and worship practice as both merely a cultural attraction and something no-longer alive which needed to be resuscitated.

This ritual was revived in joint cooperation between the local government, a single Ang Kong temple, and a coalition of tea farmers. Whereas the logic of the revived ritual is that disenchantment has occurred, with the new version nostalgically recalling a long-gone past, according to participants and temple-goers, disenchantment has never occurred. Rather than the loss of agriculture translating into the loss of an agricultural god, Ang Kong has instead been integrated into a modern, service-based economy. What the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual recovers is a particular, historical expression of Ang Kong's power, as if all that is in the past and no longer has any influence. This is the creation of a fiction that serves the narrative of modernization. In the temple in the present day, Ang Kong's power and agency remain intact,

and he remains a person who acts in the social sphere, but he mainly deals with modern problems. Because the immediate concerns of Muzha's residents relate to their shops and local businesses as well as property development, most of Ang Kong's present-day acts address these concerns. Instead of fading away, along with agriculture, he, like the people he supports, has developed to deal with new concerns.

Previous scholarship on folk customs and the so-called popular religion of Taiwan categorizes Taiwanese society into two sets of people holding two separate attitudes, one an educated elite who take the god to be merely symbolic, perhaps a historical model of loyalty that people should emulate, and the other a larger mass of non-elites who see the god as an actual influential agent who exists in the world in a real way, not just as a concept, but as a person who can do things that change the way they live (Weller 1987). This division is secularizing, dividing society into fully modern elites educated in the formal school system and possibly abroad, and non-elites who gain their education and socialization within the family and their neighboring area, the former naturalists and the latter animists. In the present, in a highly educated society of people working in an increasingly complex economy, this division is no longer tenable. Markers like education and employment are not indicators of a person's behavior towards spirits and gods *in all situations*. The enduring presence and importance of spirits and gods in the lives of people whose livelihoods and living environments have changed drastically after industrialization and continuing economic development has been a puzzle throughout Asia. Some researchers still find examples that show how social and environmental change leads to a deity's stepping back from the sphere of influence, which is possibly the first step toward total disenchantment, or at the very least a more abstract understanding of the gods (Lutz 2021).

While sweeping societal changes have led to a reduction in Ang Kong's influence in the field of agriculture, which the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual addresses, these same changes have also lessened the impact of agriculture on his worshippers' daily lives. Ang Kong remains involved in his worshippers' social lives, not because they are uneducated, poor, or otherwise marginal and powerless in society, but because they maintain a relationship with him by attending rituals and temple events or communicating with him in the temple or in their homes through the act of 拜拜 *bai bai*, a ritual of direct communication with a god. His agency and personhood is established through a continual practice of communication, rather than being a product of faith or belief, which is irrelevant. Ang Kong has adapted to a modern context to help with modern problems, but, unlike the dictates of modernization and disenchantment demand, he has not become only a symbolic resource. Where this does occur, where he has been rendered symbolic, such as in the context of parts of the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, it is due to a change in a form of address and a change in interaction. It is action and communication which makes the god a social person, and in the absence of this, he becomes abstracted and symbolic.

In addition to explaining the background by which the disenchantment and rationalization of agriculture took place in Taiwan, a corresponding movement took place, driven from the bottom-up, which is the enchantment of real estate property development. Disenchantment was part of a top-down modernization process that was executed successfully in the practice of agriculture in Maokong; it was so successful, in fact, that a local ritual performed since the beginning of agrarian development in the area died out. Today, conventional farming techniques are considered to be the only way to grow tea, even by the youngest generation of farmers. Tea as a crop gradually lost importance as a resource, while the land on which these crops were grown or which the farmers kept for their residences became a far more important resource. Real

estate, rental income, and property development became central to the lives of many of the farming families in Muzha, often pioneering families who held a great deal of land. Ang Kong's worshippers use the prosperity they were granted through their activities in this market in order to regularly host elaborate rituals for him. The shifting nature of enchantment provides the key reason for the endurance of Ang Kong worship. Although the revitalized ritual focuses on an instance of disenchantment in the history of Ang Kong worship, continuous shifting enchantments are what has kept it alive for more than a thousand years and in many disparate geographic locations, among people with widely varied livelihoods.



Literature Review

Popular Religion in Taiwan

Relations between humans and spirits have been mostly shelved in the category of religion, with the non-literary tradition being labeled popular religion. In Taiwan, textual traditions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and even Confucianism have been defined in terms of their difference from the so-called popular religion, which was generally held to be a separate system; categorization was the main focus of early debate (Freedman 1974; Wolf 1974). However, following the thinking of Mus and Work, among others, the difference is not necessarily in form or content but in degrees of power and legitimacy; elite traditions were granted formal status as religions and peasant traditions were relegated to the status of custom (Mus 1975[1933]; Work 2019). Even participants of popular religious rituals were well aware of that, as in the example provided by American anthropologist Emily Ahern in which one man equated rituals for Ang Kong with the public ceremony of the Republic of China's Double Ten holiday, which celebrates the founding of the state (Ahern 1981:417). Formally organized religions such as Buddhism and empire-building political configurations absorbed local forms of power in order to overtake them. Much of the ritual activity in Taiwan is still conceived of in terms of popular religion even as it intersects with international politics, takes on aspects of the service economy, and is steered by a formalized leadership, such as a chairman and a board of directors.

Early English language field studies (drawing on data from mainly rural areas in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1960s) often focus on the dominance of the imperial bureaucracy in the everyday life of the peasantry. According to these early studies, villagers and ordinary people view the gods as bureaucrats (Wolf 1974:133). Their religious system is a transposed underworld

bureaucracy which helps them understand and navigate the real bureaucracy (Ahern 1981:97; Gates 1997). Gods are authority figures and, for the more sophisticated, exemplars of morality to contemplate (Weller 1987:127; Feuchtwang 1972:66). A peasant underclass was seen as dominated by forms of power that they could not control and only vaguely understood. This interpretation of the function of religious systems, as mystifications of political power, was the favored interpretation of scholars influenced by the work of French sociologist, Émile Durkheim (Sangren 1988).

English language references to the Ang Kong cult are found mainly in this early literature on popular religion. Notably, the two scholars who studied the Taiwanese Ang Kong cult in some depth and whose field sites were both located around the Taipei basin, Ahern and German anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang, came to the same conclusion that the relationship between gods and worshippers was directly analogous to the relationship between imperial bureaucrats and their subjects (Ahern 1981:97; Feuchtwang 2001). Ahern explained that villagers ritually interacted with an imperial bureaucracy, stating that the “religious system mirrored the bureaucratic political system with uncanny sociological accuracy” (Ahern 1981:92), and Feuchtwang traced the spatial organization of deity cult systems, evidently organized in a state-like way (Feuchtwang 2001:65).

Beyond these two scholars, many scholars who did foundational fieldwork in Taiwan or with Chinese imperial archives drew similar conclusions (Wolf 1974:133). Not only were gods considered to be as powerful as imperial officials, but they were also conceived of as being exemplars of moral attributes promoted by the state. As such, they were constant reminders of ethical ideals, and the worship of these deities was a way for a person to affirm their commitment to living up to these ideals (Weller 1987:127). There was this division drawn between a (real)

state of affairs, in which deities were promoted among a populace for the purpose of molding them into obedient subjects, and the (naïve) way that the populace saw them, as close or distant relatives who could speak with them directly or intercede in their lives. Rituals and communication with deities, then, always stood in for something else.

However, a divinized relationship with power and resources can exist independent of a state. Better to view the state as having adopted elements from diffuse ritual life rather than viewing religious systems as a copy of the state created for or by the dominated. In *On Kings*, American anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and David Graeber develop this thesis in depth, mapping a process in which over time, a society's conception of order and hierarchy can develop into something which looks like the contemporary state. They show that state-making is a process which appropriates relationships between humans and gods: "what usually passes for the divinization of human rulers is better described historically as the humanization of the god" (Graeber and Sahlins 2017:3). Work highlights this in a specific case, describing Cambodian *neak ta*, spirits which are the controllers of resources such as land and water, spirits which announced themselves to settlers in the absence of fully formalized land claims (Work 2020). These beings and these relations exist independently of the state or institutional civilizing religion, such as Buddhism, but are overtaken – this same process took place in Brahmanic India and Imperial China (Work 2019).

The division of local power structures into the separate domains of politics, economy, and religion is a long-standing project of modernization. When the Republic of China (ROC) wanted to modernize Taiwan, they targeted ritual as a source of waste (Katz 2003; Hatfield 2019). The bureaucrats' dream was to replace the messiness of a local society which arranged itself around a temple with neatly organized development aided by state-controlled cultural

centers (Katz 2003:404). Historian Prasenjit Duara shows the way that modernization with disenchantment was consciously adopted in the ROC's early attempts to restructure and control rural society, and that these ideas were largely imported by way of foreign advisors. In the early twentieth century, when the ROC ruled over China, they targeted the gods directly, turning temples into schools and offices for government staff, replacing the authority of the gods with the authority of the state (Duara 1988:153). Japanese modernization efforts in Taiwan also targeted ritual and promoted a form of Buddhism with a rationalized management structure (Dawley 2019). In these efforts, there was an attempt to secularize society, which took the form of draining the power from local cults and turning them into symbolic memorials, when they were allowed to remain. This process drew on a concept of disenchantment and modernization as understood by early German sociologist Max Weber, a progressive outcome of rationalization (Weber 1991). This ideology was consciously imported and adopted into the Chinese world by revolutionary modernizers (Van Der Veer 2014). It has, ever since, had an uneasy foothold there, but it is not an irrelevant concept since it was championed by early modernizers in the ROC and the Japanese modernizers who made it their project on their colony of Taiwan (Dawley 2019).

Autopoiesis, Personhood, and Non-Human Agency

Since metaphorical or symbolic interpretations of ritual have fallen out of fashion, another analytical tool has taken their place, that of centering the act of ritual itself. A popular formulation of this orientation is to focus on what ritual *does* rather than what it *means*. Resulting from this orientation, there has been more scholarship focusing on how communication and ritual order a social sphere, including non-humans as actors and persons within that sphere. This orientation can be referred to as anthropology's "ontological turn" or "new animism." A notable influential scholar focusing on the theoretical side of this trend is

French anthropologist Philippe Descola, who theorizes four basic ways that people define society and determine who is a member of society, two of which are animism and naturalism (Descola 2013). For a naturalist, there is a strict division between non-human nature and human culture, and for animists, society contains many non-human actors. In the field of science and technology studies, French sociologist Bruno Latour had claimed that naturalist society had long contained many non-human actors (Latour 1993). Later scholars used field studies from multiple areas of the world to more fully understand a previously over simplified idea of “animism,” a worldview shared by forest dwellers, herders, and technologically advanced city residents (Kohn 2013; Ingold 2011; Jensen and Blok 2013). Focusing on urban Taiwan, American scholar Teri Silvio has engaged with Descola’s work to analyze the close connection between fans of popular culture and the so-called popular religion, deciding to name the Taiwanese practice of worshipping idols “analogism” (Silvio 2019). Focusing on rural and urban Taiwan, Taiwanese anthropologist Lin Wei Ping has drawn from English social anthropologist Alfred Gell’s theory of non-human agency to illustrate how the god statue is rendered as a social person, from its conception in the mind of the sculptor to its one-month celebration (equivalent to the one-month celebration for a baby) to the way that those close to gods consider them as relatives (Lin 2015). These have been the few scholars working in Taiwan who have engaged with this new theoretical lens and shown how non-humans have a clearly defined, valid, and important role in local society.

Many scholars who also seek to account for the role of non-humans in social systems have turned to the concept of autopoiesis and systems theory. For example, Japanese anthropologist Ishii Miho and German anthropologist Guido Sprenger both apply the theory of autopoiesis (which Miho calls self-poiesis) to overturn the idea that interaction with non-humans,

such as gods and spirits, in a ritual context is the product of a set of *beliefs* (Sprenger 2017; Miho 2012). Instead, they focus on the emergence of relations with the divine through concrete and observable actions as well as communication about those actions, putting these beings back into the social sphere. Their arguments draw on the theoretical works of Bin Kimura, Hideo Kawamoto, and Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann's systems theory, a universal theory for analyzing complex, modern societies, does not necessarily exclude non-humans from the social system. The concept of autopoiesis, which was drawn from biology, refers to the way that the functioning of a system produces itself; its end product or goal and the path to reach that goal are the same (Luhmann 2013). "Social systems use communication as their particular mode of autopoietic reproduction" – social systems produce communications at the same time as they are produced by a layering of communications (Luhmann 1986:2). Social systems, then, are not spheres full of a specific type of *actor*, which was the basis of the naturalist culture-nature divide which allowed mainly humans the role of creating culture; rather, their core is certain types of interactions. In systems theory, there is room for actors beyond the human, and the internal consciousness of any participant is irrelevant to their inclusion in a social system. Sprenger points to the systematic nature of personhood and social inclusion by showing how exchange (through communication or action) renders the non-human as persons: "Objects and animals are persons to the degree that they are involved in the same exchange networks that humans or spirits are. By being involved in the relationships which constitute humans as persons they, almost by necessity, acquire degrees of personhood" (Sprenger 2015:84).

Miho puts it similarly in her statement that "the formation of divine worlds does not necessarily depend on people's *beliefs* in religious powers or in magical things. Rather, divine worlds are created through concrete relations and actions among persons, things, spirits, and

deities” (2012:372). Miho’s divine worlds point to a social system which can include non-human actors. Both authors point to the observable, which Miho calls “acting with,” as a way to understand how persons are conceived and enter into a social system (Miho 2012).

In this way, modernity and disenchantment can be sidestepped; even as people consciously adopt a naturalist view through uniform, mass education, that does not necessarily lead to the destruction of a society which could be called “animist” if that form of sociality is the result of action rather than belief or internal cognition. Often, modern activities are enfolded into an already existing social sphere rather than overtaking it totally; in cases in Southeast Asia, people whose environment and ways of living had changed due to development, often stated that the spirits of mountains or rivers that were previously very active, had departed. That was a more common interpretation of change rather than a statement that they had erroneously believed in spirits before but were now enlightened with the truth (Johnson 2020; Lutz 2021). Additionally, it could also explain why modernization campaigns focus so much on action itself (by destroying temples in early Nationalist China or, in modern Taiwan, denying certain ritual expressions), and the reworking of ritual communication into ritual memorialization. The creation of an alternate, naturalist sociality requires the denial or elimination of certain social actors.

On Ritual Revival

When disenchantment by destruction fails, the next stage is renegotiation through ritual revival. After so much time and effort expended on destroying rituals’ wasteful expenditure, the state in Taiwan has seemingly reversed its course and now supports rituals as profit-generating tourism magnets and saviors of traditional industries (Chang 2017). This is reflected in the literature, with cultural tourism utilized to correct uneven urban development in Taipei; temples, and their associated ability to host large events and mobilize large groups of people, are targeted

as resources (Lin and Hsing 2009). Previously, they were slotted for total replacement; the Council of Cultural Planning and Development aimed to promote state-controlled centers which could perform the role of temples inside of villages and neighborhoods (Katz 2003:404). Now, in contrast to total destruction and replacement, there is an attempt to coordinate *with* local networks of power, ideally inserting the state's agenda into locally produced rituals. With a change in focus toward the commercialization of ritual itself (rather than rituals being used to aid the commercialization of another industry), ritual is produced as spectacle for those who do not seek to have any long-lasting connection to it or the area and the group of people hosting it.

This can be seen in Taiwanese rituals which are preserved or renewed deliberately as the result of political and economic considerations, which take advantage of this new orientation. For example, the Sea God Ritual was revitalized and recreated in order to publicly create an ethnic persona for the Sakizaya people of Eastern Taiwan (Huang 2015). In order to be classed as an ethnic group in Taiwan, a group needs to have certain cultural markers, such as a costume, a dance, a song, or a ritual. In order to meet the government requirements, the Sakizaya hired a local fashion designer to create a native costume and enlarged and emphasized their own ethnic identity in the performance of a renewed Sea God ritual, which had, for some villages, stopped being performed as people moved away from fishing as their primary commercial or subsistence activity. Ethnic distinction was utilized by the group partly to enhance their ability to receive government funding but mainly in order to attract novelty seekers. This is something of a trend. For other Taiwanese aboriginal groups, "ritual" becomes an ideal form and changes to meet popular taste; a Bunun group hired choreographers to help them add dance moves to traditional music in order to increase the appeal of their public-facing ritual performances; they themselves, being high mountain dwellers, did not dance (Yang 2011a).

Outside of Taiwan, in other parts of Asia, studies on ritual revival also highlight the connection to politics and income from tourism. In Hong Kong, the Chaozhou Hungry Ghost Festival gained UNESCO World Heritage designation entirely for political reasons, since Hong Kongers of Chaozhou heritage largely supported the Chinese Communist Party; it was one of many similar festivals held at the same time, but it was elevated to a higher status as official culture (Chan 2018). In China, the government has attempted to reshape ritual activity to fit into its own agenda and marginalized the actual participants, and the government strategically uses ritual revival or preservation in order to reward their supporters. In another case in Hongtong, a local ritual procession known as Receiving Aunties was designated as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH); this title was applied for by local state officials who still actively viewed it as “backwards superstition.” This view was a requirement of their position as mouthpieces and representatives of the Chinese Communist Party which has historically been anti-religion (You 2020). There remains a difference in the official position on ritual and the perspectives of those involved; designating rituals as ICH does not mean that the government has changed its stance and now reflects the will and activities of the populace. Studies from Japan focus on the economic logic behind ritual revival. In a study of the Namahage ritual designated as ICH, a village was entirely overrun by the mass tourism that this designation inspired. The ritual itself was renewed as a spectacle performed for the sake of entertaining tourists and generating tourist revenue to revitalize the countryside village that had been performing it (Foster 2013).

Ritual revival in Taiwan negotiates politics at the national and local levels while they are also reconfigured as wealth generators rather than wealth facilitators. The pilgrimage circuit inspired by the Xingang’s Fengtian Temple in midwestern Taiwan was able to channel income from the cities into the countryside and became an example which policymakers have been

inspired to apply broadly (Chang 2017). The Bao-an Temple festival in Taipei was also lauded as a successful example of urban regeneration due to a harmonious “community-temple-state relationship,” in which an area’s temple is shown to have an in-place administrative structure to host a large festival, which the government only needs to join, rather than building from the ground up (Lin and Hsing 2009:1338).

In all of these examples, what is called revival or regeneration is actually the latest stage in negotiations between the state and local communities. No longer straightforward repression and resistance, these collaborations still maintain a difference in perspective and meaning for those involved. Whereas, in many of these policy-oriented accounts, rituals offer an in-place network of power and money which governments can tap into, there is still enough difference in power and perspective between the groups to counter the seamless merging which the term “public-private partnership” implies. It is really a collaboration between two different publicly oriented entities, a meeting of two differently structured political groups. A statement by one of the Bao-an temple area interviewees echoes what I heard frequently from the Maokong tea farmers: “I think the most important problem lies in that they [local government] give what they want rather than what we need” (Lin and Hsing 2009:1336).

Methodology

All of the data collected which is analyzed in this thesis comes from direct participant observation during rituals held at Zhongshun Temple or around Muzha, contemporary and historical written documents regarding Ang Kong worship and the Qing dynasty period tea farming boom, and structured and unstructured interviews with representatives of my three core groups of concern: tea farming and processing business owners in Muzha, temple goers and temple staff, and the local government workers and historians who were involved in joint projects with Zhongshun Temple to revitalize and preserve the rituals of Ang Kong worship. Since all of these groups represented the public or primarily faced the public, I did not want to conflate a publicly oriented temple practice as representing the entirety of a ritual system. Apart from these three groups, many Taiwanese co-workers, classmates, teachers, and friends (who often grew up in other parts of Taiwan) offered their own experiences of ritual practices and opinions about them.

I attended all the largest, major rituals held for the public at Zhongshun Temple from March 2020 – April 2021. This time period coincided with the coronavirus pandemic outbreak, so at times, activities were conducted on a small scale or canceled entirely. I joined the 中秋節 mid-Autumn Festival, 中元普渡 Ghost Month Festival, 祭解 *tsè kái*, 圓斗法會 *yuandou fahui*, and several of the bi-monthly scripture readings, among many others. I also joined other events that Zhongshun temple was a part of, such as 遶境 *rao jing* processional tours organized by nearby temples. The first Welcoming Ang Gong to the Tea Fields ritual I attended in 2020 was influenced and semi-closed to the public because of the coronavirus pandemic (considered to be an exceptional circumstance), but the 2021 ritual was open to everyone. Although the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was my main point of focus, since it included all

three core groups working together and beside each other, I also attended an exhibition for Ang Kong worship in March 2020, organized by the local government and heard from the staff and local historians there. At a farmers' market held at Zhongshun Temple in 2020, I was able to connect with members of the 木柵青農會 *Muzha Qingnonghui* Muzha Young Farmers' Association, who were active in joining and promoting the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, and interview members of their organization, in order to gain some of the young tea farmers' perspectives on this joint cooperation and their own concerns and interests.

Initially, I did not go to Zhongshun Temple with the intention of conducting research, as I had long been going there to attend events and *bai bai*. I decided to make it the focus of my research at the advice of a friend who liked going there, and also at the invitation of the local district government workers who managed the Ang Kong worship culture exhibition. In the early stages of my research, I was mainly able to observe what I saw people doing, but at this time, I met many temple goers and small business owners who talked with me and introduced some "local customs" to me. A local professor from National Chengchi University researching rituals and customs of Northern Taiwan, Professor Lin Ching-chi, introduced me to the temple's Chairman, and from there, I was introduced to and able to interview many of the temple leadership and other active volunteers.

I attended lectures given by local historians at Zhongshun Temple and interviewed four scholars working in Taiwan who study anthropology, Taiwanese folk religion, media and culture industry development, international relations, and Taiwanese aboriginal land rights – their perspectives and their research, which often engaged directly with the local or national government, led me to see the revitalized Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual in Taipei as an expression of government policies, popular research trends, and social planning interests.

Their broad research interests which all centered on Taiwan helped me to situate the joint project between the temple and the government in a larger, national context.

Regarding language and historical materials, written sources in English and Chinese were necessary to inform the historical background of Ang Kong worship in China and Taiwan. Because Taiwan was brought into the international market in the mid to late-nineteenth century, there are English language documents from the time which track this commercial development. Chinese language secondary sources are some of the only recent sources on Ang Kong worship in Taiwan. Most are local theses and dissertations, and there are some academic journal articles, all of which are available online. However, some come from privately printed temple almanacs, worship associations' books and documents, and pamphlets which have no publishing information. When I draw on these harder-to-find resources, I quote them in the original language in an appendix section.

As for my ability to conduct interviews and draw on data from these Chinese language sources, I have taken seven three-month long semesters worth of Mandarin Chinese language instruction at National Taiwan Normal University's Mandarin Training Center starting from 2017. This was one of the first institutions to teach Mandarin as a foreign language, and it retains the standard Mandarin pronunciation and vocabulary. In the Muzha area of Taipei City, in and around the temple where I conducted most of my research, long-time residents (descendants of the earliest settlers from the period of the Qing Dynasty) speak Taiwanese Hokkien, and many of them speak with an Anxi County accent. I also took a short course in Taiwanese Hokkien at National Taiwan Normal University in 2019, but formal training for this language, which is not standardized and modernized to the degree that Mandarin is, does not reflect the variety of regional differences. I could not reasonably expect myself to be able to converse fluently in it,

but I gained an ear for picking up vocabulary and knowledge of some very basic sentence patterns. However, I am fortunate enough to have a few classmates and friends who are Taiwanese Hokkien native speakers from Taipei who assisted me in speaking with (but mainly listening to) some elderly women and men.

I was able to tackle all academic materials written in modern, vernacular Mandarin Chinese with the assistance of a dictionary. I rarely used sources written in classical Chinese, so my primary historical sources are limited and one-sided, but I do my best to work around this by drawing on secondary sources. When I introduce a new term in Mandarin or Taiwanese Hokkien, I also include the written form. For Taiwanese Hokkien terms, I primarily use Taiwan's Ministry of Education dictionary to provide a standard romanization, but Taiwanese Hokkien is not standardized, and the dictionary does not include a written approximation of many accents, which are always changing. Where the dictionary version does not correspond closely to how the word sounds as it was spoken to me, I provide my own romanization. For some Taiwanese Hokkien terms, the written version of the words is lost or never existed. I provide standardized information as available so that readers are able to look up these terms for themselves in the future. I call almost everything in the written form "Chinese," but the spoken language is "Mandarin" or "Taiwanese Hokkien" to reflect the fact that, during earlier periods, such as Tang Dynasty, the spoken language and the pronunciation of written characters was similar to modern Taiwanese Hokkien. Both Mandarin and Taiwanese Hokkien often have different written forms, however. This is a complex reality which becomes easier to navigate over time, but I hope that I can convey it as simply as possible to the reader.

As for my own personal background and biases, I was raised in the American South where I went through both private and public schools and was baptized and went through

confirmation at a Methodist Christian church. This early childhood indoctrination definitely colors my interpretation and perception of what I have seen in Taiwan. The Christian taboo on idolatry does make a symbolic interpretation of god statues and spirits more palatable for those raised in that environment, but, being aware of that, I also tried not to indulge in extreme over-correction.

Given these limitations and capabilities, I aim to provide a well-rounded picture of the interests and perspectives of three different groups all interacting and drawing on their own ideas of their traditions to revitalize a local ritual for the god Ang Kong.

This thesis is organized into three chapters. The first deals with how Ang Kong is considered as a person or an agent. An understanding of what ritual does is drawn upon to show how the functioning of a social system gives actors the role of persons regardless of their presumed inner states. This contrasts earlier anthropological works which focused on ritual's meaning and predicted an end to enchantment once modernization more fully took hold in Taiwan.

The second chapter provides a more detailed historical background of Ang Kong worship in Taiwan. Although this particular form of worship is a practice with hundreds of years of history, this research takes the period of the mid-nineteenth century as its starting point, since it was this period that the modernized ritual draws on in its own description of its history. Sudden bursts of economic activity and prosperity have influenced the nature of Ang Kong worship. The tea boom of the late 1800s and the growth in property values starting from around the 1970s and 1980s in Muzha deeply influenced the way that people in the area view Ang Kong, and these were the resources drawn upon to fund the elaborate rituals for him. There are apparent contradictions in Ang Kong's function in the way that it is described by the state which

reinterprets the past and seeks to impose its own ideas on the present as well. Ang Kong worship is shown to be a living tradition which has shifted its focus from safeguarding income from agriculture to assuring income from property development.

The last chapter provides a description and brief analysis of the practice of the renewed ritual. Two instances of the renewed ritual, performed in 2020 and 2021, are described in detail. The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual is defined as being comprised of two distinct portions: one part which the local government defines and organizes as a spectacle for tourists and those outside the core local community, but with Zhongshun Temple providing the resources for, and one part which is organized by the temple which provides many more interactive opportunities for the temple's core group of worshippers. These two different parts allow the observer to discover the distinct ways in which the government approaches and defines popular ritual activity, as a somewhat solemn memorial to the past and a time to reflect on and respect certain moral attributes and ideals of development, and how the temple itself conceives of it, as a riotous festival in which worshippers clamor together to ask and thank the god for the help they have recently received. One is focused on a dead ritual form, revived as a symbolic expression, and one is an example of the living form.

The conclusion aims to pull through some of the theoretical implications of this study of Ang Kong worship. Included are some key considerations for current theories. The specific Ang Kong ritual practice described serves as an example of how the personhood of non-human beings does not necessarily imply a harmony between humans and non-humans that lends itself to proper environment stewardship or preservation. The Ang Kong ritual exemplifies a more-than-human social system, but one which is aligned with development interests. The concepts of disenchantment and modernization are put aside in favor of an idea of shifting enchantments. It

is this flexibility in regards to changes in Ang Kong's domain or sphere of influence that can provide some explanation for this form of worship's durability over time and obvious presence in the current day.



Chapter 1: The Social System Beyond Humanity: Ang Kong's Nonhuman Agency

Introduction

Early scholarship of what is termed Chinese popular religion in Taiwan relied heavily on a metaphorical or symbolic interpretation of ritual. In a review of early ethnographic fieldwork in Northern Taiwan, the ritual worship of deities is interpreted as a transposed symbolic relationship with imperial officials, as the spirit world was bureaucratically organized (Feuchtwang 2001). Praying to god statues was considered a kind of trial interaction, a practice run for dealing with real officials (Ahern 1981). An appeal to the agency of gods was mainly the domain of the uneducated, with those who had more formal education firmly stating that praying to gods was actually a way to properly memorialize historical figures (Weller 1987:145). In this section, ritual itself is the central focus, a system of communication between gods and worshippers.

The early divisions between the popular religion of peasant society and the great traditions of literate Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism of elite society were difficult to maintain over time, casting doubt onto whether they were valid at the time of their formulation. As the division of society into an educated elite and an uneducated peasant underclass is no longer tenable in modern day Taiwan, maintaining divisions between institutional religions like Buddhism and local customs often becomes a marker of aspirational social status (Madsen 2007). In the past, elite rulers of local society, whether they were imperial officials or Republican presidents, tended to reinforce the association between high governmental position and the gods. However, after democratization and the broad diffusion of political power into civil society, authoritarian leaders in Taiwan have all but disappeared while gods and spirits have proliferated. According to a review of religious activity in Taiwan, ritual activity and temple building has

actually increased alongside of gains in total wealth and education levels (Katz 2003:396). This situation is not unique to Taiwan. The phenomenon of modernized and modernizing economies increasing their ritual activities rather than discarding them has thus been rationalized in several ways: as a possible economic engine and alternative form of capitalism (Yang 2000), as a way to practice civic involvement (Madsen 2007), or as a political tool and industry in itself (Weller 2008), among others.

These examples still take an approach that sees the phenomenon of worshipping gods and spirits in Taiwan and China as primarily symbolic. That is, they see the practice of burning spirit money, praying at temples, or buying relics or amulets as primarily being about something other than communication with gods. Elaborate offerings in big rituals are not, then, feasts for the gods to gain their blessings, as the practitioners may directly say, but they are actually providing a motivating force for wealth creation, according to some (Yang 2000). Volunteering at temples and being involved in temple activities is not just about positive karma creation but is actually a veiled way for the Taiwanese middle classes to satisfy their desire for civic involvement in an atmosphere of incomplete democracy, in another example (Madsen 2007). And all across Asia, there is an active trade in religious goods and relics, a thriving industry in its own right (Weller 2008). In these analyses of increased ritual and religious activities, the ritual always stands in for something other than itself. It is not that these rituals absolutely do not function in this way, but these analyses imply that the ritual sphere exists primarily to satisfy conditions that are not being met in an imperfect civil society. If these conditions were met (and if that was even possible), these rituals would then be free to disappear. In a prescient analysis of the rituals of Iatmul people in Papua New Guinea, early English social anthropologist Gregory Bateson used three different approaches to illustrate the way that a single ritual can represent multiple things

depending on the theoretical tool utilized to analyze it (Bateson 1958). When analyzing rituals for their symbolic content, that is, the symbolic content that the practitioners may not be aware of or be able to articulate, rituals can be made to say a lot.

In this section, instead of configuring the ritual as a symbolic act which comments on some aspect of society, ritual communication with gods and spirits in temples and inside the home can be considered as its own self-generating, self-organizing social system, what German sociologist Niklas Luhmann refers to as an autopoietic system (Luhmann 2013). Its main activity is communication, and its main product is itself; that is, the ritual activities of everyday life continuously, actively produce this system of relations with gods and spirits. The process of 拜拜 *bai bai*, as this communication is known, can indeed be a social commentary on relationships beyond, or apart from, the relationship between a worshipper and a god, a notable example being the story of one interviewee's grandmother. This college-educated woman who returned home to Taichung after attending university in Taipei complained about the way that her grandmother would pray at their home shrine throughout the day, making aggressive commentary aloud about her family's behavior. However, the relationship between worshippers and the god deserves a deeper examination, since this is most frequently the way that worshippers' themselves interpret their own ritual activities, as opening up and maintaining contact.

Gods and god statues are not often differentiated in speech. The 童乩 *tâng-ki* spirit medium, literally the child of the god, *is* the god at the moment of possession. The gods write poetry, offer basic medical consultations, answer questions, and respond to requests. Their statue is not merely a representation of a once living historical figure or even a representation of divinity, but it is the deity in its own right. Spiritual power circulates and is amassed inside of the god statue over time, so that one may be more powerful than another. This way of speaking

about and interacting with gods has not disappeared after worshippers gained access to wealth and standardized education. The action of worshipping itself builds a relationship which recognizes the god's personhood. In this section, I will discuss the practice of worship that reveals the god as an active person in local society. As the context of local society changes (from agrarian to industrial to services-based), the actions that the god performs change. The rituals and ceremonies performed with him and the kinds of offerings he is given also change, yet the god still remains person-like and influential throughout these changes, rather than disappearing totally or being remade as a symbol of a distant past.

In her study on how gods are made material, Lin introduces two important ways that gods are produced as agents and persons: as statues and spirit mediums (Lin 2015). The spirit medium who has been possessed by the god is a human being, and in a rural village, this person is not a trained expert but simply any person in the village who has been called upon by the god to act as their vessel. In villages, these mediums can be men or women, they perform their services for no profit, and they continue to work their regular job (Bapthandier 2008:249). Through conversations with the spirit medium, people can get near immediate answers to questions, although the speech of these mediums often requires interpretation.

In the present day, in Zhongshun Temple, spirit possession is forbidden, so there are no mediums associated with the temple.



Figure 4 A sign in Zhongshun Temple: “Please do not become possessed inside of the temple. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Author’s Photo

However, this is a unique feature of Zhongshun Temple. Ang Kong worship associations in the area have supported their own spirit mediums in the past. One of these disbanded worship associations donated their ritual implements to Zhongshun Temple. Included was a book of “spirit writing,” poetry by Ang Kong (referred to as 保儀大夫 Baoyi Daifu). The practice of spirit writing refers to verses which are written, gestured, or spoken by a spirit medium possessed by the god, and which are then interpreted and transcribed.¹ What is important to note is that the author of these poems is unquestionably the god himself, something that is written and emphasized in the text. In the same volume, there is a list of members of the worship association

¹ See Appendix A for a sample of the original text

and their roles within it, but the authorship of the poems is uncontested. In the final pages of the book, there is a brief dialogue between the worship association members and the god, in the format of a question-and-answer session, although the form of the questions and answers as written are mostly formulaic.

Question: With all of the directors of this temple working together, will this temple's incense shine strong, bringing prosperity?

Answer: This temple's reputation and power will spread for thousands of miles as long as it loyally works to cultivate the virtues in the people's hearts.²

Spirit possession does not offer completely direct, completely open-ended communication with the deity. This is also related to the reason that was given for why spirit possession is not allowed to be practiced at Zhongshun Temple: "People should be able to *bai bai* in peace, in the way they want. Having someone around banging drums and making a bunch of noise is too annoying, too distracting. The environment in the temple should be free." With this statement, the Chairman emphasized the idea that a spirit medium limits and even decreases communication with the god rather than enhances it. This runs counter to the idea put forth by Lin, that spirit mediums offer a closer relationship with gods, a closer form of communication, and that a temple without a spirit medium is like a temple without a god (Lin 2015). Before asking the Chairman, I had asked others around the temple why they thought possession would be forbidden, and one person told me that it might be to prevent a fake spirit medium from scamming the unsuspected. This was not the fringe idea of a single skeptic, but one that appears continually in popular tv dramas, news reports, and first-hand accounts (Moscowitz 2001). However, neither the Chairman nor the person who hazarded a guess about why possession was forbidden said that it was because *tâng-ki* were *all* false. Just as in Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig's reading of accounts of

² See Appendix B for the original text.

false shamans, the fact that false shamans existed did not cast doubt onto the institution as a whole but might have reinforced it, with the idea that power had merely migrated somewhere distant and less accessible (1998). Distant power was often stronger (Johnson 2020). Simply getting rid of spirit mediums can be seen as a practical decision for an ambitious temple, since it decreases the chances of a reputation damaging scandal. In Lin's ongoing research with one spirit medium, she noted that after a conflict with the management, the spirit medium left to form his own association, taking the bulk of the worshippers with him (Prof. Lin Wei Ping, personal communication, August 21, 2020). The possibility of conflict and fragmentation could also play a role in the Zhongshun Temple management's decision.

In the book published by the spirit-medium Ang Kong worship association, the personal identity of the *tâng-ki* has been effaced, that is, the reader only knows him or her as the god. Despite whatever inter-organizational political drama might have been taking place, the questions and answers that were recorded were between a worshipper and the god. In this brief discussion of spirit mediums, it is important to note that, within the period of communication, they are still the god incarnate. The medium is not someone with privileged access to the god, someone that a person asked to speak to the god on his or her behalf, but, during the moment of possession, is the god in the flesh.

Speaking with the God

In and out of the temples in Taiwan, it is common to hear people refer to the statues on the altars interchangeably as both 神明 *shenming* gods, and 神像 *shenxiang* god statues or god images. Rather than being a simple symbolic representation of the god, the statue is more frequently spoken with and treated as the embodiment of the god him or herself. The most basic ritual that people can perform at the temple is the ritual of speaking with the god, referred to

simply as 拜拜 *bai bai*.³ It is performed as needed rather than on any prescribed occasion, and it is a ritual involving only two, the worshipper and the god. The worshipper can buy all the ritual tools on site at the temple (gift offerings, incense, and spirit money) or bring them from home. They place their offerings on the table provided and then light enough incense for each of the censers. They visit each censer in turn, addressing each god by stating their name, age, address, and problem, beginning the communication by bowing three times and ending the communication in the same way before placing the incense in the censer and then bowing three times again. Bowing can be a simple nod of the head while waving clasped hands or fully prostrating the body and touching the forehead to the floor; I have seen the former version performed much more frequently. Once they have done this at each censer, they will return to the main deity housed in the temple, and, if they want to deepen their correspondence and receive an immediate direct answer, they will 跋柁 *puah-pue*, use a set of moon divination blocks to ask yes or no questions. After shaking the blocks and throwing them on the floor, the worshipper can immediately interpret the answers, which range from yes, no, and “laughing.” If not entirely satisfied with this level of response, it is possible to draw numbered sticks in order to receive a single line poem. This verse will require interpretation, and the temple will usually have a worn book hanging by a string nearby which contains explanations for each of the possible response poems. Before ending the conversation, the worshipper must ask the god if he or she has finished with the offerings, and then they can be taken away, and the spirit money can be burned in payment.

Although the whole ritual appears impersonal and transactional, to the point where Ahern (1981) saw this ritual as a direct copy of the way that, in imperial times, peasants would have

³ As seen in (Ahern 1981a), *bai bai* can also be used as a gloss for any ritual, but the larger ceremonies held at the temple have specific designations.

approached bureaucrats, there is room for surprises that defy this interpretation, and these often lie in puah-pue, which allows for a direct dialogue with the god. A young office worker told me that he gave different fruit offerings to the 土地公 Tudi Gong and Ang Kong in Zhongshun Temple, some local grapes for Tudi Gong and some expensive, imported blueberries for Ang Kong, and he recounted this conversation with Ang Kong:

Q: Are you finished with the fruit?

A: No.

Q: Do you like it?

A: No.

Q: Is there a problem with the fruit?

A: Yes.

Q: You want the grapes instead, then?

A: Yes.

“I guess Ang Kong really is Taiwanese – he prefers local things.” It is this kind of communication which creates a personal connection with the god beyond the highly formalized relationship implied by a dry description of *bai bai*. Each time that a person goes to *bai bai*, they deepen their relationship with the god, becoming familiar with the individual personality of the god statue that they communicate with. This gets close to illustrating what is meant by personhood being emergent, appearing as the result of a layering of connections over time. It is the *performance* of the ritual, rather than any set of *beliefs* associated with it, that effectively makes personhood. Although a god can intercede dramatically in someone’s life without them ever going to *bai bai*, by appearing in a dream after making them ill, for example, this circumstance is exceptional and does not reflect how mundane the relationship can be for most worshippers. In everyday life, *bai bai* at a nearby temple cultivates a relationship between two. The commonplace content and form of direct address leaves little room for symbolic

interpretations. Many worshippers describe their relationship with a god as warm and familial and refer to the god as their grandfather or their grandmother, rather than strictly maintaining a respectful distance like that between an imperial official and a petitioner subject (Ahern 1981; Lin 2015:51).

After receiving their yes or no answer through puáh-pue, worshippers who need a more detailed answer can use puáh-pue to ask if they can pick a numbered bamboo stick which will direct them to a single line poem. This poem can then be interpreted by a book or by some friendly temple-goer. It is also possible to ask for a charm, which is a yellow seal folded into a small envelope, which worshippers can carry with them. This is as far as it goes in Zhongshun Temple. Other temples and their gods will also allow worshippers to take incense ash home with them to consume as a medicine, and Lin found that in the temple she frequented, worshippers were taking scrapings from the base of the god statue itself, to consume at home as medicine (Lin 2015).

Bai bai is the most unadorned example of communication with the god and this continual communication is what constitutes the relationship with the god. Lin states that each level of embodiment creates a closer and deeper relationship with these non-humans, ranking the relationships on scale of intimacy from formless spirits to god statues to possessed spirit mediums (Lin 2015). At each level, however, there are actions that are recognized by everyone as communication between two parties. When people refer to the god interchangeably as *shenxiang* or *shenming*, they are expressing that they make no distinction between a statue and the god; that is, one is not a representation of the other. When they discuss which Ang Kong temple's god is most effective in answering their prayers, they show that they view each god statue as an independent agent, but also as the same basic deity. Multiple souls are scattered

throughout the world but emerge as powerful individuals in some places or situations. In Taiwan, the multiple soul is what makes living human beings, and the loss of some of these souls is occasion for ritual intervention (Harrell 1979). The multiple souls are always in motion, and the god is not fixed in space or time. Graeber refers to this motion as “a constant process of construction” in which the god is not representative of anything timeless and unchanging but exists only as long he acts and displays his power (2005:427).

The practice of having to address the god directly in the *bai bai* ritual constitutes the god as a person, at least in the context of the ritual but frequently carries over outside of this moment. Carrying forward with this idea of construction and dynamism, the statue is not simply a piece of wood created to memorialize the historical figure upon whom the god is based, or even to memorialize the idea of divinity, but it is the deity himself, a responsive, communicative being. Lin shows that agency precedes embodiment: “only when a spirit performs miracles to benefit everyone in a place will they bestow a statue upon it” (2015:35). The statue binds power to a place, it does not merely represent it. In Gell’s treatment of idolatry and the agency of statues, he claims that these idol’s “‘social agency’ is not defined in terms of ‘basic’ biological attributes (such as inanimate thing vs. incarnate person) but is relational – it does not matter, in ascribing ‘social agent’ status, what a thing (or a person) ‘is’ in itself; what matters is where it stands in a network of social relations.” (Gell 1998:123). The power of a god statue is not solely based on which distant imperial official it represents; it is what it does and continues to do for worshippers. Discussing the effectiveness of certain gods is not easily dismissed as a case of mistaken attribution. Rather, the actions of ritual create their own terms for easily recognized communicative acts: the pose of the moon divination blocks after they are thrown, or the single

line of poetry indicated by the number on the bamboo stick are immediate, socially recognized utterances by the god.

Without resorting to these formalized interactions, any event related to the original problem posed to the god can be recognized as his response, and this happens outside of the time set aside for the ritual communication of *bai bai*, that privileged ten or fifteen minutes. This occurs when the requests put to the god cannot be answered with only a statement but require action. In one interview with a member of Zhongshun Temple's directorate about what Ang Kong can do today, as opposed to what he had done in the past for tea farmers in the nineteenth century, I was told that I should stop focusing so much on the connection to agriculture since it was mostly irrelevant to the lives of the people who frequented the temple. I had initially taken the ritual renewal as an example of what happened when ritual was not actively suppressed by the state, but this was not the way that those involved in the temple saw the situation. In the course of an interview with a member of the temple's directorate, I sought clarification for a statement that he had given me:

Q: So what you're saying is that agriculture isn't really that important for people now, especially in Taipei, right?

A: Right, it's more about business.

Q: So what kinds of things can Ang Kong do for people now?

A: Well, there are all kinds of things. He's a scholar, so he can help people pass their tests. The name "*Daifu*" [referring to Baoyi Daifu] means doctor, so he can heal people. I have a friend, a woman, she wanted to have children, and she came here once to pray. Afterwards, she told me that it worked. It's mysterious.

The god is always in construction; he is not a static figure from a distant past. For the woman described in the exchange above, her pregnancy was interpreted as a communicative act. It meant that the god had heard her request and granted it. She told this to others as well, to share her joy,

but possibly also to gain affirmation of her interpretation. The director himself seemed surprised, describing the occurrence as 神秘 *shenmi*, mysterious, while also offering it as proof of the god's ability to interact in human society.

In the context of the ritual communication, the god is clearly constituted as a dialogue partner. Outside of this period of direct address, the god's agency consists of discrete events which are recognized and affirmed by multiple people. Most of the time, these are not the actions of an eminent ghostly personage, that is, these events are not primarily considered to have been authored by the spirit of the dead 張巡 Zhang Xun's ghost, the historical figure on which Ang Kong is believed to be based. They are events which have been caused by the specific god statue that one has prayed to. If not, then this being will require a statue. In accordance with this idea, people will discuss which god statue has power (has 靈 *ling*) and which does not. The power of a god statue is the result of the density of that statue's relations with a community. In sociocultural anthropologist DJ Hatfield's research on an unconventional temple in 鹿港 Lukang, Taiwan which has a glass god statue, he discovered that the medium of wood is just as important as the god statue's appearance or the way it is treated in maintaining a connection with worshippers (2019:276). Only wood can absorb incense smoke and be blackened by it, a visible display of the density of relations throughout generations, a visible display of *ling*. The most important and valuable Ang Kong statues at Zhongshun Temple are the oldest and darkest ones. As a general rule, the more famous a god is, the more he engages with all kinds of people, and the more powerful he is. Zhongshun Temple's first Ang Kong statue was brought from China to Taiwan by the Chen family in 1762; over time their small family temple became a central community temple. Their Ang Kong statue was already loaded with power and responsiveness before coming to Taiwan. However, the spirit soldiers that Ang Kong commands, those whom he sent

out into the tea fields to defeat the plague of pests and who also eat the food offered to Ang Kong, their anonymous ranks are made up of all kinds of spirits, those of humans and non-humans who reside in the place he patrols. He gives legitimacy and order to a mass of powerful, local energies, and this veneer of legitimacy, taken as symbolizing loyalty or any kind of state-sanctioned value, conceals the extent of local forces of power.

The statue or image itself, disconnected from a particular named spirit, is potentially powerful on its own. During the 中元普渡 *Zhongyuan Pudu* Ghost Month Ritual at Zhongshun Temple in August 2020, a temporary paper image of Guanyin had her eyes covered by red paper so that the image did not become inhabited by the ghostly spirits congregating around. Discarded god statues, or those who have not yet had their eyes opened ritually, must have their eyes covered with red cloth for the same reason, in order to maintain them as objects rather than beings.

The material of wood that the statue is made from is significant because it is altered by the smoke from incense and fire. Crossing fire is an essential part of the ritual awakening of both god statues and spirit mediums (Lin 2015). Burning incense is how a worshipper opens a line of communication to the god, who is said to be attracted by the scent, and the ash of incense is this connection made material and can be ingested as a medicine; it is often made from spices which are used in Chinese medical treatments (Chang and Habkirk 2017). From the perspective of the worshipper, “interaction with the divine is only marginally possible without the use of incense,” and, as discussed, the point of worship is interaction rather than self-introspection (Chang and Habkirk 2017:170). On the other hand, Taiwan’s Environmental Protection Agency has decided to take a stance of discouraging incense as environmentally destructive (Environmental Protection Administration, 2017; 環保新聞專區, 2017). When temples ban incense, stating in

explicitly secular terminology that worship is based on devotional *feeling* rather than *doing*, they silence the god and the worshipper, and they offer an alternative interpretation of ritual (Taiwan News, 2020). This stance was reflected in the official Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, in which incense is strictly limited.

The god is a person whom worshippers speak with, and the god statue, as it is discussed by worshippers, is simultaneously both the god image and the god himself. Put simply by Confucian scholar Tu Wei-Ming, in traditional Chinese thought, there is no Platonic ideal (Tu 1989:70). This alliance between representation and the real thing itself, or the permeable barrier between them, seems to be addressed directly in the name of 尪公 Ang Kong. The characters are not obviously meaningful, unlike Ang Kong's alternate referent 保儀大夫 *Baoyi Daifu* which means "the great official who protects order and propriety." 尪 ang is a rare and antique character meaning "cripple" or "emaciated." Feuchtwang sees this meaning as signifying ancient shaman beliefs in which the disabled were considered to be more closely connected to the divine (Feuchtwang 2001:197). He attempted to find traces that connected ancient archaeological findings with the present-day practices he witnessed. While there may be something to this insight, most of those that I interviewed found it a stretch, that is, irrelevant to their practice. They frequently reiterated that the written form of this word has no significance – the word was chosen incidentally only for its sound. Since the Taiwanese Hokkien language that Ang Kong's worshippers speak has a history which stretches back more than a thousand years, many written forms of spoken words have been lost, as the pronunciation of these words changes. There are some spoken words which have no written equivalent. The name of the god is still to be debated, but according to most scholars, *Ang Kong* is the word that Quanzhou Prefecture people have traditionally used to refer to their god statues (Prof. Lin Ching-chih, personal communication,

March 21, 2020). It means only 神像 *shenxiang* god statue. In the local custom of Northern Taiwanese people with Anxi County ancestry, it mainly refers to Baoyi Daifu or Baoyi Zunwang, their most important patron deities.

Many people have told me that the *ang* in *Ang Kong* is adopted from the word 尪仔 *ang-á*, which means puppet. This word shows up in many places in which representations also appear.

Table 1 Related Terminology

Characters	Taiwanese Hokkien	English
尪仔	ang-á	Puppet
尪仔冊	ang-á-tsheh	Comic book
布袋戲尪仔	pòo-tē-hì ang-á	Puppet play
大仙尪仔	tāi-sian ang-á	Frame puppet
尪公	Ang Kong	God statue
尪姨	Ang-î	Medium / psychic

Compiled by the author from personal interviews

The word *ang* often appears in situations in which one being stands in for another. For the puppets, they are animated by a puppeteer, but when they portray gods, they have to undergo a ritual beforehand in order to transform them from a lifeless dummy into the god him or herself (Silvio 2019). Puppet plays themselves are the entertainment of the gods. When I visited a Tudi Gong temple during its 2020 anniversary, they hosted a week-long run of puppet plays. During much of the time, there were no human spectators. On the final day, at a small banquet held inside the temple, no one got up to watch the puppet play once it started. I asked what it was for

then, and one of the young men told me it was simply for the god to watch, 給土地公看 *gei Tudi Gong kan*. The stage directly faced the god statue, a position which made it slightly inconvenient for human spectators.

With the *ang-î*, she is a psychic or medium who is frequently host to the dead relatives of those who consult her, and she is more likely to be a woman. She allows them to speak through her. Her manner is very different from the bloody spectacle of the more well-known *tâng-ki* who pierces his cheeks with skewers or strikes his back with a serrated blade. She is not inhabited by a god who allows her to feel no pain, but she is a temporary host for mainly human spirits. Still, she is not the representative of the spirit, speaking on his or her behalf. Rather, the spirit is momentarily inside of her. The *tāi-sian ang-á* frame puppets are similar. These large, mascot sized costumes of gods need to be operated by human beings and can often be seen enshrined behind glass in the temples themselves. They are not merely holy objects or sacred tools, but they are also gods in their own right.⁴ Although, throughout their performance, the spectators can always very clearly see the people inside of the frame puppet, they are referred to as gods and treated with the respect due to them. This is a respect much greater than their operators, usually young working-class men, can expect to receive from those who are older or wealthier than them.

I received a different interpretation for the reason for naming the god in this way from a temple keeper in the nearby town of 深坑 Shengkeng's 集順廟 Jishun Temple. According to his interpretation, the name Ang Kong relates to the fact that he is a god who travels into the tea fields deep in the mountains. Unlike the gods on the plains, he cannot be carried in an enormous, ornate palanquin which requires wheels or many strong men to carry it. Since he has to walk through slim mountain trails on steep terrain, he needs to be carried in a light, portable, all-

⁴ That said, I've never seen anyone pray to them, however.

terrain sedan chair. His god statue cannot be a huge one made of heavy wood – it must be simple, light, and portable. Because his statue was so small, the farmers thought that it looked to be about the size of a 布袋戲 pòo-tē-hì puppet, an *ang a*, so they called him Grandfather Puppet, Ang Kong. His name, then, is an expression of what he is most frequently known for, so even if he must change and modernize to suit a group of people who no longer depend on tea farming as their primary source of income, his name remains tied to his history as an agricultural god of mountainous borderlands.⁵

In interchangeable references to a god statue as both “god” and “god image,” the worshippers express something about the way that they view material and persons. Livingness and personhood are emergent qualities which are expressed through responsive communication. Power and responsive communication are qualities which can accumulate inside of physical beings, and not just ones that we consider biologically alive. In discussing the emergent responsive power of material objects, particularly stone, Tu states that “rocks are not static objects but dynamic processes with their particular configuration of the energy matter. It may not be far-fetched to suggest that, with this vision of nature, we can actually talk about the different degrees of spirituality of rocks...By analogy we can also talk about degrees of spirituality in the entire chain of being” (1989:75). In a more recent example, social anthropologist Monica Janowski discusses “the belief that stone accumulates vital force which can be tapped or manipulated by humans” that “is also present in mainland Chinese culture,” a culture that its diaspora in Taiwan is a part of (2020:116). These arguments can be extended to talk directly about the god statues as well, which accumulate power through continued interactions. Even without receiving the conscientious treatment due to a person, nearly everything has the potential

⁵ I’ve asked some others about this interpretation, and they told me that many gods of all shapes and sizes are referred to as Ang Kong, which is simply a catch-all term used by people from Anxi County for a range of gods.

to become empowered and to act. A story translated by J.J.M. De Groot, a Dutch scholar who studied Xiamen festivals for years, recounts a man who was killed due to the influence of a drawing (De Groot 1972 [1896]: 656).⁶ Non-living material has long held an active role in the social world.

In a naturalist system, materials such as stone and wood are classed as inanimate objects; they cannot move or act, which excludes them from being social persons. Their inanimateness and inability to communicate is one of their definitive characteristics. Dissatisfaction with this framework has led to attempts at renegotiating this division using both non-western and western philosophical sources (Bennet 2010; Ingold 2011; Descola 2014). In a Taiwanese setting, scholars such as Silvio and Lin firmly defend the anthropocentric nature of deity worship, so that animist theories cannot be extended to Taiwanese popular worship (Silvio 2019:64). “The Chinese just can’t communicate with anything that doesn’t look like a person” (Prof. Lin Wei Ping, personal communication, August 21, 2020). According to this view, the statue may be wood, jade, marble, or gold, but a large reason that it receives the treatment that allows it to be regarded as a person is because it looks like a person. Or rather, acting things are given person-like physical traits over time. The maintenance of a division between the superior person and the inferior thing is resolved by granting exceptional actors the status of persons. “We call animals 動物 *dong wu*, that is, they’re considered nothing more than moving objects!” I was told during one interview with a Chinese literature student who firmly defended the anthropocentrism of the Chinese intellectual tradition.

Tu’s stress on the dynamic process, on objects not as firm, static, separable objects but as points in a process, is an important one. Initially, I had regarded the idea of a non-human,

⁶ See Appendix C for the full story.

especially non-living object, growing veins or displaying other markers of biological life as entirely referential; when creating the god statue, the carver can place a live wasp or bee inside a cavity and fill it with five different colored substances which correspond to organs (Lin 2015; Hatfield 2019). At first glance, these ritual actions can be seen as representing life, that is, the objects represent viscera and the bee symbolizes the internal motion of a living body; however, representation is too static a concept. A local friend told me several stories about jade, which, when continuously worn next to the skin, begins to grow veins and changes its color. Chinese aristocracy was buried with their jade and graverobbers often dug it out to sell it, as people considered that jade which had grown with an eminent person would be powerful itself. The livingness of the jade was an emergent quality which built up over time, due to its connections and relationships, and it would be visible to others and verifiable.

A god statue can take on this power in a similar way, as miracles accumulate around a specific one. Not only miracles, but the density of communications accumulate and empowers the deity. The material of the statue, generally wood, is important “because most images are constructed of wood, the porous, organic qualities of the medium permit both the opening of the cavity for the organs, the secreting of the organs within the body, and this transfer and absorption of breath and other essences, including of course, incense smoke” (Hatfield 2019:276). Just like jade, wood is a medium which is altered over time due to its connection to humanity and its interactions with humans. The bluish incense smoke, which is the line of communication between humans and deities or opens the channel of communication, not only wavers before the eyes of the bowing worshipper, making the deity appear to move, but it impregnates the statue. In most temples, Zhongshun Temple included, the older the statue, the more valuable and highly prized it is. It has sustained long-term interactions with people.

Although, in specific contexts, people will refer to these statues as symbols of moral ideals, they are primarily social beings. The point is not the temperament or belief of the individual worshipper, but the context in which worship is performed. The same person who, at one time, told me that the display and ritual of popular worship was intended as a form of mass education for the illiterate, also expressed to me his happiness that Zhongshun Temple's Tudi Gong had directly helped him succeed in a public funding campaign. The gods and their statues are potential actors with emergent agency, and throughout the process of the *bai bai* ritual, they are addressed directly, constituting them as persons. This is a structural feature of the ritual itself, which illustrates that "recognition of communication, or ascription of personhood, is thus not necessarily a cognitive act of consciousness" (Sprenger 2018:114). The god statue does not need to be believed to be a person or alive all the time, but it will still be treated that way some of the time by people who have been through formal public schooling, the people who, in earlier times, would have been considered elite and modern and unlikely to "believe" in this way. In the moment that communication begins, directed towards the god, two parties are present. It is the act of communication itself which makes the personhood of the god evident not just to the one performing the ritual, but to those who view the performance of it as well.

A Brief Chinese-English Dictionary

Words such as belief or faith were imported concepts which focus on the inner experience of an individual and misrepresent ritual activity, ultimately damaging rituals' standing in society by dis-embedding them from it (Yang 2011:6-7). These imported concepts often have a secularizing function, removing a host of activities from their position within society to a position outside of it. Early twentieth century modernization in China targeted gods and temples for total destruction and replacement; most local activities were glossed under the

term 迷信 *mixin* superstition (Duara 1991:76). The attitude in the early modern period, the time during which terms such as religion, mythology, superstition, and others were adopted to describe a complex of local activities, was to view all local practices with suspicion. Chinese modernizers learned from Japanese advisors, and the Japanese colonial state on Taiwan also targeted local practices, such as that of burning spirit money, for removal (Dawley 2019). The ensuing Chinese Nationalist government on Taiwan continued pursuing a policy of banning certain practices and forcibly limiting the expense of rituals (Katz 2003). This effectively drained local sources of power. Much of the vocabulary used to describe actions with deities and spirits can be traced to these attempts, and at the same time, these words have been adapted since their initial adoption.

In Mandarin Chinese, mythology is 神話 *shenhua*, a term which was imported into China from Europe by way of Japan (McNeal 2012). It carries with it the weight of Greek mythology, a category constructed to subvert criticism of an intense interest by Christians in the Greek religion. Rather than challenging Christian doctrine, mythology is constructed as a harmless, secondary domain. In Taiwanese student researcher Lin Chuan Kai's research on Ang Kong worship in Northern Taiwan, he uses the term mythology to contrast and complement the idea of history; he re-defined mythology as the historical consciousness of the (mainly uneducated) local populace (2007). Using this term, he showed that mythology offered the flexibility to adapt to continuous changes that formal historical records did not have.

宗教 *zongjiao* religion refers to doctrinal, written teachings, such as those of Buddhism, and during Chinese modernization, it became conflated with Protestantism and “suggested a distinct religious system in contrast to secular life” (Yang 2011:6). Historian of religion Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) illustrates the way that diverse practices such as Hinduism or Confucianism

were molded into religions which could be equated with and measured against their European counterparts. Cultural anthropologist Talal Asad (2003) shows that, once there was something called religion, it became possible to create something called the secular, a world apart. Since the Chinese terms for such concepts as religion or mythology have meanings which were taken from a European context, then, when using terms like “mythology” or “religion” we enter into a Judeo-Christian system, and the discussions that we can have within this system are limited by its own terminology. This is also why divisions between elite and popular “religion” divided along the lines of wealth, urbanity, and education offer numerous exceptions. In modern times, the division is not necessarily based on background, but on the context of the situation at hand. A middle-aged engineer I interviewed used English to term it “dynamic flexibility,” the ability to switch sides based on context, the subject under discussion, or the party one was communicating with. After rumors spread about the possibility of a ban on incense, the practice of burning incense became known as Daoism, out of a desire for government protection, which the Taiwanese government guaranteed for religions (BBC, 2017). When I used the term *zongjiao* to ask for information about what I was seeing at Zhongshun Temple, most people there thought I was talking about Buddhism or Daoism, which means that they did not always see what they did as strictly religion.

Burning incense and *bai bai*, then, are not necessarily parts of a religion or a product of religious-based *belief*. Belief is the fundamental cornerstone of religion in a Christian Protestant context, and it replaced action as the prime requirement for salvation. In Taiwan and the Taiwanese ritual context, belief is beside the point and should not be the main term used to characterize diverse practices (Yang 2011). As Silvio observed in her research, only sociological researchers tend to approach relations with gods in terms of belief (Silvio 2019:112). The

question that people ask of each other is more like “is it efficacious? – is there 靈 *ling*?” *Ling* is a much-studied concept, and it refers to the tangible effects that a god has had (Chau 2006). It can be understood as power; for American socio-cultural anthropologist Steven Sangren, it is “the mystified power of local social institutions,” a mistaken attribution of agency to a god which conceals power’s source (1988:56). If the god frequently possesses people, answers questions correctly, helps worshippers succeed in business ventures, and/or appears in the sky or in the flesh, the god is deemed to have *ling*. A specific god statue or temple can be discussed in this way. Degree of belief does not determine the manifestation of *ling*, since there is no shame in shopping around for the god or temple which works best for an individual: “Maybe you should try asking a different *Tudi Gong*, the one at Zhongshun Temple always answers me.” I spoke to someone at Zhongshun Temple about an unsatisfying experience with *Tudi Gong* at a temple in another area, and this was their suggestion. The point of this exchange is that they did not say that my going to *bai bai* had not worked because I lacked faith, but the specific *Tudi Gong* I had asked had limited power to help me.

External effects are relied upon as indicators of internal states which remain murky. The internal states are not the focus. The same can be said of people as of gods, and this is the key place where we can see that agency and personhood is easily distributed amongst non-humans. Human beings themselves do not hold a monopoly on psychic activity, and even the internal world of persons is not assumed to be lively and active without some attempt at making it apparent in the external world. In terms of the dialogue between a human and a god that takes place during and outside of ritual, the communication itself makes the two partners, regardless of what there is to speculate on their inner state. Subjectivity and consciousness are the preoccupations of early theories of communication that were discarded by Luhmann as irrelevant

to a discussion of communication's functioning; the idea of internal states, which is what is implied by a focus on *belief* in a god, as being fundamental to ideas of what makes agency is often beside the point in a study of a practice of worship and ritual (Luhmann 1992:251). Internal psychological states had been the focus of western scholarship's preoccupation with language, but Luhmann's concept of communication did not take consciousness or psychic activity as its primary requirement (Maurer 2010). Arthur Kleinman, a psychiatrist who did field work in Taiwan in the 1960s, noted that in Taiwan, the patients he worked with rarely discussed their internal psychological states (Kleinman 1980). There was limited vocabulary available for discussing mental unease, compared with the American patients he had worked with; in contrast, the Taiwanese patients had a rich and specific vocabulary with which to discuss the body and its sensations, far beyond what the Americans had (Kleinman 1980). External or physical effect and sensation was given primacy over psychic activity in everyday life, and this can be seen in the terms that are used to discuss *bai bai* and other activities in the temple.

One example of this is the notion of piety, or 虔誠 *qiancheng*. In English, the term piety is an important concept for Catholicism and connotes faith and belief as well as proper behavior. In a Chinese cultural context, piety evokes 孝順 *xiaoshun* filial piety, the act of treating one's parents well. What is glossed as piety in Mandarin Chinese is really a set of actions, which is how 虔誠 *qiancheng* was described to me. *Qiancheng* is entirely external. It is frequenting the temple to pray to the god there, caring for the gods and ancestors in the home by giving them the right offerings at the right time. An elderly woman I saw at Zhongshun Temple who prayed aloud in rhythmic verse, with large motions of the hands and by knocking her head on the floor was described as *qiancheng*. An older man even told me, jokingly, that I was *qiancheng* because I came to the temple so often. This word is also often translated into English as "religious," so in

Taiwan, a religious or pious person is not someone who deeply believes (which is unverifiable) but someone who has certain observable habits, patterns of action which can be verified by a range of independent observers. Devotion to a god, or 還願 *huanyuan*, is the action of redeeming a vow to a god by returning to the origin of the god to light incense. The emphasis lies on action rather than belief.

When Sprenger (2017) and Miho (2011) apply the ideas of auto-poiesis or self poiesis to activities that they observed, they also move away from a focus on the internal, psychic state and instead turn to observable action. For Miho, humans do not simply act on things or express their will and agency by means of things; relations emerge through actions *with* things, making humans and things co-actors (2011). Actors in a shared social sphere emerge in the course of action. Sprenger draws on Luhmann's idea of autopoiesis and communication to inform his argument that "the most important indicator for subject status is not restricted to psychic systems" so that a certain type of consciousness is not a requirement for being involved in communication (2017:114). In both of these views, social systems take external interactions as the basis for membership rather than restricting membership based on specific psychic qualities. The social system is not a system full of a certain type of actor but a certain type of action, a collection of communications. Communication was not a meeting of the minds, it was a process with three steps: information, utterance, and mis/understanding (Luhmann 1992). It could also be performed with non-humans. In this description of society, there is no need to resort to assumptions about actors' psychic action or consciousness, which is to say, the idea of society can be expanded to include a range of actors, human and non-human (Luhmann 2013: ch. 5). An observable operation of communication is explicit in notions like *qiancheng* and *huanyuan*, which emphasize activity. In practice, it appears in the way that most elderly people perform *bai*

bai by speaking aloud, often using formulaic phrasing. It is possible to hear them directly addressing the deity and even speaking out their personal requests. In silence, it would be necessary to speculate on their thoughts and question whether communication was even occurring at all. However, many young people do voice their requests in silence and say that it is equally effective. The idea of *bai bai*, defined by all whom I asked, is expressed through action, by the shaking of clasped hands.

In contrast, many words which are used to describe ritual activities are frequently imported concepts, belief being one of them. Although initially irrelevant, they have taken root. Both sociologist Richard Madsen and Silvio note that the highly educated, mostly middle class, urban residents they spoke with tend to discuss the god's efficacy in terms of influencing their emotions and internal state (Silvio 2019; Madsen 2007). Their informants say that they keep the gods, such as Guan Gong or Guanyin, inside their hearts, that the presence of gods brings them comfort (安慰 *anwei*), and that when they get the result that they are after (such as success in the workplace), they attribute it to the god having given them the fortitude and courage to succeed, rather than the god having interceded directly on their behalf. The god is still an active agent, but his agency is not sited in the outside world for all to see. Concepts are reworked with this new frame of mind. People who position themselves primarily outside of the ritual sphere, often (but not always) young people with no altar in their rented housing, view ritual activities as something that they do recreationally, and which provides them with a feeling of security, 平安的感覺 *pingan de ganjue*. These are words frequently utilized by the temple and within the context of rituals to refer to divine protection from harm (usually, for the primarily elderly people who visit, freedom from illness), but used by the young, they refer to something more abstract, the soothing of a mental state. *Pingan* is not a description of what happens when you

pray for financial security, and your property value increases ten-fold. That is *ling*. *Pingan* is, for Silvio's office workers and the young tea farmers I interviewed (among other young people of various backgrounds), the calming of unnamable anxieties, which are not to be resolved all at once and once and for all.

Sprengr tracks the shifting of personhood, communication, and interaction with nonhumans in commercial coffee cultivation in Laos; as people start to mainly produce commodities for the market rather than growing rice for their own use, rice becomes a depersonalized and distant object (2018). In cultural anthropologist Andrew Johnson's research in Thailand, the damming of the Mekong forced a change in the way villagers could interact with it; dam controllers and migrant laborers began to be discussed in the same way that river nagas and island kings had been discussed and propitiated (2019). Total disenchantment did not occur; rather, sources of potency shifted. A similar move took place in the case of Ang Kong worship, in which tea farming has become largely disenchanted while tea farmers and others in the area turn to Ang Kong for help with more relevant parts of their life. Although the sphere of Ang Kong's godly influence and control has been, for the most part, removed from tea farming, it has shifted to another domain as the topics of constantly occurring communication have changed

To conclude this chapter, rituals to Ang Kong all take the ritual form of communication *bai bai* as their basis, and it is this ritual that affirms the personhood of all of those who are a party to it. The god is not a symbolic person or personified ideal, but rather ritual creates the god as an active agent. Despite the fact that early scholarship predicted a turn towards a symbolic understanding of gods due to a modernized mass education and economic growth, this has not been what has happened. The enchantment of an industry occurred during a period of continued contact with the god. The process of *bai bai*, a casual ritual, and larger, whole community-

oriented rituals shows that the god is a person to those interacting with him. This endures largely because of the nature and structure of the ritual itself, which, in its performance, requires interaction. Personhood emerges throughout performance, regardless of prior belief or faith.



Chapter 2: The Tea Industry in Taiwan: Commercial Enchantment and State-sponsored Disenchantment

Introduction

Modern day Ang Kong worship in Taiwan has its roots in the development of the tea industry in Northern Taiwan. The legend of Ang Kong driving out plagues of insects from the tea fields has been relayed to me orally by most of my interviewees, and it has been recorded in the literature (Ahern 1973:4-6; Lin 2007; Fan 2003). Although Ang Kong worship stretches back much further than the height of the tea industry development in Taiwan, most people in the area of Northern Taiwan identify this miracle as a pivotal event and justification for the importance and localization of Ang Kong worship in Taiwan. This legend illustrates the way that in the pre-modern period, before the beginning of Qing dynasty governor 劉銘傳 Liu Mingchuan's modernization reforms, even the development of a globalized and commercialized agricultural industry was enchanted. Globalization and commercialization, powerful enough forces on their own, did not provide enough motivation for the disenchantment of the land and people's productive relationships with it. It was the deliberate suppression of ritual activity due to changes in state policies (both the Japanese colonial government and early ROC government followed this policy) that played a key role in reducing ritual-mediated relationships between farmers, their crops, land, and weather. Weberian disenchantment as part of the process of modernization is an ideal form which involves exposing "magic" as a false science in a naturalized progressive evolution from false beliefs to true ones (Van Der Veer 2014:117-119). Disenchantment is part of the process of secularization, which was considered to be a gradual and inevitable side effect of technological and economic changes (Yang 2011:20). In practice, regulation and repression were the tools use to force disenchantment (Duara 1991). In the case of Ang Kong worship, it is

possible to see both gradual adoption of scientific, technologically based land use *and* the persistence of Ang Kong as an active figure. As farmers began to use chemically derived pesticides, the practice of calling on Ang Kong for pest relief ceased totally, with no present-day examples to be found in Maokong. The focus on the tea field pest relief miracle, which had disappeared, highlights Weber's idealized process of disenchantment. However, the exceptional fact that Ang Kong worship persists, in the form of a personal relationship between worshippers and the god, must be accounted for. The attempt by the government, in cooperation with Zhongshun Temple, to revive Ang Kong's seasonal visitation to the tea fields no longer has the same ritual pest relief function that it did in the mid-nineteenth century, but this does not mean that worshippers' relationship to Ang Kong is now merely memorial. That is to say, the entire content of worshippers' lives and their relationship to Ang Kong has not been disenchanted and rationalized despite the fact that even the elderly worshippers have grown up in an increasingly modernized Taipei, which was once the central point of an authoritarian state. Instead, the nature of the god has changed and shifted. While the production of tea has become rather thoroughly disenchanted, other spheres of economic production which are arguably much more important to people's daily life experiences have become enchanted in its stead. One interviewee, an elderly committee member of Zhongshun Temple, put it best when he stated that just as Taiwan's economy has shifted from agriculture to business and services, so too has Ang Kong been "promoted" from a god of agriculture to a god of business. In this section, I plan to illustrate a process by which Ang Kong gained and then retained his power and influence even as the tea industry itself has been marginalized, showing that disenchantment and secularization occurs more as the result of strict governmental interference or concerted effort rather than being just a side effect of modernization.

Taiwan's Economy Commercializes: The Development of the Taiwanese Tea Trade

In 1858, the Treaty of Tientsin was signed by the Qing Dynasty as a result of the Opium Wars which stipulated that multiple Chinese ports should open up to trade with Western powers on terms favorable to Western business interests (Beeching 1975). In Taiwan, these ports included 淡水 Danshui and 大稻埕 Dadaocheng in the North. Although these ports were not big enough to accommodate very large ships, there was still a marked increase in trading activity. Very shortly after these ports opened, two new industries emerged on Taiwan: camphor and tea. These industries were novel in that they exploited mountains and slope lands, which had been considered economically unproductive prior; the previous focus had been on areas suitable for agriculture, mainly the western plains. These hilly areas were also border regions which were under the control of aboriginal groups; in Northern Taiwan, these were mainly groups that, in the present day, are called Atayal and Sediq. Once these regions were open to profitable activities, the greatly weakened Qing Dynasty government was no longer able to maintain the quarantine and border policy that they had previously enforced which separated Han and aboriginal groups under state control and those outside it. Land all over the Taipei basin was subsequently converted from forested game animal habitat to permanent tea agriculture production. Tea had long been grown in the area by Han migrants who came from Anxi county, a hilly region of Fujian province known for its tea production, prior to the arrival of global business interests, but the opening of the treaty ports massively sped up the process of land conversion.

Since foreign firms were newly legally allowed to enter the Chinese market, they began to make detailed records of market conditions. Two accounts by American consulate officials record the process of the tea industry's rapid development (Davidson 1988[1903]; Clark 1971[1896]). Most accounts attribute the development of the tea industry to the nudging of two

businessmen, the Scottish John Dodd and the Fujianese Li Chunsheng (Alsford 2010). These two businessmen had previously worked in Hong Kong and Xiamen respectively and found the markets overcrowded. Taiwan was a relatively unexploited market, and just like the early Han migrants who were already growing tea, they discovered that the hilly parts of Northern Taiwan were geographically similar to the tea growing regions of Fujian, specifically Anxi county.

The places suitable for commercial tea production were already in use by aboriginal peoples and some early Han settlers. Dodd was able to convince some Han settlers and farmers to clear their fields and plant tea slips imported from Anxi (a substantial investment in time and money) by organizing loans and advances. His and other firms were also able to provide the cash incentive for processors, people who were experts in roasting and sealing tea (it needed to be packed into airtight lead-lined boxes for overseas shipment), to move to Taipei from Xiamen and Fuzhou permanently or seasonally (Davidson 1988[1903]:374). What foreign firms were able to do to expand the industry was provide access to a large and hungry market: the United States. At the time, the United States was the largest buyer of oolong tea, and Dodd arranged the first direct shipment from Dadaocheng to New York City (Davidson 1988[1903]:374). This was an important milestone in the history of Taiwan's economic development since it had not been officially connected to the global market since the Dutch era or Zheng Family Dynasty in the 1600s. Before this, all of the goods produced for export had to be first shipped to Xiamen, on the mainland, in order to market them, which dramatically limited the possibility of Taiwan's economic expansion. The location of a legal port in Xiamen⁷ was crucial. It had allowed Quanzhou people to control access to cross-strait trade as well as most merchant guilds in Taiwan (Lamley 1981:287). This longstanding dominance over legal trade doubtlessly aided the

⁷ Although Xiamen was one of the few legal ports, there was always illegal cross-strait trade. According to the diaries of John Dodd, even during the French naval blockade of the northern ports, smugglers still managed to import some of the lead needed for the tea trade (Dodd 1972 [1888]).

rapid development of the tea industry. Although in the 1700s, Taiwan was largely rumored to be a place of relative prosperity in comparison with the mainland,⁸ its growth was purposely bottlenecked due to the Qing government's concern that it would become ungovernable (Myers 1972:438-439; Shepherd 1993).

Growth was so rapid that it only took one decade for the hills surrounding Dadaocheng to be almost completely denuded. A visually striking depiction is offered by Davidson that, in 1877, a person standing in Dadaocheng could turn in any direction and see tea plantations on every hill surrounding the Taipei basin (Davidson 1988[1903]:379). Just a decade earlier, the view would have been drastically different, as the hills would be full of mainly wild vegetation.

In terms of importance to Taiwan's entire economy, the industry reached its peak in the 1880s, with tea accounting for the bulk of Taiwan's (officially reported) export share.

⁸ Although Myers (1972) uses translated documents to provide evidence of a high standard of living on Taiwan in the eighteenth century, it should be kept in mind that these exaggerated claims benefitted the smuggler's trade.



Table 2 Total Tea Exports (in pounds) 1866 – 1899

Adapted by the author from James W. Davidson, The Isle of Formosa Past and Present, pg. 395-

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While tea's export share declined afterwards, this was due in part to the development of other industries which overshadowed it (Etherington and Forster 1992). Although many entrepreneurs, English consultants as well as the Japanese colonial state, tried to introduce a plantation or estate style of black tea production in order to revive the industry's dominance, these simply never took off. The small enterprises were already too autonomous, and the entire system of production was already very well integrated and organized. The fact that these interests were so entrenched and powerful has been considered by some to be the primary reason of the industry's downfall, as cartel-forming behavior which prevented intra-firm competition quickly led to a decrease in the quality of the finished tea leaves, a practice which foreign firms bemoaned (Davidson 1988[1903]:377).

After its peak, the tea industry never reached the same level of economic importance for the economy, which is not to say that it was not productive. The Japanese colonial government was successful in introducing black tea, but there was simply no way to compete globally with estate plantations in India and Africa (Forrest 1985:62-63). The early success of North Taiwan as the primary tea producing region in Taiwan was due not just to a favorable climate but also because of its extensive waterways. It was relatively inexpensive to ship tea over water to the market and from there ship it out to the steamers which would then take it abroad. Due to the limitations for deep water ships in the shallow northern harbors, the Japanese colonial government went to great expense early on in their rule in order to modernize the port of Keelung (Dawley 2019). The Nationalist government did something similar, expanding the highway system in order to facilitate commercial access to hard-to-reach places. As infrastructure developed, this allowed for the creation of a high mountain tea industry in mountainous Nantou County in Central Taiwan. Most of the production of tea in modern times has shifted there (Etherington and Forster 1992).

To this day, although the tea industry has shrunk in size and value in Northern Taiwan (as opposed to Central Taiwan where it has expanded and prospers), it remains highly autonomous, with tea field owners roasting on site and setting their own prices, supported by their own networks of patrons. The tea fields mostly remain in the hands of those early migrants; the family farm which introduced the 鐵觀音 *tieguanyin* cultivar to Taiwan, a cultivar which has become the definitive tea of Muzha, is still owned and operated by the same family and part of their estate has been turned into a museum for tourists (Zhang Nai Miao Memorial Hall, 2021). Most of the tea fields in the Muzha (Maokong) area have remained as independent family-based enterprises.

In summarizing these accounts, the focus is on a completely secular commercial development. Ang Kong, or any ritual behavior at all, is entirely absent, but ritual activities played an essential role in commercial development. A written record from the Japanese colonial era by a Taiwanese folklorist 吳瀛濤 Wu Taoying gives a brief summary of Ang Kong which connects him directly to the development of this industry:

Baoyi Daifu, commonly known as Ang Kong. Peasant farmers in the outskirts of the Taipei Basin worship him for the purpose of repelling pests and protecting their fields and farming villages. Enshrined as a god of war, in the past, he protected the villagers against outbreaks of aboriginal attacks. The god is asked to “Station Soldiers (*fang jun*)” as a protective mechanism. (Wu 1977:74).⁹

Despite the lack of overt connection between ritual and market activities in the early market reports of foreign consulates, it is clear that there is a connection between recorded myth and oral versions of Ang Kong’s role in early settlement as Han settlers’ border guard and the written accounts of the frenzy for land clearance due to the rapid expansion in demand for tea. What stands out in the early accounts of the commercial development of Northern Taiwan is the violent conflict with and displacement of aboriginal peoples in the course of massive land conversion for tea farming. The land clearance was described by Davidson as an invasion undertaken by “warlike tea farmers” (1988[1903]:379). This also accords with an interpretation of the function of 神明會 *shenminghui* worship associations in Taiwan, which held land in common to pay for ritual expenses, but also in order to finance small armies (Koo 2013; Lamley 1981:306). In oral accounts given by worshippers and recorded by Taiwanese researchers, the function of Ang Kong as a fierce general who led settlers in battle with aboriginal inhabitants and policed the newly claimed border areas is fundamental (Lin 2007:40). Although Davidson

⁹ See Appendix D for original language

(1988[1903]) and Clark's (1971[1896]) records offer little details of the actual battles, except to say that the settlers were given legal permission by the Qing Dynasty government to clear the land, Ang Kong mythology references these battles not as one-time occurrences, but as recurring events. Worship associations have long functioned to collectively gather, hold, and distribute resources among members, organizing labor for crop-watching or determining irrigation scheduling (Duara 1988). The ritual of *fang jun*, the practice of sending out and provisioning spirit soldiers, could easily have provisioned human warriors as well, since food "sacrifices" are not discarded but are used as enhanced foodstuffs. Not only was Ang Kong known for appearing on the battlefield – "he [Ang Kong] was said to have been very effective once, in a fundamental past defending Mountainstreet from aborigine attacks" – his worship associations could easily have played a role in managing and offsetting the costs of farming on disputed territory, which first needed to be invaded and then defended (Feuchtwang 2001:112). In contemporary retellings, such as the performance of the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual as well as in the presentation of Ang Kong worship in the Wenshan District exhibition this history has been downplayed and cleaned up. In the current-day revitalized ritual, *fang jun* is only remembered as protecting tea fields against insect attacks.

Another area where a connection can be made between ritual activity and the territorialization that sudden commercial development sparked was the fact that the infrastructure that was needed to expand the industry was funded locally, often through worship associations. Compared with the southwestern area of Taiwan, Northern Taiwan was relatively undeveloped during the period of rapid commercial expansion starting from the 1860s. Tea was shipped from plantations along the river in the wet season and overland during the dry season. The overland route which connected the Muzha area and beyond with the main marketing area of

Dadaocheng in central Taipei was maintained with private donations from tea merchants. The Qing dynasty government must have profited greatly from taxing sales on tea, evidenced by the fact that the Japanese colonial government sought to make themselves favorable to their newly acquired colonists by lowering taxes on tea (Davidson 1988[1903]:377). The drive for acquiring wealth on the part of the populace was not initially shared by the Qing state, whose policy in Taiwan was one of discouraging development and population growth, since Taiwan seemed more likely to cost them in terms of suppressing rebellion than to be profitable as a commercial hub (Shepherd 1993). The formal Qing state did not encourage or aid commercial activities on Taiwan in order to raise their own revenues until well after they were underway. Taiwan was upgraded to the status of a province (from a part of Fujian province) in 1885, and Taiwan's first governor and modernizer Liu Mingchuan instated aggressive policies to increase revenue, such as making the mountain borderlands subject to state taxation and control (Tavares 2005:370). In pre-modern Taiwan, commercial expansion was the result of mainly local initiatives which organized themselves to provide public goods and services, often through worship associations.

sphere were political configurations, forms of local governance. This was not unusual, as the pre-modern state did not penetrate down to the village level, and the temple was often the center of a village's organized public life (Sangren 1987). In this pre-modern but commercialized period of time, the ritual sphere still provided the administrative tools necessary for managing even international business networks. In the literature, worship associations are shown to have functioned as paramilitary associations, and land grabbing and occupation of other groups' land – whether they be migrants from another county in China or Taiwan or the so-called “raw barbarians,” aboriginal groups outside of state control – is one of their core reasons for being (Koo 2013; Lamley 1981). The development of a tea industry in Taiwan depended not only on know-how and heightened demand from an external market but also a willingness to dispossess prior residents and the ability to sustain soldiers during conflict with these residents, something which required provisioning and gathering troops, which temple associations and worship associations were able to provide.

In the present day, temple and worship associations often still carry this connotation of unrestrained and illegitimate violent power (Boretz 2011). In certain expressions, they descend into gangsterism, something which one middle-aged interviewee, who migrated to Taipei from 彰化 Changhua when he was young, stated he was very concerned about when he revisited his hometown. He noted that 遶境 *raojing* processions had increased in frequency in his area, and organizers and participants had become aggressive about collecting 紅包 *hongbao* red envelopes full of cash, and he was concerned that these groups were taking advantage of his elderly relatives. Whatever the actual dynamics of these kinds of situations are, what is important to keep in mind is that there does exist a popular perception of 廟會 *miaohui* temple events as questionable and suspicious activities, perhaps a long-lasting impression of their former roles in

frontier violence. “The problem with them is too much money. Things easily get out of control,” one young man from Zhongshun Temple commented when I asked him about a notorious three-day long *miaohui* that had just taken place in the 萬華 Wanhua district, the western area of Taipei. Both younger and older people in Taipei are aware of the poor reputation that temple events have, whether or not they endorsed it. As Taiwan’s capital, Taipei is the seat of legitimate governmental power and is the face of Taiwan’s miraculous developmental success story. In order to modernize a Taiwanese ritual in Taipei, the part of the history in which gods aided violent land grabs and in which worship associations were organizations full of rough pioneers, needed to be cleansed.

The early ROC government on Taiwan was as colonial as the Japanese state on Taiwan: the language and culture of power, money, and influence was that of the minority, the elite members of the mainland Chinese who came to Taiwan after World War II. Since Taiwan under the early ROC was only a province of the whole of China, the Taiwanese were very limited in their ability to govern their land; they comprised only a small percentage of the government (Wang 2013). It was also an authoritarian state: all local power networks, worship associations being one form, needed to be suppressed and replaced by associations which could be directly overseen by the state. Ang Kong ritual networks were dismantled: “Government pressures to reduce feasting and in effect reduce the representation of communities to each other had, however, resulted in the amalgamation of the end-of-year processions into the one day” (Feuchtwang 2001:118). The KMT also adopted a policy of cultural chauvinism: local Taiwanese languages were banned in education and mass entertainment, and speakers of those languages misrepresented in popular culture as backwards, ignorant, and even criminal (Hsiau 1997). When a part of the local culture was decided to be worth protecting, it was reconfigured

as national Chinese culture, in order to represent it as high culture. This is the background against which Ang Kong worship activities were curtailed and which a secular, aesthetic tea culture was made a part of a grand Chinese heritage.

The reclamation of native Taiwanese cultures has become associated with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP's) governance and political stance (Ho 2006). Reclamation of what was denigrated and suppressed brings along with it a certain amount of overcorrection and overcompensation, so that unsavory elements of Taiwan's frontier history *and* Japanese colonial history often go unmentioned. In addition, the assertion of a unique Taiwanese culture and identity all takes place during a period in which Taiwan has increasingly adopted a neoliberal governance model; what was once a common public good or an elite activity, such as culture and heritage, becomes primarily a set of profit generating commodities divorced from the context in which they arose (Zorzin 2020). This orientation is reflected in the revitalized Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, in which a selective history is recalled in order to correct one prior abuse of power (but not all of them). The development of a culture of recreational tea drinking was critical for the creation of the Maokong recreational tea farming area, and this culture was initially brought forth as an expression of a national culture. Later, under a new, democratized regime, this same culture was revealed to have been Taiwanese all along, with the distinctly local ritual tradition of Ang Kong worship taking the spotlight.

A National Pastime is Born

At the southeastern edge of the Taipei basin, on a high mountain ridge overlooking the city, there are a large number of recreational teahouses catering to the weekend tourist market. While riding the sky gondola up to the mountain, tourists can see the tea fields unfold beneath them in snaking rows of compact, shapely hedges. This area is known as the 貓空休閒農業區

Maokong Agricultural Tourism Scenic Area by the government, or simply Maokong, a mountainous tea farming area that was re-developed in the 1970s and 1980s to provide leisure for the growing middle classes in Taipei and steady income for the farmers who were considered likely to abandon the area within a generation.

The recreational farms and teahouses of Maokong celebrate the long-standing heritage of tea culture and the tea arts of Taiwan. However, the tea culture that is at the root of Maokong's identity is a longstanding political project, an invented tradition. Although many of Maokong's tea fields certainly do have a long history of tea production, with many fields owned and tended by the same family for generations, a few key areas of difference remain between the interests of tea farmers and state, with politicians often desiring to utilize the Maokong area as a place to leave their legacy. In this section, I aim to show the way that tea culture was developed in Taiwan as a concerted, political effort that first nationalized and then localized a specific cultural form. In the process, Maokong became the territory of the state due to the legacy of former Taipei mayor (and Taiwan's first native president) 李登輝 Lee Teng-hui (Lin 2010). The city-sponsored ritual of Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields enters in as one of many political projects which takes place in the Maokong area. The state and individual politicians use Maokong as a proving ground and the Welcoming Ang Kong event as a successful grassroots project which connects culture with industry. Zhongshun Temple, which hosts the event, is also able to leverage their connection to government as proof of their legitimacy and supremacy as the official center of Ang Kong worship. The Muzha Young Farmers Association members, although they have a mainly secular interpretation of the event, see the project as more sensible and effective than conventional city planning for economic revitalization, which disregards local culture and environmental limitations. Compared with the worshippers and local residents who

frequent Zhongshun Temple and appear at most of its ritual events, the Young Farmers do not regularly participate in ritual preparation and events (most of the regular attendees are retirees). They spend most of their time working, and although they all still identify themselves as farmers, the content of their work is not growing tea leaves but preparing, roasting, and marketing them. They are better described as tea farm operators. In December 2020 and April 2021, they attended a farmers' market event at Zhongshun Temple and the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual mainly as part of their marketing outreach work. The most senior member of the association, its representative, told me that the Welcoming Ang Kong collaborative event is in line with their association's goals, which focus on the long-term survival of their tea businesses, because it uses pre-existing infrastructure and brings local people out to see what the local business operators would like to show them. In contrast, she complained about another proposed government initiative to build a suspension bridge in Maokong, a costly project which a politician would like to leave as a monument to his personal glory, but which would be unnecessarily environmentally destructive and would not improve any tea farmer's livelihood in the long term.

The tea farms and recreational teahouses of Maokong are part of an industry which has become known as Taiwanese tea culture. In the parlance of the Taiwanese government's Ministry of Culture, the term 文創產業 *wenchuang chanye*, meaning Cultural and Creative Industries, is meant to utilize specific cultural practices and products for both monetary gain and international recognition (Ministry of Culture, 2021; Ministry of Culture, 2021a). The elevation of tea drinking into a tea culture illustrates this. At every tea house in Maokong, customers can experience a particular way of drinking tea known as 功夫茶 *gongfucha*. This method involves steeping whole tea leaves in a small pot and then pouring the infusion into a vessel and from there, into small, walnut-sized cups from which the tea can be drunk in two or three sips.

Although this method of drinking tea is now common, even ubiquitous, all over Taiwan and China as well, this method of tea preparation was once just one regional variation among many (Zhang 2016). Originating in Chaozhou, it was the go-to tea brewing method of the migrants from Fujian and Guangdong who brought it with them to Taiwan. As the Taiwanese economy grew, so did demand for leisure activities, and tea drinking, which had been primarily a practical activity, was reborn as a ceremonial high art. Zhang makes a convincing argument that elements like visual presentation and bodily movements were borrowed from other traditions, such as Japanese tea ceremony, incorporated into *gongfucha* and then repackaged as *chayi* 茶藝, or the art of tea (Zhang 2016). The artistic teahouse distinguished itself as a center of culture, in contrast with older versions of teahouses which were just fronts for gambling halls and brothels (Boretz 2011:190). When this art of tea was conceived, the Nationalist government had a strong interest in promoting it to the world as a quintessential part of Chinese culture, which it laid proprietary claim to in order to legitimize the Republic of China as the real China and the People's Republic of China as a pretender. As Zhang shows in his investigation of *gongfucha*, this Chinese tea ceremony was no more “Chinese” than other forms, from Tibetan yak butter tea to Beijing jasmine tea, all of them regional forms of tea drinking with none of them laying a claim to being *the* national method (Zhang 2016).

In the 1970s, at around the same time that the art of tea was being developed in high class teahouses in central areas of Taipei city, Maokong was one of the few remaining agricultural areas within Taipei city limits. Although a large number of Taipei citizens were prospering due to high rates of economic growth and a booming stock market and real estate trade, the farmers in Maokong were largely being left behind (Lin 2010). This was due both to structural changes in the Taiwanese economy as well as the particular conditions of farmers on steep, mountainside

land. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Sino-American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction, which ushered in sweeping changes over Taiwan's rural landscape, recommended that farmers industrialize and mechanize their fields as much as possible in order to increase efficient production and heighten their income (Shen 1970). However, the steep mountainside slopes of Maokong were not suited to mechanization and neither were their tea products, which were considered a luxury rather than a commodity. Additionally, increasing supply through mechanization, which was the policy goal, was not necessary for Maokong farmers as the area was already highly productive and supply outpaced demand. By the 1980s, this policy failure had to be accounted for. Farmers' living costs were rising or were soon to rise, but their profit margins were not growing, and rural outmigration was already predicted to become a large issue. At that time, the mayor of Taipei, Lee Teng-hui, led the crafting of a new policy promoting leisure farms and teahouses directly in the tea fields, and in 1980, the first teahouse was opened in Maokong (Lin 2010:28). Taiwanese tea was marketed to the wealthy middle classes as a luxury good and cultural product, and weekend tourism in Maokong became a trend. Recreational agribusiness appeared to be a viable strategy for farmers to increase their income and profit from urban Taipei's development. Many middle-aged and older Taipei residents that I spoke with had fond memories of visiting the area in the 1980s and recalled how popular and lively it was when they were young. Some of the children of those tea farmers recounted to me the way that their relatives would hire themselves out as baggage porters, babysitters, and even sedan chair carriers for those tourists.

Turning tea from a standard agricultural commodity into a cultural good had multiple benefits; apart from improving farmers' livelihoods and stemming outmigration, it even brought the Republic of China onto the global stage. The art of tea was also an internationally recognized

cultural product that legitimized Nationalist rather than Communist rule over the popular idea of China (Zhang 2016). While mainland China's modernization focused on systematically destroying Chinese traditions, first by the Nationalist party and then by the Communist party, when the Republic of China moved to Taiwan, the Nationalists made the preservation of these traditions part of their core ideology (Yang 2011; Tu 1991:10). Using culture as a bridge is an important part of unofficial connections between states and soft power diplomacy, and it is especially important in the case of Taiwan, where a bulk of diplomacy work must distance itself from the government (Rawnsley 2014). Given Taiwan's longstanding restrictions on official diplomacy, the Ministry of Culture has politically utilized culture in order to bolster Taiwan's image abroad in several industries, such as film and music (Lin and Tsai 2019). At the time of tea art's infancy in Taiwan, the purpose of advancing tea culture was in order to market it as specifically *Chinese*, and after democratization, this goal has ostensibly shifted. The Ministry of Culture is interested in promoting cultural industries and products from Taiwan as Taiwanese. As one scholar noted, "the DPP cultural policy has three unique tendencies: an emphasis on the economic value of culture industries, the theorisation of Taiwanese subjectivity, and branding Taiwan as a cultural product," and these tendencies are highly visible in the way that the government has handled the revitalization of the Maokong area (Chang 2004:5).

Not only is the tea culture of Maokong a specifically Taiwanese culture, but it is representative of a Northern Taiwanese regional culture. The idea that Taipei, on its own, has no culture or is not truly Taiwanese is a commonly voiced sentiment (Allen 2012). A statement that I have heard repeatedly is that "the real Taiwan" is anywhere outside of Taipei. Additionally, state funded projects for cultural initiatives are believed to be more successful outside of Taipei, in places like Taiwan's former capital, the city of Tainan, which is considered to have a more

comprehensive and unified vision of Taiwanese culture, as opposed to the confused version that is apparent in Taipei (Prof. Lin Ching-chih, personal communication, September 14, 2020). The current government administration, desiring to emphasize Taiwan's unique traditions, rather than its Chinese-ness, seeks to undo decades of government suppression of local culture, the strongest effects of which were felt in the seat of government, Taipei.

It has now been forty years since the first leisure farm opened up in Maokong. Whereas the first leisure farms and tea culture helped provide some additional value to an agricultural product and preserve a sunset industry, they can no longer fulfil this function and have undergone waves of re-branding in order to keep attracting visitors. Compared with other tea producing areas in the North, like 坪林 Pinglin, the Maokong area is much more heavily reliant on tourism than on tea production. That is, the recreational agribusiness no longer only *supplements* tea income, but comprises the bulk of the tea farm operator's income. According to most of the middle-aged Taipei residents I spoke with, Maokong's glory days are long over; although they had fond memories of visiting there in their youth, they have little interest in returning: "the cost-performance ratio is too low. You go once, and you won't go back again." Even the Muzha Young Farmers acknowledge that there is limited appeal for locals, as they were hit surprisingly hard by the lack of foreign tourists due to the coronavirus pandemic. Recreation is subject to fashion, and the cost of keeping up with fashion is high. State-sponsored revitalization of post-industrial urban areas is globally popular, but large flagship infrastructure projects have mostly passed out of fashion in favor of intangibles like "culture-led urban regeneration" led by the "endemic festival" (Lin and Hsing 2009). At the same time, the Maokong area is a continuing public expense, for which over-eager state planning is largely responsible for incurring, by putting up bulky infrastructure (the sky gondola) which is expensive

to maintain. From the perspective of the Muzha Young Farmers, the Maokong tea farmers on the whole are autonomous and do not depend on city spending for their development. The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual represents a more up-to-date fashion in urban planning initiatives, which fulfills a requirement for local politicians. For the Young Tea Farmers, it is a less intrusive city project which affords them a valuable marketing opportunity that they make the most of. For both of these groups, the ritual is a resource on its own, and they participate in it on their own terms, rather than within the terms of the ritual context. It is a tourist-friendly event in which spectating is expected more than participation, and participants are produced as spectacles.

The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields Ritual Returns

In 2006, a long-abandoned ritual, called 尪公巡茶園 *Ang Kong Xun Cha Yuan*, literally Welcoming Ang Kong to Patrol the Tea Fields, returned to the tea gardens of Maokong. This ritual takes the form of an elaborate procession in which the god Ang Kong is brought to the tea fields in the mountains on a decorative palanquin twice a year, once in the spring to release *yin* shadow soldiers, known as 放軍 *fang jun*, “stationing soldiers,” and once in the winter to collect them, in a ritual known as 收軍 *shou jun*, “calling the soldiers back.”

The ritual itself is a tour of the deity, most commonly called 遶境 *raojing*, but alternately known as 出巡 *chu xun* or 巡境 *xun jing*, which means going out on patrol. The name of the ritual recalls a separate ritual of welcoming a god to one of his alternate homes, which comes from the activities of worship associations, which would be groups of people who would circulate a single god statue among themselves. As has been stressed to me by multiple people, the maintenance of a god is necessarily time consuming and expensive, and the ability to simplify this care is limited. One particular injunction sticks in mind: “If you want to care for a

deity, you need to quit your full-time job.” It is not only cost effective to share the burden among multiple people, but there can be an added incentive of making money and earning prestige. Many worship associations do double duty as credit associations.

In general, worship associations keep detailed account books of their expenses, and those who are selected to take charge of organizing all of the ritual activities needed need to be wealthy, so that they are able to pay for all of the expenses of various rituals as needed, and well-connected and influential, so that they can easily collect donations from other wealthy people for these activities. The ones in these roles are still primarily men. Oftentimes, when membership in a worship association is large, donations exceed the amount of money needed, and this extra money is at the disposal of the organizer. This, in turn, motivates more people to join the organization and compete to host the god.

The god known as Ang Kong has fewer dedicated temples than many other popular deities, such as 媽祖 Mazu, 關公 Guan Gong, 觀音 Guanyin, etc., and he still continues to circulate, taking up residence in temples and in associations in turn. In the 臺北火聖廟 *Taipei Huosheng Miao*, Taipei Fire God Temple, Ang Kong only had a censer but no statue in permanent residence. According to interviews I have conducted, this is not necessarily a sign of his marginalization in modern times, as Ang Kong historically was circulated rather than being bound to a single temple. The two figures, Baoyi Daifu and Baoyi Zunwang, are both known as Ang Kong, but each have different personal attributes, one a scholar-official and the other a fierce general. The term “daifu,” meaning a great minister, is also the common word for doctor, so that Baoyi Daifu became associated with healing illnesses. In these roles as both a traveling doctor and a patrolling guard, the god needed to be able to move wherever his help was needed. Other gods were able to proliferate, expanding their temples into new areas. Even today, many

temples request to host Ang Kong temporarily. His expansion and influence are more informal than the well-known popular deities and lighter on infrastructure.



Figure 6 A Tudi Gong Temple in the Daan District of Taipei Prepares to Receive Ang Kong

(Baoyi Daifu) 恭迎保儀大夫

Author's Photo

The Welcoming Ang Kong ritual is the elaborate ceremony that is required for the god Ang Kong to travel from one location to the next. He does not travel quietly or secretly, but he must arrive with the appropriate amount of celebration, and he must be sent off with the same courtesy. Ideally, many people will be in attendance, the noise and smoke of firecrackers will fill the air, along with the sounds of drums and the 噴吶 *suona* reed pipe, all of the finest relics will be on display, there will be lion dancers, strippers or dancing girls, 八家將 *bajiajiang* spirit generals, frame puppets, and many temple volunteers wearing matching baseball caps and polo shirts. The expense of hiring all of these people is high, as the dancers, the musicians, and the *bajiajiang* troupe are all professional organizations, and there are also food offerings that must

be made. It takes at least half a day, if not longer. While there may be a minimum amount of money required to host one of these events, there is almost no ceiling on expense, and 拚 piànn, competitive display, will drive up the expenditures.

In the 1960s, the government forcibly tried to reduce these Welcoming Ang Kong rituals due to their expense and frequency. They may have been occurring in different locations around Taipei and its outskirts as often as once or twice a month (Prof. Lin Ching-chih, personal communication, March 21, 2020). In modern processions, the volunteers are mostly men, and in the past, the composition was basically the same; since men were overrepresented in the formal economy, their ritual activity would be bothersome to the government since it precluded them from any other economically productive activity that day. An informant statement taken by Ahern in the late 1960s reveals the conflict between the Northern Taiwanese (of 三峽 Sanxia) and the Nationalist government.

“on my first field trip in 1969 Ch’i-nan villagers were upset over a government tax on each performance of a folk opera for the gods and over mounting government pressure to combine what were traditionally separate *pai-pai* for the god Ang Kong (held by different districts in sequence). Even at that time, resentment toward these policies was common. One elderly man said: We work hard every day. We are up early every morning at 5:00 A.M. and don’t sleep until late at night in order to get everything done. Why does the government begrudge us a few days’ rest? The aborigines have their *pai-pai* in the mountains; why can’t we have ours? Every year the government spends untold dollars celebrating national holidays like Double Ten. If they can spend money on their *pai-pai*, why can’t we spend money on ours? No, they insist on interfering with our customs by imposing fines and taxes on opera performances. There is absolutely no chance we will ever combine our *pai-pai* for Ang Kong with others.” (Ahern 1981:417).

The amount of Welcoming Ang Kong rituals was reduced, however, and many of them disappeared, including the practice of Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields. However,

according to multiple statements by participants, tea farmers, and the staff at Zhongshun Temple, this mountaintop ritual had never been as lavish as the ones on the plains, as the mountain farmers were not as wealthy as those living in the plains. Unlike the Welcoming Ang Kong rituals in which the god would be moved from one host's dwelling to another, the tea field ritual was simply a territorial tour, where, after the tour was complete, the god would return back where he came from. Additionally, the purpose of the tour had already changed multiple times by the time it was revitalized in 2006.

In the period of earliest settlement, the processional tour was violent. Settlers claimed hill land, forcibly displacing prior residents, both Atayal and people from other Han settler groups with subsistence claims on the area, and the god accompanied them as they fought the aboriginal inhabitants (Lin 2007:40). After the territory had been more firmly settled by Han people from Anxi county, Ang Kong's tour was a kind of policing against the aboriginal prior inhabitants who did try to take the land back, as well as other county's people. According to Feuchtwang, who did fieldwork in the nearby town of 石碇 Shiding in the 1960s, which shares the same practice of Ang Kong worship, ritual processions were "essentially a territorial tour of boundaries" (Feuchtwang 2001:63). Ang Kong was no longer believed to be as powerful and effective as he once was, since his primary function had been to maintain the borders of Shiding from aboriginal attack (Feuchtwang 2001:112). In the 1960s, then, the Ang Kong processional tours in Shiding were still mostly related to this earlier meaning. This early ritual activity with its clear ethnic boundary marking is distinct from the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, which revives and cements connections between groups of people who are all involved in one industry. In the current version of the ritual, this particular historical feature is

also downplayed. There is an analogue between human and insect occupation of land converted to commercial production, in which subsistence use is redefined as an invasion and a pestilence.

According to an exhibition which was held at the Wenshan District Community Center directly before the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was performed in 2020, the modern ritual takes its history directly from a miracle after settlement, in which Ang Kong dispersed insect pests. It is a historically recorded miracle performed by Ang Kong, but it is not the only one, and it is not the most exciting one, but this story, in a fairly similar form, though with some change in details, was told to me by multiple committee members of Zhongshun Temple, the temple keeper of Shengkeng's Jishun Temple, as well as a member of the Muzha Young Farmers' Association. It has also been recorded in a book which the Zhongshun Temple distributes copies of, which is privately published by the temple. According to that document, the story of the miracle's origin is as follows:

Some farmers went to attend a festival for Baoyi Daifu held by the Chen family in Muzha, and one of them left early to return to his home in Xizhi. He and his son planned to wake up early the next day to deal with an insect infestation, so the Chen family lent him one of Baoyi Daifu's lanterns from their festival to guide his way home. Upon his return to Xizhi, he decided to check up on his field before going home, using the light from the lantern to look around.

Early the next morning, the farmer's son set out to their field to get rid of the insects, and when he arrived, he discovered that they were already all dead. Oddly, the neighboring field was still badly infested. All of the local farmers wanted to know how he had managed to rid his field of pests. The farmer told them how he had used Baoyi Daifu's lantern to take a look around his field just last night, and this morning, the insects had all naturally disappeared.

Everyone agreed that this was the miraculous power of Muzha Zhongshun Temple's Baoyi Daifu. News spread rapidly, and one after the other, farmers began to invite Baoyi Daifu to come patrol

their fields to deal with their insect problems. It became known throughout the Taipei Basin that

Baoyi Daifu was the protector of farmers, and he had the power to get rid of plagues.¹⁰

It can be said that this story is now the official origin myth of specifically *Taiwanese* Ang Kong worship (as opposed to its Chinese heritage). It takes place entirely in Taiwan, and the historical origins of Ang Kong are completely irrelevant. Whether he actually is based on the Chinese historical figure of Zhang Xun is of no consequence and has nothing to do with this miracle. The spread of Baoyi Daifu's reputation and the practice of worshipping him was due entirely to his efficacy in providing tangible pest relief services rather than in passing down family traditions for memorial or any other purposes. As stated in the previous chapter, every god statue has its own character and distinctive personality, and Zhongshun Temple's Ang Kong became well known outside of his immediate base of worshippers for the specific miracle of clearing the tea fields of pests. However, as worship associations circulated their god statues and held joint rituals and banquets, Ang Kong's battlefield stories should not have been unknown to anyone who worshipped him. Although this aspect of his power is no longer discussed officially, that does not mean it never existed or was unknown among his worshippers in Muzha.

In frontier Taiwan, ethnic feuding was rampant, and during mass commercial development, increasing territory meant increased profit. These were the common concerns of the time, important to the people who worshipped Ang Kong, so he was directly involved in them. Years after new settlers first cut plantations out from the mountain, productivity dropped off due to the build-up of pests. The practice of not using fertilizer in the mountain tea fields exacerbated problems, remarked upon by foreign observers (Davidson 1903:378). The decision not to use fertilizer could not solely be blamed on ignorance, as fertilizer use was common practice for farmers in other parts of the Chinese-influenced world; as remarked upon by another

¹⁰ See Appendix E for text in the original language.

foreign observer, sustainable, intensive farming was some of the world's most advanced in these places (King 1911). Rather, it reflected the recent settlement of the area, and the sole reliance on the forest soil's pre-existing fertility; for these specific farmers at that time, the tendency was not to build up fertility in fields through careful management, but to cut new fields. There was the added difficulty and cost of transporting fertilizer into the mountains and keeping it from running down the slopes. In modern terms, these were unsustainable, extractive farming practices. The natural consequences of this behavior, crop disease and crop pests, were avoided through Ang Kong's miraculous intervention. This assuaged any lingering doubts regarding farming practices and also land seizures. Pests were equated with demonic forces, the enduring presence of spirits in the land who desired vengeance, and Ang Kong's power repelled them. The ritual of *fang jun* is not performed to *directly* act upon insects, it is for repelling and controlling spirits. The two miracles, that of repelling the attacks of aboriginal warriors and repelling crop pests, both of which threaten profit, are intimately connected. The focus on dispelling the build-up of demonic energy in the land is still practiced in the present-day ritual of *fang jun*; the original meaning of the ritual has not entirely changed, but its expected effect has. *Fang jun* now offers worshippers a generic blessing of safety as well as the promise of renewed demand for locally grown tea leaves. However, in present-day explanations, the circumstances of the birth of the tea industry and Ang Kong's power are downplayed, if not entirely left out. The stress is no longer on ethnic conflict, but on the shared experiences of people in the same industry, their hard work, and their difficulties in improving their livelihoods. In the new ritual, the history of the cultivation of cash crops on a disputed borderland is reimagined in a way that benefits the present-day desire for the continuation of the status-quo, even while referencing modern ecological concerns.

In contrast, in an earlier account of Ang Kong worship and mythology in Northern Taiwan recorded by Ahern, the two miracles took on equal importance:

Whatever the historical facts, residents of Ch'nan say they continue to worship the Ang-kong because they are powerful gods who saved the people of Hengch'i from disaster twice in the past. According to one story, a plague of locusts had descended on the crops in the area and threatened to destroy everything in sight. After the images of the Ang-kong were brought from Chingmei and the gods beseeched to dispel the insects, a huge flock of black crows arrived, devoured all the insects, and flew away. According to another story, a group of Hengch'i residents engaged in battle with the aborigines were badly outnumbered and faced imminent defeat. But suddenly, terrified looks came over the aborigines' faces, and they fled to the mountains in rout. Later the Hengch'i people heard that the aborigines had seen two gigantic figures on horseback waving yellow flags and charging down on them. Since the Ang-kong characteristically carry yellow flags, the villagers knew that the gods had appeared to save them from destruction (Ahern 1973:4-6).

Even among some informants in later ethnographic accounts, it can be seen that the story of Ang Kong's involvement in chasing aboriginal residents off of their own land was a highly important foundational story for Han settlers from Anxi County (Lin 2007:50). The newer version of the story, the miracle in the tea fields, is repeated and emphasized by those who told it to me, from the temple committee, the Muzha Young Farmers, and a local professor who is now undertaking research on the Ang Kong ritual community. I never heard any information about Ang Kong fighting aboriginal residents from the people involved in the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual. When I attended this ritual in 2020 and 2021, the story of who is Ang Kong and the origin of the ritual was repeated over and over again for the benefit of newcomers and tourists, and the pest relief miracle is given as the only historical origin of this event. It would be considered politically incorrect to openly praise the god for repelling aboriginal “入侵 *ruqin*” or invasion, which is the ironic way that many local people still describe the conflict between Han

settlers and aboriginal people in the Taipei hills. In the revitalized ritual, only the politically correct ritual has been preserved, at the expense of not acknowledging the other at all.

In contrast with this self-conscious preservation, the temple keeper of Shengkeng's Jishun Temple which enshrines not only Baoyi Daifu and Baoyi Zunwang but also another lesser-known historical hero of the An Lushan rebellion called 莫英 Mo Ying, told me, almost in one breath, all of the miracles, myths, and legends together, including the legend of Ang Kong protecting Kinmen islanders from raiding pirates (see also, Lin 2018:127). He mentioned the earlier aboriginal conflict and even connected Ang Kong to a famous case, in which a sick woman woke up one day claiming to be the reincarnation of a drowned girl from Kinmen Island (Chao 2002:136-137). He also lightly mocked Zhongshun Temple for their claim that Baoyi Daifu was Zhang Xun, claiming that it was impossible, and that they only did this to due to jealousy.



Figure 7 A sign in an MRT station advertises Maokong's attractions, including the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields Ritual

Author's Photo

In the first performances of the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, the project advisors had also planned to use the event to promote Maokong ecotourism and ecological education, to encourage “people to think about the source of their drinking water and the state of the environment” (Muzha Zhongsun Temple Record, n.d.).¹¹ The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was a perfect candidate because it took place inside of a green space and referenced a specifically Taiwanese phenomenon. Through this renewed ritual, it was possible to add a veneer of culture to the brute tourist trap that Maokong had become over time. It performed many jobs, that of localizing Chinese culture and reconfiguring it as Taiwanese as well as illustrating a foundational myth of what it meant to be Taiwanese, or more specifically, Northern Taiwanese. According to the new story, it meant being a hardworking and hard-pressed tea farmer, a hardscrabble pioneer settler who came to a marginal landscape and made it blossom into an economically productive area. This story parallels Taiwan’s own economic miracle, in which a small island with limited natural resources, besieged by war and a refugee crisis, became a global economic powerhouse (Rigger 2011). It leaves out the tricky parts, the parts which local people of varying social status, all mythmakers, used to make sense of what was happening around them. It takes the multiplicity of meanings, and the ritual complex and practice of deity worship, a kind of open-source content for meaning-making, and flattens them into one narrative, which it presents to the state to secure project funding, and which the state in turn presents to the public.

The Nature of Modern-Day Miracles, or The God of Developers and Landlords

Historically, Ang Kong had a strong connection to tea growers in Northern Taiwan, but in an age when almost all of these farmers use conventional pesticides and fertilizers, I wondered

¹¹ “也希望能喚起大家飲水思源、重視環境改變的現況” (Muzha Zhongsun Temple Record, n.d.)

how he maintained his relevance to this base of worshippers. I had attempted to chase down a lead on what may have pointed to the durability of Ang Kong worship's connection to tea farming and the tea industry. One of the most important events for Maokong tea farmers was the twice-yearly tea competition, held by the Farmer's Association, a governmental organization created to support Taiwanese farmers through access to credit, banking, seeds, tools, and know-how. Winners of the tea competition not only won a large cash prize, but they were able to sell their prize-winning tea leaves for higher prices than average and use their title as a way to advertise their teahouse. Many teahouses in Maokong posted signs outside of their businesses advertising that they were winners of the tea competition. One interviewee wondered about the timing of the rituals and competitions and thought that maybe some farmers believed that the tea fields that Ang Kong visited were more likely to win the tea competition. It seemed to fit. The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual took place twice a year, and each time, it took place immediately before the judging. I had wondered if this was the proof that young farmers still needed Ang Kong's intervention in the process of growing, roasting, and promoting their tea leaves.

After further probing of tea farmers and temple committee members, the answer was a firm no. As it turned out, the tea farmers themselves saw neither correlation nor causation between the two events. In an explanation of the preparations for the tea competition itself, it becomes clear why. According to the representative of the Muzha Young Farmers' Association, a business association which receives funding from various state agencies, most tea farmers participate in the competition, and of the ones who participate, usually half of their tea leaves are grown strictly for the competition judging, rather than simply for sale. Some farmers focus all of their effort on this competition, and all of their tea leaves are grown simply for competition

judging. Preparing for the competition takes four months out of the year, but the rewards are irresistible for most. For tea farmers in Maokong and the Muzha area, an ideal existence would be to have a network of clients who acted as patrons to support a stable existence for the tea farmers. These are the upper echelon of tea farmers, and they have the privilege of no longer deigning to enter their leaves in the competition. The tea competition could possibly provide a pathway toward this, as the competition judges are often viewed as tastemakers with a following, as tea connoisseurs buy the leaves that the judge they follow praises the most, whether they win or lose.

However, the tea farmers do not draw any connection between the quality of their leaves, winning the competition, and the power of Ang Kong to influence the outcome of the competition. Even the Chairman of Zhongshun Temple, who wants to promote the popular notion of their temple's power, emphatically stated that the credit belonged solely to the farmers. For these farmers, there is a separation between their farming and business activities and the ritual activities that they participate in. When I asked the representative of the Muzha Young Farmers' Association about what she felt the purpose of the ritual to be, she said that she felt it created a sense of peace and security, of 平安 *pingan*, even a sense of generational continuity, as she enjoyed participating in the ritual with her parents, grandparents, and her own daughter. However, ritual activities were just something that she joined as they came up, they were not something that was part of her life at all times.

This is in contrast to her own description of her grandfather's lifestyle, which she discussed when I asked her about ritual activities, and other elders I spoke with at Zhongshun Temple and in other places. For the older generation, their social life, and even their working life, was almost completely merged with ritual activities. The representative's grandfather was part of

the temple band, with whom he practiced in the evenings. According to her, his leisure activities were made up of this practice as well as enjoying the outdoor banquets known as “flowing water banquets” because multiple households would play host as guests traveled from one banquet to the next. Not long after our interview, I was able to meet an elderly man, who had been a traveling chef, preparing just these kinds of banquets in Shiding and other places in North Taiwan. These banquets had a ceremonial function, as they were held on important occasions such as weddings, funerals, or anniversary celebrations for a worship association’s deity. In his prime, this chef could deal with one banquet every three days. After he retired from this occupation, he studied with a relative who made sculptures to adorn the temple, and he learned to make clay figures which were used in the ritual display of food offerings, and sometimes earned a permanent place on the altar. Although the amount of formally paid employment related to ritual preparations varied depending on the individual, these two accounts illustrate the way that, for this generation, there was virtually no secularization, no separation between the content of the social and working life and what could be termed religious or ritual life, and that these cases describe time periods long after modernization could be said to have arrived on Taiwan. The rituals themselves, 法會 *fahui*, could be defined as discrete moments often presided over by hired professional ritual masters, yet these events could also be considered as something like a calendar by which many worshippers arranged their lives.

Women were involved in the informal, unpaid preparations for rituals, as they prepared food offerings for the altars inside their homes, the temporary altars set up outside the home in large community shared rituals, as well as temple events. These homemade offerings have made appearances at every temple event I’ve attended at Zhongshun Temple, and they are primarily prepared by elderly women.



Figure 8 Vegetarian Offerings made by Zhongshun Temple Volunteers

Author's Photo

In trying to conduct multilingual interviews, it was no surprise to me that many of these elderly women did not speak Mandarin Chinese, but some did not even understand it, and most of them cannot read or write beyond basic character recognition. Due to this, their ability to engage with people outside of their family and immediate area is limited, and their activities at the temple (and the market) often represent their main expressions in the public sphere. Preparation of offerings for rituals was almost entirely the responsibility of women, and for those who could not read or write, they had to internalize the ritual calendar, as was expressed by one

man in his description of his grandmother: “She had something to do every single day for *bai bai*. She was an expert of *bai bai*. I don’t know how she was able to remember when to start preparing. She couldn’t write anything down to remind herself because she didn’t know how to!” Although, throughout their lifetimes, economic and social modernization was occurring around Taiwan, and there was some effort expended by the state to create a stricter division between economically productive activities and the rest of a person’s life, elderly people often continued to arrange their time according to the ritual cycle, that is, according to the 農曆 *nongli* traditional calendar. In Muzha today, many of these retired elderly people keep up the rituals of the temple and collaboratively prepare all of the cooked offerings for them, rather than preparing for rituals as individual households. For the most part, it is a mutually beneficial relationship in which the temple becomes publicly recognized as an institution that benefits the community and in which the elderly can occupy the space of the temple, impose their meaning on its rituals and determine their scale and success. It is *more* financially beneficial and effective at garnering a positive reputation for the official staff members, who engage in well publicized charity campaigns and host events, like classes and lecture series, similar to those that the district community center organizes. External funding and voice amplification from large organizations and the state now tips the balance in favor of the temple’s male middle management. However, if the elderly were to withdraw completely, all authenticity would be lost, as many of them are the only ones who know how to prepare and enact various rituals. In fact, I have heard stories of just this happening when most of the worshippers did not agree with some policies of the temple management or had conflict with certain individuals who were chosen as leaders.

It was a different experience of living and a very different worldview than that of the Young Farmers who enter the ritual sphere more rarely. For them, there is a clear separation

between ritual activities and the content of their everyday life. They partake in these activities when they attend *fahui* as a participant or visit a temple, and although this has an effect on their life, by creating a sense of mental ease and balance, it does not necessarily need to yield concrete results. They see ritual as an addition to their life rather than a necessary component of it, and they rarely need to be involved in preparing for it since their grandparents do it on their behalf. For them, it is best if *fahui* are organized by others, and they can attend as spectators. In general, the aspirational Taipei citizen believes that young people who are heavily involved in the temple are generally not nice, tending to be rough and poorly educated. This came up in a discussion about a large event held in the Fall of 2020 by the 艋舺青山宮 *Mengjia Qingshan Gong* Temple in Wanhua, a temple which is well known for engaging younger people through innovative events, such as music festivals featuring popular local bands. The people around Zhongshun Temple did not approve of the way that the anniversary event was handled, and the program did include everything that is disparaged about Taiwanese working class temple culture: pole dancers, techno, gangsters, fighting, and a lot of littering (Chen 2011). These negative connotations are one of many barriers on young people's engagement with ritual and the gods.

This difference in attitude was not a change that happened overnight, but a process that unfolded both due to governmental regulations as well as the encouragement of middle-aged and elderly women, who consciously and deliberately simplified their ritual activities so that they could free up more time for themselves and their children to participate in the formal economy. Some of the elderly women also expressed the point of view that preparing offerings was too time consuming.

“My mother-in-law was so hard on me. We couldn't buy anything for the offerings, we had to make it all ourselves, and it took so long, but she forced me to do it that way. So when she

died, I started buying some of the things, and when I became a mother-in-law, I told my son's wife, just buy everything! Don't waste your time. Now it's so easy. It's not like the way it was when I was young," an elderly woman proudly stated at a 祭解 *tsè kái* ritual I attended at Zhongshun Temple. I have heard similar statements of ritual simplification from middle-aged women who even like to share their time-saving secrets with each other. I visited a friend's family home and asked to have a short introduction to her home altar. There, the three cups of tea that were customarily offered to the ancestors and gods were filled with tea leaves instead: "I only change them once a month, when they get dusty," she told me. "How clever!" the woman's sister exclaimed. Secularization, or the separation between ritual and religious life and economic life, although it was first roughly enforced at the hands of an authoritarian government, became an accepted practice that gradually unfolded as women actively reduced the amount of time they spent on these duties, not for their own selfish benefit, but for the benefit of their family members, who they encouraged to spend more time on study or work.

According to Asad, more can be discovered by comparing secularities than by comparing religions as secularization is not a standardized sloughing off of false beliefs which is the same everywhere but a place-specific result of complex negotiations in an elite-driven modernization process (Asad 2003). The young farmers, and young Taiwanese in general, can be said to have undergone this secularization process, in which they divide their life into their everyday activities and their "religious" activities. For them, *bai bai* can be considered as 宗教 *zongjiao*, religion, as opposed to the elderly who might not have grown up with an awareness of this term as having anything to do with their daily ritual activities. This is the term that they themselves will use to formally categorize this domain of activity, but oftentimes, all of these activities are simply called *bai bai*. *Zongjiao*, while generally descriptive of doctrinal Buddhism, increasingly comes

to describe any ritual activity in a secularized worldview (Yang 2011). Although the specific form of ritual as seen at temple events may not be something that young Taipei people want to be heavily involved with, total disenchantment has not occurred. Silvio argued that urban young people enact the traditional rituals by transposing their forms and even their discourse onto their modern hobbies (Silvio 2019). Beyond this, almost every young person I have spoken to has at least one ghost story that they personally experienced or that their close friend experienced. However, their interaction with formal gods is much more demarcated, cordoned off from the other parts of their daily life, and of the young people who are involved with Zhongshun Temple or tea farming, they rarely share their personal experiences of Ang Kong doing something for them, appearing to them in a dream or answering their prayers directly. This is in opposition to some older people who see Ang Kong's agency as pervasive in the area, influencing their lives casually, such as an older man who got pulled over on his scooter by the police. He had been drinking 高粱 *gaoliang* sorghum liquor, but he passed the breathalyzer test after a desperate prayer to Ang Kong. It was simply a casual fact of his life.

Though Ang Kong is no longer directly involved in the business of tea, he has not simply faded away. Although the legend regarding his involvement in the tea industry is important for his localization in Taiwan, it was not the only thing that he was known for, and he continues to shift in terms of purpose and ability. It can be said that he helped with tea not because of any affinity for tea leaves but simply due to the timely needs of his worship base. Like most modern, popular gods, he is a generalist, helping his worshippers to pass their exams, find success when they open a business or get involved in a property deal, maintain their health or get over an illness, and even conceive children, both sons and daughters.

During one weekend ceremony held at the temple called 圓斗法會 *yuandou fahui*, a local woman in her early seventies spoke to me at length over a light meal of noodles and tea (provided free of charge by the volunteer kitchen staff, all local women):

“When I first opened my shop, the rent cost only 2,000 [NTD] per month. Now, it’s 10 times the price. It’s impossible for young families to be able to live in Taipei anymore, they’re all leaving to live in places like Taoyuan or Hsinchu. In the 1980s, you could buy a house here for 300,000 [NTD]. You could just save up your money and buy one. Now, that’s impossible. I bought my house [then], and I had my business, and I was able to live all these years. I thank Ang Kong for that. I really think that’s how I was able to do so well and be so successful, that it’s thanks to Ang Kong.”

This woman’s story and commentary, of which this is just a fragment, is important because it illustrates how Muzha people both recognize the reason for their success as partially external to their own effort and transpose the reason for this success onto the deity. In emphasizing the inflated property values (this woman now rents out her former shop and lives off the income), she recognized that the vagaries of the market enabled her to prosper. However, she attributes the growth of the market and her ability to profit from it not to early development state economic policy, her own hard work, her intelligence, or entrepreneurship, but to Ang Kong. This is key, and it illustrates what an older temple committee member told me that same day, when I asked him why people would continue to worship a farmers’ god: “Taiwan used to be an agricultural society and now it is a market society; it upgraded. Ang Kong upgraded, too, from a god of agriculture to a god of business.”

Many of the elderly people in Muzha, who frequently visit the temple to hang out and chat with their friends there, have similar success stories. They were able to secure comfortable retirements for themselves through landlordism. Property development was the key for these local residents, rather than tea farming or even the export economy or technology industry that

made other areas in Taiwan prosper. For these worshippers of Ang Kong, he was able to miraculously make them rich, since they openly recognize that they are not incredibly gifted with business acumen, nor do they have high educational degrees.

Muzha has been a marketing town since the Qing dynasty, and for a long time, tea was the most profitable business. When Ang Kong was first worshipped in China, as the vengeful ghost of Zhang Xun, there was no association with tea. His role for the community is flexible, changing to suit the needs of his worshippers. Despite the laudable and interesting attempt of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual revival, the Maokong tea farmers have not expressed that they depend on or even attribute any of their financial success to Ang Kong. They also do not look to him as their hope for the future. He is simply a preferable mascot to a cartoon cat, since he has deeper, authentic cultural ties with the area.¹² The term “Economic Miracle” is the term popularly used to describe the fact of East Asia’s rapid industrialization and economic growth, and Taiwan has long been used as the model child to show that hard work and bootstrapping are truly the keys to success (Lee et. al. 1994). However, for ordinary, formerly working-class people, the term “miracle” is literal. Muzha, by virtue of its location on the outskirts of Taipei city, generated vast prosperity for many of its residents, who in the 1960s, were still mainly farmers and small businesspeople (Long 1960). The generation who benefited most from this development is riding high on their unbelievable success.¹³ Access to an external market was able to generate the demand needed to create sudden wealth for tea farmers and businesspeople in the 1880s, and this process was overseen by Ang Kong. The development of

¹² The name 貓空 Maokong contains the character 貓 mao, meaning cat. However, the name comes from the word 壺穴 which means “kettle holes,” referring to a geological formation in the area. The word, when pronounced in Taiwanese Hokkien, sounds sort of like *maokong*.

¹³ Many tea sellers and tea farming families derive the bulk of their income from property ownership but continue to maintain their storefronts. I was introduced to a local tea selling family who owned over fifty apartments in the area.

recreational agrotourism in Maokong in the 1980s, in which tea farmers would even hire themselves out as sedan chair carriers, baggage carriers and babysitters for the hikers, was not considered as a boon from Ang Kong, but the responsibility of the government, specifically former mayor and president Lee Teng-hui. At this point, Ang Kong's provenance shifted, as a development process analogous to the tea boom, a real estate and development boom, brought unexpected wealth to a number of Muzha residents. Ang Kong had proved himself durable, directing some of the wealth of development toward his people. For the younger generation, however, the people who cannot afford the rising cost of living, they live at a distance from miracles and from the god himself.

For most older worshippers at the temple, when I asked them if they felt concerned about the lack of young people at many rituals, they said that a healthy, able bodied young person who cares a lot about ritual performance and *bai bai* is a little odd. Older people are not alarmed that young people have different lives than them, and they do not openly profess that they worry about ritual preservation or cultural survival. Most of them expect that as younger people grow up, they will become more like them. However, when we compare the elderly whose education had a great degree of pre-modern influence and today's youth, whose influences were increasingly more fully modern, there is a change in their world views.

We also see that with the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong ritual itself, it consciously recalls and reimagines a popular image of the past. The bursts of rapid enrichment and development of Taiwan came at an extreme cost to the environment; before the post-war industrialization of rural areas to service the export economy polluted the water and air with industrial byproducts, businesses in Japanese colonial times engaged in raw extraction of timber, and before that, profit seekers engaged in extraction of camphor and grew cash crops on clear-cut

mountain lands (Chi 1994). In some sense, the renewed ritual acknowledges this, with its early emphasis on ecological education, as any mention of ecological concerns must necessarily question the costs of development which led to the current state of environmental degradation. It also immediately discards this acknowledgement, by focusing not on what the rituals were for (generating prosperity at no cost), but the conduct of the rituals themselves: by banning firecrackers and incense, they shift the focus onto ritual's performance. By desiring to discourage incense burning, they also, perhaps unwittingly, cut off channels of communication between worshippers and the god, just as the god himself silences the spirits of the dead and other formless but possibly malevolent spirits in the area he presides over.

In summary, the history of Ang Kong worship is continuous, one of shifting enchantments. The areas that he influences have changed again and again as those who worship him moved across the world and engaged in a variety of livelihoods. Ang Kong's function is expected to change rather than stay the same, so while the preservationists of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Field ritual worried about the loss of a unique cultural practice, the temple's directorate and worshippers did not share these concerns. For them, it had long been obvious that Ang Kong had been helping them by increasing the value of their family landholdings. Preservationist activities, exemplified by the exhibition on Ang Kong Worship Culture and the renewed ritual, dredge up an idealized version of Taiwan's developmental history, one which fails to acknowledge its dark side.

Chapter 3: Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields: the Performance of a Renewed Ritual

Introduction

In 2006, the 尪公巡茶園 *Ang Kong Xun Cha Yuan* Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was revived with state support after a gap in performance among tea farmers for some decades. Formerly, the state suppressed ritual performances, and presently, it appears to support them as part of a strategy of culture-led urban regeneration. Instead of viewing the revitalized ritual as complete top-down state co-optation or commercialization of local culture, it is more accurate to understand it as one specific temple, Zhongshun Temple, and business organizations, the Muzha Young Farmers' Association, leveraging existing government policies for their own benefit. Since the leadership of these groups have all emphasized their autonomy to me, this joint cooperation is better understood as a path that they have chosen rather than the out-of-control forces of an overbearing state or economic expansion pressed upon an unwitting community. The re-staged ritual, a product of the collaboration between state, business, and civil society, emphasizes a disenchanted zone of agricultural production. In this zone, ritual is performed as a spectacle, a historical reenactment of a once powerful activity. There is no threat to state development planning and state political power when a ritual is conducted as a memorial. Enchantment re-enters as the ritual continues its course down in the main center of Muzha, and the state loosens its grip on interpretive control. Ang Kong and the host of gods and spirits who all go out on parade, have influences outside of the tightened control of the state and the temple staff. While this influence no longer necessarily concerns tea and farming, it remains open and obvious.

In 2020, there were two events which the city government and Zhongshun Temple cooperated to host. One was the revived Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields Ritual, and

another was an exhibition introducing the culture of Ang Kong worship to the local community, hosted in the Wenshan District Community Center. In 2021, the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was held once again, this time with greater participation from the Muzha Young Farmers' Association, a business alliance of tea farmers. In scholarly literature on ritual revival, most scholars pinpoint the way that native customs are re-worked or created for the generation of tourism revenue, becoming an industry of their own, separate from any ritual's initial meaning (Foster 2013; Huang 2015). Taiwan's Ministry of Culture has formerly stated their goal regarding culture more broadly as 「文化產業化,產業文化化」 *wenhua chanye hua, chanye wenhua hua*, or “culture industrializes and industry culturizes” (Lin 2010:20). The focus on utilizing culture to generate profit is still emphasized in the newly updated policy on Cultural and Creative Industries (Ministry of Culture 2021a). It is no straightforward matter to use the critical framework of commodification of ritual to analyze the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, since it was originally a ritual that focused on maximizing crop yield, profit, and ensuring wealth generation. In order to preserve the spirit of the original ritual, there must be an aspect which acknowledges the desire for wealth and prosperity and hopefully generates it. The ritual was historically performed to aid a globalized, commercialized tea farming industry. As discussed in the previous chapter, this historical foundation was drawn on to explain the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, mainly highlighting the positive points of early commercial transformation and discarding the negatives. Critical scholarship on revitalized rituals acknowledges a conflict due to recent, sudden intrusions of the market or the state, but this is not a primary conflict in the case of the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual (You 2020). In fact, it even seems that the ritual falls short on the promise of rapid commodification, as the tea farmers feel that it is merely a nice gesture which

does not do much for them financially; they have increased their involvement in this event as a marketing opportunity.

The problem with commodification, for those involved, is not simply that it happens, but that it is experienced as a reterritorialization by outsiders, or even a colonization. The relationship between actors in the case of the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual is a complex dance of agencies, in which it is hard to shape it into a simple case assigning one party as the victim and the other as the agent. If anything, the ritual aims to provide a glimmer of culture to an overly commodified area, described by most Taipei residents as a tourist trap, a reverse of the standard commodification of ritual and festival performance. Zhongshun Temple and Maokong's tea farmers are both firm in asserting their autonomy – they are financially solvent and do not require any government intervention for their living. From the perspective of Zhongshun Temple's management, they have agreed to restart this event mainly to help with the government's own initiatives. They believe they are firmly in control, and they hope to gain increased renown for their efforts, which will aid them in their plans to further develop the Muzha area that is within their sphere of influence. In fact, they have little interest in the area where the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual is held because it is defined as strictly governmental territory (the zoo, the gondola, and Maokong) and cannot be further developed due to natural environmental and legal restrictions. Most of the tea farmers do not live there, anyway, but live in Muzha's valley. As businesspeople, they have bet that Maokong will not grow, but that the broader Wenshan District (which Muzha is a part of) provides opportunities for developers able to negotiate with its dense masses of residents living in old apartment buildings.

According to observation and discussion with some members of the younger generation in Muzha, rather than fearing what changes commodification will bring to the community, they

seek to actively bring it on and steer it. One of them showed me a new Ang Kong logo design and stated that Muzha needed to regain youthful vitality by developing its identity through a branding initiative. This young generation does not spontaneously bring up anything about the agency of gods and may admit to something when pressed, but it is not something that is actively on their minds, or which they feel comfortable sharing. They have not personally experienced direct repression of ritual activities by the state, and professionalized groups, such as the Muzha Young Farmers, find mutual benefit in working together with the government in state-funded joint projects. In the present, they do not need to make large rituals themselves, because they can rely on their elder family members to do so on their behalf. These younger members of a family are under the spiritual protection of their grandparents who admit to making large changes to simplify rituals for the benefit of the young.

Grassroots-driven commercial expansion harnesses cultural features to produce a defined territory of Muzha as a brand. The renewed ritual is simply one of many activities arising from this orientation, which the state also supports as it maintains that culture is an economic resource to be mined. It is also a political spectacle which territorializes the Maokong Agricultural Recreational Area as the domain of the state. There is thus a generational divide where the younger generation identifies more with the views of the state, that gods and the performance of ritual are matters of belief, memorial, respect, and introspection, rather than the views of their grandparents, that gods are persons that demand attention. The Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, as presented by the local city and district government organizers, constantly drives home the historical connection, rather than the continuities of Ang Kong worship.

A Political Pilgrimage

In the case of the joint project between the local government and Zhongshun Temple to restart the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, the local temple has reconstructed an old ritual practice almost as a service to the local government, which requested it. The temple staff claims that this is a continuation of its earlier processions to the tea fields, which it had performed as a contract service. It is not performed cynically, as merely a performance for tourists, but it is participated in at differing levels of engagement, by Taipei residents who walk with the god as short-term spectators, by staff or involved members of other Ang Kong temples in North Taiwan, or by some of the tea farmers themselves, who prepare their own offerings and light incense.

A unique feature of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was that it was first performed during the height of globalized, commercial expansion of the tea industry in Taiwan. The ritual itself, at this time, was not commodified, but the large, international markets which the Taiwanese tea industry fed were ritualized. Sprenger introduces the idea of the “ritualization of the market” as the way that the modern, international market enters into a pre-existing ritual system, using examples from the Thai amulet trade and the way that Laotian Rmeet rice farmers have used items that they have bought from the marketplace, including currency, in their own rituals (Sprenger 2014). In this way, the market is subsumed and made a part of a ritual system which overtakes it in preeminence. Tea farming migrants from Anxi County, China, who settled in the hillsides around the Taipei Basin, eagerly entered into the rapidly growing international tea trade. When they faced barriers, such as insect plagues, they called upon their god Ang Kong to dispel them so that they could continue expanding the reach of the global market, through first expanding the reach of their ritual sphere, their territory. Welcoming Ang Kong is a ritual known as 出巡 *chu xun*, a territorial tour. Agrarian development was a new physical arrangement of the

land which also imposed new systems of order onto it, displacing former ritual relationships and prior land claims (Scott 2017). Ang Kong territorially re-inscribed boundaries, expelling the spirits of prior residents and their associates (ancestors or gods), mainly aboriginal residents (Lin 2007). The hillside tea farming area was not rationalized and disenchanted, but instead, a spiritual warfare took place alongside a physical warfare as the Anxi migrant settlers and their gods replaced those of earlier residents. Only when the land was cleared of spirits who were unfriendly to development interests could commercial crop production take place. A ritual sphere which was friendly toward commercial expansion preceded the international market's penetration of Taiwanese borderlands. In the current day practice of Ang Kong's territorial tour into the mountains, the god often pauses, and his sedan chair carriers encircle places where dangerous energy gathers in order to dispel it. These are places such as crossroads and the heads of bridges, where many people have died before. For example, the dammed and straightened 景美 Jingmei river which was crossed at the beginning of the procession seemed placid, but an older man recounted that, when he was young, some of his elementary school classmates had drowned there. Although the river is no longer as fearsome today, the deaths it caused remain in living memory; unburned bundles of spirit money can be found at the bridge's four corners. The god's power to dispel and destroy other spirits is so strong that, after the 2021 territorial tour was finished, one person asked the temple staff if they could make a change to the ritual: when Ang Kong passes by a roadside grave (there are many along the route), they should use an umbrella to shield the god so that he does not "shock" the ancestral spirits housed in the grave. Instead of the tour serving only a memorial function, the god is capable of heedlessly destroying history on his way. The tour does not simply preserve history but rewrites it.

Ritual performance is in dialogue with current events. In a study of Northern Taiwanese rituals, American anthropologist Robert Weller noted a parallel between the changes that took place in ritual performance during the commercial expansion and social transformation of post-treaty Qing Dynasty Taiwan (from around the 1860s through 1880s) and the temple building explosion and increased worship of 陰 *yin* spirits of the 1980s (Weller 1987). During this time period, export-based economic growth had nearly reached its peak, and many newly cash-rich Taiwanese scrambled to find new ventures through which to grow their hoard of cash: real estate, the stock market, and illegal gambling. There were political changes leading up to the ending of martial law, and the violence that always lurked beneath the surface of the apparently orderly social fabric (because it was monopolized by the state military police) became increasingly visible. During both time periods, ritual became unruly, violent, and focused on *yin* spirits, human or non-human ghosts, rather than stately, bureaucratic 陽 *yang* gods, reflecting a downward trend of power. Amoral *yin* spirits were able to grant the wishes of thieves, prostitutes, gangsters, and anyone who wanted lottery numbers. The *Robbing the Lonely Ghosts* ritual which was performed at the turn of the nineteenth century also catered to these same elements, for example, young male migrant workers in the camphor trade, desperately poor and inclined to violence. For Weller, ritual reflected social changes and sought to order them (1987:77). These rituals also showcased the association between *yin* spirits and social outcasts, such that, to this day, the worship of *yin* spirits in small shrines is considered unseemly. In Muzha, there is an ongoing conflict regarding a roadside *yin* shrine to an unknown spirit, called 萬聖公 *wan sheng gong*. In late 2019, this shrine was destroyed in a car accident, but the driver's life was saved. Supporters of this shrine took it as proof of the spirit's power and benevolence and decided to collect money and materials to rebuild the shrine, but they were prevented from this by residents

of the apartment building that it abuts. Although the shrine is older than the building itself (one elderly man said that the spirit of this shrine “adopted” him when he was still a child), some of the apartment residents were able to blockade it with sheet metal. In the present day, worshipping *yin* spirits is often viewed with suspicion in comparison with worshipping *yang* spirits, such as gods. Although this specific tendency is outside of the scope of the present research, there is much more to be said on the ambivalent relationship between official gods and unofficial spirit deities. Hatfield (2011) and Weller (1985) deal with this topic in more depth.

The ritual sphere absorbs social changes and creates order in uncertain times. Shrines, like the one named above, cropped up along the formerly dangerous Jingmei river and remained along the more recently developed, treacherous 木新 Muxin Road. People, gods, and spirits stay in communication throughout the process of development and change, negotiating these changes together. The mid-to-late 1800s period of social upheaval and ritual changes that Weller (1987) identifies is the same time period during which the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was first held. The territorial tours and dispelling of pests were able to reassure farmers on a disputed borderland that their activities were just, well supported, and should continue. Rather than showing a mass society out of control, as in Weller’s (1987) examples of itinerant laborers, gamblers, and thieves hosting bloody rituals for nefarious purposes, the Ang Kong rituals and the Ang Kong myths create stability through hierarchical orderliness, with a god occupying the highest place and sanctioning cash crop activities on seized land. This expropriation and the international market itself were divinely protected and ritualized.

In the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, commercialization and commercial expansion provided its sole reason for being, as revealed in its origin myth. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, growing tea became a big business in Taiwan, challenging the dominant

mainland Chinese tea trade. In modern times, the renewed version can be said to be carrying on this same tradition. However, when discussing this revived ritual with the organizers, tea farmers, and participants, it is generally viewed as unimportant to the normal functioning of the temple community and the tea farming community, which mainly uses pesticides and fertilizers to assure high yields, rather than divine intervention. Organic and natural farming methods are not preferred by most of Maokong's tea farmers due to their prohibitive labor costs. This ritual itself, which wanders deep into formerly aboriginal mountain land, does not reference these boundaries at all, but rather, it traces tea fields and temples which were reinvigorated as tourist sites by the former mayor, Lee Teng-hui. It is a political pilgrimage, which traces the path and history of positive government intervention (provision of funds for recreational development rather than prevention of ritual performance) into the Maokong area.

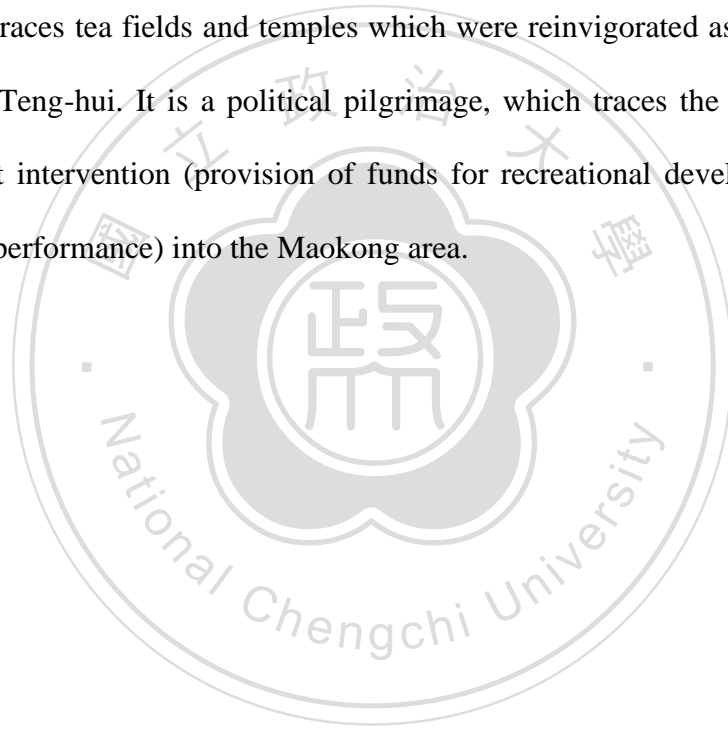




Figure 9 Path of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields Ritual Procession, 2021

Author's rendering based on an image adapted from Google Maps

It was a young man, a newly graduated university student who is active in Zhongshun Temple, who revealed to me that this ritual hit the necessary checkmarks for local politicians, by demarcating territories: “Zhongshun Temple serves the community from Xinglong Market to Muxin Market and Muzha Market. We are not too involved with the government’s three areas in Muzha: the zoo, the gondola, and Maokong.” As the name indicates, the Muzha Young Farmers’ Association members identify themselves as part of Muzha rather than as part of Maokong; their representative stressed to me that their farmers were Muzha residents who lived in the valley. The state is territorially distinguished from the broader civil society and the business community.

The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual draws on local cultural capital to provide a service for the government, with the added bonus of subsidized advertising. Notably, during the day of the procession, apart from a few shops functioning as normal, no one else set up temporary roadside stands to sell things to the mass of tourists thronging the mountainside. For the state, one of the purposes of the ritual is the creation of a cultural experience that tourists can enjoy. When I asked who the ritual was for, rather than being told it was for the tea farmers (as the historical legend attests), the temple staff I spoke with and the Young Farmers' Association leader said that it was for attracting outsiders to the area and entertaining hikers. "Before the coronavirus, we never realized how essential the foreign tourists were. We can really feel the difference now without them," the representative told me, with a sigh, going on to say that everyone needed to work harder to attract domestic tourists. Most of the Taipei residents I spoke with expressed that Maokong offered little entertainment at a high cost, that it was a typical tourist trap. Revitalization of post-production areas, like the revitalization of post-industrial urban areas, are popular undertakings for governments in almost every developed country, and these projects often take the form of building a "cultural" experience for tourists. In Taiwan, using temples for this purpose is a common strategy (Lin and Hsing 2009).

On the day of the ritual itself, which I attended in both 2020 and 2021, tea farmers themselves were actively involved in it, preparing their own ritual offerings at the roadside, in front of their homes, for Ang Kong to enjoy. This difference in stated intent and actual participation accords with the literature on state recognition of and involvement with renewing rituals in China and among aboriginal groups in Taiwan; bureaucrats and organizers say that a revived, well-advertised ritual is for attracting tourists while local participants believe and behave as if the ceremony is for them, attaching personal importance to it (Huang 2015; You

2020). But the interviewees I spoke with were right that the revived ritual as performed on Maokong was intended for mainly for those outside of the community: tourists and politicians. The core participants are taken for granted by outsider organizers whose purpose is to gain broader recognition for political and economic reasons. There were distinctive zones of ritual performance. The route which passed by the tea farmers' fields and houses was for the tea farmers, and a short performance held at the terminal point near the Maokong Gondola station was for the public, mainly hikers. This is made apparent by the fact that tour organizers continuously give short introductions of what the ritual is about and who the god is, in Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese Hokkien, and occasionally in English.

However, rather than being overwhelmed by this turn of events, in which a ritual is turned into spectacle, the Zhongshun Temple organizers of the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual consider it as performing a contract service, which is in the same spirit of the tea field visitations that took place during the early stages of modernization, late Qing Dynasty and early Japanese colonial government. These early tours took place by appointment only, depending on the needs of the farmers, and they were not routine events in the temple's ritual calendar. Zhongshun Temple was proud of being chosen to perform this ritual again, as it increased their prestige and importance, establishing them as the true center of Ang Kong worship. It was personally important for the new leader of Zhongshun Temple, a man with no family ties to the ostensibly public institution of Zhongshun Temple, to demonstrate his capabilities. There were mutual benefits for all of the event organizers. Zhongshun Temple showcased their willingness to cooperate with the government by simply adding one more ritual to their already crowded calendar of ritual events, and the bureaus and project holders were able to record an event that incorporated multiple major target groups: the teahouse operators and tea farmers whose

development is part of former Taipei mayor and president Lee Teng-Hui's legacy, the international performance troupe U-Theatre, the elderly, hikers participating in environmentally friendly recreation, Muzha residents, and more.

In comparison with normal ritual events at Zhongshun Temple, the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual is exceptional. Its character is much more publicly oriented, which is to say, oriented toward the desires of the state, rather than to the desires of the temple's internal supporters. In a calendar year, the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, although very large, is not the most important ceremony for Zhongshun Temple. The most important events are those that have meaning for the temple's own core community, such as *Zhongyuan Pudu*, the Ghost Month Ritual, the temple's yearly anniversary of its founding, or the birthday celebration of Baoyi Daifu. The revival of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, unperformed for decades, was recently overshadowed by another event which overtook it in importance. In 2019, Zhongshun Temple took Ang Kong to Daping Village, Anxi County, Fujian Province, China to visit his root temple, the original Zhongshun Temple of which Muzha's temple is a branch. When I visited the Chairman's office, he showed me some keepsakes and photographs from this visit, the first time Ang Kong had gone back to China since 1762. Compared to reviving the ritual in Maokong, Ang Kong's return to his homeland had greater significance to the temple itself, and it was important for the broader group of worshippers as well. However, as with anything to do with opening up ties to China, this action is politically contentious – supporting it sends a message that the current government cannot afford to send. The renewed tea field ritual sends an important political message: Ang Kong is Taiwanese. Zhongshun Temple's staff and leadership personally lean towards the pan-green camp in Taiwanese politics, which emphasizes Taiwanese local identity and interests over pan-

Chinese global ambition, but making Ang Kong Taiwanese, as the state defines this identity, or rather, cutting him off from his Chinese roots is not urgent for the people involved in the temple. Just as one of the temple members stated, the renewed ritual of Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields does not serve their intended community and takes place *outside* of the community. This ritual is seen as being performed primarily for the benefit of others. The logic of the local government officials is that temples themselves are discrete communities which can be tapped for total economic renewal, as expressed in a case study of the Xingang's Fengtian Temple's resurgence (Chang 2017). For bureaucrats, culture itself, as performed by the temples in their processional tours, is an economic resource which can be mined if it is first properly "industrialized," that is, cleansed of unsavory elements and optimized for outside involvement. This difference becomes apparent during two instances of cooperation between the temple management and the state: the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual and the Ang Kong Worship Culture exhibition in the Wenshan District Community Center.

The Ang Kong Worship Culture Exhibition

In the run-up to the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual, there was an exhibition of Ang Kong Worship Culture held in the Wenshan District Community Center in March 2020. This exhibition was held for over a month, and in addition to showcasing the material culture of Ang Kong worship, including antique banners, carriages, flags, talismans, and photographs, there was a lecture series by notable local scholars and historians who discussed the history of Ang Kong worship in the area and its modern-day legacy. Ang Kong worship was introduced as a distinctive part of Northern Taiwanese culture, one which had been obscured by waves of migration and political changes. Thanks to the work of scholars, notable residents, and a supportive area government, this local color had been recovered and made into something

presentable and easily digestible to newcomers. Many of the attendees of the exhibition were people who had no family or historical connection to this practice, although they lived in the area. The organizers, the district office staff, insisted on using the Mandarin Chinese pronunciation of 尙公 *Wang Gong*, which served to emphasize their disconnection, or their desire to relate to those outside of the community. Even staff members who were locals of the area did this. This was a marked difference from my interviews with worshippers in the temple itself. No worshipper has ever referred to him using the Mandarin pronunciation, even when we were using Mandarin to conduct our conversations. Further examples of the outside public facing orientation of the exhibition became obvious during the question-and-answer session that followed a lecture on Ang Kong worship. After a lecture in which a local professor introduced Ang Kong worship throughout time, many attendants wanted to discuss the practice of 豬公 *ti-kong* sacred pig sacrifice, stating that it was a form of animal abuse that needed to be fully eliminated everywhere in Taiwan. This practice is rarely seen in Taipei, and I have never personally seen it in my time here.¹⁴ However, it persevered in Muzha for a long time before disappearing. For the descendants of the Anxi migrants who came to Taiwan, the 創豬公 *thâi ti-kong* ritual is a common and important one (Ahern 1981a). As an area urbanizes, this form of ritual offering tends to die out, as there is no longer any space to raise a *ti-kong* in the home. Despite this, the attendees at the lecture were adamant about the fact that this practice should be outlawed in every instance. Just as with the targeting of incense burning and firecrackers as environmentally noxious, *ti-kong* raising is also pinpointed as a source of environmental exploitation and dysfunction. The *ti-kong* is treated as a personage when it is ritually raised, even as a god, and interaction with and around a *ti-kong* are subject to the same social norms and rules one would

¹⁴ It is still popular outside of Taipei. In November 2020 in Tainan, there were dozens at a large ritual offering, and the pigs were not overly fattened. I've also been shown photos of this in Muzha from a few years before.

apply to an eminent guest, such as the requirement to only talk kindly to the *ti-kong*, feed it extremely well, and for the family members to abstain from fighting amongst themselves or cursing in front of the *ti-kong* (Ahern 1981a). Whereas industrially farmed pigs are not persons and can be treated as object-like resources, *ti-kong* have a special status. In the process of raising one, everyone involved, human and pig, enter into a more-than-human social system. However, in targeting incense, firecrackers, and *ti-kong*, among other ritual practices, this widened social system itself is seen as an environmental problem. While many western scholars believe that western Christian beliefs of dominion over nature created a dysfunctional relationship with the non-human environment (White 1967), many Taiwanese find that their own culture is the root of the environmental destruction that took place in their land.

The district government-sponsored exhibition and the partially state sponsored Welcoming Ang Kong ritual both reconfigured worship as culture, and they had to consider the desires and perspectives of diverse constituencies, mainly those outside of the core temple community. They were open to stripping away elements of ritual that were deemed unsavory or shameful. On the one hand, many ritual practices were removed from the bottom-up: *ti-kong* sacrifice was impossible in the city and preparing cooked offerings almost daily was not feasible for the working women who were in charge of this task. Other ritual practices were removed or limited during certain rituals at urgings from the top: spirit mediums, paper money burning, firecrackers, and incense burning. In the past, during the height of government repression of ritual, during both the Japanese colonial period and single party period of the Republic of China, it was the government that banned ritual activities (Hatfield 2019:265). In multiple instances in Muzha, the repression of certain ritual expression was due to class concerns and was expressed as a conflict between two groups of private citizens, such as the protest against the reconstruction

of the roadside shrine and the noise complaints that accompany every 遶境 *raojing* held in Muzha, despite their relative infrequency. The staff members of Zhongshun Temple, aware that they are in the public eye, are careful to distance themselves from the kinds of temple activities that are considered low class or suspicious; their *raojing* is boisterous but stately and does not include many of the popular elements more common to *raojing* outside of Taipei, such as dancing girls or decked out sports cars, and their temple does not host spirit mediums.

Performance of Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields

In 2020, only a few weeks after the above-mentioned exhibition, the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual was held. It was a day-long event, spanning twelve hours, where a procession of people and gods traveled from the base of the mountain to its ridge and back down again. I attended the event two years in a row, and I noticed that in both years, there was a marked difference in the part of the ritual held in the morning, with the local government's attendance and cooperation, and the part of the ritual held in the evening, which is only hosted by the temple. It is possible to compare both of these parts and determine what the state envisions for a public ritual, which is how they interpret and define local culture, and how the local temple defines and creates a public ceremony. The state-sponsored part creates ritual as spectacle, and they highlight the historical origins, specifically those origins that relate to economic development. The later ritual, managed only by the temple, places greater emphasis on the total participation of the group and highlights the modern-day continuity of traditional culture, as it relates to group cohesion, such as drawing attention to an example of *xiaoshun* filial piety. In the state's version, the ritual community is (or was) dead and requires revitalization (and is able to be reinterpreted in the process), so in their imagination, there is a clear break between past and present. By privileging spectacle and observation over interaction, they express a view of ritual

as religion, which requires faith and belief. In the temple's version, the ritual community has been sustained basically intact for more than a thousand years, and modernity has only brought a few novel details rather than global change to the ritual community. Acting and interacting with the god and with each other is still the primary reason for the event. The ritual system continues to subsume all other changes that occur around it and are taken up within it.

In 2020, due to concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, the ritual was shortened, and the procession was altered so that, instead of a group of people walking to accompany the god, there were only pick-up trucks carrying him around. The only part of the ritual which was open to the general public was the final stop on the tour, the large ceremony at the Maokong Gondola Station. At this ceremony, there were several local politicians and local city or district government staff present, as well as many hikers and tourists. The second part took place in the late afternoon, when the god descended back down to the valley. Ang Kong then made visits to some notable, influential local families before returning to the temple and being received back in a final ritual. At the end, many tourists remained, but the bulk of the participants were people from the area who frequented Zhongshun Temple.

The first part of the ritual was an inspection tour of the tea fields in Maokong. At its final stop, there was a stage covered by a tarp and several tables set up, one for the gods to be seated, and others for the offerings. All of the offerings on the table were products from nearby teahouses, and the displays included the names of these businesses. In 2020, before the ritual began, an elderly woman came along carrying a large basket of fruit and paper money. She dawdled in front of the table with offerings, deliberating where to put it, since there was no open space. A tough middle-aged man swiftly cleared a space and put her basket down for her. "Grandma, go back to picking your tea leaves. I'll get you when it starts," he told her gruffly,

and she quickly disappeared down the road. Her offerings were clearly in contrast with the teahouses' offerings, but they were similar to the homemade kind that can be seen in the temple. Before any large ritual takes place, Zhongshun Temple will contact the neighborhood by mail, by announcement in the temple, or online to let them know what kind of offerings to bring, if they should prepare them themselves or buy them, and where they can be displayed. Many elderly people already know what to bring for which rituals, so they do not need to be told. In contrast, this courtesy was not extended for the mountaintop event because it was not meant for the general public to co-create the event in this way. It was meant to only be viewed by the general public, as a cultural spectacle for them.



Figure 10 Professional and Homemade Offerings for Ang Kong during the 2020 Ritual

Author's Photo

During the 2021 ritual, the offerings were also professionally supplied, and they had a similar look to the ones of the year before. Notably, there was only one incense censer in front of the god, and only one designated temple volunteer to manage it. In the first year I attended, there were very few people in attendance, and there was no moment for individuals to light incense for the god. In the second year, there were many more attendees, and in order to involve all of the participants to allow them to receive a personal blessing from the god, a member of the temple staff invited everyone to fill their water bottle or cup with tea, which she said that the god would bless for them. This was a way to involve all of the participants, but it is not a standard part of any of the other rituals I have attended at Zhongshun Temple. It is a sharp contrast to almost all of the other rituals that take place at the temple throughout the year in which people jostle each other to place their lit incense in the censer, often burning themselves and others in the process. Since this ritual is mainly a cultural event, the spectators are not compelled to take part in this blessing, but they are given a choice. In the first year, a few people asked me if I was a Christian; they expected and were prepared to host a variety of tourists. In both years, I heard many people asking others who is Baoyi Daifu and who is Ang Kong, and I received the explanation frequently, meaning that many of the attendees are not familiar with Zhongshun Temple's primary deity and the main purpose of the event before they attend it.

Newcomers would be forgiven for their confusion, however, due to the fact that when the ritual was first revitalized in 2006, it was revitalized as an event for Mazu, a well-known goddess, giving the event greater public interest, but making it even more obvious that it was an event organized by those who were not familiar with the area. Mazu, a goddess of the sea, has very little historical connection with the Maokong mountain farmers. However, Mazu events were often nationally and internationally recognized as Taiwanese cultural attractions. For many state

workers, a Mazu festival was an event that represented an idealized “local” Taiwanese culture, emphasizing their disconnection with the variety of regional practices across Taiwan. Over time, local interests in the Muzha area took over the event and the Mazu element disappeared. For someone who is not familiar with Zhongshun Temple, there would be further confusion due to the fact that there were thirty or more god statues out on parade, so not only were there multiple Baoyi Daifu god statues, but there were many other gods in attendance. Now, Ang Kong stands alone as the primary reason for the event, but he is still a distinctly regional god and is still not well-known among all of the Taiwanese.

Although in the abbreviated 2020 ritual, the ending ceremony was the only part that the public was able to join, during 2021, the full-length version of the ritual was held, in which hundreds of people walked from the temple in the valley up to the mountains of Maokong along with the god. On the way, there were rest stops at several temples and rest areas around tea fields. The temples and tea fields are not places that have long-term ritual connections with Zhongshun Temple (meaning that they do not house each other’s gods or visit each other outside of this event), but they are popular throughout the year with tourists because they offer beautiful views and comfortable amenities. Although the ritual draws on actual historical instances of a similar ritual performance, it fits the category of an invented tradition because it claims to be old, and it serves the purpose of unifying and identifying a group; with it, the North Taiwanese can claim a tradition and culture which is still authentically Taiwanese but distinct from that of the south, and Maokong can claim that it is an area with a culture, rather than a brute tourist trap (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Many of the places that were visited during the Welcoming Ang Kong morning tour had been revitalized in the 1980s through the attention of the city government. Part of the route went along a popular hiking trail that had been developed by the government. This tour did

not strictly trace the path of original connections between Zhongshun Temple and the people in Maokong, that is, it was not solely based on the history of the local ritual community. Rather, the tour traced the state's development of its own Maokong Agricultural Recreational Area.

However, the tour still held personal meaning for the local residents, as evidenced by the elderly tea farming woman mentioned above. Apart from her, many residents set up temporary altars outside of their homes to welcome the god, and many farmers set up temporary altars in their fields, which consisted of nothing more than some fruit, some paper spirit money, incense, and a cup of tea. "You just need to set up a small table with fruit and incense, and Ang Kong will stop by and come into your home. He will know," one participant told me when I asked if I needed to apply to join the ritual or tell the temple staff or the god's chair carriers. Brief stops were made at these temporary altars set up along the route, as Ang Kong was certain to visit any home that had made an effort to welcome him, no matter how humble, but long stops for breaks were only made at pre-planned destinations. Apart from the shops nearby the Maokong station, none of these residents, whose participation was voluntary, had prepared to use this opportunity to sell goods to the participants. Some sponsors of the tour, such as a funeral company whose hearse ominously followed the procession, also set up stations to give away snacks to participants. All of the official participants, such as the Muzha Young Farmers' Association, only gave away items for free and were not selling anything at the time of the ritual. Some of the people who lived along the path of the procession gave away drinks for free as well.

At the final ceremony at the Maokong Gondola station, there were performances held. The structure of this ritual was much the same as any other 出巡 *chu xun* or 遶境 *raojing* procession, in which troupes accompanying the god dance in front of designated altars, but the character and content of the performances was different. In 2020, there were performances by a

troupe of lion dancers, the international performance drum group U-Theatre, as well as frame puppets strutting before the god was carried in by two men and placed on the temporary altar, but instead of lighting firecrackers, they only used the firecracker noise machine. In 2021, this program was similar, with performances of fan dancing and tai qi (these are clubs of local elders who practice at Zhongshun Temple on weekdays), U-Theatre, lion dancers, real firecrackers, and, finally, the chair carriers who circled the area before bringing the god to rest in his place on the stage.

After this point, there were rounds of speeches given by the high-ranking temple staff, local politicians, and a recitation of poetry in Taiwanese Hokkien. Since Zhongshun Temple brought many gods along on the procession, there were multiple Ang Kong statues in attendance and on the stage. The Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual is a safe opportunity to bring out all of the gods which pleases them; it is a way of caring for them and receiving their blessings in return. However, during a previous performance, one of the oldest Ang Kong statues requested, through *puah-puey*, to remain at the home of the Chen family rather than returning to Zhongshun Temple. This upset some of the staff of Zhongshun Temple, since it split the source of Zhongshun Temple's power. In 2021, on the stage where the gods were placed, all of the high-ranking temple staff and officials of varying ranks, some from President's Hall and some from the Taipei City Mayor's office, stood with their backs to the crowd, obscuring the god statues. A member of Zhongshun Temple's staff read out some auspicious phrases, and a volunteer handed round a few sticks of incense to just about twenty people. After everyone had bowed three times, the volunteer collected them back and disappeared with them. A few more words were spoken before dispersal. An hour or so later, all of the officials had already left, and the procession prepared to move down the mountain.

Ang Kong's Return to the Temple

In 2020, the procession through the streets of Muzha was the liveliest part of the whole event. The 噴呐 *suona* reed pipe, gongs, and drums were nearly drowned out by the artillery fire sounds of long strings of firecrackers, set off continually. The air was filled with smoke, and cars honked to pass by. Frame puppets walked over the bursting firecrackers and paid visits to those businesses and houses which lighted off firecrackers to announce their arrival. Many local families thronged the streets, watching the procession from beneath the 騎樓 *qilou* overhangs. It was a Wednesday afternoon, when elementary schools let their students out at half day, so the streets were full of young kids and their parents. Shopkeepers and local businesspeople as well as elderly retirees made up the rest of the crowd. Due to the time, young office workers were absent. Many of the shopkeepers had set up temporary altars outside of their shops with incense. Some temple volunteers threaded through the crowd handing out charms, which they did not pressure you to pay for through donation. The final ceremony at Zhongshun Temple, to welcome the god back to the temple, was closed to the public due to coronavirus safety guidelines.

In 2021, the ritual was held on a Saturday, and it was advertised broadly and completely open to the public. Around four hundred or more people had come to walk the god up to the mountain, and on the way back down to the valley, about one third or more remained. There was a marked contrast between these two parts of the ritual in 2020. That is, in 2020, the mountaintop ritual had to adhere to government recommendations on coronavirus prevention and environmental protection while the event in the valley did not face such restrictions. In 2021, the ritual was enlarged and open to the public; a participant only needed to reserve a space in advance. This was how the ritual had been planned and performed since its revival. In 2020, all reservations were closed, and no one was allowed to accompany the gods up the mountain. On

the way back down the mountain, toward the temple, the procession visited some places that the temple had a long-standing connection to, including the house of the Chen family, which was the family who was responsible for bringing over the original Ang Kong god statue in 1762. A woman from Chen family was elected 總斗主 *zong dou zhu*, the head of ceremonies. This role requires money, influence, and power to properly fundraise to make sure that the year's rituals go as expected. These roles are rarely held by women, and the rest of Zhongshun Temple's management committee is made up of men.

At the terminal point and the final ceremony held at the temple in 2021, a group of volunteers prepared to receive the gods when they returned and set out some branded packaged snacks for the participants: some *tieguanyin* tea and tea flavored snacks. The gods arrived on pick-up trucks, and they were either driven in the trucks or in their ornately carved palanquins back toward the temple's main hall, driven or pushed toward the censer three times while a volunteer burned paper spirit money in a wok beneath it. Everyone shouted 進哦! *Jin o*, "going in!" as the gods' spirits were pushed back into the temple. The power and the spirits of the gods are not entirely contained in their statues, the statues are simply a vessel to bind their power in a convenient, central point. The processional journey outside of the temple is a not entirely controllable spread of power, a temporary decentralization of a temple's power which allows for the fragmenting of a group. In the worst-case scenarios, the power of the gods can destroy the spirits of people's ancestors residing in their graves and choose to remain behind, outside of the temple. The calling and recalling of spirits and souls is a fundamental Taiwanese ritual, done throughout a person's life (mainly early childhood) and after their death. The calling of the gods' souls back into the temple served to bind them to the place and to create a unified group, of people, spirits, and gods, at least at the moment of performance. Many of Zhongshun Temple's

god statues had left to accompany the procession, possibly thirty or more, and all of their spirits needed to be pushed back into the temple through the efforts of the participants. Every single person was made to take part; mere observation was not an option. I was pushed and persuaded by multiple people, temple staff members and worshippers who were total strangers to me, to join the throng and help pass the gods along back into the temple. The largest group of them, including the Ang Kong carried in a small chair, arrived at the final moment with the walking participants. Firecrackers were set off, the lion dancers performed, and all the participants were invited to walk beneath Ang Kong's chair to receive his blessing. Finally, the rest of the gods and Ang Kong himself began to be placed back inside of the temple, handled by every person on their way back in through the central entrance, the entrance of the temple reserved for the gods.

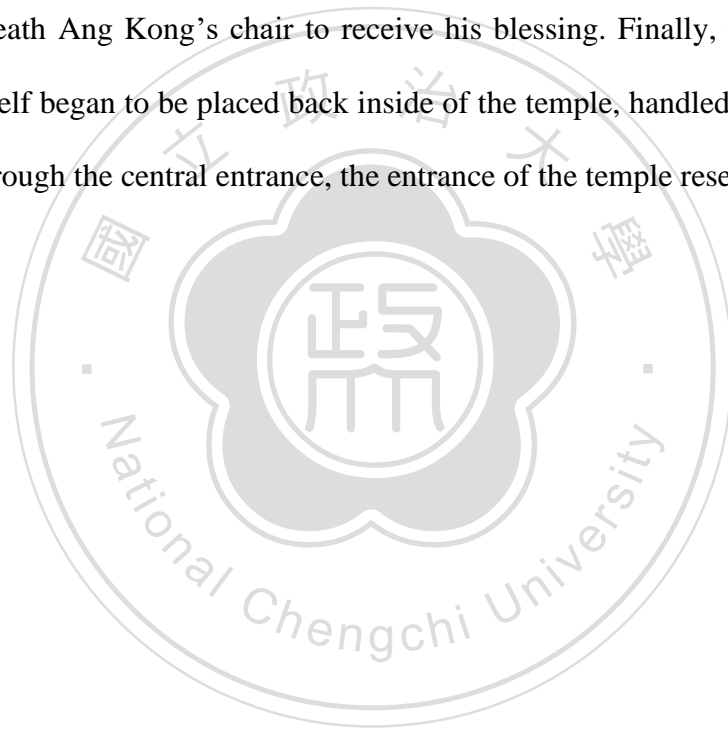




Figure 11 The Gods are Returned to the Temple

Author's Photo

During this time, when every god's spirit was re-entering the temple, something unusual happened. All of the chair carriers, those who had strutted and dipped the god into the tea fields and encircled crossroads and bridge heads and who had placed themselves in the service of the god to move as he wished, surrounded one chair carrier who was seated. This seated man began shaking as if from a seizure, and soon enough, a large group of people noticed. The temple's designated 法師 *fashi*, or wizard, rushed over to do something which I was unable to see, and the

man who had been shaking violently was then dragged out of the temple by the shoulders, his feet dragging on the floor, unconscious.

“What’s going on?” an older woman asked one of the temple staff.

“Nothing, it’s nothing,” he told her.

There was too much going on to cause people to pay sustained attention to this event. The chair carrier had entered a trance almost directly beneath the sign forbidding possession. The situation was neutralized quietly without much drama. This unexpected event does deserve some follow-up study, especially by finding out more about the chair carriers, their views on this and similar circumstances, but this is a project for the future. The ritual continued moving forward, and everyone took part in continuing to pass the gods hand over hand. The opportunity to touch the gods is extremely rare, and as the god’s body is thought to have some medicinal effect (among other effects), this is a part that everyone looks forward to (see also, Lin 2015). Before long, all of the gods had taken their places on the inner altar.

Every single person was handed incense by a volunteer, no matter how far away the spectators or participants were, and everyone bowed together. Afterwards, all of the temple staff and some volunteers made several announcements, thanked each other, and congratulated themselves for the successful conclusion of the event. They also singled out a participant who had attended the entire procession with his elderly mother, who was in a wheelchair, for being particularly *xiaoshun*, and everyone clapped and cheered for him. The *fashi* was also introduced, and he looked calm and unfazed. I had seen him several months ago performing a simplified 改運 *gaiyun* luck changing ritual for someone who came to the temple, but he came and went as he pleased, without a permanent office (unlike some other large temples where rituals such as this are services easily paid for), and his services were available only upon referral. The Chairman

gave a final speech, in which he triumphantly announced that, in the coming month, the president of Taiwan would arrive to attend one of the upcoming rituals.¹⁵ All of the speeches were given in Taiwanese Hokkien and partially in Mandarin Chinese. After this, the day's events were over, and most of the participants went home. It had been at least twelve hours by this point, so I went home as well.

Generation Gap

In the two parts of the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, one held on the mountaintop, and one held in the valley, there are two distinct modes of relating to the god. In the Maokong ritual, communication *with* the deity is valued less than communication *about* the deity, who is a stand-in for the community itself. A poem is recited to the audience, and the poem is about the history of the community and their worship of Baoyi Daifu. Instead of individual offerings for the god, there are corporate gift-baskets. When the performance of a contemporary art troupe shares the same program with lion dancers and the pageantry of the frame puppets or chair carriers who lead the god to his dais, all of these performances are equalized as “art” or “culture.” They take on the same distance from the viewers, mostly tourists, who become spectators rather than participants. In 2020, several politicians took the stage to say some words about their own goals and campaigns, which were basically unrelated to the ritual but more related to the development of the Maokong area. In 2021, this group of political elites took the stage again to address the audience, and during a short *bai bai*, where participants clasp their hands and bow a few times, incense was allowed in small quantities, and most of the audience's view of the gods was blocked by the backs of these politicians. As we bowed, facing the gods, these VIPs were in our direct line of sight.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, all of these rituals were canceled due to the worsening of the coronavirus pandemic.

Although the tea farmers who participate along the route of the procession tend to do things the old-fashioned way, holding up incense as they stand in front of the altar they have set up in front of their home and laid with offerings of fruit and spirit money, the official ritual has a different tone. The terms of *bai bai* are a wish and a contract between an individual and a god, and even when completely surrounded by others in a large crowd, there is still the possibility for the expression of an individual desire. The tea farmers along the procession create their own offerings, and outside of this ceremony, they are firm in stressing their autonomy in life and business, their separation from the state. Student researcher Lin Yi-Chieh collected many statements to this effect in his research on the effects of public planning on the Maokong tea farmers (Lin 2010).

In the final ceremony, in which we needed to go through the backs of officials to reach the gods, I suggest that this visible, physical interposition sent a strong message about who to appeal to in order to reach power. Some restrictions, however, had been lifted, such as that on incense and firecrackers. When the ritual was first renewed, one of the stated goals was to make Taipei citizens aware of ecological concerns, and both incense and firecrackers have come under fire for being environmentally damaging, both by creating waste and destroying a temple's antiques. This transposition of the cause of environmental degradation, from the heavy-handed policies of an authoritarian development state which allowed for unbridled resource extraction to local practices of worship and interaction, has remained unchanged. Whereas in the past, the entirety of ritual was forcibly curtailed by direct intervention by an authoritarian state, now, only certain ritual features are targeted, but this general suspicion toward local power networks remains the same. In an authoritarian state, destabilizing pre-existing local social systems and reinventing them totally was an openly stated goal (Katz 2003:404). In a democratic state, when

it is not possible to be so openly domineering, certain communities and activities are co-opted or created as aspirational displays of the state's vision of a perfect civil society and its vision of itself.

When the procession came down to the valley, spectacle was still possibly the most important feature, but spectacle was something that individuals could make rather than just watch. On the mountaintop, I could passively watch, along with the other tourists. A young volunteer from Zhongshun Temple gave many explanatory remarks over a microphone in English and Mandarin Chinese, so it was clear that this part of the ritual was focused on tourists and those outside of the community. Additionally, in 2020, some people had asked me if I was a Christian in order to explain that it would be acceptable for me to watch the ritual as a kind of cultural display, that I would not be breaking any Christian taboos on idol worshipping. No one tried to make this distinction for me in the valley, and I was made to participate as older women handed me charms and incense. I was not really treated in any particular way as a foreign guest by those who interpreted the event for the benefit of outsiders, a contrast to the morning's ritual. This was the same whenever I visited the temple during any large ritual and was made to take and offer incense by the very friendly volunteers who handed it to me. They never attempted to interpret the situation for me and draw internal distinctions. Whether I cared to or not, I was now drawn up into a relationship with Ang Kong, just by virtue of appearing on the site.

To some, I was inside of the ritual system all the time, whether or not I was aware of it, simply because I lived in Ang Kong's territory. In French philosopher Louis Althusser's parlance, I was drawn up into the ideological apparatus of the ritual community; I was directly hailed and called upon by members of this group and asked (made) to participate in the conditions of its continuous construction (Althusser 1971). In Luhmann's terms, I entered the social system

created by the terms of the ritual communication, a system for which everything outside of it was recognized as an environment, rather than as legitimate alternative systems (Luhmann 2013). For many of the elderly worshippers, *there is no other system* than the ritual system, and all changes and information they receive is reinterpreted and translated in terms of this system. For example, a gentry family from Yilan, in Northeast Taiwan, with the surname Chen whose ancestors had passed imperial exams during Qing Dynasty now feels pride in their family members who have become high level civil servants and doctoral degree holders. They list these accomplished relatives inside of their family temple.

派別	時間	姓	職銜	經歷
後頭厝 (二房廣輩)	咸豐5年 (1855)	陳宜梓(梓聲)	五品軍功	平定吳璣之亂有功。三貂堡保正 銓選江西候補通判
前頭厝	咸豐7年 (1857)	陳虎生(炳文)	咸豐七年監生 晉附貢生	
前頭厝	同治1年 (1862)	陳永元(燦同)	同治元年監生 晉附貢生	銓選儒學正堂
後頭厝 (四房廣輩)	同治4年 (1865)	陳添丁(捷元)	同治四年監生 晉附貢生	字掄三
後頭厝 (六房廣輩)	同治7年 (1868)	陳進土(開元)	同治七年監生 晉附貢生	銓選通判
前頭厝	光緒3年 (1877)	陳永順(季忠)	光緒三年武秀才	縣府院試武科同考官
後頭厝 (五房廣輩)	光緒3年 (1877)	陳木桂(掄元)	光緒三年武秀才(憲尊老師)	字春三
後頭厝 (二房咸輩)	光緒3年 (1877)	陳朝鏘(和明)	光緒三年武秀才時年19歲	字繼爾 武科第一名
前頭厝	光緒6年 (1880)	陳贊周(丕武)	光緒六年武秀才	
後頭厝 (二房咸輩)	光緒8年 (1882)	陳朝楨(能致)	光緒八年秀才	字周臣 18年晉廩生
後頭厝 (三房咸輩)	光緒9年 (1883)	陳振利(朝義)	光緒九年武秀才	
前頭厝	光緒17年 (1891)	陳贊綱(維伍)	光緒十七年武秀才	
後頭厝 (三房咸輩)	光緒18年 (1892)	陳忠陽(朝謙)	光緒十九年武秀才	字振益
前頭厝	光緒19年 (1893)	陳贊獻(翼臣)	光緒十九年武秀才	
後頭厝 (六房咸輩)	光緒19年 (1893)	陳振昌(朝儀)	光緒十九年武舉人	
後頭厝 (八房廣輩)		陳廷輝(燦元)	員山堡保正	
後頭厝 (二房咸輩)		陳松鏐	日本帝大醫科肄	壽32歲英年早逝，壯志未酬
後頭厝 (二房靈輩)		陳崑峰(堉埔)	陸軍中將、監察委員	日本陸軍士官學校第17期畢業
後頭厝 (二房定輩)		陳喬岳(幸祥)	宜蘭市民代表會主席	日本大學齒科醫學士

Figure 12 Famous Members of the Chen Family, Yilan, Taiwan

Author's Photo

Returning to the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, for four days in 2020, processions were kept marching, and firecrackers were continually set off. That year, the temple's anniversary celebration coincided with the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual. Masses of people gathered at the temple to offer incense together. By lighting incense and making offerings, by lighting off firecrackers in the street in front of their businesses and inviting the large frame puppets to walk inside, they established increasingly closer connections with Ang Kong and his retinue. For the god in his sedan chair to be taken into a tea farmer's field was the same. The purpose of these activities was for the individual to be able to meet the god in a way that was unmediated.

The power of the god, glossed as *ling*, to hear and respond to worshipper's wishes is regarded by Sangren as "*ling*, the mystified power of local social institutions" (Sangren 1988:56). It is just this view of a deity's cult as a coherent, local social institution that led the city government to want to harness this power in order to more efficiently manage and promote development in the Maokong area, which it had become involved with years before. It is this notion that led the program of the mountaintop ritual to address the community rather than facilitate communication between the worshippers and the deity. This change in orientation and address is one that often accompanies the modernization of rituals; it echoes the performance of local village ceremonies in Java during its state-led modernization campaigns, as observed by American anthropologist John Pemberton (1994). Thus, there was little opportunity for anyone to directly state their wishes, making the idea of community revitalization seem abstract, the domain of the government. Government projects, one of the Muzha Young Farmers told me, were usually misguided and ineffective, relying on show rather than substance. She illustrated this by complaining about a planned project for the construction of a suspension bridge in Maokong as a tourist attraction, stating that this kind of government intervention was costly and

outdated. It was an idea that came from an ambitious politician who wanted a big infrastructure project to leave as a legacy, and its impact on tourism would be fleeting.

In comparison, the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual was a much gentler intervention, but it still needed to stroke the egos of political players. However, this event was also personally meaningful for many of the pilgrims who are aloof from this particular expression of politics, like the *xiaoshun* man and his elderly mother, who insisted on making the full tour. This pair was lauded by the temple staff and many walkers mentioned them and drew my attention to them, but their presence was “unofficial” and spontaneous. Temple hopping and having the opportunity to *bai bai* at as many places as possible was something that attracted many of the pilgrims. I spoke to the family members of one of the Muzha Young Farmers to ask them what they thought of the event: “We look forward to it. We go every year. It’s fun to go together with our whole family.” For many participants, even those who are more officially involved (as the Muzha Young Farmers were responsible for many of the refreshment stands), it is casual weekend recreation. For the Young Farmers, it was a development strategy that the government got right.

In the literature, these two modes of participation are separated as popular and elite traditions, with the popular perspective focusing on short-term, tangible rewards and direct communication, and the elite perspective focused on long-term goals and the education of the populace through the medium of deities (Weller 1987). A person I interviewed stated that public spectacle was a form of “street education.” This seemed to be exemplified by what I observed, until I was able to have a few discussions with some younger people in Muzha, who tended to take on this “elite” perspective more in their discussions. The Zhongshun temple community is the domain of the elderly. The temple hosts morning exercise courses for elders, and they tend to hang around there throughout the day as well. During large rituals, they make up the majority of

the participants. Some of the more active members have encouraged (or forced) their children to join in as photographers and videographers, and I was able to discuss the affairs of the temple and the area it serves with some of them. By speaking with them and the Muzha Young Farmers' Association members, I was able to discover that there was a generation gap.

When I asked about the joint cooperation between the government and temple, one young man, the son of a temple committee member expressed his desire to shift the focus from Maokong to Muzha itself. Instead of promoting Maokong as a destination for tourists, he wanted to promote Muzha as a destination through a branding initiative that emphasized its distinctive culture, which included its festive rituals. He was able to show me the mock-up of a new logo for the temple, Baoyi Daifu drawn using the Taiwanese aesthetic (台式美學 *taishi meixue*) rather than the Japanese manga style drawing that the temple was currently using.



Figure 13 Current Japanese-style Baoyi Daifu Mascot used by Zhongshun Temple

Photo courtesy of Zhongshun Temple's Facebook Fan Page

In a long conversation together, most of our discussion focused on branding. Instead of seeing his proposed local branding initiative as commodifying the god at the risk of destroying him, he saw it as a necessary step to ensure the survival of a distinctive community, which he expressed worries over: “I want to dedicate my life to this because Muzha is a good place.” There was an echo of the Tswana elder who told the American anthropologists the Comaroffs: “[I]f we have nothing of ourselves to sell, does it mean that we have no culture?” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:10). This young man’s statement should not be seen as jaded or cynical but idealistic: personal gain was not the goal above all others, but personal gain must certainly come as a result of his total commitment to community renewal in a modern way that he understood well (branding and digital marketing) and which the elder generation was not well aware of. When I interviewed one of the Muzha Young Farmers, her uncle interrupted one of her responses to inform me: “no, the main difference between the older and younger generations of tea farmers is that the younger generation understands how to sell things online.” He spoke of this as an urgent and important contribution, a positive development.

In a similar way, the state-sponsored mountaintop ritual for Ang Kong turned him into a figure who represented the community rather than a person that people in the community frequently interacted with, just as the branding initiative turns Ang Kong into a symbol of authentic Muzha culture. The move to change ritual relations with a person into a representation of an abstract concept is a hallmark of modern transcendental religion; modern religion takes omnipresent custom and moves to both compartmentalize it in one domain of life and also dematerialize divinities into abstract notions (Keane 2014). This is not to say that because the god is discussed like this, an irreversible process of disenchantment has occurred. The opposition

between these two attitudes, one elite and enlightened, the other popular and misguided, is tenuous and needs to be consciously maintained and restated. Dutch scholar Peter van der Veer explains that this opposition is a product of a modernizing movement in which the state feels threatened by popular practices which “provide alternative networks of power and allegiance” but that elites and authorities themselves “also tend to participate if they need the blessing of the god” (Van Der Veer 2014:120). The alternative networks are extremely active around the temple, especially when the staff is made up of members of influential and wealthy local families. Within the temple itself, the staff has also attempted to curtail any possibility of alternative networks springing up, by banning spirit mediums from operating out of the temple.

In discussions with the younger generation, they tend to align their own views with those of the state, and to be more fully modern than their elderly counterparts. On an individual level, they participate, occasionally visiting the temple for *bai bai*, but their participation in individualized communication with deities and spirits is much more limited than their grandparents’ generation. On the one hand, a process of intense repression during the KMT’s early rule over Taiwan contributed to the reduction of ritual performance and expenditure. On the other hand, individuals themselves, specifically women, have stated that they have simplified ritual activities due to personal preference. There is also the external pressure from wealthy and influential Taipei residents, who are often perceived as social elites, who disparage temple events in general for being low-class and certain ritual practices, such as *ti-kong* raising, as abusive.

Throughout time, rituals change their form, but if ritual is a communication between persons, the less often it is performed, the weaker the relationship between the two parties becomes. The modernization of rituals and temple activities removes certain ritual actions and stresses sincerity instead, even though ideas of sincerity are alien to the context of ritual. In his

discussion of ritual as a subjunctive action, scholar of religion Michael Puett states that ritual should not be understood as mainly a manifestation of piety or sincerity: “In doing a ritual the whole issue of our internal states is often irrelevant. What you are is what you are in the doing, which is of course an external act. This is very different from modernist concerns with sincerity and authenticity.” (2008:24). Ritual is not a system of meanings but a system of relationships. Performed infrequently, those relationships decay or become vaguely threatening. Yet attempts to modernize ritual do misconstrue them. Without incense, *bai bai* loses its meaning. For some younger people, they are aware that change has occurred, and this scarcity of encounter has led them to want to remedy the situation. They have decided to do so in a way that will touch people’s daily lives, which is through the marketing and branding of the culture of Ang Kong worship. They are not necessarily trying to commodify this activity for their own gain but to insert it back into the market which has overtaken all aspects of their lives anyway. They are also highly sensitive and aware of the popular opinion of these activities as low-class and seek to distance themselves from certain expressions, such as the hiring of pole dancers in 遶境 *raojing*. Instead, they hold lecture series and host exhibitions and promote an artistic re-interpretation of Baoyi Daifu. In terms of the relationship between Ang Kong and commercial ventures, there is limited conflict, since many people attribute their financial stability and business success to gods in the first place. Unlike their elders, however, they have not experienced development as a miracle that benefits them, but something that they have to deal with the fallout from, which ranges from the resulting inflated housing market, stagnant wages, and environmental degradation, all factors which cut them off from profitable activities. They take seriously the proposition of “industrializing culture” because it is possibly the only venue left to them to industrialize.

In conclusion, two forms of a single ritual were compared to reveal two separate interpretations on what ritual is. For the local government workers who were responsible for organizing the first half of the ritual, Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields is an interchangeable, somewhat nostalgic spectacle which represents local Taiwanese culture to those who position themselves outside of the local community. Through a memorial, it temporarily revives an enchanted period of Taiwanese history and development, now lost due to modern ways. For the core group of worshippers and temple volunteers, who take over fully in the second half of the ritual held in the afternoon, Welcoming Ang Kong is one of many rituals performed in an already busy calendar year. It is proof of Ang Kong's resurgent status among outsiders, in a long, unbroken history of miraculous acts recognized by those who worship him. Modern day miracles can be commonplace occurrences for those who foster a relationship with Ang Kong through continued ritual communication. Modernization and state repression of ritual expenditure did not lead to a complete break in ritual performance, but they have influenced which rituals were performed.

Conclusion

The non-human agency referred to in the title of this thesis refers not only to the agency of contained gods but the agency of the earth and the environment itself, which is often negotiated through the authoritative presence of the gods. A productive environment is not a passive and inert backdrop which can be exploited at will (albeit “sustainably”). The connection between human society and the productive potential of the land, and the ritual interactions between human beings and the land they live on envelops all of them into a ritual sphere. Regardless of an individual’s belief or his or her commitment to scientific rationalism in other parts of life, the ritual is subjunctive; it creates a space where non-humans are influential actors in society. It expands society to include many kinds of non-human actors.

This is the main essence of the ontological turn, the ability to extend culture and society into the environment, thereby removing the artificial barrier erected between them that has caused many theoretical missteps over the years, perhaps from its very inception during the scientific revolution (Latour 1993). Oftentimes, and especially when studying groups which live by hunting, trapping, pasturing, and/or rotational agriculture, the idea of a humanlike consciousness found in the non-human other has been seen as a panacea to naturalist beliefs which lump together all non-humans, morally allowing for their exploitation (Simon 2020).

However, there are several examples in East Asia and Southeast Asia, where the recognition of non-human personhood and non-human sociality do little to temper exploitation of non-humans and humans alike. Complex relations with spirits who reside in forests, stones, or other natural features, do not automatically lead to the preservation of forests or other natural resources (Boomgaard 1991). In Taiwan, it is easy to see the select preservation of a god tree or god stone within highly built-up urban areas – the stones and trees themselves are preserved

while the environment around them can still be changed totally. And just because non-humans are treated as persons some of the time does not mean that they remain persons and enjoy the treatment and rights of persons all the time (Sprenger 2016). In this thesis, I have tried to illuminate some ways in which the market-driven commercial economy can also be enchanted and is capable of bearing similarities to the animist societies described by the anthropologists. What allows for the continuation of ritual is not self-conscious preservation activities, such as the renewed Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, which admits the disenchantment of agriculture and tries to make a symbolic apology for it. Rather, Ang Kong's presence signals the shifting nature of enchantment. Though disenchantment did occur in one place, as happened with the scientific rationalization of tea farming, enchantment developed in another, the volatile real estate market. It has been more than a century since the concept of modernity and disenchantment was born, and we have seen that there is no straightforward, evolutionary progress toward a totally rationalized, disenchanted world. The Chinese civilization and society which Taiwan has inherited is rarely considered as animist, but there is potential power everywhere. In the locally based political-economic system known as popular religion, trees, rocks, and rivers are spiritually endowed, and they have the potential to gain a human form and enter into communication with human beings. Mus described it as the "divination of the energies of the soil" (Mus 1975 [1933]:10) These concentrations of power, whether they are recognized as spirits or gods, act as "a critical conduit between humans and natural resources (economy)" so that "excising this chthonic energy is at the foundation of modern political economy" (Work 2019:76). In these works, a humanized or divinized relationship with the land is a necessary part of profit extraction, as Mus primarily discusses the roots of Chinese civilization, a massive profit extracting machine based on grain agriculture. In the transposition of Ang Kong's agency and

domain from extractive farming to extractive land ownership and property development, the presence of godly spiritual agency smooths rather than resists economic development and commercial expansion.

In many places, it seems that disenchantment is a necessary precondition of mass commercialization through environmental change. The graves of the ancestors must be removed before the factory can be built.¹⁶ The spirits of the trees must be removed before they can be chopped down and turned into the objects called timber (Boomgaard 1991). However, there is little, if any, conflict between the mass extraction of resources from the land which implies an overall transformation of the land, and the spirit beliefs which are connected to the land. Rather, the spirit beliefs on their own are not a powerful enough force to prevent development, and they can be altered or removed to accommodate it (Johnson 2019). Whether the land is enchanted or whether it is a passive backdrop, it can still be mined and polluted, rivers can be dammed and straightened, trees can be cut, and monocultures can be brought in. The Han Chinese cosmological system is a plains system derived from plains-level extraction and cut-copy replication of rice fields (Scott 2009). It has been intimately entangled with empire building, and the nature beliefs that remain are not a primitive substrate but a co-existing feature which is often layered over by empire-building civilizing projects. Sacred trees or stones remain, but over time, they may become worshipped as Guanyin or any other mainstream deity.

The tea fields of the Taipei Basin, of which the Maokong tea fields are some of the last of those that once surrounded Taipei, were once the frontier of ecological transformation and exploitation in the area. The memory of the conflicts involved in molding this land to suit intensive cash crop cultivation is still alive in myths about the battles between early settlers and aboriginal groups in which Ang Kong intervened on the settlers' behalf and also in the taboo

¹⁶ See Appendix F

against offering Ang Kong Muscovy duck (the word in Taiwanese Hokkien is a homonym with “barbarian”).¹⁷ In the present day, these fields themselves have become a target of preservationist activities, as a human cultural achievement. The early settler farmers credited their god Ang Kong for much of their ability to expand into the hills and mountains. The entire cultural system of the tea fields, including its ritual milieu, is being revitalized in a project which involves cooperation between the temple community, a new business association, and the local government.

The Zhongshun Temple is the area where I spent the most time, and its system is the most open one. It offers itself as a legitimate center of a local practice of worship, but it does not make heavy coercive demands on its worshippers. Just as prior worship associations collapsed and donated their ritual items and gods to the temple, new worship associations have arisen and have held their god’s eye-opening ceremony at the temple. If too many members of the community became dissatisfied with the changes made by Zhongshun temple in order to appease outsiders, they have the ability to break off, forming their own worship circles, or simply worship at home with their family. Although the temple is professionally managed and operated, with little room for the marginal, such as elderly grandmothers, to enter into the decision-making structure, there are places for the marginal to wield influence simply by occupying the space of the courtyard day after day, by forming a critical mass of participants, and by retaining detailed knowledge of past ritual performance. While there is something of a suggested orthodoxy, it is not a hard and fast rule. There is a clear and obvious form to the worship known as *bai bai*, but there is no emphasis on faith or frequency of devotions.

Although I set out to discover the ways that non-humans feature in human-centered sociality in Taipei and the interactions between the market and ritual sphere, between a

¹⁷ In general, it is unusual to present duck meat as an offering, however.

cosmopolitan internationalization and the distinctly local atmosphere of the ritual community, I ended up with a collection of elder people's stories and practices, with history and myths, and with younger people's anxieties and nostalgia. I was not able to discover an ideal system of integrating the non-human and the human in a respectful utopia, lying just under the surface of domination, suppressed in turn by the Qing, the colonial, and the development state. The surface as I saw it, the litter, the pollution, the luxury apartment buildings, the plastic rubble, is as much a product of the bottom as the top. In describing a situation in which urban development in Lukang, Taiwan laid waste to a cemetery, Hatfield describes these interactions between politicians, the populace, and the ancestors as complicity, and the popular reaction to urban renewal as ambivalence, rather than simple resistance and domination (2011). In the Muzha area, there was an alliance between all parties in recognizing Ang Kong, an authoritative pro-development god, but it was popular ambivalence toward development that led to the popularization of the Maokong tea farming area, a nostalgic tourist attraction. It had been developed from mainly working farms into a recreational zone that the middle class could go to recall the way that they imagined their parents or grandparents had lived. It was this ambivalence toward development and generational changes in general that had a hand in reviving the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual as well, in which a historical reality of extraction by dispossession was reimagined as the enchanted, mutually protective relationship between migrants from China, tea, and Ang Kong.

Instead of resistance, there was mutual accommodation and collaboration. It was similar the way that historian Evan Dawley described Taiwanese local families in Keelung interacting with their new Japanese colonial overlords (2019). Through accommodation and collaboration, many families were able to continue amassing resources in order to develop their own families

and villages during regime changes. In Muzha, Zhongshun Temple staff members gave the impression of having graciously accepted the invitation by the local government to hold the Welcoming Ang Kong ritual, and although they changed some parts, they maintained enough “traditional” features to satisfy the participants.

The collaboration and integration of the state, the modernized Muzha Young Farmers, Zhongshun Temple’s management and its core base of worshippers could only go so far. The temple and its nearby environs are better described as a unique political-economic system that works and acts, rather than a religion that is to be believed. However, this system is often slow, inefficient and arguably wasteful with the resources that it collected. There were spaces for difference and dissent, a contradictory relationship with notions of development and progress, and a move toward increased legibility and standardization of ritual practice that did not wholly succeed. It looked forward, and it forgot its responsibilities to the god and was stopped from its momentum by having to attend to this god. An important Ang Kong god statue left the temple for this very reason, returning to the Chen family’s private altar, fragmenting the center of power. And without a doubt, the god is a person whom worshippers cultivate a personal relationship with. For some elders, this god might even be biologically alive.

“If you want to care for a deity, you need to quit your full-time job.” This statement, and ones like it, that emphasized the time commitment (and chafed under the burden) of popular worship, kept being recalled to my mind as I saw the ambitions of all the area temples being checked by the many activities required to care for the god, and by the needs of the ritual calendar which gave people something to do every single day. Innovation and changes to rituals were limited due to a fear of losing the core base of worshippers, the elderly. This inefficiency

was an important part of the system itself, a functional piece which, when removed, caused a loss of meaning.

Yet modes of communication and direct linkages between the people and the gods are removed in urban areas. *Ti-kong* sacrifice is all but gone in the Muzha area, and it is controversial amongst the middle and upper classes. Firecrackers were forbidden in one of the performances of the Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields ritual due to ecological concerns. One well-regarded temple, Xingtian Gong, has forbidden the use of incense.¹⁸ Although this often happens for very practical reasons, the loss of practice causes a loss of connection. As people spend less and less time with gods through ritual communication, they are less likely to experience any kind of active relationship. The difference in frequency of ritual preparation and performance between the elderly and the young exemplifies this. Oftentimes, according to direct statements, it was the older generation who encouraged the younger generation to distance themselves from these responsibilities for their own sakes.

The ritual system of Muzha, just like many others, is full of contradictions. It is integrated into the modern development projects that promise more up-to-date buildings, a new MRT station (or several), an industrialized culture, and more wealth to larger numbers of people, promises that prove elusive, especially for the younger generation. Although connected deeply to the area, it has little consideration for the physical, natural, or historical environment. In fact, it delights in its transformation, so long as those changes lead to the enrichment of any of the local families. This is how it was during the early stages when settlers came to claim mountain lands for tea farming and camphor extraction. Ang Kong is a god of questionable morality, a mercenary god more than anything. He enters into the social system, he presides over it, and he

¹⁸ Even in the 1990s, this temple was known as a religious site well suited to the aspirational middle classes (Madsen 2007). It is still a favorite amongst this group today.

is a large part and important feature of it. Yet his influence corresponds only to those things that people in the area already want. He does not go against them. In this particular circle of worshippers, he has become the god of working-class landlords and land developers, the descendants of the tea farming families who brought him to Taiwan in the first place.

As Taiwan went through waves of development, from the frontier tea boom of the late nineteenth century to mid twentieth-century industrialization to its current move into information and services, attitudes toward rituals performed for gods have changed. Ang Kong ceremonies were at times directly targeted and banned, and at other times disappeared due to lack of need. The disappearance ceremony of Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields in order to eliminate pests provides a straight-forward example of disenchantment as a consequence of industrial development, the rationalization of agriculture. However, to use this example as proof that modernization inevitably brings disenchantment would be to show an incomplete picture.

It would be more accurate to describe what occurred in the case of the Ang Kong rituals as shifting enchantments. The enchantment of an important feature of social life shifted as the basis of the local economy shifted. In the case of this neighborhood in Muzha, there was a shift from the enchantment of farming to the enchantment of property development. Not only is the god considered responsible for the continued success of those who worship him, but the people who were the most enriched by property development in the area are responsible for hosting more and more rituals, which are legitimized through their endorsements by important political players.

They have invested significant time and resources in making their worship practices appear legible and socially beneficial to the local government, helping to both influence and express the new perspective of the government toward popular religion as a positive investment

into local civil society rather than pure waste. There is an integration of the state and civil society in that they now both apparently support ritual activities, a marked change from the past. However, there is still a difference in the way that each approaches the god, as a person with whims who is capable of fulfilling their wants directly or as a unique cultural symbol which can be leveraged as a marketing tool for monetary gain. Connections with and ceremonies dedicated to Ang Kong in Muzha have persisted throughout the massive structural and developmental changes Taiwan has gone through, but rather than disappearing or changing their character to merely symbolic and nostalgic spectacles, they have adapted to meet new needs.



Appendices

Appendix A: A spirit-written poem written by Baoyi Daifu.

保儀大夫詩 己亥年三月初五日 宇基方向合良佳勿改原盤勿改低。議論雖多毋輕作求懇指示我歡懷。諸生有志發勤皮境內蒼黎志頗堅。同勸共作完成宇鎮護威靈顯赫具。進行工事願留心如有疑問到堂臨。有求公應神顯赫異日功亡几福併臻。神人繁忙改宇新生意勤皮我欣心。懇示聖誕成道日客彼宇完另述宜。鎮殿金身可安排落成登龕表另栽。尊王行述容漸且願望諸生相作偕。保儀大夫詩半壁懸岩九曲前儼若逢壺別一天。臨堂佛聖仙真伴點滴甘霖潤大千。奉黃開堂集群真佛聖殷勤闡教施。岩穴靈基成五事前徒神人功德深。

Appendix B: Question and Answer Session with spirit medium possessed by Baoyi Daifu

問：指示全體董監事為本廟同心協力供獻力量龍使本廟香火旺盛？

答：忠義高風振廟堂照耀千里百鎮香 順應民心培大德明鑒功名系科楊

Appendix C: A story translated by DeGroot.

Herewith I detail the particulars of my collision with an evil spirit, and report my death. In front of my third hall stood an old Hwai tree (Sophora), making the rooms very dark; I wished to fell it, but the petty officers in the city all said: 'there is a spirit in this tree; it may not be felled'. I did not believe them, and I felled it; moreover I had the roots dug up, and when these had been removed I saw fresh flesh, and under it a painted paper showing a naked girl in a reclining attitude. With great detestation I burned the picture and gave the flesh to the dog to eat, and that same night I felt that my soul was uneasy; I was not ill, but dejected, and this has become worse every day; alarming sounds are drumming in my ears; my eyes see nothing, but my ears hear; I feel that I shall live no longer in this world (De Groot 1972 [1896]:656).

Appendix D: Wu Taoying's Entry on Baoyi Daifu

保儀大夫：保儀大夫，俗稱尪公。臺北郊區農民，祀為驅除蟲害，保護農村之神，又奉祀為武神，往年番害，必請此神「放軍」，助援保佑。(Wu 1977:74).

Appendix E: Origin Story of the “Welcoming Ang Kong to the Tea Fields” Ritual

因為來參加祭典的農民，必須要早點趕回汐止家，以便於一大早可以跟兒子一起驅蟲害，陳氏祖厝的人只好將當日祭拜保儀大夫的燈火，借給農民使用。農民趕回汐止之後，也沒有立即回家，就直接帶著祭拜保儀大夫的燈火巡視農地。

第二天一大早，農民的兒子要去農地除蟲，竟然發現到蝗蟲都已經死光了，但是，僅僅是隔壁鄰地的農田，蝗蟲依然是非常猖獗、兇悍。這樣的結果，當然引起了當地農民的注意，大家都到這位農民的家裡詢問是怎麼除蟲害的。農民就直接告知，昨晚用了保儀大夫的燈火巡了田園一圈，早上起來蟲害就自然消失了。

因此，大家都認為這是木柵忠順廟保儀大夫顯靈，經由大家的口耳相傳，紛紛到木柵忠順廟去迎請保儀大夫巡視自己的農地，而蟲害災區也就自然化解，保儀大夫保護農民，去除蟲害的靈驗事蹟，也就在大台北盆地傳驗開來。

(木柵忠順廟誌 Muzha Zhongshun Temple Record)

Appendix E1: Shortened Version provided for the Ang Kong Worship Culture Exhibition at the Wenshan District Community Center

「清時有陳姓者，自安溪遷移木柵，隨奉保儀大夫寶像，初奉祀於木柵樟腳村陳姓祖厝，例年農曆四月十日，殺豬以祭，是有親戚，住汐止某處。。。，偕一所耕田園，正遭受蚊蟲災害，無以為計，須亟趕回，。。。因此陳代為設法，將是日祭保儀大夫燈，代替燈火，供彼帶回，回到汐止猶念蝗害不置，未即回家，攜此登，逕到所耕農園周圍，祭視受災情形，及農其兒子赴田園除蟲時，竟發現蚊蟲已自斃殆盡。。。，此後各地

（包括臺北市）凡遭受蚊蟲災害之農民，紛詣陳姓祖厝禱告，並恭迎神像，到災區遶境一視，及農害蟲已蕩然不復為災。」

Appendix F: Information from Jingmei Jiying Temple's first root-seeking trip to China in which they recovered the tomb of Zheng Baohui, self-published in a Chinese language commemorative album:

“保仪尊王

郑公保惠莹城

保仪尊王（原大夫之职）逝于宋代，葬在大坪社溪尾大坂，茶乡在公元 1998 年 3 月创立绿色食品工程有限公司，起盖厂房，占地十七亩，迁公墓，受挖推平地，只存墓碑一道，该牌雕有文字，其文：

“乾隆乙巳年，皇宋保惠郑公墓，张朝盛立”。”

[Baoyi Zunwang

The Tomb of Zheng Bao Hui

Baoyi Zunwang (formerly known as Daifu) was buried in Daping Village, Anxi County during the Song Dynasty. In March 1988, Chaxiang Company established the “Green Packaged Foods” factory. When they built the factory, they excavated and destroyed 17 *mu* [3 acres] of the former cemetery. Only one tomb was left standing, and a commemorative stele from Qing Dynasty was preserved. It read: “Qianlong reign, the year of Yisi [1785]: the great Zheng Baohui rests here.”]

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