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A Chinese Spirit-medium Temple in  
Kwun Tong: A Preliminary Report

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A CHINESE SPIRIT-MEDIUM TEMPLE IN  
KWUN TONG : A PRELIMINARY REPORT

By

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WITH THE COLLABORATION OF

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## INTRODUCTION:

This paper is a preliminary report covering one phase of an ongoing research project dealing with religious behavior in urban Hong Kong. The long range goal of the project is to sort out the key factors in the Hong Kong urban environment which influence the religious behavior of its Chinese residents. Included in the project are individual studies of several religious centres each of which represents a different form of religious adaptation to the Hong Kong urban situation. The present paper, however, is based on the study of only one such centre, a spirit-medium temple which is located in one of Hong Kong's industrial-residential communities, Kwun Tong.

It is important that the "preliminary" nature of the following report be recognized. The data gathering phase of the temple study is still in progress and will not be completed for several months yet. Significant gaps still exist in our knowledge of details pertinent to cult activity, the life-history of the religious specialists, and the cult's formal and informal alliances with other religious institutions. Due to these gaps and the fact that the analysis of already collected data is not complete, the present report is basically a descriptive account of the cult and its activities. Only the most obvious conclusions are drawn; and, even then, there is full realization that the input of additional information at a later date may lead to the revision or abandonment of these conclusions.

The romanization of Chinese words employed in this report is more random than systematic. Whenever appropriate, the romanization

commonly used in Hong Kong for place names, Chinese linguistic groups, and the Chinese names for religious organizations is used, e.g. the designation "Chiu-chow 潮州" is given to speakers of the Min dialect common to the Swatow region rather than "Teo-chou 潮州". In most cases a rather ad hoc, toneless approximation of the Cantonese pronunciation is given and, as an aid to the reader, the Chinese characters for the more technical terms are also included in the text.

The decision to study the spirit medium temple was arrived at partly by accident and partly by design. The principal investigator resided for approximately nine months (Sept., 1972 - May, 1973) in Kwun Tong where he conducted a study of a Chinese Christian community located in Block 18 of the Tsui Ping Road Resettlement Estate. During that period he became acquainted with the staff of the spirit medium temple situated on a small hill adjacent to Block 18. For purposes of comparison with the Christian community, the temple appeared quite promising. Because it draws its clientele and staff from the same resettlement estate as does the Christian centre, and is devoted to the maintenance of a traditional form of religious behavior; it was felt that a detailed study of the temple followed by a comparison with the Christian community might illuminate factors in the urban environment that affect the residents' choice between the two fundamentally different religious strategies of adaptation offered. The temple staff expressed willingness to endure the presence and questions of the investigators so that the formal research was initiated in October, 1973.

The method of data acquisition used in this project has been almost exclusively participant observation. Numerous daily rituals and festival ceremonies have been attended. Interviews of an informal nature have been conducted with the temple staff and worshippers. Literature published and/or distributed by the temple has been acquired and, in large part, translated into English. In order to fill the informational gaps that still persist the investigators plan to conduct more detailed interviews with key temple personnel. The additional data will be included in a final report issued upon completion of the project.

## I. SPIRIT MEDIUM CULTS:

When man recognizes the existence of supernatural beings and/or forces, he is seldom content to allow matters to rest at the cognitive level. Few believers in the reality of the supernatural realm have accepted the view of the French Encyclopedists that its inhabitants are unconcerned with man and therefore best ignored. The more common view is that the supernaturals are quite capable of affecting man's earthly lot for good or ill and, additionally, that they have a privileged insight into the future course of events on the earthly plane. If his religious perception had ground to a halt at this point, man would have been left with the uneasy notion that the quality of his existence is totally subject to the whim of uncommunicative supernaturals. To bridge the gap between supernatural whim and purpose, man has devised various methods for communicating with supernaturals and even for influencing the quality of their interaction with mortals.

Although the range of methods devised for divine communication is quite varied, there is sufficient cross-cultural regularity in the techniques employed to allow for classification into a limited number of conceptual types. Spirit mediumship is one such type which implies the adoption of a specific technique in communicating with the supernatural. This form of communication is found in all of the world's major culture areas, although it is seldom the most commonly employed or the most culturally approved. Firth offers a concise definition of two concepts that are central to this form of supernatural communication: "spirit possession" and "mediumship";

"Spirit possession is a form of trance in which behavioral actions of a person are interpreted as evidence of a control of his behavior by a spirit normally external to him. Spirit mediumship is normally a form of possession in which the person is conceived as serving as an intermediary between spirits and men. The accent here is on communication; the action and words of the medium must be translatable, which differentiates them from mere spirit possession or madness" (Firth, 1959, p.141).

During the trance state the medium's normal consciousness and ordinary behavioral patterns are seemingly suspended; anything that he may do in such a state is attributed to the possessing deity. In their introduction to a collection of papers on spirit mediumship in Africa, Beattie and Middleton (1969, P.XVII) add the point that the medium's trance may be "real" or "assumed". Although it is not clearly stated, it is obvious from the context of their discussion that "real" refers to the psychological validity of the trance state rather than the ontological validity of the possession by a deity. Their contention, and ours, is that whether the trance state in individual instances reflects a true alteration in the consciousness of the medium or a controlled performance on his part for the benefit of others is an important question only if it is judged so by the adherents of the spirit medium cult. To the anthropologist spirit mediumship is a cultural reality and will remain so as long as there are individuals who act in accordance with the belief that it is an effective method for communication with supernaturals.

In the West, the historically dominant position of Christianity, a religious tradition allied with a more indirect, sacramental mode of divine communication, has relegated mediumship to a heterodox, peripheral



position. In China, the failure of any one religion allied with a special form of divine communication to win effective dominance has been conducive to the persistence of a wider variety of religious techniques. In southeast China, especially in the northeastern counties of Kwangtung Province, Fukien, and Taiwan Provinces, spirit mediumship has continued as a popular form of religious activity. Although the existences of spirit mediums have been listed in a number of Western language works on China, few have offered details of their activities. The most notable exceptions are DeGroot's (1892-1910) description of spirit mediumship in Fukien Province during the waning years of the Ching Dynasty, Elliott's (1955) account of spirit medium cults among the overseas Chinese in Singapore, and Jordan's (1972) recent study of religious behavior in a rural Taiwanese village.

Detailed and systematic accounts of spirit medium cults in Hong Kong or, for that matter, in Kwangtung Province are presently unavailable. In addition to the lack of scholarly literature on the subject, one notes that when casually questioned about the existence of such cults the average Cantonese resident of Hong Kong will often express complete ignorance of the subject. The rare positive response will usually be with reference to a specific type of medium known locally as a "Mun Sien Poe" - 問醒婆. The "Mun Sien Poe" is invariably a middle-aged or elderly lady who specializes in contacting the spirits of the deceased at the request of relatives or close friends. She ordinarily acts on an individualistic basis and is seldom if ever the central focus of an organized cult (Doolittle, 1876, p.114).

A reasonably careful search of resettlement estates or other urban residential facilities housing a significant number of Chiu-chow, Hokkien, or Hoifung people will reveal that there are a number of cults formed around the activity of another type of spirit medium whom the Chiu-chows refer to as a "ki-tong" - 乩童 . Unlike the "Mun Sien Peo", the "ki-tongs" we have encountered in Hong Kong do not contact the spirits of deceased persons for the benefit of their survivors. Instead, they claim a special relationship with one or more specific traditional deities who utilize on occasion the medium's bodily facilities to communicate with mortals. A further contrast with the "Mun Sien Poe" is that the "ki-tong" does not use his own home for spirit communication nor will the average Hong Kong "Ki-tong" visit the homes of his clients for such sessions; he usually confines his activities to a specific temple. (1)

The Hong Kong spirit medium temple may be either a humble structure devoted exclusively to religious activity with minimal staff; or it may be a rather ornate edifice sponsoring, in addition to those which are the specifically religious, a number of social service oriented projects, thus requiring a rather large staff. Our study focuses on a temple that falls into the latter category. Although the temple itself is unimpressive, construction is currently under way of a new one which represents only the first phase of an ambitious building program being undertaken by the cult association. At a time when it is common to hear people celebrate or bemoan the supposed demise of traditional Chinese religious practices in Hong Kong, this spirit medium cult gives every indication of prosperity and an increasing popularity among inhabitants of the community in which it is situated.

The writer maintains that a major factor contributing to the cult's popularity is its selective appeal to a limited, though sizeable, segment of the population of the resettlement estates in which it is located, the Chiu-chow residents. Elliott (1955, P.22) proposes that the Singapore medium cults are fundamentally economic enterprises whose prime purpose is to realize a profit for the promoter who owns and maintains the temple. Even though the staff of a Singapore temple may be Chiu-chow, they nevertheless endeavor to attract as wide a clientele as possible regardless of ethnic or linguistic affiliation in order to maximize financial returns. The Hong Kong model, at least as exemplified by the temple we are discussing, appears quite different. The Chiu-chow are in a relatively weaker numerical position vis-a-vis the dominant Cantonese in Hong Kong than they were with other linguistic groups in Singapore. (2) Not surprisingly this has fostered the formation of specifically Chiu-chow economic and social organizations dedicated to mutual assistance as well as maintenance of the language and customs of the homeland. The temple has become a focal point for members of the Chiu-chow community in the estate; it is a place where the ordinary language is the Chiu-chow dialect, the staff are fellow countrymen, and the deity who appears most frequently is a favorite of the Chiu-chow. The primary promotor of the temple is a wealthy businessman who appears more interested in the prestige that he acquires in the Chiu-chow community as Honorary President of the temple than in financial returns.

In the remaining sections of the paper, as we discuss the setting, the personnel, the ritual activity, and the organizational characteristics of the cult, the strength of its association with Chiu-

chow ethnicity will hopefully become clearer. Since our study is limited to one temple, we cannot imply that Elliott's economic explanation will not account for the existence of other spirit medium cults in Hong Kong. Our only contention is that there is at least an instance which justifies appeal to factors other than the economic.

## II. THE SETTING

The spirit medium temple is located in the "new" residential-industrial community of Kwun Tong which is situated on the eastern edge of the Kowloon Peninsula. Prior to 1956, the area was a sparsely settled rural district with a total population scarcely exceeding one thousand inhabitants. In 1973, Kwun Tong boasted a population exceeding one half million with roughly 80% living in public housing (Chan, 1973, P.14).

The temple is situated on a small hilltop adjacent to the eastern portion of the oldest government housing complex in Kwun Tong, the Tsui Ping Road Resettlement Estate. Completed in 1961, the estate consists of twenty-three Mark I - "H" shaped residential blocks. The designation "resettlement estate" indicates that the occupants are all former urban squatters the majority of whom migrated to Hong Kong from China after 1949. Current records indicate that there are 56,184 residents divided into 8,595 households. The overcrowded conditions prevalent in the estate are obvious to even the most casual observer who takes the ten minute walk along the length of Tsui Ping Road through the heart of the complex. Because each person in the Mark I blocks is officially allowed only twenty-four square feet of living accommodation, the sense of external crowding that one perceives is magnified within the individual household units. The estate itself is popularly known by residents and non-residents alike as "Kai Liu" - 雞寮, the "Chicken Shed". Informants have insisted that no matter how apt the expression may seem as a description of the crowded conditions, it is the original name for the area antedating the estate's construction.

In addition to crowded conditions the older Mark I residential blocks lack many of the conveniences included in the newer varieties. Each block is seven stories high with access to the upper stories only possible through open staircases. The living quarters lack individual kitchens, running water, washroom facilities, and toilets. Communal washrooms and toilets are included in the crossbar of the "H" on each floor. The ground floor units of most blocks are rented out for shops, restaurants, clinics, and various types of social service agencies while the rooftops are usually fenced in for use as nurseries, kindergartens, or primary schools.

The majority of wageearners in the estate are employed as semi-skilled or unskilled laborers in the industrial sector of Kwun Tong. Although the monthly wage of the average household's chief supporter seldom exceeds \$800 HK, this figure does not ordinarily reflect the household's total monthly income. Youngsters of both sexes often discontinue schooling in their early teens to seek employment in local factories and subsequently contribute the major portion of their earnings to a common family purse. This additional income may be a necessity rather than a surplus especially if there are aged or sick members in the household who are unemployable. Temporary lay-offs are not uncommon in a working population which is largely unskilled and whose major employment opportunities are in industries subject to the fluctuations of the world economy.

Crime is a topic of constant concern to the estate's residents. Several informants claim that in their blocks a mugging occurs every three or four days. The attack usually takes place after dark while

the victim is going to, coming from, or using the communal facilities in the crossbar of the "H". If he hands over his money without a struggle the victim is seldom injured. Fear of rapists and "peeping toms" has encouraged women to organize self-protection groups to accompany one another to the toilets and washrooms after dark. The estate supposedly abounds in "junior" triad societies which are blamed for most of the muggings and which are also said to prey on local shopkeepers, demanding money in return for "protection".

Housing office records reveal that roughly one half of the estate's 56,184 residents list their place of origin as Cantonese speaking regions of Kwangtung Province. Of the remainder, 37% formerly resided in the Chiu-chow speaking counties of northeastern Kwangtung Province while the others are largely from Hakka speaking districts of Kwangtung Province or from neighboring Fukien Province. There are very few northerners presently living in the estate. The heavy concentration of Chiu-chow is in marked contrast to their overall percentage of the Colony's total population, i.e. 9.7%. A possible reason for this heavy concentration is the government's policy of resettling the mass squatters from the same squatter area into a particular estate. It may be that many of the Chiu-chow who came to Hong Kong after 1949 tended to cluster in the Lo Fu Ngam squatter area north of Kowloon City. After the Tsui Ping Road Estate was completed they were resettled as a group into it.

Although the most common Chinese dialect spoken in the estate is Cantonese, one hears conversations carried out in the Chiu-chow dialect frequently. In a recent official survey (1971), it was revealed that almost one half of the Chiu-chow residents listed the native Chiu-chow

dialect as the ordinary language used in social situations. This group undoubtedly includes a number of the aged and non-working women who have not mastered Cantonese. Even among the men who need to have a facility in Cantonese to find employment in Hong Kong, the native dialect still prevails within the household. Parents often express concern that their children who are being schooled in Cantonese will forget or fail to learn the native dialect. Several fathers known to the writer have strict rules forbidding their children from speaking Cantonese at home. Although both Cantonese and Chiu-chow are included within the Sino-Tibetian Language Family under its Chinese Branch, they are in essence mutually unintelligible. Cantonese is officially classified as a sub-dialect of the Yueh Group while Chiu-chow is a subdialect of the Min Group.

Over half of the estate's Chiu-chow population (14,000) live in the eastern section, in rather close proximity to the spirit medium temple. In marked contrast to the crowded conditions of the estate, the spirit medium temple occupies spacious premises. The interior area alone consists of 4,000 square feet. The grounds are divided into three sections: a covered shrine chamber in which the main altar is located, a large partially-enclosed boothlike structure containing a stage, and a garden on the upper section of the hill. The nearest resettlement block is no more than thirty yards from the temple. Below the temple, between it and the estate proper, is a bazaar type open market. Unlike most other urban temples in Hong Kong, there are neither beggars at the entrance nor fortune-teller's booths in the main hall.



### III. THE TEMPLE'S HISTORY

As will be evident to the reader, the temple's history remains problematic and we can only hope to offer a more complete picture at a future date. Information currently available allows little more than a skeletal account of its development.

The temple itself bears the official title of "Taih Wong Yeh Miu" - 大王爺廟, i.e. Temple of the Great Illustrious King. That designation is commonly given in South China to former statesmen of Imperial Dynasties who seldom, if ever, held the title of "King" during their lifetime. As we shall see ~~more~~ in detail below, the chief deity of the Kwun Tong temple was a relatively minor statesman of the T'ang Dynasty. The history of the temple can be roughly divided into two periods: the first encompassing its stay in Lo Fu Ngam and the second its relocation to Kwun Tong.

The Lo Fu Ngam period is believed to have lasted about 658 years, i.e. approximately 1300 to 1958. A handwritten sign-board in the present structure offers the following account of the temple's origin:

"In the Southern Sung Dynasty a statesman, General Li, was committed to protecting the Emperor Ping - 昺 during his flight to the South away from pursuing enemies (the Mongols). General Li was unwilling to leave behind the tablet of his ancestor Li Man Chung Kung - 李之忠公, a loyal statesman of the T'ang Dynasty, to be despoiled by the foreigners. He took it with him during his flight. Eventually his army was completely defeated in Ling Ting and its military capability destroyed. The general then decided to settle his ancestor's tablet at the "Rock of Dropping, Pearls" on the Tiger Tail of the Tiger Rock - Lo Fu Ngam 老虎岩. Nourished by the site's favorable

geomantic conditions, the loyal spirit often appeared to members of the community. The deity showed his mercies by providing remedies for those who were ill. Being greatly attracted to the deity, the local residents worked hard to construct a temple in order to house the deity's shrine; an interior room was added so that formal rituals and ceremonies could be held. Additional shrines to Kuan-Yam - 觀音 and Pao Sha 菩薩 were added in recognition of their efficacy. These spirits daily received and answered hundreds of petitions; they were very merciful in healing people and giving prescriptions. The upkeep of the temple was borne by the Tang Shang - 壇生 with no appeal to external sources. The temple prospered for hundreds of years, its reputation for religious betterment induced favorable response from the people ...."

The sign-board is the work of a former official of the "Religion of Virtue" - Tak Kow 德教 religious organization of which the temple is a branch. It was presented to the temple in 1963 on the occasion of its re-opening in Kwun Tong.

The chief deity, Li Man Chung Kung, whose tablet is reputed to have been brought south by a descendant does appear to have been an historical personage of the T'ang Dynasty. The Old Book of T'ang, Chiu T'ang Shu - 舊唐書 carries the biography of a statesman named Li Yun-wen 李元絃 who was given the posthumous title of "Man Chung" - 文忠. His personality and merits are described as follows:

"Yun-wen carries on his political missions in his own unique style without even once showing any signs of modification. He persists firmly in his own unique orientation to politics. He pays no attention to his carriages, horses, or servants nor does he consider renovating his dilapidated house. The benefits that the emperor gives him are all donated to clansmen and relatives. Sung Ching the Prime Minister of State was deeply impressed by him and concedes that Deputy Li mirrors the virtues of Sung Yao and despises the greeds of Liu Huang. He upholds a sense of frugality and thrift yet is quite pragmatic in orientation. Being a Deputy Minister in officialdom, he never lets the lure of wealth undermine his integrity. His outstanding virtues supersede those of Shi Man-Tzu."

It is well documented that the fleeing Sung Court did spend some time in the Hong Kong area before its demise in 1279. Records of the Sung Dynasty also indicate that a General Li Pan - 李玘 accompanied the Emperor Ti Ping in his flight to the South, but we have no way of knowing whether he is the descendant of Li Man Chung. The Sung did at one time set up a travelling court in the area now known as Kowloon City, to the South of Lo Fu Ngam (Lo, 1963 PP.61-79). It is of course possible that after the defeat of the Sung, General Li and some of his followers returned to the area, settled down, and constructed the first temple to Statesman Li.

Except for the aforementioned signboard, details of the temple's history before the squatters arrived are totally lacking. It is quite possible that the temple had fallen into disuse and was taken over as a centre of worship by the Chiu-chow when they settled in Lo Fu Ngam. Another nearby temple dedicated to Wong Tai Sin 黃大仙 seems to have been much more popular with the Cantonese in the area. The signboard claims that the deity appeared to the devout and healed their ills, but it does not indicate explicitly the precise form used in this communication. Since the Cantonese do not ordinarily employ "ki-tongs", it is probable that its role as a spirit medium temple dates back only to the coming of the first Chiu-chow refugees. Elliott (1955, P.126) reports that in Singapore it is common for a temple which was not formerly used for medium activity to become almost exclusively a spirit medium temple upon the appearance of a person who had been possessed by a supernatural.

From the information given, the Chiu-chow's choice of the deity may possibly be attributed to two different though not mutually exclusive considerations. The first is that the Chiu-chow might have consciously or sub-consciously chosen this temple because they knew the chief deity's characteristics, i.e. lack of attention to worldly appearance, frug<sup>l</sup>aity, and generosity toward kinsmen and felt that his personality closely mirrored the Chiu-chow self-image. The second consideration is that the Chiu-chow did feel a sense of closeness to officials of the Southern Sung Dynasty because before arriving in the Hong Kong area the Sung<sup>s</sup> established temporary residence in the Swatow region.

The second stage of the temple's history began in 1957 with the government's drafting of an urban development plan for the Lo Fu Ngam region. In 1958 the temple premises and the squatter structures in the district were torn down to make way for a new public housing estate. Devotees of the deity now resettled in the Tsui Ping Road Estate requested land for a new temple. They received a strip of land on a small hill - "Crab Eye Hill", on the eastern edge of the estate. A well-to-do prominent member of the Chiu-chow community in Hong Kong was enlisted as a promoter of the temple; he contributed heavily to the temple's reconstruction and was named Honorary President of the temple association. Since the promoter is also an official in a syncretic cult known as "The Religion of Virtue" - 德教 Tak Kow, he enrolled the temple as a branch of that cult. A number of officers and members of the Tak Kow organization were guests of honor at the dedication of the new premiese in 1963.

Previous to 1972, the temple association was registered with the Hong Kong Government as a voluntary association. In that year, however, it was registered as a limited company under the Company Ordinances of the Colony. Temple personnel indicate that the change of status was sought after the local City District Officer advised them that as a limited company they would be eligible for government support in various endeavors. This move for incorporation ties in closely with current plans for the construction of a new temple and the expansion of present facilities. Literature recently published by the temple committee indicates that the deities are not very pleased with the immorality and lack of virtue so evident in the resettlement estate. Strong appeals are made for a return to righteous behavior, an indication of good will can be shown by making a generous donation to the construction of the new temple. The precise program for the current expansion project will be discussed in a later section of the paper, for now it suffices to say that it is not the type of project that could possibly reach fruition if the temple failed to enjoy wide financial support in the local community.

#### IV. TEMPLE PERSONNEL AND WORSHIPPERS

##### (A) Personnel

The term "personnel" is used here with reference to individuals whose associations with the temple include the holding of a title and/or office in the cult organization. The worshippers are generally related to the cult only as consumers vis-a-vis the religious activities. Even though the personnel may also be consumers they are more often involved in the productive aspect of cult activity. The personnel can be divided into four major categories: a. the cult promoters, b. the altar tenders, "Tang Shang", c. the mediums, "Ki-tong", d. the paid staff.

##### a. The cult promoters

The cult promoters are wealthy members of Hong Kong's Chiu-chow community who have received honorary offices from the temple committee. There are currently three such offices occupied by promoters - Honorary President, Honorary Vice-President, and Honorary Treasurer. The promoters are not expected to attend the monthly committee meetings or to participate in the day to day running of temple affairs. They are, however, expected to be financially generous in contributing to temple projects and to demonstrate a willingness to act as middlemen for the cult in its dealings with government and other organizations situated outside of Kwun Tong. The promoters are expected to attend major festivals and other special events sponsored by the temple; failure of the promoters to attend may elicit comments about their lack of sincere interest in the temple.

The chief promoter is a wealthy Chiu-chow businessman who was most influential in having the temple re-established in Kwun Tong as well as effecting its alliance with the Tak Kow religious association. In return he has been given the title of "Honorary Life President" of the cult. His present high status within the Hong Kong Chiu-chow community is amply testified by a glance at his calling card which lists thirty-nine titles held by him in religious and secular organizations. Twenty of the thirty-nine are Honorary Presidencies or Life Presidencies, while the remainder range from Honorary Advisor to Executive Committee Member.

Information collected to date fails to link the promoter's interest in the cult with the possible financial benefits that can accrue to them from the temple's activity. Unlike their Singapore counterparts (Elliott, 1955, P.67), the promoters do not actually own the premises and therefore have no right to a financial surplus that may accrue. Quite the opposite seems to be the case; while at the temple the promoters engage in rather conspicuous spending and delight in recounting their generosity to the temple. The major return appears to be the prestige and influence that they receive in the local Chiu-chow community.

b. The Altar Tenders - "Tang-shang" 壇生

The temple committee and all voting members of the cult organization are included under the category of altar tenders. Although the title implies that the prime role of these individuals is a religious one, it is this group that handles most of the practical considerations

in running the temple and the cult activities. Altar tenders are in theory chosen by the deities rather than by other members of the organization. In fact, they are inevitably chosen from among friends and acquaintances of existing members. Two criteria of a religious nature are given for altar tenders: the first is that the person must be devout and the second is that he must show some enthusiasm for the cult's activities. Once interest is expressed and the person is judged suitable he will be invited to petition a deity for membership during one of the spirit medium sessions. If the deity accepts the individual, as inevitably he does, he then is considered an altar tender of the specific deity who possessed the medium at the time of acceptance.

There are currently 180 registered altar tenders of whom 80% are male with a median age of 40. All are Chiu-chow residents of the Tsui Ping Road Estate, and the majority formerly resided in the Lo Fu Ngam squatter area. With few exceptions, they are employed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in local industry.

Altar tenders are expected to contribute financially to the cult through an annual subscription of \$5 HK and to be willing to give <sup>some</sup> of their time in helping with the planning and implementation of cult activities. The former obligation is considered an essential sign of good faith, while the latter is treated as strictly voluntary. It is from the altar tenders that the office holders in the temple committee are chosen. All altar tenders have the right to cast a ballot as well as to stand for office in the elections. The chief religious



role of the altar tender is to assist the medium during the possession ceremonies, e.g. he accepts the petitions presented by worshippers and passes them on to the medium. Because the medium's speech during the possession is often unintelligible, the altar tender will often act as an interpreter of the deity's message to the petitioner. Two or more altar tenders ordinarily assist during the daily spirit possession ceremonies.

Although there is a total of 180 altar tenders at Taih Wong Yeh Temple, only about 30 are especially active in temple affairs: the others come to the temple less frequently. The number of active members corresponds rather closely with the number of offices currently available on the temple committee. Not including the three honorary offices mentioned above, the temple committee consists of a chairman, four vice-charimen, eleven department heads, and eleven assistants to the department heads. All of the positions on the committee are elective on a yearly basis.

The altar tenders, especially the members of the temple committee, are inclined to use the temple premises as a centre for informal social gatherings even when there are no ceremonies being held or official business to transact. The temple office is a place where one can relax, watch television, play mahjong, and chat with friends. It offers a refuge from the constant din of the crowded resettlement estate.

c. The Paid Employees

There are two salaried positions associated with the temple: secretary and caretaker. The current secretary is an elderly Chiu-chow gentleman who received a university education in China. He was appointed as temple secretary on the recommendation of the Hong Kong Chiu-chow Association. His main duties are to handle the correspondence of the temple and to keep records. He does not live in the resettlement estate and is seldom included in most of the informal activities that take place at the temple.

The temple caretaker was, until he recently resigned, a late middle-aged Chiu-chow who previously was employed in the rice shop of the temple committee chairman. Because ill health made it impossible to continue in the rice shop the chairman had him appointed to the less demanding job of caretaker. The main duties are to keep the temple grounds clean, fix tea for visitors, set up the necessary items for spirit medium sessions, and in general look after the physical appearance of the temple. By Hong Kong standards the pay is quite low, i.e. approx. HK\$300 per month. Unlike the secretary, the temple caretaker resided in the estate and often participates in the informal gatherings taking place on the premises.

d. The Spirit Mediums, "ki-tong" - 乩童

The term for the type of religious specialist found in the temple - "ki-tong" is often found in the literature on Taiwan and Singapore (Jordan, 1972; Elliott, 1955) with the syllables reversed to read - "tong-ki" or a close approximation thereof. The latter variation

reflects the ordinary usage of Taiwanese and Hokkien speakers, while the former reflects the common practice of Chiu-chow speakers. The more literal translation of the characters constituting the term is "young servant of the cosmomantic basin". The character "Ki" - 乩 refers to the process of spirit writing, a form of communication with the deities traditionally found in China. The character "Tong" - 童 refers to the young person who assists at some form of ritual activity. It can be misleading to adhere too closely to the literal rendition of the characters since the terms are now exclusively used by the Chiu-chow to refer to specific individuals who can communicate with the deities through possession rather than spirit-writing. A religious organization supported by Chiu-chow in the Western District of Hong Kong which engages in spirit-writing claims to have no "ki-tongs" nor to employ their services.

Jordan (1972) has to date published the most detailed study of the Chinese "ki-tong" with special attention to events in their life-history that are related to the phenomenon of spirit-possession. Like most shamanistic religious specialists elsewhere, the "ki-tong" insists that he has been chosen by the deity rather than vice versa. Initial possession may take place during a period of personal crisis, often manifested by strange behavior which the person so afflicted is unable to interpret by himself. An older "ki-tong" is ordinarily the one who interprets the symptoms as a case of divine possession. Among the Taiwanese in particular it is believed that the new "ki-tong" is a young man with a light horoscope who would have died at an early age,

but his life is now prolonged by the deity in order that he can be an instrument of communication with mortals. The "ki-tongs" at Taih Wong Yeh Temple insist that the horoscope is not an important factor; it is basically the will of the gods that determines selection regardless of one's horoscope.

The new "ki-tong" must prove to others that his possessing spirit is indeed a benevolent one and not an evil spectre. He is required to undergo varied exorcisms which could not be endured by evil spirits. If accepted, the new "ki-tong" must also undergo a period of training by older, more experienced religious specialists before he is able to handle all of prerequisites of the office. The ability to perform acts of bodily mutilation without suffering lasting injuries is one of the marks of the full-fledged "ki-tong". At Taih Wong Yeh Temple this aspect of the "ki-tong's" repertoire is not very prominent. Mutilation is practised only on infrequent occasions, and even then it is rather mild consisting of the chewing of pieces of broken porcelain cups or the chewing of lighted incense sticks. A spike ball - 釘球 is kept suspended behind the curtain of the temple's main altar, but the staff indicated that it would only be used on the occasion of a major disaster or epidemic.

Elliott notes that in Singapore the more "ki-tongs" a temple has the more prosperous it is considered. By those standards Taih Wong Yeh Temple boasting of four "ki-tongs" would rank quite high on the prosperity scale. Of the four "ki-tongs", three are considered "official", i.e. they are completely accepted by the temple membership and are able

to handle all of the prerequisites of the office. The fourth is "unofficial", i.e. he is allowed to perform on certain special occasions but he is not allowed to handle petitions from the worshippers. Deities do not randomly possess the mediums; each "ki-tong" has a special possession relationship with one specific deity, or in the case of the most experienced medium with two deities.

Below we present a brief description of each of the four "ki-tongs" presently active in Taih Wong Yeh Temple. Rather than give their names we will refer to them as "ki-tong" A, B, C and D.

#### "Ki-tong" "A"

"A" is a Chiu-chow male about 50 years of age. He has the title "cult master" 闍長 and is the most experienced and oldest "ki-tong" in the temple. The initial possession occurred 17 years ago, i.e. 1957, while he was still residing in Lo Fu Ngam. He claims that all of a sudden he started to act rather strangely and could not diagnose what was wrong. After consultation with several of his friends, one of whom was possibly a "ki-tong", he discovered that he was being possessed by the deity Li Man Chung Kung, Taih Wong Yeh - 李六忠公 大王爺. To date, we have no evidence that there were any other "ki-tongs" associated with that temple. It is very possible that the spirit medium activity, now so integral a part of the new temple, actually began with "A"'s possession.

Soon after the initial possession by Taih Wong Yeh, "A" was also chosen as a medium by another deity who is quite popular with the Chiu-chow people, the Third Prince - 三太子, often called by his given name "La Cha" - 哪咤. Being a medium for two deities well-known to the local population has contributed to "A's" reputation as the most efficacious "ki-tong" at the temple and to the fact that he officiates at about 90% of the daily spirit consultation sessions held at the temple. "A" also takes a keen interest in temple affairs and along with the chief promoter was one of the key instigators of the relocation to Kwun Tong.

"A", like the other "ki-tongs", is not a full-time religious specialist. During the daytime he is employed as a foreman of coolies, therefore his attendance at the temple is almost exclusively limited to evenings. His ritual activity is confined to the temple premises; neither he nor the other "ki-tongs" will visit the homes of sick people or other locations to conduct spirit possession sessions.

While actually undergoing spirit possession, "A" is the most composed of the "ki-tongs". He shows very little discomfort compared to the other mediums, yet he is the one who engages in acts of self-mutilation on the infrequent occasions that they are incorporated into the ceremony.

- "ki-tong" "B"

"B" is a Chiu-chow in his middle thirties. Although he is also a previous resident of Lo Fu Ngam, his initial possession occurred in Kwun Tong seven years ago. His possessing deity is the Supreme

Buddha under the title of 如來佛祖 . It is extremely rare for one of the major deities to possess a medium; DeGroot claims knowledge of no instances when other than lesser deities allied themselves with "ki-tongs". There is, however, no discernable correlation between the rank of one's possessing deity and the medium's relative status within the cult. Even though "B" boasts a relation with such a prestigious spirit, he is still in an inferior position to "A" who is the cult master. Although "B" handles daily sessions much less often than "A", he is the "ki-tong" most likely to be present when "A" is absent. Although he seldom practises self-mutilation, he appears quite pained and distressed during the initial moments of spirit possession. On those occasions his hands tremble; he becomes flushed in the face; he coughs loudly; and, he often falls to the floor. "B" is also only a part-time "ki-tong"; his ordinary occupation is that of a performer in a Chiu-chow opera troupe.

"Ki-tong" "C"

"C" is also a Chiu-chow in his middle thirties. His possessing deity is the saintly monk, Buddha Sha - 沙僧 . We have had little opportunity to obtain information from "C" because his job in a local textile factory is time-consuming, and he comes to the temple infrequently. "C" appears to experience much more discomfort during trance than "A" or "B". While handling petitions, he seems quite nervous and occasionally faints at the end of the trance. "C" has been witnessed performing an act of self-mutilation involving the chewing of the lighted ends of burning joss sticks.

"Ki-tong" "D"

"D" at twenty-two is the youngest of the "ki-tongs". Although born in Hong Kong, his background is Chiu-chow. His possessing deity is the popular Great Saint - 大聖 also known as Monkey. The initial possession experience occurred after he had visited his home country with his mother, i.e. the Chiu-chow region, in China two years ago. He claims that, prior to the journey, his mother consulted the deities about the advisability of the trip and was warned not to undertake it at that time. Having disregarded the deity's advice, they made the journey as scheduled. Soon after arriving in the home country, he was afflicted with severe stomach pains for which the local medical authorities recommended hospitalisation. Instead, his relatives consulted the Great Saint, presumably through a "ki-tong", and received a medical amulet. After the water in which the amulet was boiled was consumed he immediately recovered. Soon after returning to Hong Kong he felt an irresistible compulsion to go to Taih Wong Yeh Temple. That compulsion and other strange forms of behavior that he could not control were interpreted as indications that he had been cured by the Great Saint in order that he might serve as his "ki-tong".

The relationship between "D" and the altar tenders (including the older mediums) at the temple is not yet clear to us. The local cult president tends to view "D" as rather frivolous and unreliable, and criticizes the infrequency of "D"'s attendance at the temple. However, "D" has been accepted in most of the informal gatherings at the temple



and he does not sense the cynical attitude of the president. The co-existence of these two inconsistent views towards "D" may be one of the reasons why he has yet to be granted the status of an official "ki-tong." The exact procedure that "D" must follow to become an official "ki-tong" is still unclear to the investigators and possibly also to "D" himself. "D's" relationship with the Great Saint is evidently accepted by the other mediums as being authentic, since he is permitted on special occasions to participate in the possession rituals. While in trance, however, he is not allowed to handle the petitions of worshippers, nor has he been known to perform acts of self-mutilation. His behavior during possession is the least controlled of all the mediums; he often jumps about and has had to be constrained by the altar tenders lest he knock down or accidentally injures petitioners standing closeby.

"D" is presently unemployed but does manage to make some money by doing piece work for local factories in his flat. Prior to his unemployment, he was employed as a security guard at a local transportation facility.

After this brief consideration of the "ki-tongs", several points seem obvious. The religious specialist's status within the temple is related to the length of his association with his possessing deity and the degree of his involvement in temple affairs. The status of a "ki-tong's" deity compared to the other deities is not an important factor. It also appears that the more secure the position of the "ki-tong", at least in this particular temple, the less necessary it is for him to demonstrate the reality of his trance states through external expressions

of discomfort. The mediums are the key personnel in the cult, therefore, the acceptance of new members to that role is taken anything but lightly as witnessed by the close scrutiny that "D" is being subjected to by the official mediums. The president's present opinion of him makes it unlikely that he will be fully accepted in the near future; and, even then, his eventual acceptance must be preceded by an increase of interest on his part in temple affairs and activities.

(B) The Worshippers

For the ordinary evening ceremony, one seldom finds more than thirty worshippers in attendance. For popular festivals, however, that figure may rise to well over a hundred. The worshippers at the temple are a fluid group, difficult to characterize with precision. Our comments can only express general impressions obtained through witnessing a number of daily ceremonies as well as festival rituals.

The majority are middle-aged or elderly women from the resettlement estate. Almost exclusively, they are Chiu-chow. There are, however, a fair number of men, i.e. 30% of the total; and young people frequently accompany parents or grandparents. Before and after the medium sessions, the atmosphere is very relaxed. Temple staff and worshippers will, over a cup of tea, exchange news about each other's families or mutual friends, generally using the Chiu-chow dialect. Living in the same estate, few of the worshippers seem to be absolute strangers to one another or to the temple staff.

The worshippers seldom appear at the temple empty handed; they usually bring an offering of fruit to place before the deity. Time permitting, they will light incense sticks and place them in censers beside the shrines of the various deities and kneel before the deities to offer personal prayers. After this, they will sit in the shrine chamber to await the "ki-tong"'s arrival. It is at this time that casual conversation will occur. Cantonese worshippers are rare. During the course of this project, the only one encountered was a Cantonese lady who came to the temple to seek help for an ill relative. She had extreme difficulty in understanding the correct procedure that was to be followed in approaching the deity as well as in understanding the Cantonese of the "ki-tong" and his assistances. Her ignorance of the procedure and of the Chiu-chow dialect irritated the officiant and amused the other worshippers who laughed at her. Although the deity did give her an amulet for the sick relative, he, through the medium, advised her to present any future petitions at another temple where Cantonese is the normal tongue spoken.

Temple staff insist that anyone regardless of linguistic affiliation is welcome to participate in their ceremonies. De facto, however, the preference for the Chiu-chow dialect evidenced in the above incident excludes those without a facility in it from feeling welcome. Another reason for the lack of Cantonese participation in temple activities is possibly cultural. Communicating with the deities through "ki-tongs" was not commonly practised in the regions of Kwangtung Province where Cantonese is the dominant dialect. Some Cantonese in

the Tsui Ping Road Estate who worship the same gods as are worshipped at Taih Wong Yeh, but in other temples, consider the "ki-tong's" claims to be at best a hoax and at worse a dangerous toying with supernaturals that can lead to possession by evil spirits rather than benevolent ones.

The Chiu-chow do have a tradition of communicating with the gods through other humans serving as mediums. Although neither gives concentrated attention to this form of religious activity, both Kulp (1925, P.288) and Newell (1962, P.115) in their monographs on Chiu-chow communities indicate the presence of spirit mediums. The spirit mediums and the gods that they represent, at least for some worshippers do symbolize a point of continuity between their lives in the estate and in the home country. Two elderly women worshippers were overheard discussing the problems that occur when one has family members who have converted to Christianity. One indicated that, even though she is the only member of her family who has not converted to Catholicism, the others generally do not attempt to hinder her religious activities. She indicated that she has a strong belief in all manner of spirits - and that she has the right to continue worshipping the deities of her ancestral country in the manner in which she is accustomed.

## V. RITUAL ACTIVITY

The designation "spirit medium temple" is applied to Taih Wong Yeh Temple because the trance session of the "ki-tong" is the central focus of almost every religious activity that occurs on the premises. Although the temple is open throughout the day and people occasionally stop at the office to chat with the staff or drink tea, very few worshippers come during daylight hours. Except for festivals that are themselves public holidays or that happen to occur on Sundays or public holidays, all possession ceremonies - ~~the~~ are held in the evening. In this paper we will describe the ordinary daily ceremony; a more complete future report will include details of the various festival ceremonies that contain variations from the daily format.


### The Daily Possession Ceremony:

Each evening between 9:30 and 10:00 a possession ceremony is held in the shrine chamber of the temple by one of the "ki-tongs", most frequently "A". On only three types of occasions are the rituals not held:

1. From the twenty fourth day of the 12th month of the Lunar Year to the third day of Chinese New Year when the deities are reporting to Heaven.
2. When worshippers have not come to petition the deities.
3. When a "ki-tong" is not in attendance.

The investigators have not recorded in their own observation any instances when there were no worshippers present to present petitions; there was,

however, one occasion when the "ki-tong" did not come. It occurred on the birthday of "ki-tong" "A"; friends of his planned a party for him at a local restaurant which was also attended by the other "ki-tongs". The secretary informed petitioners that there would be no ceremony that evening.

On an ordinary evening, the worshippers arrive at the temple around 9:30. They first acknowledge the deities in the shrine chamber and then proceed to fill out the red petition cards given to them by the altar tenders (c.f. appendix I). The altar tenders prepare the table and the throne-like chair used by the medium. On the table is placed a wooden herb box, yellow amulet paper, a paint brush, red ink, and the chops of the deity/deities who may possess the medium. On a nearby table is a bucket with sacred plants -  and the ashes of burnt amulets soaked in water. A small cup of the "sacred water" is placed on the "ki-tong's" table. No special vestments or forms of personal decoration are used in the ceremony.

When the "ki-tong" arrives, he ordinarily spends the first several minutes pacing back and forth by himself in a section of the shrine chamber apart from the worshippers and altar tenders. When all of the petitions are filled, he takes off his hat and coat and moves to the table to glance at the petitions. He then moves to his place at the table and drinks the glass of sacred water. Almost immediately he begins to cough loudly and moves his body back and forth. Liquid starts dripping from his mouth. In a short time he leans his hands on the table and jumps three times while emitting a loud yell. His next

position is a pose which indicates to the onlookers which deity has possessed him, e.g. for the Third Prince he stands on one foot with his arms outstretched like a soldier holding a weapon. The "ki-tong" then recites several chants in the Chiu-chow dialect using a tone of voice different from his ordinary one.

Realizing that the possession has taken place, the altar tenders now lead the worshippers in bowing to the various shrines in the chamber; they bow 12 times to the shrine of Heaven and Earth, the Father and Mother - 天地父母, 3 times to the General of Heaven - 天國元帥, 3 times to the central shrine containing the images of Li Man Chung Kung - Taih Wong Yeh, The Great Saint - 大聖, Kuan-yam - 觀音, Buddha Sha - 沙僧, the Third Prince - 三太子, the Pig - 八戒, and the Earth God - 土地 (c.f. Appendix II for a sketch of the shrine chamber and the positioning of the deities).

The bowing completed, the altar tenders grab the wooden chair and assist the "ki-tong" in being seated. The medium scrawls an amulet with his brush and stamps it with the chop of the appropriate deity. The altar tenders then burn the amulet in a nearby censer. The request sheets having been given to the "ki-tong", the worshippers are now free to approach him individually. The worshipper stands at the side of the medium and converses with him as if he or she were actually speaking with the deity, e.g. if the Third Prince is the possessing deity then the "ki-tong" is addressed as "Prince". While speaking with the "ki-tong" the worshipper will often be continually clasping her hands and moving them up and down as a sign of prayerful respect.

Since the possessed "ki-tong" will often speak in a manner that is quite different from his ordinary speech, the petitioner may have difficulty understanding him. If this occurs, the altar tender assists in the interpretation. Observation of the ceremonies reveals that without the expertise of the altar tenders much of the "ki-tong's" advice would be lost on individual worshippers because of the altered speech patterns.

Jordan (1972, P.68) notes that a major difference between the role of the urban and the rural "ki-tongs" in Taiwan centres on the types of petitions that are handled by each. The urban "ki-tong" ordinarily deals with petitions requesting personal or individualistic benefits from the deity, whereas his rural counterpart is almost totally involved with community matters that warrant the deities' assistance. The usual petitions presented to the medium at Taih Wong Yeh Temple conform to Jordan's model with very few exceptions. The major exception may come at a time of great community crisis, eg. natural disaster, epidemic etc, during which the mediums petition the deities on behalf of all or a portion of the community. The last such crisis to occur was the landslide disaster in June, 1972 which killed about 70 people living in squatter huts on the fringes of the Tsui Ping Road Resettlement Estate. The mediums conducted special ceremonies to appease the spirits of the dead who were killed in the disaster.

The petitions presented by worshippers at the daily evening ceremony are invariably for personal favors for themselves, relatives, or close friends. The petitions fall into four common categories:



requests for (1) cure of illness; (2) security in the future; (3) advice on difficult to resolve problems; (4) information on the odds one has of acquiring wealth during the coming year, this form of request being most common during Chinese New Year.

Of the above four categories of requests, the most common is the one for "a cure of illness". While conversing with the "ki-tong", the petitioner is expected to give as many details about the illness as possible. On several occasions the medium has been seen holding the wrist of the sick person apparently attempting to read the pulse. The response to the request for a cure may take one of four possible forms:

1. The giving of herbs for the use of the sick person.
2. The giving of an amulet - drawn with red ink on the yellow paper - to be boiled in water and then cooled and drunk by the sick person.
3. A combination of both of the above, i.e. herbs and an amulet.
4. Herbs mixed with pieces of a burnt incense stick that was chewed by the "ki-tong" while still burning. This remedy is rather rare and may be given with or without an amulet.
5. The "ki-tong" may judge that the illness is the doing of an evil spirit and that exorcism is in order; in this instance, he will take a mouthful of sacred water and spit it onto the face of the afflicted person to drive out the spectre.

The precise system utilized by the medium to fit the exact remedy with the symptoms of the illness is presently not clear to the investigators. Research on this topic is continuing and will be reported at a later date.

The second most common petition involves the desire for future security. This request, although perfectly acceptable at any time, is most commonly presented during Chinese New Year. In this instance, the spirit's knowledge of future events is tapped with the hope that advice will be forthcoming to help the petitioner in avoiding possible dangers to his and his family's well-being. Seldom is the request just for knowledge about the individual's future; the family is invariably included.

The "ki-tong" examines the red card on which are written the name of the petitioner and the sex and age of his family members. He then writes a note next to each concerning prospects for the coming year. If a particular member faces no specific danger, the notation "security" - 平安 is inscribed next to the name. If, however, there is some pitfall lurking in the future, a general indication of its nature as well as the month in which it will be most threatening is recorded next to the name. These warnings fall into four major categories: (1) "stay clear of the waters" - 勿近水 ; (2) "stay clear of fires" - 勿近火 ; (3) "Be careful in ascending and descending" - 上落小心 ; (4) "Do not take part in ceremonial feasts" 紅白勿食 . The first two warnings, i.e. about fires and water, are generally given to young children. The third, i.e. being careful while going up and down, is usually limited to older people who have difficulty climbing the stairway in the estate. And, the fourth, i.e. avoiding ceremonial feasts, may apply to any age group.

Another common type of petition presented to the "ki-tong" contains the request for advice on hard to-resolve personal problems. The exact content of these petitions covers a spectrum of concerns ranging from advice about one's now unknown future spouse to quandaries related to one's business. Young people often accompanied by their mothers inquire of the deity about their marriage prospects in the future. Usually, the "ki-tong" offers an assessment of the petitioner's personality and then indicates the type of person that he or she will marry, when and how they will meet, etc. The medium is also asked to comment on the propitiousness of dates chosen for important events, e.g. marriages, new business ventures, and journeys. He does not hesitate to advise the petitioners to change dates already chosen or even to cancel journeys already planned if the time is an unlucky one.

Members of the temple staff delight in recounting to newcomers the unfortunate consequences that have befallen people, often themselves, when they failed to heed the deities' advice about problematic decisions. The present Chairman of the Temple Committee recounts such an incident involving his own failure to heed the deity's directives. Several years ago, he had considered expanding his rice business and consulted the "ki-tong" about the advisability of doing so. The advice given indicated that his expansion should be less extensive than he desired. He disregarded the deity's advice and subsequently suffered financial loss. While the business reverses could be attributed to fluctuations in the world rice market etc., the Chairman is convinced that had he heeded the deity's advice his losses would not have occurred.

Early in the Chinese New Year, a fourth category of petition frequently put to the "ki-tong" is the request for knowledge about one's prospects for becoming wealthy during that year. In response, the medium literally cites the exact odds each person has of obtaining wealth, e.g. he indicates that one may have a "three out of eight" - 八分三, a "five out of nine" - 九分五, a "two out of seven" - 七分二, etc. chance of striking it rich.

After consulting the medium, each petitioner places an offering in a red box provided for that purpose. Seldom is more than one or two dollars given by an individual. While the "ki-tong" is handling petitions, those who have not yet had their consultation and those who have concluded theirs gather in an informal group talking with each other, smoking, etc. Even though the "ki-tong" may adopt a serious demeanor during the ceremony, the atmosphere among altar tenders and worshippers alike is relaxed.

Other than on the relatively rare occasions when burning incense sticks are chewed, the "ki-tong" at Taih Wong Yeh Temple never engage in acts of self-mutilation during the ordinary, daily ceremonies. On special feast days, "ki-tong" "A" will chew broken porcelain and make blood amulets "Ling Chus" 靈珠; but these are not distributed to the faithful as a matter of course since they are judged to be extremely lucky and therefore valuable. During a recent temple festival, "Ling Chus" were auctioned off at an average price of HK\$200 each. The performance of the "ki-tong" during the daily sessions appears very low key when compared to Jordan's (1972) description of the "ki-tong" as a "spectacle" in rural Taiwan and to Elliott's (1955) account of the elaborate rituals held in Singapore.

After the last petitioner has been handled, the ceremony is quickly concluded with the "ki-tong" placing his head on the table for a few minutes in order to regain his normal composure. After he gets up, the worshippers disperse and he and the altar tenders will either likewise disperse or go to the temple office to watch television, play majong or have an informal conversation. All four "ki-tongs" at Taih Wong Yeh Temple claim that they have absolutely no recollection of any events that have occurred while they were possessed by the deity; they liken the experience to being in a "deep sleep".

#### VI. TAIH WONG YEH TEMPLE AND THE RELIGION OF VIRTUE

Although we have used the words "temple" and "cult" almost interchangeably in this report, a more precise usage would limit "temple" to the premises dedicated to the deity - Taih Wong Yeh and "cult" to the religious organization using the temple as its base of operation. The cult includes in its official title the designation "Tak Kow" - 德教 "Religion of Virtue". As mentioned earlier (P.11), the dedication of the new temple in 1963 coincided with its incorporation as a branch of the Tak Kow cult organization. It is logical to assume that the present Honorary Life President included as a condition of his support of the new temple that it be incorporated into the Tak Kow organization of which he is also an officer.

"Tak Kow" is a syncretic religious association; the details of whose history must still be sorted out by the investigators. One fact, however, is currently clear; its membership in Hong Kong is exclusively

Chiu-chow. The limited information that we will present has been obtained from one of its main branches located in the Western District of Hong Kong Island, "Chi Ching Kwok" - 紫靖閣.

Ideologically, "Tak Kow" claims to encompass "the virtuous elements" contained in the world's five major religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam. The focus is exclusively on virtue and morality; the claims of Christianity and Islam to exclusivity are viewed as irrelevant epiphenomena brought about by the cultural context in which they were spawned. An article entitled, "The Essentials of the Religion of Virtue" appearing in a bulletin published by the "Chi Ching Kwok", encapsules the main themes of the organization:

"The fact that Tak Kow is constantly referred to as a 'religion' - 宗教 is evident. A religion must affirm a platform of principles and teach a sense of virtuousness to the world. The secular conviction that religion is superstitious and mystical, therefore fails to grasp the true significance of religion. The secular understanding is correct, however, that there are five religions important to our times; Confucianism which exhorts the rectitude of loyalty and forgiveness - 忠恕; Taoism which upholds the virtues of mankind - 德; Buddhism which manifests the might of kindness and sympathy - 慈悲; Christianity which spell out the importance of constant 'love with no distinction' - 博愛; Islam which stresses the importance of kindness and forgiveness - 慈恕. These, the greatest articles of faith, originate in mankind's recognition of virtue. In this light, the common element 'Virtue' - 德 can bring all of those elements together. Tak Kow's origin can be traced back to the very beginnings of the universe when the common order was worked out according to the Yin-Yang and Life was brought forth .. . . . . ., the ancient sages imitated the cosmic order in order to formulate a code of ethics .. . . . . .: Confucius distilled the essence from those cultural traditions when he produced his philosophical teachings on virtue .. . . . .; the Book of Filial Piety - 孝經 stressed that 'the people are to be taught with virtue' - 德教加於百姓; the Announcement of Wu Wang to K'ang - 康誥 manifested the 'implemetation of Virtues' - 克明德。 These renowned ancient canons each justify the timely educational function of Tak Kow. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are endowed with the same essential teachings of the ancient sages, yet the principles of virtue are slightly adapted to fit into differing cultural contexts." (3)

A memorandum recently issued by Taih Wong Yeh Temple's branch of the cult echoes the same theme but adds the local deities as well as a list of the "Ten Constant Virtues" promoted by Tak Kow.

"..... the religious bodies such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam, each propagates its own doctrines using a distinctive point of reference; but their common objective is to direct mankind to a state of virtue and integrity and this may allow one to discover a common ground in their divergant doctrines ..... The temple (Taih Wong Yeh) reverences the spirit of Li Man Chung Kung, the Taih Wong Yeh; along with the Buddhas, and other deities, for passing on their ethical heritage which consists of filial piety - 孝, courtesy between brother - 悌, loyalty - 忠, sincerity - 信, propriety - 禮, righteousness - 義, modesty - 廉, a sense of shame - 恥, love - 仁, and wisdom - 智, the Ten Constant Virtues."

The tone of both documents definitely reflects a priority given to traditional Chinese concepts and religious teachings. Confucianism especially preserves the essential message of virtue that has become increasingly embedded in the midst of the peripheral, culturally induced elements that have been added to the newer religions. The list of "Ten Constant Virtues" published by the temple is interesting because that number is not traditional in the Chinese context even though the virtues included are ones traditionally recognized. It is possible that this number may have been borrowed from the Judeo-Christian list of commandments.

Despite its adoption of Tak Kow ideas and literature, Taih Wong Yeh Temple's position within the overall Tak Kow organization is a relatively minor one. When questioned about the relationship, the staff at the large Tak Kow centre in the Western District indicated

that Taih Wong Yeh has very little contact with the other branches of the organization. One reason for this lack of contact may be the difference in the ceremonies that take place in Kwun Tong and in other Tak Kow institutions. -Chi Ching Kwok, for instance, does not have "ki-tongs"; instead, its members communicate with the deities exclusively through "spirit writing" - 扶乩. That ritual is held only twice a month, on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month. During that ritual, the officiants, a "ki-sau" - 乩手 and his assistant hold a "Y" shaped stick in a container filled with sand while the deity uses it to write messages. Several interpreters read out the characters while they are being written. The outcome is usually in the form of poetry which the organization then sends out to other member institutions of Tak Kow, including Taih Wong Yeh.

The deities contacted at Chi Ching Kwok do not correspond to the more popular ones at the Kwun Tong temple, since those at Chi Ching Kwok do not handle personal petitions from worshippers; the divine messages are of a more general nature. Although the membership of both the Western District Centre and the Kwun Tong one are exclusively Chiu-chow, those allied to the former generally come from the urban regions around Swatow while the latter numbers an apparent majority from the rural countryside in Chiu-yang - 潮陽 country. Whether each centre is maintaining a tradition of religious communication popular in the region of China from which a majority of its members have come, or not, is unclear at this moment.



The main link between Taih Wong Yeh and the other Tak Kow centres seems to be in the person of the Honorary Life President. Certain members of the medium cult do attend a vegetarian meal held at Chi Ching Kwok on the feast day of Kwan Kung - 關公, but other than on that one occasion, they make little effort to sustain a more constant relationship. Although a non-Chinese deity occasionally sends a message through the "Ki-Sau" at Chi Chung Kwok, they never appear at Taih Wong Yeh where the concern seems strictly limited to the local deities allied with the Temple's mediums.

## VII. THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF THE TEMPLE

In contrast to the Singapore spirit medium temple, which as it becomes more prosperous is inclined to engage in more elaborate rituals, the staff at Taih Wong Yeh has adopted a different tact. On June 13th, 1972, the temple committee issued a memorandum to the community announcing plans for the renovation of the temple premises. An appeal was made on the basis that the temple, seeking to implement the teachings of Tak Kow, was to be a vital factor in restoring rectitude and harmony to the community. The warning was included that if social morality did not improve some forms of divine retribution might follow in due course. Individuals, however, can demonstrate their sincere desire to practise virtue by contributing to the temple's building project in using the Tak Kow ideology, the temple staff apparently attempted to direct their appeal to all members of the community including those who no longer follow the traditional religions. (4)

In the same announcement, the temple committee noted that the cult was changing its official status from a voluntary association to that of a limited company. As noted earlier, this was effected on the advice of the City District Officer so that the temple could become eligible for government help in its development plans. Even by Hong Kong standards, the committee's plans are impressive; they include:

1. The construction of a completely new temple at a location higher up the hill than the present one.
2. The construction of a Hall of The Hundred Surnames -  
百家祠
3. The construction of a home for the aged.

4. The construction of a free school.
5. The construction of a nursery school.
6. The renovation of the present structures so as to provide space for a medical clinic and a large conference room.

Actual construction of the new temple was begun late in 1973 and is now almost complete (June, 1974). Due to the construction of a new government school nearby, the committee has since discarded the plan for a school of its own. Item no. 2, The Hall of the Hundred Surnames, will be a significant addition to the religious repertoire of the temple. Such Halls are quite common in Hong Kong offering people who are separated from their native districts and their proper ancestral halls a place to repose the tablets of deceased ancestors. To date, Taih Wong Yeh, unlike many other temples in Hong Kong, lacks a designated area on its premises for ancestral tablets or photographs of the deceased. Although one may propose that the Hall represents an attempt by the cult to attract members of the estate who are not especially attracted by the spirit medium ceremonies to its premises, i.e. the Cantonese, a glance at the document advertising places in the Hall will quickly dispel the notion. The document begins: "The cult - 門 是 taking proper steps to establish a Hall of the Hundred Surnames; this is in accordance with the desires of fellow countrymen (Chiu-chow) to commemorate their ancestors and enhance their filial piety."

Throughout the document, the expression "fellow countrymen" is used to denote its appeal to the Chiu-chow community. In one instance, the expression "fellow countrymen and clansmen" appears; this may imply

that non-Chiu-chow who have married into one's clan are also acceptable. The addition of the Hall will probably increase the number of people frequenting the temple at times other than when the spirit medium sessions are held and make it even more of a focal point for the estate's Chiu-chow inhabitants.

The remaining items on the development list, with the exception of the conference room, are explicitly social service oriented. The services to be offered seem to reflect an imitation of the strategy long practised by Christian missionary organizations in Hong Kong which rarely limit their activities to the explicitly religious. Whether the development scheme will be totally realized is still an unanswerable question even to the temple staff. One facility will be built at a time with the new temple and the Hall of the Hundred Surnames being given priority; the others will follow if sufficient funds are available.

## CONCLUSION

In a recent conversation with a resident of the Tsui Ping Road Estate who has converted to Catholicism since his arrival in Hong Kong, the topic of traditional religion and its persistence or demise in the estate was discussed. The informant noted, "Even in my native village prior to 1949 many of the traditional practices had begun to disappear because people had doubts about their efficacy. Now, however, in this resettlement estate, I find that the old religion prospers even more than in my ancestral village; an especially good example is that Chiu-chow place on the hill, i.e. Taih Wong Yeh".

When asked to comment on the possible reasons for Taih Wong Yeh's apparent success, the above-mentioned informant attributed it to one major factor, the support of the local Chiu-chow community. He added that "the Chiu-chow are a deeply religious people who have a strong emotional attachment to the customs of their homeland. They are more generous than others in supporting religious activity". While not desiring to deal with the thorny question of whether the Chiu-chow are indeed more religious than other Chinese, the writers do agree that one of the prime reasons for the temple's success is its strong association with Chiu-chow customs and the resultant appeal to that segment of the local community.

Taih Wong Yeh may be defined as an 'ethnic temple' in the sense that it provides physical and social space where symbolic links with the Chiu-chow homeland are maintained and fostered. It is a place

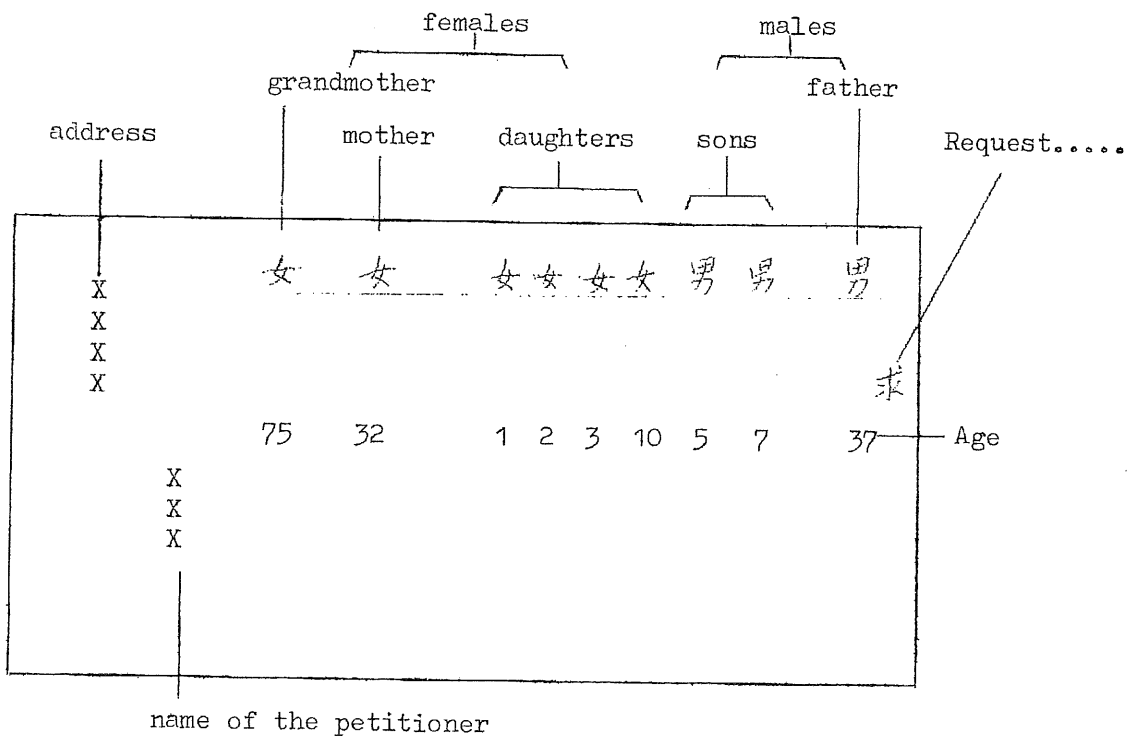
where Chiu-chow residents of the resettlement estate can come together and feel at ease conversing in the native dialect while worshipping deities in a manner traditional to their home country. Even members of that linguistic group who have converted to Christianity or who profess no religious belief will attend functions of an entertainment nature sponsored on major festivals.

Although in theory the temple is open to all residents of the estate regardless of linguistic background, in reality, the same factors that attract the Chiu-chow, i.e. language and manner of worship, discourage others from association. Rather than broadening its appeal to the wider community, the temple's current expansion program appears aimed at solidifying its involvement with the Chiu-chow alone.

Appendix I.

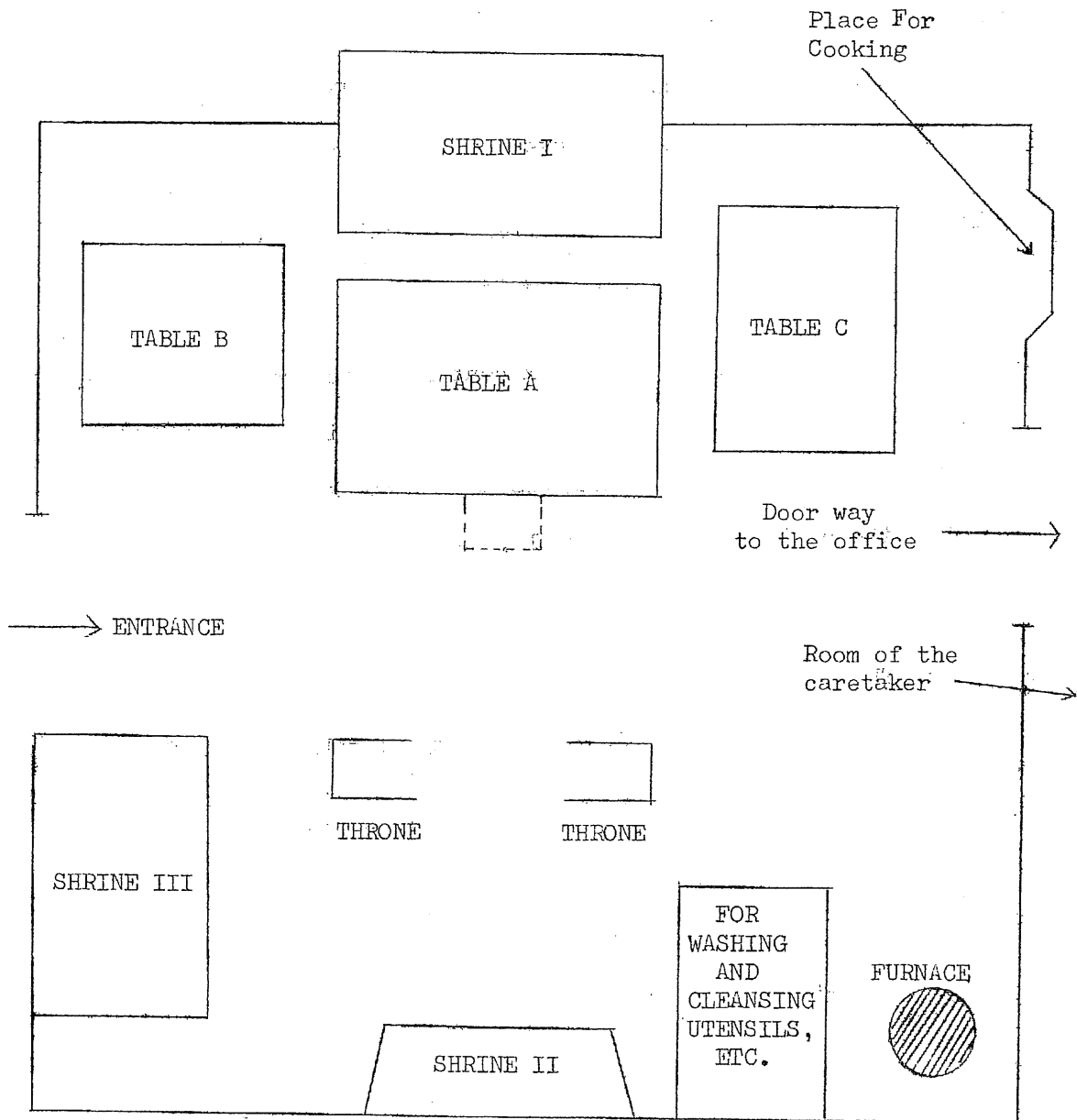
The Request Sheet

The petitioner writes down his petition on a sheet of red paper, the request sheet - 帖 . If required, he may approach the Tang Shangs for their help in completing the request sheet. The altar tender will note down the name, sex, age, and address of the petitioner. The Chinese character - 求 (request) is put down on the sheet. If the petitioner wants his family members to be included in the petition, the ages and sex (not names) of these subjects should also be jotted down. The Tang Shang will write down the ages of males first in a sequential order from the eldest (father) to youngest. Then the ages of the daughters are added, also from eldest first to youngest last. The ages of the mother and the grandmother will be put last. The request sheet appears in the following format:



Appendix II

Interior Setting of the Shrine Chamber





Shrine I: altars with statues of Li Man Chung Kung Taih Wang Yeh

李文忠公大王爺, the Great Saint 大聖, Kwan Yin  
觀音, Buddha Sha 沙僧, the Third Prince 三太子,  
the Pig 八戒, Tu Ti 土地。

Shrine II: no statue, only the characters T'ien Ti Fu Mu 天地父母  
written on a tablet. (Heaven and Earth: Mother and Father)

Shrine III: The statue of T'ien Kuo Yun Shang 天國元帥 (the General  
of Heaven) and the statue of his Horse.

TABLE A: On this table a wooden box containing several small flags,  
a bucket of water with sacred plant inside and a donation  
box are placed. During possession the ki-tong handles  
the petitions at this table. A tray of herbs is also  
put on the table during the possession ceremony.

TABLE B & C: The Tang Shangs prepare the request sheets on Table B.  
worshippers gather in the vicinity of tables B and C.

The Thrones: On the sketch the two thrones are in their ordinary  
positions. During a possession ceremony, one of them  
(or both) will be moved to the side of Table A as the  
dotted shape indicates.

Footnotes

1. Doolittle (1865, Vol. II, P.110) reports that in Fukien Province the medium commonly performed in private homes rather than in temples. Jordan (1973, P.72) notes that in contemporary rural Taiwan the medium often performs trance ceremonies in the home of petitioners. The exclusive use of special spirit-medium temples for possession ceremonies appears to be an urban phenomenon.
  
2. In Singapore at the time of Elliott's study - 1955, the Chiu-chow were approximately 20% of the Chinese population; the Cantonese 20%, the Hokkien 40% and the rest consisted of Hailams and Hakka. (1955, P.17). No one linguistic group in Singapore enjoyed the overriding dominance of the Cantonese in Hong Kong, i.e. over 80%.
  
3. The first part of this indicates the cult's self-conscious distinction between itself seen as a religion in the Western sense - thus the term " 宗教 " and the term in its title Tak Kow 德教 which we have translated as "religion" although it may also be translated as "teachings".
  
4. The resettlement estate has long been a field for Christian missionary endeavour, the local Catholic parish numbers 3,000 + members and the combined strength of the Protestant churches is several hundred less than that number. Roughly half of the church membership is Chiu-chow with the largest percentages belonging to the Catholic church and the Swatow Christian Baptist Church.

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劉昫，“李元絃傳”，舊唐書九十八卷，列傳四十八。