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The spreading cult of Baosheng Dadi through hun-hiun () and its territorialization through koah-hiun ()

Fiorella Allio

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臺灣與各地保生大帝之信仰研究

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臺灣與各地之保生大帝信仰研究

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臺灣與各地之 保生大帝信仰研究

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**The spreading cult of Baosheng Dadi
through *hun-hiu*ⁿ (分香) and its
territorialization through *koah-hiu*ⁿ (刈香) :
the case study of Hsuehchia (Hakkah) 學甲 (Tainan)”**

從「分香」、「刈香」儀式論保生大帝
信仰傳播及其「地域化」過程：
以臺南學甲地區為例

Fiorella Allio (艾茉莉)*

摘要

保生大帝信仰與香火自閩南祖廟，以「分香」儀式建立各地分廟，逾有千年的傳播歷史。祖廟與分廟有著強烈的承啟聯系，因此分廟信眾定期都會回到祖廟。本文以臺南學甲慈濟宮為研究案例，探討該廟宇最重要的年度遙拜——「上白礁謁祖」，以追懷保生大帝信仰於十七世紀隨著先民渡海來此地。除卻一般的出陣進香活動與三種靜態儀式，該祭典每四年擴大規模舉行歷時三天的活動，依香路遶巡轄境的參與友宮，此大型遶境稱之為「刈香」。本文旨在

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分析這兩類交織於學甲地區的宗教機構和儀式。刈香與上白礁謁祖其中亦凸顯了傳統儀式中的象徵性創造力與信仰於地方的文化記憶。文章著眼於當中團結形成、儀式合作及其「地域化」的過程。此案例顯示保生大帝信仰可藉由「分香」儀式線性擴散亦可藉由「刈香」的地域性部署擴大影響力。

關鍵詞：保生大帝香火、學甲、傳播、地域化、上白礁謁祖、刈香

1. An endearing personality, an exceptional god

The cult of the Great Sovereign Who Protects Life, Baosheng Dadi (Po-seng Tai-te) 保生大帝 is one of the most celebrated god in Fujian and also one of the most diffused outside China. Also known as Dadao gong (Tai-te kong) 大道公 or Wu Zhenren (Go chin-jin) 吳真人, the saint bore the name Wu Tao (Go Tho) 吳本 during his human lifetime. A Northern Song dynasty figure, Wu Tao was born in 979, more than one thousand years ago, and passed away in 1036. An orphan from poor parents who died of sickness, he dedicated his life to the study and practice of both Chinese medicine and the Dao. His legend specifies that as a Daoist he was directly taught by the Queen Mother of the West, Xiwang mu, 西王母. Very popular during his lifetime, successful in his practice, his principle was to assist everyone, without distinction between the rich and the poor. He died accidentally in the heights of Qingjiao 青礁 (Fujian) while he was collecting ingredients for the phyto-therapeutic treatment of his patients. He spent his life in the Minnan region and his cult started on the most suggestive places of his existence. Grateful people began to worship him right after his demise. They invoked him for healing purposes but also against the invasion of pirates, the devastation of war, that of epidemics, droughts and other disasters. In other words, not only did he become a god of medicine, in continuity with the main activity of his lifetime, but he also turned out to be the classic protector of

a place, insuring its peace, security, prosperity, good health and happiness.

2. The cult of Baosheng Dadi and its development

The cult of Baosheng Dadi started to spread in the Minnan region, in southern Fujian, from the ancestral temples established on the saint's birth place, Baijiao 白礁, and on the place of his demise, Qingjiao 青礁; these villages still exist and are situated within three kilometers of each other. Both temples bear the name Ciji gong (Chu-che kiong) 慈濟宮 (Palace of Merciful Salvation), but because of their interrelated location, they are commonly designated as the Western Ciji gong 慈濟西宮 in the case of Baijiao (originally named Yilingshen ci 醫靈神祠) and the Eastern Ciji gong 慈濟東宮 in the case of Qingjiao (originally named Longqiu'an 龍湫庵). These two temples were respectively built in 1157 and 1151. At that time they were included in the county of Tong'an, itself related administratively to Quanzhou, city known by foreign traders as Zaiton, in Arabic language, on the basis of its old name Citong cheng 荊桐城. Nowadays, although very close, the two villages and their temples belong to two different local administrations: Baijiao Ciji gong is included in the city of Longhai, county of Jiaomei 龍海市角美鎮, and Qingjiao Ciji gong in the city of Xiamen, district of Haicang 廈門市海滄區.

Votive statues representing the god were carved early after his death and were, most probably, first put on family altars with other gods. Qingjiao's temple was erected before Baijiao's but both seemed to have been preceded by a shrine on Xiamen island that Sun Tianxi 孫天錫, a former patient and acquaintance of Wu Tao, built on a piece of land in his property. This shrine later became Wuxi gong 吳西宮. As his grandson Sun Yu 孫瑀 reported, yet in 1087, in the *Xigongtan yueji* 西宮檀越記, Sun had started to worship Wu Tao after his death, considering him as the divine protector of his family, and later on opened the cult to the many

devotees attracted by the god's blessings, hence the need to turn the shrine into a small temple (Chou Mao-chin 周茂欽, 2013: 20).

J. J. M. De Groot, the famous Dutch historian of religions, mentions in *Les fêtes annuellement célébrées à Emoui* (Amoy), published at the end of the nineteenth Century after a series of direct observations in the region of Xiamen, that the temple Ciji (gong) in Baijiao was one of the most beautiful he had ever seen in the region (J. J. M. de Groot, 1886: 273). This author addresses the cult of Baosheng Dadi (translated by him as the Great Tutelary God of Production and Life) because he relates him to the cult of the sun. His description of a procession held on Gulang (yu) 鼓浪嶼 island near Xiamen, on the fifteen day of the third lunar month, to celebrate the god's birthday is full of details reminding us of the processions in southern Taiwan and that of Hsuehchia in particular (J. J. M. de Groot, 1886: 273, 282-285), with the rite of "Crossing the fire" (J. J. M. de Groot, 1886: 276-277).

3. A cult transcending localism

Several processes enabled the expansion of the cult over time and space. Kenneth Dean, who dedicated a large section of his Ph.D. dissertation, later turned into a book, on Baosheng Dadi (K. Dean, 1988: 69-169), pointed out various types of development processes that helped the cult to transcend localism, which I could sum up or re-phrase this way: an image building through several enfeoffments after petitioning the throne; a dissemination of the god's legend through printed pamphlets; a "pantheonization" of his figure through the integration of the saint into the Daoist pantheon, and in some cases, association with Ziwei, the Central Stellar Divinity of the Daoist pantheon represented on the central altar of Daoist rituals (K. Dean, 1988 : 111-112)); the formulation of sacred scriptures revealed texts in conjunction with the saint; and last but not least, a "division of incense", *fenxiang* (*hun-hiu*) 分香, With a certain historical depth compared to what we observe in the present day, J.

J. M. de Groot had already pointed out this institution in the 19th Century and given the rationale explaining this process, even mentioning in the vernacular what he calls the “founding gesture”, *tchia^{ng}-hiou^{ng}-he* 請香火 (“asking for incense fire”), (de Groot, 1886, vol 1: 270-271), an atypical ethnographic precision at the time on China.

The “division of incense” is the basic ritual process to establish a cult and join a cultic network, with at least one partner: the ancestral temple which the cult stems from. In order to found a cult, a community visits a temple already instituted –as old or as outstanding as possible–, dedicated to the god chosen, collects ashes from the incense-burner of the god and disposes them into a new incense-burner that becomes the emblem of the new cult community. This is called *fenxiang* but also *fenling* (*hun-leng*) 分靈 (“dividing the efficacious power”). It is the custom to reinforce the power of “incense” repeatedly and the same way, so visits to the ancestral temple are paid regularly. The ties established in the past become particularly perceptible through these reverse movements, and the organization of a pilgrimage procession uncovers instructive socio-religious facets of this institution. Most of the time a new statue of the god is carved and placed behind the incense-burner, on the altar. This altar can expand into a shrine, then into a temple. Many temples and cults can spin off this way from the oldest temple dedicated to a god, such as Baijiao’s or Qingjiao’s, called “ancestral temple”, *zumiao* (*cho-bio*) 祖廟, but if it is too far, an intermediary temple may also be suitable. There is in principle no limit to this expansion and on the other side a temple can be related to different cultic networks if it hosts several gods. “Incense”, *xiang* (*hiuⁿ*) 香, can be literally for “ashes” used. Moreover, “incense”, basic medium of the cult, evanescent path to supernatural forces, omnipresent in rituals, is often used to designate the itself *xianghuo*(*hiuⁿ-he*) 香火 or a ritual, and is found in many vernacular expressions. As a matter of fact, this term is a basic component of all the ritual names we shall analyze later.

The cult of Baosheng Dadi which had started to spread in southern Fujian expanded subsequently overseas: toward Quemoy, Penghu, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Southeast Asia. The branching out pattern that had flourished in Fujian, played a key role elsewhere as well. Kristofer Schipper remarks that “the institution of *fenxiang* and the way it operated remained essentially the same throughout the centuries, so that even rather recent developments can help to understand the way the institution worked in former times” (K. Schipper, 1990: 401). The author studied the socio-religious institution of *fenxiang* from a trans-regional perspective and examined its implications in terms of communication network and socio-economic links (K. Schipper, 1990). It is largely attested that this type of diffusion followed the path of the guilds and the migrants coming from the Minnan region, place of origin of the god. Even more, statues, incense burners or amulets containing ashes symbolizing the active cult of the saint were brought along to safeguard the journey, the health and the future activities of these travelers.

4. The cult and its penetration on Taiwan through Tainan

On Taiwan, also relying on the institution of the division of incense, the cult first settled in the south, accompanying the earlier trade guilds and waves of immigrants from Minnan, in the 17th Century; over the centuries, it progressed toward the center and the north of the island.¹ Quite a lot of temples, especially in the south, were affiliated in a straight line to Baijiao, less to Qingjiao. Sometimes they were linked to other temples in the Minnan area or Quemoy (an island where many Koxinga soldiers and later immigrants came from), as for them deriving from Baijiao or Qingjiao. But the largest part of the temples dedicated to Baosheng Dadi in Taiwan did not directly come from Minnan, because

¹ The temple Bao'an gong 保安宮 of Taipei Dalong tong 大龍峒, founded in 1742, is an exception, since it pre-dates by many decades those of central Taiwan.

Fujian was too far or temporarily unreachable by sea, or else because various temples on Taiwan were well established already and had gained attractive notoriety for themselves. So, later temples practiced their division of incense from a Taiwanese temple of the first and even second generation. Based on the data compiled by the GIS Center of the Academia Sinica, the number of temples dedicated to Baosheng Dadi on Taiwan in 2017 reached the figure of 266.²

The Taiwanese record for most temples belongs to the Jianan plain 嘉南平原 and, more narrowly, to the Tainan area, as for it arriving at about one third of the total.³ As a matter of fact, the people from larger Quanzhou were the first to massively settle on this area. The oldest Baosheng Dadi temples of Tainan still show an intense religious activity, such as Xinhua Baosheng Dadi miao 新化保生大帝廟, Kaiji Kaishan gong 開基開山宮, Sidian Xingji gong 祀典興濟宮, Guiren Renshou gong 歸仁仁壽宮, Lianghuang gong 良皇宮. In the past, Sidian Xingji gong 祀典興濟宮 had the particularity of hosting twice a year, in both the spring and the fall, the official ritual service of the island administration. Sidian Xingji gong 祀典興濟宮 is also referred to in Minnan language as the Upper Tai-te (temple), Ting Tai-te (kiong) 頂大道(宮), in relation to the Lower Tai-te (temple), E Tai-te (kiong) 下大道(宮), aka Lianghuang gong 良皇宮. An interesting point concerning this series of pioneer temples, existing since the Ming/Koxinga period, is that they were not only established in the heart of the island largest city of the time, but also in its hinterland, most often along river routes or lagoons, such as Xinhua and Guiren. The temple Ciji (gong) in Hsuehchia

² Y[no spau] Cf. <http://crgis.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/spatial/atlas/temple/god/040-5/view>; update (2018) provided by Hung Ying-fa 洪瑩發 (GIS, Academia Sinica).

³ K. Schipper mentions a total of 130 temples dedicated to Baosheng Dadi as main deity in downtown Tainan, the first one having been established back in 1650 (K. Schipper, 1996: 399).

(Hakkah Chu-che kiong) 學甲慈濟宮, in the northwest side of the Tainan region, which is not mentioned in the earliest gazetteers of Taiwan (unlike the last other two) actually is already the second altar of an old Baosheng Dadi cult which started as early as in the Koxinga period. These few facts indicate that the cult communities managing the temples were not closed in on themselves, in a remote countryside, and their cult most probably facilitated external contacts. In view of these varied urban and rural locations, the economic activities of the communities dedicating a cult to Baosheng Dadi in early Han Taiwan, might have been accordingly diverse; and this possibly broadened the types of divine protection people were waiting from the god.

5. Cult study from the angle of ritual observation

This article starts from a series of remarks that K. Schipper made in the chapter he dedicated to the cult of Baosheng Dadi and its spreading to Taiwan through *fenxiang* (K. Schipper, 1990). Important aspects related to the institution of *fenxiang* are highlighted by the author. We would like to remind after him a few major points: *fenxiang* is a process of inherent and continual expansion; far from being a marginal institution it rather endures through the centuries; for more than eight hundred years, the *fenxiang* of Baosheng Dadi played the role of a rallying point and a communication network for local interests; it has supported different kinds of motivations among which, contrary to expectation, religious creed is not necessarily decisive; the desire to belong to and to participate in a circuit of communication and cooperation seems, in contrast, more influential. In general, as the author goes on, each community is free to conclude the alliances that it prefers; inside a given circuit, which is non-hierarchical, no group has authority over another; local cults and *fenxiang* circuits have not constituted very clear-cut territorial entities but *fenxiang* networks have definitely provided transversal communications among localities.

Further debate would be necessary regarding the characteristics attributed here to the *fenxiang* system in relation to spatial relations and power distribution, as for instance, the assumed lack of hierarchy among the temples within the same circuit. Because not being a rigid vertical institution, it is neither a clear-cut horizontal one. The respect of these interrelations principles is based on social pressure rather than controlled authority, and this may explain that. The comparison with another institution, that of *koah-hiu*ⁿ 刈香⁴, seems indispensable in my view to apprehend the case of *hun-hiu*ⁿ (*fenxiang*) 分香 further; so one can better delineate the respective attributes of these two systems and their function in the domains of power and space.

Both K. Schipper and K. Dean have explored the spawning off of subsidiary groups from epigraphic and local gazetteers which are inestimable sources, when existing and accessible. This depiction can be completed with an approach relying as well on the direct observation and analysis of *chin-hiu*ⁿ 進香 pilgrimages, corresponding to the return of an affiliated cult community to the place of origin of its god's "incense". During these reverse movements, the ties established in the past become particularly perceptible, and the organization of a pilgrimage procession uncovers instructive socio-religious facets of the institution. The *jinxiang* events observed by K. Dean for his thesis were carried out during a very particular period of time: that of the reactivation of religious cults and cult networks among temples in the 1980s in Fujian. His description and comments are therefore very precious.

For my part, in order to emphasize the standpoint of living practices analysis, I will examine here two different types of ceremonies in relation

⁴ For the evocation of ritual names, I will favor vernacular language; some expressions like *koah-hiu*ⁿ are never translated in mandarin, except in the administration, the media or the education system, which does not represent the traditional environment of rituals anyway.

to Baosheng Dadi, performed in the region of Hsuehchia (Hakkah) 學甲, within the same ritual complex and during the same period of time, but leading to distinct, yet complementary, institutional, symbolic and spatial outcomes. Not only can the analysis of this category of events help us go back in time and recall centuries of local social networks history, but it can also help us apprehend locals' symbolic space and territoriality formation.

Event-related phenomena such as collective rituals and processions rely mainly on oral traditions and managerial skills that make little use of writing for their enactment. As a consequence, this makes it problematic to count on the written medium to understand their development throughout the years. First hand literature such as leaflets, booklets, maps, printed nowadays in a limited edition by temples, just before celebrations, are very useful to grasp a larger picture of the events' unfolding and organization, but, because of their elliptical character, they have to be necessarily used in conjunction with direct observation and interviews.

My own ethnographic fieldwork research on temple festivals, collective rituals and processions in southern Taiwan, with a perspective of more than thirty years, has been instrumental for the understanding of their settings, contexts and stakes. I began to observe the ritual of Hsuehchia ever since 1986; I did see the one-day procession many times and studied the three-day one on several occasions; the most recent observation being in the spring of 2018.

6. Two systems in comparison, one case study

The problematics I would like to address in this paper relates to the inner dynamics of socio-religious institutions and networks conveying not only a *diffusion* but also a *territorialization* of cults. I will examine the ritual action and symbolic notions which these processes draw on, in order to bring out further aspects of cult communities' social organization and interrelations. As I mentioned earlier, the empirical objects of the

present study are two types of ritual systems that have been instrumental to Baosheng Dadi cult's diffusion and territorialization in the social landscape of Hsuehchia. They are the *chin-hiu*ⁿ/*iat-cho* 進香/謁祖 ritual system, and the *koah-hiu*ⁿ 刈香 ritual system; each of them mobilizing its own processional mechanism.

There exists a nuance between *chin-hiu*ⁿ and *iat-cho*. *Chin-hiu*ⁿ can be translated literally as “offering/presenting incense (ceremonially)”, and extensively as “going on a pilgrimage [during which incense is presented ceremonially]”. *Iat-cho* signifies literally “asking for an audience with a superior”, and extensively “going on a pilgrimage”. But the difference is less in the terms or the acts –pretty much alike– than in the principles. As a matter of fact a *chin-hiu*ⁿ pilgrimage delegation, aside from going to an ancestral temple, can also visit several temples dedicated to the same god, especially if they are famous, or simply on its route. *Iat-cho*, instead, is reserved only to the cases of direct affiliation with the visited temple/god, or else, as for Hsuehchia, is used when the worshipped statue comes directly from the altar of the visited original temple. In both cases, the delegation goes in great procession to collect incense, sometimes accompanied by allied temples which show their support; in both cases, the itinerary is thought in linear terms, as a back and forth journey. These pilgrimage routes make tangible *hun-hiu*ⁿ intangible maps.

*Koah-hiu*ⁿ is also a large-scale networking system that regulates fluxes of exchange and solidarity; it does not lead to a back and forth pilgrimage, a *chin-hiu*ⁿ –contrary to what might often appear in the leaflets and other documents disseminated during festivals–; instead, it circumscribes a space with a procession. This type of processional ritual celebrated periodically by several communities putting their efforts together, is based on a criterion of territorial proximity, not on a common cult; it does not ritualize ancestry and origins but rather territorial organization and it pursues a resolution of conflicts and local prosperity

through a tour of inspection that is more or less explicitly likened to an exorcism.

If *chin-hiu*ⁿ clearly rests upon the well identified *hun-hiu*ⁿ (*fenxiang*) 分香 institution, conversely, we scarcely hear a vernacular term specifying the ground which the second system leans on; maybe because *koah-hiu*ⁿ implies both an action and an organizational mode; however this is pretty much the same for *hun-hiu*ⁿ. *Hoe-hiu*ⁿ 會香, “to gather, to congregate ‘incense’”, that is quite recent⁵, could yet clarify *koah-hiu*ⁿ's foundations, if it were to become more common.

Likewise, whereas *hun-hiu*ⁿ and its *chin-hiu*ⁿ / *iat-cho*ⁿ ritual counterpart are widely known and recognized in their institutional aspects, it is far less so for *koah-hiu*ⁿ. A systematic and analytical comparison is equally rare. I started to approach systematically this issue through my Ph.D. dissertation (Fiorella Allio, 1996) dedicated to the study of the most popular *koah-hiu*ⁿ of Taiwan today, that of Hsikang (Saikang), *Saikang-a-hiu*ⁿ 西港仔香. This mega-ritual takes place every three years and is widely mediatized, which of course was not the case when I started extensive research on the subject in 1988.

Several areas in the western and northwestern parts of the Tainan region, where Hsikang and Hsuehchia are located, practice at regular intervals a ritual named *koah-hiu*ⁿ. We believe that other large scale processional rituals practiced elsewhere, bearing different names but possessing similar traits, could in fact be likened to the *koah-hiu*ⁿ pattern and be approached the same way. Moreover we notice that the term *koah-hiu*ⁿ can have a different meaning according to the regions. For example, the traditional expression in Tainan is used differently from that of the Taichung region within the Matsu cult, where it rather points to the precise gesture of taking incense from incense-burner number 1 and disposing it in incense-burner number 2.

⁵ I have seen it used in the area of Annan district, north of Tainan.

The case I chose to present here, that of Hsuehchia, famous in all Taiwan and abroad for developing a sizeable Baosheng Dadi network, relying on Ciji (gong) (Chu-che (kiong)) 慈濟宮 temple, Palace of Merciful Salvation –the same name as Baijiao’s temple in Fujian–, and on a periodical large-scale celebration, is of a fascinating nature in regards to its long history, its complexity and its impact. The Hsuehchia region provides a rare situation where both ritual systems, *iat-cho* 謁祖 and *koah-hiu*ⁿ 刈香, still practiced today, are remarkably visible and entwined, in various layers of complexity. This combination raises many puzzling questions which will revolve here around the issues of solidarity formation, ritual cooperation, spatial organization, activated by religious practices.

7. The cult of the Great Sovereign Who Protects Life in Hsuehchia

In Hsuehchia, the cult of the Great Sovereign Who Protects Life started as early as the Koxinga era, in the second half of the seventeenth Century. It is said that a vessel of the Ming loyalist army berthed on the right bank of the river now called Jiangjun xi 將軍溪, not far from the coast, to the west of the current Hsuehchia center. Generally speaking, Koxinga’s soldiers had to rely on their farming skills to make a living off the land they were trying to conquer. In Hsuehchia they were the first group of Han people to open the way to the reclamation and development of the surrounding lands and natural pounds. Prior to their arrival, the territory was entirely used by a group of indigenous people related to the Siraya community of Siaulong, further south. The Taiwanese pronunciation of the place name, Hakkah, is in fact of Siraya origin. It is said that members of the army, and most probably the pioneers that joined them soon after, whose main figures were surnamed Li 李, Chen 陳, Hsieh 謝 and Chuang 莊, brought along from their hometown, Baijiao in Fujian, a

statue of Baosheng Dadi for their protection during the journey and their uncertain future. The statues of Marshal Hsieh (Hsiehfu Yuanshuai 謝府元帥) and Marshal of the Central Altar (Zhong tan yuanshuai 中壇元帥) were brought along too. The new comers slowly dispersed, started families and occupied different areas to engage their agricultural activities. Thirteen clusters/villages (Hsuehchiah Shi-san-zhuang (Hakkah Chap-sa-chng) 學甲十三庄) were constituted. When the population grew and land and resources diminished, new settlements were established in the surroundings. One important precision to add is that even if most of these communities worship Baosheng Dadi in their temple, he is not necessarily their main god. Sometimes also the saint is not present at all.

Ever since the beginning, it was the pioneer Li Sheng, and later his family group, who have been in charge of the statue of Baosheng Dadi. A first shanty was built for the cult in their property and hosted, on a simple altar the statues of the three original protectors. In 1701, a brick building was erected on the place where Ciji gong lies today. This small initial building was enlarged, reconstructed and repaired several times from 1744 on, until it took the appearance it has today. In 1985, it has been designated as a national third-class monument by the Ministry of the Interior. Nowadays Hsuehchia Ciji gong is one of the major temples devoted to Baosheng Dadi in the Tainan region and in Taiwan. The statue of Baosheng Dadi, identified in its full name as The Second Founding Sovereign Who Protects Life (Kaiji Baosheng Er Dadi 開基保生二大帝), is special in the sense that not only is it estimated to be eight hundred years old but also because, before being brought to Taiwan, it was worshiped on the altar of the Ciji gong of Baijiao, place of birth of the saint. Having a statue from the original place is even more prestigious than carving one after the transfer of ashes. Many believe that this is the only relic remaining from the group of original statues worshiped in the ancestral temples. Its title indicates that it is the second original statue. The first one in Baijiao has been lost or destroyed, while the third one, hosted

in Qingjiao, is not to be found either. This is why the Second Founding Sovereign Who Protects Life of Hsuechia enjoys a high status among the Asian community of Baosheng Dadi's devotees. This has also been a driving force to underpin a network of subsidiary temples, not only in southern Taiwan among the population of emigrants from Hsuechia but also abroad: the Philippines, Hong Kong... Lastly, it is necessary to mention that Hsuechia Ciji gong has always been very active in the international associations gathering the temples dedicated to Baosheng Dadi. The founding meeting of a new organization, Shijie Baosheng Dadi miaoyu lianhe zonghui 世界保生大帝廟宇聯合總會 (World federation of Baosheng Dadi temples), took place precisely at Hsuechia in January 2018, and is also chaired by Wang Wenzong, head of Ciji gong.

8. Hsuechia rituals within time and space

Despite geographic distance and the passage of time, the link to the ancestral temple on the mainland had been maintained in the old days and in spite of a necessary journey by sea to perform a pilgrimage, the inhabitants were used to go back regularly to Baijiao, within the god's birthday celebration period, (the fifteenth day of the third lunar month). This form of pilgrimage is strictly called *iat-cho* 謁祖 in Hsuechia and not *chin-hiu*" 進香. This underscores the idea of a very direct link with the Palace of Merciful Salvation in Baijiao. Which is the personal hometown of the statue.

The crossing of the strait was sometimes arduous in the past, when it was not totally impossible, because of weather conditions, the bans on seafaring, and of course financial constraints. The interruption of cross-strait relations after the war definitely stopped connections until the late 1980ies and early 1990ies. With the easing of exchanges, delegations of Hsuechia Ciji gong returned many times to the original temple of the god and donated money for the restoration of the site too.

Facing the impossibility of crossing the strait, the inhabitants put in place another type of celebration to substitute the straight pilgrimage, which generic term is called *yaobai* 遙拜, “to conduct a celebration remotely”; in other words they stay home and project themselves ritually to the other side. Even if this celebration is a simplification of a former pilgrimage it is far from being simple. It allows on the contrary many kinds of formulations and innovations. This is particularly interesting from an anthropological point of view because it shows symbolic creativity within a traditional pattern, and from a historical viewpoint because it elaborates on the memory of the arriving of the cult in the context of the first wave of Han immigration on Taiwan.

This ritual, taking place every year, on the eleventh day of the third lunar month (Sanyue shiyi 三月十一), four days prior to Pao-seng Tai-te’s birthday –as for it celebrated as usual with a temple fair–, is called Siong-Be-ta (Shang Baijiao) 上白礁 (*siong* 上 here means “toward” and Be-ta refers to the place of the ancestral temple) or, in its full name: Siong-be-ta iat-cho 上白礁謁祖. The locals, led by the main temple Ciji gong, operate a symbolic journey toward the sea, on the western part of their territory, reaching the precise spot where, several centuries ago, on the right bank of the Jiangjun River, their ancestors berthed with their ship and took off board the protective gods they had brought with them from their homeland. Even if the inhabitants are authorized to travel nowadays to the other side, where they are indeed very welcomed, they continue performing on Taiwan the Siong-be-ta ritual form instead of going on an effective pilgrimage as in the old days. By the date chosen, they even include the time that would be necessary to reach their final destination, on time again for the god’s birthday. This is quite remarkable and even more so when one bears in mind that the Hsuehchia community does undertake real pilgrimages to Baijiao every now and then. We can see that the present form of Siong-be-ta has distanced itself from the form it took in the past. And thus it can be expected that its socio-symbolic

meanings changed accordingly, opening the door to new elements, formulations and interpretations.

The ritual Siong-be-ta iat-cho takes an entire day and consists of several sequences: various static rites at significant sites and a procession departing from and returning to Ciji gong which main destination, Tai-te-kung po 大道公埔 “The shoreline of the Great Sovereign Who Protects Life”, is close to the hamlet of Touqian liao 頭前寮, on the right bank of the river. The main collective actors involved in the ritual constituting Hsuehchia ritual alliance are the thirteen original villages founded by the pioneers with their surrounding hamlets. Those are, in *pinyin*, Xuejia 學甲 (including Qianshe 前社, Zhongshe 中社, Houshe 後社, Dongliao 東寮), Dawan 大灣 (not participating anymore), Caodi 草坵, Shanliao 山寮, Zhongzhou 中洲, Zhaizigang 宅仔港, Xuejialiao 學甲寮, Daofengliao (倒風寮), Duzitou 渡仔頭, Huiyaogang 灰礮港, Erchonggang 二重港, Xidiliao 溪底寮, Sanliaowan 三寮灣. Except for the last five ones that are situated in the district of Peimen 北門, all other are in Hsuehchia.

9. A static return: the Siong-Be-ta 上白礁 ritual

The early morning of the thirteenth day of the third lunar month starts with the presentation of offerings and the release of a memoir to Baosheng Dadi inside Ciji gong, orchestrated by a master of ceremony which conducts the motions of the audience: state or local dignitaries, special guests coming from abroad and of course Ciji gong's board of directors, as well as the delegates of the thirteen villages which form the ritual territory of Hsuehchia. The statue of Baosheng Dadi and those of other gods are prepared to be seated in their palanquins. They will parade at the very rear of the cortège, place of highest honor according to local processional protocols. Meanwhile, all the other formations of the procession have already lined up and the very head formation have started walking. Each formation is composed of a palanquin at the rear and a

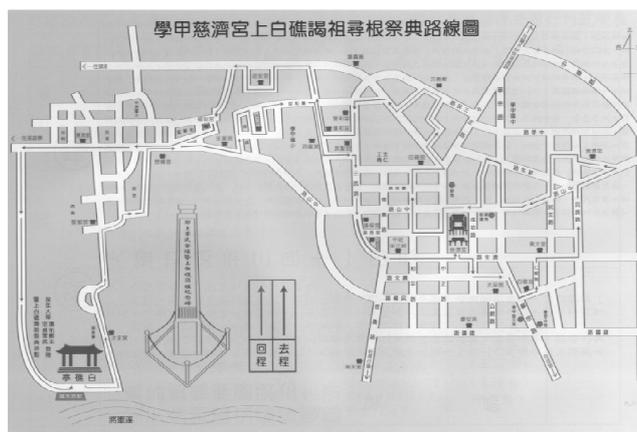
performance troupe or a float (one of Hsuehchia's lovely characteristics) at the head. From early morning they had practiced one at a time their own greetings outside Ciji gong, and had been welcomed by an *ang-thau* 紅頭 shaman hired by the temple.

Afterwards, the movement of the cortège progresses in the neighborhood and heads to a specific site, four kilometers away, close to the hamlet of Touqian liao, near the bank of the river Jiangjun, where two other static rituals are going to be held. This progression is carrying great weight and is punctuated by mutual greetings of palanquins containing the statues of the gods, as well as ceremonial exchanges of incense and offerings in the patio of the temples situated along the course. Before reaching the focal spot, the cortège will pass through a few units belonging to the Hsuehchia ritual territory: Houshe 後社, Guanghua 光華, Zhongzhou 中洲. For the return trip, the cortège will go through Zhongzhou 中洲 again, Pengcheng 彭城, Houshe 後社 again, and conclude with Ciji gong, where they perform a valediction rite.

The cortège involves at least sixty-odd delegations that are in great part mandated by the thirteen original villages' temples, and the hamlets' temples around them. Besides, temple communities who "divided incense" from Hsuehchia Ciji gong, often founded by migrants coming originally from Hsuehchia, as well as allied cult communities, *kau-poe bio* (*jiaopei*) 交陪廟 (literally : "temples practicing mutual assistance") may also join the procession⁶. This leads to other interesting types of exchanges and networking.

⁶ Such as Xia Yihe Baoxing gong 下義合保興宮, Ding Yihe Bao'an gong, 頂義合保安宮, Kanping Fu'an gong 看坪福安宮, coming from the nearby Qigu district 七股區 (which moreover actively participate in the three-day territorial procession of Saikang), who join the one-day procession and the rite Siong Be-ta every year and participate only the last day of a *koah-hiu*ⁿ year.

The leaflet provided by Ciji gong to the participating formations includes a map of the circuit; the red color on the 2018 document reproduced here indicates the outward route, and the blue color, the return route:



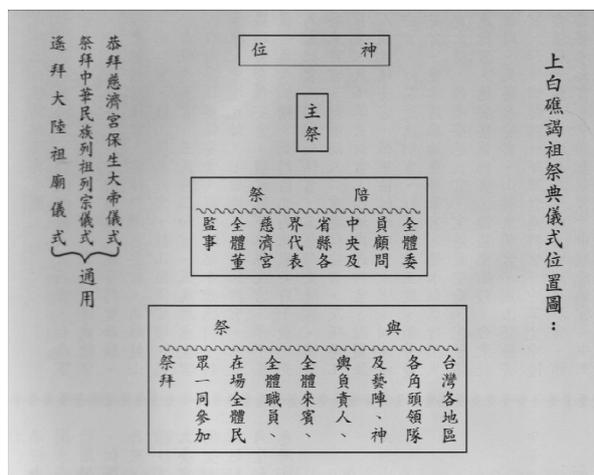
保生大帝臺灣開基祖廟 學甲慈濟宮 歲次戊戌年上白礁謁祖遶境祭典，
星期四中華民國 107 年 (2018) 農曆 3 月 11 日 國曆 4 月 26 日。(leaflet)

This map indicates also at the lower left, the river and two constructions on the sacred site where all participants and officiants gather in the late afternoon to perform a ceremony designated precisely by the generic term *Siong-be-ta iat-cho* 上白礁謁祖, consisting in fact of two main and distinct rituals further divided in several sequences. The monuments as sketched on the map are actually inverted from their real location.

The higher edifice is a commemorative obelisk erected by the local government in 1977 to honor, as an inscription reveals, “the pioneers of this region who came with the national hero Koxinga, as well as the pilgrimage custom to the ancestral temple of Baijiao” (*Zheng wang junmin denglu ji Shang Baijiao yezu jinianbei* 鄭王軍民登陸暨上白礁謁祖紀念碑). The other edifice, situated in reality further north from the obelisk, is the Baijiao Pavilion (*Baijiao jing* 白礁停) which name clearly

refers to the original place in Fujian. It does not look like a temple though: without any walls, except for the screen behind the altar, it stands as a station to harbor the annual ritual event and gives it more decorum and constancy.

In this isolated location, the two monuments make tangible and durable a double ritual that is going to take place during Siong-be-tai iat-cho'. The Ceremony honoring the ancestors and forefathers of the Chinese nation (Jibai zhonghua minzu liezu liezong dianli 祭拜中華民族列祖列宗典禮) comes first and takes place in front of the commemorative obelisk; it consists of a symbolic welcoming and farewell with formal offerings and supplication reading. In a second phase comes the Ceremony held remotely from the ancestral Palace of Merciful Salvation on the Mainland, in Baijiao (Yaobai dalu baijiao Ciji gong zumiao dianli 遙拜大陸白醮慈濟宮祖廟典禮), taking place under the pavilion and on the riverbank. The spatial arrangement of the main participants in these ceremonies remains the same as that of the early morning, inside Hsuehchia Baosheng Dadi's temple. The 2018 brochure printed by Ciji gong sketches the scene:



學甲慈濟宮 歲次戊戌年上白礁謁祖遠境祭典 (brochure), 中華民國 107 年 (2018) 農曆 3 月 11 日 國曆 4 月 26 日, p. 12.

Except for the hieratic presentation of offerings, the “Ceremony held remotely...” includes also the sacrifice of a memoir by a Taoist master and an Invitation of Water and Fire (*qing shuihuoxiang* 請水火香) by a shaman. The second phase goes on by the river and its apex consists for the shaman of entering the stream to collect water in a recipient, later put and sealed in a miniature temple brought back on a yoke to Ciji gong with a counterpart containing incense powder and Sandalwood joss sticks that are lit under the pavilion. Both of these elements, water and fire, symbolize (and materialize in their own way) the liquid medium supporting the passage of the first comers on the one hand and the spark that spurred the cult from the original temple on the mainland to Hsuehchia on the other hand. This is indeed the interpretation that is favored in the narrative promoted by the dignitaries of the main temple. Nonetheless, the framework and gestures of the Invitation of Water near the river resemble those practiced for another purpose (accompanied with another implicit discourse): that of enrolling new staff for the local divine armies and strengthening the power of local protective deities. Actually, this is typically the main goal of a *iat-cho'* ritual: to take back the deity to its parental temple and be provided with new soldiers-supposed to be more numerous and powerful in the original place.

10. A territory in movement: the *koah-hiu'* 刈香 ritual

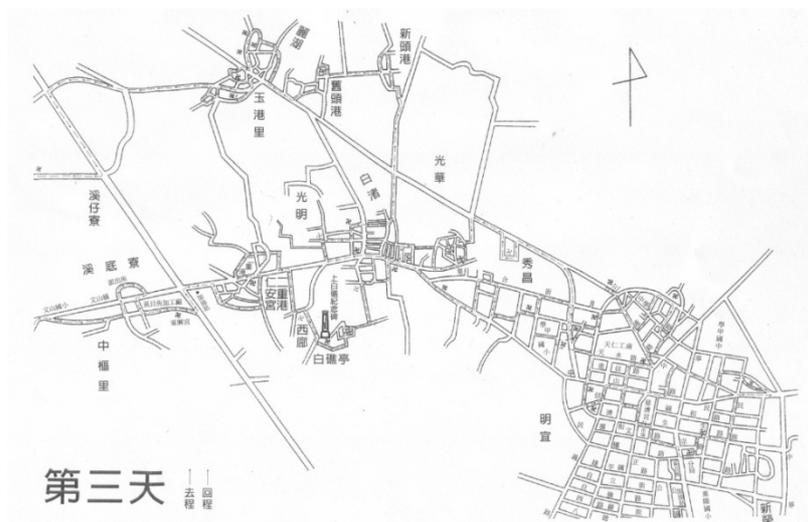
The ritual Siong-be-ta *iat-cho'* 上白礁謁祖 on the riverside is repeated each year, in the afternoon of the eleventh day of the third lunar month, but every four years it takes place by night and is preceded by a three-day circuit instead of a half-day procession. This last evening “remote pilgrimage” is in fact embedded in the complex processional ritual called *koah-hiu'* 刈香 that begins on the ninth instead of the eleventh, in order to keep the usual timing on tracks and have the *iat-cho'* to Baijiao still being performed on the eleventh day of the third lunar month, which provides in turn enough time for the imaginary sea crossing

and a well-timed arrival at the Fujian temple, for Baosheng Dadi's birthday, on the fifteenth. Every four years, the whole celebration is commonly called *koah-hiu*ⁿ or more precisely Hakkah *hiu*ⁿ 學甲香 (meaning the *koah-hiu*ⁿ / ritual of Hsuehchia), since this type of procession is always identified in relation to a place. On written documents, the event is usually referred to as Shang Baijiao yezu raojing jidian 上白礁謁祖遶境祭典 (pilgrimage and Processional ritual toward Baijiao), without writing the term *koah-hiu*ⁿ because it is considered as too vernacular, local, low level⁷.

Every four years the elemental participating communities listed above, forming the Hsuehchia "ritual territory", *hiu*ⁿ-*keng* (*xiangjing*) 香境, accomplish a territorial procession which takes three days to relate the spots where they lie. In other words, the principle of a *koah-hiu*ⁿ is to assemble in a cortège the units mandated by the cult communities that are visited by the cortège itself. Every delegation has to visit the temple or the temporary altar of its peers in a limited time, according to the pre-established schedule of a ritual circuit, *hiu*ⁿ-*lo* (*xianglu*) 香路. This progression is carrying great weight and is punctuated by mutual greetings of palanquins containing the statues of the gods, as well as ceremonial exchanges of incense and offerings in the patio of the temples situated along the course. Usually, the process takes three or four days. This length of time is also an indication of the distance traveled and of the size of the territory covered. Every day of the Hsuehchia festival, the cortège starts from Ciji gong early in the morning and returns late in the evening. In this way all the temples involved practice a reciprocal and egalitarian exchange of incense and offerings in all the temples of the ritual territory. These visits seal an alliance and forge mutual protection. One particular type of offerings gets all the attention: beautiful floats and animated troupes, opening the way for their formations, perform at every

⁷ This linguistic discrimination is slowly changing.

The third day, the cortège moves westwards to include the sacred site of the Siong Be-ta ritual:



學甲慈濟宮 歲次丙申年上白礁謁祖遶境祭典 (brochure), 中華民國 105 年 (2016) 農曆 3 月 9-11 日 (國曆 4 月 15-17 日), p. 17.

As suggested already by the elements of the description, the socio-religious scope of a *koah-hiu*ⁿ celebration is important in this context and for our topic and so is its historical background. According to Huang Wen-po, the Hakkah *Koah-hiu*ⁿ could have started in the nineteenth Century (1994: 50-52, 105, footnote 19), around 1850 at the latest (2014: 15) and, adds he, more or less at the same time as Saikang's and Hsiaulong's. Except for the fact that the Saikang's *Koah-hiu*ⁿ is directly inherited from that of Guma gong 姑媽宮 which began in the eighteenth Century (1784), the nineteenth Century represents in any case a consequent time depth for the establishment of this kind of territorial and intercommunal ritual and in the context of Taiwan's specific Han immigration conditions and history.

The *koah-hiu*ⁿ of Hsuehchia is now celebrated regularly every four years but this has not always been the case as Huang Wen-po accounts (1994: 51, 2014: 119). Before, its occurrence was not systematic and was decided in a traditional way, that is to say by divination in front of the altar of Baosheng Dadi, on the basis of his indications. Ever since 1987 the decision is taken/confirmed by the Ciji gong assembly of devotees. So as of 1988, the *koah-hiu*ⁿ has been performed inflexibly once in four years: 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 for the last one in date. The next occurrence will be held in 2020, almost one thousand years after the divinization of Wu Tao, this reflecting the resilience of his worship, the endurance of this kind of cult institution and the power of mobilization of folk religion.

What motivated at one point the extension of the procession from one to three days? The reason is evident for the locals: a one-day parade cannot encompass the totality of the ritual territory including the original thirteen villages and the surrounding hamlet sub-divisions. In other words, only a few partners benefit from the one-day procession while all others participate actively and fully, spending energy, time and money. This accumulated discrepancy needed to be rebalanced on a regular basis by a more encompassing ritual which stabilized the alliance. In my view, the idea of a possible variation of degree, on a regular or irregular basis might have been conceived ever since the initial shaping of a processional celebration. Besides, the systematization of regularity might have been also conditioned by a steady sufficiency of resources in the late 1980ies. The alternative of a more balanced second form every four years actually ensures the locals' mobilization for the reduced one-day procession every year, a part symbolizing the whole. The basic principle of a *koah-hiu*ⁿ form as we have seen is equality through ceremonial exchange, source of social stability, which the partners strive for to ensure their prosperity. Besides, the performance of other *koah-hiu*ⁿ in the region could have strengthen this model and promoted that principle. In point of fact, many

organizational patterns within popular religion yearn for equality. In the case of Hsuehchia, this aspect counterbalances the loose symbolic hierarchy implied by the top role of Ciji gong and its main god Baosheng Dadi.

Conclusive remarks

The solidarity and voluntary interdependence of the communities forming the ritual territory of Hsuehchia are notable, and so are the connivance and trust among them (at least apparently, which is in any case difficult to shape and maintain at this scale and at this length of time). Observing Hsuehchia's communal ritual one can only remark that the agents are accustomed to their collective participation and show a great familiarity with the ritual processes and the role they have to play in it.

The communities' interrelations, the connection with Ciji gong and the place of the latter, are noteworthy, especially because Baosheng Dadi is not necessarily the main god of all the communities, and sometimes not even one of the gods they worship. The astonishing achievement of Ciji gong has been to mobilize at all levels, from the neighboring communities of the ritual territory to the state and sometimes foreigners, from affiliated to allied temples, to make them adhere, support and participate in the same ritual whose most highlighted protagonist is Baosheng Dadi.

The event reconnects with the past, that of the origin of the cult, the homeland, but also with the pioneers of the region: this is the strength of the *iat-cho* religious institution; it also makes sense of and unifies the place, not abstractly but physically, it operates a symbolically and socially meaningful territorialization: this is the power of the *koah-hiu*ⁿ religious institution. The case of Hsuehchia shows that Baosheng Dadi can both benefit from the linear diffusion of cults and be the divine and inclusive embodiment of a large scale territory, thanks to a procession. He becomes a reference god for all within the ritual period, a rallying great protector.

This can be achieved through his credibility and his prestige but mainly by giving space and position to other territorial deities and cult communities who practice at the horizontal level mutual and equal exchanges.

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