Chapter IX

Donations and Rewards in the Fundraising System of Chinese Charitable Organisations: The Case of the Chaozhonese *Shantang*

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Introduction

This paper aims to examine donations and rewards in the Chinese charitable organisations called *shantang* 善堂, with a particular focus on Chaozhounese *shantang*s. *Shantang* is a historical Chinese term indicative of a charitable organisation, literally meaning "a hall of benevolence." Fuma Susumu 夫馬進 defined a *shanhui* 善會 (association of goodness/benevolence) as a group of individuals who voluntarily get together in order to do what they consider to be 'good,' and a *shantang* (hall of benevolence) as a facility or building where the secretariat is established [Fuma 1997, 3, 187]. That is, no matter whether big or small, public or private, or whether it strives to relieve the living or the dead, if a group of people voluntarily gathered to work together with the goal of doing good deeds, the association was generally called a *shanhui*; it was called shantang once they acquired a permanent facility or building.

Most scholars believe that the *shantang* movement began in the late Ming period (the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries). Fuma considers the *tongshanhui* 同善會 (literally, "associations of doing good deeds together") movement that arose in the Yangtze River 揚子江 delta in the late Ming period as the start of the subsequent *shantang* movement. Fuma pointed out that the *tongshanhui*s in the Yangtze River delta, including the *tongshanhui* established in Wuxi 無錫 by Gao Panlong 高攀龍, Chen Youxue 陳幼學 and their companion, were modelled after two *tongshanhui*s established in Hebei 河北. One was the *tongshancang* 同善倉 ("charitable storage") established by Lü Kun 呂坤, and the other was the *tongshanhui* established by Yang Dongming 楊東明 in 1590. Fuma emphasised that the purpose of these new associations was unilateral charity by the rich to the poor, unlike mutual aid associations or social assemblies for parents' funerals, money loans and others that had been established in many regions long before. After this type of *tongshanhui* was adapted in the Yangtze River delta, it became much less of a mutual aid

association and more concerned with enlightenment and welfare [Fuma 1997, 92–97].

Fuma attributed the origin of the *shanhui*s and *shantang*s, which continued until the Republican period, to these new *tongshanhui* movements in the late Ming. This means, in other words, that he considered the essential character of *shanghui*s and *shantang*s, which he regarded as the modern form of Chinese charity, to be a unilateral vector from the rich to the poor, rather than a form of mutual assistance.

Angela Leung (Liang Qizi 梁其姿) considers the small-scale burial service associations that emerged in the late Ming period as one of the origins of the large-scale and comprehensive *shantang* movement which arose from the late Qing to the Republican period. She points out that in the Yangtze River delta, *shiguanhui* 施棺會 ("association for free coffins") or *yanmaihui* 掩埋會 ("association for free burial services") first emerged in the late Ming. By the middle of the Qing, they had spread throughout China, and some of them eventually developed into large-scale charitable halls which conducted various charitable activities such as free medical services, free schools and *xizi* 惜字 (literally, "cherishing of written characters") activities[1] [Liang 1997, 217–218]. The burial service associations that Leung discussed were also oriented to unilateral charity, not mutual assistance.

Joanna Handlin Smith also thought that the *tongshanhui* that emerged in the late sixteenth century was the forerunner of the benevolent societies in the nineteenth century [Smith 2009, 4]. She described *tongshanhui* as "a type of voluntary charitable organisation" and "the large-scale cooperative efforts" managed by benefactors of varying social strata [Smith 2009, 4, 11].

Smith examines in detail the characteristics of Yang Dongming's *tongshanhui*, the same one discussed by Fuma, but Smith's perspective differs from Fuma's. Fuma concluded that the *tongshanhui* was oriented towards unilateral charity from the rich to the poor and did not have the "spirit of mutual aid," which was the core of so called *suhui* 俗會 (common societies) that had existed since the Tang dynasty [Fuma 1997, 94–96]. By contrast, Smith understood that Yang modelled his benevolent society after common societies. The common societies that Yang referred to were, according to Smith, "the sort of voluntary associations through which residents of given local pooled resources for a wide range of goals, including religious processions, funerals, and crisis intervention." As Smith mentioned, "the common people had over centuries developed among themselves numerous strategies for collecting funds to deal with crises." Smith states that what was new in the *tongshanhui* in late Ming was "neither the concept of a voluntary association nor communal managing of risk but that Yang, a member of the gentry, should have appro-

[1] *Xizi* is a folk custom based on the Confucian practice of paying respect to written characters and the paper containing them. Burning and sending them to heaven is considered a good deed to accumulate merit.

priated something he explicitly identified with the common people and resituated in his own, elite milieu" [Smith 2009, 49–50]. Smith concludes that the importance of Yang's *tongshanhui* project was that it allowed the benevolent society to easily communicate its purpose to the community and to open up a legitimate space that was easily accessible to a wider range of non-official wealthy people in the town [Smith 2009, 50]. In other words, the difference between Fuma and Smith is that while Fuma sees *tongshanhui* as a newly developed elite society that was influenced by, but different from, common societies, Smith sees *tongshanhui* as taking over the traditional common societies, which she believes contributed to the spread of the *tongshanhui* movement.

I tend to support Smith's perspective. In fact, a *shantang* and a *suhui* are not clearly distinguishable categories. If *shantang*s are defined as elite associations completely distinct from mutual aid associations, as Fuma does, it would be difficult to understand the diversity of *shantang*s that spread to broader local regions from the Qing dynasty to the Republican period.

In this article, among the various types and sizes of *shantang*, I would like to discuss those *shantang*s that are small-scale, deeply rooted in the local community, and have relatively strong mutual aid and religious elements. Such groups have also undoubtedly played an important role in the history of social welfare and charity as we see in the case of other cultures and societies, such as the "friendly society" in England or the "chevra kadisha" (burial society) in the Jewish community. Although they have played an important role throughout China's long history, especially in the fundamental community such as a neighbourhood or village, they have received little attention in historical studies of charity in China due to the lack of data. The ethnographic and historical data on Chaozhounese *shantang*s should be able to somewhat compensate for the lack of case studies on small charitable associations in rural areas.

*Shantang*s were organised as an alternative to a lineage or clan. Unlike a family/clan charitable estate (*yizhuang* 義莊), whose main function was to cover the burdensome ritual and educational expenses, *shantang*s' targets for relief were not limited to family, or those of patrilineal descent or with the same surname. After the Song dynasty, when the Fan 范 Family Charitable Estate was established, the *yizhuang* system spread rapidly in the seventeenth century and served major charitable functions in local society. However, according to Angela Leung, the clan charitable estate system had two main restrictions as a social relief system: first, its main purpose was not merely to provide relief from poverty, but also to maintain the family's livelihood and honour, and, second, this system targeted a limited number of people. The people who benefited from it were mainly members of large families with abundant social resources. In areas where the clan system was weak, clan charitable estates were not very common; even in those areas where the clan system was particularly developed, clan charitable estates only provided relief to a small

number of people, namely members of the main lineages of the clan, but not to all clan members [Leung 1997, 20–21].

The background behind the rise of *shantang*s after the late Ming is considered to be the spread of ideas and beliefs about doing good. Smith pointed out that leaders in late Ming charity inherited a legacy of ancient ideas, associated with the idea of the unity of the three teachings Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism (*sanjiao heyi* 三教合一)[Smith 2009, 249]. Fuma considers the influence of the ledgers of merit and demerit (*gongguoge* 功過格),[2] based on the Confucian moral order, that became popular in late imperial China, as one of the reasons for their spread [Fuma 1997, 3, 187].

Cynthia Brokaw emphasized that the merit and demerit system of late imperial times, in contrast to earlier times, shifted the focus from religious and other-worldly goals to secular and this-worldly ones. Man was now able to control his fate through voluntary action and reflection and was no longer dependent on a supernatural power [Brokaw 1991, 105]. However, as Brokaw also pointed out, the ledgers of merit and demerit "reflect a belief in supernatural retribution in a heaven or an assembly of gods and spirits who watch over men and consciously recompense their acts with good or bad fortune." This system is obviously built on divine or supernatural intervention, in terms of God or Heaven watching human behaviour and bringing blessings or punishments as a result of their assessment [Brokaw 1991, 229]. Also, judging from my ethnographic research into the practice at the level of the common people, or even at the level of the intellectuals, it seems to be somewhat oversimplified to say that charity in modern China has left the religious world and come to be brought to fruition within the secular world.

While *shantang*s were established all over China during late imperial times, their organisational principles and activities differed greatly according to the social class and occupation of their members, the local religious and folk culture, and the social and economic situation of the area in which they were based. Therefore, it is not too much to say that a *shantang* was a product of local culture. In the studies of Chinese history in Japan, scholars tended to discuss what *shantang*s were like based on the model of the *shantang*s in the Jiangnan 江南 area. But the origins and membership of Jiangnan *shantang*s do not necessarily apply to *shantang*s throughout China. Even in the same Guangdong 廣東 Prefecture, *shantang*s in different areas had their own characteristics. Hokari Hiroyuki 帆刈浩之, a scholar who studies the history of *shantang*s in both Jiangnan and Guangdong, pointed out that

[2] The ledgers of merit and demerit were a type of morality book to improve people's moral practice. They quantified morality by setting out the standards for good deeds (merits) and bad deeds (demerits), and assigning each deed a certain number of merit or demerit points according to their size and depth. People used to count the number of good deeds and bad deeds and enter them on a chart at bedtime. At the end of the month and the year, they counted the final total of merits and demerits.

"future historical research on charity in China will need to take local differences fully into account" [Hokari 2011, 15].

In the twentieth century, *shantang*s even spread abroad and they have remained active until the present day. The Chaozhounese *shantang*s, discussed in this paper, are the best examples of this expansion. Chaozhou 潮州, also known as Chaoshan 潮汕[3] or Teochew, which is located in Eastern Guangdong, China, is a region known as a homeland for the Chaozhounese, an ethnic subgroup of overseas Chinese, mostly living in Southeast Asia. With the increase of Chaozhounese migration, Chaozhounese *shantang*s spread to Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. They became the predecessors of modern religious and charitable foundations established in these areas, for example the Poh Teck Tung 報德堂 Foundation in Thailand, the Seu Teck Sean Tong 修德善堂 in Singapore and Dejiaohui 德教會 (the Church of Virtue) distributed throughout Southeast Asia. The important point to note is the fact that even though those foundations had become powerful organisations with great financial resources, they started as mutual aid associations, charity events and religious festivals, organised around a basic level of territorial community.

According to historical and ethnographic data, the social public activities of Chaozhounese *shantang*s, whether at home or abroad, are divided into two categories: those intended for the dead and those for the living. The former includes free coffins and burial services, as well as so-called *xiugu* 修骷 (literally, "repair skeletons"), collective burial activities for unclaimed bones and bodies. It also includes folk religious rituals with Buddhist and Daoist elements held for funerals and memorial ritual services after one's death, or during the Hungry Ghost Festival as a regular annual festival. Activities aimed at the living include free medical services, the construction of bridges and roads, firefighting activities, relief for the poor and refugees, and includes free schools.[4] It is clear that Chaozhounese *shantang*s have placed greater emphasis on activities for the dead than on those for the living.

More noteworthy is that Chaozhounese *shantang*s are "saint-based charitable temples, organized around the worship of one or more saints or deities," as the

[3] Chaoshan is the name of the region that combines Chaozhou Prefecture and Shantou 汕頭 City, and has been in common use in modern times. In recent historical and anthropological studies on the Chaozhounese, the use of "Chaoshan area" is preferred to "Chaozhou area". For this reason, this paper will use Chaoshan when referring to this region.

[4] For more details, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 [1996], Formoso [2010, 2012], Tan Chee-Beng [2012] and Lee Chee Hiang (Li Zhixian 李志賢) [2017]. Lin Wushu is the first scholar to have given much attention to Chaozhounese *shantang*s and the history of the Song Dafeng cult. The French anthropologist Bernard Formoso paid close attention to Chaozhounese *shantang*s in both China and Southeast Asia from a socio-religious perspective. He showed in full detail how *xiugu* activities have been practised in China, Thailand and Malaysia, and what meanings they were given in the cultural and social-political conditions of each country.

Malaysian Chinese scholar, Tan Chee-Beng, has pointed out [Tan 2012, 76]. Although I generally share his view, I believe that more attention should be paid to the various folk beliefs and customs underlying the cults of patron saints.

In this paper, I would like to examine Chaozhounese *shantang*s, focusing on their fundraising systems, including the purpose and rewards of donation, in the following three basic components: the mutual aid associations for funeral and burial services, *xiugu* activities and the Hungry Ghost Festival. Through these cases, I will illustrate the diversity of the social and religious meanings embedded in the fundraising systems, by using mainly ethnographic resources.

Over the past few decades, a large number of studies have been made on institutional charities and major charitable organisations managed by the gentry class, or wealthy merchants with state endorsement in China. However, little is known about the fundraising system deeply rooted in local merchant and peasant life. I would like to pay more attention to the latter, as I believe that its autonomous and sustainable nature, is one of the reasons why Chaozhounese *shantang*s have survived—not only in mainland China, but also in Southeast Asia—until today.

1. The Mutual Aid Associations for Funeral and Burial Services

We can find some earlier records about burial service associations in local gazetteers of the Chaozhou region published at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Ciji Huitang 慈濟會堂 (Hall of Mercy and Relief), officially recognised as one among them, was organised by donations from the local gentry, and appeared in the county town of Jieyang 揭陽 in 1719. The Hall of Mercy and Relief was financed mainly by the rent from fields, garden ponds and shop sites donated by the gentry. It is clear that the Hall was a unilateral type of *shantang*, not a mutual aid association.

Some of the founders of the Ciji Huitang also donated money, rice and coffins for both the living and the dead during the famine of 1726–1727. It was then that the local elites in the Chaoshan region began to cooperate with each other and organise ways to solve the problems of bringing relief to local people and burying the large number of those who had died from starvation.

Since the late nineteenth century, large scale charitable halls with comprehensive functions were established one after another in urban areas. In Chaozhou provincial city, the Ji'an Shantang 集安善堂 (Charitable Hall of Accumulating Good Deeds) was established in 1886. The Ji'an Shantang owned a large cemetery in the suburbs, where the poor who could not afford the burial expenses were buried for free. It kept a register of the names, genders and burial dates of the deceased inscribed on the tombstones of each grave, and responded to inquiries from the relatives of the deceased. It also buried bodies of those who had drowned in the Han

River and the unclaimed dead who had died on the road.

While the stream of the gentry-based and unilateral type of *shanhui*s and *shantang*s arose and evolved in urban areas, the tradition of mutual aid associations for funeral and burial services and labour has continued to the present day among common people. In the Chaoshan region, this type of association, called *fumuhui* 父母會 ("parent burial association") was common before the communist era. An American sociologist D. H. Kulp, who conducted his field research in "Phoenix village" in the Chaoshan region in the 1920s, examined the parent burial association as one of six different associations in the village. It was usually organised with ten to thirty members paying a certain admission fee, which was pooled and used as capital for the association. When a member's parent died, the pooled funds were used to provide cash gifts or loans to the member. In addition, the members were obligated to help with the funerals of other members. Each member would send two people to assist. The assistance was available until the parent was finally laid to rest in the graveyard. The association continued until the last parent of all the members was properly buried, then it automatically dissolved itself [Kulp 1966, 199–200]. Kulp pointed out that, in addition to ancestral worship and filial piety, "the more ordinary community values—the elements of display that give 'face'—embodied in burial practices are reenforced powerfully by religious sentiments" [Kulp 1966, 201].

In modern times, there appeared cases where parental funeral associations in villages were affiliated to large *shantang*s in cities. For example, the Guangji Shantang 廣濟善堂 (Charitable Hall of Universal Rescue) in Anbu 庵埠 town of Chao'an 潮安 County, founded in 1899, had thirteen branch units outside the city, most of which were originally parent burial associations. In Anbu town, there existed a few networks linking one large charitable hall in the town as the headquarters and smaller mutual aid associations outside the town as its subordinate units. The branch units usually functioned as mutual aid burial associations, but also provided manpower when their headquarters held larger scale charitable activities. In return, the branch units could receive funds and political support from their headquarters.

Parent burial associations also spread abroad. In Cholon in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, which has long been inhabited by Chinese people, there are several Chaozhounese religious societies that have a system of parent burial association. The Shi Zhu Xuan Parents Association (Shizhuxuan fumuhui 師竹軒父母會) was rather well known among them. According to the Japanese scholar, Serizawa Satohiro 芹澤知広, it was established as a mutual aid association for funerals and burials in 1927, and also functioned as a group of religious specialists performing Chaozhounese-style rituals and music during funerals. Nowadays, it is involved in a wide range of social welfare and charitable activities, such as providing coffins to poor families [Serizawa 2018, 264, 280].

The Ling Fu Tan 靈福壇 (Altar of Spirit and Happiness), a Daoist organisa-

tion established in 1957, also has a system of parent burial association. It has more than four hundred members. The annual membership fee is 400,000 dong (about 2,000 yen), which covers the funerals of the four parents. For the funeral rituals for parents, it organises a group of memorial ritual services which teach the rituals to the members. There are two teachers, one for the music and the other for sutra chanting. Other charitable activities include helping the Red Cross in the event of floods or natural disasters. The members of the board of directors donate the rice. They also have a service of providing coffins [Serizawa 2018, 273–274].

2. The *Xiugu* Activities and the Cult of "Sacred Dead"

Xiugu, literally meaning "repairing skeletons," indicates a collective burial activity, including the construction and repair of graves for unclaimed bones and bodies, usually organised around a basic level of territorial community. *Xiugu* activities have played important functions both from a social and a religious perspective in the Chaoshan region from the past until today.

In the Chaoshan region, when human bones and bodies were found while cultivating fields or fishing on the beach, people used to bury them and erect a small tombstone inscribed with the words "Old Ancestor." Sometimes they would place the bones in pots and keep them around a shrine or a graveyard. When the number of bones increased, the neighbourhood would donate money to build a collective grave. Among these unclaimed bones, the dead who had characteristics that distinguished them from others or revealed efficacy were "sanctified," and came to be regularly worshipped by the local lineage members or the neighbourhoods who benefited from their spiritual power. As a result, the "sacred dead" came to be considered as patron saints of the communities.

The folk beliefs associated with the sacred dead could create new deities or saints. Here, I would like to examine folk beliefs associated with collective graves established through burial activities. The cult of *shengren gongma* 聖人公媽 (literally, "sacred ancestors") is a typical example. *Shengren gongma* are most popular in Haifeng 海豐 County, where they are usually enshrined in a collective grave where unclaimed bones or drowned bodies have been buried. Most *shengren gongma* have their own legends.

For example, a *shengren gongma* grave in an area called Huziqishe 湖仔七社 (Seven Villages at the Waterfront), near the sea in the town of Dahu 大湖, Haifeng County, is said to have the following origin: One day, when a fisherman from Huziqishe went to the beach to catch fish, he caught up a skull in his net. From that day on, he continued to catch so many fish that he could not sell them all. He was grateful for the efficacy of the skull. One day, the skull manifested himself and said he was from a wealthy Fujian family, and had set sail for the capital as an official,

together with thirty-eight family members. However, the ship sank in a storm on the way, and he and his entire family were drowned. The fishermen buried the skull on the beach and built a tomb.

The grave where the skull is buried is called *shengren gongma* and is believed to have great spiritual power. Therefore, the village people periodically venerate the skull as their patron saint.

A Taiwanese scholar, Lin Fushi 林富士 examined the people's mentality of enshrining and venerating unclaimed bones and bodies through the following five aspects: pity, fear, wishing for blessings, self-identification, and following custom. Even though the remains are anonymous, they may originally have been one of their own ancestors or a neighbouring villager. While people fear being cursed by such anonymous dead, they also feel pity for them and even wish good rewards for themselves by burying the dead. The dead could also become a symbol that evokes a common memory and strengthens the sense of belonging to a social group, such as a village or a clan. The mentality of fishermen in coastal villages to venerate drowned bodies from the sea is based on empathy for the fate of the dead [Lin F. 1995, 215–217]. These diverse beliefs and sentiments towards the anonymous dead have created the image of the sacred dead, the king of demons, and the guardian deity who brings order and peace to the community.

In general, the neighbourhoods or communities conducting *xiugu* activities eventually began to regularly hold *xiugu* activities, rituals for their guardian deities and Hungry Ghost Festivals. They then formed a more permanent type of association or society for doing good deeds, called *shantang* or *shanshe* 善社, although the name *cishan fulihui* 慈善福利會 ("charity welfare society") is preferred in contemporary China. In the Chaoshan region, this type of association had been established in the late Qing period. In the Chaoyang 潮陽 and Huilai 惠來 areas of the Chaoshan region, a mutual aid association, called *chashe* 茶社 ("tea society"), provided free tea and accommodation for travellers and burial services for the dead on the road. In late Song Chaoshan, Buddhist stations called *anyi* 庵驛, providing accommodation for travellers, had been established along the road from Guangzhou to Fujian [Chen C. 2007, 80–81]. It is likely that the tea societies were successors of the Song *anyi*. Most tea societies also functioned as mutual aid associations providing free coffins and burial services, and regularly conducted *xiugu* activities in neighbouring fields.

According to my ethnographic research, most of the tea societies in Chaoyang are dedicated to Song Dafeng 宋大峰, the most popular saint worshipped by Chaozhounese all over the world. Song Dafeng was originally a Buddhist monk from Fujian living in the Song period. He was also the "sacred dead," who was deified by his apparition and efficacy, as with the cult of *shengren gongma*. Since Dafeng's main character was a ruler of the lonely souls of the dead and of demons, his cult was closely related to *xiugu* activities, burial work and rituals for neglected

bones and bodies.[5]

Members of tea societies in Chaoyang affectionately call Master Dafeng (Dafeng zushi 大峰祖師) "A-Gong" (grandfather). They used to visit the Hall of Repaying Kindness once a year in the tenth lunar month, around the birthday of Master Dafeng, and once every twelve years for "taking fire," which meant the rejuvenation of their spiritual power by refreshing the incense ash. When the representatives of the tea societies brought A-Gong's incense ash back to their own altar, thousands of villagers welcomed them with a celebratory event.

The place where the tea societies often conducted *xiugu* activities was the area along the seashore known as Nanshanwei 南山尾 (The Tail of the Southern Mountains), where many bodies of those drowned in marine accidents or large typhoons were washed ashore. The local people used to carry the wooden gold-coloured statue of Song Dafeng, called Nanshangong 南山公 (God of the Southern Mountains), out of the Hall of Repaying Kindness during the *xiugu* ritual. Nanshangong, carried on a sedan chair, inspected and indicated, via spirit writing, the precise locations where bodies and bones were exposed or buried. After collecting the remains, the people constructed a collective grave to bury them according to Dafeng's spirit-written instructions. Across the top of the tombstone of the grave, they engraved three characters "宋大峰" horizontally, wishing the dead in the grave to be controlled by Song Dafeng.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the tea societies in Chaoyang and Huilai Counties began to organise a broader network. The tea societies belonging to this network had the right to participate in a large-scale *xiugu* ceremony called "Nanshan Xiugu" 南山修骷 (*xiugu* on the Southern Mountains), held in the eleventh lunar month every year. At the end of the programme, all of the participating societies used to worship collectively in front of the grave believed to be that of Master Dafeng, located on the neighbouring mountain.[6]

The Cunxin Shantang 存心善堂 (Charitable Hall of Devotion), a large-scale and powerful charitable foundation in Shantou, also evolved from a small lay Buddhist society in Chaoyang, called *nianfoshe* 念佛社 (sutra recitation society), whose main activities included conducting *xiugu* activities through Song Dafeng's spirit written instructions. The *nianfoshe* members were likely to have been common people. Zhao Jinhua, a member of the *nianfoshe* and later one of the founders of the Charitable Hall of Devotion, was an ordinary peasant, nicknamed "Uncle Flea," who would often go to Shantou for work [Wang and Li 1996, 22].

However, it was only with the financial support of wealthy merchants and the endorsement of government officials that the Charitable Hall of Devotion was able to become a modern charitable organisation widely known in the Chaoshan region,

[5] For details about the deification of Song Dafeng, see Lin Wushu [1996]; Shiga [2012].
[6] Based on my field research and Xu Yuan's master's thesis [2006].

as well as in South China and Southeast Asia. Twenty trading companies in Shantou, including the Shantou branch of Jardine Matheson, acted as promoters to purchase the land for building the Hall, and forty-eight organisations subsequently made a donation for its establishment. In December 1903, the construction of the Hall was completed in the present location [Zhang 2005, 65–66].

The *xiugu* activities also spread to Thailand, sometimes leading to the establishment of charitable foundations there. For example, I would like to take a look at the early history of the Poh Teck Tung Foundation (Baode shantang 報德善堂 in Chinese), the biggest charitable organisation in Thailand. In 1896, a merchant who immigrated from Chaoyang County carried a statue of Song Dafeng—the golden body of Nanshangong—from Chaoyang, and enshrined it in his store located in Bangkok's Chinatown.

At that time, Bangkok was hit by an epidemic, and many people came to Dafeng's statue to pray for help. In 1899, the shrine was moved to the common cemetery for the Chaozhounese. Since Song Dafeng became known as a guardian god of *xiugu*, people began to collect bones and conduct burial services. However, as the cemetery was not large, the remains needed to be exhumed every year and stored in a pagoda. In 1906, they expanded the cemetery, and constructed three graves known as the Tomb of All Souls, where the remains that had been kept in the pagoda for many years were finally buried. In 1910, the Poh Teck Tung Foundation was established with donations from Chinese merchants who were the leaders of the Chinese community in Bangkok.

Even in rural areas in Thailand, *xiugu* activity was often the first step in establishing a charitable organisation. One case is the Thailand Association of Buddhists for the Relief of Merit, commonly called the Ming Lian 明聯 (the Ming group), an alliance of Chinese charitable organisations spread throughout Thailand.[7] As of 2009, there are fifty-two organisations affiliated with the Ming Lian.

The foundation of the Ming Lian dates back to 1908, when two brothers from Puning 普寧 County, Guangdong Prefecture, came to Thailand to work, carrying the incense of the Eight Immortals enshrined in a temple in their hometown. They stayed for a while with their uncle in Ban Bueng District, Chonburi Province, and enshrined the incense ash in their uncle's general store. In 1925, in the neighbouring district of Sriracha, a number of human remains were found in an old cemetery that had been dug up for road construction work. The bones were soon cremated, and the ashes were disposed of in the sea. A few days later, however, rumours began to spread that someone had seen ghosts or heard cries. Therefore, people consulted a Chinese god called the King of the Three Mountains through a medium and were

[7] The meaning behind the name of the Ming Lian is that all organisations belonging to the Ming Lian have "ming" as the first character of their names, such as Mingteng, Minghui and Mingxin.

told, “Let the Masters of the Eight Immortals deal with them.” A few days later, the owner of the general store came from Ban Bueng to Sriracha on business. He told the people in Sriracha that there was a shrine dedicated to the Eight Immortals in his store. He also told them that his nephews, who had come from Puning, had attended many *xiugu* ceremonies in their hometown and were familiar with the procedures and rituals. Therefore, the people of Sriracha decided to bring the incense ash of the Eight Immortals to Sriracha and asked his nephews to conduct a *xiugu* ceremony.

Since 1925 when the first *xiugu* ceremony was held, the temples and shrines enshrining the incense ash of the Eight Immortals had increased by the incense-dividing system and two more *xiugu* ceremonies were held by them. The third ceremony was held in 1946 with the participation of eleven organisations, which consequently established a federation in order to cooperate with one other in the future. In 1957, a total of sixteen organisations, including those that had newly joined the federation, held a general meeting and officially registered with the government. Thus the Ming Lian was established.

In contemporary Thailand, *xiugu* ceremonies are becoming more and more popular and large in scale. Most have been conducted by local *shantang*s or branches of the Church of Virtue, with the cooperation of neighbouring charitable associations, and usually last from less than a month to more than two months. Since the 2000s, large-scale *xiugu* ceremonies have been held several times a year in various parts of Thailand [Tamaki 2009, 122].

3. The Hungry Ghost Festival in Chaoshan and Hong Kong

The Hungry Ghost Festival, also known as *Yulanpen* 盂蘭盆 or the *Zhongyuan* 中元 festival in China, originated from Buddhism in India and evolved into a festival composed of a series of rituals and local theatrical performances, connected with the filial piety of Confucianism, as well as the idea of salvation in Chinese Buddhism and Daoism. The Chinese Hungry Ghost Festival spread not only throughout mainland China, but also to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and other Chinese ethnic enclaves in Southeast Asia. The festival is usually held by territorial communities, religious organisations, and social groups in the seventh lunar month. Its main purpose is appeasing malevolent ghosts from hell, by offering and chanting scriptures, and restoring order and peace to society. It also performs charitable activities for the living, such as distributing rice or daily commodities.

The Hungry Ghost Festival (hereinafter referred to as HGF) is one of the most important annual events for most ethnic groups from southern China, but it plays a particularly essential role in Chaozhounese communities and charitable organisations. In this section, I would like to consider the Chaozhounese HGFs in

Chaoshan and Hong Kong, mainly in terms of donations.

First, I would like to examine the HGFs held by territorial communities in rural areas of the Chaoshan region. The festival is a good platform for raising the largest amount of funds for the year for communities and organisations. For example, the board of the *Shengren gongma* Association in Huziqishe, Haifeng County that I mentioned in the previous section, holds the HGF from the fourteenth to the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month every year. The board is made up of the core members of the village, and is responsible for fundraising, as well as accounting. There are three ways of collecting funds. The first is a kind of membership fee. Each household pays a small amount of money per person for each family member. When I was doing research here in 2004, the fee was only 10 yuan per person. The board members write down the names of all the heads of households and the number of family members on sheets of red paper and post them on the wall of the meeting place next to the grave. They stamp the Chinese character for "fortune" on the names of those who have already paid the fee.

The second is a donation by the *huishou* 會首 (association head). The *huishou* is chosen from among the candidates by divination. Non-villagers can also become the *huishou*, but there is a limit of one per household. Donations from the *huishou* are usually more substantial than the membership fee. The person who becomes the *huishou* is given a piece of red paper with the inscription "*Huishou* Mr. XX, receiving fortune." It is believed that if they hold this paper over the incense burner in front of the *shengren gongma*'s grave, turning it three times, and then enshrine it near the altar at home, they will receive the *shengren gongma*'s blessings and live in peace for one year.

The third is a form of donation called *xiti* 喜題 ("joyful theme") made in the name of an individual. The amount has no upper limit. The most common type of *xiti* is a donation to pay for local theatrical productions, on behalf of both supernatural beings and the living. The cost of one night's performance is usually between 2,000 and 3,000 yuan. Those who donate in the form of *xiti* are presented with a banner with congratulatory phrases, such as "wealthy and prosperous" and "benefit to descendants," which is considered a great honour.

The funds that have been collected are used for various expenses, including for banquets, sacrifices, Daoist rituals and local theatrical productions during festivals. The remaining money might be used for public facilities, such as the maintenance of roads in the village.

The way of conducting the HGFs, including raising funds, has been inherited by the Chaozhounese immigrants to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, in the seventh lunar month every year, various social groups, such as neighbourhood associations, public housing associations, companies, and Daoist and Buddhist organisations, hold their HGFs. According to Chen Qian 陳蒨, there are 118 festivals held throughout Hong Kong during the month, of which 56 or nearly half, are organised

by Chaozhounese communities [Chen Q. 2015, 18–24].

The main way of fundraising is collecting small donations from the members of the community, substantial donations from a president and directors of the board and the shops and companies in the community, and income from an auction, which is usually held during a banquet on the final day.

The first Chaozhounese HGF in Hong Kong is said to have been held by an organisation called Gonghe Tang 公和堂 (the Gonghe Hall), which was established in 1898. At that time, a ghostly apparition was reported in the warehouse of a British trading company, Jardine Matheson, and a large number of Chaozhounese coolie labourers working at the warehouse held rituals to appease the ghosts following the way of the HGF held in their homeland.

The earlier Chaozhounese HGFs in the early colonial period of Hong Kong were held in Sheung Wan and Sai Wan Districts in the western area of Hong Kong Island, where Chaozhounese traders and workers lived. This area includes a street called Bonham Strand, where some trading companies, called Nam Pak Hong 南北行 (literally, "South-North Trading Company"), mostly run by Chaozhounese merchants, were established.

Tanaka Issei 田仲一成 examined the financial reports from 1906 to 1943 published by the Po Leung Kuk 保良局, a well-established charitable organisation in Hong Kong. He pointed out that the Hall of Nam Pak Hong had been making large donations every year since 1906 to the Hungry Ghost Festivals in Sai Ying Pun district and on a few streets in Sai Wan district [Tanaka 2014, 407–412].

Among the earlier HGF organisations in this area, a well-known one is the Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-lan 三角碼頭盂蘭 Association (Triangular Wharf HGF Association). Triangular Wharf, also known as Yongle Wharf, was the largest transit port for ships travelling between the Pearl River delta, Fujian, Chaozhou and Southeast Asia. The shore was lined with warehouses where many coolie labourers worked to carry the cargo on and off the ships. The Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-lan Association was organised by the Chaozhounese, who formed the majority of the coolie labourers.

In Hong Kong, as HGF organisations are recognized as institutions of a public character, collecting donations for public charity, most of them are registered as a company limited. Furthermore, at least thirteen Chaozhounese HGF organisations had been approved as a charitable institution or trust of a public character by 2014, and are exempt from tax under section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance. The Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-lan Association was incorporated as a company limited in 1975 and was approved as a tax-exempt charitable association limited in 2000.[8]

[8] Retrieved January 26, 2022, from https://www.l568.com/companies/0042331/ and https://www.tempb.com/companies/buddhist-sam-kok-mar-tou-yu-lan-charitable-association-limited/.

According to the research conducted by Chen Qian in 2012, the donation amount to the Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-lan Association was 628,530 HKD (about 80,000 USD), which is the third largest among HGF organisations in Hong Kong. The donors are divided into four main categories: individuals, shops, households and organisations. Individuals account for 48.6% of donations, households for 32.1% and shops for 18.8%. However, 48% of donations of 5,000 HKD or more come from shops, and 95% of donations of 500 HKD or less come from individuals and families. In other words, the funds of the festival are covered by small donations collected widely from residents and relatively large donations from small business owners in the community [Chen Q. 2015, 164–167].

Chen Qian examined why small business owners actively fulfil their moral responsibilities in the community. She said that we must understand that small business owners have been doing business in the community for many years and have naturally developed relationships with the residents. The donations from small business owners to support the HGF organisation are an expression of a mixture of human feelings, making good relationships with the residents and saving face in the community [Chen Q. 2015, 168].

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me summarize a few main points that have been made in this paper. I discussed the fundraising systems in Chaozhounese *shantang*s, focusing on their three basic components: *fumuhui*, *xiugu* activities and the Hungry Ghost Festival (HGF). All these associations and activities remain active not only in mainland China, but also in Chaozhounese communities in Southeast Asia. In fact, they were more active in immigrant communities, where they adapted to a new environment and have undergone further developments. This is because they were all mutual aid systems that could be adopted rather easily and quickly by poor immigrants without capital to survive in an unfamiliar environment.

In the Chaoshan region, one of the earlier *shantang*s providing free coffins and burial services, the Ciji Huitang, was established in Jieyang at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This type of *shantang*, which was a gentry-based and unilaterally-oriented charity by the rich for the poor, began to spread mainly in urban areas, and formed the mainstream of the *shantang* movement in Chaoshan by the end of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, mutual aid associations for funeral and burial services, such as *fumuhui* associations, survived in rural areas, and even played an important role in the boom of *shantang* that occurred in the modern Chaoshan region. Furthermore, in Vietnam and Hong Kong, the destination countries of Chaozhounese migration, a parent burial association became the foundation for the establishment of charitable organisations there and has continued to the

present day.

Xiugu activities were closely related to folk beliefs in spirits of collective graves established through burial activities. The belief of *shengren gongma* that I discussed is a typical one. *Shengren gongma* were the dead who had been "sanctified" by their apparition or efficacy and who had come to be regularly venerated by local lineage members or the neighbourhood who benefited from their spiritual power, and consequently became the patron saint of the community. The belief in "sacred dead" like *shengren gongma* was also a cultural foundation in the creation of Master Song Dafeng, the most popular Buddhist saint worshipped by the Chaozhounese.

In late Qing Chaoshan, small-scale associations, such as *chashe* (tea societies) and *nianfoshe* (lay Buddhist societies) functioned not only as mutual aid associations providing funeral and burial services and as associations regularly conducting *xiugu* activities, but also as the cult of Song Dafeng. The rise and expansion of such associations eventually led to the establishment of the Charitable Hall of Devotion, the largest charitable organisation in modern Shantou.

This heritage has been passed down in charitable organisations founded by Chaozhounese descendants in Thailand. *Xiugu* ceremonies held by immigrant communities have been a trigger for establishing new charitable foundations. The spiritual power of the sacred dead treated in *xiugu* ceremonies still attracts many devotees.

The cases of the Hungry Ghost Festival (HGF) in Chaoshan and Hong Kong illustrated that there are various ways and meanings in donation. At the HGF in Haifeng, China, all villagers pay their fees equally, and the blessings are distributed fairly. In principle, every household head has the right to be an association head, but the final decision is left to the divine will through divination. The association head, who is to receive more blessings, is limited to one person per household, and also requires divine permission. This is a system reflecting the principle of equality, where no one person with wealth can monopolise the blessings.

The HGF was introduced to colonial Hong Kong by Chaozhounese immigrants as early as the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the Chaozhounese HGF organisations that were newly established in Hong Kong have developed into powerful charitable associations by obtaining more substantial donations from wealthy merchants, such as the Nam Pak Hong. Nowadays, more than ten HGF organisations have been officially approved as a tax-exempt charitable association limited.

However, most HGF organisations are still supported by small donations collected widely from local residents and small business owners. Their motivations behind the donations to the HGF are quite diverse: making good human relationships, saving face or fulfilling moral responsibility in the community. Although they are almost secular and this-worldly, they cannot be understood simply through

the idea of the merit and demerit system, which is rather egoistic and materialistic. The rewards for donations to the HGF organisation of the community are not immediately calculated and earned, but people would feel their benefits through their daily lives and business.

Furthermore, we should not overlook the point that rewards for donations are also religious. The devotion to a particular deity or saint is accompanied by expectations of divine mercy, benevolence and generosity. The number of blessings is not necessarily determined by the amount of the donation, but rather by the principle of fairness within the community or the sincerity of faith.

It may be concluded, from what has been said above, that one of the reasons why Chaozhounese *shantang*s have attracted so many people and collected so many donations beyond time, place, class, ethnicity and gender is largely due to components such as mutual aid, devotion to a particular god/saint and the protection of his spiritual power, and a responsibility and emotional attachment to the community to which they belong.

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