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Alan J. A. Elliott

Chinese

Spirit-medium Cults in Singapore
The concentration of this monograph on Chinese spirit-mediumship in Singapore is chiefly a device for focusing attention upon the most typical, although other concrete manifestations of the major religious orientations of the overseas Chinese. Only by such a device is it at all possible to cope with the immense range of religious beliefs and practices found in Singapore. The accounts given here may chiefly be of interest as a detailed record of religious rites, but it is hoped that the description and analysis will throw some light upon the wider ramifications of culture and society among the Chinese.

The field work on which the book is based extended from February, 1950, to November, 1951, and a preliminary report of the work was submitted to the Colonial Social Science Research Council. In its present form, the account is less intended for the sociological theorist than for those who take a general, or even a professional, interest in the affairs of the overseas Chinese and of Southeast Asia.

During the twenty-one months of field research, Singapore enjoyed a period of relative calm and considerable prosperity. The Japanese occupation had left a legacy to be felt for many years, but the Police Department had made remarkable progress in ensuring public order. The community was not without its problems, but these were for the most part of internal origin, caused by disputes over land or property, and did not centre on the path to self-government although the full impact of the movement had not yet been felt by the majority of the population. Disturbing influences were due more to internal causes than to external events. The most notable was rising by Muslims in December, 1950, over the Maria Hertogh case. This was the only instance of serious trouble, but not serious enough to affect public confidence. Although there were some casualties, the Chinese generally kept aloof from any trouble-making and were notable for the philosophic manner in which they accepted the curfews that were imposed. By the beginning of 1950, the Communist regime was established throughout China, and the attitude of most overseas Chinese had become that of awaiting events without showing much overt enthusiasm for either side.

The state of emergency due to Communist terrorism had continued since June, 1948, but its effect in Singapore was slight compared with that in Malaya. In Singapore, police methods included the use of identity cards, but security measures were sufficient to prevent any serious dislocation of life. Nevertheless, there was a growing atmosphere of tension under the threat of Communist attack. The most important indirect influence of the emergency upon Chinese religious customs arose from the measures that had to be taken to control and restrict processions and parades. The police had always had to keep a
watchful eye on these at Chinese festivals, but the prevailing situation made restrictions additionally necessary. A more important factor, from the viewpoint of the detailed description of rite, was the banning of fire crackers, except during limited periods in the Chinese New Year, thereby prohibiting one of the customary adjuncts to many religious ceremonies.1

In June, 1950, the Korean war broke out. At first there was no apparent effect in Singapore but eventually the scarcity of certain commodities and the phenomenal increase in the price of oil and rubber led to sharp rises in the cost of living. By the middle of 1951, many families which had not been directly affected by conditions of prosperity were in severely straitened financial circumstances.

One spirit-medium cult was studied with as much thoroughness as possible. This cult was selected for detailed attention largely because it offered the best opportunities for consistent investigation over a long period. It was possible to observe performances and to keep a close watch on the activities of the leaders. A number of other cults were studied, about a dozen other cults, selected chiefly for variations they displayed in relation to the first cult. As a further check upon the problem of variation, attention was paid to about forty additional cults. In all, the information given in this report is based upon a knowledge of some seventy spirit-medium cults, many of which I visited and investigated personally. In some cases, observations were of only a casual nature and not reported in detail.

The investigation of spirit-medium cults represented my main interest, but the scope of my studies was not restricted to this alone. In the course of this book, references are made to many other types of religious practice, and to the more general features of Chinese life in Singapore. These were given as detailed investigations as circumstances would permit, but in the present context they serve as background material to the central theme.

Throughout the book the term 'South Sea', which has now become well-established in studies of overseas Chinese, is a direct translation of the phrase the Chinese themselves use when referring to the overseas Chinese, and the term 'Malaya' is used to cover both the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore. When monetary values are given they are quoted in Straits dollars, each of which is worth 2S. 4d. at the official rate of exchange. Without going into a detailed examination of its actual purchasing power, it can be taken as being worth about 2S. In other words, there are approximately $10 to the pound, and three Straits dollars are about equivalent to the United States dollar.

1 Here, as elsewhere, references to the British colonial administration are restricted to the immediate relevance of governmental action to matters under discussion. No attempt is made to suggest that the part played by British administration, or of the European community as a whole, in the development of Chinese life in Singapore was unimportant.
A few remarks must be added on the perennial problem of the romanised spelling of Chinese words. In cases where a place or a street with a Chinese name has an accepted romanised spelling this form has been retained, but in all other cases, absent a Chinese name, a romanised transcription has been used. Although some confusion may result in some instances, it should be noted that the romanisation of Chinese names is not uniform, and alternative romanisations are sometimes used. Where a Chinese has selected a romanised name for himself or his business it would be discourteous not to follow a similar course, however incorrect phonetically his choice may have been. In all other cases, where it has been impossible to avoid the use of a Chinese name, and where it is desirable that characters should be given for the benefit of Chinese scholars, a romanised form has been used. Although the National Language is very far from being a lingua franca among the overseas Chinese, I have found it convenient to give most of these Chinese phrases in the Wade romanisation of Mandarin. In a few cases, however, where this was not justified, owing to the use of a phrase which is peculiar to a southern dialect, I have used an alternative romanisation with (C.) or (H.) after the word to indicate its origin.

In this connection, it should be pointed out that the terms 'Hokkien' and 'Cantonese' are used throughout as they are commonly understood in Malaya. That is, 'Hokkien' refers chiefly to the Amoy dialect and to the inhabitants of certain districts in southern Fukien, while 'Cantonese' refers to the dialect spoken in Canton, and to most, but by no means all, the inhabitants of Kwangtung province.

In two important cases, I have followed an entirely independent line in romanisation. So frequently do the words appear that in using the designation 'shen' for god or spirit and 'dang-ki.' for medium, it is unlikely that any strain will be put on the reader's powers of recognition. The former is derived from the Mandarin word shin, but deprived of its diacritical mark, and the latter represents the pronunciation of a colloquial Hokkien word. Although the phonetic transcription of the latter form (t4ng-ki) is preferred, it would be going too far to use the plural forms of 'shens' and 'dang-kis,' so the reader must be left to infer from the context whether the singular or plural is intended.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my great debt to the Colonial Social Science Research Council for a year's postgraduate study in the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, followed by six months in England for the preparation of the report. The financial provision made for my accommodation by the Government of Singapore while I was living in Singapore is also acknowledged with deep appreciation.

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Affairs, whose breadth of scholarship and knowledge of local affairs
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who, in addition to trying to teach me Cantonese, provided me with
much of my background material concerning Chinese religious customs.
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relation to Mandarin,
and was, in addition, responsible for the growth of many stimulating
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in the present, customs and workshops of the cult of the 'Great Sage' who endured my presence at their ceremonies on frequent occasions for over eighteen months. In spite of my efforts at preserving anonymity, and particularly the one, will be easily identifiable by inhabitants of Singapore. It stands only to fair that some of my criticism of Chinese spirit mediumship should be taken to apply
particularly to any one of the cults I have described. The same dis-
reputable ones, from which some generalisations have been drawn,
have, in fact, been omitted from detailed reference.

It is no secret that the Chinese, in general, are not particularly well-liked
by the other communities among whom they live in Southeast Asia. They are, of course, well capable of looking after themselves whether they are liked or not. But in common with most other peoples, they are highly sensitive to slight and insinuations, particularly those pro-
dered to them in an animus based on unjustifiable grounds. The whole
argument of this book, therefore, would be misused if the material
concerning spirit mediumship were offered as evidence that the
Chinese are a people with undesirable qualities. No opportunity is
provided here for dwelling upon the many excellent qualities of the
overseas Chinese, which have gained them at least the respect of other
communities. It is hoped that the reader will take full cognisance of
these good qualities as he proceeds in the pages which follow.

August, 1954
A. J. A. E.
FOREWORD

This account of Chinese spirit-medium cults describes in great
detail an important aspect of the religion of overseas Chinese in
Singapore. It is an historical study, since the field research was carried
out over nearly two years in 1950 and 1951. It is historical for two
reasons. One is that the highly personalized nature of many of these
cults has meant that they are short-lived, ephemeral. The other is
that in the forty years since the study was made the life of the
Singapore Chinese has changed radically, and many of their ritual
practices must have altered accordingly. But at the time this research
was carried out, anthropological field studies of Chinese social
institutions were rare, and this particular investigation was unique.
Most studies of Chinese religion anywhere had been of a literary
nature, concerning the ideas and practices of Confucianism,
Buddhism, Taoism; very little information was available about how
ordinary Chinese conducted their daily ritual affairs.

The significance of this study is not just focused on the past. It has
contemporary relevance, and for a field far wider than Singapore
alone. For anthropologists, enquiry into spirit-mediumship,
damnation, exorcistic religion, possession, has become a recognized
part of the discipline, over a broad ethnographic range. But the
general problems involved, of alternative personality, of apparent
lack of sensitivity to external physical stimuli, of claims in the name
of spirit to knowledge and authority not possessed by the human
medium, can attract the attention of psychologists, psychiatrists, and
all interested in the obscure and complex workings of the human
mind. The issues raised involve ordinary people too, since they show
how anxiety, uncertainty, fear, disappointment and greed seek
assurance and resolution from some source deemed superhuman,
even spiritual. The basic beliefs revealed by this study of Chinese
spirit-mediumship are not confined to Chinese.

Raymond Firth
May 1990
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INTRODUCTION

The basic principles of Chinese spirit mediumship are relatively simple. The underlying assumption is that a spiritual being of vast and undefined powers possesses the body of a human medium and enables him to inflict injury upon himself without feeling pain, and to speak with deep wisdom, giving advice to worshippers and curing their illnesses. This phenomenon is known as ‘demonism’, which is found in a world-wide scale. The medium, however, is not a phenomenon which is usually associated with contemporary Chinese religious practices. Indeed, very few Europeans, even among sinologists and persons who have spent their whole careers in contact with the Chinese, are aware that there are spirit-medium cults among the Chinese in Malaya.

If Chinese spirit-medium cults have received little attention by either western or Chinese scholars, it is partly due to the fact that the religions of China have received more extensive treatment as systems of thought than as practical expressions of popular belief. Nevertheless, notable aspects of spirit mediumship have been reported by several western authors, particularly by J. J. M. de Groot. References to spirit mediumship, and in some cases lengthy accounts of its practices, can be found in many of de Groot’s works. Their special value is that de Groot’s researches were undertaken towards the end of the last century, chiefly in the districts of south Fukien from which many of the Chinese now living in Singapore originated. Much of what de Groot described can be found in present-day Singapore, but in spite of this there is a general ignorance of spirit mediumship among most non-Chinese. There is an even greater ignorance among the Chinese themselves because they would prefer foreigners to remain unacquainted with some of the practices involved.

Seen in one light, Chinese spirit mediumship in Singapore represents only a small part of the life of a busy commercial port, but seen in the light of European ignorance and Chinese secretiveness it is possible that spirit-medium cults may serve as a partial guide to the nature of overseas Chinese society. Although the sophisticated Chinese may not be particularly proud of what spirit mediumship stands for, it would be a gross misrepresentation to propose that Singapore is the only place where the practice is found.

1 See, among many others, MacCulloch, 1920 and Shirokogoroff, 1935.
2 There have been important exceptions, for instance Freeman, 1924; Middlebrook, 1939; and Stirling, 1924.
3 Especially, de Groot, 1886; 1892-1910 and 1912. Further reference may be made to de Groot, 1903; Doolittle, 1876, who deals with Foochow in North Fukien; Dore, 1918; Harvey, 1933, leans heavily upon de Groot but adds personal observations; Meade, 1928, is based upon secondary sources; and Reichelt, 1952.
be difficult to deny that it contains much that is meaningful in the
culture of the great mass of immigrants.

The Singapore Background. Only a brief survey can be given here
of the varied background against which the events described take
place. In 1819, when Raffles founded his fortress and trading post
on an island just north of the equator, until the present day when
Singapore is a flourishing British Colony with a population of over
a million, the Chinese have played a major part in its development.
For although eighty per cent of the Colony's population is now Chinese,
the social life of the Malay, Indian, and other inhabitants of Singapore
remains outside the scope of this account, if only for the reasons that they live entirely
of their own culture, almost entirely remote from the Chinese,
and that Singapore as a whole is still very much in its early stages
of growth, has not yet developed a culture of its own. There is no
lingua franca, except a crude form of Malay, and English which serves
the better educated persons of all communities. The apparent unity
in which so many ethnic groups live side by side in Singapore is based
more upon ignorance than upon any active virtue of tolerance. The
1947 Census showed that over sixty per cent of the population had
been born in Malaya. Although it is now possible to discern the
emergence of a 'Singaporean', to use the term which the local Press
likes to popularise, as yet this amounts to little in terms of an inde-
pendent culture. Singapore is a city to which many people have come,
chiefly for the sake of economic advantages, but it is still a place to which
few consider themselves genuinely to belong.

In addition, Singapore suffers from many of the difficulties of great
cities anywhere in the world. Above all, there is severe overcrowding
in nearly all types of homes. Since 1939 the population has almost
doubled, while the suspension of building during the war has rendered
the task of housing the still-increasing population an almost impossible
one. By most standards, however, Singapore is a clean and orderly
city. 'It has one of the best health records in Asia and a mortality rate
that compares well with European cities. The health services have
performed an excellent job of post-war rehabilitation, but their
resources, chiefly of personnel, are too scanty to make very deep
inroads into the numerous diseases that can be found among a crowded
Asian population. Similar problems occur in the field of education.
An energetic Ten Year Programme is designed to cope with a situation
in which the deficiencies of the war years have yet to be made good
while at the same time about 30,000 additional children are reaching
the school age every year.'

1 See especially Purcell, 1948 and 1951.
2 Del Tufo, 1949.
3 Detailed information can be obtained from the Annual Reports of the
school age every year. The police force is kept exceedingly busy, but security to life and limb is sufficient to save most residents from undue worry. Much of the more persistent trouble arises from the widespread vices of gambling, prostitution and opium smoking. These in themselves can be kept within reasonable bounds, but various 'rackets' associated with them represent more difficult problems of suppression. In general it can be said that Singapore is a place which has most of the material amenities of what is reckoned to be a civilized existence by western standards, but as yet there is little corporate sense of morality that transcends the desire for individual or communal gain.

Singapore society as a whole would be exceedingly difficult to analyse. Even when attention is focused on the Chinese alone, the complexity is not greatly reduced. A Chinese is mainly identified as such because he is not a European, a Eurasian, a Malay or an Indian, but when we turn to the positive characteristics which go to make up a Chinese there is a wide range of variation. Very often, extensive social knowledge concerning the Chinese is insufficient to provide the basis for confident generalisations.

There are, firstly, the so-called 'tribal' differences, although the designation 'tribe' is by no means justified in this case. Chinese originating from certain parts of the country differ in their dialects and in many of their practices from those originating in other parts, and it seems valid to speak of about forty per cent of the Chinese as Hokkiens, twenty per cent as Teochius, twenty per cent as Cantonese, seven per cent as Hailams and six per cent as Hakkas. The remainder are made up of a few thousand each from other areas in China, but only about one per cent come from areas other than near the southeastern seaboard. Most of the dialects spoken are authentically Chinese but mutually unintelligible, and the Hokkiens are also divided into two main sections because of a more northerly accent of the Peking dialect. Added to this are differences due to length of residence in Malaya. The ten to fifteen per cent who can trace their rootstock back for two or more generations, who are often more at home speaking Malay or English than Chinese, and who have their roots more deeply in Malaya, are sometimes classified as a separate group from those born in China.

It should also be added that Singapore is the largest Chinese publishing centre in Southeast Asia. Although it publishes few books, and such books as are likely to be formative of public opinion are usually imported from Hong Kong or, government regulations permitting, from Guangzhou, there remain Chinese-language newspapers. One of the largest and best in Southeast Asia is the Nanyang Siang Pau which, with its evening editions, has a circulation of

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*For a sketch-map showing places of origin in China see Purcell, 1951, p. 9.*
about 60,000. Although it often gives a pro-Peking slant to news, it is not pro-Communist. Sin Chew Jit Pao is rather more objective and has a circulation of about 35,000. In both cases, much of the circulation is in the Federation of Malaya. The Chung Shing Jit Pao is an official Kuomintang organ with a circulation of about 17,000. Until it was suspended by government in September, 1950, a left-wing paper with strong pro-Communist sympathies was also published. In addition, seven major Chinese periodicals and a larger number of minor ones are published in Singapore.

Chinese Social Organisation in Singapore. In the past, differences between the Chinese in Singapore have tended to make them nearly as remote from fellow-countrymen of other groups as from Indians or Malays. One of the most powerful factors in minimizing differences was the Japanese occupation from 1942 until 1945. This occupation had a notable influence in the history of Singapore and brought about rapid change. A minor by-product, which will concern us here, was the fact that the occupation brought about the elimination of many Chinese, with consequent increased numbers. Actually, the Japanese were a sort of landscape which dulled the sharply Chinese opposition in a manner previously unknown. This newly-found sense of unity has been accorded over into the post-war period, but it is still far from producing any true unanimity. There is, for instance, no leader to whom all Chinese look for guidance. Although there are many powerful clubs and guilds, there is none which effectively controls all the important affairs of the Chinese community.

Nevertheless, the Chinese still practise methods of control which are something apart from the laws of the Colony. They abide by British law not because they have any inherent respect for law as such—no government is conceived as being essentially beneficent—but because they have an extreme respect for any law which is likely to be enforced. They have never demanded a large share in the ruling of the country; nor, until fairly recently, with the encouragement of democratically elected City and Legislative Councils, have they been offered much in this nature. They ask chiefly to be allowed to retain their own forms of social organization with a minimum of interference from the government and other communities. They have mechanisms for disseminating information, reaching decisions and formulating policies right down to the level of the villages and city streets. It may be an amorphous and ill-disciplined system, but it works well enough.

In considering Chinese social organisation, it is inevitable that there should be reference to the traditional bedrock of Chinese society—the family. In Singapore, as elsewhere, great emphasis is placed upon the

"Chinese kinship organisation was the subject of a study similar to

over the same period. While the author of that study, Maurice Freedman,

should not be held responsible for the conclusions given here, a considerable

debt is owed to him for his help.

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importance of ties of kinship, but at the same time the practical signi-
cificance of the family is severely limited. Although the Chinese have
retained many of the ideals of family life as a pattern for proper conduct,
they have not, in general, carried them very far as a basis for actual
social organisation. The classical conception of the Chinese family has
not been reproduced in Singapore, partly because the persons who
emigrated were of the type who never subscribed to it fully in China,
and partly because the kinship system was something that belonged
to the ancestral soil and could not be transplanted. On the other hand,
the surname group is still considered exogamous, and provides the basis for a type of
association to which considerable importance is attached among the
overseas Chinese. The interpretation to which Chinese customary law
has been subjected in the legal system of the Colony has led to many
complications in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, but
surviving all the many and varied efforts at adaptation to modern and
local circumstances is a strong attachment to notions of patrilineal
descendancy and to a moral code which stipulates responsibility in caring
for aged parents.

An important factor in family relations is that only in recent years
the sex ratio among the Chinese reached reasonable proportions. There is reason to believe that the earliest settlers had mostly taken
Malay or Indian wives, and even by the end of the last century it was
not a common practice among Chinese. In 1911, the sex ratio was
356 females per thousand males. But by 1947, it had risen to 882 per thousand.
This has permitted greater stability in family
life, but it has come too recently to bring about any thorough-going
re-creation of the Chinese kinship system. Families live together in
households through economic and biological necessity, while the back-
ground of kinship custom serves more as an ancient precedent, to be
referred to as and when desired, than as a strict code which regulates
the details of everyday life. Only in very few cases is there a power-
ful lineage organisation which can discipline its members. It is not
even usual to find a thorough and consistent knowledge of kinship
terminology. One's kinfolk have the first call upon one's loyalties, but
it does not follow that a consideration of these ties always overrides
the importance of other social relations arising in the course of
business and pleasure.

Many of the features of this situation can be seen reflected in the
nature of clubs and guilds. Membership of some of these is open only
to persons bearing the same surname. These clubs often perform
kinship functions, such as the storing of ancestral tablets and the care
of burial grounds, despite the fact that there may be no traceable degree
of kinship among the members. The common surname is taken to mean
Freedman, 1951.
that all are descended from a common ancestor. Other clubs which perform much the same function have a membership which is open only to persons who originated in a certain area of China. The more influential ones are recruited at a provincial level, but there are others which recognize differentiations in membership right down to the village level.

Over a thousand clubs and guilds are registered in Singapore. They embrace a wide range of commercial, charitable, benevolent, sporting, recreational and religious objects. Although associations such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Hokkien Association possess considerable power over the Chinese population, and this in turn affects club membership one of the most important causes of social advancement among the wealthier Chinese. The status which membership and the holding of office in the more exclusive clubs can give is much sought after. The clubs seem to make business contacts and influence policies in an advantageous direction. That, at least, is the picture presented by the more legitimate side of club activity. The other side of the picture is represented by the "secret" societies which have played such an important part in Chinese history. For centuries, it has been accepted that a Chinese must belong to some sort of club for his own safety and protection. This feeling is particularly strong in times of stress when the legitimate civil power is weakest. In the earlier days of Chinese settlement in Malaya, the Triad Society and its rivals and offshoots threatened to subvert the basis of colonial administration by creating an imperium in imperio. Towards the end of the last century, secret societies were prohibited and all associations were ordered to register. Whether this led to a genuine suppression of secret societies is open to much debate. Some would maintain that secret societies have possessed sinister powers through the whole of Chinese history. The official police view is that there are about three hundred thuggish gangs in Singapore, some of which use secret initiation rituals and which might be considered as secret societies. The census may contain relatively few of these secret societies. They are mainly among the poorer sections of Chinese society which can be managed by the levying of protection money from householders and small businessmen.

The settlers, in fact, created for themselves a special type of Chinese society—by no means peculiar to Singapore, but strongly in evidence there—which shows for constant and rapid change. The attuned kinship system and the clubs and guilds form two of the main institutional pillars upon which Chinese society is based, but for the rest their social organization is divided into many differentiated units in which a high degree of variation can be found. The 1947 Census shows, for instance, that status of all male Chinese are

1 Works, 1666; Wood and Balfour, 1876; Women, 1876; and relevant passages in Purcell, 1866, Oliphant, 1876, and 1877, and 1879.
'own account' workers, being neither employers nor wage-earners. Also, chance is believed to play an extremely important part in the shaping of a man's fortunes. It is accepted that a shrewd stroke of business may launch someone on the path towards becoming a millionaire, and equally, that an unfavourable turn may strip him of his fortune overnight. This conception is reflected in an excessive addiction to gambling among most classes of Chinese. In spite of relatively stringent legislation, it is reckoned that the four big rings of chap-ji-ki operators in Singapore have a daily turnover of at least $200,000, made up mostly of stakes of less than a dollar. There are many other forms of gambling, and the actual turnover is probably far greater than that estimated. This illustrates the normal course of fortune. In spite of the immensely better living conditions that they enjoy when compared with those of their homeland, the majority of overseas Chinese, particularly those living in the larger towns, still lead lives that are fraught with many hazards.

It is the Chinese cultural belief that religious systems based on divination, of which spirit mediumship is an outstanding example, appear to flourish. It is recognized that luck can make or mar a man's fortune, nonetheless it is not an uncontrollable factor which demands passive resignation. A widespread conception is that luck comes and goes in cycles, and that by the correct use of methods of divination its movements can be foretold, and, to a limited extent, altered advantageously. The important point, however, is that the religious precepts upon which these methods of divination are based are just as much a part of the culture of China as most of the other customs that the immigrants retain. The degree of assimilation to other cultures varies from place to place among the overseas Chinese, but in Singapore there have been relatively few concessions to Malay culture or, as far as the greater part of the Chinese population is concerned, to European culture either.

The Significance of Spirit-Medium Cults. It is at this point that the significance of Chinese religious practices begins to emerge as a possible guide to the type of society found in Singapore. However often it may be contended by Europeans that the Chinese have no real religion, there is ample evidence that many of their actions are, in fact, motivated by attitudes that are essentially religious. The Chinese, in common with most people elsewhere in the world, have systems of belief which postulate a set of guiding forces behind the universe and human lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>10,604</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>10,472</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wages-Earners</td>
<td>148,262</td>
<td>32,835</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>5,368</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>5,151</td>
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<td>Own-Account Workers</td>
<td>61,862</td>
<td>7,868</td>
<td>54,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid Family Workers</td>
<td>4,978</td>
<td>138,336</td>
<td>133,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolchildren, Students, Apprentices</td>
<td>66,424</td>
<td>32,536</td>
<td>33,888</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others, Indeterminate or not Stated</td>
<td>382</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>387,883</td>
<td>342,250</td>
<td>45,633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
conduct, and include among these postulated forces spiritual beings who are capable of influencing worldly affairs. More important, they promote various rites and ceremonies connected with these beliefs.

Admirable though de Groot's descriptive material may be, it is badly lacking in this type of information. Nevertheless, it seems a reasonable hypothesis that recognition of the fourth force has led to a significant shift in the emphasis that is placed upon such practices. Urbanization and commercialization in the larger cities overseas, not to mention the class composition of the emigrants, have reduced the significance of religious undertakings for some of the overseas Chinese, who have found new and more effective methods of placating spiritual influences, and, more significantly, of seeking recognition from professional mediums who claim to be in touch with the spirit world. Yet these practitioners and their enterprises furnish an excellent example of the small-scale economic endeavor so typical among the overseas Chinese, by which a man attempts to exploit whatever means he can find in order to open up the road to wealth. This has led to emphasis upon methods of placating spiritual influences, and, more significantly, of seeking recognition from professional mediums who claim to be in touch with the spirit world. Nevertheless, it is one of the most spectacular.

In several other respects also, spirit-medium cults possess certain advantages as a subject for study. As has already been mentioned, the work of de Groot, undertaken in China towards the end of the last century, gives detailed accounts of religious practices in the areas from which many of the emigrants originated. One of the constant difficulties in any study of the overseas Chinese is the lack of accurate information concerning their culture and social organization in the homeland. There are few subjects in which there is comparable material to that given by de Groot on spirit mediumship. Secondly, spirit mediumship, as a religious practice, has been almost completely tolerated by the British administration, which only in very rare cases has bothered to ascertain the exact nature of the proceedings. The only governmental interference which spirit-medium cults have suffered, which in practice has become considerable in recent years, is restriction upon processions and large gatherings. These restrictions, which are imposed entirely in the cause of public order and traffic control, have had to be increased since 1948 on account of the state of emergency. Nevertheless, the tolerance of religious practices as such means that.

1 Until China was dominated by a Communist regime an increasing flow of sociological literature was reaching western readers. Much of this was produced by Chinese scholars under the leadership of men such as the anthropologist Fei Hsiao-t'ung; Chen Ta, 1940 and Lin Yueh-hwa, 1947.
Spirit mediumship has been able to survive and develop in Malaya more freely than most Chinese institutions, and a great deal more freely than in China where it has been subjected to sporadic persecution. A third advantage of mediumship is that, although spirit-medium cults are numerous and widespread in Singapore, there is not such a large number of them that it is impossible to draw reasonably valid conclusions concerning their activities.
THE BACKGROUND OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

The Traditional Systems of Thought. Although the Chinese in Malaya have made certain cultural concessions to their environment, their religion has always remained oriented towards the homeland, which is still thought to be the fountain-head of all true doctrine. It is, therefore, impossible to understand the religious traditions found among the Chinese in Singapore without some reference to the great systems that have flourished in China.

Confucianism is often regarded as the Chinese religion in terms of the great systems of thought, but such analysis can only be of limited assistance in the study of popular and corrupted religious practices such as are found in Singapore. So different is the type of study that must be undertaken among the overseas Chinese that only certain points derived from historical studies must be borne in mind.

For instance, it would appear that in present-day Singapore Confucian principles are of negligible importance. Confucius himself is reputed by modern scholars to have been a political reformer rather than a religious leader. For many centuries, from the time when his adherents began to receive state patronage, his thought had an immense effect upon the political and social life of China. The classics which he selected and edited became the authoritative texts upon which all scholarship was based. The emphasis that was placed upon the value of education and the training of imperial officials is of particular importance for understanding the structure of Chinese state religion, which was an integral part of the imperial system of government and only survived the last of the Manchus by a few years. The element in Confucianism which raises it to the level of a religion, and not simply an ethical system, was its acknowledgment of the desirability and necessity for worshiping ancestors. Yet ancestor worship can be traced back to the earliest

1 See Nee, 1931, a monograph rather than a systematic study, which was largely dependent upon the work of Dr. S. C. H. Lee, who summarised the history and development of the Chinese Nguyễn 4th century, in a comprehensive manner. The work is prefaced by a brief history of the Chinese Nguyễn period, followed by a study of the Chinese Nguyễn period, and then a detailed account of the Chinese Nguyễn period, and finally a brief summary of the history of the Chinese Nguyễn period. It is not possible to give a complete account of the history of the Chinese Nguyễn period, but it is clear that the Chinese Nguyễn period was a period of great prosperity and cultural development, which was reflected in the architecture, art, and literature of the time.
days of Chinese history and was intimately connected with Chinese family organisation. Confucian etiquette in such matters was, moreover, learnt by the preception of the upper classes. In Singapore, the family system has been severely weakened in the process of emigration, and the Chinese gentry who were the chief upholders of the etiquette have not been greatly in evidence. Little is left of the organised basis upon which Confucianism as a religion could survive. Hardly a temple can properly be called Confucian, and very few families have established an ancestral hall or shrine after the old pattern. But in spite of this, the ideological influence of Confucianism should not be underrated. The Confucian system of ethics, particularly in the sphere of human relations, has become deeply embedded in Chinese culture, and even at a popular level of thought the numerous sayings which are still on people's lips in everyday life have an inscrutable effect upon the general system of morals.

In contrast to Confucianism, the type of Taoism from which that now found in Singapore is derived has only a remote connection with the philosophy of its reputed founder, Lao Tzu. The historical character of Lao Tzu is in some doubt and as with Confucius the principles attributed to him were probably derived from far older systems of thought, possibly from the Yin-Yang school of diviners who attributed the cause of all movement in the universe to contending positive and negative forces. Lao Tzu is credited with some of the greatest philosophical and mystical writing in Chinese literature, but from the Han Dynasty onwards his metaphysics were popularly re-interpreted in terms far removed from the original philosophy. Philosophical Taoism was preserved by certain groups, but by the fifth century A.D. Taoism had degenerated into an institutionalised religion with temples, a priestly class and a pantheon, drawing many of its ideas from Yin-Yang and chief concerned with systems of alchemy, divination and sorcery. The major device of its practitioners was to counterbalance the evil forces in the universe by invoking the good through their occult knowledge.

Today in Singapore there may be one or two small establishments where Taoism as a mystical philosophy is practised by a few devotees. But in its popular form Taoism has a very strong hold upon religious thought, practice and symbolism. The Taoist influence is strongly visible in most temples, even though they may be reputed to be Buddhist. There are something approaching a hundred so-called Taoist religious practitioners, many of whom are part-time performers who pick up such fees as they can from participation in occasional rites. But among them are some who work for a living by using their occult knowledge to secure remedial treatment for the sick or to secure good fortune for those who consult them. These are known as sai-kong by the Hokkiens and as lai (naam) mo lo by the Cantonese. They work individually or in bands, but do not lead what might be considered a monastic existence and there is little need to discuss them further in the context of philosophical Taoism.

The third great tradition, that of Mahayana Buddhism, which is usually accepted as one of the three major religions of China, was introduced from India in the first century A.D. It had grown to
considerable importance by the T’ang Dynasty and continued to flourish in spite of frequent persecution, having a great influence upon Chinese religious thought. Buddhism was responsible for many positive contributions to religious ideas, but the greatest, perhaps, was that of attaining Enlightenment, and thereby salvation, through the merit of the Bodhisattvas. In postulating a class of being who voluntarily delayed his own entry into Buddhahood in order to help his less advanced brothers, Mahayana Buddhist doctrine differs radically from the Hinayana Buddhism of the southern school which still prevails in Burma and Ceylon. In some respects there are recognizably Indian elements in the ideas of the Mahayana. A horrible hell has been added and heaven is in the form of the Western Paradise. The countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have also been given Chinese characteristics.

One of the major organisational contributions of Buddhism was the introduction of the idea of monasticism, which was later adopted by the Taoists. Like Taoism, Chinese Buddhism has also tended to produce two very different forms. On the one hand is the scholarly, mystical Buddhism of the reputable monks and masters. This is the facet which has splintered into numerous sects and cults, some of which have from time to time suffered severe persecution. The other facet is represented by a more corrupt Buddhism which has contributed greatly to popular beliefs and has, in turn, absorbed many religious practices of an unorthodox nature. It is this latter type of Buddhism with which we are almost entirely concerned in Singapore. In name at least it holds a strong institutional position. There are numerous monasteries and temples, and a considerable body of recognised monks. In addition, many guilds claim to be pursuing Buddhist aims. Some of the more interesting of these are the ‘vegetarian houses’ in which sisterhoods of women band together. But many of the practices followed in monasteries and temples are far removed from the stricter standards of orthodoxy. The Buddhist Federation which was founded recently incorporates a large number of guilds and temples, and aims at maintaining a standard of purity, but so far its effect has not been very pronounced except within a restricted circle.

 Folk Religion and Occultism. The religion of the Chinese in the southeast seaboard province, which provides the basis for that practised by the overseas Chinese, undoubtedly contains many elements that are not found elsewhere in China; nevertheless, it would appear to conform with the general principles that apply to the whole country. This implies that the vast majority of Chinese do not follow either one or other of the great traditions with any regard for its purity. There are, indeed, numerous religious practices in which elements from all three traditions can be discerned. It would be unwise, moreover,
to consider contemporary religion as defined solely from the three best-known traditions. Many systems of belief and practice, some of which, of very ancient heritage, have contributed to popular religious ideas, are still in existence and belong to the popular traditions. It is impossible to say whether this was an indigenous growth or whether it was diffused from the Siberian and Tibetan peoples living outside the borders of China. Nevertheless, many very early ones have been divided, sources, magistrates and mandarins in China. The general term for them is the "Wu". Aspects of the influence of Mahayana Buddhism, popular Chinese forms of worship, may be derived from the proper order and serve little tendency to regard the world of men as an object of spiritual aspiration in a spiritual world. It is accepted, however, that there is an extremely influential spiritual world with a large number of powerful and powerful inhabitants who act upon the human world but in a spiritual sense. Specific dwellings strongly anthropomorphic and their modes of behavior are firmly patterned on human activities. As a comprehensive level of knowledge, many of them are envisaged in the guise of ancient emperors, empresses and heroes, as depicted in the better known legends and on the stage. Their dress and conduct are wise is popularly considered to have been appropriate to their times, but their powers incorporate a large measure of the miraculous. The greatest among them are considered as primi inter pares or, at the most, as powerful rulers over numerous followers. If services are performed to glorify them they will attend to the welfare of worshippers and often reveal their wills. Such a process, however, usually requires a specialized body of knowledge which is often possessed only by persons with shamanistic powers. Methods of divination for ascertaining the will of the gods are also in the hands of those with specialized knowledge and power.

Shenism and the Idea of the Soul. If a Chinese in Singapore is asked what religion he follows he may be somewhat puzzled, since sectarian differentiation is not an important question to him. Only very rarely will a person answer that he is a Confucianist, and if he does so it will probably imply that he follows no sort of religious practice very closely. Even less frequently will anyone claim to be a Taoist. On the other hand, many will claim to be Buddhists. This means that they or their womenfolk indulge fairly frequently in worship, although not necessarily of a Buddhist character. The probability, however, is that the answer will simply be "I worship the gods". The word *pai shen* is comparable to western ideas of worship, in so far as it implies an attitude of respect to something that is higher and mightier than the worshipper. In the Chinese context, however, the idea of worship also has several concrete connotations. The word ...
used in connection with the performance of certain ceremonies, and refers to physical actions as much as to mental attitudes. It often pertains to the motions of the hands commonly made by the Malayan Chinese of both sexes when worshipping in front of an image, for which there appears to be no other term. The hands are clasped in front of the body and moved up and down level with the chest as a sign of reverence. The concept further includes the adding of oil to temple lamps, the burning of joss papers, paper images and incense, the lighting of candles, presentations in front of the altar, and generally speaking, involvement in a temple or shrine with the intention of performing these acts.

The word **shen** presents rather greater difficulties. It stands for a major category among the powerful and fearful spiritual beings which have to be worshipped in order to secure human well being. It is also the idea who possess mediums when they fall into trances, in order to apply the divine will to the problems of worshippers. Finding a consistent equivalent in English is acute. The term 'god' is inaccurate and fraught with the overtones of western theology, while the term 'spirit' is too impersonal and too vague. There appears to be no satisfactory alternative but to employ a romanisation of the Chinese word. In Mathew's Chinese-English dictionary the following meanings are given: 'spirit, a god; Spiritual, inscrutable, divine, supernatural. The soul. The mind, animal spirits. Genius, expression. Nervous energy.' Other authorities give further meanings. The central theme is sufficiently vague to make an accurate English translation impossible, but in popular Chinese theology the meaning is more clearly crystallised. According to Werner...
them they may develop into demons and live to a great age. They are
then one of the many species of evil spirits who plague the living.

The survival of the shen depends chiefly on its power while inhabiting
the human body. The shen has authority over immortal Shen while still living, and after death he may
also gain great power in the spirit world. Similarly, it is always possible
for an disturbed soul to come down and inhabit a man's body. The shen,
however, may also represent cosmological influences in the universe,
meaning the shen depends on the shen. In the case of a Taoist or a
Chinese, one relying on personal experience, these concepts have
already been discussed. Even today, a shen is often referred to as a shen
for a coherent explanation of the human soul. But the orientation which the
old ideas represented does not die easily. The most popular word for
'soul' is ling-hun, the concept of ling including many traces of that
impersonal power often referred to as 'mana'. There are no very clear
ideas as to how many parts of the soul there are, but there is a vague
notion that there is more than one since its presence can make itself
feel in more than one place after death. For instance, one sometimes
is told that a part is destined to dwell in heaven, another to hover round
the grave, and a third to inhabit the ancestral tablet.

The strongest prevailing idea, however, is that the fortunes of men
are largely controlled by the working of shen and by a right propitiation
of the more powerful among them. Many devils are at work in the
world causing disaster and misfortune, and the only powers that can
deal with them effectively are the shen. In the context of spirit medium-
ship, it is the shen who is appealed to when he is in possession of a
medium's body. In the present accounts, therefore, it would not be
very difficult to disregard the whole religious tradition with which
we are dealing as 'Shenism'. In the present accounts, the distinctiveness
of this tradition is often referred to as the dominance of Buddhism
from Confucianism and Buddhism and, perhaps more importantly,
from ancestor worship.

It may shock purists to see such Buddhist personalities as Kuan Yin
referred to as shen in this account, but there can be little doubt that this
is what she often becomes in popular religion. In assigning the title of
Shenism to this dominant element we are not, in fact, departing from
the opinions of many Chinese in Malaya. Few Chinese concurred
with the tripartite division of their national religion into Confucianism,
Taoism and Buddhism. They explained instead that their religion
is a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism and the worship of local deities.
By the latter they mean that any traditions of shen-worship which forms the
basis of their accounts are derived from indigenous folk religion.

CONTEMPORARY INSTITUTIONS IN SINGAPORE
Christians and other Religious Influences. Although they wield
considerable influence, it is impossible that there are more than
29,000 Chinese Christians in Singapore, of whom the majority are
Possibly the same number again are imbued with Christian ethics or are sympathetic to Christianity as the result of mission school education, although they are not members of any of the churches. The number of Chinese Muslims in Singapore amounts to only about two or three hundred at the very most. Many more young Chinese have been strongly influenced by rationalist atheism and agnosticism along western lines of thought. Despite the importance of these groups, however, at least nine-tenths of the Chinese population adhere to a greater or lesser extent to the traditional beliefs and practices of China.

In matters of religious education there is little formality in the manner in which a Chinese child is taught. Mission schools endeavour to teach Christianity, and at least two Chinese schools base their teachings on the precepts of Buddhism. But except in such places, where a formal religious education can be obtained, the child is left to learn by example. If he is brought up in a temperate home, he will be taught a great deal by the routine of household duties which he has to perform. But if he is reared in a home where the customs of the household are observed, he will be exposed to such an influence from a very early age. A mother can often be seen carrying her small child into a temple and at an appropriate moment clasping his hands in hers to wave them up and down in motions of reverence to the *shen*. If, as is often the case, at least one of the womenfolk in the household indulges in periodic rites either at home or in a temple, he will be exposed to such an influence from a very early age. A mother can often be seen carrying her small child into a temple and at an appropriate moment clasping his hands in hers to wave them up and down in motions of reverence to the *shen*. The child may also be given small jobs to do in connection with caring for the family altar in the home.

In China, where the child of a well-to-do family would participate in the activities of a large lineage, he would also be assigned duties concerning the frequent ceremonies of marriage and death taking place within his lineage. In Singapore, the functioning lineage unit is rarely large enough for him to gain much ceremonial education from this source. Few Chinese seem to have much idea of the correct behaviour on such occasions without prompting from the master of ceremonies. Although the institutionalised religious practices which a child may learn will vary considerably from home to home, the child is sure to be subjected to a less variable influence: the indoctrination of religious ideas by means of proverbs, fables and theatrical performances. The use of Confucian epigrams as a guide to morality is very widespread among all classes of Chinese, and even among those overseas, the head of a household will make frequent use of such precepts, even if he quotes wrongly, to instil a sense of obedience into his family. It is difficult to assess the effect of such a practice, but it seems probable that it goes far towards perpetuating a traditional Chinese sense of morality, a sentiment which is regarded as an essential factor in the development of the family. More important still are the legends and taboos that are told to children from a very early age. Some of these concern terrible stories of corpses rising out of coffins and chasing mourners, or evil spirits that terrorise a neighbourhood until placated by occult means. Stories such as these cannot fail to leave a lasting impression on most children.
Legends and the Theatre. Another type of story concerns the legendary heroes of Chinese history. A Record of the Journey to the West and the Story of the Three Kingdoms are examples of legends which have a particular popularity in Singapore, as indeed they have among Chinese everywhere. The themes of legends such as these is the manner in which great heroes of the past, who were endowed with miraculous supernatural powers as well as spectacular physical prowess, overcome the powers of evil. As an alternative to vigilant vigilance the hero may sacrifice his life for some moral principle. The Chinese are strongly susceptible to the type of hero worship that such stories can evoke. The theme of stories such as these is the manner in which great heroes of the past, who were endowed with miraculous supernatural powers as well as spectacular physical prowess, overcome the powers of evil. As an alternative to vigilant vigilance the hero may sacrifice his life for some moral principle. The Chinese are strongly susceptible to the type of hero worship that such stories can evoke. They still tend to regard the battles and intrigues depicted as a true historical record rather than an elaborate romance based remotely on historic incidents.

Legends may be told in the home, but it is more usual for them to be propagated through professional story tellers and theatrical performances. The profession of story teller is now dying out under the pressure of more modern and spectacular methods of presentation. But still, at certain street corners in Singapore, there can be found men who will tell their stories hour after hour, charging only a small fee from those who wish to make use of the circle of stools that they provide.

A more popular method of presentation is that given by Chinese theatre companies. These companies have casts of from thirty to forty players and use full-sized stages, often with elaborate scenery. The actors use the conventional costumes and make-up of the Chinese theatre. In Singapore, efforts to modernise Chinese drama have met with little success. Since these companies do not possess theatres of their own, and regard themselves as touring companies, their success or failure depends almost entirely upon securing for a sufficient number of engagements. Hong Kong and Malaya are the main sources of supply. Invariably, there are companies playing at the three large amusement parks of Singapore: the New World, the Great World and the Happy World. Occasionally, a company may be engaged by an individual or a club; but they depend chiefly upon temple festivals at which an essential feature is a theatrical performance. During the busiest seasons, which occur during the New Year and the Seventh Moon, a company is constantly on the move, playing for two days in each village or market and shifting its prefabricated stage and baggage to another location overnight.

A majority of the Chinese in Singapore are Hokkien-speaking, but, among the dialects that approximate to their own, Teochiu has the highest theatrical reputation. Most of the engagements in Singapore are shared by six, and sometimes seven, Teochiu theatre companies, which vary considerably in their fame and in the prices they can charge. There is also a Hokkien company or two, and sometimes a Foochow company, which are less successful.

"Shanghai" company, three Cantonese companies, and various visiting companies from Hong Kong. "Peking Opera" has the highest reputation, but its language is not well understood in Singapore. The Cantonese companies are rated highly in the world of Chinese theatre, partly because they follow the practice of engaging highly paid stars, as opposed to the other local companies which usually hire casts of repertoire players. But they lead a precarious existence, chiefly in the amusement parks, because of the language difficulty in obtaining temple engagements.

When a theatre company visits a village during a temple festival, it plays from about mid-day until midnight with only short breaks. In the course of the evening the open-air auditorium becomes more and more crowded until there is hardly room to stand within a reasonable distance of the stage. For those who do not know the story and stage conventions, there is little meaning in the performance. Most members of the audience learn the story at an early age. The set-piece opening is almost always the same. The play is invariably a dramatic presentation of one of the more popular legends, although not necessarily one connected with the occasions being celebrated.

If a temple cannot afford the services of a theatre company, or if the space in front of the temple is too limited for a full-size stage, as is often the case in urban areas, there are alternative forms of theatrical performance. A common one is the puppet show. The puppets are dressed in costumes similar to those used by human actors, while behind the scenes two or three men and girls provide the voices. A small orchestra produces nearly as much noise as that of a proper theatre. There are two variations on the puppet show. One is a marionette show with dolls suspended on wires. The other is a shadow show with the puppetors positioned behind a curtain. There are about a dozen of these companies operating in Singapore which will provide a performance at about an eighth of the price charged by a full-scale theatre company.

In recent years, the more popular legends have been made into films and shown in some of the Chinese cinemas, but there is no evidence to suggest that they have attained any great popularity. In cases where a modern medium of presentation has replaced a traditional method, it seems that there has been an accompanying tendency for modern heroes to supplant the ancient heroes. Batman and Robin, Superman and other extravagant miracle workers in movie serials have gone far in acquiring the loyalty which was formerly reserved for Kuan Ti and the Third Prince.

Ancient legends have also been perpetuated in the written word. "Shanghai" is the general designation used by the Singaporeans for anything that comes from northern or central China, just as all north Indians in Malaya are known as 'Bengalis'. It does not follow that the subject thus referred to has any necessary connection with either Shanghai or Calcutta, nor is it true that the figures or the language of the literature are always the same. The play is inevitably a dramatic presentation of one of the more popular legends, although not necessarily one connected with the occasions being celebrated.

If a temple cannot afford the services of a theatre company, or if the space in front of the temple is too limited for a full-size stage, as is often the case in urban areas, there are alternative forms of theatrical performance. A common one is the puppet show. The puppets are dressed in costumes similar to those used by human actors, while behind the scenes two or three men and girls provide the voices. A small orchestra produces nearly as much noise as that of a proper theatre. There are two variations on the puppet show. One is a marionette show with dolls suspended on wires. The other is a shadow show with the puppetors positioned behind a curtain. There are about a dozen of these companies operating in Singapore which will provide a performance at about an eighth of the price charged by a full-scale theatre company.

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Ancient legends have also been perpetuated in the written word. "Shanghai" is the general designation used by the Singaporeans for anything that comes from northern or central China, just as all north Indians in Malaya are known as 'Bengalis'. It does not follow that the subject thus referred to has any necessary connection with either Shanghai or Calcutta, nor is it true that the figures or the language of the literature are always the same. The play is inevitably a dramatic presentation of one of the more popular legends, although not necessarily one connected with the occasions being celebrated.

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There have been many Chinese editions of the more popular stories. At one time, there was a vogue for romanised Malay versions for the Chinese who could not read their own language. These publications could be hired for a few cents from wayside bookstalls, but now this habit is disappearing. A few wayside bookstalls are still in existence, but their stocks consist more of serious political pamphlets, pornographic stories on American lines, or pornographic material. For those who are illiterate, there is a flourishing trade in illustrated versions of the old legends along the lines of strip-cartoons.

The Calendar and Festivals. Another factor of considerable importance in maintaining respect for old religious traditions in Singapore is the use of the Lunar Calendar. The business and administrative life of Singapore is ordered chiefly according to the western calendar, but there are many aspects of Chinese life, mainly in the field of religion, in which the Lunar Calendar still prevails.

The Chinese New Year is officially recognised in Singapore, but even without this recognition of Chinese customs it is improbable that the Lunar Calendar would fall into complete abeyance. For a city almost on the Equator, the seasons of the northern latitudes have little significance, but though the Chinese calendar has become divorced from any agricultural relevance it still remains the only guide in Chinese eyes, particularly at the time of the New Year. Even for Chinese Christians, the Lunar Calendar seems to have a deeply embedded significance which it would be difficult to supplant.

The dual influence of ancient legends and the traditional calendar serves to perpetuate the observance of the better-known Chinese festivals. If all types of anniversaries were taken into account, the Chinese year would be strewn with festivals. In practice, hardly a day passes without some kind of religious celebration, but the majority of these are of a local or personal nature. Of those that are widely observed, some are related to the home and some to temple worship. Relatively few can now be regarded as national festivals in which all Chinese participate.

The most important by far is the Chinese New Year, which should last from the first to the fifteenth of the First Moon, when fully celebrated. In practice, two days of public holiday are kept, followed in many cases by two or more days of voluntary holiday on the part of shopkeepers. The Jade Emperor’s birthday on the ninth is celebrated in most temples, and the fifteenth is usually marked by the farewell to the Buddha for the coming year. This latter is an occasion for cleaning one’s house, giving presents, visiting relatives, and a general purification of the home for the coming year.

Many have been written about Chinese festivals in general. For a detailed treatment of their survival in Malaya see Choo Hui Ming, 1937, and Pocock, 1938.
The most important festival in Ch'ing Ming, which occurs some time during the Third Moon, 105 days after the Winter Solstice. Within ten days of Ch'ing Ming, visitors to the graves should be paid to burn offerings. If the graves are not within travelling distance, a ceremony should be held in the home.

The Dragon Boat Festival occurs on the fifth of the Fifth Moon, but there are no dragon boat races in Singapore. The festival is chiefly notable for the eating of sticky rice cakes wrapped in leaves.

The Hungry Ghost Festival occurs on the fifteenth of the Seventh Moon, when all the ghosts from hell are supposed to descend to earth and look for food. They have to be properly received by the living and offered suitable food and entertainment lest they cause mischief. This involves the burning of incense and the feeding of the living rather than for the dead, except in the more sincere Buddhist temples which take the Ghost Festival very seriously at this time. The practice of joss paper burning, which flourishes during the month, depends largely on when it is able to engage the services of a theater company or a singing troupe. In the middle of the month, a date set by local customs or personal convenience, each household is expected to hold a ceremony in the courtyard outside its home at which many joss papers are burnt. On the seventh day of the Seventh Moon there also occurs the festival of the Seven Fairies, which is very important to Cantonese women.

The Moon Festival occurs on the fifteenth of the Eighth Moon. This is reckoned as a woman's festival, when the moon is worshipped in the evening. ‘Moon cakes’ are eaten and coloured paper lanterns are carried by the children.

The Ninth Moon is hardly a national festival in the traditional sense, but among the Singapore Chinese it assumes such proportions for different reasons. At Paya Lebar and other parts of Singapore, festivities in honour of the Nine Divine Brothers (chiu huang) culminate on that day. These nine brothers, embodied in a single deity, are probably a southern Chinese version of the Dragon Kings, the tutelary deities of the seas and waterways. Also, during the whole of the Ninth Moon, pilgrimages are made to an island, Pulau Kusu, about four miles outside Singapore harbor, to worship at the two shrines there, one of which is Chinese and the other Malay.

The Winter Solstice festival is not very intensively celebrated in Singapore. During the Twelfth Moon most attention is directed towards preparation for the festivals that will begin on New Year's Eve, and the most important day is the twenty-fourth, which is recognised by the southern Chinese as the birthday of the 'Kitchen God'.

The festivals listed so far are celebrated by most Chinese, whether or not they have strong religious tendencies. Most of the festivals with which we shall be dealing subsequently are the commemoration days of deities. Kuanyin, for instance, has three, on the nineteenth of the Second Moon, the nineteenth of the Sixth Moon, and the nineteenth
of the Ninth Moon. The distinctive features of these will be dealt with in a later chapter.

It is inevitable that under modern conditions the Chinese festivals should lose much of their religious significance, partly because of a genuine scepticism and partly because the social organisation upon which the proper celebration of many festivals depended has been disrupted. But as in the case of the European Christmas, commercial interests have tended to fill the breach by multiplying as well as by perverting as well as by the sentimentality of worship. However, the fact that such occasions take place according to the traditional calendar and at a time when at least some members of the community are taking their religious obligations seriously tends to preserve a pattern of life which in typically Chinese in its origins.

Certain life crises are customarily also attended by religious practices. These are occasions such as births, deaths and marriages.

Chinese festivals and mourning customs alone could be treated at great length and many works have been written on them. The range of practices found in Singapore is extremely wide, but involves five elements which all have a ceremonial function. They are therefore, often one of the many undertakers and professional practitioners who have a living to make by the conduct of burials. Very few bereaved persons are hard-hearted and sophisticated enough to dispose of a relative's corpse without any ceremony whatsoever, so that they are compelled, for lack of a better alternative, to provide at least a minimal of ceremony based on traditional Chinese lines. The practice is therefore, to some extent further complicated by holding funerals on a scale that defy anyone visualise, while the widow often takes the opportunity for an ostentatious display of wealth on a series of ceremonies in which there is virtually no limit to the amount that is spent.

Marriages represent rather a different problem, since there are secular alternatives to the customary Chinese wedding in which no recognisable religious element need enter. Marriage, anyway, has always been the occasion for conviviality and for a display of family solidarity, so that even if it is tending to lose whatever religious elements it ever contained, this convivial aspect of the ceremony is being more than ever reinforced. The same might be said of certain other Chinese family ceremonies such as the celebrations that mark the first month after a child's birth.

Household Religion and Ancestor Worship. There is little opportunity here for going into any great detail concerning the household religions found in Singapore. There is, in any case, a wide range of variants which makes accurate descriptions difficult.
It has already been pointed out that ancestor worship has lost most of its significance as the basis for household, or any other, religion. Yet, although wooden tablets are only rarely found, inscribed strips of red paper or photographs are often set up on household altars to commemorate the dead. The rest of the paraphernalia of worship found in a household offers ample evidence that the members are practicing a form of Shenism, in which charm papers, incense sticks, paper images and pictures are all designed to keep evil influences at bay. The poorer the home, the more profuse will be these efforts to woo the Shen and drive out the Kuei. Even the richer households which claim some degree of sophistication may possess similar equipment, but it will be hidden from the eyes of casual visitors.

The state of neglect into which burial grounds have been allowed to fall reflects the decline of kinship organizations directed to ancestor worship. Some of the larger regional and surname associations attempt to keep burial grounds in good order, but in this they do not receive much help from the Chinese community. At Ch'ing Ming, the festival when the graves are tended, only the most recently made mounds receive much attention. After a generation or so, nearly all the graves are allowed to fall into decay. A powerful Teochew association recently started exhuming some of its burial grounds so that the land could be put to a more profitable use. There have been no vociferous objections, but there has been no great deal of help from the Chinese community. An eighteen-year-old Chinese girl was asked whether she believed in Chinese gods. "No," she said, "Our parents believe, but we don't any more—except when we're in trouble and then we do." While life is running smoothly, this type of belief may find no overt expression. The major festivals of the Chinese year pass by as occasions of conviviality, and participation in marriages and funerals is accepted as a normal, if sometimes burdensome, part of life. Little regard is paid either to worship at the family altar or in temples unless some elderly member of the family is in a position to insist on proper observance. Such insistence will not be met with great opposition since it would be deemed very unwise to tempt providence by complaining openly against the propitiation of spiritual agencies.

Fortune Telling and Divination. The religious life of most Chinese in Singapore weaves itself into a vague and variable pattern in which the motif is a generalised belief in the ways of ancient Chinese religion as conditioned by the stories and experiences of early upbringing. It might be more accurate to explain this type of belief negatively: it is considered unwise not to believe. This outlook is further reinforced by modern scepticism concerning all religious matters, yet men do not turn away entirely from the ways of Chinese religion, however free thinking they may profess to be. An eighteen-year-old Chinese girl was asked whether she believed in Chinese gods. "No," she said. "Our parents believe, but we don't any more—except when we're in trouble and then we do."
expected crises of life, numerous difficulties arise from poverty, sickness and personal antipathies. The individual is often thrown back
upon his own resources and beliefs.

It is at this point that we begin to encounter the most enduring basis
of religious organisation among the Chinese in Singapore—the numerous
temple-owners and practitioners who exploit the religious needs of
individuals. There is no rule concerning the frequency with which
such practices are indulged. Some old women spend most of their
time consulting occult influences. Others may employ these methods
only once in a lifetime. But sooner or later most Chinese find them-
selves drawn to such practices with varying degrees of success. Whether
the worshipper approaches his task with an air of half-hearted but
hopeful experimentation, or whether he is full of sincere belief in its
efficacy, there is the likelihood that his participation involves a cash
payment to a religious specialist for services rendered or use of
equipment.

Not all methods of divination need be carried out in a temple, or
even with the help of a professional expert. Many persons claim to be
able to read occult signs without any such assistance. There are, for
instance, traditional Chinese almanacs (t'ung shu) which find their way
into most homes where there is regard for such knowledge. These
almanacs are published annually, and most of those used in Malaya
are imported from Hong Kong. A typical almanac includes much
sound, practical advice, but there is also a strong emphasis on methods
of future telling, and reading omens for propitious occasions. The
last quarter of the almanac is devoted almost entirely to a calendar of
the whole year in which recommendations are set out in detail concern-
ing the actions that are lucky or unlucky on any particular day. These
almanacs also show the correct rites that should be performed on
different occasions.

For Chinese who are literate, the almanac is a store-house of occult
knowledge. But many who wish to consult it cannot read properly,
and this entails recourse to a fortune teller, who has probably derived
much of his own knowledge from the almanac. The basis of most
fortune telling rests upon the casting of a horoscope, which is read in
relation to the proposed course of action, and based in turn upon the
calendar. Everyone has signs associated with his birth. Two
relate to the year, two to the month, two to the day, and two to the
period of two hours within which the event actually took place. Since
these characters are in turn related to the Five Elements and other such
symbols, there is limitless scope for the skilled fortune teller to base
his judgments upon calculations that are quite incomprehensible
to his clients. A simple reading may not cost more than two or three
dollars. But a more elaborate affair, running to many pages, may prove
very expensive. Curry brown paper readings may only be ventured to
once in a lifetime, if at all, but for many lesser occasions, whether they
be marriage, travel or business ventures, a person may produce the eight
characters relating to the date of his birth for the scrutiny of an expert.
At a more popular level, the horoscope is open to limited interpretation without the help of an expert. The years are supposed to move in cycles of twelve, and each of the years in the cycle is associated with an animal. In the Chinese zodiac, there are twelve animals: the Rat, the Ox, the Tiger, the Rabbit, the Dragon, the Snake, the Horse, the Goat, the Monkey, the Rooster, the Dog and the Pig. Each year in this cycle is commonly known by the name of the appropriate animal. There are many Chinese who do not know the animal under which they were born, but there are few who do not know the animal under which they were born. The events of the year, and the people born in it, are supposed to be characterized by the qualities of the animal. For example, people born in Tiger years are supposed to be of fierce temperament and likely to dominate their husbands. In Tiger years, missionary orphanages still receive exceptional numbers of unwanted baby girls who are discarded in the belief that it will be difficult to find husbands for them. This practice even extends to Christian Chinese.

In addition to a computation of the horoscope, there are many other methods of fortune telling which need not delay us here. Most of them are practised by itinerant fortune tellers of the poorer type who sit by the roadside in the evening. The important point, however, is that fortune telling is rarely conceived as a purely secular affair. Its whole atmosphere is closely associated with divination and is, therefore, a branch of divination. There is, thus, an added incentive for combining a reading of occult wisdom with worship. Once again, there is no necessity for such worship to be carried out in a temple and under the guidance of a recognised expert. Many acts of worship associated with divination are carried out in front of household altars by persons who claim to have a traditional knowledge of such matters. These are particularly prevalent among Cantonese women, who perform a large number of rites for themselves or near their homes in a wide range of circumstances. Such acts of worship are common among Chinese women who are not able to afford to go to the temple or near their homes. In these cases, the performance generally takes place in a temple under the guidance of a priest who receives a fee.

One of the most popular and by far the most widespread method of divination, which can be carried out in almost any Chinese temple, is for the supplicant to go there provided with joss papers, incense sticks and food offerings. She can, if she likes, buy the former from the temple-keeper. On the offering table in front of the altar stand several bamboo vases holding up to about a hundred thin sticks. She makes her offering, and depending on the type of vessel she has chosen, shakes the vase or turns it over. The priest then picks up a stick or two and reads their magical signs. There are, however, two very common methods of divination which are not dependent on the temple. In one of these, a woman holds a small jade ring and reads its lines. She may also perform a similar act with a piece of paper or a large piece of cloth. Each of these methods of divination is based on the assumption that the future is not only in the present moment but also in the past. The past, in turn, is supposed to be a reflection of the present and the future. This is why the past is considered to be so important in Chinese culture.
to rise up in the vase. She carries on until one, and only one, falls out. If more than one falls, she must begin again. She takes up the stick that has fallen and places it on the offering table in front of her. She then takes up another stick from the vase which is ready for use. These are bean-shaped blocks, usually made from bamboo root, with one side flat and the other side rounded. They range from about one to six inches in length. The supplicant throws them to the ground. If both blocks land with the same side up, she has not chosen the right stick. If they land with one rounded side up and one flat side up, the shen is indicating his approval. The supplicant must carry on shaking sticks out of the vase until one is approved in this way. She takes the stick to the temple-keeper, who identifies it by a number or character written at the top. From a bank of pigeonholes at his side he takes a slip of paper which corresponds with the stick that has fallen out of the vase. On this is written a pronouncement of a vague and oracular nature. The temple-keeper helps the supplicant to read this and to apply its wisdom to her problem. The divining sticks can be used alone without recourse to the divining blocks for confirmation. Alternatively, the divining blocks alone can be used to obtain an answer to a question that is put to the shen silently. If the supplicant desires to obtain a lucky gambling number, she uses an old cigarette tin, also on the offering table, in which are a dozen rolled slips of paper with a number written on each. The tin is shaken and one slip is taken out. The number on the slip may then be confirmed by the divining blocks.

Most of the divining sticks in temples deal with general matters for which vaguely oracular answers are probably sufficient. But in some temples are sets from which medical prescriptions can be obtained for cases of sickness. The slips are inscribed with Chinese characters, except in a few temples where a translation in romanised Malay is given on the reverse side. It will be readily apparent that it is only a short step from a practice such as this to spirit mediumship which is, after all, only an extreme form of divination when used in the Chinese manner. Instead of praying silently to the shen's image and leaving it to him to influence an otherwise mechanical casting of lots in order to achieve the right answer, the supplicant can put her question to the shen in person while he is manifesting himself through the body of a medium. And instead of receiving a vaguely intelligible answer printed on a slip of paper, she is able to discuss her case with the shen and, if illness is her trouble, receive a medical prescription dictated by him personally.
has is available. In practice, the two systems exist side by side. In some temples sets of divining blocks and divining sticks are used as the most popular method of divination; in other temples mediums constitute the chief attraction. In most spirit-medium temples, there are, nevertheless, sets of divining blocks which worshippers can use privately if they so wish. But whatever the systems may be, the motive on the part of the worshipper remains much the same. Propitiation of the shen, in conjunction with recourse to divination, is the accepted means of resolving problems and overcoming hardships which do not appear to have an immediately practical solution.

THE ORGANISATION OF TEMPLE WORSHIP

Types of Temple Worship. There are at least three important types of Chinese temple organisation. The first of these is based upon the ancestral hall as the focus for the worship in a lineage. As has already been indicated, this type is of minimal importance in Singapore, although a few families make some effort to maintain this form of religious organisation, and some of the surname and regional associations carry on a few of the functions usually found in connection with an ancestral hall.

The second type belongs to the Buddhist monastic ideal. Superficially, this monastic organisation seems to have been transplanted overseas, for there are many Buddhist monasteries in Singapore, some of which are of imposing dimensions. A closer examination, however, shows that too many of the monks are dependent upon the patronage of rich Chinese merchants and their wives to make it likely that any thoroughly monastic organisation could exist for long. Moreover, many so-called Buddhist temples, who may possess valid orders, are little concerned with the religious life except for the fees that they can obtain for the performance of rites. Buddhist organisation in Singapore is far more closely allied to that of the numerous guilds and clubs than to any monastic ideal, and these clubs in turn can represent a wide variety of objectives, many of which are only nominally religious.

The third type, which belongs to quite a different line of social and religious development is based upon the neighbourhood, particularly one with an urban atmosphere. This is by far the most prevalent type of religious organisation found in Singapore. Many temples in Singapore have been established by residential communities and supported by them for several decades. The usual reason given for such an organisation is that the temple is the residence of the 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches' (ch'eng huang yeh) in urban areas, or the 'Earth Shen' (t'u ti shen) in rural areas. These offices, which are not necessarily held by permanent incumbents, involve the performance of offerings to propitiate the shen, and the temple buildings are used for various social functions. The temple is thus an integral part of the urban or rural community.
The temple itself may be privately owned, but success in the manage-
ment of its affairs depends largely upon the cooperation of a committee
made up of persons who are well known and trusted in the neigh-
borhood. The highlight of its activities is the annual festival at which a
theatrical company plays. On the last day of the festival the committee
for the coming year will be selected. The names of local personages
who are willing to stand for election are read out one by one in front
of the altar. After each name, the divining blocks are thrown, and the
person whose name receives the greatest number of affirmative answers
becomes the next president, “Stove Master” as he is called. The most
important obligation on the “Stove Master” is that he should be prepared
to make good any deficit that may occur during his year of office on
account of failure to attract sufficient subscriptions from the inhabitants
of the area.

A local organizing committee of this nature need not necessarily be
connected with the temple of the tutelary god of an area. During the
Seventh Moon, when the hungry ghosts from hell must be propitiated
in every village and market, ad hoc committees on the same basis may
be formed. In many such towns there is no permanent temple for the
convenience of its population. In this case, the temple is set up ad hoc
for an indefinite period and then abandoned.

In the rural areas, the “Stove Master” and committee members tend
to be men of some substance and local reputation who are trying to do
something for the good of the community in addition to bolstering their
own prestige. In urban areas, the system is far more open to abuse by
individuals who are simply concerned with making as large a profit as
possible for themselves and for their clique.

Promoters. This illustrates again the element of private enterprise
which, plays such an important part in the temple worship of Singapore.
For every reputable temple, there are probably at least a dozen which
have been established by an individual or a clique with the aim of
exploiting the religious susceptibilities of their compatriots. The
supposed qualifications of these promoters may be very varied indeed,
but the aim in every case is to attract as many devotees as possible.

The promoters of such enterprises must always bear in mind the more
esteemed types of Chinese religious organizations. They must aim at
attracting their devotees into a religious guild with high-sounding
objectives, or they may try to gain a measure of genuine neighborhood
spiritual supervision of the whole of a fixed area. When a person in that
area dies, for instance, his soul is apprehended by two fearsome armed
retainers and brought before the ‘Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches’
as the first of a series of spiritual overlords and judges to whom it must
answer. Some of the ‘Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches’ and ‘Earth
Shen’ in Singapore are exceedingly well known personalities in the
Chinese pantheon; others are the spirits of local personages who have
died in recent years; and in many cases the identity of the office holder
is quite vague.

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objectives, or they may try to gain a measure of genuine neighborhood

support. Some even attain a certain success in both these directions simultaneously. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that much of the present religious activity connected with temple worship in Singapore grows out of the activities of such individuals. The survival of religious institutions depends not simply upon the activities of certain cliques, but upon the dominating personalities of a few individuals, each of whom, in his own particular field, has an outstanding flair for exploiting religious susceptibilities in a profitable manner. Frequently, these men have not the least knowledge of religious matters, but they are well versed in the art of organization that makes their vital contribution. Their success, however, depends ultimately upon the services of religious practitioners in order to attract worshippers within their sphere of influence.

If a temple is to establish a reputation and enjoy success, it must obtain the services of a specialist who can attract worshippers. These religious practitioners are often treated with high respect, but it does not follow that they are given a corresponding authority where worldly matters are concerned. Many of them have neither the same ambitions as the temple-promoters, and are satisfied with the provision that the performance of their religious office can give them, provided that it is accompanied by a reasonably comfortable livelihood. Such practical mindedness as they do hold is in general directed towards the extension of their religious sphere. When they are in no position to use this threat effectively they are treated with scant respect in matters unconnected with their religious duties. Theirs is a weakness by the fact that once the reputation of a temple has been established, it is sometimes not even considered necessary to retain the services of a skilled specialist. In many of the temples of Singapore, monks, priests or mediums are only called in on special occasions. For the rest of the time, the place is in the charge of a temple-keeper with no specialised knowledge beyond an ability to cope with the few simple duties expected of him. This is usually the case in the older temples, particularly in those that are owned by clubs and associations which are not particularly concerned with increasing the steady flow of worshippers which already come to the altar.

This situation, however, creates fresh problems for the promoters. Since the temple-keeper is the man to whom monetary contributions are paid, it is usual to find that he has a position more than that of a mere employee. Often, he is the actual owner of the temple, or at least he is closely associated with him by ties of kinship. But when a temple is trust property, the committee has to ensure that an adequate income from worshippers will reach them. The following is an extract from the rules of a wealthy association with a large nominal membership, having control over a burial ground, a club house and a temple:

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Temple Keeper

- The appointment of the Association's temple-keeper shall be decided by tender.
- Notice for the call for tender for the position of temple-keeper must be published in the local newspaper one week prior to the closing date.
- The tender must be accompanied by a deposit of $100 which, if the tender is not accepted, will be refunded the following day of the opening, otherwise it would be transferred to the tenderer's account with the Association.
- If any person whose tender has been accepted refuses or is unable to pay his fee he shall have his deposit forfeited by the Association.
- The temple-keeper, if appointed, shall remain paying the monthly fee as offered in the tender, and, in accordance with the clearly defined scheme of profit-sharing, with a religious specialist who can prove a sufficient attraction to worshippers.

Apart from indicating the manner in which a religious specialist can be dispensed with, this document is a good indication of the attitude of many Chinese towards temple organisation. Unless one is in the business for one's own profit, it is recognised as an extremely difficult matter over which to keep control. In practice, most of the promoters of temple worship retain a firm control over their affairs and work in conjunction, and in accordance with a clearly defined scheme of profit-sharing, with a religious specialist who can prove a sufficient attraction to worshippers.

Professional Specialists. The most clearly defined categories of religious specialists are Buddhist monks and nuns, and Taoist priests, but there is, in addition, a very wide range of miscellaneous practitioners. Every Chinese who takes much interest in religious matters is, in his or her own way, a religious specialist, possessing items of knowledge and experience which are useful. Very often they may help their friends and neighbours by advising them on the conduct of ceremonial matters, and they may regard such advice as a charitable service to others. They are not only a great storehouse to resort to methods of divination but also they are far more people trying to set themselves up as such.

The so-called medical practitioners also draw upon occult devices such as the writing of charm papers and amulets for the curing of disease. The Chinese medical profession has an exceedingly long history in which many of its practitioners have developed undoubted therapeutic skills, but the mystical philosophy upon which its methods are based, combined with the lack of any generally recognised standard of qualification, opens the way for charlatans. People without any pretence at medical qualifications claim to have undergone specialised courses in occult training under skilled masters, and write out charms which are supposed to be efficacious for almost any conceivable human purpose.
Another group of specialists depends upon the rendering of service. These may be undertakers, geomancers, theatrical performers, still-walkers, boxers or self-defenders. There are also those who render services to temples. These are often the manufacturers of joss papers, incense, paper images and the wide variety of decorations that are used in temples. Most of these products used to be imported from China, but now there is a considerable local industry.

The Position of Spirit Mediums. The craftsmen and tradesmen need not concern us, nor need the professionals who can ply their business as solitary practitioners, for their labours bear little direct relation to temple organisation. Spirit mediums, on the other hand, are almost exclusively associated with temple worship. It is virtually impossible for a medium to operate without the help of other individuals and without premises that approximate to a temple. But this need not be taken to imply that mediums hold an exalted position in relation to other practitioners. De Groot says:

Most of these dancing dervishes come from the lower classes •••• People of good standing seldom debase themselves to things that were spoken of in terms of contempt ... thirty-five centuries ago, however frequently they may have recourse to them for revelation of things unknown. 1

A similar situation exists in Singapore today. However widely mediums may be patronised, their profession is not very highly esteemed. Reputable monks and priests will have nothing to do with them, and yet in many cases the mediums appear to have taken over certain functions which previously belonged to the higher types of practitioners. This is particularly true of the so-called Taoist priests. In the ceremonies described by de Groot the saikong seems to have played a very much more exalted part than the mediums. In Singapore, the position is often reversed. Some of the saikong, particularly of the Cantonese variety, have retained a status which is quite independent of other practitioners, but among the Hokkiens the saikong is often hired to appear at festivals in a capacity in which he is of necessity of lesser importance than the medium. The saikong have retained funerals and weddings as preserves upon which the mediums have not encroached, but in many other matters the spectacular feats of the mediums appear to have a greater attraction than the quiescent arts of the saikong.

Whatever the nature of the demand for their services, all religious specialists, whether they be Buddhist monks, saikong or mediums, tend to become subordinate to the promoters of religious ceremonies who are exploiting the public demand for their services. In this respect, spirit-medium cults are typical of the organisation of temple worship. The work of these organisations is simply that, but for reasons of respectability the promoters make considerable efforts to make it

appear that the cult is based upon a more reputable type of organization such as that of a guild or a neighbourhood association. It will be shown that the expansion this involves often leads to the disruption of the cult.

In this and other ways, spirit-medium cults provide typical examples not only of the style of Shenism so prevalent among the overseas Chinese, but also show how their aspirations, fears and religious beliefs find expression in certain of their forms of social organization.
III
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SPIRIT MEDIUMSHIP

MEDIUMS: Suggested upon the broad and vaguely defined foundations of Chinese religion is a specialized body of knowledge concerning spiritualism. Many of the details are known only to specialists, who is some important respects differ in their views. But the main principles are known to most Chinese. The practice of spirit mediumship, and the equipment that is used, may similarly vary in many details. In general, however, they follow a pattern which has been made familiar by age-old usage.

In theory, the influence of a shen is not restricted to any one spot, and no medium itself is one place simultaneously. In practice, the presence of a shen is usually associated with an altar or shrine where it has become customary for him to be worshipped. It may be in a home, or it may be in a temple, but it is the place where the public comes to make offerings, to add oil to the lamps, to burn joss papers and incense, and to make obeisances. In return for these worldly offerings, the shen is expected to reveal his supernatural will and knowledge.

The shen may reveal his will and speak to worshippers through a medium whom he has selected for the task. In temples where there is no medium, it is assumed that the shen has not chosen to reveal himself by such means, and is content to rely upon other methods of divination. In theory, anyone can become a medium, sex, age and nationality having no necessary bearing on the matter. If a person is chosen by a shen for this task there is no escape, but on the other hand, no one can become a medium, however much he may desire to do so, unless he has been selected personally. Certain types of people, however, are considered more likely than others to become mediums. Those are under twenty are the most suitable candidates—particularly those whose horoscopes are reckoned to be 'light', i.e., their eight characters, derived from the year, month, day and hour of birth do not include a proper weighting of the more stable elements. Such people are expected to lead blameless but unhappy lives, and to die young. They are chosen by the shen because they can at least be of value to society by lending their bodies for this purpose. Although some mediums may specialize in possession by one shen alone, there is no theoretical limit to the number that may use his body once his powers have been established.
The Meaning of Dang-ki. The term for a medium, male or female, which is most widely used in Singapore is the Hokkien word tang-hi meaning, roughly, a ‘divining youth’. Interaction of the two syllables is significant; occasionally the order is reversed, giving dang-hi. The Chinese, using the more archaic pronunciation, will give the word as dang-tung, but which is obscure in its derivation. All these words imply that a medium is youthful, although in fact this is by no means always the case. Since the Hokkien word is the most prevalent one in Singapore, it will be used henceforth throughout these accounts, but with the slightly simplified spelling of dang-hi which gives a rather closer idea of the pronunciation to a reader not versed in the romanisation of the Amoy dialect.

Once a dang-hi has embarked on his career, he is thought to have very little choice as to when and where he will become possessed. This raises difficulties for his friends and helpers. When a shen takes possession of a dang-hi’s body, in the jargon of the school, or the shen, which he replaces (see p. 48), the dang-hi’s own yang element then wanders about in safe places, probably being cared for by other shen. The dang-hi’s own yang element, or yin, which is more closely associated with his material and worldly functions, can, however, be placed in considerable danger. The shen is benevolent towards his dang-hi, and will not cause harm if he can avoid it, but the nature of possession is such that the human body is likely to suffer and even succumb to early death. The dang-hi, therefore, needs human helpers versed in occult ways, who will take all the necessary measures to protect him from the dangers that beset him. They must support him bodily, for instance, lest he should suffer the calamity of falling to the ground in a state of trance. If a dang-hi is subject to involuntary possession, he must have friends or relatives in constant attendance. This is an obvious inconvenience, and so, if it can possibly be arranged, possession takes place only in a temple where all the necessary apparatus for dealing with eventualities is in proper order and available. In practice, although some mediums may become possessed involuntarily at any hour of day or night, possession usually results from the attendance of the dang-hi, his assistants and worshippers at a temple, with the specific intention of calling down the shen by invocation. Or attendance may be because the shen has previously indicated that he will appear at that time.

Because of the dangers of his occupation, a dang-hi has to approach a state of possession in a pure state of mind. This usually includes fasting, and sometimes abstinence from sexual intercourse. Otherwise, the prohibitions placed on him appear to be little more than dooms expressed by the prevailing sense of morality. He must be an honest man of upright character. There is, however, one additional prohibition of the greatest importance: he must not perform as a dang-hi for material gain. In fact, this convention is so strongly upheld that it can be extremely bad manners even to mention matters of money.
the business of the shen is concerned. It is recognized that a dang-ki must sometimes depend for his livelihood on gifts from worshippers, but such remuneration as he receives must be left entirely to the discretion and gratitude of devotees. If such paraphernalia as incense, joss papers and candles are purchased at the temple there is a fixed price for them, but payment for services rendered must take the form of a sum of money handed over according to the 'red packet' principle. In many cases, coins and notes to the amount which the worshipper wishes to give are wrapped up in small sheets of red paper and dropped discreetly into a box or bowl. Only occasionally is the money simply handed over to a temple assistant. In either case, it would constitute a serious ethical breach if the dang-ki or his assistants were to complain openly about the amounts given.

Assistants and Worshippers. Since the success of the dang-ki's performance depends greatly upon the competence of his assistants, they too should be men of untarnished reputation. In some cases, they must also observe certain fasting rules. Above all there must be no suggestion that they are gaining financially from giving their services. If the conditions of moral rectitude are not observed, it is possible that something will go wrong during the performance, to the great danger of the dang-ki, his assistants and the worshippers. If a dang-ki persists in following immoral ways, it is considered inevitable that the shen will withdraw the powers of mediumship that were bestowed on him.

Among the worshippers, there are also certain moral obligations which have a bearing upon the success or failure of the ceremonies. They are expected, of course, to have faith in the type of rite that is being performed, and although as rewards can be asked of them, openly, they are expected to support their expression of faith with gifts of money and temple adornments. They are sometimes expected to fast before entering the temple, but the strictest and most commonly observed prohibitions concern pregnant and menstruating women.

If a menstruating woman is present while the dang-ki is possessed by the shen, she places both himself and his assistants in great danger. If the shen is not followed as part of the performance, he may have great difficulty in stopping the flow of blood if such a woman is near him. But a pregnant woman is more likely to damage herself and her unborn child than to cause any harm to the dang-ki. She is thought to be an excellent target for the malice of evil spirits which are bound to be frequenting the outer fringe of the temple area during the dang-ki's performance. She is guilty of a grave discourtesy if she enters a temple in her condition without having previously consulted with the dang-ki. She is considered to be bringing about the wrath of the shen if she is present while the dang-ki is possessed by the shen. She is also considered to be especially vulnerable to the effects of the shen's mediumship. She is sometimes compelled to leave the temple area if the dang-ki is possessed by the shen, and she is never allowed to approach the dang-ki's booth. She is considered to be a source of great danger to the dang-ki if she is present while he is possessed by the shen.
Apart from the dangers involved, the presence of pregnant and menstruating women is undesirable because it is likely to frighten the shen from entering and possessing the dang-ki's body. In cases where invocations are chanted for days or weeks without success, the failure of the dang-ki is sometimes attributed to the unsuspected presence of such women. Another type of prohibition against attendance at the temple concerns horoscopes. Sometimes occult calculations reveal that persons born under the signs of a certain animal should not be present at a performance and those to whom the prohibition applies have to take themselves off to a safe distance.

It is impossible for the human province to decide when the shen will possess the dang-ki, much can be done to ascertain and even bend his will in this matter. It is often made known that the shen will manifest himself at a certain time if there are devotees requiring his help. This knowledge is usually given in utterances made on a previous occasion. But even if there is no certainty of the shen's appearance, it is probable that he will condescend to come down if properly invited. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that when circumstances gather for consultations with the shen, he does, in almost every case, make an appearance.

Spirit-Medium Temples. For a dang-ki's performance, a wide range of material equipment is held to be essential, or at least desirable. A spirit-medium temple is not necessarily distinct from places in which other types of rites are performed. Nevertheless, a temple in which a dang-ki practices has certain specialized requirements.

It need not be a large building. Most of the rituals of a spirit-medium cult entail small, intimate gatherings, involving not more than a dozen people at one time. This can be carried out in a room of no great size.

On the other hand, there are occasions when the proceedings are witnessed by large crowds which could never be accommodated in the temple itself. Spirit-medium temples, therefore, often consist of a very small building, surrounded by a disproportionate space of vacant land.

The main hall of a spirit-medium temple is frequently not more than about twenty feet square. The usual entrance is through large doors in the front. Smaller doors lead from the side into other rooms, which may be used as accommodation for side altars or for dressing rooms, store rooms, or living quarters. Much of the space in the main hall is taken up by an offering table in the centre of the floor. Against the back wall is the altar on which the images are placed. Outside the main hall is a covered porch with benches along the sides. Here again is usually an offering table and pedestals with images on them. In the flat, open space of land in front of the building, there should be a permanent theatrical stage, built about thirty or forty yards from the temple and facing it. In a few cases, such stages are possessed by Singapore temples, but a more usual procedure is for a temporary stage to be erected at the time of the annual harvest.
For small, intimate gatherings which concern the day-to-day activities of the cult, the performance is carried out in the main hall inside the temple. If the gathering is rather too large for convenience, the performance is carried out on the open space in front of the temple. On really great occasions, it is not unusual to find an offering table, altar and other apparatus set up on the open space in front of the temple.

Superficially, a temple where a dang-ki practises may not appear to differ greatly from other temples. Whether the temple is the front room of a private house or a building designed specifically for the purpose, certain fundamental ideas of religious ornamentation and equipment find expression. Outside the temple there is a brick or concrete furnace in which the worshippers can burn large wads of joss papers as offerings to the shen. The building itself is decorated with auspicious inscriptions which may be carved in stone, painted on wood or written on strips of paper. Inside, certain standardised receptacles and implements for holding oil lamps, candles and incense sticks. Large and small paper lanterns, elaborately painted, may be found hanging from the roof. Embossed brass and teak panels proclaim the name of the shen found there. On the offering table are the "wooden fish" which are sounded during the chanting of Buddhist sutras, and other instruments such as bells, drums, gongs and brass bowls. The instruments of divination are also present: the divining blocks in various shapes and sizes, and bamboo vases containing sets of divining sticks. On a side wall, there are usually hooks of pigeon-holes containing slips of paper which give interpretations of the fortune indicated by the fall of the divining sticks. Somewhere within the temple, or perhaps in the porch, there is a table at which the temple-keeper sits to receive the contributions of worshippers and to sell them incense sticks, candles and other such equipment as they may require.

The altar under the porch is often dedicated to the Jade Emperor, who is the chief guardian of temples. Although he is rarely represented by an image, he may occasionally be seen in the temple, standing on a pedestal or in the temple hall entrance. Two door-guardians are painted, and the entire front of the temple is often decorated with a painting of the Jade Emperor in various shapes and sizes, and various vases containing sets of divining sticks. On the altar under the porch, there are usually hooks of pigeon-holes containing slips of paper which give interpretations of the fortune indicated by the fall of the divining sticks. Somewhere within the temple, or perhaps in the porch, there is a table at which the temple-keeper sits to receive the contributions of worshippers and to sell them incense sticks, candles and other such equipment as they may require.

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and unless he happens to be possessing the dang-ki's body, it is to the image that prayers are said and questions directed. Moreover, the shen is credited with the power of moving his image if he desires, and there are many stories of images on altars making noises at night and changing their positions without human aid.

In other types of temples, particularly those that are more genuinely Buddhist, it is usual to find that some of the images, which may be life-sized or larger, are set up permanently in fixed positions. It would be difficult to take the image down from the altar when the shen's presence is required outside his temple precincts, to be represented by a little of the incense ash which has fallen down and been packed into a brass bowl on the offering table. The bowl is then ceremoniously carried to the spot required. One of the essential elements in the spirit-medium tradition is that the shen be able to proceed outside his temple, not only in possession of the dang-ki but also in the form of an image which can be carried by devotees. The images in spirit-medium temples, therefore, to be small and portable. Even if the temple happens to possess the larger type of image, there is sometimes an additional smaller duplicate which can be carried around.

Temple Equipment. Apart from the images many items of equipment and furnishings are of special significance to the spirit-medium tradition, although some of them may have a wider usage in Chinese religion. There may be special sets of clothing which the dang-ki and his assistants wear during performances. These may only be uniforms which are worn to distinguish the performers from the worshippers, and as such are not essential to the cult. Of great significance, however, are the ceremonial robes which the dang-ki wears while possessed.

These robes are made of a kind of silk called "stomacher," which has a kind of apron (siu to·H.) fastened across the front of the body. This is made of coloured material, embroidered silk, and proclaims the identity of the shen, the name of the temple, and probably the name of its donor as well. A temple must possess suitable robes for each one of the shens that appear. Outside most spirit-medium temples hangs a black flag on which is depicted in yellow or gold the Eight Trigram (Pa Kua) design attributed to the mythical ruler Fu Hsi. This serves as a warning to ghosts and devils that it would be dangerous for them to try to make any trouble here, since the Eight Trigrams are a potent force against evil. It also serves as an advertisement to passers-by that this is a place in which a dang-ki operates. Often this method of publicity is carried a great deal further by planting triangular flags and notices at distant approaches to the temple and along paths leading to it. Smaller versions of the Eight Trigrams flag will also be found inside the temple for use by the dang-ki while carrying out exorcising rite and similar operations requiring a powerful antidote to evil.
A most important item of furniture is a heavily-built, portable chair, sometimes called a 'Dragon Chair', in which the dang-ki begins and ends his trance. Dragons' heads are usually carved at the end of the arm-rests. The whole chair is painted red and adorned with carvings and inscriptions picked out in gold-leaf and other colours. Rapidly essential items of equipment are the drums and gongs that are beaten while the shen is being invoked to descend and at other points in the ceremonies. The drums, which are held on wooden handles, are about nine inches in diameter and about six inches deep, with skin stretched over both openings. The woodwork is invariably painted red, with the name of the temple written in black or gold on the sides. The gongs, which are held by a string or short chain, are discs of bronze about a foot in diameter with slightly curved rims. The noise from these instruments can be tremendous when operated by half a dozen youths. It is particularly obnoxious to evil spirits and conducive to the descent of the shen.

The most important element in calling down the shen into the dang-ki's body is the 'Invocation' which the assistants chant. These invocations, of which four examples are given in Appendix I, are transmitted by an almost exclusively oral tradition, and consist of grandiloquent and poetic invitations. They are supposed to have been given to the shen by the shen himself at some remote time. The invocations and the other equipment must be at hand. On the offering table is a wooden block about six inches long which may be tapped down sharply several times if it is feared that the shen's descent is being deterred by evil influences. There are bowls of 'charm water' in which the ashes from burnt charm papers, and perhaps a few pomegranate leaves, may be floating: drops of this water constitute a particularly powerful protective agency. There may also be supplies of crushed rock salt mixed with dry rice to be hurled around the temple as a deterrent to evil influences.

Two kinds of exorcising whips are also available for use by the dang-ki and his assistants. One of these consists of a tuft from a horse's tail fastened to a wooden handle about eighteen inches long. The other, known as a 'Method Cord', is a long plaited rope attached to a shorter wooden handle fashioned in the shape of a snake's head.

Some of the items of equipment most characteristically associated with the practice of spirit mediumship are those which the dang-ki uses for self-mortification. Of greatest importance among these are his swords, which in themselves are powerful weapons against evil. A cult may possess three or four swords, each of which is reserved for a separate purpose. They are sharp, two-edged weapons which vary considerably in size and shape, but are usually around two feet in length. The more highly-prized ones have the seven stars of the Northern Dipper engraved on their blades. With these swords the dang-ki slashes at his body and cuts his tongue to obtain blood for charm papers.
Another highly esteemed instrument is a 'prick ball'. It is a ball made up of 108 metal spikes radiating from a central core. Prick balls vary in diameter from about six to eighteen inches. In one temple in Singapore there is an example nearly three feet in diameter, though it does not appear to be used nowadays. Sometimes there is a network of coloured cord between the spikes, and sometimes the ball is packed with yellow paper so that only the sharp ends protrude. The dang-ki holds the ball by a short chain or cord and swings it on to his back with a great display of violence.

If a sword is used to slash the dang-ki's body, he swings it over his back, or swings it vertically on to his bare stomach. Sometimes this is done with one sword, and sometimes with two, holding one in each hand. This display rarely reaches impressive proportions. The momentum of the swing is skillfully checked just before the edge touches the flesh, so that it is unlikely to produce more than a scratch. Usually, there is no greater injury than a few red weals.

If the dang-ki uses a prick ball, it is held by a short chain or cord. It is swung over the head on to the back or around the body, rolling across the back on each circuit. The force of the swing is controlled in much the same manner as when a sword is used. Nevertheless, the injury caused from a prick ball is rather greater. The back is sometimes badly scratched, and a considerable amount of blood pours from superficial wounds. These sometimes cause heat and leaves the sort of scars which might be expected. One hears in these cases also that no scars are left. It is certainly true that when the blood has been wiped away by an assistant there is little to show, but it can hardly be said that the back is quite unscarred.

Procesional Equipment. The more severe forms of self-mortification are performed only at festivals and involve the use of equipment which may have to be hired specially for the occasion. This equipment will be dealt with in the chapter devoted to spirit-medium festivals. There are, however, other items which are usually displayed prominently in the temple at all times of the year. Prominent among these are the sedan chairs. The dang-ki, of course, is the main figure in a procession, but wherever he goes the shen's image must accompany him. If necessary, this image can be carried by hand, but it is greatly preferable that it should ride along in the style suited to a potentate. This involves the use of a specially constructed sedan chair, somewhat smaller than one which would be used for a human being. On the seat between the arms is a raised pedestal, with room for the shen and two of his subordinates to be firmly fastened. At the back of the chair five triangular and embroidered flags are set up, representing the 'Five Directions', of North, South, East, West and Centre. The chair is a highly ornate affair, painted in red and decorated with carvings and inscriptions in gold and other colours.
Once the image has been placed in the chair the shen is supposed to be able to move it by his own power. It is carried by human beings, as indeed such a chair should be, but they have little control over its movements or direction. The chair is carried by two or four men, according to its size. As they progress along the road, it sways and gyrates. Sometimes, it may stop and refuse to move on. Occasionally, it stops dead and refuses to move on; sometimes, it rushes forward at breakneck pace. When the shen is particularly upset about some matter it sways and circles around with excessive violence. Helpers of carriers have to stand by in order to take over from their exhausted comrades, and onlookers are well advised to keep out of the chair's path.

The dang-ki may follow the shen's chair on foot, but it is more splendid if he too is carried in a sedan chair. A well-equipped spirit-medium cult will have two more sedan chairs of similar design to that in which the image is carried, but larger. One of these is fitted with sharp spikes on the seat, back, arm-rests and foot-rests, and is called teng-kio (H), meaning a 'nail chair'. The other is similarly fitted with knife blades, and is called to-kio (H), meaning a 'knife chair'. When a dang-ki is travelling in one of these, progress is relatively normal. There are no astonishing gyrations comparable to those exposed of the image's chair. All three of these chairs are kept in the temple, perhaps in a back room, and brought out on the more important occasions, even though a procession is not in prospect.

The blades on the knife chair are usually fairly blunt and are unlikely to cause much harm. The spikes on the nail chair are rather sharper and can hardly provide a very comfortable style of travel, particularly since the dang-ki already has skewers through his cheeks (see below) and is obliged to stand on the chair at frequent intervals to perform rites of exorcism. Such festivals usually involve self-mortification, with a great deal of skewering and piercing. Provided the dang-ki has learnt the knack of distributing his weight evenly over the spikes, the actual riding in the chair is probably not dangerous, although uncomfortable as they may be, they never seem to draw any blood.

The same may be said of the knife beds, sword ladders and sword bridges discussed in the chapter on festivals. The blades are sometimes unpleasantly sharp, but in general the feats performed on these represent no excessive hazards to persons who have learnt the correct knack of distributing weight evenly as well as handling them accordingly.

Another practice peculiar to spirit-medium festivals, particularly when a procession is involved, is the skewering of various parts of the body of the dang-ki and some of his assistants. The instruments for this constitute a desirable item in temple furnishing and are of several sizes. Three patterns of skewers are in common use. Two of these are the 'Generals' Heads' (chiang cliun t'ou). These are about six inches long and ornamented with small painted wooden heads with tassels hanging from them. They are usually kept in sets of five in a box made of bamboo, and are taken to some knife beds.

The knitting needles are made of metal, but are not primarily knives, but are taken to some knife beds.
wooden racks, to represent the generals of the hosts associated with the five quarters of heaven. A second type with ornate metalwork heads, instead of wooden heads, are called 'Silver Needles' (yin chen). A third type, the metalwork at the top of the skewers is fashioned into the insignia associated with certain deities. The skewers are used for piercing the cheeks and fleshy folds in the neck, breast and arms, before going out in procession. In the case of an assistant, piercing is usually restricted to the upper parts of the arm, and there is no suggestion that the man is in a trance or in any state of possession. The assistant has some faith that he feels no pain and suffers no ill effects.

All three patterns of skewer are also made in lengths of up to about two feet, but their use is restricted to the dang-ki for the purpose of piercing his cheeks. In addition, there is an exceptionally long skewer, of perhaps six feet, which is patterned on the insignia associated with well-known deities. The most commonly found is a halberd-like weapon associated with Kuan Ti. These, too, are used by the dang-ki alone. All sets of skewers are kept in racks on the offering table when not in use.

When the cheeks are pierced, the skewer is introduced from either the outside or the inside, so that the handle or the point sticks out through the mouth. Sometimes this is done to both cheeks, with the shorter skewers, and sometimes to one cheek only with the longer skewers. The operation is entirely painless. Sometimes, the assistant will insert the skewer into the cheek in such a manner that the point sticks out through the mouth, instead of from the side. Sometimes the tongue is pierced. The piercing is usually restricted to the upper parts of the arm, and there is no suggestion that the man is in a trance or in any state of possession. The assistant has some faith that he feels no pain and suffers no ill effects.

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The introduction of skewers, and also their extraction, is always carried out with flags held round the head so that unprivileged persons cannot see what is going on. Sometimes a flag is used to prevent the operation from being seen. The assistant holds the flag over his head and body so that no one can see his movements. If the piercing is carried out with care, there is rarely any bleeding, and such as there may be is quickly wiped away with paper. If the piercing is carried out carefully, there is rarely any bleeding, and such as there may be is quickly wiped away with paper. If the skewer is to be placed in the neck, it is stuck through a fold of skin that is pinched up just above the Adam's apple. Small skewers are also used to pierce through folds of skin that have been pinched up on other parts of the body, particularly the breasts and the upper parts of the arm. The latter type of skewering is generally reserved for assistants who are not necessarily meant to be in a state of possession. The skewer passes only just under the skin for about a
quarter of an inch, and often has to be held in place by a strip of cloth tied around the arm.

The skewers are extracted as soon as the procession of the perfumers has reached the temple, or even while they are still in the form of a group, or in a process of change. The assistants, after the perfumers have been instructed to do certain acts, will then hold the skewers in place with a strip of cloth tied around the arm.

The skewers are extracted as soon as the process of prayer and sacrificial offerings has been completed. After the skewers are removed, they are replaced by a strip of cloth tied around the arm.

An hour or more may have elapsed since the skewers were introduced, during which time the performers have usually acted energetically. Extraction is made with a sharp and sudden pull, whereupon an assistant presses hard with his thumb on the wound and blows charm water on the spot. After a few moments, he raises his thumb cautiously to see if there is any bleeding. If there is no bleeding, a little ointment is smeared on the wound and the performance continues. Occasionally, however, there is considerable bleeding which requires pressing on the spot, until it ceases, and a further washing with charm water. A small square of absorbent paper is then placed over the wound and left there until the blood begins to coagulate. The claim that no scar whatsoever remains can hardly be substantiated. It is true that it is not very noticeable, but on one occasion a small white mark was still visible on a dang-ki's cheek where a spear had been passed through three weeks previously. In fact, a way of identifying a dang-ki is by the pock-marked appearance that his cheeks develop after several years of periodical skewering.

A claim is sometimes made that a common practice among dang-ki is for them to stab themselves with daggers and yet to show no ill-effects. Such an occurrence was not witnessed in Singapore.

Charm Papers. Feats of self-mortification play a significant part in the ceremonies of a spirit-medium cult because they are the major device for persuading worshippers that the dang-ki is immune from physical harm while in a state of possession. They are by no means essential, however, and are sometimes despised by some of the more reputable practitioners. They may be in any case present to the extent of a belief in the effectiveness of the ritual, in the nature of a pious act, and are not essential to the performance. They are, in any case, more in the nature of a pious act, and are not essential to the performance.

The charm papers (Wu) are among the most frequently used devices of Chinese occultism, whether spirit mediumship is involved or not. They are used in the ceremonies of the tang-khu cult because they are the major device for persuading worshippers that the dang-ki is immune from physical harm while in a state of possession. They are by no means essential, however, and are sometimes despised by some of the more reputable practitioners. They are, in any case, more in the nature of a pious act, and are not essential to the performance.

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scrawls and whorls which are meaningless to the uninitiated. Each design is written according to a special formula known only to an expert who will give useful instructions as to the manner in which it must be used. These designs, which vary greatly in size, have to be burnt at a specified place and time, and the ashes disposed of in a prescribed manner. These ashes may have to be mixed with water that the patient drinks or pours over parts of his body, or they may be thrown into the face of the person whom it is intended to influence. These ashes are supposed to have some influence and for which an expert cannot write an efficacious design. These designs are supposed to have been revealed to him by powerful deities with whom he maintains intimate relations. The use of charm papers is an integral part of the particular purpose of the Wu priests mentioned in the last chapter, but there are many self-appointed experts who claim to have a wide knowledge of the art.

In spirit mediumship, charm papers play an exceedingly important part, but the designs on the paper tend to be carried out in a manner of secondary significance. In some temples, a possessed dang-ki will scribble on each individual piece of paper, but more often a standardised version will have been printed from wooden blocks. The important point is that before distribution to worshippers they are daubed with the dang-ki's blood. This daubing is often a very elaborate and laborious process, and is carried out in conjunction with the assumption that directions for their use are received from the shen himself through his dang-ki.

Most of the small charm papers are meant to be burnt by worshippers in the performance of the rite that has been prescribed, but a second type of charm paper is retained by worshippers. These are about double the width of the smaller variety, but of the same colours, with yellow predominating. They can either be folded into small wads and worn as amulets, or pasted above doors and other parts of houses. A more durable version, which is used chiefly for amulets, is made of yellow or orange cloth. These, too, carry a standardised printed design and are treated with the dang-ki's blood before being presented to worshippers.

In many cases the dang-ki lick each charm paper with his bleeding tongue, but when the flow of blood is scanty, or the objects to be daubed numerous, other recognised methods can be used. The dang-ki may blend his tongue into a cup of water and use a small brush to paint the daubed mixture on to the papers, or he may spit a little of his blood into ink made from red powder mixed with water. The blood used should be used in every case. In some cases a white cockerel is produced for the dang-ki to sacrifice by cutting its throat with his sword. The blood is dripped over the papers laid out on the offering table, and the cockerel is then thrown outside the temple to die. The white cockerel is a bird of great significance in Chinese religious ideas, and its sacrifice by a possessed dang-ki represents a potent method of obtaining efficacious charms.
Miscellaneous Equipment. As well as holding verbal consultations with worshippers and distributing charm papers among them, the dang-ki performs many other services. In some of these, he bled that he might consecrate images, household ornaments and articles of clothing to be consumed in the temple. Many of the images on family altars and the religious pictures seen in houses have been 'dotted' by a dang-ki. The usual method is for the dang-ki to take a small knife, slice it across his tongue, and touch the image or picture at several points in such a manner that blood is left behind. Household ornaments such as mirrors are dipped in the blood, and articles of clothing such as shirts and blouses are brought for stamping at the back of the neck. In such cases the dang-ki invariably uses a real about two inches square bearing an insignia which shows the name of the shen and the temple. He licks the seal and stamps it on the object. It is equally common for the dang-ki to take a large seal about two inches square bearing the same name, to stamp it on the back just below the collar. The stamp marks remain clearly visible on the backs of many worshippers and are a means of identifying devotees of spirit-mediumship in everyday life. In some temples, where the Taoist tradition is strong, there can be found on the altar a wooden container in which lies a cube about six inches square tied up in yellow cloth. This is a representation of a large imperial seal such as is considered appropriate to the authority of a shen. Similar imperial seals can be seen on the stages of Chinese theatres. A dang-ki, however, only uses a small replica as a sign of his shen's authority in protecting his devotees against evil influences.

Most temples will possess the more important items from the range of equipment described here, or at least such items as can be afforded. A temple may also have some items specifically required because of its devotion to a particular shen. For instance, when the 'Third Prince' has made an appearance, he is expected to hold a metal ring in his hand. There are, also, numerous other pieces of apparatus, apart from images, which devotees like to keep in their own homes. An outstanding example is an article of equipment almost exclusively associated with the worship of the 'Great Saint'. This is the apparatus known as the 'ping-pong'. It consists of an ordinary bottle filled with 'twelve o'clock water', water drawn from a tap or well at midday. Into the neck of the bottle is fitted a funnel-like piece of glass-ware open at the lower end of the funnel, which dips into the water but completely closes the top. Every day at noon, and sometimes at other hours as well, this apparatus gives off a sudden 'pinging' sound, as if bubbles were rising and forcing up the funnel in the bottle's neck. When this occurs, the shen is supposed to be revealing his presence in the temple or the home, and an immediate act of worship must be carried out by the persons there. These 'ping-pong' are invariably found in temples associated with the 'Great Saint'. Devotees will purchase their own funnels and bring them to the temple for the dang-ki to consecrate them with a lick of his blood.
Although the interrogation and cross-checking necessary to the compilation of complete life histories of a sample of dang-ki would have led to the gravest suspicion, it was still possible to collect enough evidence to make some generalisations possible. It is certainly not an hereditary occupation. It is exceptional to find a dang-ki whose father was similarly employed. They do not display, moreover, any very marked physical or mental abnormalities. There is one case of a Cantonese hunchback, now dead, and a Hokkien dang-ki still operates in Singapore who has his right hand missing. A more interesting example can be found in a Tamil dang-ki who was adopted by a Hokkien family when a baby and is now Chinese in every respect apart from his physical characteristics. A few dang-ki might be considered normally subnormal, and it is possible that some are epileptics. But in general they come from much the same type of family and environment as most of the other participants in temple worship, and such abnormal characteristics as they may possess are not those which have marked them out for a career of mediumship. Even if they can be accused of addiction to alcohol or opium, this is by no means exceptional in the people among whom they live and work. Since spirit mediumship carries considerable prestige, many persons aspire to it. A man, or woman, can become a dang-ki either by involuntarily displaying signs of spirit possession, or by cultivating the powers consciously. Involuntary possession can take place during the course of everyday events, but it is considered far more likely to happen at a temple, particularly if an annual festival is being celebrated. Many stories relate how men and women have suddenly become possessed while attending festivals. This need not be taken to imply that they are destined to become dang-ki, but rather that they may be possessed by one of the spirits which is responsible, but such an occurrence is at least evidence that they are likely candidates for possession by them. But in most cases, a man becomes a dang-ki by the conscious encouragement of the powers that is meant to be latent within him. From an early age, even when they are too small to realize, they are initiated into the spirit mediumship cults and hence by the age of nine or ten, they are among the boys who beat drums and gongs, and perform other minor functions. Do hundreds of occasions they have seen and heard the performances of dang-ki. It is among youths such as these that the status of the dang-ki, who is the chief centre of attraction in the temple, must appear particularly marked. If they wish to emulate his fame, they can begin their careers when they are about twelve or fourteen.
It may be that the cult already has one or two dang-ki, but it is thought desirable that an additional dang-ki should be trained. Or possibly the shen has lost its dang-ki and is anxious to acquire a new one. In the former case, a dang-ki already practising in the temple will guide the candidates in their training. In the latter case, an experienced dang-ki will be invited from elsewhere.

Training Ceremonies. The candidates for mediumship have to undergo a course of preparation for a specified period. This usually includes fasting for a few days. In some cases the services of a Taoist priest may be called upon for preliminary rites, and blocks may be thrown to ascertain whether or not the shen is willing to come down to possess the new dang-ki.

The candidates, who may number five or six, seat themselves in a row in front of the altar. Each is given three small, narrow sticks to hold. They then have to meditate on the shen they wish to invoke. In theory, no dang-ki can tell in advance what shen is likely to possess him, but in practice most of them seem to be able to tell which it will be. Two or three assistants chant their invocations to the same shen.

After appropriate cleansing ceremonies have been performed the assistants begin to chant and beat their drums and gongs. The experienced dang-ki who has been asked to participate is standing by, and possibly assisting in one or other of the minor duties. The ritual may last for an hour or two while the candidates sit with their heads bowed, waiting to become possessed. It always takes a great deal longer than when an established dang-ki is entering a trance.

Eventually, some slightly strange effects take place in one or more of the novices. They may shiver a little, or shake their heads. When the experienced dang-ki sees this, he seats himself in a chair beside them and prepares to enter a trance. Within a few minutes the shen has possessed him. Rising to his feet, he strikes a posture in front of the altar and waits until the novices show further signs of possession. He then begins to recite his invocations, and the body seems to be able to stand up of itself. The assistants try to support him, but he is too strong. Here the experienced dang-ki intervenes. He grasps the novice by both hands and tries to drag him to his feet. Often the novice is extremely reluctant to stand up. At once the dang-ki and assistants can support him in a standing position, they lean over and try to catch the words he is muttering. From this, or from his bodily movements, they identify the shen that is possessing him. They assist him in the shen and try to make it easier for him to stand. The assistant helps him to get into position, and in some cases he is even able to stand up. Finally, the assistants call on the shen they have identified. The shen is told across the novice's chest, and he is dragged up to the offering table, still reluctantly, and in a state bordering on collapse. Here he has charm water blown over him and he is given a drink.
Having brought the novice this far, the dang-ki and the assistants urge him to attempt the next stage of mediumship, which involves cutting his tongue with a sword. It is not unusual, however, for this to happen on the second or third attempt, as the novice may have to face the discomfort of being possessed again, even if only in a rudimentary manner. But now the possessing influence is deserting him. His movements become less violent and he lapses into a lethargic state. Still supported by the assistants he recovers consciousness and stares dazedly around him. The stomacher is removed and he is led back to his chair to rest.

While this has been going on, it is probable that one or two of the other novices have begun to show signs of possession. The dang-ki and assistants then turn their attention to the next most likely candidates. One by one, they are treated in the same way and urged to reach the stage in which they can cut their tongues. Not all of them, however, are likely to reach even the rudimentary stages of possession. By the time the possession ceases, one or two novices will still be in their chairs, deep in meditation without any signs of returning. If it is decided that there is little use in giving them further encouragement, they will be revived by a splash of charm water in the face and a smart smack on the forehead. The unsuccessful novice starts up with a look of alarm on his face which invariably produces roars of laughter among the onlookers.

The Stages of Development. There are four stages of development through which a dang-ki must pass before he reaches full maturity. The first stage is the stage described above when he begins to show signs of possession by an identifiable slum. It is possible that even this stage will not be reached until many attempts have been made. If the novice is particularly anxious to possess, he may undertake exercises at three-day intervals over a period of several months.

The second stage is reached when he is able to cut his tongue and carry out other tasks of self-mortification without showing pain or fear. He has then become of use to the cult to which he belongs, for the blood that he sheds can be smeared on charm papers and he can add to the display at festivals. The third and most important stage for temple worship is when he is able to dispense medicine and advice to worshipers coming to the temple. The fourth and most advanced stage is one which comparatively few dang-ki in Singapore attain or even aspire towards. It involves the study of the occult under an accredited master and initiation into a brotherhood of experts. The initiation ceremony, which is carried out in privacy and secrecy, used to last forty-nine days. Nowadays this period has been reduced to a week. The secrets, which are closely guarded, represent an accumulation of occult knowledge rather than immediate revelations from the mouth of a possessed dang-ki.
at this stage, actual mediumship is regarded as an almost unnecessary device, and the followers of such a method begin to merge into the general body of Chinese practitioners who have no immediate connection with spirit mediumship. For most dang-ki in Singapore the third stage is sufficient to secure an adequate livelihood and assured position. It also represents the most popular type of manifestation among potential worshippers, who expect to be impressed by the noise and spectacle of the performance as well as by the efficacy of the cures given. Even within the third stage, which is representative of spirit mediumship among the Chinese in Singapore, there are marked variations.

Trance Phenomena. Not all dang-ki make equally careful preparations for their performances. Some come strolling into the temple and set about their preparations in a most haphazard manner; most, however, are extremely anxious and painstaking. The intention may be to impress onlookers, while the nervousness may be accounted for by a form of stage fright. The dang-ki may go round the temple, making sure that everything is in order. He ensures that the lamps have been filled with oil, that the incense sticks are in place, and that bands of yellow cloth protecting the assistants from evil influences are securely fastened round their wrists and waists. He often gives the impression that his own welfare and that of all those present depends upon a meticulous attention to detail.

The dang-ki is supposed to vomit all the food in his stomach before entering a trance. Sometimes he leaves the temple to do so, sometimes he vomits on the floor after sitting down in his chair, so that the assistants have to catch the mess in a paper or wipe it up. In many cases, there is no sign that the dang-ki has been sick at all, and when it does occur it is more in the nature of retching than actual vomiting. On the other hand, there would appear to be some sincerity in this practice, since on more than one occasion a dang-ki was seen vomiting secretly in a secluded corner behind the temple where he would not normally expect to be observed.

Before a dang-ki becomes possessed, his body is supposed to become very cold. Where it has been possible to test this, there were, in fact, a few cases in which the body was almost icy to the touch. By the time the dang-ki has completed his preparations and is sitting in his chair, ready for the trance, it is probable that the drums and gongs have started beating. No description can do justice to the effect when these instruments are efficiently operated in a confined space. Experience has proved that one becomes highly sensitive to it when exposed frequently and for prolonged periods. The effect on the dang-ki must be considerable because the drummers are often standing within a couple of feet of him while he is sitting with his head bowed in meditation. This is added to the menacing background of the invocation chanted by other assistants. Further
physical effects may be derived from the smoke of incense sticks: by the time the performance is due to begin, the whole interior of the temple is usually thick with smoke. The dang-ki may also hold a spray of incense sticks under his face, while in some cases an assistant waves another bunch near him.

The first overt sign that the dang-ki is being abnormaly affected is that he stretches and yawns several times. After this, there is a minute or two before the next further signs. On the other hand, a young dang-ki will take longer than an older man. There is considerable variation in the time from the first indication of physical contortion to the moment when the infraction begins. Abnormal physical effects are more easily differentiated from that of a young one. Younger dang-ki are almost invariably violent in their movements, while the older ones exhibit relatively quiescent during the whole of the trance. This bears no relation to the length of time that a man has been practising as a dang-ki. Younger dang-ki are almost invariably violent in their movements, while the older ones remain relatively quiescent during the whole of the trance. This bears no relation to the length of time that a man has been practising as a dang-ki.

First, there is a gentle quivering of the limbs, which rapidly becomes stronger. Soon, the dang-ki's whole body sways and his head begins to swing round in circles. This may go on for two or more minutes, becoming faster and faster all the time. The dang-ki's hair, which is usually left very long, flies in all directions, and his head appears to nod at impossible angles as he flings his head back and forth. As the drums rise to a crescendo, he staggers to his feet to have the stomacher tied across his front. He is now behaving like an intoxicated man trying to play a theatrical part. Those around him pander to every whim. He slobbers at the mouth and rolls his head, peering about him with half-closed eyes. He prances around on his toes, staggering from side to side and muttering strange sounds. He commands and abuses his assistants in a petulant voice. He postures, bows and grimaces, demanding this or that piece of equipment. For the time being, he personifies the 'Third Prince' or whatever other shen he is thought to possess him, and he dramatically portrays the signs and characteristics that are expected of him. It is usually at this stage, while the dang-ki is still numbed and befuddled by his physical contortions, that the infraction of injury takes place. It is now that he cuts his tongue with his sword, or on festival occasions sticks spikes through his cheeks, hits himself with a prick ball, or climbs a sword ladder.

The dang-ki does, in fact, inflict injury upon himself, although it is rarely as severe as his supporters maintain. The most frequent examples are to be found in cutting of the tongue with swords or broken birds. It is maintained by some devotees that there are dang-ki who can cut off the tips of their tongues, use them to smear charm papers with blood, and return the severed portion to its former place in the
mouth, where it heals immediately. While nothing remotely approaching such a case was observed, there can be no doubt that a dang-ki's tongue does actually bleed, sometimes profusely. It is unlikely that any red colouring matter is concealed in the mouth. On several occasions, the examination of a dang-ki's tongue after his performance revealed a few superficial marks across the surface. Too frequent repetition, however, can reduce the tongue to a permanently raw condition. The tongue of an old dang-ki, now retired from active practice, has remained an unpleasant mass of lesions.

In cases where the dang-ki extinguishes a bunch of burning incense sticks partially damp the burning ends in a cup of water before putting them in his mouth. Even when he does not do this, he often picks off the brighter embers with his fingers first. He then licks around the tops of the sticks before putting the remnants of the now faintly glowing embers inside his mouth. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that some of the fire comes in contact with his tongue, as can be seen from the steam that sometimes comes out between his lips.

Further descriptions of self-mortification are to be found in discussions of temple and processional equipment above, and in the chapter on festivals. The possibility of drug-taking to aid in these feats should be considered. There is a notorious tradition of opium-smoking among professional religious practitioners, but this in itself can have little bearing upon self-mortification. It is reported that certain drugs can be taken in order to dull the physical senses and heighten the imagination. Before their performances many dang-ki have been seen to chew some sort of root or sip from a cup, but it has been impossible to ascertain whether these contain stimulating substances. The possibility must be borne in mind, but on the whole it is not very important because so little a dang-ki does along these lines demands an extraordinary explanation.

After the feats of self-mortification, the ceremony is largely concerned with personal consultations. These involve the presentation by worshippers of charm papers and amulets, or the stamping of clothing and household ornaments with blood marks. Or the consultations may include lengthy verbal deliberations. The Chinese theory of 'speaking with tongues' is that it is greatly to a dang-ki's credit to speak unintelligibly, in a manner which requires interpretation. This is not necessary, however, even if the sound he is depicting is a northern Chinese who lived many centuries ago. In practice, most dang-ki speak so that no one else can understand them except their immediate colleagues. Often, they mutter petulantly and at great length in a shrill, artificial voice. This is supposed to be 'shen language', an approximation to old Chinese. Some dang-ki do, in fact, speak something like Mandarin. On the other hand, a few speak in the ordinary colloquial Hokkien or Teochiu of everyday use without raising serious doubts as to their authenticity.

The manner in which the performance comes to an end is roughly
the same for all dang-ki. When there are no further consultations to be held and no more business to be transacted, the dang-ki gives a signal that the shen is going to 'return'. He makes some final gesticulations, does a leap into the air, and is caught in the arms of an assistant. He is lowered into the dragon chair in an apparently unconscious state from which he is revived by having charm water splashed in his face. After a minute or two he recovers consciousness, and although appearing rather dazed and shaken at first, more conversing with his friends or going about his ordinary business matter-of-factly. He will never admit that he has more than a few vague memories of what has happened to him just before trance.

CULT ORGANISATION

' Cult' is used here to mean something more than a type of religious belief. It implies the concrete and institutionalised behaviour by which that belief finds social expression. There must be a number of regular participants who hold recognisable rites at a fixed place on more than one occasion. A spirit-medium cult postulates the existence of spiritual forces which can enter a human medium and motivate him to behave other than that which he expresses in his normal personality. The rites of the cult, therefore, are aimed predominantly at producing such a state of mind in the medium. The cult is concerned with the spiritual forces that are thereby revealed to worshippers.

Sometimes a cult may have only a very brief existence. It may spring up overnight in connection with someone who claims to have seen a vision or to have been possessed by a shen. For a few days, or for a few weeks, there is great activity in the neighbourhood as persons come to pray their respects to the new dang-ki, while his friends work hard to establish the cult on a sound footing. But then something will happen which brings the episode to an end, and the dang-ki reverts to his normal occupation without anyone outside a relatively small circle having heard of the new cult. Even though its existence may have been fleeting, it still remains an example of Chinese spirit mediumship in Singapore, a case in point of the small beginnings from which many famous cults have sprung.

Many earnest seekers after occult wisdom, even in a place like Singapore, practise divination either alone or privately with a few friends. Their protestations that they never intend to perform publicly are probably quite sincere. Although they derive some of their methods from the same occult tradition as that from which spirit-medium cults spring, we shall have to make the proviso that for our present purposes a true spirit-medium cult holds its performances publicly and anyone wishing, in good faith, to avail himself of the services of the dang-ki is permitted to do so.

But a further difficulty arises from the fact that Chinese occultism is not divided into clearly recognised and mutually exclusive compartments. Priests, wise men, fortune tellers, geomancers and physicians all have their particular methods of divination, but it is not usual for a person to have more than one method. Furthermore, a true spirit-medium cult holds its performances publicly and anyone wishing, in good faith, to avail himself of the services of the dang-ki is permitted to do so.
not always as clearly distinguishable from dang-ki as might be imagined. Many of them give public and professional performances similar to those of a possessed dang-ki. Often they are supposed to be inspired by unworldly powers while performing so that the distinction between inspiration and possession becomes somewhat vague. The fact should be stressed, therefore, that in a spirit-medium cult the dominant interest stems from the possession of the dang-ki by a specific shen, and that part of the ritual consists of the shen being called down and moving the dang-ki's body.

Enumeration and Classification of Cults. It is not easy, unfortunately, to assess the number of spirit-medium cults among a predominantly urban population of nearly a million. The number of Chinese temples that can be considered public places of worship runs to several hundred, and of these a hign proportion show signs of subscribing to the tradition of occultism as that to which spirit mediumship belongs. Nevertheless, the number in which a dang-ki can now actually be found is relatively small. On the basis of guesswork, supported by such experience as is relevant, it seems that the number of spirit-medium cults, as defined here, must be located somewhere around 150 for the whole of Singapore. At least half of these are found in those parts of the suburban belt where there are the highest concentrations of Chinese, particularly in the sections where the Chinese have been longest resident. In the overcrowded heart of the city, there are a few actual spirit-medium cults found in all parts of the island, but it does not follow that one can be found in every Chinese village. About half the cults have a dang-ki permanently attached, but only in a few cases can be considered a full-time professional. The other cults have an arrangement whereby the services of a dang-ki can be obtained when required, sometimes only at the annual festival. Not all of them, of course, are of equal influence. A few have been established for many years and can command followings running into thousands, but most are the outcome of far more local or temporary arrangements.

The cults fall into several relatively distinct doctrinal and functional types. The majority, as we have seen, follow a tradition which is most aptly described as ‘Shenism’ but which draws heavily upon the imagery and ideas of Taoism. On the fringe of this category are cults which lean more heavily upon Buddhism, although retaining the elements of other traditions as well. In Malaya, there is a third type of cult which merges into this category in which the dang-ki is genuinely a Malay, Siamese or Javanese, but his clientele is drawn almost entirely from Chinese among whom he has a great reputation.

These various types of cult operate in much the same manner: the
Dang-ki goes into a trance and gives medicine, and verbal advice, to the supplicants. Theoretically, there is no specialisation in the subjects that the dang-ki deals with, although in practice many cults tend to acquire an enhanced reputation in one or more directions. There is, however, another type of cult which operates similarly, but which is avowedly specialist in its functions—the female dang-ki who specializes in raising the souls of the dead for the purpose of communication with surviving relatives.

Lastly, there are cults which do not base their operations on the verbal pronouncements of a possessed dang-ki, but receive the messages of the shen by other means. The most popular method for this is automatic writing, in which two persons hold a forked writing-stick which traces messages on a sand board.

**Ritual Office Holders.** The dang-ki is always the central figure in a spirit-medium cult's performances, but his success depends to a considerable extent upon the retention of the services of a number of persons who are familiar with the rites that are an essential part of the ceremonies. Next in importance to the dang-ki is the interpreter who always stands at the dang-ki's elbow and translates the murmurings that are supposed to come from the shen into a dialect intelligible to the worshippers. He also acts as the scribe who writes down medical prescriptions and other instructions. It is claimed that it takes many years for a good interpreter to become competent, and that he must also be familiar with the ways of the dang-ki with whom he works.

In addition to the interpreter, two or three further assistants stand by; they are responsible for providing the equipment that the dang-ki requires, controlling worshippers, chanting invocations, and fulfilling other such duties as may be demanded. A number of youths, ranging in age from about eight to sixteen, also hang around the spirit-medium cults. To these are assigned such duties as the beating of drums and gongs, and the carrying of flags and other equipment in processions.

There is no fixed system of succession to office within this hierarchy. The dang-ki's role is the most important, but it is improbable that any of his assistants will become a dang-ki unless, as sometimes happens, one of them finds that he has gifts in that direction. Among the assistants, the interpreter holds the most important position. It is possible that a replacement for him could be found from among the more junior assistants, but even this is not necessarily the case. A cult is usually established on the basis of having qualified persons who can fill the chief offices. It continues for so long as they are willing to perform and cease to do so for any reason at all. The question of promotion or succession to office hardly arises.

**Promotion of Spirit-Medium Cults.** It will be apparent, however, that it is not only the ritual aspect of a spirit-medium cult that requires organisation. Many practical and economic arrangements also require
attention. These can include such matters as the care and upkeep of
the temple, the collection of subscriptions and donations, the hiring of
actors, the control of hawkers, and dealing with the police and other
government departments in order to secure licences. Sometimes a
dang-ki will concern himself with all these matters, but most often
they are left in the hands of other persons. It is in this connection that
the lay promoters of religious ceremonies play such a prominent part
in Chinese religious institutions.

In nearly all spirit-medium cults, and certainly in most of the
successful ones, a high degree of practical authority is vested in
individuals other than the dang-ki. A cult can, and usually does,
develop from small beginnings in which the promoters required very
little capital. Since the temple can be a room in an ordinary dwelling
house, no additional rent need be paid. A household altar is probably
there already with images, incense holders and lamps. If there are no
images, these can be dispensed with temporarily and cheap printed
pictures of the shen made to do instead. Ten or twenty dollars will
suffice to have a few inscriptions written on red paper, to buy a sword,
a drum and a flag or two, and to have a minimum of robes made for the
dang-ki. These and a few touches of red paint on doorways and furniture
are enough to give the right impression. Thereafter, the promoters
may depend upon potential worshippers for the provision of more
elaborate equipment and the promotion of Temple activities and attend performance of any of necessity. The
promoters promise vaguely that they are acting for the good of the
neighborhood, with no intention of making any profit. Nevertheless,
those who come to consult the shen are allowed to make their contrib-
tutions towards expenses. Often or later a cure which appears
miraculous to be achieved, and the fame of the cult spreads
farther afield. Grateful worshippers then donate articles of temple
equipment and may make large offerings towards expenses in the hope
of gaining personal benefit.

If the dang-ki and the cult promoters have the acumen to keep their
organisation to this relatively simple basis of private enterprise, they
stand a chance of making a comfortable profit over a prolonged period.
They can stick to their contention that they are really performing a
charitable work, and no one will be in a position to substantiate accusa-
tions that they are fleecing a large amount of money from gullible people.
The weakness as well as the strength of most cults lies in the fact that they do not claim to be practising any new religion. In
most cases, they maintain that they are followers of the Buddhist
tradition which is common to all Chinese and that they are bringing the
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truths to the masses in a more potent form than can be done in a
straightforward temple. This places them in a position where it
is impossible to ignore demands that they should conduct themselves
after the accepted manner of temple organisation. If they do not
manage to fob off their accusers by pointing out that the
business of the cult is concerned, they are forced to make some sort of a con-
cession to popular demands, and lay the affairs of the cult more open
to public control, after the style of approved temple organisation.
Nevertheless, the cult rarely loses the characteristics of private enter-
prise. If the cult is in the hands of properly elected presidents, vice-presidents,
secretaries, treasurers and committee members, it is usual to find that
the real driving force lies in an individual who is the leader of the clique
which enjoys the greatest part by the successful prosecution of the cult's
affairs. He may concern himself with the ritual aspect of the cult's activities, but so often as not his attention is
more engaged upon the practical duties of keeping the cult's organisation
running smoothly. Where a dispo is not himself the chief promoter,
he and his assistants must come to a satisfactory understanding concern-
ing remuneration for services. The organisation of authority has
always been an important factor in the development of the cult's
affairs and quests which led to the disruption of a cult.
There is no established system by which promoters and ritual assist-
ants work together with the dang-ki, or by which they allocate duties
among themselves. The basic principles of organisation are, however,
relatively clear. It is accepted, although never explicitly expressed,
that all the participants are working for some sort of private gain, even
though they may not always be thinking in terms of immediate financial
rewards. The organisation of a spirit-medium cult depends, therefore, not on any religious prototype designed for the purpose, but on a type
of social organisation directed towards quite different ends. The
affairs of a spirit-medium cult may be a group of kindred who
exploit the talents of one of their number. Or in some cases they may
be the members of a secret society which uses this means of extending
its influence in a neighbourhood. In either of these instances, a rela-
tively clearly defined pattern of authority, rights and obligations is
already available and is used in the organisation of the cult's activities.
In many other cases, however, the 'club' atmosphere predominates in a
spirit-medium cult. The dang-ki, promoters and assistants are
not associated on a basis of kinship or any comparable type of bond.
To them, their temple is a desirable place for spending spare time and
indulging in comradeship and congenial activity. It also provides the
opportunity for making valuable contacts, and increasing prestige and,
possibly, income. In these cases, the organisation of the cult depends
upon the leading members asserting their personalities, abilities and
prestige in order to induce all the participants to be sufficiently trustful
and active.
and co-operative to ensure the continuation of the cult as a going concern.

One of the more difficult problems of organisation concerns the manner in which the dang-ki, as the key performer, will be remunerated. A dang-ki with no temple of his own may hire himself out for an agreed fee. This may range from twenty to fifty dollars if he is to appear at a festival, but very much less on other occasions. Most dang-ki, however, have a personal interest in the affairs of a temple and are more inclined to work on a profit-sharing basis. The income that they share with the promoters may be derived chiefly from what worshippers contribute for the favour of a consultation with the shen. Ideally, this sum should be left entirely to the worshipper’s discretion. In the more reputable cults, the convention is strictly observed that the worshipper wraps as much or as little as he likes in the red packet that is dropped into the offering bowl. But in some cults the promoters stipulate the sum that has to be paid before the consultation is allowed. Whereas the average red packet appears to contain less than a dollar, a worshipper may be asked for ten dollars or more.

The red packets, however, are only one of the sources of a cult’s revenue. Omitting any question of contributions towards the annual festival, and of the presents of temple equipment that devotees may give, there are fixed fees, ranging up to about a dollar, which are charged for services which the dang-ki performs in addition to consultations. These may consist in stamping clothing and household ornaments with his blood or providing charm papers to ward off evil spirits. Incense, charm papers, candles, paper money and oil are also sold to worshippers at the temple. Although these can be bought in shops outside at about the same price, the temple makes a small retailer’s profit on each article.

In some cases, the dang-ki may share in any or all of these sources of income, depending upon his personal interest in the cult’s business affairs. The percentage which he takes varies from case to case, but the ratio of seventy per cent to the dang-ki and thirty per cent to the promoters, based upon a dollar in the red packet, seems often to be an acceptable arrangement. The income that remains after the incurrence of the customary expenses of a cult is never made known publicly, except perhaps in accounting for contributions given towards the annual festival when the promoters almost invariably show that the contributions have been largely expended.

Although a dang-ki may be of either sex, the promoters and assistants are almost always male. If there are female assistants in the temple, they are generally the relatives of male promoters. The only branch of spirit mediumship in which women appear to have an undisputed control is that which specialises in the raising of souls.

Many of the cults are run on a spare-time basis, the promoters and dang-ki doing a full-time job and devoting only evenings and weekends to the business of the cult. The occupations followed cover a relatively wide range. Officials of the cult may be clerks, junior government
servants, including even police detectives, taxi-drivers, trishaw peddlers, or labourers. It is not so usual to find shopkeepers or other traders involved in the promotion of spirit-mediumship. If the affairs of spirit-medium cults are not always considered a full-time preoccupation, many promoters and assistants still seem to follow no recognized business or profession whatsoever. Sometimes, they own temples or are temple-keepers living on the proceeds from the cult. As also are those they are men and youths with no fixed occupation who hang around coffee shops and markets in order to pick up small commissions and odd jobs. The number of these has been increased by the Japanese occupation, when many youths who should have been in school or businesses learnt to live by their wits. In many ways, this type of person seems to encourage the perpetuation of spirit-medium cults as an adequate and not too arduous means of making a living.

The Worshippers. Both the promoters of spirit-medium cults and the dang-ki who perform are almost invariably Hokkiens and Teochius. The Hakkas have a few cults of their own, but the Hokkiens and Cantonese hardly any, except among those women who specialize in the raising of souls. But any suggestion that spirit-mediumship is a predominantly Hokkien and Teochiu characteristic must be rejected when the composition of the devotees and worshippers is examined. In contrast to the promoters and temple assistants, who are mostly men, the great majority of the worshippers are women, as indeed are the majority of all temple worshippers among the Chinese in Singapore. They are not restricted, however, to any special dialect groups. In spite of the attachment of Cantonese women to the performance of occasional rites of their own, it is not unusual to find considerable numbers of them resorting to spirit-medium temples. Hokkien and Teochiu women dominate the scene in most temples, partly because there are more of them than the women of other dialect groups, and partly because the ceremonies are promoted by persons who are familiar with their customs. But they are by no means the only worshippers there.

The most ardent supporters of spirit-medium cults are found among the older type of Straits-born Chinese women of the poorer class. In general, these women are simple, conservative and extremely suspicious of strangers. Penang and Malacca, where there are many persons of this type, are also places where spirit-mediumship flourishes. Other worshippers are drawn chiefly from among the wives of junior clerks and labourers, and from among domestic servants, many of whom are Cantonese. It is not unusual to find the women of well-to-do families consulting a dang-ki and women, or even men with a reasonably good English education sometimes attend the ceremonies of spirit-medium cults. On the other hand, women of Chinese are rarely囱

1 'Trishaw pedaller' is the local term for what is known elsewhere in the Far East as "pedicab operator."
concerned in the affairs of cults, and it is even more exceptional to find anyone with a modern Chinese education either as promoter or as worshipper.

Cult Affiliations and Rivalries. Finally, a word must be said concerning the inter-cult affiliations and rivalries that are found in Singapore. In spite of the similarities in the rites of different spirit-medium cults, there is no constant form of inter-cult organisation which can be taken to imply that a large number of cults are subject to a single authority.

There is no priestly hierarchy in spirit mediumship, only such arrangements as the promoters of different cults may make among themselves. Similarities are due, rather, to the common tradition derived from the homeland upon which all cults are based, and to the fact that in many cases cults intentionally imitate each other. At the festival of an old-established cult, the promoters and dang-ki of a new cult may often be seen on the fringe of the crowd observing the rites. In the higher grades of Chinese occultism, there are reputed to be associations of persons with occult powers, in which the members transmit a fund of esoteric knowledge from one to another, and in which grades of competence are recognised, but it seems improbable that the promoters of spirit mediumship in Singapore, who are almost entirely concerned with giving the public what they expect, have much to do with guilds such as these.

Most cults are individualistic and parochial affairs, in which the dang-ki and promoters have picked up their knowledge by a variety of means before starting cults of their own. Generally the knowledge has been gained simply through long association, often since babyhood, with other cults.

It is usual to find enmity and jealousy between cults, involving both the dang-ki and the promoters. They accuse each other of all sorts of malpractice, particularly extortion of money from devotees. The dissension hardly ever involves sectarian squabbles over questions of dogma. Accusations are kept at a straightforward human level, based on personal antagonism, and do not conflict with the Chinese concept of religious tolerance.

On the other hand, many cults and promoters maintain amicable relations with each other. The basis of this relationship is the rendering of reciprocal services. This often occurs at the annual festival when a cult calls upon the promoters of friendly cults elsewhere to provide additional equipment and dang-ki, and to bring the festival to the notice of their supporters. In due course such services will be repaid in a similar manner.

In Singapore, the most widespread affiliation of this nature exists among a number of spirit-medium cults of the rather less reputable type. This is not meant to imply that they are necessarily connected with illegal activities, but rather that they are of the sort which gain their popularity by arranging spectacular displays at which charm papers and other such talismans are distributed on a wide scale. No great
effort is made to encourage painstaking verbal consultations with the shen. The festivals of these cults are remarkable for the presence of a large number of young and not very experienced dang-ki. Sometimes, there may be as many as twenty of them, spiking their cheeks, cutting their tongues, climbing sword-ladders, and in general performing the more arduous physical feats.

About half a dozen middle-aged Singapore Chinese are chiefly concerned with the promotion of these festivals. Time and again the same ones will make appearances at festivals in different parts of the island, giving the benefit of their specialised knowledge. Between them these men maintain friendly relations with about twenty to thirty young dang-ki who are attached to about a dozen spirit-medium cults.

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cults do not hesitate in calling up, with apparent success, some of the mightiest figures in the Chinese pantheon.

It would be pointless to try to give a complete list of shen associated with spirit mediumship because some of them are local and of very limited significance. In some cases, they are the local deities of the villages or sub-prefectures in China from which the emigrants came; in others, they are the special shen summoned by a guild or lineage. In a few cases, they are Straits-born Chinese who died in Malaya many years ago. One of the later delivers his messages through automatic writing in English. But wherever their origin, their influence is known to a small circle that has not extended a place to the Chinese pantheon.

The Legend of the 'Great Saint'. On the other hand, several very well-known figures in Chinese mythology and legend make themselves known to worshippers in Singapore through the agency of spirit-medium cults. The most outstanding case is the 'Great Saint Equal with Heaven' (Ch'i-t'ien Ta-sheng), known erroneously, but perhaps excusably, as 'The Monkey God' to many Europeans. In nearly half the spirit-medium cults of Singapore, he is given a revered place even though it may be other shen who possess the cult's dang-ki. So popular is this figure that it is worth giving something of his background as an example of the way in which old legends have been retained and adapted by the overseas Chinese.

The 'Great Saint Equal with Heaven' is a character popularized for western readers in several translations and abridged versions, but particularly by Arthur Waley's English translation of the Chinese novel A Record of the Journey to the West.

The authoritative opinion of Arthur Waley, and of Dr. Hsi Shih who has contributed an introduction to the translation, is that A Record of the Journey to the West was written by Wu Ch'eng-en who lived between 1505 and 1580 AD. The full literary version of A Record of the Journey to the West was written by Wu Ch'eng-en who lived between 1505 and 1580 AD. The full literary version is of great length, but the story, briefly, is that of a monkey, born from a stone egg, who so excelled in prowess that he became king of all the monkeys. Yet not content with this, he sought to become immortal. He left his kingdom, and after much wandering served under a Patriarch who taught him many magic arts. Before returning to his kingdom, he achieved immortality, but the mischievous manner in which he used his magic powers soon brought him to the notice of the Jade Emperor, the head of the Taoist pantheon. So that he could keep him under closer supervision, the Jade Emperor invited him to Heaven and gave him the post of supervisor of the Imperial Stables. Not content with this lowly post, the Monkey took upon himself the title of 'Great Saint equal with Heaven'. After an expedition had been sent out, unsuccessfu

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1 Waley among others uses the translation 'Great Sage' rather than the 'Great Saint' but the latter is preferred here largely because of its religious implications.
special duties or salary’. But once again the Monkey misbehaved himself by eating the Peaches of Immortality which he was meant to be in charge of. He also drank the wine of Heaven which had been prepared for a great banquet and stole the elixir of long life. These mischievous acts made it impossible for him to be forgiven. After a great battle, he was subdued and captured, but the inhabitants of Heaven found that they were incapable of inflicting physical punishment upon him. The Monkey managed to break loose again and was only prevented from causing further harm when Buddha was called in from the Western Heaven. Mind you, wisdom Buddha made a bargain with him. He was to take the monkey to the edge of the Mountain of the Five Elements, and if he could jump off the palm of Buddha's hand, he would give him the Emperor's throne. Thinking this would be easy, the Monkey tried, but to his surprise he found he could only jump as far as Buddha's little finger. Then Buddha shut him up and sealed him down under the Mountain of the Five Elements.

The Monkey remained imprisoned under the mountain until one day Buddha decided that the people of China, being greedy, lustful, murderous and quarrelsome, deserved to be punished. He deputed Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, to find such a person. She had not forgotten the Monkey imprisoned under the mountain, and so prepared to release him if he would undertake to serve the people of China. She found him and did as she had promised. He was only released from his prison if he was tied up to a trunk of tree. After a journey to the West, the Monkey returned and declared that the people of China were fit for being punished. Buddha then released him and gave him a new body. He was only prevented from causing further harm by a steel chain which was fastened round his neck and tightened whenever he spoke. Further on in the journey, the monkey and the Monkey collected three more companions, a white horse, an unsuccessful monk, and a strange creature, half-pig, half-man.

The greater part of the story is then devoted to the journey to the West, which took fourteen years. On the way the pilgrims encountered many dangers, but the Monkey always remained true to his master, and although his wild and impetuous nature had often to be curbed, he managed to use his supernatural powers most effectively to save himself and his companions from all difficulties. By the time they reached Buddha's court, the Monkey had advanced a long way spiritually. Buddha presented him with a new body and a new title, and the pilgrims were given the scriptures to carry back to China. The Monkey at last became a Buddha with the title of the ‘Buddha Victorious in Strife’.

There they delivered the scriptures, and the monkey and his companions were promoted. The Monkey at last became a Buddha with the title of the ‘Buddha Victorious in Strife’.

There they delivered the scriptures, and the monkey and his companions were promoted. The Monkey at last became a Buddha with the title of the ‘Buddha Victorious in Strife’.
This story deserves an exalted place in the world's allegorical literature, but in spite of its fame A Record of the Journey to the West could never be remotely considered as Chinese classical literature. Wu Ch'eng-en lived in an age of partial literary reaction. The sixteenth century saw a period of strong classical revival, but at the same time there was a growing vogue for 'vulgar' literature based on folk songs, folk tales, and popular stories of ghosts, judges and heroes. Many of these had been known for centuries, but when at last they were written down and published they became best-sellers among all persons who could read. A Record of the Journey to the West based on a collection of such tales had much in common with the new popular genre. The affinity of this historical base can be found in a journey made to India in the seventh century A.D. by a monk named Hsuan Tsang for the purpose of collecting Buddhist scriptures. By the tenth century many legends concerning the journey were current, as a man of letters with a reputation to guard, Wu Ch'eng-en had to publish his work anonymously. The inhabitants of his birthplace appear to have been aware of his authorship, but his anonymity was so well guarded that for three centuries it was believed that the story had been written by a Taoist master of the early thirteenth century who left a record of his travels in central Asia under a similar title.

A Record of the Journey to the West has been compared, quite justifiably, with Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Generation after generation of Chinese have been told the story. But the comparison with Pilgrim's Progress hardly does justice to the popularity of the book as light reading and entertainment. Wherever Chinese is read or spoken, it has been adapted and re-staged in various forms. In the abridged printed versions much of the text, particularly the dialogue, has been drastically curtailed. There are illustrated editions for the benefit of illiterate persons, and the narrative has always been a stand-by for storytellers, both professionally and in the family circle. There is a stage play which probably had its origins centuries before Wu Ch'eng-en's writing of the story, and which includes incidents which can only be found in the oral and theatrical versions. In recent years cinematograph films have been made of the story.

The Monkey has many names and titles, some of which were bestowed on him as honours and some of which he took upon himself in his more arrogant moments. Although he holds the legitimate title of the 'Buddha Victorious in Strife', the one by which he is universally known in Singapore is Ch'i-T'ien Ta-Sheng, or Ta-Sheng for short. This was one of the titles that he took in a rather dishonourable manner, but since it is the one best known in Singapore we shall use the approximate translation of the 'Great Saint'.

The 'Third Prince', Kuan Yin and Kuan Ti.

1 Wu Ch'eng-en, 1943. See also Giles, 1927; Hussey, 1931; Reischauer, 1937; Reischauer, 1950; and Weiner, 1956, pp. 208 ff.
‘Third Prince’. He, too, is a celebrated hero in stories and on the stage, particularly the latter. His surname is Li, and his personal name, by which he is frequently mentioned, is No-cha (or Lo-cha). He was the third son of a general who fought for the Chou Dynasty in the eleventh century BC and subsequently became the Prime Minister of Heaven. According to the Taoist version, he was a mighty figure whose birth was miraculous and who developed magical powers and great strength at an early age. He had many quarrels with his father and with the Dragon King’s family. In order to save his family from disgrace, he committed suicide. In the popular Buddhist version, he is represented as an assistant to Kuan Yin in caring for the inhabitants of hell. He is considered to be a prankish and mischievous youth with miraculous powers. In his hands, he carries a golden ring and a spear. His hair is done up in a top-knot.

The chief female personality of spirit mediumship is Kuan Yin, who, of course, holds a most exalted place in orthodox Chinese Buddhism. In the spirit-medium cults which pay some regard to Buddhist doctrine she appears as a Bodhisattva with great qualities, but in other cults, where she is depressed more to the status of a shen, she is known as the ‘Third Lady’ or the ‘Third Aunt’. In these capacities, she is connected especially with the raising of souls of dead relatives. She can also be identified with important deities such as the Jade Emperor, Yu-huang, and the Sovereign on High, Shang Ti, as well as with Kuan Ti, the patron of war, wealth and literature. She is likewise the hero of a very well-known legend whose exploits are celebrated chiefly in The Story of the Three Kingdoms. He is reputed to have been born in A.D. 162. At first he was a bean-curd seller, but as a youth he devoted himself to study. He had to flee from his home in Shensi after he had broken out from a room in which he had been shut up as a punishment by his parents and had killed a magistrate who wished to make the daughter of an aged couple his concubine by force. He made good his escape in a remarkable manner, and eventually met two friends with whom he became a sworn brother. He took part in a number of military campaigns and intrigues in which his behaviour was miraculous but hardly heroic. He kept faithful to his oath of brotherhood, however, and was eventually captured and put to death in a rebellion in A.D. 220.

Other Shen. These four shen are between them responsible for more than half the cases of possession of dang-ki in spirit-medium cults. It will be noted that none of them are among the highest ranking in the pantheon. Sakyamuni Buddha is never known to speak through a dang-ki, nor is the Jade Emperor (Yu-huang Shang Ti), Heaven (T’ien) or the Sovereign on High (Shang Ti). The great sages such as Confucius and Lao-tzu are also never called upon.

1 See Waley, 1936.
When we descend further down the scale the choice of spirit-medium also appears to be more arbitrary. A celebrated shen among the Malayan Chinese is Ti-poh-kong (H.), whose functions are similar to those of the 'Earth Shen', with particular reference to the guardianship of an area where pioneers have settled. The 'White Tiger' is also a shen, though in animal form, with fearsome characteristics if not placated. It is only rarely, however, that they are reported to have possessed a dang-ki. In the case of Ti-poh-kong, the explanation sometimes given is that he is an old man who does not like to cut his tongue and engage in energetic feats. On the other hand, there are several shen with a peculiar popularity among the overseas Chinese. The Chiu Huang, or 'Nine Divine Brothers', occasionally have a dang-ki, as also does the Empress of Heaven (T'ien Hou), or 'Mah Chew' as the Hokkiens call her, who is the patroness of fishermen and sailors. Although the Jade Emperor does not himself speak through dang-ki, he is assisted by several 'Lord of Black Heaven' (Hsuan-t'ien Shang Ti), and the 'Lord who Protects Life' (Pao-sheng Ta-ti), both of whom have a certain following as spirit-medium shen.

Descending further in the pantheon, we come to tutelary shen such as the 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches' and the 'Earth Shen'. Sometimes, the shen who hold these local offices are already associated with spirit mediumship. In such cases, the promoters of their cult will often endeavour to maintain the services of a dang-ki.

There are also a relatively large number of minor shen, mostly of Hokkien and Teochiu origin, whom the emigrants have brought with them from their places of origin. A few of these, however, are well known in Singapore, largely because of their association with spirit mediumship. In all, therefore, about a dozen Chinese shen have a very close connection with spirit mediumship, and about a dozen more whose connection is rather more tenuous. This by no means exhausts the number who may make their appearances in a spirit-medium cult, but for practical purposes we can limit ourselves to this list.

In addition, there are the shen of the Sino-Malay cults. Strictly speaking, they should not be known as shen, although theologically that is what they become. They are, in fact, revered holy men of Malay, Arab or Hindu origin. There are many framed statues throughout Malaya where Chinese are prepared to worship quite indiscriminately. Chinese worshippers who have found a shrine efficacious have often started a spirit-medium cult at which the Malay-speaking saint makes an appearance. The Straits-born Chinese often refer to these saints by the honorific Malay title of Dato, as indeed they do to their own shen when speaking the Malay language. The worshipers know little about any of the shen except those that are exceptionally renowned on the stage or in legends. It is a laborious and unrewarding process to try to secure coherent details concerning many of the minor shen's lives on earth. The results also tend to be

1 For further details see Werner, op. cit., p. 25.
artificial, because the devotee is often far more concerned with the present efficacy of the sham than with the stories of the past. For that matter, there is very little discernible difference in the behaviour of dang-ki when possessed by minor shen, for the qualities of the dang-ki often tend to over-shadow those of the shen who is possessing him. Only in the cases of the 'Great Saint', the 'Third Prince', Kuan Yin and Kuan Ti, the four most popular shen of spirit mediumship in Singapore, are the appropriate legends well known. When possessing dang-ki, they have, as might be expected, clearly defined personalities, and their characteristics are highly dramatised.
THE CULT OF THE 'GREAT SAINT'

The cult which has been selected for description in the present
detail is one which is composed largely of Straits-born Hokkiens, many
of whom, including the chief dang-ki and the chief promoter, are
English-speaking. It can hardly be claimed that this cult is typical of
all spirit-medium cults, but then no single cult in Singapore could
claim to be so. The main point which needs to be emphasized is that
many of the more important characteristics of spirit mediumship in
Singapore, which are deficiencies in this respect, an attempt at
compensation will be made in the next chapter by the presentation of
further examples of spirit-medium cults.

As a subject for intensive study
this cult has several outstanding
advantages. The ability of several of the promoters and assistants to
speak English and Malay helped to smooth out language difficulties,
particularly in view of providing a ready supply of willing interpreters.
Since many of them were workers in government offices and com-
mercial firms, there was a sufficient degree of sophistication among
them to admit the presence of a foreigner without too serious misgivings.
Moreover, they were almost ready to allow observation and flashlight
photography on all possible occasions, in contrast to many other cults,
which, while not openly objecting to incursions upon their privacy,
preferred it on the more elaborate occasions. Above all, there was an
orderliness in the cult's affairs, and a relative punctuality in its perform-
ances which permitted frequent and sustained observation in a manner
not always possible elsewhere.

It will be obvious, however, that this orderliness has been applied
in a highly ingenious manner, and makes the cult rather exceptional.
It is, in fact, a cult promoted largely for the benefit of the Straits-born
Chinese who do not want to become involved in more questionable
spirit-medium practices which are found elsewhere.

The growth of the cult can be traced from the later days of the
Japanese occupation, which ended in September, 1945. Several of its
promoters had been connected with spirit-medium temples for many
years before that. The dang-ki himself had begun to develop his powers
at about this time, when, as he describes it, he was filled with a desire
to do something to alleviate the suffering which prevailed in Singapore.
He and others gathered together to call upon the shen to
help them, and it was on such an occasion that he began
to come under the influence of
the 'Great Saint'. Even so, the cult did not begin to operate properly
until the early days of the British Military Administration which
undertook the task of rehabilitating Singapore after the war. At first,
the cult had its headquarters in a small house near the site of its present
site.
There were then eighteen promoters and two dang-hi. Nowadays, there is only one dang-hi, but since its earliest days the cult has had associated with it a second dang-hi who becomes possessed by ‘General Chao’ (Chao yuan shuai), a black-faced commander of the Heavenly Hosts of particular fame among the Hokkiens. This dang-hi is an elderly, Wake-speaking Hokkien, who had been practicing for many years. At first he was fairly active, but after two or three years he became too ill to perform regularly, and was eventually admitted to hospital in a semi-paralysed condition. He was discharged after a year later, and continues to lead a rather pathetic, invalid existence, partly on the charity of the cult. He still makes occasional appearances as a dang-hi at festivals, particularly that of ‘General Chao’.

The chief dang-hi, upon whom the existence of the cult really depends, is a small, elderly, Hokkien, who works as a clerk for a well-known firm in Singapore. He is married and has a son, but almost the whole of his life outside office hours is devoted to the practice of his powers of mediumship.

Under the British Military Administration, the cult leased a plot of land on a hillside not far from the railway station from the Hokkien Association, and built a wood and thatch temple at a cost of about $2,000. This temple is a relatively simple building, with a covered porch leading into a main hall about twenty feet square. Another door leads out of the main hall into an ante-room on the left. To the right is a storeroom in which the three ceremonial sedan chairs are kept, and beyond that there are living quarters and bathrooms.

By the time the temple was built, many of the essential furnishings had already been provided by the promoters and grateful worshippers, but in order to raise sufficient funds the number of promoters was increased from eighteen to thirty-six, and today the names of these ‘temple members’ can be found on two framed plaques hanging inside the door of the main hall. Each of these promoters contributed according to his means, but apart from that the list has little bearing upon the present temple organization. Some of these early promoters have died, and some have paid no further attention to the cult’s affairs. On the other hand, some of the more important positions are now filled by persons who do not appear on the original list. In general, however, the men who are chiefly responsible for the promotion of festivals are drawn from the thirty-six founders, even though they may not often make appearances at other times.

The real driving force behind the cult is a man who was not associated with it in its earliest days. His normal occupation is in a position of some trust in a government department. He and his wife, together with about six other regular assistants, are largely responsible for the smooth running of the day-to-day business. One of these assistants is a hospital attendant, another is an old man retired from service in a shipping
company, and there are two clerks or labourers in a well-known company of British merchants. In addition, four or five youths who live in the neighbourhood can be called upon to beat drums and gongs, and to perform other such minor duties. The resident temple-keeper is an old woman, but her duties do not amount to much more than cleaning and caretaking, since there are very few casual worshippers at the temple, and the chief promoter or one or other of his assistants is always in attendance when a ceremony is taking place. With the exception of the chief promoter, all the persons most intimately concerned with the cult's affairs live within a few hundred yards of the temple. Although the area itself is within a stone's throw of a main road running through a suburban district, none of it is built over with substantialched huts on a sparsely wooded hillside.

The cult usually meets eight times a week. One of these performances is held on Sunday mornings, when there is always the largest crowd and richest spectacle. The other performances are held at about 6 p.m. on each evening of the week, including Sundays, and consist of less spectacular versions of the Sunday morning performance. At least one festival is held every year to celebrate the 'Great Saint's' Birthday on the sixteenth of the Eighth Moon. If circumstances permit, two further festivals are held on the sixteenth of the First Moon and the seventeenth of the Second Moon, to celebrate the 'Great Saint's' subsidiary birthday and 'General Chao's' birthday respectively.

Since the failure of 'General Chao's' dang-ki, the worship of the cult has been directed almost exclusively towards the 'Great Saint'. According to the current version of the legend, for which no supporting authority can be found elsewhere, there are five Monkey Brothers who may appear when the dang-ki is invoked. Each is likely to appear for a number of years before handing over to another brother, unless for any special reason the others have to be consulted. The first Monkey Brother is the wisest and most quiescent of them all. When possessing the dang-ki, he can be identified by the manner in which he shades his eyes with his right hand while gazing into the distance. The second Monkey Brother is of fiercer temperament, and can be identified by the manner in which he scratches at his ears as a monkey would. He has a predilection also for eating fire and fruit. The third, fourth and fifth Monkey Brothers are more and more irascible, but there is no detailed knowledge concerning their characteristics since they have never yet appeared. So far it is only the second Monkey Brother who possesses the dang-ki, although the eldest brother is sometimes deferred to in difficult cases and even makes a temporary appearance. Although there is no detailed knowledge concerning the characteristics of the other brothers, it is always a speaking of women who come from the servant classes. Few men seem to come of their own accord. Most of those who have consultations with the dang-ki have been persuaded to take this course by their wives, and others who wait around the temple premises have come in the company of a wife or 82
sister. They are more prepared than the women to produce a certain suspicion, but this does not mean that they are not equally open to conviction if the results are satisfactory. Part of the dang-ki’s skill lies in persuading his consultants that satisfaction has in fact been given. 

On one occasion, a young man came to the dang-ki to obtain protection for his brother who was shortly to be tried for a smuggling offence. With a few well-chosen phrases, the dang-ki was able to persuade him that he ought to be very grateful that his brother had escaped with a fine instead of a heavy gaol sentence. By constant repetition that he alone can be efficacious whatever the trouble, the dang-ki is able to convince a number of people. It is by methods such as these that the fame of the cult is spread. A satisfied worshipper tells his friends, and when these friends are in trouble they, too, come to the temple. It is not surprising to find that many of the worshippers have relatives in the business houses to which some of the leading promoters belong. Beyond that it is difficult to ascertain what part of Singapore the worshippers come from. No records are kept of the day-to-day consultations and it is not an advisable procedure to question worshippers too closely in such matters.

The only likely evidence can be found in the register of the temple’s ‘dedicated children’ (Khoe-Kidn). These names, which appear over the names of the children, are entered in romanised characters as well as in Chinese in order to facilitate alphabetical reference. They may be those of children who have been brought to the temple and cured of some illness or they may be the children of ardent devotees who wish to have them under the protection of the shen in their early years. When a child is dedicated in this manner, he is given a red cake to eat and a medallion to wear. In the year of the shen’s anniversary, the dedicated children are ‘prayed for’. There is no stipulated limit of age up to which a child can be considered dedicated to the shen. The practice of compiling a register of ‘dedicated children’ is one which many spirit-medium cults have borrowed from the general practices of Chinese temple worship in order to spread their influence and give themselves an air of authenticity.

An examination of the register reveals that about seventy-five per cent of the ‘dedicated children’ live within a radius of half a mile from the temple. The others come from various parts of Singapore, but rarely from the far side of the city. There are a few cases which substantiate the promoters’ claim that worshippers come from extreme distances, but these are rare. The only exceptions can be found in a following of about twenty persons who come from a Hakka village eight miles away which has no temple of its own. Within that area, it is capable of drawing most of the people who wish to consult a dang-ki, but beyond that any reputation it may have depends largely upon the connections of its promoters. By one means or another, however, the cult has acquired its support.
of over a thousand devotees who are prepared to make subscriptions and attend personally at the time of the annual festival.

The Sunday Morning Ceremony. On Sunday mornings from ten o'clock onwards the promoters and worshippers begin to gather at the temple. The chief promoter is usually seated at a table under the porch where the business with worshippers is transacted. Those who wish to buy incense sticks and other paraphernalia from him may do so. These supplies are stored on shelves beside the altar in the back of the main hall. If worshippers wish for consultations with the dang-ki, they are given cardboard tickets, numbered in both Chinese and English, showing their order of precedence. Inside the main hall, a bundle of red papers is hung on the left wall. The consultation is paid for, according to the means of the worshipper, by wrapping the contribution in one of these sheets of red paper and dropping it into a brass bowl on the offering table.

Meanwhile other temple attendants are lighting oil lamps and candles and pumping at the pressure lamps which provide the chief illumination inside the dark interior. The worshippers mingle with them, placing food and fruit offerings on the table, lighting incense sticks and carrying out their private devotions in the dark. From the altar, which is shut off from the public by a few wooden barriers, only the back is seen. A large bundle of red papers is hung on the left wall, and the consultations are paid for by wrapping the contribution in one of these sheets of red paper and dropping it into a brass bowl on the offering table.

By eleven o'clock, about forty or fifty people are waiting round the temple. Nothing can happen until the dang-ki arrives. At last he comes up the hill, a bespectacled little man in a yellow frock coat. After a few words of greeting, he disappears behind the scenes and re-emerges dressed in a costume of saffron-coloured silk. Across his chest is a stomacher with an Eight Trigram design embroidered on it. A sash fastens this round his waist. His pyjama-like trousers, embellished with a floral design, are tied around his ankles. On the more important occasions he wears a tiger-skin belt, apron and gaiters. His spectacles have been removed and his bare feet are bare, but he still wears his wate-and-white shoes. Standing beside the offering table he makes up the whole of his face with red and white grease paint until it becomes unrecognisable. He then draws a collar from which hang many-coloured strips of silk. With the help of an assistant he ties an orange cloth round his head so that the loose end hangs down the back of his neck. This is held in place by an ornate wire clamp from which there are suspended two long tassels, one on each side of the head. A folded joss paper is stuck into this just in front of each ear. He is then ready to begin. It appears that this costume has been elaborated, bit by bit, during the development of the cult. Earlier pictures of the dang-ki show him in a less picturesque costume and wearing no make-up. There was also a time when the
head-dress was not put on until after he had entered a trance. But now, as an exception to the practice in most other cults, the dang-ki puts on the whole of his costume, including the stomacher, before his performance begins.

When everything is ready the dang-ki goes round to the left side of the offering table and carries out his own devotions to the shen. One of the assistants has now placed the special chair in the doorway, facing the altar. The dang-ki picks up a small hammer and starts striking a brass bowl to produce a clear ringing sound at regular intervals. So far the worshippers are paying no great attention to the proceedings, except the recent arrivals who are still pushing their way into the main hall to carry out their devotions and to place their offerings on the table. Most of them sit on the benches under the porch, chatting among themselves.

One of the assistants has now provided himself with a spray of joss papers and incense sticks. He marches to the middle standing by with drawn and gong in their hands. Having lit the incense and joss papers from a candle, he takes up a position in front of the offering table facing the altar. As he goes forward, the drums start beating rhythmically. He turns and goes out of the temple to the Eight Trigram flag hanging on the edge of the terrace. Here he genuflects again and places the joss papers and incense on the ground to burn away. He returns to the main hall and takes up a position in front of the offering table facing the altar. As he genuflects, the drums start beating rhythmically again. He turns and goes out of the temple to the Eight Trigram flag hanging on the edge of the terrace. Here he genuflects again and places the joss papers on the ground to burn away. He returns to the main hall and places the incense sticks in a holder. The dang-ki has now been given a smaller spray of joss papers and three incense sticks. Having first bowed to the altar, he goes to the doorway of the porch and hands three times in different directions. When he returns he takes a folded paper, and having lit it, burns it round and under the chair in which he is to sit. Leaving the smouldering ash under the chair he takes the spray of three incense sticks in his hand and turns to face the altar.

As he does this the assistants begin to chant the invocation in time with the beating of the drums. The dang-ki steps back and sits down in the chair, with his head lowered, his elbows resting on the arm, and the incense sticks held close under his face. He remains quite still as the drums and chanting continue. The ritual interpreter takes a large bunch of burning incense sticks and waves it slowly between the dang-ki's legs so that his whole body becomes shrouded in smoke. After a minute or so the dang-ki's muscles begin to tauten and his feet begin to shake on the bar between the chair legs. Gradually he rises in the chair, still standing on the bottom bar. The spray of incense is taken from him and the dang-ki, having first bowed to the altar, goes to the doorway of the porch and makes something avuncular with his hands behind his back. His lips quiver with a malicious expression. Then, with a little leap, he jumps forward from the chair and lands on his toes in front of the offering table. He stands there, snarling at the onlookers, with his body crouched low and shaking in every limb. The assistants get the chair out of the way quickly and the interpreter hands him the bunch of burning incense sticks. After a few minutes, with his face quite close to the altar, his countenance changes and he appears as if he were hungry. He gets carefully
at the embers and places some of them on the end of his tongue. Approving the flavor, he licks at the burning ends several times and finally strikes the whole bunch inside his mouth to extinguish the glow. "Standing upright, the dang-ki steps back a few paces but always keeps the embers between him and the ground and on to his feet. As he presents several heума on three while still suffering without showing any signs of pain. He swallows the extinguished bunch, which is thrown into the firebox outside the temple, and advances towards the offering table, where he is given a small cup of tea from which he sips. A few oranges and bananas have been placed in front of him. He picks these up and pretends to bite them while he rolls the fruit back on to the offering table. He never takes any part of the fruit into his mouth. While he has finished with them, he rolls them back on to the offering table. While all this is taking place some of the more curious worshippers have crowded into the corners of the main hall to watch the performance. Others are peeking through from the porch. But most of them are paying no attention to what is going on. They have seen this or similar performances too often before. They know what to expect, and are not sufficiently interested in the variations on a familiar theme until the time comes for their personal consultations. Alternatively, there are some among them who are genuinely disgusted at the dang-ki's self-mortification and do not wish to concern themselves with what they consider to be necessary but unpleasant preliminaries to the real business of the ceremony. As soon as the dang-ki has rolled the fruit back on to the offering table, the drums stop beating and there is a hush. The interpreter is standing at the dang-ki's elbow to listen for the shen's instructions concerning the next rites to be performed. Sometimes, but not always, the next item is the cutting of a white rooster's throat. This may have been decided in advance by the promoters, or occasionally it is carried out at the request, and expense, of a devotee. Whenever the case, neat rows of the larger type of charm paper will have already been laid out on the offering table. When the shen's permission to proceed has been obtained a live white rooster with its legs tied is produced from under the table and has a few drops of charm water poured over its head. All the onlookers, except the assistants, are then sent out of the main hall. If they still wish to see what is happening they can look through the doors and windows. The drums start beating again as the dang-ki takes the rooster in his left hand and grasps a sword with his right. Two or three times he pirouettes around by the door, and then advances towards the offering table and draws the sword down the rooster's neck. The blood stains the charm papers on the table. As the drum beats more and more excited, he plunges the sword up and down, sniping the blood-stained papers flying in all directions. Assistants hurriedly gather them up in flat, basket lids and carry them out to the porch where the chief promoter examines them in piles. The cockerel is taken
away and thrown on the ground outside the temple, where it continues to struggle until it is dead.

This item of ritual is not always carried out, and when it is included it is not always at this point in the programme. Occasionally it follows the next item. By now the chief promoter and his wife have marshalled a parade of worshippers inside the porch. These are persons with urgent requests to make, with particular emphasis on a change of luck. Each one has been provided with three large incense sticks at a cost of fifty cents, and a 'golden peck' of three dollars. Inside the golden peck are many strips of yellow paper. To this is added a pink strip on which is written the name and date of birth of the supplicant, or of the person concerning whom the request is made. These supplicants usually range from ten to twenty in number and occasionally include one or two men.

The dang-ki has now taken up his Eight Trigram flag and horse-hair whip and led the supplicants in a lengthy line. They follow him as he leads the way down the right side of the offering table towards the altar. They pass behind the barricade, make motions of respect as they pass the images, and return by the other side of the offering table. With jerky, theatrical movements the dang-ki heads the procession as it makes three circuits of the offering table in this manner. Occasionally he ends his following thirty round the porch as well, and then proceeds to make two further circuits.

The dang-ki stops at the Eight Trigram flag which stands at the edge of the terrace and the supplicants form a semicircle round him. Two of the assistants have joined the procession, carrying a tea pot and a small tea cup. The interpreter takes the golden peck from the nearest supplicant and sets it alight on the ground. While it is burning, he reads the name and date of birth from the slip of pink paper. The dang-ki takes the cup filled with tea from the other assistant and sprinkles the liquid over the flames with a few dramatic gestures. The cup is replenished from the tea pot and the performance is repeated as each golden peck is added to the flames. As the supplicants return to the temple, another assistant is standing by the door to take their incense sticks from them, to be placed in the holders over the offering table. Finally, the dang-ki too returns. The next item is for him to cut his tongue with a sword, and for this casual onlookers are again sent out into the porch. The youths stand by with their drums and gongs as the dang-ki is handed a sword of a larger type than that with which he killed the cockerel. With the sword in his right hand and the Eight Trigram flag in his left, he does a wild dance, again mimicking sword movements.

A round receptacle, about nine inches in diameter and five inches deep, open at the top, made of yellow paper stretched over a bamboo frame. The sides are adorned with auspicious characters consisting of strips of red paper pasted on.
tongue, slowly at first, and then more rapidly as the drummers work themselves up to a crescendo. Suddenly, the dang-ki stops and looks around with a look of malevolent satisfaction. Equally suddenly, he leaps into the air and starts sawing at his tongue again. Three times he does this before he is satisfied that he has drawn enough blood. He steps up to the offering table and puts the sword down. An assistant is wiping it with a wad of joss papers, ready to reinsert it to its proper place. Another assistant has provided himself with a bundle of about two hundred charm papers of the smaller variety. As these are handed to the dang-ki, he lets them fall on to a basket lid which has been placed in front of him. They are spread out to dry and carried to the porch for subsequent distribution among the worshippers.

The licking of charm papers may take from five to ten minutes. During this time many of the worshippers have made their way back into the main hall, particularly those who are early in the list of consultations and do not wish to lose their places. But the dang-ki still has several duties to perform before he can give individual attention to the devotees.

An assistant has collected together a pile of shirts and blouses belonging to the devotees. This pile is placed on the offering table for the dang-ki to stamp with his blood. A wad of joss papers is placed under the pile to ensure that it is properly covered. As each stamp is made, the dang-ki wipes the stamp across his tongue and makes a careful imprint on the shirt or blouse. The articles are then handed to their owners. After that a further array of articles will be produced for consecration. Mirrors for use in the household and amulets which will be worn as amulets by "dedicated children" are similarly treated with the dang-ki's blood. Images and religious pictures are brought to the offering table and dipped in the bloody saliva of the dang-ki. These are then restored to their owners. There are usually one or two devotees who wish to set up "ping-pons" on their family altars. The funnels are brought to the dang-ki for him to give each a lick of bloody saliva. It is possible that a new piece of temple equipment, donated by a devotee, is being consecrated. In such cases the dang-ki carries out the same ceremony as before, but this time the blood-stained brush is used to mark the new piece in an appropriate manner.

Invariably, the red cakes which worshippers wish to take from the temple to consume at home with the blessings of the ihen are laid out on the offering table. The dang-ki slices half-way through each one of them, collaborating with two of the assistants in an extremely neat manner. The slices are then restored to their owners. The bloody sword with which he cut the cockerel's throat is held in his right hand. With his left hand, he reaches across to take a cake from the man standing at his right. He steps back, alms into the cake, and leaving it impaled on the sword steps forward again to take another, while the assistant on his left removes the cake from the sword and places it in a basket to be carried to the place of worship.

Before the actual consultations can begin, there is usually a stream
of worshippers who come before the offering table and bend down to have their backs stamped with the mark of the shen. Some of these are young children led by their parents, and some are even babies who are held by their mothers while the dang-ki stamps them and with his finger makes a small saliva mark on the forehead. These babies differ greatly in their behaviour. Most of them accept the treatment placidly, but a few scream with terror at the sight of the strange figure.

When all such services have been rendered, the shen steps back and makes a final stamp on the forehead of the worshippers. The person with No. 1 card pushes her way forward. The interpreter and another assistant have stationed themselves on either side of the offering table, one of them equipped with a writing pad and pencil. A couple of youths with drums are still standing by for the moment when they will be required again. Otherwise, there is an atmosphere of relaxation in the temple. The dang-ki and the interpreter concentrate their attention on the immediate task and the person whose consultation is taking place hangs on every word that is uttered. Friends and relatives of the consulted often take a lively interest in what is happening, but the rest of those present seem to be settling down to wait their turn. The other assistants attend to minor duties or sit in the porch talking to friends.

There is no privacy in the consultations, which are carried out in a clear, audible voice. Anyone who cares to listen and who can understand the dialects being spoken can hear all he wants concerning the secret illnesses and worries of other worshippers. It is extremely difficult to say whether the atmosphere of bored inattention among many of the onlookers is anything but a conventional disguise for surreptitious interest. The dang-ki speaks in the first person singular, as if he were the shen. He uses a type of old Chinese which the shen are supposed to speak, and occasionally breaks into pure Mandarin. Sometimes, however, he speaks a few sentences in Hokkien or Cantonese. He appears to understand all that the worshippers have to say, but his pronouncements are always made so that they require translation into the appropriate dialect. The consulter is accompanied by one or two interpreters, and there are always a fair number of Cantonese and Hokkien. Occasionally, a consultation has to be held in Malayan, even when a Chinese worshipper is involved. Once or twice Indians have asked questions. The promoters claim that followers of all religions, including Hindus, have been to the dang-ki for his help. The consultations have the appearance of being held informally. The group of people chiefly concerned loll around the table, adding their comments to what has already been said whenever it pleases them. The person whose case is being considered may seem slightly hesitant about speaking out boldly in the presence of the shen, but she is often accompanied by one or more relatives who have no qualms about entering into a full discussion of the problem. One or both of the interpreters may offer advice and suggestions, so that a cross-fire of
conversation is maintained among four or five persons. But all the time
the dang-ki holds the centre of the stage at the head of the offering
table, interrupting narrowly when he considers that the discussion has
gone far enough and making a pronouncement which cannot be disputed.
Some old women want to ask an endless stream of questions, but
usually he gives them short shrift and manages to clear up each
consultation in a matter of four or five minutes. This does not
necessarily end the matter, however, because there may still be some
doubt as to the manner in which his instructions should be interpreted.
The interpreter scribbles down what he can on his pad, but unless the
dang-ki is prepared to elucidate his advice the assistants and consultants
have to make what sense they can out of his deliverances. A medical
prescription may be included. Since it is improbable that the consultant
on call Chinese, she has to take the piece of paper out to the porch
and find another assistant who can help her. It is probable that she
requires one or more charm papers for carrying out the instructions
properly. Having been given these, she goes on her way full of hope
that the dang-ki has been able to remedy the affliction from which she is
suffering. On the third day, she must return to the temple to report to
the shen on the success or failure of the cure.

Back in the temple the next consultation is now taking place. With
each consultation the dang-ki listens to the problem that is set him,
and then leaps into the air and performs a short dance around the
doorway. This is a signal for the drums to start beating again. Some-
times the drummers have not been paying sufficient attention and miss
their cue. When this happens, the dang-ki holds up the proceedings for
several minutes to make sure the drummers are awake and ready to
their duty. Sometimes he even holds up the proceedings while he
stands by the doorway, going out into the distance with his hand
shaded over his eyes. Having gained inspiration, he returns to the
offering table and delivers his decision. If a very difficult case occurs,
the dang-ki will defer his judgment until a later occasion, after he has consulted with his Monkey Brothers or
even greater authorities in the pantheon.

The types of cases heard differ little from those dealt with in other
spirit-medium temples. The immediate reason for most consultations
is physical illness, but more often than not this is allied with other kinds
of worry. Men most frequently complain that 'their luck is bad', while
women often have family worries, caused by unfaithful husbands and
wayward children. An exceptional number of cases at this particular
temple are concerned not so much with the treatment of physical
illness as with the problem of deciding whether or not it is the right thing
for the person concerned to enter hospital. The dang-ki refuses to deal
in gambling tips, but he is not averse to giving occult protection to
defendants in court cases.

Some of the worshippers come to the temple in the expectation that
the dang-ki will perform a prescribed rite for them. It may simply be a
matter of exorcising an evil spirit which is supposed to be affecting the
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patient. Or perhaps the consultant imagines that the trouble is being caused by the restless soul of a dead relative, in which case the dang-ki is made to make enquiries in hell to ascertain what is leading to unrest. But often the consultant will leave the diagnosis and treatment to the dang-ki, demanding a sufficiently plausible reason for the trouble as well as the prescription of a cure. Often, no particular remedy is required and no special rite is performed. The devotee wishes only to ask a question concerning some future event or the possible consequences of some act of commission or omission. Having been informed of the questioner's date of birth and present place of residence, the dang-ki gives his answer, although he rarely commits himself very fully in cases where prophecy is involved.

The cases of physical illness range from headaches and indigestion to tuberculosis and cancer. He looks at the patient carefully and asks about the symptoms, but makes no attempt at a physical examination. He usually prescribes a Chinese herb which can be obtained from a pharmacist for a few cents. To this, however, he will almost invariably add directions for a rite to be performed in connection with the taking of the medicine. For instance, the drug itself may have familiar ingredients, even though some of them may be distasteful like dried cockroach, but before it can be administered the two handfuls of stones have to be gathered from outside one's home and added to the concoction together with the ash of a charm paper that has been burnt. The whole mixture must then be boiled for a prescribed period, or until the liquid has evaporated down to a certain quantity, and drunk by the patient. Or incense may be ordered to be burnt, and offerings made at a cross-roads at a prescribed time each day until a cure is achieved.

Many of the illnesses treated seem to be the chronic symptoms of deeply rooted maladies arising from many years of misfortunes, excessive child-bearing and internal complaints. Most of the cases are of a type in which a European doctor would find it almost impossible to produce a radical cure. The patient's will to live may be greatly strengthened by the provision of mild palliatives and a bolstering of morale. In this respect, the powers of the dang-ki are unsurpassed. Whatever the efficacy of his medical prescriptions, the occult devices which he uses are calculated to inspire confidence in the patient. A sick and worried man is assured that his luck will change after several months, or an ageing woman who fears that she has lost the affection of her husband is told that her horoscope ensures that his lasting affection is for her alone. A pregnant woman will bring her pot of flowers to the dang-ki for his blessing. She is assured that when she takes it home and watches
the plant grow as the child will grow within her and be delivered safely.1

The question, of course, is whether the dang-ki discerns and treats serious ailments which should have been taken to a western-trained physician. The scope of faith healing is always open to debate, but allowing for the fact that not all dang-ki are equally able and scrupulous, their record in this respect is not a good one. Any doctor in Singapore will be able to cite many cases of patients whom he might have saved if they had come to him in time instead of resorting to a dang-ki, but it is doubtful whether this peculiar cult affects greatly in this manner.

Making occasional recommendations to go to a general hospital for surgical treatment, the dang-ki are fairly acute to make occasional recommendations that his patients should go to the General Hospital for surgical treatment. If such a recommendation is made, the patient is also given a special charm paper which will protect him from all evil while in hospital.

On one occasion, a European doctor who had enquired about a patient was taken to witness the ritual. It was known that several of the cult's assistants worked for a well-known firm of British merchants as clerks or labourers, but it was not known that the partnership to which this doctor belonged undertook the medical attention of the employees of the same firm. The latter, however, was well aware of the skill and existence of his patients at the temple. He seemed to think that this highly unlikely, but as soon as we had entered the temple he was in fact confronted with several patients whom he had treated in his surgery only a few days previously. Moreover, a few days later, he was able to identify a patient who came to him with a bad cold as one of the leading promoters of the cult. This evidence is not as contradictory as it might seem. It is a good example of the Chinese tendency to resort to several different agencies for the curing of illness in the hope that one if not another will prove efficacious.

On a Sunday morning, it may be necessary to hold between twenty and forty consultations. The performance usually begins between half past eleven and twelve; the preliminaries usually take a little over half an hour. The consultations may then carry on for from two to three hours. This means that the dang-ki has to keep himself at a pitch of efficiency for three hours or more at a time. Whatever his inspiration may be, each consultation is a considerable mental and physical effort. He sweats profusely, and the grease paint melts and smudges on his face. The assistants mop his back and body with a towel, and sometimes remove his head-dress to give him greater comfort. But still he concentrates intensely on each case, giving advice and medical prescriptions to whoever may ask for them. Finally when the last consultation has ended and he is exhausted that no devotees are waiting to hear him, he announces that he

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1 This would seem to be a version of the Wai Fa Uen ceremony described by Mrs. Topley, 1951.
PLATES
(a) Temporary stage and first display of the festival.
(b) Temple-keeper.
(c) Altar to the 'Great Saint' in a private home.
(d) Altar of Sino-Malay cult.
Exorcism at crossroad during festival procession. (b) Possessed dang-ki emerges from temple procession. (c) Sedan chair with images rocking as it progresses. (d) Female dang-ki being carried in procession.
(a) Puppet stage set up for festival.
(b) Sword ladder.
(c) Ceremonial sedan chair.
(d) spirit-writing session in progress.
PLATE IV

(a) Young dang-ki holds consultation.

(b) Fire walking.

(c) Novice medium awaiting possession.

(d) Dang-ki is supported at end of trance.
PLATE V
(a) Dang-ki performing on knife bed.
(b) Dang-ki-Kwan Ti-cutting tongue.
(c) Dang-ki having spear placed through cheek.
(d) Dang-ki surveying list of ‘dedicated children’ (spear in cheek).
PLATE VI

(a) Dang-ki of the 'Great
Saint' in full dress.

(b) Beginning of trance:
dang-ki rises in chair.

(c) Dang-ki extinguishing
bundle of incense sticks
with tongue.

(d) Sacrifice of white
cockerel.
The shen is going to return. He does a dance and gives a great leap into the air, falling back into the arms of assistants. He is lowered into the chair, which has been brought back into place by the doorway, and has charm water splashed in his face. For a few moments he sits there, exhausted, and then he gets up, restored to his normal self.

He claims that he knows nothing of what has happened since the time when he went into the trance. He describes his feelings on entering the trance as those of having someone else enter his body, filling his chest and lifting him off his feet. After that everything goes black, although he admits that he has faint memories of certain of his actions. He is tenderly washed and dressed by his assistants. Unconscious he is carried out and put on a stretcher, and there is a small round spot on it which never appears to heal properly.

One of his first actions on being restored to consciousness is to empty out the brass bowl in which offerings have been made, and count the money with the help of one of the assistants. Unless there has been some munificent gift the proceeds are rarely very great. It seems that the offerings average less than a dollar for each consultation. Seventy per cent of the takings go to the dang-ki and he returns the remaining thirty per cent to the temple 'for charitable purposes'.

Having pocketed his takings the dang-ki goes behind the scenes again to remove his costume and wipe the remaining grease paint off his face. He then goes home until the next performance.

Week-Day Performances. The Sunday morning performance, which has been described incorporates the cult's basic ritual for all its performances, whether held in the evenings or on festival occasions. Hardly a day in the year passes without some sort of ceremony being held. The chief meetings can be found on such days as the eve of the Jade Emperor's birthday on the ninth of the First Moon, when it is the traditional practice for families to make acts of worship in their own homes. Apart from that, the dang-ki and some of his assistants are in attendance at the temple at about six o'clock on every evening of the week, including Sundays. On these occasions, a less spectacular version of the Sunday morning performance is given. The dang-ki wears his costume, but he rarely paints his face or puts on his head gear. He does not eat burning incense sticks and he does not lead a procession carrying 'golden pecks'. He will not even cut his tongue if there is a sufficient supply of bloodstained charm papers left over from the previous Sunday. There may be only six or seven worshippers present, and the greater part of the ceremony is taken up with verbal consultations concerning sickness or other troubles.

Most worshippers come on Tuesdays, which by Chinese reckoning is the third day after Sunday. This is the day worshippers return to report on the success or failure of their cures. The next most important day is Thursday, the third day after Tuesday, though it differs little from other weekdays.
Exorcism in a Private House. The tendency nowadays is for a dang-ki to perform only in his own temple. A temple performance is far less satisfactory from the promoter's point of view. Quite apart from any occult considerations which render it desirable that the shen should be called down in a spot where all the proper precautions can be taken to safeguard the dang-ki, it is simpler to deal with the troubles of a large number of people in one place than to have to visit them in their homes separately. And from the worshippers' point of view it is far less expensive to take one's turn for consulting the dang-ki at his temple than to arrange a special performance elsewhere. The shen himself is unlikely to perform outside his temple at any place where his services may be required, but in practice such occasions are relatively rare. The cult of the 'Great Saint' only undertakes the task about five or six times a year, although this is partly accounted for by the fact that the dang-ki and nearly all the assistants are full-time workers in other occupations, and most of their spare time is already taken up with regular temple performances. If a visitor is to be made, a good reason must always be given. Since it is by no means essential that the dang-ki should see the person he is treating, most cases of sickness can be dealt with by proxy, even where the patient is so severely ill that he cannot move from his bed. On numerous occasions, consultations in the temple concern sick persons who have remained at home. In some cases, the shen gives instructions that the dang-ki should go out and minister to the patient personally, and these account for a few of the occasions when the dang-ki leaves his temple to perform elsewhere. It seems that the dang-ki used to be called out by popular demand in cases of epidemic or other such disasters, but popular support of spirit-medium cults nowadays is unlikely to be sufficient for this. Most of the occasions, therefore, arise from the necessity of a personal visit to a building or area which is believed to be affected by an evil influence such as a ghost or poltergeist. The more serious cases of the nature cannot be dealt with by simply reporting them to the dang-ki in the temple. Even if there is no one who will accept the responsibilities of the shen, it is often quite possible to arrange for a regular medium cult. At an ordinary consultation in the temple, there is only the cost of the 'red packet' to be considered, even where special apparatus has to be purchased; the total outlay need not exceed five dollars. But an individual consultation in one's own home may be far more expensive. If the dangers are not clearly understood, it may be necessary to pay the charge may not be excessive, but in such cases, the promoter and dang-ki are usually reluctant to go to the trouble. They will be more inclined to make the necessary arrangements if the incentives are great. A levy must be levied to transport the apparatus and statistical of the temple equipment to the site, and the house-owner must be prepared to spend an equivalent sum on food offerings, joss papers and a white cockerel to be sacrificed. In all, it may be necessary for him to spend from thirty to fifty dollars on the rites of exorcism.
When a visit to a place outside the temple takes place, the procedure followed is more an adaptation of the normal ritual than a ceremony specially designed for the occasion. The dang-ki goes through his usual repertoire of acts of self-mortification, and the remedy he prescribes is identical with one which he might recommend during his everyday performance. The assistants, too, behave in much the same way as they would in their own temple. The chief difference lies in the fact that the whole ceremony is directed towards a specific end.

One such occasion related to the servants' quarters in a European household. It was alleged that a Chinese houseboy had hanged himself from a beam on the verandah three years previously. Several persons claimed to have seen his ghost. The reputation reached such proportions that no servants could be persuaded to live there. Eventually, a young Cantonese girl agreed to stay provided the ghost was laid by a Chinese dang-ki. The ceremony was arranged for a Saturday afternoon.

The cult promoter and assistants arrived in a lorry with much of the temple's portable equipment, including the image of the 'Great Saint'. A temporary altar was set up inside the room the girl was going to occupy, complete with the image, swords, whips, flags, dandles, incense and fruit offerings. An Eight Trigram flag was planted outside the building and all washing was removed from the clothes-line in the vicinity. The earlier part of the dang-ki's performance was identical with the procedure followed in his own temple. He went into a trance in a chair placed near the doorway, ate burning incense sticks and cut his tongue to daub blood on charm papers. A white cockerel was then produced. Holding the bird and a horse-hair whip in his right hand, and a bundle of flags and a willow whisk in his left hand, the dang-ki began a perambulation of the block in which the room was situated. Preceded by an assistant hurling salt and rice into the air, and another cracking an exorcising whip at every corner of the building, the dang-ki pranced his way down the line of servants' quarters, past the garage at the back, and returned once more to his altar. Here he cut the cockerel's throat and sprinkled the blood on charm papers. One of these, together with the willow whisk, was fastened to the lintel of the door.

There was then a long conference between the dang-ki and his assistants. The shen informed them that the real cause of the trouble was not the man who hanged himself, but several unsatisfied ghosts who had been killed by the Japanese. This being so it was impossible to lay them completely. But any evil effect that they might have could be counteracted by suitable offerings. The servant girl who was to occupy the room was called in and instructed to make offerings to the hungry ghosts on the first and...
fifteenth of every moon, and throughout the whole of the Seventh Moon. She was then made to kneel down in front of the altar while an Eight Trigram flag was held over her head and the dang-ki made a stamp mark on her back as a special protection. After that the performance came to a close in the usual manner.

The immediate consequence of the rites was somewhat unfortunate. As soon as they had ended, the whole grounds were found to be surrounded by a strong posse of armed police who had arrived on the scene in response to a telephone complaint from a nearby resident concerning the unpleasant smell of smoke and garbage in a pre-determined area. The Indian inspector in charge of the case was heard to make the comment that there had been no breach of the peace in the legal sense, and that each noise as there was would not be reported.

It must also be recorded that the servant girl disappeared next day and was never seen by the householders again. It appears that she was more scared by the rites of exorcism than by the ghost. The promoters of the cult commented rather disgustedly that she was a modern kind of girl who had never been properly instructed in her religious devotions. For the time being the household had to make do without servants.

As for the ghosts, there is no report that anyone ever saw them subsequently.

The 'Great Saint's Birthday. In keeping with the practice followed by all Chinese temples, the cult holds a festival at least once a year. In the case of the 'Great Saint', the most important day to be celebrated is his birthday, which falls on the sixteenth of the Eighth Moon. A subsidiary birthday, when a festival is optional, also occurs on the sixteenth of the First Moon. The scale upon which these occasions are celebrated is determined by a number of factors, including the amount of money that can be collected. A secondary factor is the day of the week upon which the festival falls. The chances of success are greatly increased if it falls on a Saturday or Sunday when more devotees are able to attend. Another consideration is the possibility of obtaining police permission in order to make the necessary arrangements. One of the most important items in obtaining permits is the possibility of obtaining police permits in order to make the necessary arrangements. One of the most important items in obtaining permits is the possibility of obtaining police permission for a procession of more than fifteen persons to take place. Police permits are required. Another desirable type of permit is for a house-to-house collection to be made. There was a time when such permits could be obtained for collections all over Singapore. But by 1951 abuses of the system had led the police to refuse all applications unless the applications were for purposes in the interests of the whole community. In very few cases can this principle be said to apply in Singapore. However, when the festival described here took place, towards the end of 1950, the more severe restrictions had not yet taken effect. It had been decided about three months earlier that a festival would be held on the grandest scale possible. Subscription lists were then opened.
and all subscribers were given a properly printed and signed receipt.

As the time of the festival drew near, large sheets of red paper were prepared. The names of all subscribers, showing the amounts given, were written on these and posted up outside the doors of the temple in keeping with the usual Chinese practice. The majority of the offerings, however, took the form of promises of payment on the festival day.

The cult of the 'Great Saint' does not indulge in the more spectacular physical feats during its festivals. It is not, moreover, connected with a 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches'. The most that it can hold, therefore, is a processional march with certain rites of exorcism and worship being carried out. There are also frequent theatrical performances, both for the shen and for the entertainment of the spectators. These must, of course, be a theatrical performance in honour of the shen, and for this one of the better, but not necessarily the best, Teochiu companies is engaged. Their stage is set up a little way down the hill below the terrace on which the temple stands. A large awning is spread over the terrace so that it extends from the porch and covers most of the flat piece of ground in front of the building. To do this the three sedan chairs are placed on the edge of the terrace with their backs to the stage. The chair for carrying the shen's image is in the center, flanked on the left by the nail chair and on the right by the knife chair.

The arrangements inside the temple remain much the same as usual, except that the tables under the porch have been turned into an offering table and the chief promoter and his clerical assistants move out to another table under the side of the awning. In many ways, however, the scene has been transformed. Many new banners and streamers hang across the doorways and along the ceilings, and several highly ornate suits of paper clothing have been provided for the shen's birthday and hang on the walls inside the temple. Baskets of flowers hang from the beams in the main hall and the porch. From early in the morning streams of worshippers have been coming to make their obeisances to the shen. By the time the ceremonies are ready to begin, the offering table is piled high with gifts of fruit and foodstuffs, and a forest of incense sticks is sending up its smoke in front of the altar. The furnace outside is tightly jammed with the ashes and smouldering remains of joss papers that devotees have burnt there. The chief promoter is exceedingly busy attending to a crowd of newcomers who have brought their subscriptions and are each receiving in return a receipt, a red cake and a couple of bloodstained charm papers.

By eleven o'clock the ceremonies are about to begin. The dang-ki has dressed himself in a new suit of clothing and has gone down to the back of the stage to complete his make-up. He returns to the temple and dons his head-dress and the tiger skin that...
is reserved for more special occasions. A few days before he is ready to begin his performance, a roll of drums announces that the theatrical company is meeting to dress. Few people pay much attention, however, since the play will consist of one of the usual set-pieces with which all theatrical performances at temple festivals must begin. The show is to start in the hall inside the temple and everyone knows that this is the beginning.

The first part of the show is much the same as that which is given every Sunday morning, except that it takes place under the porch, facing westwards, instead of inside the main hall facing the altar. On this occasion, the procession of worshippers carrying 'golden pecks' is omitted because a far finer procession will take place later in the morning. The business of daubing blood on charm papers is a very lengthy one because of the enormous number that will be required during the course of the festival. First a cockerel's blood is used to daub the smaller papers, then the blood of a long-haired hen is used to daub the smaller ones. After about ten minutes of this, he has to cut his tongue again in order to ensure a continued flow. Having completed these preliminaries, he goes out on the terrace and waves his horse-hair whip over the three sedan chairs. He runs his tongue along the line and then in the back. While he remains near them, a crowd of mothers carrying babies come to him. As each baby is brought to him, he licks his finger and touches it on the forehead.

While this is going on, three of the assistants have gone into the temple and taken out the images of the 'Great Saint', the 'Third Prince' and 'General Chao'. These are the three small images that are to be carried in procession. They are brought down from the altar and carried out to the middle sedan chair on the terrace. It is most important that they should be tied to the seat securely. When the show has finished, the blood is used again in order to ensure that the job is being done properly and return into the main hall of the temple. There, other assistants have two silver needles ready for piercing his cheeks. An Eight Trigram flag is brought in and held behind his head. Everyone except the immediate participants is sent outside. An assistant places a finger inside the mouth and removes the needle gently with a pliant clamp. The needles are pierced through the cheeks, one on each side, so that the point emerges through his mouth. A few minutes are spent in adjusting the needles in a position so that the dang-ki is still able to speak.

At this point in the ceremony, the leading child actors of the theatrical company are led with their retinue into the temple to deposit their doll on the altar. In accordance with the usual custom, this doll will be left on the altar until the end of the theatrical performance. The dang-ki receives the doll and the children depart with inquisitive glances at the outlandish figure.

The dang-ki is now ready to make a dramatic appearance to the large crowd waiting outside. Escorted by his assistants and drummers he
makes his way out on to the terrace. Four other assistants have stationed themselves by the sedan chair holding the images, and on a signal they raise the chair from the ground. The chair begins to swing to and fro, and its momentum increases until the carriers can hardly restrain it. Soon they and the chair are racing round the confined area of the terrace as if quite out of control. The circle of spectators scatter to a safer distance and make frantic gestures of worship with their hands. For several minutes the chair continues to gyrate round the terrace with its carriers making strenuous efforts to control it. Then, for no apparent reason, it slows down and rushes down the steps into a lane leading to the main road. In a more leisurely fashion, the dang-ki and his procession follow.

In his right hand, the dang-ki carries the long metal bar which is associated with the legend of the shen possessing him, and over his right arm he carries a bundle of flags. He is supported on either side by two of his assistants, one of whom is carrying an exorcising whip. While the procession forms up below the temple the sedan chair sways and swings on the roadway in an erratic manner. At the head of the procession goes a party of small boys carrying long poles to which there are attached an Eight Trigram flag and white banners announcing the identity of the shen and the temple. Behind them are two more small boys carrying a sandalwood censer slung between them on a pole. Next comes the sedan chair with the images in it, and behind that the dang-ki and his escort, followed by the main body of worshippers with incense sticks in their hands.

It is usual for the dang-ki, when out in procession, to pay his respects at the temples of the spiritual superiors of the shen possessing him. A few hundred yards below the temple belonging to the cult there is an older temple dedicated to the 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches' of that area. This is not one of the places where the dang-ki pays his respects, since, it is explained, it is not truly a Buddhist temple, and the 'Great Saint' belongs to the Buddhist hierarchy.

The progress of the procession through the streets is somewhat erratic since it is dependent upon the movements of the sedan chair. For a time it may travel along at a normal walking pace with nothing more than a swinging movement from side to side. Then, without any warning, it will rush forward at break-neck speed. Equally suddenly it will stop and gyrate round in the middle of the road. This is an indication that the shen is displeased with something at that spot. Assistants rush forward and help to support their colleagues who have become almost exhausted with the movements of the chair. At frequent intervals, they replace each other under the carrying poles. The drummers, too, have come rushing up and are beating their drums furiously as the chair staggers about. By now the dang-ki and his assistants have caught up with the chair. He makes a gesture, and perhaps calls upon one of his assistants to crack the exorcising whip in the air. After that the chair calms down again and proceeds on its way with a more leisurely swaying motion.
The first objective of the procession is a newly-built Buddhist temple about half a mile distant. This is a substantial and expensive building which is laid out in an orthodox Buddhist manner with images of the 'Three Treasures' occupying the place of honour on the altar. A smaller image of Kuan Yin is seated at their feet. Arrangements have been made for the cult to hold an annual ceremony in this temple. It is noticeable, however, that none of the monks resident at the temple participate in the ceremony, except as casual onlookers.

In order to reach the temple, the procession has to pass through narrow, winding streets. Assistants go ahead calling upon anyone with washing hanging out of the windows to pull it in while the shen passes by. When the forecourt of the temple is reached, the sedan chair begins to race around more madly than ever. Presumably this is caused by excitement on the part of the shen, and not anger. The rest of the procession follows the shen into the temple, but the chair stays outside.

First the shen bows low in front of the main offering table. Then he goes round to the left. Taking his bundle of flags in his arms, he offers these to Kuan Yin, his spiritual superior. He is handed a large bunch of flowers by an assistant and offers these too. After each offering, an attendant ties a short piece of pink ribbon round one of the needles through his cheeks. After that he goes into the side altar on the left and makes his obeisances. The side altar on the right of the temple is usually looked upon by the shen, and not by any of the other assistants or members of the cult. The main hall of the temple is crowded with worshippers shuffling around rather uneasily. Few of them are quite certain what they should do until one of the cult's promoters starts giving instructions as to when they should kneel, when they should stand, and when they should bow. Even so their movements do not represent the actions of a well-drilled body of worshippers. They still retain the individualism so characteristic of Chinese worship.

When the ceremony is finished, the procession sets out again in the same erratic manner as before to return in the direction of its own temple. Its next objective is a road junction several hundred yards away which is reputed to be a notorious spot for car accidents. When the sedan chair reaches this place, its movements become more violent than on any occasion previously. It rushes into the crowd of onlookers, knocking some of them down. It hits one of its carriers off his feet so that others have to run forward and support it before it falls into a ditch. It bumps up and down, breaking off ornate bits of woodwork from its legs. Only when the shen catches up with it does the shen consent to calm down slightly. One of the assistants produces a bundle of joss papers which he places in the centre of the road and sets alight. Another takes his exorcising whip and cracks it loudly. Holding his Eight Trigram flag, the shen makes a sign which will ensure that the spot will be rid of evil spirits causing disaster. Then he is satisfied, and with a slow, swinging motion, he allows the chair to proceed back towards his own temple. Only in the last few yards does he become
excited again and rush headlong up the steps on to the terrace from which he started. The dang-ki follows the chair up the steps and persuades it to stop where it is and not to go any farther. The dang-ki enters the main hall of the temple and sits down again on the little seat under his head, and on each side of the steps he has a row of hammers which have been provided for him. As he sits, he rubs his cheeks with joss papers and then stands up and makes a great leap into the air and falls back into the arms of assistants to be revived in the usual manner. That, for the time being, is the end of the ceremony. The dang-ki has been given only a few hours leave of absence from his office, so he must return there until work finishes at five o'clock. In the meantime the theatrical company is still playing, and hawkers have begun to gather in the lanes below the temple. In the evening, when everyone can be present, the temple is once more crowded than ever before. For three hours the dang-ki holds consultations with worshippers who look to the shen for advice and cures. By now the theatrical company has started playing one of the traditional dramas that are so popular with the large audience, while nearby the brightly-lit hawkers' stalls give the impression of a thriving fair. It is not until nearly midnight that the final curtain falls on the stage and the crowds begin to disperse. The festival lasts for two days. Next day there is no religious ceremony in the morning, but the theatrical company plays for those who care to watch, and the temple is open for the offerings of worshippers. But, when evening comes, the dang-ki gives his usual performance, and once again the scene is transformed until late into the night by coloured lights and the noise of crowds who are taking advantage of the entertainment offered by this great local event.

The Second 'Great Saint's' Birthday. This festival just described had proved an undoubted success. Soon after, the promoters began to make plans to celebrate the other 'birthday' of the 'Great Saint' on the sixteenth of the First Moon as richly as possible. This birthday occurs on the day following the first fifteen days of the New Year celebrations, and in view of the heavy expenses that most worshippers would incur at that period there was an urgent need for action on the part of the local authorities. The dang-ki was called to a council of the local authorities, and it was decided that a large number of the temples and shrines in the town should be closed and that only a few major shrines should remain open. Although the larger temples were crowded with worshippers on appropriate days during the festivities, the first half of the First Moon is above all a time for family reunion and the performance of rites in the home. But on the sixteenth, the normal pattern of worship is resumed for the rest of the year with a birthday festival for a shen.

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Once again the festival falls in the middle of a week, which makes it an unsuitable occasion for a very lavish display. For reasons of expense, a full-scale theatrical company is not engaged. Instead, a small puppet stage has been set up a few yards down the slope in front of the temple. The method of performing is one rarely seen. In the usual puppet show or marionette show, the manipulators of the actors are either above or below the miniature stage. In this case, the manipulators are young girls, who work from directly behind the stage and partly in the audience's view. They push the figures forward on sticks and manipulate the hands and feet with wires attached to their fingers. Even at its best, however, such a method does not seem to be a very popular theatrical substitute. When performed in an exposed space, these miniature theatres can rival the noise produced by a full-scale show. But even a large theatrical company, with full stage and orchestra, uses amplifying equipment when working in the open. A miniature theatre without the help of amplifying equipment cannot create the same impression.

The cost of this miniature theatre for two days is about $200 as opposed to the $1,000 or more that would have been required for a theatrical company. This has left a comfortable margin for the provision of other attractions. A company of Taoist priests has been engaged for the two days at a cost of $160, and a 'Bridge of Peace and Prosperity' has been purchased for $50.

For weeks before the festival, the promoters have informed worshippers that special arrangements have been made for them to be 'prayed for' individually. In return for a contribution of three dollars, the name and date of birth is filled in on a folder of salmon-coloured paper which is presented with special prayers and commendations to the 'Great Saint'. These will be retained by the temple for a short time after the festival and then burnt.

On the first day of the festival, there can be no doubt concerning the religious interest that it has aroused. Most of the men are at work, but early in the morning women by the score have crowded into the temple. The shrine of the Great Saint, on the edge of the place where the offering table has been set up, has been specially adorned. An offering table has been set up in the porch, and the table at which the business of the cult is transacted has been moved under the porch. Under the bridge an oil lamp and a sandalwood censer are set on the ground, and on the steps at each end four red cakes are piled, with a spray of burning incense sticks stuck in the top.

At about ten o'clock, the first part of the ceremonies begins. The performers on the miniature stage below the temple have made their
preparations. The dang-ki is dressed and has painted his face. The Taoist priests have their equipment ready and put on their red robes. Their company consists of one very old man, two youths, and a couple of instrumentalists and assistants who remain unrobed. More or less simultaneously, but quite independently, the actors, the priests and the dang-ki begin their performances. The drama under way behind the stage, the Taoist priests begin to chant inside the main hall of the temple, and the dang-ki’s assistants begin to invoke the ‘Great Saint’ from under the porch. At the same time, and sometimes even more or less simultaneously, the dang-ki goes through much of his usual performance, eating burning incense sticks, cutting his tongue and the throat of a white cockerel, and daubing blood on to many charm papers. At one stage the dang-ki has to enter the main hall of the temple. The priests are pushed out of the way unceremoniously to continue their chanting outside in the porch while the ‘Great Saint’ is consulted concerning the final details of the rites to be held that day. When the dang-ki emerges again, the priests are pushed back into the main hall to carry on with their own business.

The chief object of the present performance is the consecration of the bridge. The dang-ki approaches it from the porch, carrying his Eight Trigram flag and horse-tail whip, and views it critically, first from one end and then from the other. He waves his whip over it and wipes incense strewed over it, erasing any previous bad effects. He then pierces through a piece of paper with his blood and waves it over the bridge before entering it and, carefully supported on each side by assistants walking on the ground, crossing it. He repeats the performance from the opposite end and then goes back to the main hall of the temple, where, after a few more words of consultation with his assistants he gives a leap into the air and the shen leaves him.

There is then a pause for about an hour and a half, during which the priests carry on with their chanting, the shen begins its performance in earnest, and more and more worshippers come into the temple to pile their gifts on the offering table and light incense sticks to the shen. At about midday the main performance of the day is due to begin. This is to be a procession to a nearby temple of Toa-peh-kong in which all the participants will have first followed the dang-ki across the ‘Bridge of Peace and Prosperity’. The dang-ki enters a trance under the porch of the temple, and as a preliminary cuts his tongue again to daub more charm papers with his blood. The Taoist priests are once more evicted from the main hall so that the dang-ki, with the Eight Trigram flag held behind his head, can have his cheeks pierced with silver needles amidst an uproarious crashing of drums and gongs. He then emerges from the temple in order to lead his followers across the bridge before setting out on the procession. But at this stage an awkward and unexpected incident occurs.

Within the last month or two another spirit-medium cult had been started among one of the clusters of huts in a hollow down by the railway line about a quarter of a mile away. The promoters, assistants and dang-ki are all unaccountably youths with tattoo marks on their
arms and bodies. Their temple is housed in a tiny room in a row of shacks, but their equipment is sufficiently new and expensive to suggest that they have substantial funds at their disposal, allegedly acquired by extortion from shopkeepers in the locality. In fact, this cult seems to be little more than an illegal gang of young thugs which has embarked on the exploitation of spirit mediumship as one of its covert activities.

The shen possessing the dang-ki of the Third Prince, as it is difficult to know why they should have chosen to hold a festival on the same day as the Great Saint’s birthday, but whatever the reason, the procession, which had set out from its own temple somewhat earlier than the procession from the Great Saint’s temple, arrives at the steps of the latter temple at exactly the moment when the shen is emerging with silver needles stuck through his cheeks. The Third Prince’s dang-ki, a long skewer, is being held by one of his attendants, leaves his spiked sedan chair at the bottom of the steps, and rushes up on foot with him carrying the sedan chair which holds his shen’s image, rocking violently and threatening to scatter the worshippers crowded round the Bridge of Peace and Prosperity. The Great Saint’s dang-ki and promoters have little alternative but to greet the intruders as graciously as possible. The dang-ki makes gestures of welcome to the visiting shen and invites him to cross over the bridge. The Third Prince’s dang-ki does so, followed by about half a dozen assistants carrying swords, whips, drums, and other paraphernalia. Realising that they are not very welcome, but having gained their objective, the visitors then hurry on to carry on with their procession.

First, the dang-ki crosses the bridge, followed by the promoters of the cult and his attendants. A group of women are seen raising the rear of the bridge in order to make as early a crossing as possible. The great mass of worshippers then cross round the edge of the bridge in order to make as early a crossing as possible. The procession, which now consists of the five small boys who lead the procession with flags, followed by the great mass of the procession, now consists of the five small boys who lead the procession with flags, followed by the Great Saint’s dang-ki who is armed with his silver bar, horse-tail whip and a bundle of flags. He is supported on either side by assistants, one of whom is the chief interpreter carrying the exorcising whips. Other assistants carry drums, swords, and gongs, and two small boys follow behind with a tray of cakes as an offering to the temple which he will visit.

The temple to Toa-peh-kong is about a mile away, in the opposite direction to the Buddhist temple which was visited on the previous festival. The road passes several large blocks of modern flats. The inhabitants seem to take little heed as the procession passes.
As soon as the dang-ki returns to the main hall of his temple, he is immediately beset by crowds of women asking favours and advice of every description. Shortly he tells them to get out of the way while he has the silver needles extracted from his cheeks. Once these are removed, he returns to a trance in which he makes his obeisances and offerings, with his followers kneeling behind him, first at the central shrine and then at the shrines on the left and right. The greatest difference is that on this occasion he asks for Toa-peh-kong's blessing on his followers and throws the divining blocks to ascertain whether this will be granted or not. The answer comes down in the affirmative, and the procession leaves the temple to form up outside for the return journey. For most of the way, they go back by the same route, but before reaching their own temple they turn off down a side road to carry out exorcising rites at the same notorious spot for car accidents as at the previous festival. This spot happens to be near the temple of the new cult which intruded on the ceremonies before the start of the procession. As soon as the dang-ki and his followers approach, this new cult is obviously expecting a return visit, but at the last minute a hasty message is sent forward to the youths leading the procession not to go down the track leading to the temple. The 'Great Saint' has declared that no return visit must be paid. The rite of exorcism is carried out at the crossroads, and the procession departs in the direction of its own temple, leaving the promoters of the other cult to look on with ill-concealed wrath.

The next important ceremony takes place at about seven o'clock in the evening when worshippers who have missed the evening procession begin to arrive. Once more the dang-ki enters a trance, and leads a long line of devotees across the 'Bridge of Peace and Prosperity'. This is followed by a long session in which medicine and advice are given to numerous consultants. The next day the temple is open for prayer and offerings from early in the morning. The miniature theatre is still playing, and from time to time the 'Great Saint' dons his robes and mutters his chants in a similar vein to his previous performance, but this is a mere rehearsal of the same ceremony as that of the previous evening.
This festival can hardly be called spectacular, in so far as the weather was not of the best, the theatrical performance was not popular, and there were few hawkers who bothered to attend with their stalls and barrows. Even the display of religious rites was not of the sort which might be calculated to attract much attention, but for all that the occasion was marked by a display of devotion on the part of the worshippers such as is rarely seen in a Chinese temple, and which is probably the best possible indication of a cult's genuine affluence and popularity.

'General Chao's' Birthday.
The next occasion on which the cult could hold a festival fell on the seventeenth of the Second Moon, the birthday of 'General Chao'. From its earliest days, the worship of the cult had been associated with this shen as well as with the 'Great Saint'. 'General Chao' is one of the many military dignitaries of the Heavenly Hosts who are venerated by the Chinese in connection with the 'Great Saint' legend. Such popularity as he has in Singapore is probably due to a Hokkien belief in his efficacy as a shen of wealth.

In one respect, the date was admirably suited for the holding of a festival, for it fell on Easter Saturday, which was a public holiday. On the following day, too, any number of devotees who so desired could attend the temple. On the other hand, it was only a month since the last festival had been held, and as it had recently become almost impossible to get a licence for house-to-house collections there was great doubt as to the amount of money that could be raised. Besides this, there was another difficulty. Who should perform as the dang-ki for 'General Chao'? The old man who was 'General Chao's' dang-ki had been out of action for a year. For several months he had been in hospital in a semi-paralysed condition, but now he had been discharged, and although he could only hobble about with difficulty, he was determined to go through with his birthday festival. A short trial performance had been held in the temple to ascertain whether or not this could be permitted. The answer had been given that the old man could perform on 'General Chao's' birthday, but that he could not undertake any feats of self-mortification. This, however, was most unsatisfactory for the promoters, since a festival demands something spectacular in the way of a dang-ki's performance. The 'Great Saint' dang-ki could not be called upon to act as a substitute for his colleague. He was not one of those who could allow himself to be possessed by a variety of shen, and in any case there was a certain degree of jealousy between the two dang-ki. When the 'General Chao' dang-ki had been new in the temple, he had often heard his predecessor say, "I am the shen of wealth, and no one else can claim to be," but now his pride was quenched.

Moreover, people in the neighbourhood were saying that the promoters were making too much money. The simplest method of counteracting such a charge was to offer to turn the financial management of the temple over to a committee of persons in the neighbourhood...
who are willing to serve on it. If this arrangement is adopted, the customary expectation is that the chairman and committee members do not stand to gain personally even if a profit is made, whereas they have to share the deficit between them if there is a loss. In a community where there are few wealthy members, it is unlikely that many persons will come forward to face this risk. If a committee cannot be formed, the management of the temple reverts to the promoters, to act as they wish. At the previous festivals, there had been no committee of management other than that formed among the promoters themselves. In view of the increasing criticism, it was considered that this was a suitable occasion for an attempt to form a committee that would undertake responsibility for festivals to be held in future.

It was agreed, therefore, that General Chao’s birthday should be duly celebrated. The same puppet show would be engaged as for the ‘Great Saint’s’ second birthday. The ‘Great Saint’ dang-ki would be performing in his usual splendour, but as a precaution lest the old man failed altogether a young labourer who performed occasionally as ‘General Chao’s’ dang-ki was also engaged for the two festival days.

On the morning of the first day, the temple is set out in its usual festival arrangement, with an awning outside the porch, the sedan chairs on the edge of the terrace and the stage erected down below. Although it is a public holiday, it is apparent from the start that the occasion is not going to attract nearly as much attention as the previous festivals. Nothing happens until about eleven o'clock. The ‘Great Saint’ dang-ki has arrived, but the chief promoter has been called away on a job that prevents his appearance. The additional dang-ki is waiting in the temple, but no one is certain of what is going to happen. Suddenly someone draws attention to the figure of the old dang-ki hobbling up the hill on a stick. As he enters the temple, he greets the onlookers and repeats his determination to perform. He is helped into the side-room on the left of the main hall while final preparations are made for the ceremonies.

By about half past eleven, the performers are ready to begin. Two chairs instead of one have been placed in front of the offering table inside the main hall. The second chair is painted red, but otherwise it has no ornamentation or carving to distinguish it as the proper equipment for the use of a dang-ki. The usual preliminaries are undertaken by the assistants. While the drum is beating and the invocation chanted, the ‘Great Saint’ dang-ki seats himself in the ornamented chair and prepares to enter a trance. As his body begins to shake and his face to contort, the ‘General Chao’ dang-ki seats himself in the second chair and in a few moments begins to tremble and jump in the manner expected of him. From the two of them standing up, the audience can distinguish the slightest gesture of invitation and acceptance is made between them,
The 'Great Saint' dang-ki then withdraws to the offering table set up in the porch to carry on with the rest of his performance of cutting his tongue and smearing the blood on charm papers. Inside the main hall, 'General Chao' settles down to a long and somewhat irate consultation with one of his assistants. Eventually he calls for a sword. He cuts his tongue and dabs it into a small bowl of water. With a brush, he daubs his bloody existence on to numerous charm papers. After a further consultation with his assistants, he calls for a larger sword and carries it out through the porch and into the terrace. He dances around, flagellating first his back and then his stomach while assistants pour charm water on to him. At last they persuade him to go back into the temple. He has inflicted much damage upon his body apart from a gash in the upper part of his arm caused while wielding the sword rather strongly across his chest. Since this is still bleeding freely he uses the blood to daub several more charm papers.

By now the 'Great Saint' has followed 'General Chao' into the main hall and is waiting quietly behind him. The latter announces that his spirit is returning. He does several violent leaps, one of which sends most of the equipment on the offering table spilling, and jumps back to be caught in the arms of his assistants. The 'dang-ki' is dragged back to the main hall to prepare ceremonies. The 'Great Saint' now has the stage to himself, and announces that he will hold a short procession to carry out exorcising rites at the road junction below the temple where many accidents have taken place. With the Eight Trigrams flag in the front, the 'dang-ki' with a few assistants and devotes sets out on his procession. The others who remain behind now turn their attention to the elderly 'dang-ki' who has been sitting in the room beside the main hall. As soon as they start their drum-beating and invocations, the old man begins to tremble and mutter. He rises to his feet and demands that the green cloth should be tied round his head and that some black paint should be smeared on his cheeks. When this is done, he hops and hobbles painfully into the main hall where he begins to talk with his assistants in front of the offering table. In his prime, he had been an adept in the use of the prick-ball as an instrument of self-mortification. He begs to be allowed to use it again, but his assistants refuse. He then hops out through the porch and on to the terrace, still muttering and gesticulating with his right hand. He sits down, which is almost impossible, on his stool. When he sees that he cannot persuade the assistants to let him have his way he hops back to the offering table and utters a few more words. Once again they persuade him to go back into the temple and persuade him to continue to expostulate rather petulantly.

In the meantime, the 'Great Saint' has returned to the temple, having completed his short procession to and from the road junction. He is waiting quietly in the background while 'General Chao' dives the stage. It would be impossible to hurry the old man unduly, but at last, to more people's relief, he announces that he is going to return. Instead
of leaping into the air as a younger dang-ki would do the old man
sink down gently into the arms of assistants and is helped away into
the side-room from which he started his performance.

The time has come for the 'Great Saint', too, to return. After a
few more words of instruction, in which he announces that he will be
back again at half past five that evening, the dang-ki gives his usual
leap before being revived. One of his first remarks on emerging from
the temple after cleaning off his make-up is rather pointed observation
on how few people are present. He adds, quite correctly, that when it
is the 'Great Saint's' birthday, the place is so packed that one can
hardly move.

'General Chao's' birthday is the end of the ceremonial year. The
next great occasion is the major birthday of the 'Great Saint' once again
on the seventeenth of the Eighth Moon. Frequency too was, however,
less. It was still a great display of devotion, but events, such as the 'Great
Saint' festival, take more planning and involve a great deal of expense,
and there is little to add. The festival was more than ever marked by a
great display of devotion on the part of ever a thousand worshippers, but the ceremonial aspect showed a decline in splendour which was paralleled by a similar decline in many other respects.

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The rival cult below the hill disappeared soon after its interference
in the 'Great Saint's' festival.

The chief promoter still rules the affairs of the cult with a firm hand,
although one or two of his assistants do not appear as frequently as
before. Complaints that the promoters are making too much money
have come to nothing, and now it seems to be accepted in the neighbour-
hood that the temple will be run far more successfully if left in the hands
of its promoters. In general, the cult flourishes even better than before.

Within the period of eighteen months during which frequent visits
were made, it was noticeable that the number of worshippers and the
intensity of their devotions increased considerably. The extent to which
this was due to the interest shown by a European and some of his friends
can never be ascertained. It is more probable that it flourishes largely
on its own merits, and will continue to do so as long as the general
dang-ki and chief promoter have a hand in its affairs.
COMPARISON OF SPIRIT-MEDIUM CULTS

Although the cult of the 'Great Saint' just described has several exceptional characteristics, it incorporates many of the beliefs, practices, and styles of organisation found in other cults. For that reason it would be pointless to give an equally full description of cults in which the main features are similar. Observations carried out in connection with over fifty different cults in all parts of Singapore led to the conclusion that variations can best be dealt with under a few simple headings.

A Buddhist Cult. Although the participants in most spirit-medium cults will answer that they are Buddhist if asked what religion they practise, it is usual to find that the genuinely Buddhist elements in their worship have been inundated by the Shenist tradition. There are exceptions, however, where spirit mediumship is allied to a form of Buddhism showing resemblance to the more orthodox expression of Mahayana doctrine.

Apart from the numerous elements of Chinese folk religion which Buddhism has absorbed, the direction in which Buddhism lays itself open most readily to spirit-medium practices is the emphasis it lays on the value of prayers for the dead. In contrast to Hinayana Buddhism, it is believed that great merit is to be gained in offering prayers for the dead.1 In Singapore, it is common to find Buddhist guilds arrange elaborate religious ceremonies with the purpose of praying for the souls of the persons who died during the Japanese occupation. The idea prevails that if these souls are not propitiated, their errant ghosts are capable of causing great trouble to the living. Prayer is often directed to one of the great Bodhisattvas, particularly Kuan Yin, who are supposed to be in a position to alleviate the suffering of souls in hell. From this, it is only a short step to a belief, frequently held, that the bodhisattvas themselves are able to possess the body of a Danger (dang-ki) and communicate with the living concerning the fate of the dead. Nor need such a form of spirit mediumship stop at this. Once the bodhisattvas have materialised in this manner, it would be unpardonable not to avail oneself of their great wisdom for curing human ailments.

If the more orthodox Buddhist monks condemn the resulting practices, it is on the grounds that it is unworthy for human beings to seek material well-being by such methods, and not that they arise from erroneous belief. To the Chinese Buddhist, the power of evil

1 See particularly Reichelt, 1927.
spirits is as real as it is to the worshipper of the shen. The difference lies more in the approved manner of counteracting their influence. The Taoist priest will fight the evil spirits with his occult powers in order to make himself and his devotees impervious to their influence. In Singapore, it is rare to find Buddhism transcending the cruder influences of Shamanism. Many people, however, have banded together in associations with the purpose of pursuing what in their eyes is a reformed version of Mahayana Buddhism. The spirit-medium cult described here is an example of a sincere effort in this direction which, nevertheless, has retained certain elements of Shenism which would be frowned upon by more orthodox Buddhists.

By the standards of spirit-medium temples, the cult's headquarters is large and well equipped. In fact, its appearance is far more in keeping with the usual style of a Buddhist temple. In the porch is a large image of Maitriya Buddha, and the images on the altars inside are those of the acknowledged Buddhist pantheon. Moreover, most of these are of the large type not usually found in a spirit-medium temple. In addition, however, there are several small portable images, a 'ping-pong' associated with the worship of the 'Great Saint', a chair in which the dang-ki is seated in front of the offering table for most of her performance, and racks containing knives.

As is often the case with Chinese temple worship, the organisation of the cult is largely based upon an association formed for religious and charitable purposes. Its constitution and rules represent a good example of many such associations formed for similar purposes. It has a membership of about a hundred persons, who are nearly all Hokkiens and Teochius. The constitution and rules of the organisation are based upon the fact of Buddhism, of good behaviour and law abiding citizens of this country. The age will be limited to those between 21 years and 65 years old.

There is an entrance fee of four dollars and a monthly subscription of one dollar. The latter was subsequently reduced to six dollars per annum. Forty per cent of the money collected goes towards temple expenses, and sixty per cent is divided among the beneficiaries of deceased members at the end of each period of three months. If no death has occurred during a three month period, the sum which would have been distributed is paid into a reserve fund. If a member dies a contribution of sixty dollars is made towards his funeral expenses, and as many members as possible have to attend the ceremonies.

The most important festival days of the guild are those relating to the worship of Kuan Yin. All members are expected to congregate for worship between two and four p.m. Light refreshments are served afterwards at the cost of one dollar to each member. On the nineteenth day of each Moon, the members should attend the temple for chanting prayers. In all these respects, the temple and the guild connected with it differ little from many other temples in Singapore. Like others, it is affiliated to the Singapore Buddhist Federation which aims at regulating
Buddhist practices throughout the Colony. The chief difference lies in the fact that it retains the services of a highly gifted female dang-ki. She is an old woman now, and has been practising mediumship for many years. Like most female dang-ki, she is married, and now has several grandchildren.

Occasionally, she will hold a private performance for someone who has a personal need for help, but usually she restrains herself to the more important festival days. Sometimes, she will assist a ceremony by saying prayers for the dead at some spot which is supposed to be exceptionally troubled by unquiet ghosts. On such occasions, she often attends a ceremony in which the spirits of the dead will be spoken to and counselled by the medium. She is also called upon for her rare gift of mediumship in times of trouble.

On the more important festival days, the dang-ki performs in her own temple as part of the religious ceremonies. For instance, during the Seventh Moon, when it is necessary to placate the hungry ghosts which have been let out of hell, a series of lengthy ceremonies is arranged, involving the presentation of food offerings and the chanting of masses for the dead. On such a day, the dang-ki will perform a service in which she becomes possessed by one or other of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. During the course of the trance it is quite possible for the shen possessing her to change, thus whenever Buddha may possess her arbitrarily, it is generally Kuan Yin that gives advice and instructions.

Much of the performance is devoted to whispered conversations with her assistants in which the plans and policy of the cult are discussed. Equipment and decorations presented to the temple, and religious articles which worshippers will take back to their own homes are consecrated. The shen possesses the dang-ki with the wave of a horse-hair whip held in her right hand. Eventually, she will sit down in her chair in front of the offering table and be dressed in a white robe and head-dress. On a few occasions, she has been known to cut her tongue with a knife, but this is now very rare.

During most of her performances, the dang-ki carries a wooden staff about four feet long with an ornate brasswork design attached to its head. This is another exorcising instrument, a key whereby evil spirits can be unlocked from the influences that are holding them down in places where they are not welcome. It was used, for example, at the consecration of a Buddha's image recently purchased for the temple. During most of her performances, the dang-ki carries a small piece of equipment used in this temple is a wooden staff about four feet long with an ornate brasswork design attached to its head. This is another exorcising instrument, a key whereby evil spirits can be unlocked from the influences that are holding them down in places where they are not welcome. It was used, for example, at the consecration of a Buddha's image recently purchased for the temple.

During most of her performances, the staff is used to raise the level of the spirits to which she is communicating. She then sits down in her chair in front of the offering table and is dressed in a white robe and head-dress. On a few occasions, she has been known to cut her tongue with a knife, but this is now very rare.

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whatever may have been perceived. The purpose is to provide evidence of the dang-ki’s power of evoking such manifestations.

Before the consultations begin, the dang-ki prepares a large number of charm papers. On slips of yellow paper, she scrawls a design in red ink, using a writing brush. She does this at great speed and each design appears to be more or less the same. It bears a slight resemblance to a Chinese character, but if there is any meaning it is highly esoteric. Occasionally, she demands a large sheet of white silk. When this is brought to her, together with a bowl of black ink, she paints designs and wheels all over it. A number of these charts are hung up on a wall, and by some strange instinct can drive some meaning from her designs, but no one seems to be able to transmute them into intelligible human terms.

Usually, a large number of persons seek the dang-ki’s advice. One by one they come up to her and hold a whispered conversation. An assistant is standing nearby to help with any interpretation that may be required. More often than not his services are necessary. While these consultations are going on, people carry out their private devotions in the rest of the main hall, while outside in the porch a party of guild members may chant the sutras appropriate for the occasion.

When the consultations have finished, the dang-ki sits quietly in her chair for a few moments and then falls back in it. Assistants have been standing by to revive her. As soon as her white robe has been removed, she rises to her feet and goes to the back of the temple to rest. A Sino-Malay Cult. In Malaya, it is common to find that the Chinese have adopted shrines of Malay origin. Needless to say, most of the Chinese worshippers at such shrines are those who have been resident in the country for many generations and speak Malay as a second, if not their first, language. There is, however, no question of them being seriously attracted to Islam as a religion. In spite of superficial concessions to local conditions, they remain staunchly Chinese in their religion.

In many cases, the shrines of supposedly Malay origin which the Chinese have adopted are taken over by the less orthodox Malay Muslims from Hindu antecedents and given an Islamic character. Then in turn they are virtually taken over by the Chinese, and their continuation has come to depend almost entirely upon Chinese patronage. However, such historic developments are not considered here in detail. It is sufficient for present purposes that the Chinese in Malaya can often be found worshipping at what appear to them to be the shrines of Muslim saints and observing prohibitions such as those against eating pork before entering the sanctuary and wearing leather shoes inside it. It is not surprising that this type of worship becomes associated with spirit mediumship.

In Singapore, there are several examples of Chinese spirit-medium cults which have developed around the worship of a Muslim saint. One of the best known of these is in the area lying between the East Coast Road and...
Changi Road. The cult occupies a house in its own compound and is
not set out in the manner usual to a Chinese temple. Before entering,
one has to remove one's shoes, but this may be a concession to the
normal Straits-born Chinese custom rather than to any religious
susceptibilities. At the far end of the room, facing the door, is an
offering table and altar to three well-known Chinese deities, complete
with spirit-medium equipment. This altar, however, does not seem to
be put to much use apart from the burning of incense in front of the
images. Along the left side of the room are three curtained cubicles,
each one dedicated to Malay saints. The first is dedicated to Datok
Machap, the second to Kramat Ga'ong Sembilan, and the third to
Datok Siti Esah. Inside the third shrine, persons wishing to be cured
of illness place a straw figure fashioned like a human body to which is
attached their photograph. But it is the first shrine which is most
closely associated with spirit-medium practices. In all three shrines,
the mixture of Islamic and Chinese symbolism, not to mention the sign
boards written in English and romanised Malay, represents an interest-
ing example of culture contact.

Datok Machap is reputed to have been a Muslim saint who lived
between two and three hundred years ago. His devotees relate that,
after his death, a shrine was set up over his tomb at Machap, about
sixteen miles from Malacca. It was found that the Chinese, who
worshipped at this shrine, enjoyed great prosperity. The
\textit{dang-ki}, or sandaran\footnote{No satisfactory explanation of the word sandaran has been found. The most
plausible suggestion is that it is related to the Malay word asaran, meaning
'between.'} as the Chinese call him, who operates in Singapore is a
member of an old Malacca family. He speaks fluent Malay and English,
as well as Hakka. When he was a child, he was cured of a serious
illness by intercession at the shrine of Datok Machap. It was then
promised that later in his life Datok Machap would give him power to
cure people. This came about in 1937, when he found that he could
invoke the spirit of the saint and carry out cures. He then moved to
Singapore and set up a shrine of his own, first in another place, and
later on its present site. Some relics of Datok Machap have been taken
from the original tomb and buried six feet under the ground beneath the
spot where the shrine is now erected.

The \textit{dang-ki} carries on no full-time occupation and can be called
upon by worshippers at any time of day or night. He usually appears
a few minutes after he has been called and puts on a yellow robe after
entering the room. He then pulls a yellow hood over his head and
squatting down inside the shrine fingering a string of praying beads. A
female assistant makes ready an incense burner and any other equipment he
may desire.

There is no beating of drums, no invocation, and no self-mortification
on the part of the \textit{dang-ki}. He sits cross-legged inside the shrine until
he makes it known that the spirit of Datok Machap is possessing him.
The consultation can then begin. The consultant sits cross-legged just
\footnote{No satisfactory explanation of the word sandaran has been found. The most
plausible suggestion is that it is related to the Malay word asaran, meaning
'between.'}
outside the door to the shrine and beside her the female assistant, who also has to act as interpreter.

The consultation is carried out in Malay and follows the usual pattern of other Chinese spirit-medium temples. There is a lengthy deliberation between the participants, with the female assistant translating into a Chinese dialect if needs be. Then the dang-ki decides upon the remedy. For the purpose his equipment is not extensive. The most common cure for a physical ailment is a glass of plain water which he passes several times over the incense burner and gives the patient to drink. For cases of bad luck and protection against evil spirits, he may give a yellow charm paper on which he has scribbled some signs in red ink. Sometimes he uses sliced lime and handfuls of coloured rice as part of the prescription he hands out. But accompanying all prescriptions, he gives copious advice in occult matters which must be followed if a cure is to be achieved.

When the consultations have finished, he holds a whispered conversation with his assistant, paces for a few minutes, and then takes off his yellow robe. Compared with other types of Chinese spirit mediums the whole of the ceremony is carried out quietly and solemnly. At the entrance to the shrine is a brass bowl in which offerings wrapped in red paper may be placed. As no joss papers or incense sticks are sold by the cult this must remain its chief source of income. At the shrine itself there is a small room where the cult are held. The occasion on which the cult is celebrated varies a year. At this festival, either a Chinese theatrical party or a Malay ronggeng party may be engaged, and on such occasions they may use the services of other dang-ki who become possessed by the more familiar Chinese shen.

The organisation of this cult seems to be almost entirely in the hands of the dang-ki and his family, but in the usual fashion the co-operation of as many grateful devotees as possible has been enlisted. There is evidence that much of the equipment has been provided in this manner. On the walls are two framed testimonials, one in Chinese and one in English. The Chinese testimonial relates to a case of the luck of a consultant being wonderfully changed. The testimonial in English, signed by a Chinese gentleman, was as follows:

To whom it may concern.

FAITH HEALING in the Twentieth Century world of ours today is a belief not commonly shared by many people, but to me and to those who are religiously inclined this sanctimonious medium of healing has been responsible in saving the lives of a great number of people who have suffered all kinds of illness. In order that this benefit, of which I have recently received, may be more widely known to the public, I have the greatest pleasure and with a feeling of gratitude, to testify to the public that DATOK MATCHAP of Siglap has been, and is still curing the sick and suffering with HIS miraculous healing power. Recently my eldest son fell a victim of high fever and convulsion, and became delirious, and despite the immediate attention of doctors the case at one time was given up as hopeless. Fortunately, the existence of DATOK MATCHAP was made known to my family by my adopted mother. I consequently prayed and sought DATOK MATCHAP's help and I am glad to say that...
my prayers were answered. My son has now regained his normal health through treatment of DATOK MATCHAP.

I, the undersigned, wish to make known to the public that DATOK MATCHAP's healing powers are genuine and those who have faith in him may go and seek his help.

This testimonial is given by me as a token of my gratitude and thankfulness to DATOK MATCHAP for saving my son's life and it is hoped that many others who are suffering from sickness may benefit herefrom.

Singapore, 7th March 1940. Signed •••

Several other spirit-medium cults in Singapore are run along the lines of that worshipping Datok Matchap. In most cases, the dang-ki or sandaran is a Straits-born Chinese, but sometimes he is a Malay or Javanese. Here we slip into the religious penumbra in which non-Chinese professionals practise their art for a largely Chinese clientele.

To mention for the moment only the Malay and Javanese practitioners, it would appear that their success among the Chinese depends largely upon their reputation as sorcerers.1 A Straits-born informant has the following to say on the subject:

Considering that my family had settled here nearly 150 years ago, you can imagine the impact of the hostile jungle and a strange, primitive people on the superstitious minds of my ancestors, who had not only to face the terrors of the jungle but also the hostility of the Malays and Siamese in northern Malaya. This impact also had its effect upon the minds of other contemporaneous Chinese pioneers. This, coupled with their intermarriage with Malay and Siamese women, whereby their offspring were steeped in both Chinese and Malay superstitions, had left its indelible mark on the Straits Chinese of today. The Straits Chinese are the descendants of these pioneers, and are of the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh generations.

The Straits Chinese, despite their English education and adoption of western ways of living, deep down in their subconscious minds have an inherent fear and respect for sorcerers. Even those of them who have embraced Christianity sometimes resort to mediumship when in the throes of adversity and anxiety, though of course they keep the dark secret from their padres and fellow church members.

As might be expected, the fear of Malay sorcerers is complemented by a willingness to use their services if the opportunity is offered. Although the greater majority is associated with Siamese sorcerers, a number of Malay, Javanese and Indian sorcerers do a steady business in soliciting their services to the Chinese. Most of them, however, are of modest means, and are thus limited in their financial connections to Chinese symbolism. Since spirit possession is by no means an essential element in their performances, we shall pass over the matter no further.

Other Tendencies and Comparisons. To certain parts of Malaya, Siamese Buddhism has a strong appeal to the Chinese, partly because of the great reputation of the Siamese, not only as sorcerers but also as masters of occultism and mysticism. Several Chinese in Singapore have studied under Siamese masters, and are in turn recognised as such. For further information on Malay shamanism see Winstedt, 1951; p. 111 gives a list of authorities and references.
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ever, involve states of meditation wherein spiritual truths are revealed
to the practitioner to guide him in his efforts to cure his clients, rather
than spirit possession in which the client speaks directly through the
practitioner. A case was encountered in which a shen, who posed as a Buddhist
monk, claimed that he could be possessed by a well known Chinese
shen. On this basis, a spirit-medium cult was promoted with considerable
initial success. But the drinking habits of the Siamese were too
obscene for even his Chinese sponsors to tolerate, and after about
six weeks a sharp quarrel disrupted the cult.

The tendency to incorporate certain elements of Christian worship
into Shenist practice which, apparently, has occurred in China from
time to time, is not noticeable in Singapore. This is probably due to the
fact that anyone who is drawn to Christianity has ample opportunities
for further exploration in authoritative Christian churches. In any case,
Christianity in Singapore represents an advanced and modern influence
which is far removed from Shamanism. It is unlikely that any practices of
Christian practices would not result in severe complaints and condemnation. It is undoubtedly true that many non-Christian Chinese regard the Holy Trinity and the saints as
unspeakably powerful deities, as is shown in the respect that they are
prepared to pay to Christian festivals and processions, but this attitude
has not been incorporated into the practice of spirit mediumship. On
Chinese Christian, and Catholic particularly, are among the strongest
opponents of spirit mediumship, it is not to be wondered at. In fact, it is to be regretted that
spirit-medium cults reciprocate by avoiding any suggestion of Christian
imagery. It is reported that when some spirit-medium cults hold
processions, there is great difficulty in passing a Christian church,
outside which the medium will suddenly feel intense pain from
his skewers and nails.

A small Christian sect in Singapore, with predominantly Chinese
membership, holds meetings every Sunday afternoon at which
worshippers work themselves up into a state in which they 'speak with
tongues'. This is an adequate justification for regarding this as a
spiritual practitioners of great efficacy. The systems employed, how-
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processions, there is great difficulty in passing a Christian church,
outside which the medium will suddenly feel intense pain from
his skewers and nails.
Another basis for comparison might be found in the classification of cults according to their type of organisation. Spirit-medium cults, however, usually tend to be based upon the private enterprise of an individual or a clique. Spirit-medium cults always tend to be based upon the private enterprise of an individual or a clique. Although they attain a greater degree of respectability by moulding themselves upon religious guilds and neighbourhood associations, these are more the ideals towards which they can strive than goals that they can ever really reach. There are a few cases in Singapore of respectable religious guilds which use occult devices, but a cult which depends for its existence upon the public performances of a man who is publicly represented as a medium is always respectable in a limited degree only.

Similarly, but not for the same reasons, a spirit-medium cult can vary its activities as a genuine neighbourhood association. The main difference is that in the urban areas, the activities tend to be more closely associated with private enterprise than they are in the rural areas, and even in the rural areas a proportion of the villages work in towns some distance from their homes. It is unusual to find a community in which all the social activities of the neighbourhood form a single pattern.

Spirit mediumship, therefore, involves the private enterprise of promoters. The spirit-medium cult described in this chapter gives some idea of the manner in which this operates, and spirit-medium cults are usually associated with private enterprise to an even greater extent than other types of cult. The cult of the 'Great Saint' is a good example of the enterprise of a spirit-medium cult which is limited in the scope of its activities. On the other hand, they do go to some lengths to establish and increase the reputation of their cult in its immediate, suburban neighborhood.

Differences in the organisation of spirit-medium cults depend largely upon whether the cult is operating in a rural or an urban area. Cults in the highly urbanised areas operate on a straightforward private enterprise basis, whereas in the rural areas some measure of popular support is essential. In suburban areas, where the greatest number of cults are found, one finds something of a compromise between the two extremes.

There are several other factors, too, in which urban cults differ from rural cults. For instance, problems arise from the amount of space that a cult may have at its disposal, both in respect of the temple premises and the land surrounding it. In the urban areas, most cults have to crowd into the ground floors of shop-houses, with nothing more than the 'five foot way'1 along the roadside to allow for more extensive ceremonies. When a festival is held, the cult is limited in the scope of its activities.

1 'Five foot way' is the local term for the pavement running beside the road in a town.
the theatrical performance it can arrange. Often there is no room for a
full-sized stage, although great ingenuity may be shown in rigging up a
stage on the nearest plot of vacant land. Failing this, they must resort
to a puppet show on the opposite side of the road or a singing party on
the 'five foot way'.

A cult in an urban area will not always find it easy to obtain police
permits for processions on account of the obstructions to traffic that they
constitute. A further factor is the sense created by a spirit-medium cult
in the proper performance of its ceremonies. It could never be claimed
that the Chinese are allergic to loud noises, but the establishment of a
shen at the very entrance of a squatter area might be resented with favour by those already living there. By so doing all the squatters
would be exposed to the dirty odours of the cult's ceremonies and to the
overbearing noise. Existing spirit-medium temples are tolerated because they
have acquired a certain measure of local support, but it is doubtful
whether newcomers would find it easy to substantiate themselves in the
more heavily populated areas.

By way of illustration of the various principles involved brief accounts
are given of seven further cults. Two of these are found in urban areas
two in rural areas, and three in suburban areas.

Urban Cults.

The two urban cults selected for description have a
resident dang-ki, although one of these sometimes obtains the services
of another dang-ki on festival occasions. Both cults are related to the
worship of the 'Great Saint' and both have been established in their
present sites since the early 1930's. One of them is situated in the heart
of Chinatown on the ground floor of a shophouse. The dang-ki is a man
of about forty who gives one of the most convincing performances of
trance phenomena that can be seen in Singapore. The success of his
cult depends partly upon his personal abilities as a
dang-ki, but also
upon the organisational assistance of a number of extremely devoted
male followers. The space at the cult's disposal is very limited, but
apparently they have not found sufficient incentive to change their
present central position for more roomy premises elsewhere. On festival
occasions, there is only room for a singing party on the 'five foot way'
outside the temple. For similar reasons, the
dang-ki
cannot indulge in
the more spectacular physical feats that require bulky equipment.

On the 'Great Saint's' birthday a short procession goes up the side
street to burn piles of joss papers at crossroads while the
dang-ki
and a
colleague called in for the occasion to embody the 'Third Prince' dance
round the bonfire with 'Generals' Heads' stuck through their necks or
cheeks, flagellating themselves with swords and prick balls. The
youthful devotees of this cult show their faith in the protecting power
of the shen by tossing a prick ball from one to another in the street
outside the temple.

The other cult occupies equally cramped premises on the edge of
what used to be a squatter area, but which is now an estate of modern
flats built by the Singapore Improvement Trust. The dang-ki is a
middle-aged man who has been practising for many years. He is more
the quiescent type who indulges in no fierce and startling activity when
possessed. The promotion of the cult is largely in the hands of the
dang-ki's brother, who makes himself responsible for all practical and
business arrangements. A short time ago it was thought that the
dang-ki's powers were beginning to fail, but after a period in which
devotions and experiments were carried out, we were informed that all
was well once more.

This temple is situated only about a hundred yards or so from yet
another urban spirit-medium cult. Since this other cult is dedicated to
the 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches' of that area it is in a far better
position to hold the sort of annual procession, which includes the
burning of a bonfire of joss papers in front of the temple in much the
same manner as the other 'Great Saint' cult which has just been described. A great advantage which the only

1 Towkay is the term used in Malaya and other parts of Southeast Asia for an influential business man, or sometimes simply for the owner of a shop.
In many of the Chinese villages in rural Singapore, the affairs of the community are under the control of a *towkay*, who has acquired a dominant interest in the economic life of the village. Most of the goods which are brought from the city to the village pass through his store, and much of the marketable surplus from village crops also. In addition, many of the villagers may be deeply indebted to him. Because of his influential position, he may also have thrust upon him some of the less sought-after privileges and obligations of dealing with the governmental authorities.

The village in question is situated on the west side of the island along the Jurong Road. The religious turn of mind on the part of the *towkay* dates from the war years when he suffered badly under the Japanese regime. His immediate incentive was derived from a dream. He set about gaining merit by religious means and in the process began to develop a cult. His headquarters is on the north side of the island, some miles from his village, but he also maintains a subsidiary temple in his own village. There are two *dang-ki*, the chief of whom has now given up his employment with a bus company and become a full-time professional. The cult is dedicated to Kuan Ti, the Shen of War and Wealth. Regular meetings are held at the main temple of the cult, but occasionally, on the instructions of the Shen, performances are held at the subsidiary temple. In addition to his cult, the *towkay* is deeply involved in a spirit-medium cult. The *dang-ki* writes with an ink brush on paper while seated at the offering table. Occasionally, as a substitute, he will write large characters in rice scattered on a basket lid. A recorder stands by to write down messages. The cult is now making a collection of scriptures gathered in this way. Most of these scriptures consist of poems of a high moral tone written in passably good literary Chinese. Whether or not they are derived from existing but unfamiliar writings it would be impossible to say without expert appraisal. Translations of some of them are given in Appendix II.

The *towkay* certainly spends a great deal of money on the cult, and his arrangements are becoming more elaborate. He now dresses in special costumes for the more important occasions. He also employs a part-time Taoist priest who is present when the *dang-ki* is in trance. There can be little doubt that the *towkay* has added greatly to his prestige by such undertakings, and consolidated his position as a community leader. It would be difficult to assess his personal motives, but many of them must arise from the tensions which are suffered by a Chinese community leader under present-day conditions of great political and economic uncertainty. His sincerity can hardly be questioned, and although some of his fellow-towkays may be slightly scornful of his religious bent they have to admit that he has results to show for it in his continued and increasing prosperity.

Another example of a rural spirit-medium cult can be found along the Tampinis Road. The village in question is a conglomeration of
huts scattered among large coconut palm estates. Most of the villagers are smallholders and employees on the estates, although some of them work in the city or the nearby town of Paya Lebar. Whether or not the owners of the palm estates take much interest in the affairs of the village, they certainly seem to have little connection with the spirit-medium cults in their midst. The situation, therefore, is hardly analogous to the previous example. There is, however, a considerable measure of local, popular support for the cult. A similar situation exists in another village about half a mile away. Both these spirit-medium cults are capable of drawing worshippers from considerable distances as well as from the immediate locality and maintain extremely amicable relations with each other.

The cult in the first village has a fairly substantial wood and thatch temple with a permanent stage facing it about thirty yards away. The dang-ki, who has no other occupation, is a robust little man of about forty. He has no other occupation, is a reticent little man of about forty. He has a reputation, however, of being one of the most dangerous dang-ki in Singapore when in a state of possession. On frequent occasions, he has chased worshippers with the sword used for temple processions, swinging a pick hall at them, or hurled his sword at a group of onlookers who have offended him in some manner. He laces himself well with brandy during the early part of his performance. The temple is dedicated primarily to Kuan Ti, who is also the shen who possesses the dang-ki. After the dang-ki has entered a trance he calls for a voluminous green cloth to be tied around his head, and colours one side of his face crimson with a supply of grease paint that must be kept ready at hand. Festivals are held twice or three times a year. At these the dang-ki's speciality is climbing a sword ladder. The ladder used is one of immense height, with seventy-two rungs, rising among the tops of the surrounding coconut palms and braced against them with many guy ropes. At all other times of the year the dang-ki is available for consultations with worshippers and he dispenses medicine and advice in the usual manner. With one important exception, the cult preamble and members are all villagers. Originally there were ten committee members. The cult was in fact registered with the appropriate government department as a religious and charitable guild. A time came, however, when it was apparent that its affairs were hopelessly muddled and the president was under grave suspicion of embezzlement. Public confidence in the management, if not in the dang-ki, was so badly shaken that an outsider was called in to remedy the situation. This person is a Straits-born, English-speaking hospital assistant with a strong personality and a reputation for promoting spirit-medium cults efficiently. He lives several miles away from the village, but he agreed to undertake the task on condition that he was given a free hand. On the basis of his previous experience with spirit-medium cults and other types of temple worship, he proceeded to rule the cult firmly, giving up much of his spare time to the task. Within a few months there was such
a marked improvement that confidence in the cult was restored. The management committee now made only in name, the real control being in the hands of the chief promoter and two or three trusted assistants. It is not impossible that he values his reward in power, prestige and the odd perquisites more highly than a reward in cash. The villagers, at any rate, are glad to retain his services as long as it is apparent that their cult is being run on a straightforward and efficient basis, without the intervention of too many local rivalries.

Suburban Cults. The suburban areas of Singapore lying in the direction of Changi have long been populated by scattered Chinese communities. As far as Geylang these communities live in predominantly urban surroundings, but from there onwards the environment is rather more rural, although many of the residents are in one way or another employed in the city. This part of Singapore is relatively rich in spirit-medium cults, although few of them are in a very flourishing condition these days. The first example of a suburban cult is drawn from this area.

The neighbourhood in question centres round a roughly-made track running off the main road. Along the track is a row of shophouses and a number of brick or concrete bungalows, but apart from these most of the residents live in thatched huts. The area is surrounded by Malay villages, but all the inhabitants are Chinese, with the exception of a few Indian and Eurasian families.

The owner of the shophouses is favourably disposed towards spirit-medium cults, and is prepared to set aside one of the ground-floor shops as a temple. The intention was that a dang-ki should be engaged at a fixed salary so that he could minister to anyone in the neighbourhood requiring the services of the shen. His salary and the temple expenses would be paid for out of subscriptions raised from the whole area.

The temple was equipped with some of the essentials and dedicated to the 'Lord of Black Heaven'. A young dang-ki was engaged and came to live with his family in a room behind the temple. All went well for a few weeks until it was suspected that the dang-ki and the members of his family, who served as assistants, were exacting additional sums from worshippers. After a quarrel, the dang-ki moved out and set up a cult of his own in a house not far away. A second dang-ki of considerable experience was soon engaged.

During his time a festival was celebrated at which an additional dang-ki of the 'Third Prince' was brought in from outside. The two dang-kis stuck long spears through their cheeks and paraded round the perimeter of the village while bamboo stakes were knocked into the ground at the boundary marks. By way of a theatrical performance only a puppet show could be engaged, but the festival appeared sufficiently successful to suggest that the cult was becoming firmly established.
A few weeks later, however, the dang-ki quarrelled with the people of the neighbourhood on precisely the same grounds as his predecessor. For a time there was no dang-ki in the temple, but eventually, a young and not very experienced part-time dang-ki was engaged. Yet after about a month, he too decided that it was not worth his while to stay and returned to the full-time pursuit of his previous occupation of trishaw pedalling.

The premises are still used as a temple, where worshippers can call to pay their respects to the shen, but such attempts as have been made to get another permanent dang-ki have proved unsuccessful. The management is still in the hands of the landlord and seven of his colleagues, and although they have not abandoned their aspirations as promoters of a spirit-medium cult, the means they can achieve is the employment of a dang-ki when the festival day comes round. In this respect they have been relatively successful, and have managed to provide a reasonably good spectacle with a full-scale theatrical show, a sword ladder and three dang-ki.

The second example of a suburban spirit-medium cult is taken from the part of Geylang previously mentioned, where a number of lanes run parallel to each other and at right angles to the main road leading from Singapore until they come out in the swampy and undeveloped country a mile or two from the road. Although the character of this area is largely urban, the tendency for the communities scattered along the lanes to have some sort of corporate life of their own is very strong. One cult in question can be found towards the end of one such lane and shunned far enough from any other cult in this area, which is amply supplied with temples of every kind, to be regarded as the chief place of worship for the Chinese living there.

The building itself is large and substantial for a spirit-medium temple and suggests a former affluence greater than that which the cult enjoys now. The temple is dedicated primarily to the Lord who Protects Life, who is also the shen which possesses the dang-ki. One of its chief claims to fame is a huge prick ball, at least three feet in diameter, which rests on a special stand near the altar. However, this instrument is not used now. The lane in which the temple stands is too crowded for a stage to be set up opposite, but fifty yards away there is ample space for such a purpose.

The cult is in a state of decline owing to the familiar reason that the dang-ki is past his best and it is impossible to acquire the services of a new one. Yet a new dang-ki, whoever that may be, will not be allowed to inherit the temple. The owner of the temple is the cult's chief promoter. He inherited it from his father who had started a spirit-medium cult there before him. Unless he can soon obtain the services of a new
the temple is likely to become merely a place of worship where people make occasional devotions. As it is, the old dang-ki is carrying on somewhat reluctantly, making an appearance on festival days and when he is urgently required by a worshipper.

The third example of a suburban cult is taken from the other side of Singapore, in the rather wild and badly developed area that lies between the Tiong Bahru Road and the heights overlooking the harbour. The portions of this area that are inhabited are covered with straggling collections of attap huts.

In the Geylang area, a high proportion of the inhabitants are wage-earners who gain a livelihood through employment in commercial and industrial undertakings elsewhere in the city. In this area off the Tiong Bahru Road, however, there are many huts, which not only, at least in part, are agricultural produce from smallholdings. Warmer justified or not, the locally bear a reputation strongly associated with gangsterism. For this reason, among others, some of the collections of dwellings, which hardly justify being called villages, have developed a strong community spirit for the purpose of mutual protection against undesirable intruders.

Several spirit-medium temples are scattered throughout this area, but the one described here is fairly distinct from others. It is the only spirit-medium temple in the complex of huts to which it is attached, and is a place of some importance in the cult associated with the 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches'. It is dedicated to the 'Nine Divine Brothers', who are personified as a single shen.

The dang-ki, who is a man of about forty, is the owner of the temple, and also, for many purposes, the chief promoter of the cult. The annual festival is held on the ninth of the Ninth Moon. This is the only example in Singapore of thoroughgoing spirit mediumship in connection with the 'Nine Divine Brothers'. There is simple merit for a stage, which is set up on the hillside below the temple. Before the procession begins, a number of youths, specially dressed for the occasion, give a sword dance in front of an offering table which is placed outside the temple. After the dance, the dan-ki goes into trance inside the temple, its doors and windows are all tightly closed to exclude curious onlookers. The dang-ki and an assistant stick 'Generals' Heads' through a fold of skin in the upper part of the arm of each of the youths who have taken part in the dance. Finally, the dang-ki pierces his own cheek with a heavy, spear-like skewer. This is one of the cults which employs the services of a Taoist priest on such occasions. He is present while the piercing of arms and cheeks is going on, blowing his horn at intervals to drive away evil spirits. When all is ready, the dang-ki, the priest and the assistants emerge from the temple. The dang-ki sits in a spiked chair and is carried away in procession. There is no additional chair in which the image of the shen is carried. The procession makes a lengthy tour of the shen's 'parish', during which a number of bamboo stakes with joss papers tied over their heads are driven into the ground.
to mark out the boundary at suitable intervals. On each such occasion, joss papers and incense are left to burn at the spot and the Taoist priest cracks his exorcising whip to ward off evil influences within the delineated area.

As a reflection of the community spirit upon which such a cult can draw, the procession is followed by a number of the leading personages in that area. Many of them lend their services to the cult in one way or another on the occasion of its annual festival. More remarkable still is the popular recognition and support given by the inhabitants of the area. As the procession passes through the narrow, muddy lanes there is scarcely a house where a family does not come to the street, not just to see what is going on, but to stand with burning incense sticks in their hands, worshipping the shen as he goes by. For the rest of the year the dang-ki can be found at his temple, available to anyone who may need his help. It was hardly be said that he holds regular performances, but at least he is frequent enough to ensure him a livelihood of some sort.

The Life Cycle of Spirit-Medium Cults. One of the notable features of individual spirit-medium cults is the transience of their existence. Apart from the constant possibility of a quarrel among the promoters, that cults are too highly dependent on the qualities of a single dang-ki to provide any persistent continuity over a number of years. In five or ten years a cult may have grown to great affluence only to have withered out of existence. Spirit-medium cults have, therefore, a recognizable "life cycle" which deserves description. They are born, they grow, sometimes to great affluence, they come to a sudden end, or they decline to insignificance. They may be marked by a fever, and under certain circumstances appear to be finished. To illustrate this we will describe a number of different cults which pass through the various stages of the life cycle.

The Birth of a Cult. It may sometimes happen that a religious cult which hitherto has had no connection with spirit mediumship may acquire the services of a dang-ki and thereby become a spirit-medium cult. But when a new cult is formed, it is more usual for it to grow up around a dang-ki and develop as the dang-ki develops his powers. When someone is found to have powers of mediumship, an organisation grows up around him. Sometimes, however, such a person becomes attached as an assistant dang-ki to an established cult. A dang-ki may also become dissatisfied with the cult where he is working, and break off to form a new cult of his own. All these reasons make it difficult to observe a genuine example of a spirit-medium cult in its embryo stages. The example given here seems to conform to the minimum requirements of being based on a person developing powers of mediumship and supported by an organisation having no strong connection with any other spirit-medium cult. It was, of course, impossible to observe it over a sufficiently long period to ascertain that it developed into a fully-fledged cult.

It is only by chance that such examples can be encountered. An
embryo cult has no great fame which can serve to direct an investigator to its temple. The one described here was discovered when passing through a squatter area on the outskirts of Singapore. Notes which were made of it later appeared to show that it had been abandoned, probably temporarily, but as there was an important festival taking place in the neighbourhood this might have had no exceptional significance.

Inside the hut, a woman of about thirty was seated at a table in front of a household altar with her body swaying and her eyes closed. Over her left shoulder she held an Eight Trigram flag and in her right hand was a wooden block which she was rapping to and fro on the table in rhythm with her movements. The rest of the small room was crowded with women and children and a few men. One after another they pushed forward to have whispered consultations with her.

These present said that this woman had come from China recently, and had lived there all her life. She had no knowledge of any other language except Chinese. When she was overcome by a trance, she would become possessed by one of the lesser-known Hokkien shen. When this occurred, the women spread abroad the news of what had happened and people came rushing to her hut to pay their respects to the shen and to secure consultations. They displayed no effort to build up a cult around her, but there appeared to be three or four persons in the neighbourhood who had taken it upon themselves to ensure that the necessary arrangements were made whenever the woman was overcome by a trance. The description outside the hut bore a possible indication that a performance had been expected on that day.

Subsequent visits to the hut revealed no more information of importance. The woman still became possessed from time to time, and more and more people were coming to her because of the success of her cures. But no one could say in advance when she was going to give a performance. It is possible that this was all that ever happened.

The Growing Cult. In the description of the suburban cult which never managed to retain the services of a dang-ki for long it was mentioned that the first holder of the office moved away a short distance and established a cult of his own after quarrelling with the promoters. This in itself is highly unusual. If a dang-ki quarrels with his promoters, he is more likely to move away to a distant spot, sometimes as far away as Malacca, before associating himself with a spirit-medium cult again. If he remains in the same locality, he will probably give up practising. However, the manner in which the young dang-ki set about the establishment of his own cult represents a good example of a cult which has survived the first embryo stages and is beginning to grow towards greater affluence.

The dang-ki is a good-looking, well set up young man of about twenty-five with a considerable knowledge of occult matters as well as a competence in practical affairs. He is assisted chiefly by two elderly Chinese who are reputed to be his father and mother. The temple to which the cult moved is a fair-sized thatched hut which can be reached by taking a rough pathway from the village in which he was first
operating. The way to the temple is well signposted and flagged all the
way from the road.

The worship of the cult concentrates on three major shen, the 'Lord
of Black Heaven', the 'Third Prince', and the 'Great Saint'. The
dang-ki who initiated the cult can become possessed by all three, but
he concentrates chiefly on the first. There are now two other dang-ki
attached to the cult. One is a young man in his twenties who specializes
in being possessed by the 'Third Prince', and has reached the stage of
giving medicine on certain occasions. The other is a very small boy
whom age is given as fourteen, but who probably gets no further than
mortifying himself in the role of the 'Great Saint'.

A performance is given in the temple every day at two p.m., provided
clients turn up for consultations. A number of youths have become
attached to the cult as drummers and general assistants. They are
dressed in special uniforms for most occasions. The enthusiasm with
which they perform their duties gives the cult the distinction of being
one of the noisiest in Singapore.

The temple is poorly equipped in comparison with other cults. The
interior is reasonably well decorated and provided with the smaller
articles of equipment. But there are very few images and no sedan
chairs. These deficiencies may be remedied in the course of time by
generous worshippers, but for the present the cult has to resort to other
devices when it wishes to hold a celebration. On some occasions,
Taoist priests are engaged to chant their rituals as an added attraction.

Twelve persons are engaged in these duties under an awning outside
the temple, as a more spectacular variation on the usual ritual the dang-ki
climbs on top of these to perform his feats of self-mortification. He enters
his trance inside the temple and then goes rushing out to climb the tables.
Standing on the top, he cuts his tongue, licks charm papers, or flagellates
himself with a prick ball in full view of the many onlookers. After that,
he descends to the bottom to carry out acts of exorcism among wor-
shippers, and then goes inside the temple again to hold consultations
in front of the offering tables.

This cult is not very well known except in the immediate locality,
but there is evidence that its reputation is increasing. Some of the
worshippers who attend for consultations come from several miles away.
If this progress continues, it should not be long before the cult is amply
provided with all the necessary equipment for more elaborate festivals.
No future developments are predicted, and there is no mention of any
further expansion. This is partly because of the nature of the cult's
activities, which depend on the presence of the two young boys. If the
chief dang-ki were to fail it is possible that the cult could continue with
the other two. The promoters are middle-aged Straits-born Hokkiens.

1 Following the introduction of the Children and Young Persons Ordinance
in 1950, which restricted the employment of juvenile workers, it became in-
creasingly difficult to ascertain the ages of children engaged in any sort of
remunerative work. To be on the safe side, it was always claimed that they were
fourteen.
The Flourishing Cult. Although the 'Great Saint' cult described in Chapter IV is an excellent example of a flourishing cult, it gives too enhanced a picture, perhaps, of a cult in an affluent condition. The activities of the cult are maintained with great enthusiasm and energy, but if we are to seek a cult which is more typical of those with an established reputation, it would be better to look to an example where affluence has lasted over a greater number of years. One such example can be found in the vicinity of Balestier Road, towards the outer fringe of Singapore urban area. Like several of its kind, this cult has maintained a consistent reputation over a long number of years. In fact, it is probably one of the oldest existing cults in Singapore. Its reputation depends largely upon the fact rather than upon any very spectacular efforts made in recent years to attract popularity.

The dang-ki is a man approaching middle age. He is the owner of the temple, and also, for many purposes, the chief promoter of the cult. He was born in Singapore, but his father, who established the cult there, came from China about sixty years ago. His father was also a dang-ki, practising in China. He received instructions from his shen, the 'Great Saint', to emigrate to Singapore and build a temple. It is not usual to find that the sons of dang-ki follow their father's footsteps, but in this case the dang-ki inherited his father's reputation and added to it on his own account. He now leads a relatively quiet and affluent life, noting on a reputation built up in the past. Cults such as this can carry on for years without any great change in fortunes. The dang-ki is available at almost any time for consultations, and about once a week, usually on Saturday evenings, he is assured of sufficient clients to hold a regular performance. The physical feats which he indulges in are not very startling, but it appears that the advice he gives is satisfactory enough to maintain his reputation.

The cult holds a festival once a year on a date a few days earlier than that which is taken as the major anniversary of most 'Great Saint' cults. This festival follows the usual pattern of spirit-medium celebrations, but the more spectacular feats that are performed are not undertaken by the dang-ki himself. He engages a number of young dang-ki from other temples for this purpose, and in due course reciprocates by honouring the festivals held at these other temples with his presence in the role of the 'Great Saint'. A situation such as this can best occur when the dang-ki himself is the owner of the temple and plays an important part in the promotion of the cult. In other cases, the dang-ki may fall the promotion, or vice versa. Unless he trains a successor, it is probable that the cult will die out.

1 Shortly after this was written, the chief dang-ki did, in fact, quarrel with his colleagues over money matters. He moved away from the neighbourhood, and since he left no word concerning his destination, it has been impossible to follow his progress.
The Dying Cult. It has been stressed many times that a cult will fail if it loses the services of its dang-ki and can offer no satisfactory substitute. The dang-ki may die, lose his powers, or quarrel with his promoters and move elsewhere. In many cases, the cult will cease to exist when this occurs. If the promoters are in sufficiently strong position, they will often make efforts to maintain the tradition of spirit-mediumship at their temple by one means or another. This, however, rarely results in more than the artificial prolongation of the life of the cult. It does not mean that the temple ceases to exist as a place of worship. It is quite likely that it will continue to be used by worshippers for a variety of purposes such as making offerings to the shen and consulting them by throwing divining blocks and divining sticks. This may have been the history of many of the smaller Chinese temples that no longer maintain a tradition of spirit-mediumship.

An example of a cult which is in danger of losing its tradition of spirit-mediumship can be found in the Joo Chiat area, in the general vicinity of Geylang. The temple was built on its present site about twenty-five years ago. The building itself is small, and designed after the pattern of most spirit-medium temples. Above the altars, a very large number of small images represent a mixture of the more popular Hokkien shen. It is dedicated primarily to the well-known Hokkien shen, the 'Saintly King Kwek' (Kuo sheng wang).

The most outstanding feature of this temple is the spacious courtyard with a permanent stage built at the far end. This last feature is rarely found in connection with Chinese temples of any sort in Singapore, although it is rather more common in the rural areas. The owner of the temple and the chief promoter of the cult is an elderly and shrewd Straits-born Hokkien who retired recently from employment with a British firm. The reputation of the cult was established with the help of several talented dang-ki, but for unspecified reasons their services were lost during the Japanese occupation. The chief promoter is astute enough to realise that the reputation of a spirit-medium cult depends more upon being able to arrange satisfactory consultations than upon a display of spectacular physical feats. He is now endeavouring to obtain the services of a new dang-ki who will fulfil his requirements. He has to admit, however, that this is not an easy task. He considers that the best dang-ki always came from China and he regards it as rather comical that local-born Chinese should now be taking up mediumship because of the present shortage of Chinese practitioners. Even though some Straits-born dang-ki may be satisfactory, there are still many obstacles in being able to persuade them to serve his cult permanently.

In the meantime, however, he is not willing to abandon completely the spirit-medium tradition of his temple. He means that he has to be sure of maintaining a cult tradition at his temple while he waits for the services of a new dang-ki who will come from China. There is an old man upon whom he can call if a devotee requires his...
services. This dang-ki can at least be relied upon to give an adequate performance at the cult's annual festival, during which there must be a beating of the bounds' ceremony. As an additional attraction two or three other dang-ki are also engaged to perform some of the usual physical feats and attend the burning of a bonfire of joss papers in the temple courtyard. This and the theatrical performance which is staged in front of the temple are sufficient to maintain a degree of popular interest in the cult's activities until a more satisfactory arrangement can be devised.

It is possible, of course, that the chief promoter will soon acquire the services of a good dang-ki, but if he fails it is almost inevitable that his temple will degenerate into nothing more than a shrine for the casual worship of devotees living in the vicinity.

The Moribund Cult. In Singapore, numerous small temples are no longer the centres of spirit-medium cults but give evidence that they have been associated with such practices in the past. They still retain articles of spirit-medium equipment: prick balls, swords, 'Generals' Heads', and sedan chairs are prominently displayed. No dang-ki practises there, and there has not been one for a number of years, but these articles of equipment, which are so distinctively associated with spirit-mediumship, have not been removed.

An example of this can be found in one of the lanes leading off Geylang Road. The building itself is substantial, and is constructed more after the design of a small Christian church than the usual spirit-medium temple. It is dedicated to the 'Lord who Protects Life' and it still contains many of the accoutrements of a dang-ki. On the wall is a photograph of the dang-ki upon whose fame the reputation of the cult was built. Judging by the nature of the building he must have been very successful in attracting wealthy patronage.

The present caretakers of the temple live in a hut next door. They explain that the dang-ki was taken away by the Japanese shortly after the fall of Singapore and never heard of again. It may be a coincidence, but this appears to have been the fate of an exceptionally high proportion of dang-ki. His family was left behind with no one to care for them, so the neighbours undertook this duty. They clean the temple occasionally and maintain a semblance of order. No question concerning the legal right to ownership seems to have arisen. The present caretakers do not seem anxious to put the building to any more remunerative use than as a temple where anyone with a wish to do so can come in for private devotions.

The Reviving Cult. Once a spirit-medium temple has fallen into a moribund condition, its days are usually numbered, but this need not always be the case. If a sufficient number of persons is interested in reviving the cult, the owners of the temple may set about trying to find a new dang-ki who can re-establish their reputation. This may be done by tempting a dang-ki to give his services permanently to the cult, or it may be done by holding a series of religious rites in which aspirants to mediumship are
invited to discover whether they are able to develop their latent powers. Once the shen has condescended to choose a dang-ki for his service, and launched him upon a career in the temple, the pattern of development is laid down. The dang-ki is then brought into the temple to be initiated, and after this he will be 'chosen' by the shen. The reputation upon which the fame of a dang-ki depends is of a personal nature. Devotees will come for consultations with a dang-ki because of the cures that he has achieved and not because he practises in a temple place or because possessed by a well-known shen. Nevertheless the dang-ki who Launches himself in a reviving cult enjoys some initial advantages. The temple where he practises is at least well known among some of the older generation, and it is probably equipped already with most of the apparatus that a cult requires for a proper performance of its ceremonies.

An example of a reviving cult can be found in the area in which the inhabitants are Chinese with many years residence in Malaya. The temple is large for one used by a spirit-medium cult, and is of an unusual design. This is explained by the fact that under the previous dang-ki who enjoyed a very great reputation, the building was extended as funds permitted. Spirit-medium performances are carried out at a table and altar at the back of the temple. This was the place of worship when the cult first started in the 1920's. Subsequently, an enclosed courtyard was built in front, with an imposing façade beyond it flaring out like a pagoda. This temple is also the residence of the 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches' for the area.

The present dang-ki is a reserved and sincere young man with an excellent command of English. His normal occupation is that of a wireless operator. He describes himself as the 'foster son' of the former dang-ki, who died at a relatively early age before the Japanese occupation. He never had any aspirations towards mediumship until about a year or so ago, when he began to be very interested in the occult. It was then that he took up the study of both science and western occultism and psychology. As an experiment, he submitted to the operations that are associated with Chinese spirit-mediumship. He soon found that he could communicate with the same Hokkien shen as had been his familiar in life, and he then decided to try and arrange for public performances to be held. Persons suffering from various diseases were invited to attend to discover whether the healing powers of the shen were still operating. The cult now claims that several cures, particularly of diabetes, have been achieved.

Performances are held only when a sufficient number of persons have intimated that they wish to consult the dang-ki. The procedure followed is somewhat different from that of other cults. An assistant stands as innovation, but no drums or gongs are beaten. The dang-ki stands around the temple and he holds the influence of the shen working within him. He makes of the people who come and stop at the entrance with the shen's name on it. As he is doing this,
he begins to shiver violently. He sits down in the chair in front of the offering table and falls into a very convincing trance which lasts at least during the initial stages of his performance. A European doctor who witnessed this testified that he is overcome by a cataleptic fit which he could not possibly simulate. There are no very spectacular preliminaries to the consultations. The dang-ki cuts his tongue with a sword and extinguishes burning incense sticks in his mouth, but is less convincing in this than other dang-ki. These actions are undertaken not so much to impress onlookers as to prepare what are considered to be the necessary ingredients for inscribing the charm papers which are the important element in the method of treatment.

The consultations are held in a whisper between the dang-ki and the worshipper. No one else can hear what is being said, and no interpreter is required. When the last consultation is finished, the dang-ki collapses in the chair in which he has been sitting all the time. His assistants go up to him and rub his limbs. In a few moments he revives and dresses himself again. He admits that he has some idea of what was going on during the consultation, but his memories are very vague.

At present the work of the cult is largely experimental. It has not been revived long enough for anyone to say what its future is likely to be. It is possible that the young dang-ki will tire of his experiments and abandon the whole project. Or he may decide to develop his psychic powers privately rather than by means of public performances. But if he does in fact achieve a number of cures which have the appearance of being miraculous, it is equally possible that the cult will acquire a considerable reputation, drawing worshippers from many parts of Singapore. Whatever the basis of his psychic powers may be, there can be little doubt as to the dang-ki’s sincerity and personal interest in wishing to develop them.
VI

SPECIALISED BRANCHES OF SHENISM

Each of the cults already described centres its ritual and other activities around the spirit-possession of one or more dang-ki. But within the general field of spirit mediumship exist several branches of specialisation and methods which is not covered adequately in the accounts given.

One of these is concerned with raising the souls of the dead so that they can communicate with the living. This must not be confused with any of the stylised and mechanical ceremonies for calling back the soul which can be included as part of funeral rites. A female dang-ki can be employed to raise the soul of a dead person at any time after death, but preferably not during the initial period of mourning. In many ways, the work of these female dang-ki is indistinguishable from that of the dang-ki already described, but there is sufficient emphasis on a single function and purpose, and sufficient differences in the style of ceremony, to justify their treatment as a specialised branch of spirit mediumship.

In all cases previously described, the emphasis has been placed upon the spirit-possession of human beings, and to a lesser extent the inhabiting spirit which can motivate material objects. These two versions of the same phenomenon work more or less independently of each other, but there are certain specialised branches of spirit-mediumship in which they work jointly. That is to say, it is a material object which is the instrument of divination, motivated by the shen, but it can only be operated by a human being who makes himself a passive agent for the application of the shen's power. The outstanding example of this is the Chinese method of automatic writing by which two persons hold a forked stick that writes the shen's pronouncements on a sand tray.

Two other versions of the same thing can be found in plate turning and basket rapping. In none of these cases is there any noteworthy specialisation in the subjects concerning which consultations are held.

The Raising of Souls. The preceding accounts of Chinese spirit mediumship show that no exceptional emphasis is placed on communicating with the souls of the dead, as in the case of the type of spiritualism practised in European countries. It is true, of course, that European spiritualists deal with other matters besides communicating with the dead, just as it is true that Chinese dang-ki will concern themselves with the particular aspect of occultism if so required. It is more a matter of the direction in which the importance of spirit-mediumship is supposed to lie. To many Europeans it is highly important that they should obtain some proof that the human personality survives death.
and they can obtain comfort by communicating with their dead hus-
band, wives or brothers. The Chinese who are likely to visit a

dang-ki

have little doubt in their minds that there is such a thing as a soul which

survives death, and the reason for calling the soul back is not so much

to obtain comfort as to ensure that it will not visit its wrath upon the

living for offences such as omissions in the correct funeral rites. Prob-
lems of this type can be brought to any
dang-ki,

and often are, if it is

suspected that a run of ill-luck is caused by the unquiet soul of a dead
relative. But there is among the Chinese a specialised branch of spirit
mediumship which is more nearly comparable to the spiritualism of

Europe and consists almost entirely of women practitioners.

De Groot encountered this in the Amoy district of Fukien province

towards the end of the last century and devotes a chapter to a description

of his findings. He writes:

As far as we know, members of the female sex who perform functions like

those of the sai kong do not exist in Amoy or the surrounding districts. But

women indulge there on a large scale in Wu-ist work of other kind, even as

professionals for the sake of gain, either in their own houses, or in those of

others, but exclusively in private company.

It is the ghosts of deceased relatives, as well as spirits of gods such as

Kwan-ti, which through such mediums give advice and foretell, and expel
demons. Calling up spirits of the dead for the purpose of such psychomancy

is a very common practice among the female sex of Amoy. It is called
khun

b6ng,

'to bring up the dead', or

ch'e sin,

'to seek ghosts'.

The mediums, mostly professionals there, as in the case of sai kong, do not

come from a special caste or occupation. They are either members of the

same family or are recruited from the general population. As a rule they

are not very old, but their reputation often extends far beyond the limits

of their district. They are generally blind, and this is considered to be an

advantage, for it is said that they can see things that others cannot.

The bringing up of the dead is not a very prevalent practice in

present-day Singapore, but many Chinese are familiar with it, and most

have witnessed it at some time or other in their lives. Among the

Hokkiens and Teochius the women practitioners are known as
khun-b6ng,
and among the Cantonese as
mdn seng p'oh,
'an old woman who

demands that (spirits) should be raised'. In spite of the supposition

that the

khun-b6ng

actually becomes possessed by the soul of the person

who is being sought, most Chinese prefer to go to a soul-raiser who

speaks their own dialect. If they engage one who does not speak their

own dialect fluently, they still do not consider it strange that their uncle,
say, who was a Teochiu when alive speaks through the

khun-b6ng

with a

marked Hokkien accent. The real limitation upon a more widespread

use of soul raisers is not so much an indifference due to a decline in

belief but to the small number of practitioners who are considered

properly competent. There are many women who dabble in such

matters, but there are only a dozen among the Hokkiens with a

sufficiently great reputation to inspire confidence.

As was the case in Amoy, most soul raisers operate chiefly in private

company. Either they are invited to the home of the family desiring a consultation, or else they operate in their own households. But in Singapore some who operate in their own homes have established small temples which are indistinguishable from those of ordinary spirit-medium cults. They may specialise in raising souls, but much of their business is concerned with giving advice and medicine along the lines followed by other dang-ki.

Needless to say, the consultations that are held in private homes for the specific purpose of raising the soul of a dead relative are not an easy subject for an outsider to investigate. Information as to when such performances are taking place is not readily accessible, but it was only after attending a seance in a private home that the reason for such secrecy and exclusion was fully appreciated. A skilled soul raiser is capable of laying bare many of the skeletons in a family's cupboard and bringing to light some of the personal animosities of which an outsider might well remain ignorant.

An appointment is made with the soul-raiser for her to attend the home in which she is required. At that time the fee is stipulated. Whereas a consultation in her own home may cost as little as two dollars, a visit to someone else's home is unlikely to cost less than ten dollars. In addition to that, four or five dollars have to be spent on the necessary paraphernalia such as incense sticks and joss papers. At the time the appointment is made, the soul raiser may stipulate certain preparatory rites that have to be performed, either at the family altar or in a temple. She will also require that the name and the date of death of the person whose soul must be raised will be given to her. It is averred that even when this information is not demanded in advance the results can be equally satisfactory. It is always possible that in the two or three intervening days before the performance the soul raiser or one of her assistants could make a few discreet enquiries concerning the family that has engaged her. It is denied, of course, that she would ever do this, and it is not unlikely that the technique of a soul raiser during her actual performance can be so skilful that such an artifice is rendered unnecessary.

Most soul raisers are widows, ranging in age from their middle thirties upwards. At the time appointed, she arrives, with one or two female assistants. While the soul raiser is resting, the assistants help the family to make ready the table in front of the family altar at which the performance is to be held. There must be two red candles, three small cups of tea and offerings of fruit, preferably oranges. A bowl of 'red flower water', i.e. plain water with green pomegranate leaves floating in it, must be set on the table for reviving the soul raiser after her performance. There is also a supply of incense sticks, and golden joss papers which have to be folded into the proper triangular shapes.

When she is ready to begin, the soul raiser sits down in a chair in front of the table in the circle of the family. First she cleanses the table and chair of evil influences by burning incense
sticks and joss papers under them. Then she leans forward, resting her head on her hands and holding a spray of three incense sticks and a fan of joss papers. For a time she sits there, muttering quietly to herself, and then she begins to chant in a hoarse voice, bending forward and up and down. This is how she begins her task. In Singapore the goddess Kuan Yin is invariably the one who is called upon by soul raisers to lead them into the kingdom of hell to seek out the souls of the dead. When called upon in this capacity, Kuan Yin is usually known by one of her alternative titles of the 'Third Lady' or the 'Third Aunt'.

After a few minutes, the soul raiser's body begins to tremble, at first gently and then more violently. Her muttering becomes louder and changes to a sing-song chant. This is Kuan Yin speaking and asking what is required of her. The soul raiser reverts to her normal voice and asks that an audience be granted with a person in hell. Here she gives the name and date of death. Kuan Yin agrees and passes the request on to the keeper of hell. She is allowed through and passes into a land where there are many suffering souls. As she goes up a hill, she is assailed on all sides by souls who demand to be put in touch with their relatives in the land of the living. Many of them have no heads or no limbs, or are in other ways suffering or mutilated. Kuan Yin describes all this as she passes among them. By now the circle of listeners is thoroughly enthralled by the gruesome descriptions that are being given.

Eventually, Kuan Yin announces that she has been approached by a man who appears to have good reason for talking to the people present at the seance. She asks the ghost how he died, and how many wives, sons and daughters he had. When giving the reply, the soul raiser rises in her chair and changes her voice to a horrible growl. The ghost may evade the question and announce that he died by murder, or that he was buried in only one garment of grave-clothes. As a sign of disgust, the soul raiser raps loudly on the table as she is speaking.

This is obviously not the soul that is being sought, so Kuan Yin tries again. She asks the ghost more questions, and in a few minutes he gives the name and date of death. Kuan Yin agrees and passes the request on to the keeper of hell. She is allowed through and passes into a land where there are many suffering souls. As she goes up a hill, she is assailed on all sides by souls who demand to be put in touch with their relatives in the land of the living. Many of them have no heads or no limbs, or are in other ways suffering or mutilated. Kuan Yin describes all this as she passes among them. By now the circle of listeners is thoroughly enthralled by the gruesome descriptions that are being given by the goddess.

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he is faring in hell, to which he replies that he is moderately comfortable and that he is very glad to have been given this opportunity of talking with his family. He is then asked if there is anything that can be done for him. He may reply that more paper money and paper clothes were burnt for him at Ch’ing Ming, or that his grave is in some way slightly uncomfortable. He may explain his relatives to burn a large paper house for him in his grave-side to give him a bit more room to live in, or that the height of his grave mound should be raised slightly so that the neighboring graves do not overlook him and cut out most of the light.

Temporary visitors will be taken and asked whether he would like to speak individually with anyone present. He may say that he would like to talk with his elder brother, in which case the brother draws his chair up close to the soul raiser and enters into a conversation. The ghost pays his respects to his elder brother and requests him in duty bound to be a good father to his bereaved family now that circumstances have snatched him from the world of the living. The brother promises that this will be undertaken faithfully. His wife or a sister is then asked for until each member of the family has received instructions and advice.

In any modern gathering of this nature, it is apparent that not all persons present have an equal faith in the soul raiser’s performance. Some are convinced that the ghost raiser and take all that is said very seriously. Some of the younger members have only agreed to attend out of curiosity, to see whether or not there really is anything in this business of raising souls. Their does not appear to be any very strict order in which the ghost wishes to speak with the members present, but in general he will speak with the more senior ones that, and with those who were nearest to him in life. If a member is not present, the ghost may send a servant or a daughter to bring him to the soul raiser’s performance. If there is no one present to bring back the member it is possible for the soul raiser to speak with the ghost himself, in which case they will be treated with a deference due to their rank. The soul raiser may refuse to take part. The ghost is by no means respectful to all who speak with him. He may berate his wife for her failure to discipline the children properly, or condemn his eldest son for too frequent an indulgence in cinemas and cabarets.

Little by little during the course of the performance a clear picture of the family’s background and problems is brought to light, until it becomes a relatively easy task for the soul raiser to persuade all who are present that everything about them is known as intimately as if it were his ghost himself speaking. Some of the more susceptible members ask the ghost about particular problems that are worrying them. Some of these problems may involve personal antagonisms within the family or questions of rights to property. In such case the ghost gives a
judgment, which must be observed by those who hear it. In all his
correspondence, the ghost mentions what would have been his rightful
status in the kinship circle were he still living, and adds to it a
number of occult wisps derived from his period of residence in another
world.

Eventually, Kuan Yin breaks into the conversation again to say that
this ghost has had enough interviews for the time being. The ghost
expresses his thanks at having been given this opportunity of speaking
with his family, and hopes that he will be called on again soon for a
longer and better session in which he can invite his friends.

Kuan Yin is asked whether she would permit an interview with
another ghost. She agrees to try to find one more only, and on being
given his name, instructs the ghost who has just finished his interview
to help her to find him. Apparently, he is not very successful in his
search, so Kuan Yin has to go about the whole lengthy process again,
clamouring among multitudes of clamouring ghosts, until she can find the right one. If the second ghost is a member of the same family as the one who has already appeared much of the groundwork has already been covered and the interviews can proceed rapidly. If not, much of the family's identity and background has to be
established afresh. It is not often that two unconnected families will be
present at the same performance, but in one case where this occurred
the woman who had consulted the medium was given a severe lecture by him after he had been found. She was told
that she had no right to call him up among all these strangers in a home
that was not her own. She was asked to arrange a separate ceremony in
greater privacy where he could tell her all that she wanted to know.

After the correct atmosphere for a seance has been established many
of those present would like the soul raiser to bring up the souls of three
or four people at a single sitting. Kuan Yin says that the time is
limited. Rarely more than one or two souls are raised at a single
sitting. Kuan Yin also says that she is too busy and that further interviews
will have to be postponed until a later date. On the way back, however,
she listens to anyone present who may be ill and gives them a cure.

When all business is finished Kuan Yin emerges from the gates of
hell, chanting as she goes. The soul raiser stands up with her hands
crossed and falls back into the chair behind her. Assistants come
forward to revive her with charm water. After a few seconds she regains
consciousness and makes ready to leave the house.

In investigating the work of soul raisers, the same difficulties are
encountered as in other types of Chinese spirit mediumship. To a
European observer there is plainly room for much fraud. On the other
hand, it must be admitted that many soul raisers are sufficiently skilful
to appear completely convincing to the Chinese. To corroborate this
feeling of conviction, most persons who have consulted a soul raiser...
will testify that she has given them information which she could not possibly have known had she not been possessed by the soul of their dead relative. They will say that the ghost gave his 'milk name', or details of his life which were only known to very few persons. The simplest explanation would be that the soul raiser is in some sort of telepathic communication with the circle in which she is performing. But any such judgment is outside the scope of the present study. If whatever proves the soul raiser not duped, it must be admitted that a competent performance requires great skill. The feelings of the audience must be perfectly judged in order to establish a maximum of credulity among all those who are present. Special pains must be taken with those who tend towards disbelief, and the scene must be led forward step by step until a sufficient knowledge of the family's background has been acquired for all pronouncements to be made with the certainty of acceptance. Further, the soul raiser can never deviate from the religious symbolism familiar to her listeners, or make mistakes in the manner in which a member of a kinship circle would address his superiors or inferiors. Whatever the psychical content of her performance may be, a good soul raiser at work is a revelation in the skilful use of sociological knowledge. It is not surprising that competent soul raisers are relatively few these days, or that those who attain the necessary standards are much in demand, and have impeccable reliability in the eyes of their clients.

Automatic Writing. An interesting branch of Chinese spirit mediumship is that which receives the pronouncements of the souls by automatic writing. In Chinese, this is known as ju chi. For many centuries past it has been practised on a wide scale in China and appears to be the method of spirit mediumship best known to foreigners. It also has the most respectable reputation, being a considerable wages at different times among well-to-do and educated classes. Although the basic principles are more or less the same, the methods employed seem to differ somewhat from province to province. F. L. K. Hsu gives a description of the use of automatic writing in connection with temple worship in recent years in a town in Yunnan. There are other accounts, relating to various periods within the last hundred years in different parts of China. The closest approximation to contemporary practice in Singapore can be found in de Groot's chapter on the subject in The Religious System of China (Vol. 6). It appears that overseas Chinese adhere closely to the system followed in the Amoy district from which many of them originated. Although a number of examples of the use of automatic writing can be found in present-day Singapore, its practice cannot be considered very important in relation to other methods of spirit mediumship except, possibly, for the light it can throw on the problem of spirit possession. As a Chinese explained: 'Shoi people prefer the speaking kind of mediums.' This is itself an interesting commentary on the
religious tastes of the overseas Chinese. There are no known cases where automatic writing is employed as an alternative method of divination in cults which also use the normal type of dang-ki. If it is practised at all, it is resorted to in its own right without any dependence upon other types of mediumship. It is, however, not entirely independent of the general theory of Chinese occultism, especially the 'speaking kind' of divination. Much of the basic equipment is the same as in any other Chinese temple which is strongly attached to the tradition of Shennism. At certain points during a performance, the more conventional methods of divination, such as the throwing of divining blocks, may be resorted to in order to discover the will of the shen when he fails to reveal himself by other means.

The use of automatic writing is generally restricted to genuine believers who resort to methods of divination with no immediate benefits in view. The meetings are more often held in private homes and are not open to the public. These meetings of a few individuals have sometimes resulted in the formation of associations with religious and charitable aims. In these cases, much of the policy of the association is derived from the dictates of a shen, delivered by the means of automatic writing.

The most important piece of specialized equipment for automatic writing consists of a writing stick made out of peach or willow wood, described by de Groot. They are about eighteen inches long and shaped like a letter Y. The end of the stick, represented by the bottom of the Y, is carved in the shape of a dragon's head and painted with gold leaf. The dragon's 'chin', which is the part that writes on the sand-board, is smooth and rounded. The chief difference from de Groot's sticks is that there is no short peg extending downwards from this underside. A few inches above the head the stick forks into two arms which constitute the handles by which it is held. These arms, which are highly curved, are about an inch in diameter and highly polished. The name of the shen on whose behalf the stick is used may be carved on the arms.

Another essential item of equipment is a sand tray about three feet long, two feet wide and half an inch deep. Sand, or sometimes dry rice, is scattered in this to a sufficient depth so that a stick being drawn across it leaves a visible mark. The rest of the paraphernalia is such as can be found in most temples and shrines. The principle of automatic writing is that the dragon's head is moved by the shen to write characters on the sand, while the stick is being held by two persons standing facing the tray, one of them grasping a handle in his right hand and the other in his left. Although it is the stick itself which is considered to be the 'medium', it is still necessary to have these two persons holding the handles as 'conductors' for the psychic power of the shen. Of the two, it is the one in the right-hand position, with his right hand in the handle, who is considered to have the necessary mediumistic powers. His partner on the right is only meant.
to hold the stick as a passive agent, following all its motions without
any interference.

The sand tray is set on a table in front of an altar dedicated to the
shen who is being invoked. Before the performance begins it may be
considered by means of the divining blocks as to whether he is willing
to come down. First, there has to be a decision as to what question the
shen will be asked. This may be generally agreed among those present
or it may be left to the choice of an individual. He need not necessarily
make it known to the others. He may simply offer incense in front of
the altar and make his request silently, or he may write it on a piece of
paper which he burns over one of the candles.

It is only after lengthy and painstaking experiments that satisfactory
results can be achieved. The experimenters have to discover not only a
shen who is willing to motivate the writing stick, but also a stick holder
who is sufficiently receptive to allow psychic power to operate. The
shen may have a name that is agreed upon in advance or it may be
chosen at random. Once the shen has been discovered and the correct invocations applied to him, it is still
necessary to determine which members of the party present can produce
the most satisfactory results when holding the stick. This is a duty
which anyone can try his hand at without much danger of unpleasant
sensations. No special qualifications are needed. In fact, the results
are by no means impressive if the stick is held by persons with no
particular aptitude for this kind of work.

The two persons selected may forward and stand in front of the sand
tray, but before the performance can begin an assistant must take a
burning golden paper and hold it for a moment or two under the
hands that are going to grasp the stick. The writing stick is placed on
the sand tray with the handles protruding over the edge towards the
persons who are going to hold them. They take hold of the handles
and move them slightly, having the head resting lightly on the sand.
A large supply of golden papers has been folded into triangular shapes
and laid on the altar near the table. An assistant takes one of them,
ignites it from a candle, and begins to wave it over the dragon's head.
At the same time, one or two others among those present begin to chant
the invocation, inviting the shen to come down. On some occasions, this procedure is followed for hours on end with-
out anything happening. Relays of assistants take up the chant one
after another and an endless succession of papers are burnt over the
head of the stick, one being ignited from the dying flames of the other.
If the shen appears to be particularly indifferent, other occult devices are employed. The
altar is rapped sharply with a wooden block, a mixture of salt and rice
is thrown into the air, or charm water is sprinkled round the room. The
only persons who cannot change their position are those holding the
stick. They have to stand there, grasping it tightly in their hands and
trying to concentrate on letting the shen work his influence through
them. If either of them is replaced by another stick holder the whole
process will have to start right from the beginning again.
In most cases, the stick does in fact begin to move after a few minutes, even though the persons holding it may never have tried the experiment before. None of those who have experimented can give a satisfactory account of what has caused the motion. They describe an odd pulling sensation inside their forearm, but they are certain that they have not produced the sensations themselves, and they are certain that it is caused by some unseen movement by their partner. Sometimes, the stick moves very slowly, in little jerks, up and down the board. Sometimes, it begins a faster sweeping motion that develops into a series of circles round the tray. Observation of a number of experiments in which the same persons act as partners shows that it is the personality of one partner that determines the movements of the stick, whether he is on the right or the left, and that his personality expresses itself in a series of movements which are peculiar to his participation. For instance, the stick always followed a wide, sweeping motion when held by one Buddhist priest, but only jerked backwards and forwards about an inch at a time in the middle of the board when held by a well-educated government official.

Not much importance is attached to these elementary movements on the part of the stick. They may continue for hours without any intelligible result being produced, and are attributed to the work of some lesser spirits who do not know how to use the stick properly. The more satisfactory results are always produced when a person with long experience of automatic writing is occupying the left-hand position. It does not matter who his partner is so long as he is passive.

When the stick begins to operate in a different manner, the effect is startling. The right hand holding the stick first begins to shake and quiver. The head then raps sharply two or three times on the tray, and follows this by wide, strong sweeps across the board. Usually the stick is angry at being disturbed and displays its wrath by punishing the sand tray severely. Up and down the stick jumps, descending with terrific force on the edge of the tray. Assistants have to brace their arms against the ends of the tray in order to keep the whole apparatus from being knocked to the ground. As it is, deep dents are left on the edge of the tray, and cases have been known where it has been smashed completely. As it is, the stick is almost certain to make some sort of a pronouncement, the reading of which is no easy task. The interpreter plays an important part in connection with automatic writing since the reading of characters in the sand tray is not an easy task.

Suddenly the stick changes its motion again and starts sweeping across the board. Then with lightning movements, it traces out a large 'grass character'. By now most of the sand in the tray has been disturbed and scattered, so the movements of the stick have become more violent and jerky. The stick is not so much in a state of anger as in a state of excitement, and it is almost certain to make some sort of a pronouncement, the reading of which is often more from a knowledge of the accepted order of strokes than from
anything that actually remains visible. In any case, the stick proceeds so quickly to its next character, obliterating the last, that there is little time to examine any marks that may be left in the tray. There is a hasty deliberation as to what the character is. The interpreter writes down whatever may have been decided. Usually the first few characters are those in which the deity announces his identity and are therefore more or less stereotyped, but difficulties are encountered when he begins his message. If the interpreter fails to read a character correctly, the word of the deity becomes nonsense. The sand tray may cease to enter deities and require the presence of many strong hands to hold it in place. The deity's wrath is so great that it is often necessary to have many strong hands to hold the tray itself. Sometimes, the deity condones the error and repeats the character that has been misinterpreted, but if not, the meaning in the final version has to be deduced as well as possible. There is no knowing how long the message will be. It may be a short one, saying that the deity cannot be bothered to spend much time with his worshippers, or it may run to several pages, in which the deity gives a full account of himself and his history. It may be announced that he is returning. After a few more contortions, the stick comes to rest in the middle of the board and the persons holding it release their grasp. The interpreter sits down to write out a fair copy of the message which is submitted for the scrutiny of all those present. After a short rest, they may then embark on another attempt to call down the deity. Experimenters in automatic writing will sometimes stock nothing of carrying on their activities well into the small hours of the morning. Once they have attained some success they are unwilling to give up. If the deity seems reluctant to respond the divining blocks will be thrown to ascertain whether it is worth going on. Should the answer be negative they may decide that they have had enough for one evening. Automatic writing seems to be a branch of Chinese spirit mediumship which could well be subjected to psychological research so far as the necessary controls could be applied to experiments without involving too much of the activities of those taking part. If it were possible to control an unconventional answer, the impression given would be that the person who had written the message was a person endowed with supernatural abilities. It is maintained that when the stick begins to move violently it would be quite impossible for the persons holding it to let go even if they wished to do so. It also appears that the person on the left-hand side when the stick comes to rest is in a mildly trance-like state and requires no special measures to revive him after the stick comes to rest. Occasionally, an Englishman was in the right-hand position as partner to a Chinese during a particularly violent session. After the performance the right hand of the Chinese was badly blistered while the Englishman's left hand showed no marks. The latter maintained
that he could have let go of the stick at any time if he had so wished, but he was by no means prepared to speculate on what had been moving it or to suggest that his partner was entirely responsible.

There are many stories of miraculous answers being received by means of automatic writing, but none of these can be confirmed experimentally. Answers to questions, when received in this way, are often highly equivocal. Usually, the shen refuses to answer the type of question set, or else gives an answer which would serve for a very wide range of questions. However, the devotees of automatic writing are not particularly interested in putting the writing stick to a use such as this. Often the answers serve to confirm a belief held by the user or to add new elements to his mythology and history. Deliverances of this nature present a different problem. There is at least one religious guild in Singapore which derived the history of its shen entirely from automatic writing. It is maintained that the history of the shen was quite unknown before, it was made known in this manner about ten years previously. The association still has a flourishing existence even though the group of devotees who operated the writing stick has long since ceased its activities. It would require expert appraisal to discover whether or not the legend which is now current was in fact already known in China or elsewhere.

The most convincing evidence in favour of automatic writing was produced at an experiment in which a Scotsman of undoubted integrity participated. He asked the shen whether his age could be given and having told no one of his question took up the right-hand position in front of the sand tray. His partner in the left-hand position was a Chinese whose collusion could not possibly be suspected. After a while the stick began to move across the sand very slowly. It was a Straits-born, English-speaking shen who was being consulted, so it was expected that his pronouncements would be given in English script. After about half an hour the stick had traced out what appeared to be an M. Then on the right-hand side of the M it wrote two rather shaky circles touching each other. The inscription might have been read as \( \text{MOO} \). The session had now been running for well over an hour, and the stick was not thought to be behaving in a satisfactory manner. The Scotsman was asked whether this could be an answer to his question. Going round to the right side of the tray he pointed out that the \( \text{MOO} \) could now be read as 38, with the 3 being above the 8. Thirty-eight happened to be his correct age.

Basket Rapping and Plate Turning. Other examples of spirit mediumship in which material objects are operated by human beings who act as ‘conductors’ in the power of the shen do not merit much attention since their usage in Singapore is not extensive. One of these methods, which appears to have had a great popularity with illiterate folk in the past, might be termed ‘basket rapping’. There are varying accounts as to where and when this form of mediumship should be practised. It is said that in China, it is properly practised with dung baskets in latrines.
or pigsties. But in Singapore, the correct place for it seems to have been transferred to temples. It is generally agreed that it is strongly associated with the Eighth Moon ceremonies and is a practice widely frowned upon by the majority of the population. In Singapore, there are still a number of temples which will arrange a ceremony if requested to do so on any day of the Eighth Moon. A large flower basket is draped with an old woman's dress. An incense stick is pushed into the top, and the basket is held by two young girls. An invocation is chanted to invoke the Shen to come down. Most of the Shen who possess baskets are females, and when they begin to make the basket sway, they must be addressed as 'Aunt'. When questions are asked, the Shen gives her answer by making the basket sway in a manner which is interpreted by the temple-keeper.

Another method belongs to far more literate circles and is indulged in more as an amusing pastime by intellectuals who are interested in the occult. The equipment consists of a plate with an arrow marked on its bottom and a large sheet of paper with about a thousand characters drawn around its perimeter. The plate is placed face downwards on a table and the sheet of paper is laid out on the table. Three persons place their right forefingers on the edge of the plate and press gently. Soon the plate begins to move round in a circle. Gradually its momentum increases until it is moving quite freely. Suddenly, the arrow stops opposite a character. The answer is then given by the temple-keeper. Some remarkable results are attributed to this method of divination, but it can hardly be said that it has a very widespread popularity.
SPIRIT-MEDIUM FESTIVALS

The Importance of Festivals. In earlier chapters an attempt has been made to give a relatively thorough description of a flourishing 'Great Saint' cult, followed by several more limited descriptions of other cults, which aim at developing the range of variation that can be found in Singapore. Although these variations may seem slight differences in the rites, the same underlying ideas remain, and the same spirit-medium cults are involved. One of these points is the great importance which is attached to holding as large a festival as possible at least once a year. The word festival is not properly applicable to temple celebrations in honour of a shen's birthday, but it is retained for convenience to convey the idea of religious rites and theatrical performances in honour of the shen's great day.

An annual festival is by no means a feature of spirit-medium cults alone. They are the established practice in all large Chinese temples, whatever the tradition to which they belong. At certain important dates in the Chinese calendar, such as the first and fifteenth of every Moon and the ninth of the First Moon, all temples should hold ceremonies. In addition, each temple is expected to hold a festival on the birthday of the shen to whom it is dedicated. It does not follow that there need only be one festival in the year. Some shen have more than one date associated with them, and many temples direct their worship towards more than one shen. In theory, a temple could hold a festival at least once a month if so desired, but in practice there are few which hold more than two or three per year. It is considered highly necessary, however, that at least one festival should be held every year in order to placate the shen enshrined in that spot.

The propitiation of the shen may be the theoretical reason given for holding a festival, but a sound practical reason can be found in the fact that such a successful festival means of cult's best means of self-advancement. The chief limitation placed on the number of festivals that can be held in a year is financial. The promotion of a festival can be very costly, both in labour and cash. There are few temples nowadays with sufficiently rich patronage to ensure that any deficit will be met without difficulty. The greater part of the funds has to be obtained in small contributions from the people living in the locality, and there is obviously a limit to the number of occasions on which such contributions can be demanded. In addition, a number of formalities have to be gone through in order to obtain the necessary licences from several different government departments.

The largest single item of expense is the engagement of a theatrical company, which may charge from $1,000 to $2,000 for a two-day stand.
This does not mean that a festival cannot be highly remunerative to its promoters in spite of the check which interested persons try to keep on accounts, but even if the proceeds are genuinely devoted to religious purposes, there are very few temples in Singapore which can be sure of success on this scale more than once a year. Most cults, therefore, compromise in their use of festivals as avenues to success. They hold one large annual festival which they aim at making as successful as possible, and when the time seems ripe they experiment cautiously with one or two minor festivals, at which they may merely engage a puppet show or singing party, and later on to some use of their own dramatic company. The three main elements in a Chinese religious festival are the theatrical performance, the hawkers' market, and worship in the temple. Of these three, the theatrical performance is undoubtedly the strongest attraction, although in theory the show is staged in honour of the shen, and not simply to amuse worshippers. Of course, numerous devotees enter the temple individually throughout the day in order to make their offerings and obeisances to the shen, and certain religious rites are performed in the temple during the course of the festival, but it is hardly those that draw the presence of a large crowd. The promoters of most festivals are content to have it this way. The majority of those who attend take it for granted that the proper religious rites have been carried out, and devote themselves to the popular attractions, treating the temple more as an office where contributions towards expenses in cash and kind are made.

The right day for the festival is always calculated according to the Chinese calendar. If it happens to fall on a Saturday or Sunday according to the western calendar its chances of success are greatly enhanced. Saturday afternoons and Sundays are the weekly holidays, and it can make a considerable difference, especially in the urban areas, to the attendance. But on whatever day of the week the festival may fall, the evenings are always the time when most people are present, many of them enjoying the noisy and colourful scene without any intention of participating in religious rites. The whole of the open-air auditorium is packed, and round the edge of the crowd the hawkers, who maintain an excellent intelligence system as to where the more important festivals are being held, set up row upon row of stalls selling many different wares.

The chief manner in which the festivals of spirit-medium cults differ from those held at other temples, is that they endeavor to make performances by possessed dang-ki one of the main sources of attraction. If, as is usually the case, the dang-ki's performance takes place simultaneously with that on the stage, the crowd will often desert the auditorium and throng into the temple area to watch his feats. Since
displays of spirit mediumship usually take place on the mornings of festival days, it is a matter of additional importance that they should be arranged at weekends if possible. This is possible within narrow limits, because most festivals are reckoned to span two, or sometimes four days.

The more impressive ceremonies can sometimes be arranged for a Saturday, Sunday or other public holiday. But as often as not the festival will fall in the middle of the week when only a relatively small audience can be present. The more spectacular feats, therefore, to be reserved for years in which the festival falls on a weekend.

By that very nature, festivals involve the performance of rites and feats that are something apart from the cult's day-to-day activities. These feats of spirit mediumship which are only performed at festivals deserve separate treatment, although we have already described some festival in earlier chapters.

It is taken for granted that on one or more occasions during the course of the festival the shen will possess the dang-ki in order to dispense medicine and advice among his devotees in the usual manner. In addition, there must be some sort of display which is out of the ordinary and which would not be performed on other days of the year. Two or three weeks before the festival, it is made known that at a certain hour on a certain day a spectacular display of some sort will be given. Unless there is any good reason to the contrary, such as giving the display on a public holiday, it will usually take place on the first day of the festival. This has to be decided beforehand by consultation with the shen. Often the shen will announce the required pronouncement concerning the final details until the last moment. If he happens to stipulate a type of display that is likely to prove expensive, it gives an added incentive to the promoters for exacting promises of cash contributions from devotees and other people in the neighborhood.

A spirit-medium festival is the great occasion of the year when the shen comes down voluntarily to reveal himself to his worshippers. Sometimes, he will announce that he is going to make a special appearance at a certain time so that his devotees are forced to arrange some sort of celebration for his benefit whether they wish it or not. On most other occasions, he condescends to come down only if asked to do so by people who require his help. In order to make the more significant occasions worthy of his presence, arrangements have to be made for him to reveal himself in an unusually spectacular manner.

Processions. One of the more popular displays is a procession through the streets. Ideally the chief dang-ki, with one or two subordinate dang-ki accompanying him, emerge from the temple in a trance-like state, with skewers stuck through their cheeks, and mount their sedan chairs to be carried majestically, sword in hand, through the streets of the neighborhood. With them will go the sedan chair in which the shen's image is fastened, rocking and gyrating violently as it proceeds.
A large number of assistants are in attendance, some perhaps with spikes through the fleshy parts of their arms, bearing a variety of paraphernalia, and behind follows a crowd of devoted worshippers. If several local associations can be persuaded to turn out in force for the procession, wearing whatever types of uniforms may please them and clacking their percussion instruments loudly in unison, so much the better.

If the cult's temple is that of a 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches', the assistants beat on bamboo stakes at the boundary marks of the shen's territory and rites of exorcism are performed to clear the area of evil influences. Even if the shen has not a territory he can call his own, rites of exorcism are performed at suitable points on the route where it is deemed that cleansing is required. In addition, the dang-ki makes ceremonial visits to temples dedicated to the spiritual superiors of the shen possessing him.

Full-scale spirit-medium processions can be colourful and impressive, but unfortunately it is their presence the opportunities for holding processions are becoming increasingly limited these days. For reasons of traffic control, the police are not keen on allowing some of the main roads of Singapore to be monopolised by processions of an unpredictable nature, and for reasons of public safety the parades of uniformed associations are not looked upon with favour. Even if these difficulties were overcome, many cults do not possess sufficient equipment for a large enough body of devotees to make a procession worth while. In the case of a 'Shen of the Ramparts and Ditches' festival, a procession will usually be held, however meagre it may be, but in other cults there is more likely to be recourse to an alternative method of impressing the neighbourhood.

Knife Beds. Even if the dang-ki is not going to move outside the temple precincts during the course of the festival, a display of extraordinary feats can be given in the courtyard provided certain articles of special equipment are available. The simplest equipment, and for that reason, perhaps, the most commonly found, is the 'knife bed', or more properly 'knife table' (tao t'ai), on which the dang-ki can jump, stand, lie or roll. This is a table-like contrivance about three feet high, six feet long and two feet wide, fashioned into a carved and painted wooden framework. The top consists of thirty-six knife blades set in the frame with their sharp edges sticking upwards. At one end is a slightly raised 'pillow' of shorter knife blades. The bed hinges in the middle so that the end with the 'pillow' attached to it can be raised vertically, making the whole contrivance more like a large chair. When not in actual use at a festival, the bed is usually kept in this position with a variety of charm papers stuck across the blades and the 'Five Flags' fastened to the top. Usually more than one dang-ki is performing when the knife-bed is brought into use, but it is rare to find more than one mounting it at the same time. As a means of demonstrating immunity from physical injury
while in a state of possession, the knife bed is used in conjunction with
more familiar instruments of self-mortification such as swords and
pick balls. It is not, however, used by dang-ki who have spiked their
bodies or cheeks with skewers. The usual procedure is for the
dang-ki, who are in trance, to dance round the knife bed waving their swords
and pick balls. Then of these, dancing in wide circles, they emerge
the bed. First he rolls over and over on it with the blades digging into his flesh but nearly drawing blood. Then he may lie on it
for a few moments with his back on the yellow of knives. After that, he
throws to his feet and walks several times the length of the bed. His only
business is to walk to the edge, where the bed is flanked by knives, and,
uttering a few incantations, he jumps over it to the ground. During the
whole performance the performers will be whirling and dancing around him on the ground and two or
three assistants will throw water on the parts of the body that are in danger of becoming lacerated. If a
knife bed is wetted by blood, another assistant rushes up to him with a charm paper to slap
on the wound. A
dang-ki
performs on the knife bed for perhaps five or ten minutes. He then jumps down and another takes his place. There always appears
to be an atmosphere of competition among the dang-ki in as to who can
perform the more hair-raising stunts. Often the blades are genuinely
sharp, so that a high degree of balance and judgment is required if the
performer is to escape unscathed. Given the necessary skill, numerous
tricks with swords, pick balls and axes can be carried out on the knife
bed.
The knife bed is relatively light and portable, and it does not take up
much space. Two contrivances with which more spectacular displays
are given are the sword ladder and the sword bridge, but the

**Sword Ladder.** A sword ladder (tao t'i) usually rises to about thirty
or forty feet above the ground. Although its base is dug well into the
ground, support must be given by strong guy-ropes which are staked
down at a good distance from the ladder. To allow for
this and the large crowd that is likely to assemble, plenty of space must be
available. The ladder should have thirty-six or seventy-two runs, each
of which consists of a knife blade set between wooden uprights. At two
or three points the uprights are braced by thin iron bars, and at the
bottom there are wooden bars to help support the weight of the ladder.
A bucket can be hauled up bearing any equipment that the

**Sword Bridge.** A sword bridge (tao p'ing) usually consists of about thirty
to forty feet long. The ladder is set up between two trees, each
of which consists of a knife bed set between wooden uprights. At two
or three points the uprights are braced by thin iron bars, and at the
bottom there are wooden bars to help support the weight of the ladder.
A bucket can be hauled up bearing any equipment that the

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Pennants are fastened to the uprights and charm papers are stuck there to help protect the dang-ki from evil influences during the initial stages of his ascent.

Again, as with the knife bed, it would be unusual to find only one dang-ki performing on the sword ladder. On some occasions as many as ten will climb one after the other, followed perhaps by several devotees who do not claim to be possessed by shen but who are willing to make the uncomfortable, bare-footed climb to show their faith in the powers protecting them. Two dang-ki may cross each other half way up the ladder, with one going up and the other down, but it is unusual to find more than one dang-ki performing at the top at the same time. It sometimes happens, however, that a subsidiary dang-ki will accompany the chief dang-ki to the top in order to act as an assistant.

A performance on a sword ladder is rarely the only display at a festival. Sometimes a knife bed will be set up near the bottom of the ladder. While other dang-ki are waiting their turn to ascend they perform on this or dance around wielding swords or prick balls.

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A popular device connected with the sword bridge is for the dang-ki to give his performance with a bundle of clothes wrapped in a yellow cloth slung round his back. These clothes have been collected from devotees before the performance and will be returned to them afterwards as articles of apparel with great efficacy in protecting the wearers from evil influences.

While a sword ladder or sword bridge is being used, temple assistants are often stationed at the four corners of the arena in which the apparatus is set up with the special duty of watching over the stakes to which the guy-ropes are attached. Part of their duty is to drive the crowds back if there is any danger of them becoming entangled in the ropes. In addition to such purely practical duties in the cause of safety, they are also responsible for casting handfuls of dry rice and salt into the air at frequent intervals as a deterrent to evil influences.

Fire Walking. A type of spirit-medium display which is likely to draw a large crowd of spectators is fire walking (hsing Wu). It is a familiar feature in Chinese spirit mediumship, but is not frequently practised in Singapore. A reason given for this is the high cost of charcoal. An opportunity for witnessing such an event occurred only once, but the episode has been a reasonably good example of the manner in which fire walking is carried out by the Chinese.

The subject of fire walking immediately invites comparison with similar Hindu practices. It is possible that Indian and Chinese fire walking had a common origin. It does not appear, however, that the overseas Chinese have adopted fire walking from the Indians among whom they live in Southeast Asia. They practise it because it is a familiar feature in the provinces of China from which they emigrated. It is still possible that the manner in which it is practised in Singapore owes some of its characteristics to the type of Indian fire walking which can be seen on numerous occasions at Hindu festivals.

Among the Hindus, the relation of spirit-mediumship to fire walking is not seen as an important question. The men who walk through the pit are not possessed, but are imitating Hindu deities and claim that they do so without suffering injury because they have sufficient faith in the protecting powers of their deities. They enter the temple where the pit has been prepared after a long procession through the streets during which they have been urged on fiercely by their friends. Some of them approach the fire in a state of frenzy, but it can hardly be considered that they are being possessed by the Indian equivalent of a shen.

It is difficult without exhaustive tests to reach any scientific conclusions concerning claims that are made, but superficial observations would suggest that an explanation in terms of established physiological facts would not be easy. The pit is over twenty feet long and the charcoal embers are undoubtedly very hot indeed. Far from leaping across it hurriedly some of the performers go across in as many
as a dozen leisurely steps. Occasionally, a man falls down in the pit and suffers severe burns on his body. If he remains on his feet, he may sink into the embers up to his ankles, yet appears to suffer from no burns. The Chinese version is not as convincing as the Indian, but it follows much the same lines. The leading fire walker, and perhaps one or two others, are dang-ki who are possessed by shen. The others are cult promoters and worshippers who wish to show that they have sufficient faith in the shen to follow the dang-ki through the fire. Whatever similarities there may be to Indian practice, the Chinese system must be seen in the context of spirit mediumship.

The occasion on which a fire walking ceremony was witnessed was an anniversary of Ju-lai Fo on the eighth of the Twelfth Moon. The chief performers were the dang-ki and possessions of a cult which enthralled at staging spectacular displays of spirit mediumship. The chief dang-ki was a woman, and the only one in Singapore capable of equalling and excelling the performances of male dang-ki in the more exacting physical feats. The fire walking was held on the second day of a four-day series of processions and religious rites staged on a temporary site near the Beach Road market. The reason for holding the festival there was the familiar one of ensuring that the souls of persons who had died during the Japanese Occupation would have prayers said for them.

A temporary stage and temple had been erected for the occasion. The charcoal had been laid out beside the temple, in a square on the site of a buried grave. No pit had been dug for it; one and a half tons of charcoal, costing $350, had been spread evenly over an area about thirty feet by twenty feet to a depth of about six inches. This quantity was made up of small quantities presented by individual contributors. At 10.15 a.m., the charcoal was ignited by having kerosene (paraffin) poured over it and burning papers thrown on top. If it did not burn as fiercely as it might, the promoters can hardly be blamed. The ceremony was taking place during an exceptionally wet spell of weather and the fire was only kept alight during the spasmodic showers by the addition of large quantities of kerosene. At 11.30 the performers began to prepare themselves. The woman dang-ki entered a trance in the temple during which she cut her tongue with a broken bowl and daubed her blood on numerous charm papers. She then emerged and seated herself in the spiked sedan chair while the final preparations were being made round the fire. Tins of kerosene were still being thrown over it, and by now the heat was considerable. Much of the charcoal had burned to a grey colour, but there were still places where it had not changed. At 11.35 a.m. the fire walking began. Five assistants came out of the temple carrying bundles of charm papers. Four of them ignited their papers at the corners of the fire, and the fifth at the centre. Five assistants gave out the papers to the performers, who then placed them in the flames. The performance was taking place during an exceptionally wet spell of weather and the fire was only kept alight during the spasmodic showers by the addition of large quantities of kerosene.

1 Ju-lai Fo, the 'thus-come Buddha': one who exhibits perfect human nature, the highest appellation given to every Buddha as one of his titles. Ju-lai Fo is widely worshipped by Buddhist devotees among the overseas Chinese. On this occasion, the female dang-ki was possessed during the fire walking by a more obscure character from Buddhist mythology. 154
The fifth threw a single paper into the middle of the fire where it rested on the charcoal embers without burning, the bloodstain in its centre showing clearly. Four more assistants took up positions at tables at the four corners of the roped-off area and began to play on small gongs and 'wooden fish'. This playing continued throughout the whole performance.

At 11.45 the dang-ki was carried out of the temple on her sedan chair clasping a bundle of flags, three incense sticks and a live white cockerel. Behind her came two more dang-ki and about a dozen devotees who were prepared to follow her through the fire. Instead of the latter being girls, most of them were women. Several of the gong players were women and young girls with large and resounding gongs had stationed themselves round the fire, and a number of other assistants had taken up positions armed with plates and bowls full of dry rice and salt. As soon as the procession started this mixture was hurled in all directions, but chiefly towards the fire.

With the female dang-ki at its head the procession made three circuits of the fire in a clockwise direction. The dang-ki then descended from her chair and continued to lead the procession on foot, dancing and gesticulating as she went. After another circuit or two, she gathered her devotees around her and gave the signal that she was going to cross the fire. The gongs were beaten furiously and the rice and salt were hurled into the air. With a shout, the dang-ki rushed across the fire, still carrying the cockerel, followed by a cluster of the other dang-ki and the devotees. None seemed to be harmed except a woman follower who fell down on reaching the other side and had to be helped away. The procession then made its way back to the temple, where the female dang-ki retired to the temple with her assistants, while the little charm paper in the middle of the fire, which had escaped the trampling feet, burst into flames and shrivelled up at the very instant when she turned away to go back to the temple.

This may not have been an exceptionally convincing example of Chinese fire walking. The promoters seemed to go to great pains to produce an impressive fire, but the weather was against them, and they were unable to allow sufficient time for the bed of charcoal and the ground beneath it to reach the maximum temperature possible.
While the procession was taking place much of the mixture of rice and salt that had been thrown into the air had landed on the fire with a cracking and sizzling noise. In wet weather, this mixture becomes very damp. Not only may this have had a cooling effect but the feet of the performers also were wet and muddy from walking round the fire. When they ran across the fire, they did so in jumps and quick short steps. There was no lingering before they reached the other side.

Other Displays. A physical feat which is sometimes staged at spirit-medium festivals involves the use of boiling oil. A large cauldron of oil is heated until it is boiling hot. The dang-ki then dips towels in and splashes themselves with oil without appearing to suffer. Many Chinese are familiar with this practice, but it is not performed frequently in Singapore nowadays. No opportunity occurred for witnessing such a feat personally. The more sceptical Chinese claim that a chemical is introduced into the oil to give the appearance of boiling.

As alternatives to these spectacular feats, several minor ceremonies can be performed to give the correct flavour to a spirit-medium festival when funds and space are limited. Examples of these can be found in the description of the urban cult, where the dang-ki dance round a bonfire on a street corner and afterwards stage a show at which youthful devotees throw prick balls to each other without hurting themselves. Sometimes a 'Bridge of Peace' (p'ing an ch'iao) is erected in front of the temple, after the manner described in the case of the 'Great Saint' cult's festival. This is also presented in temples where there is no dang-ki, but where it is undertaken by spirit-medium cults the devotees add to their chance of attaining peace and prosperity by following the dang-ki across the bridge in a long procession.

A ceremony which constituted an important feature in the annual festival of one spirit-medium cult might almost be described as 'witch-hunting'. The cult had recently undergone a reformation. Its affairs had got into a very bad state, and when a competent promoter had been called in from outside he revealed that over $1,000 of the cult's funds could not be accounted for. He then arranged for the cult to be run on more reputable lines, but with the same dang-ki and with many of the same assistants as formerly. At the next annual festival, most of the former promoters were present at the temple. After the dang-ki had gone into a trance, he broke off his performance at intervals to dash round to the back of the temple or among the crowd to seek out the malefactors one by one. Having found them, he drove them at the point of his sword to kneel penitentially in front of the altar offering incense to the shen. This was a device aiming at restoring public confidence in the cult and there is no reason to believe that it is a common Chinese practice. For the rest of his performance, the dang-ki did nothing more spectacular than cut his tongue and distribute charm papers from a knife chair placed high on two tiers of tables.

Quite apart from the type of feat, much can be achieved simply by...
having a large number of dang-ki present. If the number of dang-ki cannot be augmented sufficiently, the next best thing is to engage Taoist (or occasionally Buddhist) priests to perform their rites during the ceremonies. In some spirit-medium cults, priests are engaged by the internal organs of the cult leaders, or by the services of from ten to twenty dang-ki for their annual festivals. The visiting dang-ki may appear on the scene in twos and threes escorted by assistants from their own temples. Sometimes, they arrive already possessed by slun, having ridden through the streets in hired lorries with spears and skewers stuck through their cheeks. Sometimes, they arrive already possessing a number of cults elsewhere and can call upon the services of from ten to twenty dang-ki for their annual festivals. As more and more slun make their appearance, a considerable pantheon begins to take shape, with the dangers making gestures of invitation and obeisance to each other according to the position of each slun in the spiritual hierarchy. There then follows a display of self-mortification, ladder climbing, or whatever but may have been selected for the festival.

A recent development in Singapore is the banding together of a number of dang-ki for the purpose of giving a performance at one of the large amusement parks. On these occasions, the management of the park, in order to carry out the rituals which may have been selected for the festival, may have to employ a considerable number of dang-ki to provide the necessary ceremonies. It is by the presence of the dang-ki, rather than by any specific rites for such a purpose that this service is performed. Odalmsi are called for charm papers thrown from the top of the ladder as eagerly as at any festival, and some purchase charm papers from the promoters or have their backs stamped with a bloody mark by one of the dang-ki. But there is not much pretence at giving medicine and advice.

The festivals of spirit-medium cults constitute seasonal accentuations in the cult's normal activities. The fun that is performed may be the attractions which draw the presence of large crowds, but they cannot be regarded as representative of the dang-ki's day-to-day performances.

In addition, there are many other respects in which the significance of a cult is accentuated. If it represents a genuine centre of religious worship among the people of a neighbourhood, a festival becomes the great occasion of the year when a large area in the locality is transformed into a popular fairground. On the other hand, a cult in a little more than ordinary cases becomes a religious and social centre for the community, both of which are useful in maintaining this end.

Whereas the life of a cult normally centres round a temple, the festival introduces other important elements such as the theatrical company and the hawkers, both types of enterprise being economically associated with the festival. This is especially true of spirit-medium cults who have a predisposition towards such activities, as
some of them do, the opportunities for deriving profit from the occasion are increased.

Briefly, the festivals are occasions when there is the greatest chance that spirit-medium cults will be used as masks and pretexts for unlawful and selfish activities. At the same time, they provide the greatest chance for the cults to attract and consolidate authority among their followers.
CONCLUSIONS

Factual Aspects of Spirit Mediumship.

Spirit mediumship, wherever it is found, invites some obvious and immediate questions on the part of western observers. Many wish to know how genuine is the trance into which the dang-ki falls. And if the trance is genuine, what may be the nature of the shen supposed to possess him. Correlated questions may concern the degree to which the dang-ki and his promoters are fraudulent or self-deluded, and the extent to which the advice and prescriptions that worshippers receive during consultations do, in fact, result in cures.

A full answer to such questions, if obtainable at all, would demand very different methods than those that have been employed in the study of Chinese spirit mediumship. There is no place here for a consideration of the objectives or techniques of psychical research, or for the careful physiological examinations which would often be required before any valid conclusions could be reached. In most cases, the use of such techniques would have been incompatible with the observation of religious customs as they prevail today. Nevertheless, it is legitimate that certain conclusions should be drawn.

Comments concerning the authenticity of trance and feats of self-mortification have been incorporated in the description, particularly in Chapters III and VII. It need only be said here, in brief, that although feats which defy rational explanation may be performed in Singapore, no such cases were actually observed. Most of the deeds performed by the dang-ki are uncomfortable; some of them are even painful; and they require a degree of skill in their performance. But there is nothing which a competent stage magician or ventriloquist could not carry out as well, if not better. Since, however, the main aim of all possession is to obtain help from the shen for worshippers, the subject matter of consultations and the efficacy of recommended remedies remain to be considered.

In theory, the wisdom of the shen is infinite. In practice, however, there is a relatively narrow range of subjects concerning which a dang-ki is consulted. With minor exceptions, these can be classified as follows:

1. Trouble arising from physical suffering or derangement.
   a. Accident.
   b. Childbirth, including infertility and the consequences of pregnancy.
   c. Insanity (not attributed to possession by evil spirits).
   d. Miscellaneous illness.

2. Personal change.
   a. Change of career.
   b. Change of residence.

3. Economic change.
   a. Change of wealth.
   b. Change of business.

4. Emotional change.
   a. Love or marriage.
   b. Health.
   c. Children.
   d. Enemies and friends.

5. Change of name (usually the same as that of the spirit name).

6. Personal change.
   a. Change of career.
   b. Change of residence.

7. Economic change.
   a. Change of wealth.
   b. Change of business.

8. Emotional change.
   a. Love or marriage.
   b. Health.
   c. Children.
   d. Enemies and friends.

9. Change of name (usually the same as that of the spirit name).

10. Personal change.
    a. Change of career.
    b. Change of residence.

11. Economic change.
    a. Change of wealth.
    b. Change of business.

12. Emotional change.
    a. Love or marriage.
    b. Health.
    c. Children.
    d. Enemies and friends.

13. Change of name (usually the same as that of the spirit name).
2. Trouble attributed to occult factors.
   a. Possession by evil spirits of either persons or places.
   b. 'Bad luck'.
3. The need for gambling tips.
4. Family troubles.
   a. Erring spouses.
   b. Wayward children.
5. The desire for communication with the dead.
6. The desire for news of friends and relatives in distant parts.
7. The need for business advice.
   a. Investments.
   b. Partnerships.
   c. Trouble with employers and change of occupations.
8. The need for protection in court cases.
9. The choice of auspicious dates.

There is no sound statistical basis for a study of the relative frequency
of these subjects. Every day hundreds of consultations take place in
many different temples. It would be impossible to take a representative
sample of all these, and even if the deliberations of a few cults were
concentrated upon, it would be erroneous to assume that the results
would be representative of all spirit-medium cults. There are also
fluctuations due to seasonal demands and the fleeting popularity of
certain types of request. For what it is worth, however, an analysis is
given here of one hundred cases selected from the large number recorded,
by no more elaborate a system than that of noting them down as and
when they were encountered. The chief basis of selection is that there
is sufficient information in each case to make comparisons and analysis
possible.

The hundred cases are drawn from seventeen spirit-medium cults
in various parts of Singapore. The cults of soul-raising specialists
have been omitted, as also have those which employ automatic writing.
None of the seventeen cults showed an exceptionally marked
degree of specialisation in the subjects which were dealt with, although one
from which a large number of examples was drawn had a somewhat
enhanced reputation for changing 'bad luck', and another had some
reputation in curing insanity. In general, all the cults involved are
representative of ordinary and unspecialised spirit mediumship. All
the cases were dealt with by verbal consultations which included,
in nearly every instance, the prescription of drugs, occult rites and
advice.

A complication arises from the fact that a consultation is often not
confined to a single subject. Once the worshipper has gained the ear
of the dang-ki, she is apt to pour out a string of related troubles: out of
the hundred cases only fifty-one concerned one subject alone. In the
remaining forty-nine cases, two of the consultants managed to touch on
three additional subjects, fifteen on two additional subjects, and the
other thirty-two added one further request to the first subject of
The hundred consultations thus produced 168 topics, which can be tabulated as follows:

- 53 cases involved 'miscellaneous illness'
- 32 cases involved 'bad luck'
- 13 cases involved possession by evil spirits
- 13 cases involved erring spouses
- 12 cases involved childbirth
- 6 cases involved investment advice
- 6 cases involved news of relatives in distant parts
- 6 cases involved the choice of auspicious dates
- 5 cases involved gambling advice
- 2 cases involved hospital problems
- 4 cases involved advice concerning partnerships
- 4 cases involved insanity
- 4 cases involved protection in court
- 3 cases involved communication with the dead
- 1 case involved trouble with an employer

168 cases

Of the hundred consultants, eighteen were male and eighty-two female. Two of the men raised problems on behalf of other persons, one of which cases involved business advice and the other possession in court. Of the women who were seeking answers which related to them personally, nine were concerned about sickness; three, about 'bad luck'; three, about business advice; and, one, about protection in court. In three of the cases of illness, and in one of the cases of business advice, the first subject was allied with complaints of 'bad luck'. In the other fourteen cases only one subject was raised.

Among the eighty-two female consultants, forty-five asked about problems which related to them personally, and thirty-seven were apparently asking for advice on behalf of others. Of these latter cases, fifteen concerned children, of whom ten were actually present with their mothers at the time of the consultation. Nine cases concerned sickness in other adults. Eight concerned 'bad luck'; one, the choice of an auspicious date; two, family troubles; and, two, business advice. In sixteen of these thirty-seven cases, other subjects were allied to the first subject. In the other twenty-two cases of illness, and for twenty-six of the thirty-seven cases of business advice, only one subject was raised.

Conclusions as to the success of remedies would require a medical examination. But most of the consultants simply go home and carry out whatever has been prescribed, only to return to the temple when a new question is to be raised with the dang-ki. If they come back within three days, as is expected, it is usually because the treatment has failed and they want a change in the prescription. The fact that they do not return can certainly not be taken to mean that the cure was effected.
Of course, many people are prepared to testify that the *tlang-ki* has helped them greatly, but since there is an obvious reluctance to admit that a treatment has failed completely, it would be unwise to use this information for assessing the proportion of cases in which a consultation with a *tlang-ki* has brought about a significant change.

It is only possible to estimate roughly that, in cases of minor illness, a high proportion of the inevitable recoveries have been attributed to the *tlang-ki*. The successful treatments in cases of severe illness, however spectacular they may be, are very few. In cases of possession by evil spirits, the *tlang-ki* can probably point to a higher proportion of successes, although they are usually attributed by the initiated to the combined effects of the *tlang-ki*, the *do.ng-ki*, and occulted authoritative influences. In other types of cases, in which the chief function of the *tlang-ki* is largely to crystallise decisions for initiates, the derivatives of action which has resulted seem usually to have led to a favourable outcome.

Chinese Religious Faith. In dealing with the cases that come before a *tlang-ki*, we are constantly up against the problem of what, to a Chinese, constitutes religious faith. The presuppositions which draw devotees to spirit-medium cults, and which must be an important element in achieving cures, are unquestionably based on faith in the reality of the phenomena. This merely, however, amounts to faith in the western sense of a belief in a personal god. The Chinese religious system is, on the other hand, neither monistic nor coherent. It is highly differentiated, and, at the best, dualistic. Belief in the reality of one manifestation of religious phenomena need not necessarily be related to belief in the reality of other manifestations. The same is true of the degree of belief which such manifestations elicit.

Faith, in the Chinese sense, is best summed up in the negative statement that it would be very unwise not to believe upon occasion. Some of the participants may, thus, believe wholeheartedly, while others, in western eyes, are only believing 'a little bit'. This 'little bit' is still enough to justify their actions in their own minds and to observers. It is also enough to produce moments of blind, unquestioning faith which are quite unrelated to the more rational approach followed at other times.

In the activities of any spirit-medium cult a distinction can be made between the *tlang-ki*, the *do.ng-ki*, and the *vassal*, as the three major elements upon which its existence depends. The principle of religious faith just outlined can be applied with equal validity, but with different force, to all three of these.
that this shen has cured many people. We cannot lose anything by worshipping at his temple and asking his advice. We know that the shen are very powerful, and that if they so wish they can reveal themselves by entering men's bodies. Perhaps the dang-ki will be able to help us.' The heightened atmosphere created by the dang-ki's performance is thus capable of turning even somewhat negative beliefs into a positive faith.

Applied to the promoters, the principle is rather more ambiguous, since there must often be a conscious manipulation of the evidence in order to attain the desired effect. They might, nonetheless, maintain: 'No one can say that what is happening is not true. We can be the means of helping many poor and diseased people. We know that the shen can come down to influence the affairs of men. But it is necessary that preparations should be made and that notice of the great opportunity should be brought to as many people as possible.' The attitude of the promoters then is an extension of that of the worshippers. Whatever their methods may be, they can hardly be accused of promoting something in which they have no belief whatsoever. Their attitude is more like that of a slightly unscrupulous medical practitioner who has no doubt concerning the scientific validity of the methods of healing in which he has been trained, but who is not above making his practise as remunerative as possible by exaggerating the benefits that he is able to give. Among the promoters of spirit-medium cults, the basic belief in the reality of the phenomenon appears to be sufficiently strong to permit frequent participation in ceremonies.

The attitude of the promoters is closely allied with that of the dang-ki himself because of their intimate association in the cult's activities. If the dang-ki were to admit that his performances were fraudulent, the promoters would merely be conniving at his fraud. But it is doubtful whether such an admission is ever made, even within a closely limited circle, for the reason that it is probable that the dang-ki, too, is at least partially convinced of the reality of spirit possession. Applied to the dang-ki himself, the principle is such that a 'little bit' of faith can be made to go a very long way among the Chinese.

The dang-ki starts from much the same background as the other participants in the cult's business. But it would appear that one of the pre-requisites for a man to become a qualified dang-ki is for him to have undergone an experience of some sort, at some time, that convinces him that a spiritual agency has been acting upon him. Even if this only
happens once in a dang-ki’s career, it may be convincing. On subsequent occasions, when drums are beaten and the same invocations are chanted, they may probably reproduce the motions of a possessed dang-ki, although not as perfectly. The belief is strong, with an adequate belief that they now have the shen’s authority to portray him in this manner and to act on his behalf.

These, of course, would be extreme examples. It is more common to find that “something happens” to a dang-ki in the initial stages of each performance, and that his belief in the reality of spirit possession, therefore, is being constantly reinforced. The belief that he was possessed the first time can be transferred to the second or subsequent occasions, so that it becomes increasingly difficult for him to shake his belief in what has happened in the earlier stages. Omitting any question of stimulation by alcohol or drugs, it is probable that, until the end of his performance, he remains in a somewhat altered state of mind, which could amount to hallucination if not possession, because of the highly important role that he is playing. In terms of psychical research it is probable that a dang-ki is in “trance” for at least part of his performance. Not only is his sensitivity to external stimulation reduced, but he is undoubtedly in a state of dissociation, in which his normal consciousness is displaced from its position of control. The mechanism whereby normal consciousness is displaced, and the question of what, if anything, assumes control, are problems outside our present scope.

The impression must not be given, however, that all possibilities of psychic phenomena are dismissed out of hand. It is a fact, of course, that a mighty and mythical Chinese shen will not come down to possess a dang-ki in Singapore. Even the more serious students of spirit mediumship, therefore, is the reality of spirit possession, such as we see in Singapore, in the days of mass emigration in the middle of the last century. We have the evidence of de Groot that spirit mediumship played an important part in the lives of many of the Chinese who came to the South Seas during these days. Whether or not the skill of the better ones depends upon telepathy, clairvoyance or any other of the strange powers that are now being subjected to a more thoroughgoing investigation, the question can hardly be entered into fully here. Apart from this there is enough evidence in Singapore to show, for the purposes of these present accounts, that spirit mediumship involves self-deception, ignorance and economic exploitation which render it a far more suitable subject for social study than for psychical research.

Historical and Economic Factors. There is much historical evidence to show that spirit mediumship represents the dominant religious orientation of the Chinese of the type who came to the South Seas during the days of mass emigration in the second half of the last century. We have the evidence of de Groot that spirit mediumship played an
important part in the popular religion of south Fukien at that time. There is a lack of corresponding evidence that it is equally prevalent elsewhere, but there is little reason to believe that it was not found in other provinces. Although there is some evidence that spirit mediumship in Fukien province was somewhat exceptional, there is no very positive evidence that great differences existed in the intensity with which it was practised in other parts. It does not appear, on the other hand, that spirit mediumship has enjoyed an unvarying intensity of popularity over prolonged periods. Whatever may have been the situation in Imperial times, there is evidence that occult religious practices were actively discouraged and suppressed under the Kuomintang. Under a Communist regime, it is probable that if spirit-medium cults survive at all, they also do so by operating secretly and on a small scale. The popularity and prevalence of spirit mediumship among the more old-fashioned types of Chinese from Fukien province may, therefore, be more than a reflection of the fact that it was these dialect groups which supplied the bulk of the immigrants to Singapore—and also to the other Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca—at a time when spirit mediumship was still popular. Urbanised living conditions and a governmental system which tolerates all religious practices have helped to preserve customs the immigrants brought with them.

There is, in contrast, a relative lack of interest in spirit mediumship among the Cantonese, who often prefer rites peculiar to their own provincial culture. This may be set as much as much an indication that the Cantonese have never indulged much in spirit mediumship as a reflection of the fact that a large proportion of Cantonese women in Singapore are recent arrivals from China, and that for many years women in Singapore were prevented from going to temples. Economically, spirit mediumship in Singapore rests upon the enterprise of a relatively small number of male promoters who, in turn, depend upon the disposition of a number of women to resort to divination when faced with trouble and worries. This relationship of male to female roles is typical not only of spirit mediumship but also of the greater part of Chinese religion. Whereas the promotion of religious rites is thought of as a legitimate male activity, not always very honourable perhaps but still representing a possible path to prestige and merit, the performance of acts of worship in a temple is considered predominantly a women's business. But this should not be taken to imply that men have no belief in the efficacy of divination. A feature of the institutionalisation of religious practices under conditions such as those found in Singapore is that, although men are often ashamed to be seen in a temple themselves, they are capable of sending their womenfolk to ask advice on their behalf. At least, they acquiesce if a woman from the household goes on her own initiative.
success of a spirit-medium cult must depend upon a conscious record of cures and remedies, but there are many devices that can be resorted to in order to attract attention and create a favourable impression. Fortunately for the promoters the range of expectations on the part of potential worshippers is relatively limited, so that anything at all out of the ordinary is likely to attract attention.

It has been suggested that spirit mediumship is not essentially related to the economic exploitation of a latent public demand, and that ideally most practices could be carried out in private without thought of monetary reward. In practice, conformity with this ideal is relatively rare in Singapore.

Sociological Factors. Sociologically spirit mediumship is representative of a distinctive trend in the religion of overseas Chinese. Elements from the vast background of religious ideas and beliefs of China are selected for institutionalisation by the emigrants in the South Seas. The basis for selection must depend upon complex interplay of many factors, and it is not within the scope of this study to attempt to analyse this in any depth. It is sufficient to point out that the ideas of the Chinese people have been accentuated and developed under the local conditions of overseas settlement and that this is a process which is often peculiar to the history of each territory in Southeast Asia. In the case of Singapore, one of the most enlightened illustrations can be found in the way in which the story of the 'Great Saint Equal with Heaven' has been used as a myth supporting religious practice.

In all parts of China, there are innumerable tales which may once have had a purely local popularity. The themes of the stories were probably elaborated from the wealth of the professional story-teller's imagination, and a writer like Wu Cheng-en, who had wearied of the magnificent but arid traditions of Chinese classical literature, composed the story of the 'Great Saint Equal with Heaven' for the amusement of the common people. The genius of authorship really belongs to the story's unknown originators. But its spread is largely the work of its elaborators. Not all stories by any means were written down, and not all those that were achieved outstanding success. Not many were read and repeated throughout the length and breadth of China and wherever the Chinese settled overseas.

The more sophisticated Chinese regarded these stories as entertaining, light reading for illiterate persons, in whom they were transmitted by word of mouth or through theatrical performances, they constituted the essence of historical reality. Even early childhood, they listened to stories of ancient kings, monsters, gods and demons. The life to which they were born may have been one of drudgery and poverty in the face of practical reality, but the cosmology which they learned to regard as the background against which they acted out their lives was based on this mythical world of miraculous heroes and illustrious ancestors. Furthermore, the heroes of these legends often had attributed to them not only historical reality but also the power to bring their miraculous influences to bear on the lives of subsequent generations.
This was conducive to a style of divination in which the will of the shen was revealed. Of the many possible methods of divination, certainly the ones with which we have been concerned appeal to persons of no very great intellectual attainments. Our examples of spirit-medium cults show, moreover, that they are likely to flourish best under conditions where they can constitute a form of economic enterprise among people who already have a predisposition towards such enterprises. They would be unlikely to succeed in a community where they have not a pre-existing tradition of such activities.

Considerable class bias can be seen in the practice of spirit-mediumship. This is too complex a problem to be entered into in any detail here, and, in any case, the situation in Singapore with its urbanised Chinese community constituting a majority of the population, is not necessarily the same as that found elsewhere. But one of the points that has become most apparent is that the overseas Chinese who has reached a position of wealth from humble origins is left with little guidance as to the pattern upon which he may model his behaviour. In many cases, he maintains the characteristics related to the way of life in which he was born. His sons may develop their aspirations in a variety of directions, but in the absence of any fixed criterion, it is probable that they too will retain many of their parents' characteristics. It is not surprising, therefore, that features prominent in spirit-medium cults are found throughout the greater part of Singapore's Chinese society. In many cases, moreover, we would be prepared to condemn spirit-mediumship out of hand as a wholly undesirable practice.

Questions of frequency and prevalence are relatively unimportant in assessing the strength of spirit-mediumship. It is more significant that it is difficult to find an alternative to the orientation that spirit-mediumship represents as a formative influence in religious ideas. Orthodox Buddhism and Christianity in Singapore are only of marginal importance when seen in relation to the overwhelming acceptance, both explicit and implicit, of some form of Shenism. Only 'modernism' presents a serious rival. This is a rapidly increasing influence, but as yet it has not felt its full force. For at least ten years to come, the older type of Chinese immigrant, who
probably arrived in Malaya in the first quarter of this century, in many
cases virtually penniless, will continue to control much of the wealth
that has been accumulated, and, in consequence, many of the important
aspects of the Chinese social life. These traders, who have been
subjected to modern Chinese and English education, will
be in a position to take over roles which may bring about new
changes in Chinese society. But for the present the traditional styles of
occultism and temple worship can find sufficient support among the
older men and women not to suffer greatly. And as long as there is no
open condemnation from the leaders of the community, it is likely that
the occasional practice of such practices will be maintained among the
more wealthy Chinese.

If the decline of spirit mediumship is not very noticeable, it seems,
nevertheless, to have increased in recent years. Only a small part of this
has been due to direct governmental interference, and even then it
was probably more of an incidental result of the improvement in
living standards. More significance may be attached to the general improvement
in conditions. The tendency to accept western solutions, if only as a
supplement to Chinese medicine and divination, is increasing more
rapidly than ever before, and if there are more efficient hospitals and
clinics for the whole population to attend without undue inconvenience
or cost, it is probable that the decline in traditional methods of healing
would be far more precipitous.

In the realms of ideas, it is possible that the theory of spirit medium-
ship may contain the seed of its own decline. The practice of spirit
mediumship is essentially an occult craft in which it is reputed that
masters are often unwilling to reveal the whole extent of their knowledge
or power to their pupils. In general, the Chinese are self-effacing
people, and it is still possible that under conditions in which there has been a
virtual cessation of new immigration from China, the lack of newcomers to
the craft may lead to stagnation so that the oral tradition possessed by one
generation is transmitted only imperfectly to the next.

Far more important, however, is the influence of modern education.
Here the position is complicated by problems that are peculiar to the
education of overseas Chinese. The Chinese are a lengthy and revered
culture which dates from the time when the whole system of their knowledge
and traditions was established, and any attempt to change it is likely
to meet with much resistance. It is still possible that under conditions in which there has been a
virtual cessation of new immigration from China, the lack of newcomers to
the craft may lead to stagnation so that the oral tradition possessed by one
generation is transmitted only imperfectly to the next.

For more than a century, however, in the influence of modern education.
Here the position is complicated by problems that are peculiar to the
Chinese in general. The Chinese are a lengthy and revered
culture which dates from the time when the whole system of their knowledge
and traditions was established, and any attempt to change it is likely
To the modern Chinese, the National Language, a simplified form of
Mandarin, is the medium of instruction. The overseas Chinese had
always paid considerable attention to the education of their children,
and from the early 1920s onwards the impact of the modern movement
had a tremendous effect in Malaya and elsewhere. All this was achieved
with very little encouragement from the governments of Malaya.
There were even cases in which schools had to be suppressed when their methods of political indoctrination became too blatant. It is claimed, however, that most cases of government interference were due to shortcomings in hygiene, premises and educational standards. Chinese schools which have conformed to the required standards have received grants-in-aid from government.

Many of the current problems concerning the Chinese in Malaya revolve around the question of education. Broadly speaking, the choice lies between attending schools in which the language of instruction is English, the educational methods are predominantly western and there is little overt political indoctrination, or schools in which the language of instruction is Chinese, the educational methods only partially western, and in which there is a strong tradition of indoctrination along lines favouring the homeland.

It will be apparent that these two systems of education are liable to produce very different results. They are both generally hostile to the tradition that is represented by spirit mediumship. But, paradoxically, the opposition of modern Chinese education is, if anything, greater than that of English education. What evidence there is shows former students of English and missionary schools participating in the spirit-medium cults and seems to indicate that only English education at its highest levels is capable of inculcating a strongly critical attitude towards Chinese social practices held to be questionable by western standards. The student of an English secondary school may lead an existence divided into two irreconcilable parts, one of which is the result of what he has learnt at school, and the other of the culture derived from his home environment. Chinese education, for all its shortcomings, is not similarly guilty of this dichotomy. Revolutionary as its methods may be in relation to classical education, and based as it may be upon many western techniques, it still does not represent a transition to a completely alien culture almost entirely divorced from the realities to which the students are born.

The whole theme of education is too closely related to political considerations, to be followed here in any further detail. The problem of fusing Malay, Chinese, Indian and European communities into a homogeneous nation without producing disastrous fissions is one which is taxing every site examiner and administrator. These studies can hardly hope to be offered as a contribution to the solution of a problem of such dimensions. The future development of social life in Singapore, in furtherance, governed by conditions different from those prevailing in the Federation of Malaya and elsewhere. Yet it is hoped that a study of spirit mediumship, an important feature of Singapore's social life, involves upon topics which are of significance wherever the Chinese are found.
APPENDIX I

EXAMPLES OF INVOCATIONS

The translations of four invocations are given here by way of example. All four were acquired from the same temple, which possessed copies in both Chinese and romanised Hokkien versions. It was usually the romanised versions that were used when reference had to be made to them. The Chinese versions, which were hidden away in a drawer, were badly disfigured and had some of their parts missing. For this reason, it can hardly be claimed that the translations in an accurate representation of the original. In order to acquire a text that was sufficiently coherent for translation recourse had to be made to the Chinese versions, in which gaps were filled in by guesswork based on the more complete romanised version. The first three invocations are to the 'Great Saint' and the fourth is to the 'Third Prince'.

I. Respectfully we invite the presence of the Great Sage equal with Heaven, the mighty Black Tiger General, whose feet stand on the Seven Stars and the five-coloured clouds, who holds in his hand a golden bar, and who visits Heaven accompanied by the son of the Dragon of the Eastern Capital.

In this ancient temple our first concern is to drive away evil spirits and kill all evil influences that trouble men in this world.

We, your followers, worshipping the Great Sage equal with Heaven, beseech you to descend speedily, for we know that when the order is given the Heavenly Army will come to our aid as quickly as we hope.

II. Respectfully we invite the presence of the Great Sage equal with Heaven-Sun Wu-k'ung. Spirit of cleanliness, come majestically to this Buddhist temple, bearing in your hand a golden ring and cloths of five colours. When Heaven is dark you have a clear Buddha-like heart. You hold in your hand a golden bar when you ascend to Heaven. Standing on a coloured cloth you can go anywhere. Sweep away all uncleanliness to clean the world.

Nothing can resist your golden bar.

We, your human followers, respectfully invite you. You can change into seventy-two different forms. We, your followers, worshipping the Great Sage equal with Heaven, beseech you to descend speedily, for we know that when the order is given the Heavenly Army will come to our aid as quickly as we hope.

III. He who shakes the Heavens comes from the west riding on a tiger and a dragon, bearing a holy seal, and practising the methods of Duke Ting.

Your voice like thunder makes the shin and devils tremble. With your golden bar you have great strength, chasing the devils and whipping evil spirits. You can save a myriad of people. Now we invite you, the one who can shake Heaven, to come before this altar. With your sword you can kill evil spirits, and in this way you can demonstrate your spiritual powers. Wake, wake and save us.

We, your followers, worshipping the Great Sage equal with Heaven, beseech you to descend speedily, for we know that when the order is given the Heavenly Army will come to our aid as quickly as we hope.

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IV. As Commander-in-Chief of the Thirty-Three Heavens you can lead the Heavenly Annies to this altar. You have only to show your golden spear and the doors of Heaven will be opened. Your feet are standing on a fiery wheel of seven stars. All your generals are standing on it, exercising their powers above the altar. They make sand fly, stones roll and caves open.

Come quickly to cure our sickness and save us from misery. May 80,000 soldiers come riding down from Heaven. We, your followers, respectfully invite you.

These invocations are hardly worthy of lengthy comment. It is immediately apparent that Buddhist and Taoist symbolism are inextricably confused after the typical manner of Shenism. In the fourth example, it is not even clear whether the object of the invocation is to call down the 'Third Prince', his father, or both at the same time. In any case, the exact meaning of the words is incidental to a performance in a spirit-medium temple. The words are always chanted by rote, more as a set formula at the correct time than as a meaningful prayer.
APPENDIX II

STATEMENTS OF A SHEEN WRITTEN BY A POSSESSED SANG-KYI (see page 120)

I. Dated 11.5.50.

Life is short, life is short,
When I think again on the shortness of life
I cannot help but weep.

The wife loves her husband, the children their mother.
They spend all their energies in that, and cannot keep their life.
Both are dead in the river of suffering.

Love, love, no man can be rid of it.

Girls are dead in the river of love,
Boys are dead in the sea of suffering.

Life is short, love is short,
Finally you have to die.

When the last breath has gone and will not come back
You can do nothing for your children but keep them crying.

Your body will be buried in a lost land
And your beautiful companions will be left alone.

Good man, learn to cultivate your spiritual life.
Abandon the world and you will gain eternity.

II. Dated 14.5.50.

Life is short, love is short,
Everyone is busy for profit.

Everyone suffers for fame.

All that a man has gained is a shorter life.
Everything has been done to gain them.
But life is short and the final goal is death.

Good man, think first of your eternal future,
And cultivate as early as possible
The spiritual way of life that leads to eternity.
III. Dated 29.6.50.

Life is short, life is short.

When I think again and again on the shortness of life

I cannot help but weep.

You like good wine, you like the perfume of flowers,

You like the taste of the meat of the sheep.

But the beautiful wine will be drunk with excitement,

You will like the flowers when you are young.

When you are old you will want to live a long time.

When you are old you will want to live a long time.

You like good wine, you like the perfume of flowers.

When dead you will have everything.

You will reap the fruits.

You will not die.

Yet you cannot change when you were dead.

That is the punishment of humanity.

Drunken heroes have been killed because of wine and women.

They have caused trouble even after their deaths.

They have caused trouble even after their deaths.

Good men, learn this wonderful method.

When you understand this you can overcome the shortness of life.

IV. Dated 30.7.50.

Life is short, life is short.

When I think again and again on the shortness of life

I cannot help but weep.

You like vanity and bravery.

You will lose your life for them.

When you have had too much fortune misfortune will follow.

When you are too brave you will destroy your life.

The rich man and the hero are like any other men when dead.

The fortune is gone and the bravery forgotten.

That which you enjoy in this life is only transient.

Neither gold nor silver can help you in hell.

The king of hell will judge you according to your behaviour alone.

Good men, cultivate the lasting spiritual life.

When you understand this you can overcome the shortness of life.
GLOSSARY

Romanized spellings are given in nearly every case in the Wade-Giles.
Since the chief purpose of this glossary is the identification of the
appropriate Chinese characters, no tonal indications for the Mandarin
words are given. In the few cases in which romanizations of the
Hokkien or Cantonese dialects are more appropriate, the initials H.
(for Hokkien) and C. (for Cantonese) appear in brackets after the word.
A literal translation would often not have any significance. In these
cases, a free translation is used in preference. If both are given, free translations appearing in
inverted commas.
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<td>&quot;Female Medium&quot;</td>
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<td>1377</td>
<td>&quot;Great Saint Equal with Heaven&quot;</td>
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<td>1379</td>
<td>&quot;Invocation Buddha Charm: 'Chant this Pledge'&quot;</td>
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<td>1380</td>
<td>&quot;Walk fire path: 'Fire walking'&quot;</td>
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<td>1381</td>
<td>&quot;Bring up the dead: 'Soul raiser'&quot;</td>
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<td>1382</td>
<td>&quot;Dedicated child&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Delivered child&quot;</td>
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</table>
Ki-tong (H.)
Kong t'ilng (C.)
Kuan Ti
Kuan Yin
Kuei Devil, Evil Spirit
Kuo sheng wang
Laim (Naim)
Li no-cha
Ling

e.t.
In the
Nan-ning P'o (C.)
Ng jia (C.)
Pu fan
Pu duan
Pu dze
Pu Hou
Pu Hou san
Pu Hou tie
Pu Hou wai
Pu hou wai
Pu Pei
Pu Pei Oh
Pu Ying
ta-shih
Pu-sun
Shang ti
Shen

Divining blocks: ‘Western’ or ‘Divined’
‘Western’ or ‘Divined’
Kow "Y"
Kow "Y"
Devil, Evil Spirit
Dandy King Kun-kwok
‘Taste Wine’
‘Third Floor’
Soul Raiser
Lady of Southern P'u-t'o
‘Divining Blocks’
Bridge of Peace and Prosperity
‘Negative component of the soul’
‘Lord who Protects Life’
Worship of Shen
Lord who Protects Life
Device of Power, ‘Bridge of Power and Prosperity’
‘Mischievous counterpart of the soul’
‘Cattle Friend’
‘Nervousness on High’
‘Might’
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<tr>
<td>Siutoi (H.)</td>
<td>Embroidered stomach: 'Stomacher'</td>
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<td>Tan</td>
<td>Religious festival or 'Shen'</td>
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<td>Tangki (H.)</td>
<td>Birth-day</td>
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<td>Tao chiao</td>
<td>Divining youth: 'Medium' or 'Dang-ki'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tao t'ai</td>
<td>Knife bridge: 'Sword bridge'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tao-ti</td>
<td>Knife ladder: 'Sword ladder'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu-ti</td>
<td>Knife table: 'Knife bed'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ti-tsang</td>
<td>Nail chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ti-tse</td>
<td>'Bodhisattva of the Underworld'</td>
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<td>Ti</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
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<td>Ti-han</td>
<td>Empress of Heaven</td>
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<td>To-ah-kung (H.)</td>
<td>Great-grandson: 'Toa Peh Kong'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ty-dah</td>
<td>Jade Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ty-grug</td>
<td>'Yang' or 'Positive or male principle'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ty-ah</td>
<td>'Yin' or 'Negative or female principle'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ty-ah-che</td>
<td>Silver needles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ty-kung-chung</td>
<td>'Jade Emperor'</td>
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