

TWO EXAMPLES OF THE PILGRIMAGE ACTIVITIES IN TAIWAN

(Summary)

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I. Foreword

Pilgrimage is very common in Taiwan. It is also an activity of great importance in the life of the local common people. Pilgrimages, periodic and irregular, are often made by various temples, despite their sizes and the numbers of their believers. The most spectacular are the pilgrimage groups organized by the temples dedicated to the worship of Goddess Ma Tsu (媽祖). In fact, it has become a prevalent trend that, in the early spring and at the end of each year, devotees of Ma Tsu Temples every where form a pilgrimage group to offer worship to the ancestral temple of their Goddess Ma Tsu. In order to understand the background for this fervent religious custom among the local societies, the processes through which static religious ceremonies have become dynamic, and the individual belief in gods as well as the relationship between various deities, the Institute of Ethnology, under the guidance of Director Ling, carried out a project to investigate the organizations and activities of the pilgrimage group of Tzu-Yu Temple (慈祐宮), Sungshan (松山) District, Taipei in north Taiwan and of the pilgrimage group of Yung Hsing Temple (永興宮), Ta Ya (大雅) in central Taiwan, by actually accompanying these pilgrimage groups. Liu, Chi-wan (劉枝萬), Hsu, Chia-ming (許嘉明) and the author participated in the survey of the pilgrimage group organized by Tzu-Yu Temple, while only the author himself went along with the Yung Hsing Temple pilgrimage group. For the accomplishment of this paper, the author would like to express his appreciation to Director Ling for his guidance and reading of the draft of this paper, and to Mr Liu, Chi-wan and Mr Hsu, Chia-ming for providing him with the material on the pilgrimage by the group of Tzu-Yu Temple, Sungshan.

II. Pilgrimage Group of Tzu-Yu Temple, Sungshan District, Taipei

The term 'pilgrimage' has a twofold meaning; it signifies an individual's prayers with offering of incense to a deity on one hand, and the entreaties between gods on the other. The pilgrimage conducted by the group organized by Tzu-Yu Temple, Sungshan reflected both of these. Shortly after receipt of the signs of Ma Tsu's approval of the pilgrimage through the throwing of the Kao (poa-poe 擲筊), the Tzu-Yu Temple began preparatory work for the organization of the

pilgrimage group. A general meeting of all its followers was convened, at which the date and itinerary of the pilgrimage and the amount of money each participant should pay were announced, and notices of the pilgrimage were posted here and there on the streets of Sungshan and all other villages or hamlets concerned. Believers from every part of Sungshan District could voluntarily participate in the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage group was composed of 14 units, with the Ts'un (hamlet) and Li (ward) as the basic component element. Each unit was led by the head of a Tsun or Li, whose primary responsibility was to take care of the food and lodgings for the pilgrims in his unit, and arrange the schedule for them to offer their worship at the holy place. The pilgrimage group had a General Affairs Section, responsible for general matters of the group. In addition, the group brought along with it a choir (hymn-reciting group), both Chinese and western type bands, and a Taiwanese operatic troupe. The pilgrimage group was headed by Ts'ai Shui-sheng (蔡水聲), Chairman of the Committee of Management and Administration of Tzu-Yu Temple. The destination of the pilgrimage was Ch'ao Tien Temple (朝天宮) in Pei Kang (北港), the Ma Tsu ancestral temple of Tzu-Yu Temple. The primary goal was to derive some holy spirit and bring back some of the burning incense from the ancestral temple, to reanimate the divinity of the Ma Tsu of Tzu-Yu Temple. Visits were also paid to other Ma Tsu temples on the way, including the T'ien Hou Temple (天后宮) in Lu Kang (鹿港), Nan Yao Temple (南瑤宮) and Tien Hou Temple, in Chang-Hua (彰化), and the Feng Tien Temple (奉天宮), in Hsin Kang (新港). The pilgrims, each holding a small triangular or square flag, visited each of these temples to worship. This flag served to represent the tablet of the Ma Tsu that each pilgrim worships in his family. In the group, there were quite a few septuagenarians, who, regardless of the hardships of travel, toiled along to the holy place to offer their respect. The pilgrims' pious devotion to Ma Tsu was indeed touching. The rite of 'Ke Huo' (割火) scooping incense ash, performed at Tze Shih (子時) (the period between 2300-0100 hours each day) at Tsao Tien Temple, was solemn and impressive in every respect, and brought the activities of the pilgrimage group to a climax. After so long a journey carrying the tablet of their goddess in a sedan-chair with them, it was the pilgrims' ultimate goal to collect from the ancestral temple of their goddess some of the joss sticks burnt at Tze Shih in the first incense burner. The incense in this burner was regarded as the sacred fire, symbolizing a sacred and omnipotent power. The 'sacred fire' was then carried all the way back to Sungshan, and, after a parade around the district, incense is lit at Tzu-Yu Temple with this 'sacred fire', which, they believe, would protect them for all time.) Also, upon return, all the pilgrims burned some incense to express their thanks to Ma Tsu for having returned home safely from the pilgrimage under her protection. Then all taboos imposed during the pilgrimage were lifted.

III. *The Pilgrimage Organization of Yung Hsing Temple, Ta Ya Village, Taichung County*

To celebrate the completion of the renovation work on the Yung Hsing Temple, and the realization from the divine revelation through 'poa-poe' that the Goddess Szu Ma (四媽部 Ma Tsu) worshipped at that temple, (whose origin had remained a mystery over a hundred years,) originally came from the Nan Yao Temple in Chang Hua, the Board of Government and Administration of that temple decided to make a pilgrimage to Nan Yao Temple to offer worship to her ancestor. This was a major event in the village in the last hundred years, so the believers of Ma Tsu of Yung Hsing Temple enthusiastically participated in the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage of Yung Hsing Temple, Ta Ya village was a very typical one, in that the pilgrims

- ✓ all travelled on foot to their destination, whereby they could best show their devout reverence to the deities and gain the benefit and delight of an excursion as well.
- ✓ The pilgrimage group included believers from all of the eight hamlets of the village. Each hamlet constituted a basic unit and the head of this unit was (the leader of the believers within it.) Participation was voluntary. (The organization of the pilgrimage group consisted of a number of specific sections to handle: Such as general affairs, ceremonial performances, financial affairs, march formations, (the order of arrangement of the units during march), equipment, sanitation, the sacred sedan-chair, etc.)
- ✓ Almost every important person in the village was mobilized for this religious project. The pilgrims elected the Chairman of the Board of Government and Administration of Yung Hsing Temple as president of the pilgrimage group. They also elected the village head and the chairman of the village council as vice presidents, who were to be responsible for leading and superintending the group of over one thousand pilgrims. (Carrying the tablet of Goddess Szu Ma in a sedan-chair, holding divine flags of various sizes and bringing with them theatrical troupes and different bands, the pilgrims set out on their long journey to the holy place. The Goddess Szu Ma they carried with them was welcomed and escorted through by the local "Land God" of every hamlet or place they passed on their way.) What the pilgrims saw and went through during the journey gave them some new feeling which could hardly be experienced in their normal rural life. After arrival at Nan Yao Temple, the parent temple of Szu Ma, the pilgrims began to offer their worship first by burning joss sticks, and, at the same time, prayed to the deity to help them solve difficult matters or doubts on their mind. Then, they all attended the solemn 'communion' rite, at Tze Shih between the daughter (the Ma Tsu of Yung Hsing Temple) and the mother (the Ma Tsu of Nan Yao Temple). (One of the important items at this rite was to scoop out some of the incense burning at the time of the supposed meeting between the two deities.) At the end of the rite, the pilgrims immediately started off on the return trip, carrying

the sacred sedan-chair and the burning incense collected, regardless of how fatigued they were from the previous few days' hard travel. (Upon return) they placed the tablet of Szu Ma carried over and back on a specifically built platform in front of the Yung Hsing Temple for all the villagers to pay respect to. (The burning incense) obtained from Nan Yao Temple was first used to kindle the joss sticks in Yung Hsing Temple, so as to keep them eternally aflame and then placed in a divine niche for worship.

IV. CONCLUSION—History of 'Pilgrimage' and 'Society'

The pilgrimage group of Tzu Yu Temple, Sungshan and that of Yung Hsing Temple, Ta Ya were two organizations with different social backgrounds, The former was composed chiefly of people from the industrial and commercial fields, while the majority of the components of the latter were rural people. The hamlet or Li (里) was used as the basic constituent element in both organizations, and the heads of hamlets or Li's (under the present administrative system established by the Government) or their staff officials were made leaders of such basic elements. From the fact that each hamlet the Yung Hsing Temple pilgrimage group passed on its way, the local god of that hamlet was carried out by the local people in a sedan-chair, to meet the Goddess Ma Tsu carried by the pilgrimage group and escort her through that hamlet, we discovered that the traditional 'She' (社) sacrificial system of ancient China is still preserved among the local people of Taiwan. The practice of meeting and escorting the God who was carried by a pilgrimage group, by the local 'She' god of a hamlet (land god) in the above mentioned manner, Ku, Chieh-kang (顧頡剛) said, "was but a variation from the previous 'She' society (Ku, Chieh-kang 1928: 11)". As a result of the custom of carrying the tablet of a god from one place to another for sacrificial purposes, the stationary society had become dynamic.

The 'She' religion had been in existence and very popular among the emperors and the common people since the Chow Dynasty (Ku, Chieh-kang 1928: 11). In Feng Shan Shu, Shih Chi (史記封禪書), Szu-Ma, Chien (司馬遷) said: "Beginning with the rule of Emperor Yu, 'She' sacrificial rites were established." In the light of this record, it seems that the 'She' religion began during the time of Emperor Yu of the Hsia Dynasty. But in accordance with legends of ancient China, it originated much earlier; as a matter of fact, there had been 'She' sacrificial rites even during the time of Shen Nung Shih (神農氏) (Ling 1964: 3). In ancient China, 'She' was the holy place where the people of a community worshipped the gods and ghosts (Granet 1950: 175-179) and it was, at the same time, the assembly center of the people of a society. (Hiroshi Shinbi 1935)

Ling, Shun-sheng classified the ancient 'She' into sixteen types (Ling: 1964: 5-13), of which, the 'military she' is worth particular notice. There might have

been some connection between the ancient 'military she' and the custom of carrying the tablet of a god in a sedan-chair by religious believers in Taiwan to make a pilgrimage to a temple at some distant place. Maybe the latter sprung from the former. Cited below, for example, are some of the many records regarding the 'military she' contained in ancient historical books and other documents. Chun Kwang Hsiao Chung Po, Chow Li (周禮春官小宗伯) states: "Before the departure of a large army for any mission, the commander should first have the 'military she' established.—Annotation: Before the departure of large troops for an important mission, especially expeditionary in nature, a rite should first be performed at the 'She' for taking the 'She god' to go along with the troops. The tablet of the 'she god' then carried along with the troops during their maission was called the 'military she', whereas the removing of the divine tablet from the temple was known as Tsu (祖). Again, Chun Kwang Ta Chu (春官大祝) states: "A major army, when dispatched for an expeditionary mission, should establish within it the military she." These two records can well prove the similiarity between the ancient military she and the common religious practice in Taiwan of carrying the tablet of the god of a temple by that temple's believers for pilgrimage to other temples.—The ancient cult of the ancestral temple and of the 'she chi' (land god and grain god), originally belonging to one religious system, had later been separated as two different systems (Granet 1926: 126). The passage that 'The Tsu (祖) Yen (燕 an ancient state) had was same as the 'she chi' of Chi (齊 an ancient state)." is contained in the Chapter of Ming Kuei of Motze (墨子明鬼篇) and is often quoted by both Chinese and Western scholars to demonstrate that the ancient 'she' and 'Tsu' were one and the same thing. The local custom of removing the tablet of the god of a temple (Goddess Ma Tsu) and the tablet of the local god (god of land), as observed by the author during his travel with the previously mentioned two local pilgrimage groups for investigation of their activities, can further testify that the religious cult of ancestral temple and that of 'she chi' were originally one and the same, and that the temple was originated from the 'she' cult. Besides, from the pilgrimage organizations and activities of Sungshan and Ta Ya, we found out that the development of ancient societies had close relations with the religious rites of the ancestral temple and she cult, as Ku, Chieh-kang said: "The pilgrimage organization is just a transformation of the ancient society."