

CHINESE BUDDHIST VEGETARIAN HALLS
(ZHAITANG) IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THEIR
ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS



Show Ying Ruo

CHINESE BUDDHIST VEGETARIAN HALLS (ZHAITANG) IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THEIR ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS

Show Ying Ruo

Dr Show Ying Ruo was Visiting Fellow at NSC from July 2017 to June 2018. She received her PhD in Chinese Studies from National University of Singapore (2017) and MA from SOAS (2010). Her PhD thesis explored the vernacular expression and gendered narrative in Baojuan (Precious Scrolls), part of the Chinese religious corpus. She is interested in the historical trajectory of lay Buddhist movements and local configurations of religious ideas, ritual practices, and texts.

The ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS, formerly the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is an autonomous organization established in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are grouped under Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the **Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC)**, and the Singapore APEC Centre.

© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each Working Paper.

NSC Working Papers cannot be republished, reprinted, or reproduced in any format without the permission of the paper's author or authors.

ISSN: 2529-7287

Cover Image:

The Hall of Heavenly Peace (*Tian an tang* 天安堂), a vegetarian hall in Muar, Johor, Malaysia, Malaysia. Author's own.

The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper Series (WPS) is a peer-reviewed online publication established in 2010 to serve as an avenue for the swift publication and wide dissemination of research on historical interactions among the civilisations and societies of Asia, with particular emphasis on the links between Southeast Asia, India, and China. The Series highlights how Asian polities and societies have interacted over time through religious, cultural, artistic, and economic exchanges and diasporic networks.

Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute

30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang, Singapore 119614

TELEPHONE : (+65) 6870 4549

FAX : (+65) 6775 6264

WEB : <http://nsc.iseas.edu.sg>

FACEBOOK : <http://facebook.com/nalandasriwijayacentre>

Citations of this electronic publication should be made in the following manner:

Show Ying Ruo, Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian Halls (*zhaitang*) in Southeast Asia: Their Origins and Historical Implications, **Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper No 28** (Jul 2018).

NSC WPS Editors:

Andrea Acri

Helene Njoto

Assitant Editor:

Mark Heng

Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Editorial Committee:

Terence Chong

Andrea Acri

Lim Chen Sian

Kwa Chong Guan

Helene Njoto

Mark Heng

Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian Halls (*zhaitang*) in Southeast Asia: Their Origins and Historical Implications

Show Ying Ruo

ABSTRACT

Few people associate the Halls of Guanyin in Southeast Asia with the esoteric and syncretic Chinese religious group known as the (Great) Way of Former Heaven. More often than not, the Halls of Guanyin are vegetarian halls that were established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the group's respective Great Masters or resident-members. Although Masters were largely males, those halls were usually maintained by women. Understood in the context of the 'localised' lay Buddhist movement named 'Buddhism of the Former Heaven' (xiantian fojiao), the phenomenon of vegetarian halls allows us to explore diverse forms of Buddhist expression and their entrenchment in the organic religious environment of Southeast Asia. This working paper, intended as a preliminary investigation into the historical and social conditions of Chinese Buddhist vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia, will focus on their religious pursuits within Three Teachings tradition, the gender dimension, and their texts. The intersection of religiosity and secular welfare, gendered patterns, and immigrant history presented in this historical account of vegetarian halls are ways to understand Chinese temples in Southeast Asia in their various functions and vicissitudes.

Key words: vegetarian halls, Buddhism, Southeast Asia, Guanyin

PREAMBLE: WHAT IS A VEGETARIAN HALL?

Although a vegetarian hall in Southeast Asia is commonly referred to as a 'Buddhist hall' (*fotang* 佛堂) or a 'Hall of the Goddess of Mercy' (*Guanyin tang* 觀音堂), it is not the traditionally conceived Buddhist space that these monikers suggest. It is not merely a space for people to consume vegetarian food, even though vegetarianism is widely practiced by many Buddhists. Instead, Chinese vegetarian halls (*zhaitang* 齋堂) in Southeast Asia also double up as temples of the esoteric and secretly organised religion from China, the *Xiantian Dao* 先天道 or *Xiantian Dadao* 先天大道 (Way of Former Heaven; The Great Way of Former Heaven, thereafter 'the Great Way').¹ This particular Chinese religious

¹ Although a 'vegetarian hall' (*zhaitang*) primarily refers to a religious space for The Great Way of Former Heaven in the religious contexts of Singapore and Malaysia, elsewhere it is used in a more general sense. In Taiwan, this is a collective term referring to the religious space of the *Longhua jiao* 龍華教 (Dragon Flower Teaching), the *Jintong jiao* 金幢教 (Golden Flag Teaching), and the *Xiantian jiao* 先天教 group (Former Heaven Teaching), which were subsumed under the Vegetarian Teachings (*zhaijiao*). For a visual analysis of and introduction to vegetarian halls in Taiwan, see Zhang 2003. For further background reading on the homogenisation and diversification of lay religious group in China, see Chapter 7 in Seiwert and Ma

group, characterised by its syncretic nature, was systematically developed during the Ming dynasty in China (AD 1368–1644) in the Jiangxi and Sichuan region, and expanded its religious network from Mainland China to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and eventually to Nanyang (the South Seas) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The ‘Great Way’ is one of the many variations of the Chinese lay religious movements of the ‘White Lotus’—a term collectively coined by orthodox Chinese authorities since the Ming dynasty—whose designation is indeed political and problematic.² It also overlaps with groups of other religious affiliations in that their central supreme deity is the embodied female Eternal Venerable Mother (*Wusheng laomu* 無生老母, lit. ‘Unborn Primordial Mother’). As the central deity for many secret Chinese religious groups in the Ming and Qing periods, the Eternal Mother supersedes the Buddha Maitreya as the ultimate source of eschatological salvation. Scholars suggest that the Eternal Mother religion was a coherent version of heterodoxy in late imperial and early modern China (Shek and Noguchi 2004:241, 269).³ The eclectic and syncretic character of Chinese popular religious groups is well known and sometimes understood as a mixture of Daoist heathen elements and Buddhism (Groot 1903:155).

The Great Way’s followers claim to have inherited their religious lineage from the Caodong line of the Chan school of Buddhism (*chanzong* 禪宗), and its first six patriarchs remain identical with those of Chan Buddhism. The Indian monk Bodhidharma is regarded as the Great Way’s first patriarch, and his ancestral tablet can sometimes be seen enshrined in vegetarian halls.⁴ Vegetarian halls often have ancestral halls located next to or behind the main halls where they enshrine their ancestral tablets. These tablets are often carved with names of their patriarchs and the appellation ‘past patriarchs from the West Heaven and East Soil’ (*xitian dongtu lidai zushi* 西天東土歷代祖師). Written plaques carrying the phrase *Mingxing jianxin* 明心見性 (‘Enlightenment of the Mind and Revelation of True Nature’) and portraits of prominent Chan Masters are frequently juxtaposed next to these ancestral tablets as well. The presence of these elements in the Great Way’s ancestral halls substantiates the ancient connections between Buddhism in India, China, and subsequently Southeast Asia. Historically, it was believed that after the death of the sixth patriarch, the monk Hui Neng 慧能 (638–713), the Great Way was handed over to the ‘dwellings of fire’ (*huoju* 火居, clergy living in their own houses), which means that Buddhism was handed over to lay people (Topley 1963:367).

When Buddhism was handed over to the laity, it became subjected to and influenced by extensive cultural exchanges and vernacular traditions. As recorded in the

2003. The vegetarian hall is also known as the the ‘Hall of Dao/the Way’ (*daotang* 道堂), the ‘Fellowship of Goodness’ (*shanshe* 善社) (Shiga 2013:309), or ‘Vihara’ (*jingshe* 精舍). The Buddhist term Vihara (Bahasa Indonesia: Wihara) is the common way to refer to vegetarian halls in Indonesia, replacing its original name ‘Klenteng-klenteng Tionghoa’ during the New Order period (Salmon and Lombard 2003:10).

2 See ter Haar 1992; Naquin 1985:292–324; Shek and Noguchi 2004:241; Topley 2011:211; Wu 2016.

3 See Qing official Huang Yupian’s *Poxie xiangbian* 破邪詳辯 (A Detailed Refutation for the Destruction of Heterodoxies) (Huang 1883) and its annotation (Huang and Mizuho 1972) for an idea of the authority’s refutation of ‘evil teachings’ (*xiejiao*). For more information on the persecution of lay religious groups in late-imperial China, see Wu 2016.

4 Bodhidharma was a prominent figure in Chinese popular religious hagiographies of late-imperial China; see Eskildsen 2017:119–150.

religious manual of this group,⁵ after the Great Way was handed over to the dwellings of fire, it was headed by its Seventh Patriarch, the *Baima* (White Horse), helmed by Daoist Master Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–?) and Chan Buddhist Master Ma Daoyi 馬道一 (709–788).⁶ From then onwards, the religious current of the ‘Confucianised Dao’ (*rudao* 儒道) was initiated (*rudao chuqi* 儒道初起) (Ngai 2015:53–58). Ancestral tablets titled ‘Disciples of Confucianism in Dao (the Way) Cultivation’ (*rumen xiudao* 儒門修道, *rumen guiyi* 儒門皈依) are often seen in vegetarian halls. These tablets testify to how Confucianism exerted great influence in inspiring this religious movement.

Vegetarian halls served as residential religious establishments of the Great Way, in which resident-members practised sexual abstinence and adopted a vegetarian diet (Topley 1963:362–392). Lay residents of vegetarian halls maintained a household of lay Buddhist character: they did not shave their hair like other Buddhists did, they dressed in plainly coloured clothes, yet followed a strict vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism has since become a distinctive characteristic of several Chinese religious movements since the late Ming dynasty in China, as a precept of non-violence (Overmyer 1981:158). There has been speculation that it became a virtue out of necessity, since ordinary folk at that time could rarely eat meat (*ibid.*:158). However, the word *zhai* 齋 (‘vegetarian’) has a long history in the Chinese context, and probably stems from an early Indic context. In late Warring State texts, the word *zhai* is sometimes rendered as *qi* 齊. The latter word denotes a purification ritual, wherein one abstains from certain foods and alcohol (Campany 2015:323–325). In Brahmanical contexts in India, the phrase *poṣadha*, *upoṣadha* refers to the sacrifice performed on full moon and new moon days, when the celebrant performs this purification ritual. The word *zhai* in Chinese sources can be understood as a reinterpretation of the Indian *poṣadha* (*busa tang* 布薩堂), and refers to this periodically held, self-purifying ritual performed by monks and laity (*ibid.*:323–325). This ritual adheres to the Eight Precepts Observance (*baguan zhai* 八關齋) performed by Buddhist laity (*ibid.*:323–325). As such, in medieval China, the phrase *zhaitang* referred to the sacred place in lay households where Buddhists observed these religious precepts. It thus functioned as a kind of Abstinence Hall (*ibid.*:323–343). This practice of establishing a space to perform rituals within lay Buddhist households has continued from the late imperial period to contemporary times. Many links to the original early medieval traditions are still evident in the contemporary vegetarian hall today: its practices of vegetarianism and its function as a site of ritual purification are still adhered to as in residential lay Buddhist households. However, the contemporary *zhaitang* (Vegetarian Hall) linked to Chinese lay religious groups is also a more dynamic rendition of the Buddhist Abstinence Hall. It is not only designed as a sacred space for religious abstinence in lay households, but also as a space that constructs a sense of community.

Religious practices of the Great Way combined traits of esoteric Buddhism and Chan Buddhism. This combination of practices reveals an early connectivity between

5 See especially the important *Wuji chuanzong zhi* 無極傳宗志 (‘A Manual of Lineage Succession of the Primordial Boundless’) with its interesting illustrations. This manual was published in 1887, written by master *Xingkong* 性空. I have secured a copy of this work and intend to produce a translation in the future.

6 It is debatable whether the *Ma* here refer to Ma Danyang 馬丹陽 (1123–1181) or Ma Daoyi 馬道一 (709–788), since different lineages modified their own accounts concerning their religious origin (Ngai 2015:51–58). Here I refer to Ma Daoyi according to information collected in fieldwork in Malaysia and Singapore.

India, China, and Southeast Asia, and was the result of the premodern intra-Asian networks that characterised the spread of Buddhism. Cundi Bodhisattva from the tantric tradition was appropriated as Cundi Guanyin in vegetarian halls, a fusion significant in both China and Southeast Asia contexts. We see further evidence of tantric traces in vegetarian halls through epigraphic records from the Dayuan Buddhist Hall in Penang. These records stated that the *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī Sūtra* (*foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing*) in the temple was obtained from an *ācārya* (tantric religious preceptor) in the Guangdong Kaiyuan Temple (Franke 1982–1987:612; Lim and Loh 1984:433). Moreover, vegetarian nuns sometimes wore ‘Vairocana hats’ (*pilu mao* 毗盧帽) while conducting rituals and are familiar with gestures of *mudrā*, an adherence to traditional Buddhist practice.

Yet, although residents of the vegetarian halls largely regarded (or disguised) themselves as Mahāyāna Buddhists, and the majority of vegetarian halls today are members of Buddhist associations in their respective regions in Southeast Asia, the vegetarian hall as a religious space linked to popular religious groups is *sui generis* for having offered a unique glimpse into the early movements and dynamics of secret Chinese religions and their spread across various regions of Southeast Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Vegetarian halls have to be studied for their own distinctive configurations rather than be fitted into the seemingly universal and monolithic patterns of Chinese Buddhist spaces in Southeast Asia. The purpose of highlighting the distinction between vegetarian halls and other traditional Chinese Buddhist spaces in Southeast Asia is to observe the mobility of the lay Buddhist movement in the history of a diversified Southeast Asia, and call for a rethinking of the basic assumptions about the grand narrative of Buddhist history.

Lay Buddhism had usually been considered politically unorthodox and was constantly under suppression in China. This gave rise to a complex trans-border motivation to expand the connectivity to Southeast Asia, the culturally coined Nanyang (South Seas). By using the term ‘Southeast Asia’ in this article, I do not intend to suggest that there is an overarching historical identity across the region. Instead, I only use the term to conventionally designate countries within this specific geographical region. I will provide more contextualised backgrounds of individual regions of Southeast Asia in due course as part of a larger research project.

Besides Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and Esoteric Buddhism, Buddhism found in Nanyang employs religious symbols, contents, and ritualistic practices inherited from the ‘Three Teachings’ (Chinese: *sanjiao*; Bahasa Indonesia: *Tridharma*) tradition, which primarily refers to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in a Chinese religious context. ‘Lay Buddhism’ does not mean an unorganised and unsystematic form of religious expression. Some lay religious groups, especially the Great Way, are quite well-organised in their religious administration and well-integrated into the local social environment. Hence, ‘Lay Buddhism’ here refers to Buddhists’ lived experience, a largely underrepresented field in the history of Buddhism that differs greatly from monastic Buddhism and is entrenched in the organic religious environment of Southeast Asia. They resonate with a secular motivation of engaging religious beliefs whilst balancing personal wellbeing, as well as maintaining respective societal moral obligations. In this respect, vegetarian halls can both be considered as part of lay Buddhist establishments or as distinctively constructed Chinese popular religious establishments that eventually became Buddhicised. Both dimensions overlap and are complementary to each other.

Previous scholarship on vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia is extremely thin, partly because of a lack of ethnographic information on this rather complex socio-

religious phenomenon, and also because the available historical sources are biased and often stigmatise the associated religious groups. As a lay religious group from China with an esoteric nature, the Great Way has maintained a relatively low profile on the local religious scene. The most iconic and pioneering research on this religious group is from the anthropologist Marjorie Topley (1927–2010), who worked as a curator at the Raffles Museum during her residency in Singapore in the 1950s. She had access to various vegetarian halls and published very useful fieldwork information about the condition of this religious organisation in 1950s' and 1960s' Singapore (Topley 1954; 1963). In addition, source materials and official records from China provides us with fragmentary information on the historical background of secret religions in the Chinese cultural sphere. Epigraphic materials collected by Wolfgang Franke (Franke 1989; Franke and Chen 1982–1987; Franke, Salmon, and Siu 1988, 1997) give us an overview of some vegetarian halls in Malaysia and Indonesia. However, their studies of halls only focused on the Chinese temples whose patrons worshipped Guanyin, and did not mention the Great Way at all. On the other hand, anthropologists have recorded information on vegetarian halls in their field studies of Southeast Asia (Tan 2002:33–34; Hui 2011), but most of these studies did not associate vegetarian halls with secret Chinese religious groups. However, Kenneth Dean and Hue Guan Thye's survey of epigraphic documents from Chinese temples in Singapore has identified a few vegetarian halls that belonged to the Way of Former Heaven (Dean and Hue 2017). A similar acknowledgement has been made by the Malaysian scholar Loh Cheng Sun, who has dedicated a section of his work discussing Chinese religions in Peninsula Malaysia to 'the haired religious practitioners of the Way of Former Heaven' (*daifa xiuxing de xiantiandao* 帶髮修行的先天道) (Lim and Loh 1984:431–434).

After 1949, due to state persecution of heterodox religious groups, vegetarian halls and the activities of the Great Way began to peter out in China. The extant cases of vegetarian halls in Taiwan and Southeast Asia have therefore become important historical loci to trace how lay Buddhism has evolved over time. Scholars, with their different approaches to the subject, have provided useful studies, from exploring the diasporic proselytising routes of Chinese religions and examining the intersection between Buddhism and gender to analysing religious affiliations in local contexts. In a field where much is still unknown, this scholarship allows us to develop a more nuanced understanding and comparison of the network of vegetarian halls that remain in existence.

This paper attempts to offer an insight into the evolution of vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia by examining the origins and historical implications of these religious spaces. In the following sections, I analyse the religious network and philosophy of the Great Way, corresponding visual representations of religious cosmology, the gendered significance of vegetarian halls, and the corpus of texts relevant to the topic. The investigation of the spatial, visual, and textual significance of vegetarian halls will inform the central argument of this paper, which aims to situate vegetarian halls within a local religious context, thereby providing a basis to understand the history of this regional Buddhist network and the embedded religious and societal aspirations that animate connectivity in Southeast Asia.

ARTEFACT, LINEAGE, NETWORK: TRACES OF THE SPREAD OF A RELIGIOUS TRADITION

The 19th century saw a spread of a quickly growing Chinese diasporic community to Southeast Asia. In this time, the region's maritime network facilitated the spread of Buddhist ideas from China to various areas within the South China Sea. Although Buddhism reached these various countries around the same period, it is important to note that Buddhism in the Southeast Asian region should not be assumed to be a monolithic entity. Instead, it should be understood as a phenomenon dating back to ancient times and constituted by religious exchanges driven by agents of culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The 'syncretic' nature of Buddhism in Southeast Asia often points to the fact that an institutional, wholly monastic Buddhist temple was indeed a rarity at that time (Freedman and Topley 1961:8).

It was impossible for Buddhism to remain in its putatively 'pure' form for various reasons especially in its attempt to expand in the capitalist societies of late 19th-century Southeast Asia (Lim and Loh 1984:445). Firstly, from transient immigrants to settled communities, Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia rigorously negotiated their identity by forming their local organisations to cater for their needs in place. Chinese temples, in most cases, served as significant bases for sojourners to and from their home village in various regions of southeastern China, sustaining their mobility. They became places where the Chinese could assert their local influence in these new lands. Secondly, in Malaya, temples dated the earliest were usually established along river banks and were often tied to respective clan associations. For example, the significant Wai Hai Cheng Bio (*Yue haiqing miao*, 1826) was tied to the Teochew (*Chaozhou*) clan and Thian Hock Keng Temple (*Tianfu gong*, 1842) to the Hokkien (*Fujian*) clan; both are still standing in present-day Singapore. Chen Hoon Teng Temple (*Qingyun ting*), built in 1673, functioned as religious space, local administration office, and political centre in 17th-century Melaka, and was directly managed by a local *kapitan* (Chern 2009:65–73). The oldest temple in Penang, Kong Hock Kong Kwam Yim Teng (*Guangfu gong guanyin ting*), located on Jalan Masjid Keling (originally named the Street under Coconut Trees, *yejiao jie* 椰腳街), used to face the sea before urban development (*ibid.*:73). This situation not only suggests an important trace of the littoral mobility of the early immigrants,⁷ but also indicates the social function that Chinese temples fulfilled for those communities. Thirdly, the Chinese sea goddess, *Mazu* ('Empress of Heaven'; 'Saintly Mother'), the female deity most worshipped in Southeast Asia, was another facet of maritime intervention in the religious sphere.

The diversity of vegetarian halls across Southeast Asia was also due to the fact that, unlike the way in which the social dimension of most Chinese temples is structured, residents of various vegetarian halls were not traditionally organised by any kind of blood relationship or categorised by clans. The sense of community of vegetarian halls was often fostered through its members having similar religious commitments and the orientation of their respective religious lineages, as is evident in the mutual patronage and support of halls from same lineage. Vegetarian halls in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia formed inter-connected networks according to their respective lineages, which

⁷ Refer to the newly developed Geographic Information System database of the spatial distribution and historical relocation of Chinese temples in Singapore (National University of Singapore 2017).

were visually well-represented in the halls' epigraphic materials. This illustrates how vegetarian halls are unique members of Chinese temples in the local religious scene. The control of society through familial, clan, and monarchical authority was therefore subverted, leading to the replacement of the orthodox moral norm by an alternative 'socioethic', a situation that corresponded neatly with the heterodoxy of these lay religious groups in China (Shek and Noguchi 2004:269). Scholars also noted the social egalitarianism and eschatological concerns of these groups (Overmyer 1991:109; 1999:210), and it is debated whether or not these concerns are to be regarded as supportive of orthodox morality (Shek and Noguchi 2004:271–272). On the other hand, though influenced by maritime dynamics in terms of their expansion, vegetarian halls rarely took the officially recognised sea goddess Mazu as their patron deity.⁸ Instead, Guanyin ('Goddess of Mercy') was indisputably placed on the main shrine facing the religious symbol of Eternal Mother—a clear vase beneath a hanging oil lamp—and was referred to by followers of the Great Way as 'The Fire of Eternal Mother'. Such an unusual cosmological arrangement was in fact a subtle response to the religious cultivation and training of Daoist inner alchemy.

The earliest artefact found in the vegetarian halls of Malaya dates back to 1859: a plaque encribed with the words '[The] Light of Buddha Shines Universally' (*foguang puzhao* 佛光普照), found in Lin Fah San Guan Yin Tang (Guanyin Temple on the Linhua Mountain) in Kuching, Sarawak (Soo 2004:1).⁹

In Singapore, there is an important record of 1884:

Master Li Nanshan used to stay on Pasar Lane (Rochor Road). He made a living selling Chinese herbs; he is a Chinese physician. One day, a wealthy businessman Mr. Chen Liangcheng was brought to him to 'eat vegetarian' [*chizhai* 吃齋, to follow a vegetarian diet as other religious followers do]. Over a hundred years ago, in 1884, the abovementioned businessman Mr. Chen donated a piece of land to Master Li. Together with the effort of other devotees, they established The Hall of Guanyin.¹⁰

8 During my fieldwork in Penang, I came across a very rare example of a vegetarian hall in Machang Bubok, Bukit Mertajam, Penang. This temple is called The Temple of Mother Goddess from East of the Sea (*Haidong ma miao* 海東媽廟). 'Mother Goddess from East of the Sea', here referred to as Mazu, is affectionally called 'Ah Ma' by the locals. There are in fact two *Haidong ma* temples in Bukit Mertajam—both related to each other—founded in 1940 and 1960, respectively. These two temples are managed by vegetarian nuns of the Teochew dialect group. The original name of the 1940 temple was the Hall of Virtue and Goodness (*deshan tang* 德善堂), but has now been changed to the Temple of the Mother Goddess, and the 1960 temple was called the Pavilion of Merciful Clouds (*ciyun ge* 慈云閣). These two temples are very different from other vegetarian halls in terms of architecture, cosmological representation, lineage, and so on. The engagement of Mazu as their patron deity can be seen as a defining feature of these two temples, while the performing of spirit mediumship under the auspices of Mazu is intriguing. This state of affairs stands in contrast to James Watson's emphasis of Mazu as a symbol of territorial control and lineage power in China, and on how, for women, the worship of Mazu is usually defined using personal or familial terms (Overmyer 1991:107; Watson 1985:320–321).

9 A vegetarian hall in Penang *Jishan fotang* 濟善佛堂 was recorded to be established in 1857 while a vegetarian hall in Sungai Ladi, Bintan, has a plaque encribed in the year 1811 (the 16th year of the Jiaqing Emperor's reign). Both sources appear rather unreliable to me until further evidence can be found.

10 My own translation from the Chinese text in Chen 1997:20. Refer also to Dean and Hue 2017:737–748 for the same text.

The Hall of Guanyin mentioned in the above excerpt refers to the present-day Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple located on Waterloo Street, Singapore.¹¹ ‘Hood Cho’ is a dialect expression for *fozu* 佛祖, which literally means ‘Buddha’. ‘Buddha’ here refers specifically to the eighteen-armed Cundi Guanyin as venerated in all traditional vegetarian halls. It is also a term widely used by Peranakans (Straits Chinese) to refer to Guanyin. From this excerpt, we know that to ‘eat vegetarian’ is a marker of being initiated into the Great Way. After following a vegetarian diet for some time, newcomers will then formally seek a Master to learn the Great Way. Until today, the Hall of Guanyin still attracts a booming number of pilgrims and has become one of the most iconic Chinese temples in Singapore with strong financial power and prestige. Few people, however, are aware that Master Li Nanshan is at the same time an important figure and religious patriarch of the Great Way. He has attained the second highest rank of *Shidi* (‘Ten Places’)¹² in the religious administration of this particular group (Topley 1963:378–379), and is an important patriarch of the Nanshan branch in the Dongchu lineage of the Great Way (Chen 1997:20; Ngai 2015:486–495). Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple is one example of a very successful vegetarian hall. It was originally given the name *Tiande Tang* 天德堂 (Hall of Heavenly Virtue), and is one of the earliest vegetarian halls, dating back to 19th-century Singapore (Chen 1997:81; Dean and Hue 2017:737–739). Epigraphic materials show that *Tiande Tang* supported the establishments of other vegetarian halls in Malaysia (Franke and Chen 1982–1987:1462), and occupied a prominent position in the religious administration of the Great Way in Southeast Asia.

Pioneers of the Great Way ventured out from their homeland to Southeast Asia before the major waves of Chinese emigration had even begun, in the early 20th century. Most vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia were established in the late 19th century and early 20th century as a result of local demand. In 1871, under the order of the sect’s ‘Metal Patriarch’ (*jinzu* 金祖),¹³ an important Great Way leader with a ‘Ten Places’ rank, Zhang Dongchu 張東初 (1835–1879, originary of Zhejiang), ‘once again travelled across the sea, in order to lay the foundations of this religious establishment in the Siam region, and to enlighten the primordial seeds in various states’ (*zai du chongyang, kai xianyu zhi daochang, huage bang zhi yuanzhong* 再渡重洋, 開暹域之道場, 化各邦之原種) (Ngai 2015:486). This indicates that his trip was not the first endeavour to spread the Great Way in the region; the initial religious transfer is believed to have taken place before 1871, as evidenced by the earlier halls of this lineage established in Southeast Asia. During his trip to Siam (present-day Thailand), Zhang Dongchu brought along a group of followers who spoke in different dialects from various regions of China. They are said to be one of the very earliest batches

11 For a detailed study of this temple in terms of ritual, heritage, and the making of sacred space in the global city of Singapore, see Goh 2015.

12 *Shidi* is the second highest rank in the hierarchical ranking system of the Great Way. Together with the highest rank *wugong* 五公 (Five Lords), they were known as the ‘Ten Leaves and Five Petals’ (*shiye wuhua* 十葉五花). The maximum number of leaders with *Shidi* rank is ten, and only males can attain this rank. Other renditions of *Shidi* in subdivisions of the organisation include *Jiazhang* 家長 (Family Head) or *Tai Laoshi* 太老師 (Great Venerable Teacher) (Topley 1963:378–379).

13 One of the ‘Five Lords’ (*wu gong*) of the group, named after the five Chinese elements associated with directions: Metal (West), Wood (East), Water (Center), Fire (South), Earth (North). In accordance with the group’s ranking system with the ‘Five Lords’, China was divided into five major areas for administration (Topley 2011:223–224).

of trans-regional, trans-border Chinese immigrants who acted as active cultural agents in promoting modern education and social welfare in Nanyang.¹⁴ Today, the ancestral tablet of Zhang Dongchu is seen in most vegetarian halls of the Dongchu lineage in Southeast Asia (Figures 1 and 2). He is respectfully addressed as ‘Patriarch Dongchu’ (*Dongchu zu* 東初祖).

Fig 1. Portrait of Zhang Dongchu (far right) together with the ancestral tablets of other resident-members enshrined in the Hall of the Heavenly South (*Tian-nan fotang* 天南佛堂), Geylang, Singapore (Photo: author)



Fig 2. Ancestral tablet of Zhang Dongchu enshrined in Vihara Dhammasati (*Tiancheng fotang* 天誠佛堂), Medan (Photo: author)



14 Information from Dr Ong Seng Huat, ‘Qingmo minchu zhejiangren wu luodi nanyang de yingxiang’ 清末民初浙江人物落地南洋的影響 (‘The Cultural Influence of Zhejiang Immigrants in Nanyang, Late Qing to Early Republican Period’). Article to be published soon, draft obtained from author.

Besides the Nanshan (Southern Mountain) branch mentioned earlier, there is a Chaoyuan Cave (Cave of Saluting Dao/Lao Tzu) branch under the lineage of Dongchu. The Chaoyuan Cave derived its name from another Chaoyuan Cave in Luofu Mountain (*luofu shan chaoyuan dong* 羅浮山朝元洞) in Guangdong Province. It was built in 1873 by the second patriarch of the Dongchu lineage (Ngai 2015:487–490); the schism of the lineage happened around the same time.

It is noteworthy that a subdivision within the Chaoyuan branch developed in Tanglin in early 20th century Singapore. This particular division is said to be located on the *Donglong* 東隆/東龍 Mountain. ‘*Donglong*’ is literally translated as ‘Eastern Dragon’, and the second word relies on another different Chinese character of the same pronunciation to convey the meaning ‘prosperity in the East’. On the one hand, this appellation referred to Tanglin in Singapore (Savage and Yeoh 2013:372); on the other, it implied a hidden reference to Zhang Dongchu. From the oral records I have collected, it appears that followers of the Great Way generally believed that the development of the Great Way in Nanyang would remain prosperous (*bandao xinglong* 辦道興隆) following Zhang Dongchu’s endeavour to the region (Ong 2012; Seow 2013:132). The inscription of *Donglong shan longwing di* 東龍山龍王地 (‘Eastern Dragon Mountain, area of the Dragon King’) is seen in the courtyard of Tong Sian Tng temple (‘Hall of Common Goodness’) on present-day Devonshire Road, Singapore. This further implies a connection to the ‘Prosperity in the East’ within the region. An encribed couplet featuring the words *donglong* alongside *tongshan* provides us with evidence that the Tong Sian Tng temple belonged to the compound of the Eastern Dragon Mountain (Dean and Hue 2017:958, 961). It is quite true that Tong Sian Tng and its ‘sister halls’ in the adjacent area—Sian Tng Tng (Hall of Good Virtue) and Chek Sian Tng (Hall of Accumulated Goodness)—are founded by the same Master Ma Chunqing 馬純清 (Lin 1939:7–8; Dean and Hue 2017:958, 1250). Ma’s biographical sketch reads as follows:

Ma Chunqing, whose religious name was Daoquan 道權, came to Nanyang when he was 16 years old. His family originated from Heping Village, Chaoyang district, in Guangdong province. Ma used to stay in Nibong Tebal, Penang, where he worked in a sugarcane field for his uncle. He witnessed fights and slaughters amongst different secret societies, namely the Yifu 義福 association and Yixing 義興 association, and observed how human beings were not even regarded as worthy as straw. From then onwards, Ma felt a certain tiredness towards life (*sheng yanlixin* 生厭離心). He left his family (*chujia*) in the Village of Utmost Bliss when he was 18. He moved to Singapore when he was 24, and chose a pure land beneath a slightly heightened area to build the Tong Sian Tng temple. Buddha’s statues were constructed inside the temple. This led to the accumulation of external good affinity/karma (*shanyuan* 善緣).¹⁵

Today, Ma’s portraits are still clearly seen in the halls he established. There is another interesting example of a *Tongshan tang* in Penang (Lim and Loh 1984:432). This temple is now regarded as one that belongs to the *Wanquan tang* lineage, the line of Hidden Roseate Cloud (*cangxia*), but its founder nun was a disciple of Ma Chunqing from the Dongchu lineage.¹⁶ This explains the identical name. Traces of the Dongchu lineage can

¹⁵ My own translation from the Chinese text in Lin 1939:7–8.

¹⁶ For a biography of this founder nun of Hakka origin, Huang Baozhen 黃寶真 (1902–1966), refer to *Dapu tongxianghui* 1968:74.

also be seen today in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. In the Jade Emperor Pagoda (*yuhuang dian* 玉皇殿, original name Chùa Phước Hải 福海寺), there is a couplet enscribed with the words ‘Patriarch Dongchu paved the path of the Great Way in both China and foreign lands, under his orders followers were sent to foreign countries for the cultivation of the Way’ (*dongchu kaipi huayi dadao, zushi faling waiguo xiuxing* 東初開闢華夷大道, 祖師發令外國修行) (Ngai 2015:509–510). The content of this couplet is identical to information in the religious manual of the group that records the Dongchu lineage’s endeavour in Vietnam (*ibid.*:510). Vietnam is sometimes rendered as ‘Southern States’ (*nanbang*) in the religious manual (*ibid.*:510). A good number of vegetarian halls of the Dongchu lineage can also be spotted in different regions of Indonesia (predominantly in Medan, Jakarta and Bandung) according to my own field investigation. Today, some tombs attributed to the Eastern Dragon Mountain can still be seen in Bukit Brown Cemetery (Singapore, Figure 3), Saleng Chinese Cemetery (Johor, Malaysia), and Kwong Tong Cememetry (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia).

Fig 3. Tomb attributed to the Eastern Dragon Mountain as seen in Bukit Brown Cemetery. (Photo: Raymond Goh 2017)



From a broader spatial perspective, the continuity of this religious network’s expansion is clearly visible across Southeast Asia. Some stele inscriptions in vegetarian halls stress the expansion of a merciful and blessed expansion to the ‘south’ or ‘south seas’, relative to China being ‘north’. For example, from a stele inscription found in Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, we read, ‘Buddhist Dharma has spread through Jambudvipa (the human realm), moving from the West to the East, and from China to Southeast Asia: both regions have been transformed. ... In the heaven of the southern regions transformation manifests, in a Blessed Land people receive mercy (*nantian xianhua, fudi zemin* 南天顯化, 福地澤民)’ (Dean and Hue 2017:747). Similarly, from a couplet in Tong Sian Tng Temple (Hall of Common Goodness), we read: ‘In the boundless seas of the south, our mind is the only shore; there are routes to the heaven of the western regions, our aspiration and perseverance are the only ladder’ (*ibid.*:961). The spatial implication and directionality demarcating the ‘south’ as the intended new land is a consistent discourse in documents concerning the establishment of Chinese temples across Southeast Asia. Terms such as

the ‘Southern Direction’ (*nanfang*), ‘Southern Heaven’ (*nantian*), ‘Southern Mountain’ (*nanshan*), ‘Southern People’ (*nanren*), and ‘Southern State’ (*nanbang*) are prevalent as seen in the collection of couplets in many Chinese temples in Singapore, especially those established earlier (*ibid.*:6). In some cases, for instance, Wai Hai Ching Bio, established around 1826 in Singapore, enshrines both the Empress of Heaven and the High Emperor of Dark Heaven (*xuantian shangdi* 玄天上帝). This suggests an assertion of the power from both the northern and southern regions, since the Empress formally symbolised a southward direction while the High Emperor symbolised a northward one. The High Emperor of Dark Heaven is known as the Emperor of the North (*beidi*) (*ibid.*:xxxviii), possessing apparent authoritative power. It is therefore not surprising to see a plaque in this particular temple bequeathed by the Chinese Emperor Guangxu, dated 1898 (*ibid.*:3).

It was important to those establishing these Chinese temples that its location provided good *fengshui* (‘The Harmonising of Wind and Water’). The ideal setting had the temples facing the sea with a mountain in the background (*Bei shan mian hai* 背山面海). Even on Singapore, an island with an apparent dearth of mountainous features, temples were usually built on hill tops facing the sea, a river, or a bay. The importance of the mountain and the sea were subtly reflected in the names of the temples. For example, Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery (*lianshan shuanglin si*), built in 1898, took the name Lotus Mountain (*lianshan* 蓮山); Heng Shan Ting Temple (*hengshan ting*), built in 1828, took the name Everlasting Mountain (*hengshan* 恒山); Hong San See Temple (*fengshan si*), built in 1836, took the name Phoenix Mountain (*fengshan* 鳳山); Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple (*wanghai dabogong miao*) took the name Temple of Great Uncle (Dabogong, Chinese tutelary god) Overlooking the Sea (*wanghai* 望海) (Dean and Hue 2017:73, 225, 406, 1009). There was also the prominent Kek Lok Si (Temple of Supreme Bliss) in Penang, located in the (White) Crane Mountain (*heshan* 鶴山) facing the Black River (lit.; Malay: Ayer Itam). It is also one of the earliest established Buddhist temples in Malaysia (Chern 2009:80–91).

Similarly, the names of the vegetarian halls followed this Chinese geographical model. Besides the Eastern Dragon Mountain mentioned earlier, there was the Mountain of Endless Longevity (*wanshou shan* 萬壽山), where the Hall of Guanyin in Ban Siew San and the Hall of Completion of Kun (Female Dao) (*kuncheng tang* 堊成堂) were located. These two temples were founded in 1880 as temples of the same division (Dean and Hue 2017:725, 1309). There was also the vegetarian hall Purple Bamboo Grove (Zi Zhulin 紫竹林), which was located in the Mountain of Lotus Flower (*lianhua shan* 蓮花山) and named after the five wells (resembling lotus petals) that surrounded the temple.

Besides references to the mountain and the sea, sectarian vegetarian halls would also include villages and caves in their names. The ‘Village’ (*xiang* 鄉) is a likely allusion to the utmost sacred cosmology of the Eternal Mother religion, which is the ‘home village of the Complete Voidness’ (*zhenkong jiaxiang* 真空家鄉). The Village of Utmost Bliss (*jile xiang*) in Penang comprised two vegetarian halls, the Dayuan 大圓 and the Dasheng 大生 Temples. Both are located on present-day Macalister Road. A proposal to conserve this temple compound has been submitted recently for government review as part of efforts to preserve local heritage. Additionally, caves are geographically and historically a common trope for vegetarian halls, and provide an ancient link to the practices of Daoism. The Cave of Flying Roseate Cloud (*Feixia dong*) and the Cave of Worshipping Dao (*chaoyuan dong*) are two important caves of the Great Way, and are located in Guangdong Province. Vegetarian halls in Ipoh, Malaysia, inherited the act of naming their halls after caves, as Ipoh is famous for its myriad limestone caves (Seow 2013:74–75).

From the north to the south, mountains to seas, hills to rivers, early religious leaders found ways to establish themselves in Southeast Asia. How did they proceed? What motivated them? Was religiosity the only reason? How important was being Chinese as an identity marker for these leaders? These are the questions that emerge as we seek to understand the construction of this religious network in the 19th-century and 20th-century immigrants' communities.

In 1904, another Master of the sect Zhu Cunyuan 朱存元 travelled 'south' again from Guangdong with proselytising in mind. His travel route was as follows: *Shantou* 汕頭 (Teochew, China) → *shile* 實叻 (Singapore) → *jilong* 吉隆 (Kuala Lumpur) → *Jinbao* 金寶 (Kampar, Malaysia) → *baili* 白瀝 (Ipoh and Taiping, Malaysia) → Penang Island → *wanli dong* 萬里洞 (Belitung, Indonesia) → *Gujin* 古進 (Kuching, Malaysia) → *Kundian* 坤甸 (Pontianak, Indonesia) → *shankou yang* 山口洋 (Kota Sinkawang, Indonesia) → Seremban → Riau Islands → back to *shile* 實叻 (Singapore) → *renli* 仁里 (Medan, Indonesia) → back to Penang Island (Ngai 2015:444–445). Except for the short distance from Kuala Lumpur to Kampar, which he travelled by local train, he travelled the rest of the trans-border routes by boat (Ngai 2015:444–445). Along the routes, Zhu received generous donations from local followers of the Great Way, an indication of the abundant support that would be significant to the development of the Great Way in Southeast Asia. In 1905, Zhu first travelled to Siam from Penang. Displaying a keen curiosity, he was quite amazed at the myriad expressions and flourishing state of Buddhism in the region. He even wrote a Chinese poem to capture his travel experiences there, an extract of which follows below:

Along the harbour there are many Buddhist temples, monks row boats, and the boats are abundant in the river. Towering Buddhist stupas are everywhere, boats sailing in the misty background. Every family sponsors vegetarian meals for Buddha's disciples, every household chants the name of Buddha, pays homage to the *Tathāgata*. ... After visiting this area, I travelled to another harbour, I stopped by the Temple of Thunder Sound to visit the sacred remnants ... [it is said that] Monk Tang (*Xuanzang*) had travelled to this place in his pilgrimage route to West Heaven, his sacred footprints still remain on the Golden Stairs.¹⁷

Master Zhu spent a year in Siam before going back to Shantou. In 1911, the year of the Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命 in China, Zhu sent his favourite disciple Wei Jishan 魏集善 to set up an official religious establishment in Siam (Ngai 2015:447). Three vegetarian halls were eventually established: *Fuyang shantang* 復陽善堂 (The Virtuous Hall of Revitalisation of Yang Energy), which is located in present-day Bangkok; and the new *Fuyang shantang* and the new *Leiyin* 雷音 Temple (Temple of the Thunder Sound), which are located at Phra Phuttabat in Saraburi Province in Thailand (*ibid.*:445–446). The important religious lineage of the Great Way—specifically, its *Wanquan tang* 萬全堂 division (The Hall of Myriad Perfectness)—was thus successfully anchored in Thailand. The Great Way in Thailand was renamed 'Buddhism of the Former Heaven' (*xiantian fojiao* 先天佛教) in a later period. Their temples were commonly called 'Buddhist Halls' or 'Hall of Goodness' (*shantang*) (*ibid.*:449),¹⁸ but not 'vegetarian halls' as they were in

¹⁷ My own translation from the Chinese text in Ngai 2015:445–446.

¹⁸ Not to be confused with another specific religious institution in Southeast Asia with the same name. The Chinese Teochew Hall of Charity (*Chaozhou shantang* 潮州善堂) is tied to the Teochew community. This

other regions. Until 1966, eighty-six temples of the Great Way were recorded to have been established in Thailand (*ibid.*:449).

From the typical proselytising routes of the Great Way, we can see that the maritime network remained very much the main conduit in spreading this religion. Most vegetarian halls with important histories spread across the littoral regions of Southeast Asia, for example, Singapore, Vietnam, the Straits of Malacca, the Gulf of Thailand, along the South China Sea shores, and even farther to Manokwari in West Papua and Mauritius (*ibid.*:435, 441, 458). The interconnected, trans-border, and cross-cultural religious network of the Great Way has since generated a multidimensional and multidirectional flow of economic and religious reciprocation in Southeast Asia. As far as I know, some members of the Great Way, both men and women, used to be traders ('water guests', *shuike* 水客) across the South China Sea before they settled down in vegetarian halls (*Zhongshan tang* 2012:18). An epigraphical record from the Buddha Hall of Great Kindness (*Dashan fotang*), founded in 1889 and located in Taiping, Perak, is a perfect example of this economic reciprocation. Founders of this vegetarian hall have not only supported the establishment of three more temples in the Quanzhou prefecture of China, but have also provided sustained contribution to these temples ever since (Franke and Chen 1982–1987:1053). In addition, this inscription is written in the Southern Fujian vernacular prior to the Literary Revolution, which propagated Standard Mandarin as China's national language. The name of the month, September, is phonetically transcribed as *Shidian mo* 十點末 (*ibid.*:1053).

Belonging to the *Wanquan tang* lineage, the Feixia 飛霞 (Flying Roseate Clouds) branch capitalised on an expansion of business networks. This greatly contributed to making progress in proselyting. The Feixia branch promoted Chinese religious printing in the local scene and this effected a wider dissemination of their local influence. The Feixia lineage has been well known for being involved in charity work and for their relevance to a group of female Chinese immigrants, the *amahs*, more commonly known as the *majie* 媽姐. This group of female workers departed from their maternal home in Guangdong to venture to a new life in Nanyang in the late 19th century. In a group, they tied their hair up and took vows before the statue of Guanyin to remain unmarried for the rest of their life.¹⁹ Some of them lived together and bought land or houses on a profit-sharing basis, keeping them as homes to return to after their retirement. For them, vegetarian halls not only served as an organisation to accommodate their religious pursuits, but also as a communal welfare centre to cater for their unattached identity in a traditional Chinese patriarchal society. This significantly gendered phenomenon not only found an expression in the Feixia lineage, but persists throughout the proselytising effort of sectarian Masters of the Great Way.

The Feeha Cheng Seah Temple (*feixia jingshe* 飛霞精舍) is located on Jalan Ampas, Singapore, and is in close proximity to two other vegetarian halls, Tai Pei Yuan Temple (*Da Bei Yuan* 大悲院, the House of Great Compassion) and Chan Chor Min Tong

religious institution was formed in Chaoshan in early 20th century, its patron deity being the saint Song Dafeng (1039–?). The first Hall of Charity established in Singapore is Seu Teck Sian Tong Yiang Sin Sia (*xiude shantang yangxin she* 修德善堂養心社), founded in 1916. Refer to Lee Chee Hiang's 'Charity, Ritual and the Business Network of Teochew Charity Halls in Singapore' (Lee 2009:37–38).

19 In Chinese cultural spheres, Guanyin is a female deity that symbolises celibacy, and has a solid textual and social background (Show 2017; Yü 2001).

(*Chen Zuomian tang* 陳佐勉堂, the Hall of Chen Zuomian). A temple with the same name is also found in Kuala Lumpur, on Jalan Imbi. Both temples are vegetarian halls of the Feixia branch, established in the 1930s by a successful businessman of Guangdong origin, Mai Taikai 麥泰開 (1896–1962) (Figures 4 and 5). As a visionary figure with fine business acumen, Mai introduced the system of a board of directors to the administration of vegetarian halls and hired specialists to provide chanting training to his lay Buddhist followers. This effort trained followers of the Great Way to become ritual specialists, and enabled them to earn an income. Mai also owned a number of business enterprises in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. Among them were the famous *Shijie shuju* 世界書局 (World Bookstore), which is based in Hong Kong, the Victoria Confectionary & Store, and the Buddha-World (*foshijie* 佛世界) Vegetarian Restaurant that is based in Singapore (Ngai 2015:482–483). The religious followers of the Feixia lineage, including the abovementioned *amahs*, had been regular patrons of Mai's business network. This has helped to sustain and strengthen his trans-border religious-cum-business network in the region of Nanyang. During the interwar period of China, Mai found refuge in his Feixia lodge in Singapore until his death in 1962 (*ibid.*:480).

Figs 4–5. Fei Har Cheng Ser Temple in Kuala Lumpur. **Left:** Plaque endorsed by Mai Taikai. **Right:** Portrait of Mai Taikai (right), his uncle Mai Changtian (middle), and his mother Cen Changzhen (left). (Photos: author)



Vegetarian halls were affiliated with the Great Way and were founded by sectarian Masters from China. These Masters, as well as followers of vegetarian halls, were not strictly tied to any of the Three Teachings. Instead, they served as agents to promote a religion that combined all three ways, even though they appeared to be more Buddhist in nature. We have discussed some of the more significant and more visible lineages of the Great Way in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, including the *Dongchu* lineage (Nanshan and Cave Chaoyuan branch) and the *Wanquan tang* lineage (Feixia branch). However, these lineages are only the tip of the iceberg. The Great Way, with its various evolutions and schisms, has developed into a rather complex network of lineages, divisions, and branches. Each of these lineages would deserve a separate paper for clearer discussion but I cannot afford to elaborate further in this brief overview. Undiscussed lineages include the *Xihuan tang* 西華堂 (The Hall of Xihua) and the *Qianyuan tang* 乾元堂 (The Hall of Qianyuan). Undiscussed divisions and branches include the *Zixia dong* 紫霞洞 (Cave of the Purple Roseate Cloud), the *Cangxia dong* 藏霞洞 (Cave of the Hidden Roseate Cloud), and the

Guigen dao 歸根道 (Way of Reverting to the Root). Here I will present a preliminary sketch of the contours of such an underrepresented field of study as the complex manifestations of Buddhist expression in Southeast Asia. After these general introductory notes, I now turn to the sectarian cosmology of the Great Way and the corresponding visual representations of some important vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia.

AGENT OF THE THREE TEACHINGS

It has been recognised that the Chinese folk religion in Malaysia and Singapore is rather eclectic and polytheistic in nature (Tan 1985:1). This syncretic character developed not merely because of the mutual exposure of various spiritual systems but also as a response to chaotic social conditions (*ibid.*:1). The early modern 'redemptive society' inherited late imperial syncretism in terms of its universalism and self-transformation (Duara 2001:118–119); different religious patterns penetrated and permeated this syncretic system as it developed.

In Chinese cultural settings, the Three Teachings primarily refer to the traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Since Buddhism was originally foreign to China, Buddhism here refers specifically to Chinese Buddhism, i.e. the adapted, acculturated, and appropriated reinterpretation of Buddhism in China. In contrast, Daoism and Confucianism are both indigenous Chinese. Furthermore, when the Three Teachings spread to Southeast Asia, constant contestation and negotiation within the local religious scene was inevitable. The Chinese popular religion generally encompassed uncodified common lore, prophecies, local cults, and religious communities, selectively borrowing certain elements from Buddhism and Daoism (Seiwert and Ma 2003:161–162). One needs, therefore, to be cautious of trying to fit popular religious groups and movements into one of the ready-made boxes of Buddhism and Daoism, thereby representing them as unsophisticated versions of these traditions (*ibid.*:162–163). Indeed, any sectarian milieu must be understood in its fullness. This paper's positioning of vegetarian halls affiliated with popular religious groups as Buddhist vegetarian halls is the result of observing that regionally, in the contemporary period, the discourse of vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia and the process of their acculturation to the local Buddhist scene has become increasingly significant. This demonstrates a large variation from the social environment in which it first evolved in late imperial China. Therefore, the presence of Buddhist vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia suggests an active lay Buddhist network at play, which conceptually, functionally, and simultaneously accommodates, incorporates, and integrates religious ideas of popular religions and the Three Teachings.

The circulation of Chinese Buddhism in Southeast Asia gained momentum in the late 19th century. Different schools of Buddhism, such as Caodong 曹洞, Linji 臨濟, and Tiantai 天台, had been constantly competing for religious prestige while exerting cultural influence in the region. During the first few decades of the 20th century, Buddhist masters from China had chosen Malaya (Malaysia and Singapore before separation) as their foothold in expanding their religious network to Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and other regions of the South Seas. The prosperous development of a 'humanistic Buddhism', which was established by Taixu 太虛 and his disciples in the early 20th century and which urged a critical reform of Chinese Buddhism, has since attracted a huge number of followers in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia and Singapore. Taixu's successors, Master Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005) in Taiwan and Master Yanpei 演培 (1917–1996) in

Singapore, established a network of 'humanistic Buddhism,' one that spanned from China and Taiwan to Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other parts of Southeast Asia. The case of Southeast Asia, as a key region in the spread of such a maritime Buddhist network, indicates that there is a complex negotiation between the interaction of religious traditions, circulation of Buddhist ideas, self-cultivation, as well as Buddhist doctrinal practices and orthodox and unorthodox religious paradigms.

While seeking to maintain their own religious identity, followers of the Great Way, in their various efforts and expressions, simultaneously collaborated and maintained a constructive dialogue with other Buddhist organisations in the region. This is evidenced by plaques and couplets in the halls given by Buddhist associations in their respective areas. In a 1955 version of a circulated publication of the Great Way, a recorded anecdote indicates the existence of localised trans-religious communication. It is said that one of the Siam-based Masters of the Great Way approached a reputable and erudite monk to personally send him his authored work for his comments. The monk remarked indifferently, 'I do not know how to read books of Dao (the Way)' (*daoshu bu xiao kan* 道書不曉看). The Master asked for the reason, and the monk replied, 'Books of Dao (the Way) are obscure and difficult to comprehend; Buddhist *sūtras* are direct and easy to understand'. The Master therefore explained to him that 'once one comprehends the utmost wisdom, a hundred paths are open to you, the Three Teachings are merely expounding the same idea' (*yitong baiche, sanjiao tongli* 一通百徹, 三教同理). The monk seemed to agree subtly with his statement. After a few rounds of dialogue, the Master eventually gained an upper hand in this debate (Ngai 2015:454).

On the one hand, this record suggests a negotiation with Buddhism at the local level. On the other hand, it cautions us against the possible peril of a one-sided narrative. It is also an indication that the Great Way Masters were certainly motivated to transcend the boundaries of the Three Teachings in order to harmonise the three, both philosophically and practically. An informant of the Great Way told me about the highest religious ideal of their teaching: cultivation of Dao (the Way) through the teachings of the Qingwei School of Daoism (School of Pristine Simplicity), a cultivation of seeing the true nature of mind through the Caodong School of Buddhism (belonging to the Chan tradition), and the practice of living responsibly in a social world through the teachings of Confucianism. Here, the syncretic nature of their religious philosophy is apparent. In fact, employing Daoist practices to cultivate the physical body, Buddhist cosmology to uncover the true nature of mind, and Confucian ethics to engage social responsibility has been well adopted in the religious training of the Great Way.

The Great Way inherited this fusion from its predecessors from late imperial times, especially from the Teaching of Luo (*luojiao* 羅教). Luo Menghong (1442–1527), as a lay Buddhist himself, attracted boatmen from the coast to become his followers and proselytised his religious philosophy in the culmination of his work, the Five Volumes and Six Books (Nadeau 1990; Overmyer 1978:284–302; 1999:300–307). Luo's Five Volumes cited a variety of sources, including Confucian writing, the *Daode Jing* (Book of Dao), popular morality literature, and other Precious Scrolls (*baojuan*), while his teachings were derived from Chan and Pure Land doctrines and Buddhist *sūtras* (Diamond, Heart, *Nirvāṇa*, *Avatāmsaka*, and Platform *Sūtras* were referred to the most often; Kelley 1982:361). Today, a modified version of the Five Volumes and Six Books are still enshrined behind the central pillar of some vegetarian halls.

Traditionally, followers of the Great Way received training in meditation, ritualistic chanting, internal alchemy (*neidan*), including female alchemy, and social training, such as the management of the temple, from their respective Masters. They also underwent a series of examinations periodically in the main ancestral temple of the region to advance their position in the religious hierarchy. The examination was held by masters with prominent positions. One examinee would be tested by ten examiners on topics concerning scriptures, religious memorials for offerings, *mudrās* (*shouyin* 手印), and religious mantras (*koujue* 口訣). Some involved Daoist incantations, *fengshui*, medical knowledge, and so on. As one climbed the ranks, the content of the examinations increased in their difficulty and scope (*Zhongshan tang* 2012:14). From what I understand, two of the main temples for examination are currently based in Singapore and Vietnam. The Great Way in Vietnam was called ‘The Southern Division of Xiantian Dao Buddhism (*nanzong xiantian dao fojiao* 南宗先天道佛教),’ a term particularly eclectic in its combination of references to Buddhism and Daoism. This term unveils a link to the Southern School of Chan Buddhism in China and also to the evolution of the southern Theravāda Buddhist tradition (*nanchuan fojiao*) (Ngai 2015:504).

With regard to how Confucianism influenced the Great Way, it is clear to us that the movement of ‘Popular Confucianism’²⁰ in the early 20th century relied increasingly on the concepts of understanding the social relevance and everyday practices of Confucianism (Chen 2017:63–83). In the early decades of the 20th century, the Great Way lineage in Hong Kong actively incorporated the moral ethics of Confucianism in their religious direction in the midst of the waves of Popular Confucianism. More prominent contributions came from the Hong Kong Moral Society (*xianggang daode hui*), the Hall of Blessing and Prosperity (*fuqing tang* 福慶堂), and the Hall of Virtue and Prosperity (*shanqing tang* 善慶堂), which had branched out from the Great Way lineage in Guangdong (Yau and Ngai 2011:59–99). As with Southeast Asia, the movement of Popular Confucianism made an impact in the local religious scene, to the region’s inherently Confucianised spirit, as well as in diffused religious loci in areas like Vietnam. In the case of Vietnamese Buddhism, kings of the Lê Dynasty were ardent supporters of Buddhism and Confucianism. In 1698, Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu (1675–1725) introduced the idea of ‘Living as Confucian but loving as Buddhist’ (*Cư Nho mộ Thích* 居儒慕釋) as a replacement for the mantra ‘Living a worldly life and loving the Way’ (*Cư trần lạc đạo* 居塵樂道) that the former King Trần Nhân Tông (1258–1309) advocated. This inaugurated the age of ‘New Buddhism’ in Vietnamese history (Đức 2014:53–54).

The incorporation of Buddhist ideas, especially from Chan Buddhism, in the learning of Daoist internal alchemy practices has been prevalent in China. It is in fact a tradition that can be traced to an earlier period. Daoist Master Zhang Boduan (987–1082) integrated elements of Chan Buddhism to set forth the principle he described as a ‘dual cultivation of life and nature’ (*xingming shuangxiu* 性命雙修) (Capitanio 2015:128). This tradition continued and is now vividly portrayed in the religious philosophy of the Great Way and is practised by their followers. Bodhidharma has the reputation of being the master of immortality techniques, such as Embryonic Breathing as well as death anticipation and navigation (Eskildsen 2017:119–150).

20 ‘Popular Confucianism’ might denote references to the practices of Confucianism, both philosophically and religiously, by the popular masses, and also to the intervention and appropriation of popular religious groups to the Confucian tradition. See Clart 2003.

From a historical perspective, aside from being known as ‘The Great Way of Former Heaven’, this religious group has evolved under various names in order to evade the gaze of the authorities. Such names include the Azure Lotus Teaching (*qinglian jiao*) and the Way of Golden Elixir (*jindan dao*), and it is more broadly addressed in Taiwan as the Vegetarian Teachings (*zhaijiao*). The residences of members of the Great Way are called ‘vegetarian halls’ (*zhaitang*), where ‘zhai’ denotes a more concrete ‘cai’ 菜 (vegetable) in the Chinese rendition. Therefore, vegetarian halls are sometimes called *caitang* 菜堂, resident-members called *caiyou* (Vegetarian Friends), *caigu* (Vegetarian Women), or *caigong* (Vegetarian Men) (Groot 1903:200–203; Liu 2005). Yiguan Dao 一貫道 (Way of Pervading Unity), which developed later in Taiwan, is believed to have been branched out from the Great Way (Chen 2017:73), albeit as a more modern iteration with individual administration that differs from the traditional Great Way. Besides that, followers of Yiguan Dao do not practise Daoist alchemy as the followers of the Great Way traditionally do. Therefore, the many Halls of the Way (*daotang*) of the modern organisation of Yiguan Dao are not to be confused with the vegetarian halls of the Great Way. The notion of uniting the Three Teachings is embedded too in the religious ideas of Yiguan Dao, but notions of Christianity and Islam are also incorporated into this single faith (Duara 2001:117–119). An exemplary follower of Yiguan Dao would observe Confucian rites, uphold Daoist cultivation, and obey Buddhist disciplinary rules (*xing rumen zhi liyi, yong daojiao zhi gongfu, shou fojia zhi guijie* 行儒門之禮儀, 用道教之功夫, 守佛家之規戒) (Chen 2017:76).

In Singaporean and Malaysian cases, it is not uncommon to notice that residents of vegetarian halls are, at the same time, followers of the Great Way while proclaiming to be converted Buddhists. Many vegetarian halls have eventually been turned into Buddhist spaces and their traditions related to popular religions have been largely veiled. In Indonesia in the New Order period, the naming of these halls as ‘Vihara’ and the emphasis of the Buddhist elements have hastened the Buddhization process, which might reflect the need to adapt to strict legislation in Indonesia recognising only six official religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism more recently after the New Order).

In 2016, I interviewed a 93 year-old vegetarian nun of the Kor-tai (*gutai* 姑太)²¹ level in the sectarian hierarchy. She was based in Kedah, Malaysia, and belonged to a vegetarian hall that traditionally enshrined portraits of the Great Way masters. Most importantly, the portraits are placed side-by-side with the portrait of Master Xuyun 虛雲 (?–1959), a prominent Chan Buddhist monk of Fujian origins (Figure 6). This Kor-tai was at the same time a practitioner of the Great Way and a converted Buddhist. It is noteworthy that one of the adopted disciples of this Kor-tai later received a full ordination to become a Buddhist nun and participates actively in the promotion of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the local Buddhist scene. This is certainly not an isolated case. Since Mahāyāna Buddhism has become mainstream in the society of the Chinese popular religion in Malaysia, followers of the Great Way have definitely more or less been assimilated into these waves of reform.

21 Kor-tai (*gutai* 姑太) referred to vegetarian nuns of the *Bao-en* rank 保恩 (Protecting the Grace); it is also the highest rank a female can obtain in the Great Way religious administration (Topley 1963:362–392).

Fig 6. Portraits of Great Way Masters and Buddhist Monk Xuyun displayed in the Hall of Universal Virtue (*Pude tang* 普德堂). (Photo: author)



In a social context, the demarcation between Buddhism and the Great Way is not a strict one. Neither is there an established boundary between each of the Three Teachings. The vernacularisation of Buddhism in the local context has provided an impetus for the development of a wider spectrum of Buddhist dynamics that is distinctive from mainland Chinese Buddhism. Pioneers' efforts to produce meaning in the local Buddhist scene was sometimes revolutionary. For example, Master Xuyun 虛雲 (1840–1959), Master Yuanying 圓瑛 (1878–1953), Master Zhumo 竺摩 (1913–2002), Master Xuanhua 宣化 (1918–1995), Master Fanglian 芳蓮 (?–?), Master Jinxing 金星 (1913–1980), and Master Jinming 金明 (1914–1999) were certainly revolutionary in their proactive role in propagating Dharma in Nanyang and in the way they took on followers of the Great Way as their potential disciples. It is also not uncommon to spot traces of calligraphy works or paintings of Master Zhumo in many vegetarian halls in Malaysia. Master Zhumo established the Malay(si)a Buddhist Association in 1959 and the very first Malaysian Buddhist Institute in 1970. He is also honoured as the 'Father of Malaysian Buddhism'. Master Zhumo's fruitful effort in encouraging vegetarian nuns to send their adopted disciples to study in the Buddhist College accelerated the assimilation of vegetarian halls in Malaysia into the framework of traditional Buddhist temples (Toh and Shi 2010:171–181). Venerable nun Fanglian, who originated from Xiamen, a province in Fujian, is the founder of one such college, the Phor Tay (*puti* 菩提) School in Penang. The school was founded in 1935 with the objective of promoting Buddhist education and accommodating orphans (Chen 2004:156–157). It also housed a vegetarian hall in the school compound (Ooi 1992:79). Two disciples of Venerable Fanglian succeeded her as abbots after her passing. They were vegetarian nuns of the Great Way before they were officially ordained (Chen 2004:157). Since vegetarian nuns follow a vegetarian diet, practise celibacy, and stay in temples to assist with temple affairs, it is observed that vegetarian nuns are more widely accepted as Buddhist nuns in a local context regardless of whether they are ordained or not (Kuah-Pearce 2003:93–94, 116). In a 1940 publication on Singapore's history, it is recorded that, aside from over a hundred ordained monks and nuns, the unordained Buddhist followers were estimated to number over five thousand, and vegetarian halls were indisputably regarded as Buddhist temples (Guan 1940:924). This briefly sketches the fluidity and interdependence between the vegetarian popular religion and Buddhism. A parallel worth mentioning is that in

Taiwan, Buddhist monks also make the effort to promote Buddhist education equally to both genders. Master Jueli 覺力 (1881–1933) from Fujian was active in this regard in Taiwan. For instance, he established the Female Buddhist College and *saṅgha*, and organised seminars exercises for female disciples, in order to provide females with equal opportunity for enlightenment towards the Right Awakening (*shi yiqie nv zi tongqu zhengjue* 使一切女子同取正覺) (Su 2015:37–76). Moreover, since Taiwan is geographically close to Minnan, Fujian, most religious women in Taiwan at that time were vegetarian nuns of various lineages. With contributions from people like Master Jueli, many vegetarian nuns later received the *bhikkhunī* ordination and converted officially to Mahāyāna Buddhism (Li 2012:66–105; Su 2015:39).

In sum, the combination of the Three Teachings as a primary model for popular religious movements is apparent in the religious proselytising effort of the Great Way. In line with the movement of Popular Confucianism and Humanistic Buddhism, leaders of the Great Way found ways to express and strengthen the identity and mobility of their religion. Vegetarian halls are thus presented as an important intellectual arena that allows various Chinese religious traditions and ideas to make contact, interact, and integrate in the diverse region of Southeast Asia. Since immigrants from the Southeastern coast of China brought with them their own dialects, practices, and customs to Nanyang, it is worth exploring how the Great Way, as a relatively ‘new’ religion in the region, was able to fit in and contribute to the regional religious sphere. How did it establish itself as a new religious paradigm and adapt to the region well? How was the communicative process conceived locally and regionally?

Admittedly, it is always debatable whether it is possible to draw a clear distinction between monastic Buddhists and lay Buddhists from a historiographical point of view. Lay Buddhism activities can be too ambiguous to define and too random to make sense of. Buddhism in its myriad expressions is hardly a unified and monolithic religious tradition, and each expression is different and supplementary to the other. The religious practices of the Great Way provided its followers with an internally and externally self-cultivating and self-transforming manual, and assisted them in positioning themselves closer to a broadly perceived Buddhism yet managing to maintain their unique esoteric subjectivity. The Great Way also had apparent links to a stricter Buddhist tradition, which promoted the inner cultivation of mind in a way that echoed Chan Buddhism. At the same time, it calls upon a more syncretic external cultivation of body that can be traced back to Daoist ideals. The coordination between spiritual and physical cultivation subtly points to a seemingly encompassing, mutually connected and interpenetrating lay Buddhist network of religious practice in Southeast Asia. The interaction of the Three Teachings is thus an important characteristic in the establishment of the religious identity of vegetarian halls.

VISUAL EXPERIENCE AND GENDERED MEANING

Researching vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia requires an ability to be able to distinguish them amidst the many variations of Chinese temples. This is certainly not an easy task. However, there are some consistent characteristics shared by these halls that simplify the task of recognising them.

As mentioned earlier, the worship of the Eternal Mother and Guanyin suggests the significance of gender in vegetarian halls. This is by no means the only evidence we have

of the production of gendered meaning through the halls.²² Visually, both overt and covert symbols of the Eternal Mother and Guanyin are found in vegetarian halls. This is quite unlike the setup of a traditional Chinese temple, where statues of male gods who embody distinct authoritative characteristics are featured in the main shrine. Such gods might include the City God (*chenghuang*), the Emperor of Heaven (*yuhuang*), or the God of War (*Guandi*). However, we do not see these deities being worshipped much as main deities in traditional vegetarian halls. Instead, since religious lineage is important to Chinese popular religion, we see portraits of their leaders or ancestral tablets of past patriarchs or pioneers being placed in the halls. Although Masters of the Great Way are largely males, vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia have historically become a uniquely female space that is authentic and therefore significant in the exploration of the gender identity of female immigrants and their community. Through the study of epigraphy in Southeast Asia, it is understood that donors of 'Buddhist Halls' (*fotang*; or 'Buddha Halls') often comprised a rather large number of women. Furthermore, these halls were usually maintained by women (Franke and Chen 1982–1987:69). It has been observed that this is due not to the alleged fact, as often presumed by men, that women are more superstitious (Franke 1989:405). Rather, in Southeast Asia, as it tends to be elsewhere, women are subjected to suppression, exploitation, and ill-treatment to a much higher degree than men and also have to carry a much heavier burden as compared to men (*ibid.*:405). As a result, they tend to seek refuge in gender-neutral religious establishments.

Halls are typically arranged into masculine and feminine settings, where male and female residents are allocated to different but adjacent lodging places. These lodging places are referred to as the Hall of Heaven (*Qian tang* 乾堂) and the Hall of Earth (Kun Tang 坤堂), or as the Chye Tng Jantan (male vegetarian hall) and the Chye Tng Perempuan (female vegetarian hall) in the Peranakan (Straits Chinese) language (Chan 2002:7–8). Since vegetarian halls attracted a majority of female followers rather than their male counterparts, the Halls of Earth expanded rapidly. Vegetarian halls are, therefore, widely known as Buddhist nunneries that primarily house vegetarian nuns (*zhaigu an* 齋姑庵). Until today, vegetarian halls have remained by and large an exclusively female spaces where women have exerted unprecedented influence in maintaining the dynamics of the religious institution. Some vegetarian halls in Singapore and Malaysia have been transformed into nursing homes to house aged devotees and other unattached female immigrants. Since vegetarian halls have created a sense of community that is based on religious commitments rather than blood relationships, halls of the same lineage have maintained strong reciprocal interactions. Residents of vegetarian halls of the same lineage visited their 'sister halls' frequently and shared temporary lodging with needy residents. During religious festivals or ritual performances, they provided manpower for each other's activities (Tan and Tan 2002:9–11). This assistance was sometimes transnational. For example, vegetarian nuns from Medan would provide ritual assistance to the nuns who belonged to the hall in Kuching, while the hall in Kuching would often provide refuge to unattached women from Indonesia (*Zhongshan tang* 2012:12, 93). These unattached women would include child brides (*tongyang xi* 童養媳) from China or women who suffered domestic violence in the region (*Zhongshan tang* 2012:11–12).

22 For further elaboration on the significance of gender in vegetarian halls, refer to my forthcoming publication, 'A Localized Female Religious Space: A Case Study of Chinese Vegetarian Halls in Singapore and Malaysia' (in Chinese) (Show 2018).

The significance of gender is similarly reflected visually in many vegetarian halls. From the way that the halls themselves were named—Heaven (for the male rooms) and Earth (for the female rooms)—there appears to be a preexisting and stereotypical gender demarcation. However, one should take note of the fluidity of these terms in the context of Chinese ideology. Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang, North and South are not meant to be understood as a dualistic paradigm. Rather, they have interchangeable meanings and must be understood in terms of relative conceptual logic. For example, a wife might be considered *yin* to her husband but *yang* to her children (Smith 2015:14; Grant 2012:397). The framework of *Yin* denotes the Earth/Moon and Femininity, and presents a contrast to *Yang* of Heaven/Sun and Masculinity. However, they are invariably complementary, and the unity of opposites was always the cultural ideal (Smith 2015:13–14). Therefore, as the Halls of Earth house female residents and the Halls of Heaven house male residents, they are in fact viewed as being mutually complementary to each other. Terms such as Goodness (*shan*), Virtue (*de*), Heaven (*tian*), Universal (*pu*), Blessed Prosperity (*fu*), Longevity (*shou*), and Auspicious (*xiang*) are some common choices for hall names. They indicate the embedding of traditional Chinese moral values (see Figures 7, 8, and 9). As such, while visually we can see a clear boundary drawn between male and female in the way that the vegetarian halls are constructed, further analysis into the administration and social relevance of these halls paints a more nuanced picture of the fluidity of gender in these halls, especially in terms of how they empower(ed) women.

Fig 7. The Hall of Universal Virtue (*Pude tang* 普德堂), located in Simpang Empat, Kedah, Malaysia.

(Photo: author)



Fig 8. Hall of Transforming Goodness (*shanhua tang* 善化堂), located on Burma Road, Penang.
(Photo: author)



Fig 9. Hall of Common Goodness (*tongshan tang* 同善堂), located in Kampung Baru, Ayer Itam, Penang.
(Photo: author)



In the history of early immigrants to the region, vegetarian halls included female communities in their religious administration and provided education, welfare, and religious training to the needy and unattached immigrants. Celibacy was perceived as a form of transcendence from a secular familial pattern and thus a statement of flexibility and an assertion of one's own identity. In Guangdong, women preferred to remain celibate rather than be married off, so that they could support themselves at home or elsewhere with their own income (Topley 1954:53). Anthropologists have identified the construction of the patriarchal 'uterine family' as one of the reasons that led to the rising rate of female suicides (Wolf 1972; 1975:111–141). Entering a religious institution whilst not being fully ordained to 'leave the family' or to be 'retired from the world' (*pravrajya*, *chujia* 出家) was an eclectic manoeuvre and mediation of a woman's social identity. Vegetarian halls and the syncretic nature of their religious philosophy provided women with such flexibility. Life stories of females seeking refuge and alternatives to their life are abundant, as depicted in the Precious Scroll literature and also in certain historical records of the vegetarian halls. For instance, Kor Tai Chen Yonghong 陳永鴻 was recorded to have been conflicted about embarking on a personal religious quest and the burden of her family's expectation of her before becoming a vegetarian nun. However, she eventually became an active figure in introducing the Great Way to, and establishing vegetarian halls in, Thailand. Her enshrined gilded statue can still be seen in some halls in Thailand (Ngai 2015:451–452). Another vegetarian nun Cai Zhichan 蔡旨禪 (1900–1958), who was from Taiwan, was both a teacher of inner chambers (*shushi* 塾師)²³ and a poet. She first taught students in a vegetarian hall in Penghu County, and later in Zhanghua County; her lecture room was named the 'Pavilion of Equal Rights' (*pingquan xuan* 平權軒), a direct reference to the promotion of gender equality (Cai 2012:14–15). One of her poems informs readers of her motivation for leading a religious life:

In order to repay the debts of my parents, I devoted my life to religious training (to become Buddha's disciple) in solitude since I was sixteen years old. A Bodhi tree bears a Bodhi seed, a bright mirror is free from dust and does not require wiping. When I am searching for the flavour (true nature) of Chan, I found it to be similar to the flavour of the Way (Dao); after vegetable roots are consumed (to lead a simple vegetarian life), you will be able to uncover the root of wisdom. I ask myself if I am willing to lead this (religious) life in integrity just as an ice-pure heart in a jade pot;²⁴ I am truly confident of my commitment.²⁵

為報今生父母恩，年華二八守清門。菩提有樹堪成果，明鏡無塵莫試痕。禪味尋來通道味，菜根咬盡見靈根。撫躬自信玉壺裡，一片冰心可久存。

A talented vegetarian nun like Cai Zhichan demonstrates the way that religious women were empowered and given the potential to be independent in a patriarchal society. Vegetarian nuns are believed to have more commonly achieved financial independence

23 For studies on female teachers of inner chambers in late imperial China, refer to Ko 1995.

24 A literary allusion to a poem from the Tang dynasty written by Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–757): 'an ice-pure heart in a jade pot' (*yipian bingxin zai yuhu* 一片冰心在玉壺).

25 My own translation from the Chinese text in Cai 2012:65–66.

with greater ease than their married counterparts. They are trained to manage temple affairs, have the ability to earn an income by providing ritualistic services (such as death rituals) to devotees. Some nuns are even experts in *fengshui* and fortune telling. Portraits of prominent vegetarian nuns are spotted in halls managed by their disciples. For instance, in the Hall of Completion of Kun (Female Dao) (*kuncheng tang* 堃成堂) (Dean and Hue 2017:1310–1322) (Figure 10), the portrait of founder Zheng Jieyi 鄭節義 and second generation abbess Zhou Niangle 周娘樂 were displayed in the hall. For the latter, there is a couplet bearing the words: ‘The Great Way was attained from a young age, the authentic tradition was encountered in green field and handed down from masters’ (*nianshao wu dadao, lüye yu zhenhuan* 年少悟大道, 綠野遇真傳) (Figure 11).

Fig 10. Hall of Completion of Kun in the Mountain of Endless Longevity (*wanshou shan* 萬壽山), located in Telok Blangah, Singapore. (Photo: author)



Fig 11. Portrait of abbess displayed in the Hall of Completion of Kun (Female Dao), located in Telok Blangah, Singapore. (Photo: author)



Vegetarian halls provide important visual material for understanding the dynamics of Buddhist history in Southeast Asia. Traditional Chinese religious cosmology was often employed through the use of alchemical catalysts and practices to convey religious ideas. The most prominent example is the symbolical arrangement of ‘The Fire of Eternal Venerable Mother’ (*Laomu huo* 老母火). A lantern would be placed in the main hall above the offering table, in front of the altar of Guanyin, in vegetarian halls. The arrangement of ‘The Fire of Eternal Venerable Mother’ is another symbolic setting of the ‘Complete Voidness’ (*zhenkong* 真空). A vase filled with water would be placed beneath the lamp to convey the idea of ‘fire above water, water below fire’ (*shangli xia kan* 上離下坎), a reference to the inner alchemical practice of the human body (Ong 2013:51; Huang 2009:95–96). In the Daoist framework, the Eight Trigram cosmology can be divided into the Former Heaven arrangement and the Latter Heaven arrangement. In this case, the altar and the ‘Fire of Eternal Mother’ denote a segmentation of Former Heaven and Latter Heaven. Worshippers entering a vegetarian hall are human beings living in Latter Heaven (*houtian*) while the deity (Guanyin) resides in a pure Former Heaven (*xiantian*). Both parties are separated in this way but are also in fact interconnected with each other. If worshippers bypass the altar and Fire from the left or right side of the offering table, and pay homage directly to the deity with their backs facing the altar table, they are in fact transcending and transported from the Latter Heaven to the Former Heaven geographically and spiritually (Ong 2016:128–134) (Figure 12). However, no statues or pictorial representations of the Eternal Mother are used to signal a transcendence of the secular phase in the Dao (Way) of Former Heaven.

Fig 12. ‘The Fire of Eternal Venerable Mother’ with water vase beneath, in the Hall of Universal Virtue, Kedah, Malaysia. (Photo: author)



Plaques bearing inscriptions such as ‘*wuji tianzun*’ 無極天尊 (The Celestial Venerable of the Unlimitedness), and ‘*huiguang fanzhao*’ 迴光返照 (The Returned Radiance) are seen quite frequently in vegetarian halls. In line with Daoist alchemical practices, they are normally placed on higher ground in the halls. This placement is often also presumed to be an homage to the Eternal Mother. Plaques bearing the words ‘The Celestial Venerable of the Unlimitedness’ can be spotted too in the Hall of Transforming Goodness (*shanhua tang* 善化堂), which is located on present-day Burma Road, Penang. This temple was built by the family of a Hokkien clan secret society in Penang, the *Jiandehui* 建德會 (The Society of Building Virtue) (Lim and Loh 1984:433). Plaques bearing the phrase ‘*huiguan fanzhao*’ 迴觀返照 (looking back to contemplate one’s true nature) is yet another reference to Buddhist philosophy (Dean and Hue 2017:727, 736). Worshippers leaving vegetarian halls are reminded to look back and think of themselves as human beings in the presence of the Eternal Mother, the embodiment of Complete Voidness and Unlimitedness in the Former Heaven. The most common rendition of ‘*foguang puzhao*’ 佛光普照 (Light of Buddha Shining Universally) can be seen in almost all vegetarian halls as an homage paid to Buddha (Figures 13, 14, and 15).

Some plaques have even revealed the earlier functions of vegetarian halls, especially pertaining to their role in medical practice. During my fieldwork, I was told that some Masters of halls are medical practitioners or physicians. Some of them are skillful in Traditional Chinese Medicine and have attracted faithful followers. Master Li Nanshan, whom I have mentioned earlier, is a prime example. Another example is a woman who is attached to a vegetarian hall also being a Chinese physician who specialises in acupuncture (Topley 2011:165). In other cases, trustees of temples are doctors by profession; plaques presented by patients addressed to them can be seen in vegetarian halls too. For example, a plaque bearing the words ‘*yishu jingming*’ 醫術精明 (medical skills of refined clarity) in the Ban Siew San Guanyin Temple is addressed to its main trustee, Master Li Dejing (Dean and Hue 2017:734). The neighbourhoods surrounding these halls are therefore not only visited for religious reasons, but also for rather practical ones. This overlap is not unusual in the Buddhist tradition, as Buddha is historically identified as a healer, albeit a spiritual one, of all sentient beings. In Buddhist *sūtras*, Buddha is sometimes referred to as the ‘Great Healer King’ (大醫王). This tradition of healing can also be seen in the Chinese Precious Scroll (*baojuan*) literature. In the Precious Scroll of the Incense Mountain (*xiangshan baojuan* 香山寶卷), a text venerating Guanyin as the Chinese Princess Miaoshan, there is an obvious association with Buddha being the ‘Great Healer King’ (Show 2017:57–59). In vegetarian halls, plaques bearing the words ‘saving all sentient beings from suffering’ (*jiuji qunsheng* 救濟羣生), and the veneration of Hua To, a doctor from the Han dynasty who was widely credited with legendary powers of healing, are also seen (Comber 1958:72).

Fig 13. Plaque with the inscription ‘The Celestial Venerable of the Unlimitedness’ displayed in the Hall of the Great Born (*Dasheng fotang* 大生佛堂), located on Macalister Road, Penang, Malaysia. (Photo: author)



Fig 14. Plaque with the inscription ‘The Celestial Venerable of the Unlimitedness’ displayed in the Hall of Transforming Goodness, located in Penang. This plaque was placed on top of the altar facing ‘The Fire of Eternal Venerable Mother’. (Photo: author)



Fig 15. Plaque with the inscription ‘Light of Buddha Shining Universally’ displayed in the Hall of Heavenly Grace (Tian En Tang), Sungai Ladi, Bintan, Indonesia (Photo: author)



The architectural style of vegetarian halls is another distinct example of cultural hybridisation across the diverse Chinese communities of Nanyang, bearing specifically Teochew, Hokkien, Hainanese, Peranakan (Straits Chinese), and European traits. In being located near a Peranakan neighbourhood, Sian Teck Tng Temple on Cuppage Road in Singapore has had a long association with Peranakans (from River Valley Road, Killiney Road, Carnhill, and Emerald Hill) (Chan 2002:8). Members of Sian Teck Tng Temple are primarily Peranakan women, and we can identify aspects of Peranakan culture in the architecture, decoration, and furnishing of the temple (Dean and Hue 2017:1238–1250). I visited this temple during the Chinese Qingming Festival (Tomb-Sweeping Day), a day traditionally observed by the Chinese to commemorate their ancestors. The food offerings prepared were abundant, including some clearly traditional Peranakan dishes such as *buah keluak*. Vegetarian nuns who were known for their creative culinary skills often make vegetarian food a sumptuous treat. For example, Pan-Fried Eight Treasure Seeds (*babao zi* 八寶子)²⁶ and Wind-Blown Cookies (*fengchui bing* 風吹餅) are two of the much-loved dishes produced by the Hall of Abundant Goodness (*zhongshan tang* 眾善堂) in Kuching (Zhongshan tang 2012:36–38, 49–51).

An ancestral tablet is another common feature that can be used to identify vegetarian halls and their respective lineages. Tablets bearing the names of respective patriarchs can often be seen at the top level of the ancestral hall. During Chinese festivals like the Qingming Festival, food offerings will be prepared in a manner that resembles Chinese ancestral worship. However, in Buddhist temples, we do not see this very often.

²⁶ Seeds of a species of tree, original name *Cordia dichotoma*, commonly seen in coastal area of China and Southeast Asia, believed to be good for physical health if consumed.

In a Mahāyāna Buddhist temple, ancestral tablets are usually placed in the Hall of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (*dizang dian* 地藏殿), which tends to be behind the main hall. In the main hall of a traditional Buddhist temple in Southeast Asia, we do not see ‘The Fire of Eternal Venerable Mother’ and there is no Cundi Guanyin in the centre of altar. Instead, we see the Three Saints of the West of Pure Land Buddhism—Amitābha, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and Avalokiteśvara—enshrined. In a monastery of the Theravāda tradition, a simply dressed Buddha suffices as the feature of the main altar.

The visual examination of vegetarian halls gives us an opportunity to distinguish them from other Chinese temples in Southeast Asia. Vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia were usually founded in the late 19th century or in the first few decades of the 20th century, the heyday of the transmission of the Great Way. From temple arrangements, deities, plaques, couplets, inscriptions, and photographs displayed, we get a clearer idea of the background of the temple and the subtle (or sometimes lavish) portrayal of the Three Teachings. When vegetarian nuns are present, visitors are usually quite welcome to inquire of them more about the Great Way or the background of temple. I will now move from spatial and visual perspectives to examine textual information regarding vegetarian halls, in order to understand the multi-layered influences of popular religious movements in a regional setting.

CIRCULATION OF VERNACULAR TEXTUAL CORPORA

Chinese Precious Scrolls (*Baojuan* 寶卷) evolved as popular religious scriptures for lay followers in 15th- and 16th-century China. They are largely perceived to be responsible for the proliferation of Chinese secret religions. Written in alternating verse and prose, patriarchs of respective religions were venerated and eulogised in their Precious Scrolls. Maitreya (the Buddha of the Future) and the Eternal Mother were pictured as saviours of the world of beings bound to the cycle of rebirth. One of the earliest Precious Scrolls is dated 1430 (Overmyer 1999:51–91). Precious Scrolls are seen as crystallisations of vernacular Buddhist texts and Chinese lay religious traditions. Their antecedents might be linked to the ancient Buddhist vernacular tradition in China, such as Buddhist scripture-telling practices, transformative texts and performance, *sūtra* lectures and popular lectures since the Tang dynasty, Buddhist indigenous literature, and the ‘recorded sayings’ of Chan Buddhism in later periods (Mair 1989:9, 166; Overmyer 1999:9–50).

During the Ming dynasty, especially during the reign of the Wanli Emperor, Zhu Yijun (1563–1620), the printing of Precious Scrolls became another good deed to accumulate merit. This was due to the fact that Zhu Yijun’s mother, the Empress Dowager Xiaoding (1540–1614) was, as a devout Buddhist, donating generously towards the establishment of Buddhist temples and the printing of Buddhist-related texts. From the emperor’s concubines, maids, and eunuchs in the court, to common folk seeking to attain good fortune, members of society participated in the publishing and reprinting of Buddhist texts, including Precious Scrolls (Hong 1992:35; Zhou 1987:8–11). The close interaction between popular religious groups and the royal family also provided an impetus for the popularisation of this genre. As a result, a typical Precious Scroll often begins with a Dragon Plate glorifying the imperial court. This tradition is still seen in reprinted versions of Precious Scrolls that circulated in Southeast Asia (Figures 16 and 17). Opening and closing verses, hymns, and chanting rhymes are standard formats of the scrolls.

As mentioned earlier, the cosmologies of Chinese popular religions are largely associated with the Mother Goddess. Women and their needs are also given a prominent place in Precious Scroll literature (Overmyer 1981:166). From a socio-political point of view, it is generally believed that women in popular religions were given a relatively higher position compared to what they would have attained elsewhere in Chinese society (*ibid.*:166). Furthermore, the participants and followers of these religious groups have been largely female (Grant 1995:56; Naquin 2000:511). Therefore, the Precious Scrolls are believed to be non-sexist in tone (Overmyer 1991:109–110). This provided a sharp contrast to the way that society was governed. Like the *Tiandi Hui* (Association of Heaven and Earth), a largely male-dominated society (Overmyer 1981:166), many clan associations in Southeast Asia were traditionally male-centred. Yet, in most Chinese popular religious groups, women were offered opportunities to lead religious activities, such as supervising ritualistic events, engaging in planchette writing, or even leading military uprisings (Hong 1992:274–275; Overmyer 1991: 91–120; Zeng 1994). In a similar vein, women took part in the publishing and circulation of the Precious Scrolls (Li and Naquin 1988:152–153). This gave women a voice in defining the standard content of Precious Scroll literature. They were able to portray stories of goddesses, and female heroines who negotiated their personal salvation and familial identity. The empowerment of women could be understood as breaking down the traditional Chinese pattern of gender segregation (Scott 2005:59; Yang 1961:203). The dynamic intervention of female power in a largely patriarchal Chinese political pattern has thus provided an alternative to established understandings of the female experience and is a distinctive characteristic of popular religion groups from China.

Vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia became an important religious space in terms of their role in spreading Chinese Precious Scrolls literature and other morality texts affiliated with secret religions (Show 2017:275–285). Vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia had reprinted a substantial number of Precious Scrolls (*baojuan*), which remained in print even in the 1980s and are still in use today—a sign of the vitality of this textual corpora. The printing and publishing of sectarian morality books and precious scrolls of the Great Way began in Guangzhou, continued in Hong Kong, then spread to Southeast Asia (Yau 2015:187–232). Wenzaizi Morality Bookstore (*wenzaizi shanshu fang* 文在茲善書坊) in Guangzhou was one of the fulcrums of this movement. The founder of Wenzaizi, Mr. Tan Deyuan 談德元, is an outstanding disciple of the Great Way and acted as a pioneer in the modern publishing of morality books and scriptures affiliated with secret religions (*ibid.*:194–195).

From available textual evidence, the printing of Precious Scrolls in the vegetarian halls of Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand began in the late 19th century and lasted until the early 1980s. Printing activities and the transmission of religious manuals stimulated interaction between halls and textually articulated their religious lineage and historical links. In Southeast Asia, we find that the Precious Scrolls were printed by the Great Way and also by the Teaching of Complete Voidness (*zhenkong jiao* 真空教) (Comber 1958:87–89; Lim and Loh 1984:438–440).²⁷ The recitation of Precious Scrolls in the Teaching of Complete Voidness can still be seen in Malaysia and Singapore today, and it is an important procedure in the periodically held religious rituals.

27 For an introduction to the Teaching of Complete Voidness and its spread to Malaysia and Singapore, see Lo 1962 and Ngoi 2016:129–143.

Figs 16–17. The Precious Scroll of the Fifth Patriarch (of Chan Buddhism) Living on Yellow Plum Mountain (*wuzu huangmei baojuan* 五祖黃梅寶卷), circulated in Malaysia. Date of printing unknown. From the private collection of Dr. Ong Seng Huat.²⁸ (Photo: author)



Now, we take a look at some editions of the Precious Scrolls that were printed, reprinted, or circulated by vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia. The Precious Scroll of Snow Mountain (*xueshan baojuan*) was reprinted in 1957 by the Hall of Revitalising Yang Energy (*Fuyang shantang*) in Thailand. The original woodblock plate is said to be from Chaoyuan Cave of Lufo Mountain—an important printing hub of the Great Way that was located in Huizhou in Guangdong Province. The printing house is called Shanghai Printing House and located in Thonburi (*tun fu*), Thailand. The Precious Scroll of King Liang (*lianghua baojuan*) was reprinted in 1960 in the capital of Thailand (*tai jing*) by Precious Literature Publishing House (*baowen yinwuju* 寶文印務局). Other Precious Scrolls published by the Precious Literature Publishing House include the Precious Scroll of The Third Reincarnation of Maudgalyāyana (*mulian sanshi baojuan*) (1956), the Precious Scroll of the Fifth Patriarch Huang Mei (*wuzu huang mei baojuan*) (1960), the Precious Scrolls of Prolonged Longevity (*yanshou baojuan*) (1960), and another version of the Precious Scroll of Snow Mountain (1960) (Cui 2015:51). The Precious Scroll of the Gentleman Bai (*Bai Shilang baojuan*) (1958) was printed in the Buddhist Hall of Good Virtue (*shande fotang*) located in Bangkok (Cui 2015:51). The Thai currency symbol *zhu* 銖 marked the donors' contribution in each Precious Scroll, an indication of a localised printing process (Figures 18, 19, and 20).

²⁸ Dr. Ong generously showed me his collection when I visited him a few times in 2015 and 2016.

Figs 18–19. **Left:** Precious Scroll of the Gentleman Bai, printed in Thailand in the 1950s. From the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. **Right:** Precious Scroll of Snow Mountain, printed in Thailand in the 1950s. (Photo: Charles Wong)

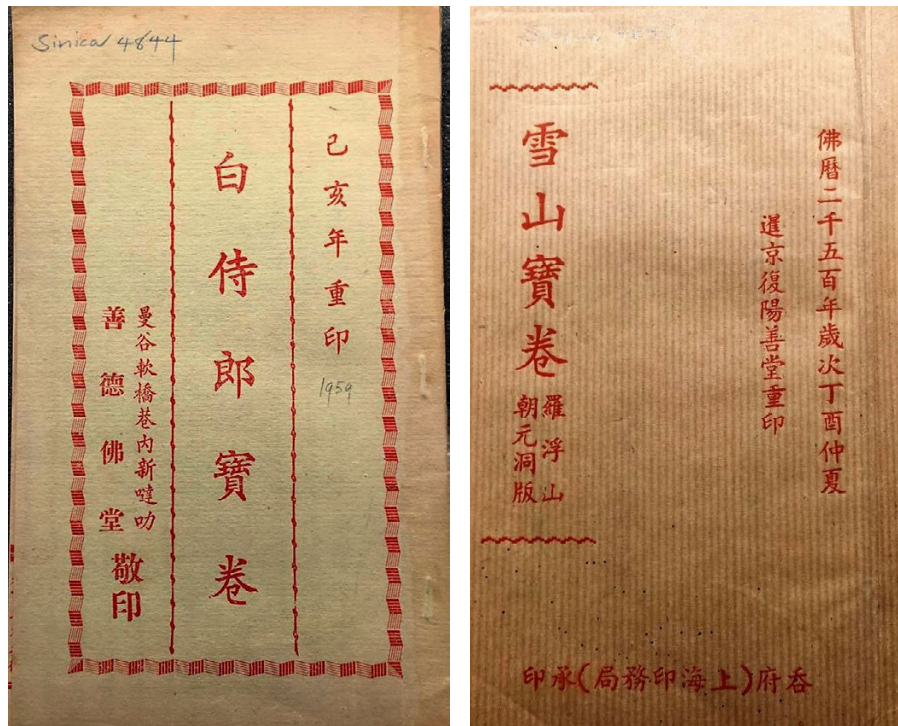
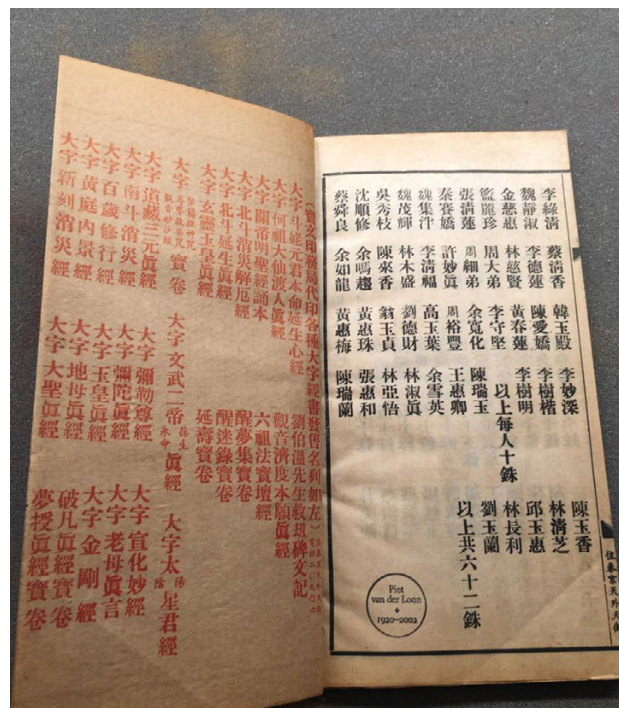


Fig 20. Colophon of Precious Scroll with sponsors' names and amounts donated to the printing, with currency in Thai baht (*zhu* 銖). (Photo: Charles Wong)



As for Precious Scrolls printed and circulated in Singapore and Malaysia, let us first look at the Precious Scroll of Bodhidharma (*damo baojuan*). Two editions of this Precious Scroll were obtained from the Village of Utmost Happiness, Penang, which were printed in 1974 and 1979, respectively (Figures 21 and 22). Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chan Buddhism in China, was venerated in the text. The direct link of vegetarian halls to Chan Buddhism is quite clear here. In the 1979 edition, the printing woodblock plate was said to be from ‘the dark region/state’ (*an bang* 暗邦). The dark region derived its name from being the centre of power of secret societies in Malaysia. The origin of this scroll in the dark region indicates how there was an interdependency between the Great Way and other secret associations in the region.²⁹ The ‘dark region’ was later renamed ‘peaceful region’ (*an bang* 安邦), and the latter name is used to this day (Cheu 1996:55). The contents of these two Precious Scrolls follows the same vein as the discourse of the Three Teachings, insofar that they are relevant to the cosmology of the Great Way. There are in fact many versions of scriptures concerning Bodhidharma (Figure 23). The sacredness of these Precious Scrolls is made evident in the reminder that appears on the cover page: ‘do not discard [the Precious Scroll] when you have finished reading [it], circulate it to other people, then you will be able to accumulate boundless merit’. On the cover pages of other esoteric religious manuals, it is not uncommon to see warnings such as ‘do not read until you are told to do so, reading [the manual] without approval will result in divine retribution’ (Ong 2013:48).

Figs 21– 22. Left: 1979 edition of the Precious Scroll of Bodhidharma, circulated in vegetarian halls in Malaysia. From the private collection of Dr. Ong Seng Huat. **Right:** 1974 edition of the Precious Scroll of Bodhidharma, circulated in vegetarian halls in Malaysia. From the private collection of Dr. Ong Seng Huat. (Photo: author)

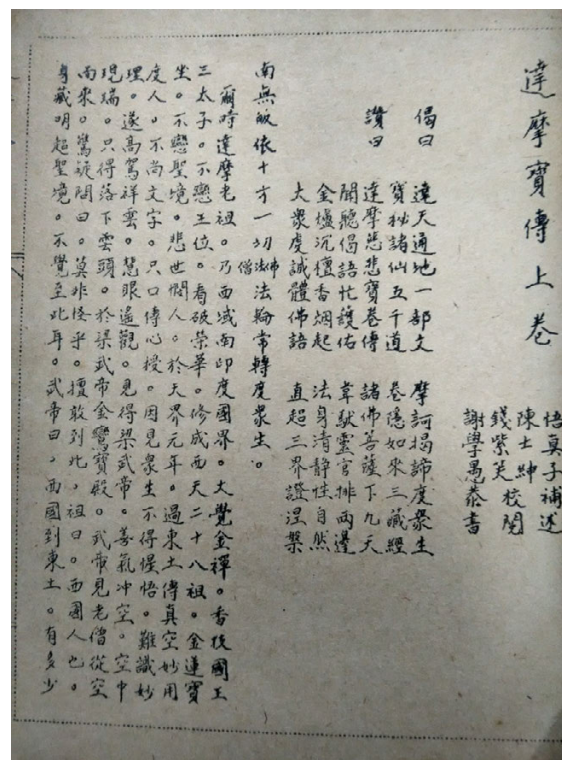


29 On historical interactions between the Great Way and other secret society organisations, see Zhou 1993:107–113.

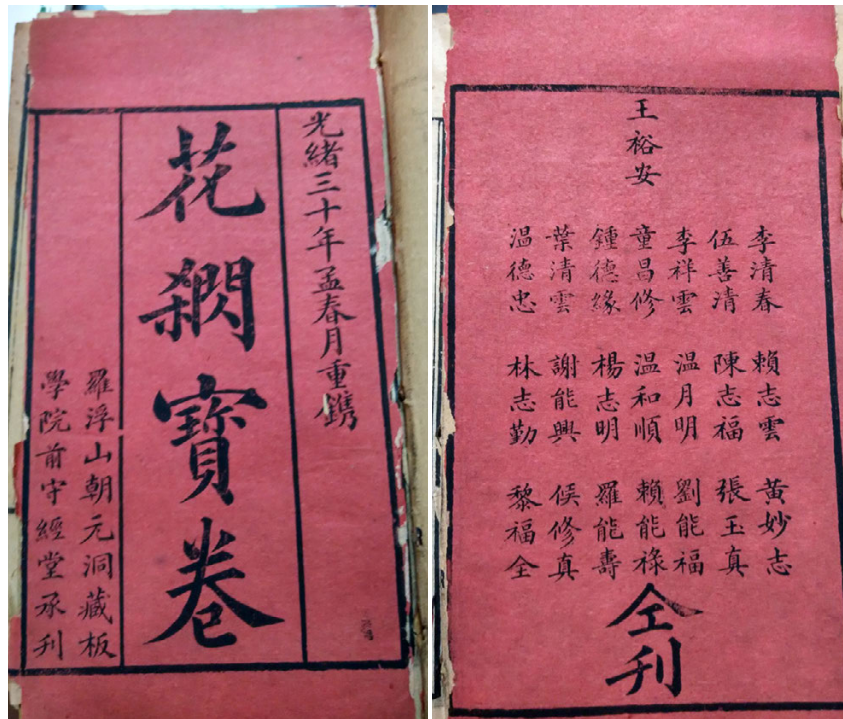
The woodblock plates of most Precious Scrolls found in Southeast Asia are said to be from Luofu Mountain's Chaoyuan Cave. Some are reprinted under the order of Yu'an Shanren 裕安山人 (Mountain Hermit Named Yu'an), both indicating the significant influence of the Dongchu lineage (Figures 23, 24, and 25). Wang Yu'an is the 19th Patriarch of the Dongchu lineage. An ancestral tablet with his name can be seen in vegetarian halls of the Dongchu lineage. Moreover, on prefaces or colophons of some scrolls, we often observe that the vegetarian halls and the founders of those halls are listed as the sponsors of the printing of the scrolls, such as Ma Chunqing and the Hall of Common Goodness.

Fig 23. The Sacred Biography of Bodhidharma (damo baojuan 達摩寶傳), circulated in vegetarian halls in Malaysia, text supplemented by Wuzhenzi 悟真子. From the private collection of Dr. Ong Seng Huat.

(Photo: author)



Figs 24–25. Left: Precious Scroll of the Flower Taboo (*huasha baojuan* 花網寶卷), published in 1904. From the private collection of Dr. Ong Seng Huat. Right: Wang Yu'an's name written on colophon on the aforementioned Precious Scroll of the Flower Taboo. From the private collection of Dr. Ong Seng Huat. (Photo: author)



Some of the other Precious Scrolls found circulating in Malaysia include the Precious Scroll of Twelve Great Awakening (*shi er yuanjue*), the Precious Scroll of Woman Huang (*huang shi nü baojuan*), and the Precious Scroll of Xiu Nü (*xiu nü baojuan*) (Ong 2013:54–55; Show 2017:279–280). They assert the importance of female followers of the Great Way. These Precious Scrolls more often than not elaborated on the conflict that women faced between achieving their personal salvation and fulfilling their familial expectations, a thematic vein that runs through the Precious Scroll genre since the Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain. These texts tend to portray a sustained rhetoric of negotiation between female religiosity and domestic resistance, before demonstrating how these female protagonists find ways to express their identity or mediate between their assigned gendered roles and unveiling a sense of female agency (Bryson 2015:623–646, Grant 1995:29–58). Historically, the Precious Scroll genre was considered literature that provided important didactic texts for non-elite readers and religious practitioners. They were a way for women to intervene and participate in negotiating the functionality of this genre, and enabled them to shape their marginalised social identity. Women were also important audiences and actors in the performance of reciting Precious Scrolls (Bererzkin 2011:353–359; Johnson 1995:59–68; Sawada 1975: 85-86; Yü 2001).

Moreover, the compilation and practice of the 'Eight Volumes of Dragon Scriptures' in Malaysia has indicated the localised character of the religious dynamic and the continued significance of gender to vegetarian halls. The Eight Volumes of Dragon Scriptures (*babu longjing* 八部龍經) comprise the famous 'Five Volumes, Six Books' (*wubu liuce* 五部六冊) written by Luo Menghong, with members of the Great Way adding two

more precious scrolls to the list to make it eight volumes of scriptures. I was told that the Village of Utmost Happiness in Penang used to store a copy of all Eight Volumes. They were placed on the tallest central pillar of the temple's structure as an insider's secret for those who were of the same lineage, and this was not to be exposed to outsiders without them being initiated into their group first. As such result, I did not have access to the text. However, Ms. Seow Wai Kin, a former resident in a vegetarian hall in Tapah, Perak, Malaysia, has provided extremely useful information regarding the Eight Volumes of Dragon Scriptures stored in her hall, the Temple of Awakening the Ordinary (*Juefan si* 覺凡寺). As a lineage of a particular Hakka (*kejia* 客家) influence, this division of the Great Way originates from Meixian, Guangdong, where there is an intrinsic historical link to the Cave Chaoyuan lineage (Seow 2013:101–102). The founder of this lineage is a nun called Li Xiangyun 李祥雲. Vegetarian halls of this lineage are abundant in Indonesia, and Li's ancestral tablet is enshrined in Jakarta (Figure 26).

Fig 26. Ancestral tablet and portraits of Li Xiangyun and her disciples. Photo taken in San Fuk Tong (Vihara Sasana Dipa), Jakarta. (Photo: author)

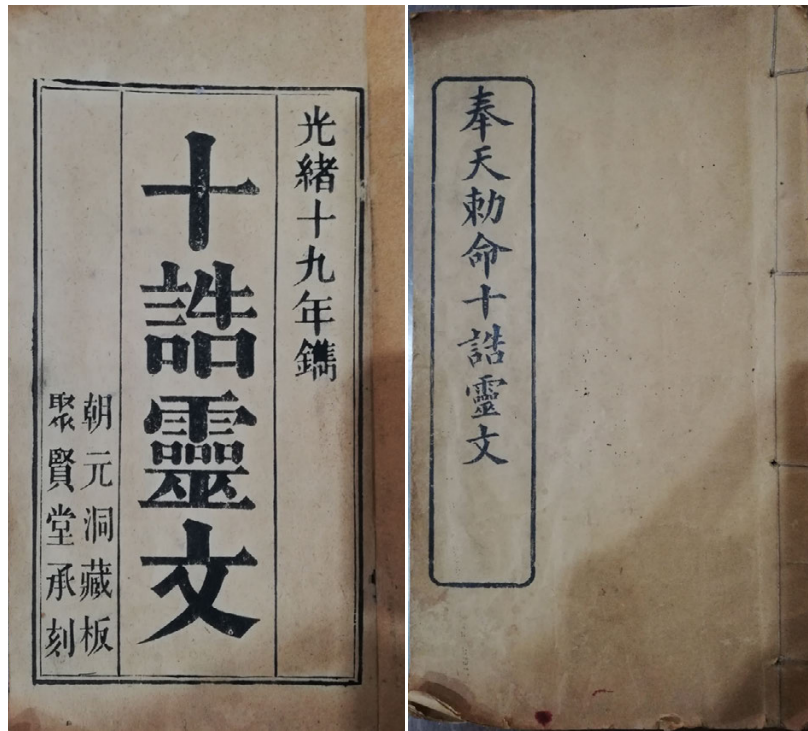


Besides providing to clients regionalised Buddhist funerary rites, the *Xianghua foshi* 香花佛事 (Incense and flower Buddhist rites),³⁰ this lineage of vegetarian halls do not call their temple *zhaitang* (vegetarian halls) like the other lineages do. They prefer to be called *an tang* 庵堂 (convent) instead. Their vegetarian nuns are called *zhaijie* (vegetarian sisters) and are not referred to as *zhaigu* (vegetarian aunt/nuns) (Seow 2013).

According to Seow (2013), the Eight Volumes are used for divination purposes in the temple. The normal procedures for divination are as follows: after reciting one volume, a piece of plain paper will be inserted between random pages of the volume. Texts in the selected pages will then be explained and expounded to devotees to answer their queries (*ibid.*:94–95). The term ‘Dragon Scripture’ implies inner female alchemy. In Daoism, female menstrual blood is known as ‘Red Dragon’ while male semen is known as ‘White Tiger’. The phrase ‘beheading the red dragon’ (*zhan chilong* 斬赤龍) means to cut off menstrual flow permanently to transform the basis of women’s energy so that they will not lose their original pneuma (*yuanqi* 元氣) (Pregadio 2013:1219–1220). The word ‘dragon’ here has been historically endowed with the meaning of purity (*qing* 清). This purity is reflected in the use of the Eight Volumes of Dragon Scriptures. It is observed that people who are not consistent vegetarians are not to be given access to the Eight Volumes of Dragon Scriptures. If a non-vegetarian reads any of the Eight Volumes, their body will turn impure (*zhuo* 濁) and will not be suitable for the cultivation of energy. Originally a Buddhist construct, the symbolic representations of purity and impurity can also be seen in vegetarian halls. For instances, plaques bearing the phrase ‘a pure mind with less desire’ (*qingxin guayu* 清心寡慾) points to self-cultivation for reducing carnal desires and maintaining an undeluded mind, while ‘purifying the unsettling fire of the mind’ (*qing xinhuo* 清心火) points to a more Daoist idea of practical alchemical activity (Figure 27). According to my informants and the oral records that I have collected, one particularly important scripture that is directly relevant to female followers of the Great Way is the *Shigao lingwen* 十誥靈文 (Ten Sacred Admonitions) (Ong 2013:47–58), which is still being circulated in vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia. This text is sacred and ritualistic in content, and only insiders who have attained a certain level of religious cultivation will be able to gain access to it. For female followers, that point is when they have ‘beheaded their red dragon’. I have, however, managed to take a look at it (Figures 27 and 28).

30 Incense and flower Buddhist rites are a Buddhist funerary ritual tradition popular in southeastern China. The performers of this rite are incense and flower monks (*xianghua heshang*) and also vegetarian women (*zhaigu*); see Tam 2012:238–260.

Figs 27–28. Cover pages of the Ten Sacred Admonitions (*Shigao lingwen*), collected in the Hall of Virtuous Lotus (*shanlian tang*), Johor. (Photo: author)



The printing of other religious manuals and morality books has also positioned Southeast Asia as a thriving region of Chinese religious printing. In the preceding discussion, I have mentioned the vegetarian hall Feeha Cheng Seah Temple and the corresponding religious network of the Feixia (Flying Roseate Cloud) lineage. A lesser known fact is that this lineage has a fine tradition of printing Chinese religious texts and books. Feeha Hall donated a substantial number of more than 300 metal or wood-carved blocks of printed scriptures, religious manuals, divination slips, and advertisement of food joints to the National Library, Singapore. Most of them were used for printing services in Singapore. The collection is currently in the Donors Gallery (Yau 2015:227).³¹ Through an arrangement with the National Library Board, I have managed to inspect the material. The printing blocks are well-preserved. The contents of these blocks are in the process of being deciphered. Many of them are religious texts of a syncretic nature, while some contain important information on the pedigree of the Great Way's inheritance.

³¹ On Feeha Cheng Seah Temple's collection in the National Library's Donors Gallery, see National Library Board (2018).

Fig 29. Inscriptions of ‘purifying the unsettling fire of the mind’ appear in the middle while couplets at the side bear the phrases ‘a pure mind is a good match with heaven and earth (*tiandi*)’, while ‘a mind with lesser desire is a selfless companion to heaven and earth (*qiankun*)’. Photo taken in Jade Emperor Pagoda (*Chùa Phước Hải*), Ho Chi Minh City. (Photo: author)



Textual corpora are important materials for understanding the proselytising and localisation process of Chinese lay religious groups. The process of constructing and remaking sacredness through texts is a traditional Chinese way of authenticating religious teachings. Whenever religiosity is concerned, texts are venerated. Traces of printing, reprinting, and publishing of various religious texts by followers of the Great Way are part of this authentication process. However, the circulation of texts among followers involves a more practical and secular function of these texts. Religious scriptures that were printed and circulated in vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia have provided a textual link and vernacular connection between China and Southeast Asia from the 16th century until today. The fact that many religious texts are still being used and put into practice in vegetarian halls has allowed us to investigate how textual articulation is an important living experience. Embarking on a spatial, visual, and textual investigation enables us to more comprehensively understand the historical background and contemporary implications of vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper is intended as a preliminary inventory of, and investigation into, the historical and social conditions of vegetarian halls in Southeast Asia. It aims to understand the halls’ religious, historical, and cultural dynamics in the region. By exploring the spatial, visual, and textual features of Buddhist vegetarian halls, this paper has traced their origin, function, presentation, and interaction. Presented as an alternative to the traditional patriarchal social construct, the relatively balanced gender dynamic that most vegetarian halls uphold has shed light on the understanding of the female condition in the immigrant

history of Southeast Asia. The cases presented in this article are the result of empirical data that I have collected primarily in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia since 2014. Since this is an ongoing project, I hope to develop my argument further after I have gathered more substantial fieldwork information from Indonesia (e.g., Kalimantan), Vietnam, and Thailand. In the present stage, this short introductory article certainly does not do justice to the richness and complexity of the topic at hand.

Scholars of Chinese religions have argued about the implications of the terminology ‘sectarian religion’, ‘sectarian syncretism’, ‘salvationist religion’, and ‘redemptive society’ as premises to make sense of Chinese religions and their many facets (Duara 2001; Ownby 2016; Palmer 2011). The putatively all-inclusive yet stereotypical approach is criticised as having labelled and stigmatised the many variations of Chinese popular religion as deviant, nonconformist, secretive, and socially exclusive (Broy 2015:145–185). However, in some cases, especially of Chinese religions in marginal regions, these ‘deviant’ characteristics of Chinese sectarian religions have sometimes failed to hold. Their fruitful religious manifestations in local settings are, most of the time, well-fitted and well-integrated into their respective social environments and there is not much secrecy in terms of their proselytising processes (*ibid.*:153). During the early Japanese colonial period, the Taiwan branch of the Great Way (*zhaijiao*, Vegetarian Teachings) was a perfect example of how these lay religious leaders were promoters of social values and social engagement (*ibid.*:164–165). Elsewhere, the Hong Kong branch of the Great Way established four schools, named Dadao (Great Way), Guangde (Vast Virtue), Xiantian (Primordial Heaven), and Zhixiu (Cultivate Wisdom), but they no longer exist today (Ngai 2015:434). We can see traces of the Great Way contributing to social welfare in Southeast Asia as well, especially in the colonial British Malaya, where their leaders strive(d) to encourage education and religious cultivation in the region. As for the members of the religious group who took pride in their identity as the ‘Disciples of Confucius in the Cultivation of the Way’ (*rumen xiudao* 儒門修道), being benevolent and righteous (*ren yi* 仁義) and being able to uphold moral justice (*dao yi* 道義) were part of their cultivation as well. The oral history interviews that I have conducted with residents of the vegetarian halls often invoked memories of the halls functioning as temporary refuge for local communities during the Second World War.

Unsurprisingly, over time, the defining features of heterodox ‘Chinese sectarian religions’ have become diluted as they are influenced by, and eventually become deeply entrenched in, the living organic of their respective cultural environments. Therefore, it is crucial for us to reconsider and reevaluate the dynamic processes and socio-cultural contexts of these Chinese popular religions in Southeast Asia. Working toward this paradigm, Southeast Asia (Nanyang) is to be approached as an organic entity where different religious groups and traditions interact, intermingle, and integrate across a wide spectrum of dynamic religious expressions. They should not be thought of as existing wholesale in their original forms, as they might have in their places of origin.

Comparing vegetarian halls to other important Chinese religious organisations in the region has proven to be a useful endeavour in the present study. It has offered the potential to untangle some criss-crossing intricacies concerning the interaction of lay religious groups at a local level. We can see this particularly in the example of three different organisations. Firstly, the *Dejiao* 德教 (Teaching of the Virtue) organisation that emerged in the 1930s adopted the Great Way’s syncretistic features (Tan 1985). Secondly, the *shantang* 善堂 (Hall of Charity) organisation that emerged in the early 20th century

resembled the Great Way's influential network in charitable and philanthropic activities (Lee 2009, 2017). Thirdly, the *Yiguan Dao* (Way of Pervading Unity), the seemingly more 'modernised' version of the Great Way, also named their places of worship '*fotang*' (Buddhist Halls), and venerated Maitreya.³²

Despite the Great Way's influence on emerging religious organisations, the thriving community of Chinese religious organisations in Southeast Asia did not help the Great Way recruit members or ensure that they had qualified successors in their organisation. In fact, the lack of involvement has accelerated the decline of an important religious tradition. It is observed that although vegetarian halls have remained a lucrative business with substantial clientele and income, they have not been able to continue to attract women to join them as vegetarian nuns (Hui 2011:191). This is indeed very true in Singapore and Malaysia and, I believe, in other part of the regions as well. Following waves of modernisation and industrialisation, women now have more alternatives in terms of finding a job and attaining their independence. Many aged vegetarian nuns did not compel their adopted disciples to carry on their lineage succession. This resulted in the lack of prospective successors (*houji wuren* 後繼無人) and halls languished as a result of this. Moreover, the flexibility of the other religious organisations hampered the more conservative Great Way's ability to recruit potential members. *Yiguan Dao*, for example, does not require celibacy as a prerequisite to enter their organisation, and they rarely relied on alchemical practices. In contrast, the recruitment system of the Great Way maintained its strict protocols and traditions. The administration of the group selectively recruited talented followers with good virtue (*andiao xianliang* 暗釣賢良) to preserve the essence of the Great Way (Ong 2013:55). Also, according to the precepts inherited from their patriarchs, members of the Great Way were not encouraged to persuade women to leave their traditional familial structure to lead a celibate religious life. Women should only do so out of their own will (*ibid.*:54). This is certainly faithful compliance to Confucian ethics.

In conclusion, Chinese vegetarian halls vividly illustrate the multifaceted intricacies of religious negotiation and expressions in Southeast Asia. The intersection of religiosity and secular welfare, gendered patterns and immigrant history are ways of understanding Chinese religions in Southeast Asia in their various functions and vicissitudes, where social identity is intertwined in a fluid manner with religious identity.

32 The term *fotang* (Buddhist Halls) can be used rather broadly in the localised religious scene. For instance, *fotang* in Sinkawang, Indonesia might refer to multiple religious associations from Taiwan, Japan or Singapore, or to the True Buddha School (*zhenfo zong*), Nichiren Shōshū School (*rilian zong*) or to Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society (*taihe guan*) (Hui 2011: 189-190).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berezkin, R.

- 2011 'The Lithographic Printing and the Development of *Baojuan* Genre in Shanghai in the 1900-1920s: On the Question of the Interaction of Print Technology and Popular Literature in China (Preliminary Observations)', *Zhongzheng daxue zhongwen xueshu niankan* 中正大學中文學術年刊 [Bulletin of the National Chung Cheng University's Department of Chinese Language and Literature] 1/13: 337-368.

Broy, N.

- 2015 'Syncretic Sects and Redemptive Societies Toward a New Understanding of "Sectarianism" in the Study of Chinese Religions', *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 2/2: 145-185.

Bryson, M

- 2015 'Religious Women and Modern Men: Intersections of Gender and Ethnicity in the Tale of Woman Huang', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40/3: 623-646.

Cai, L.P. 葉連鵬 (ed.)

- 2012 *Cai Zhichan ji* 蔡旨禪集 [The Literary Collection of Cai Zhichan]. Tainan: National Museum of Taiwan Literature.

Campany, R.F.

- 2015 'Abstinence halls (*zhaitang* 齋堂) in lay households in early medieval China', *Studies in Chinese Religions* 1/4: 323-343.

Capitanio, J.

- 2015 'Portrayals of Chan Buddhism in the literature of internal alchemy', *Journal of Chinese Religions* 43/2: 119-160.

Chan, N.

- 2002 'Cuppuge Road Temple: The Sian Teck Tng Vegetarian Convent', *The Peranakan: Quarterly Newsletter of the Peranakan Association* (January-March): 7-8.

Chen Q.P. 陳秋平

- 2004 *Yiming yu fojiao: ying zhimin shidai de bincheng fojiao* 移民與佛教—英殖民時代的檳城佛教 [Immigrants and Buddhism: Buddhism in Penang in the British Colonial Period]. Johor Bahru: Southern University College Press.

Chen, S.G. 陳聲桂

- 1997 *Simalu Guanyin tang* 四馬路觀音堂 [Hall of Guanyin on Waterloo Street]. Singapore: Kwan Im Thong Hood Che Temple.

Chen, Y. 陳勇

- 2017 'Conceptualizing "Popular Confucianism": The Cases of Ruzong Shenjiao, Yiguan Dao, and De Jiao', *Journal of Chinese Religions* 45/1: 63-83.

Chern, M.H. 陳美華

- 2009 '*Malai xiya de hanyu xi fojiao: lishi de zuji: jinxiandai de zai chuanru yu Zaidi zhagen* 馬來西亞的漢語系佛教：歷史的足跡、近現代的再傳入與在地紮根' [Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia: Its Historical Trail, Modern Re-introduction and Taking Root], in Lee F.M. 李豐楙, Lin C.K. 林長寬, Chern M.H. 陳美華, Tsai T.T. 蔡宗德, and Tsai, Y.L. 蔡源林 (eds.), *Malai xiya yu yinni de zongjiao yu renting: yisilan, fojiao yu huarenxinyang* 馬來西亞與印尼的佛教與認同：伊斯蘭、佛教與華人信仰 [Religions and Identities in Malaysia and Indonesia: Islam, Buddhism and Chinese Belief], pp. 53-121. Taipei: Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, Academia Sinica.

Cheu, H.T. 周福堂

- 1996 'The Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods in Malaysia: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol', *Asian Folklore Studies* 55/1: 49-72.

- Clart, P.
2003 'Confucius and the Mediums: Is There a "Popular Confucianism"?', *T'oung Pao* 89 (1/3): 1–38.
- Comber, L.
1958 *Chinese Temples in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
- Cui, Y.H. 崔蘊華
2015 'Haiwai yizhen: Niu jin daxue cang zhongguo baojuan shulue 海外遺珍—牛津大學藏中國寶卷述略' [A Legacy Preserved in A Foreign Country: An Introduction to the Collection of Chinese Precious Scrolls in the University of Oxford], *Beijing shehui kexue* 北京社會科學 [Social Sciences of Beijing] 4: 47–53.
- Dapu tongxianghui 大埔同鄉會
1968 *Binlangyu dapu tongxianghui sanshi zhounian jinian tekan 檳榔嶼大埔同鄉會三十週年紀念特刊* [Thirtieth Anniversary Commemorative Special Issue of the Dapu Clan Association, Penang]. Penang: *Dapu tongxianghui*.
- Dean, K., and Hue, G.T. 許源泰
2017 *Chinese Epigraphy in Singapore 1819-1911*. Singapore: NUS Press and Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press.
- Duara, P.
2001 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12/1: 99–130.
- Đức, T.T.
2014 'Vietnamese Buddhism: Past and Present', in Sachchidanand Sahai (ed.), *The Buddhist Linkages: Between India and Vietnam*, pp. 47–60. Delhi: Buddhist World Press.
- Eskildsen, S.
2017 'Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature: Immortal, Inner Alchemist, and Emissary from the Eternal Realm', *Journal of Chinese Religions* 45/2: 119–150.
- Franke, W.
1989 *Sino-Malaysiana: Selected Papers on Ming & Qing History and on the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, 1942-1988*. Singapore: South Seas Society.
- Franke, W., and Chen, T.F. 陳鐵凡 (eds.)
1982–1987 *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Malaysia*. Vols. 1–3. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Franke, W., Salmon, C., and Siu, A.K.K. 蕭國健
1988–1997 *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Indonesia*. Vols. 1–4. Singapore: South Seas Society.
- Freedman, M., and Topley, M.
1961 'Religion and Social Alignment among the Chinese in Singapore', *Journal of Asian Studies* 21/1: 3–23.
- Goh, D.P.S. 吳佩松
2015 'In Place of Ritual: Global City, Sacred Space, and the Guanyin Temple in Singapore', in P. van der Veer (ed.), *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City*, pp. 21–36. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Grant, B.
1995 'Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature', *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23/1: 29–58.
2012 'Gender', in R.L. Nadeau (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*, pp. 397–417. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing.

- Groot, J.J.M. de
1903 *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions*. Amsterdam: Johannes Müller.
- Guan, C.P. 關楚璞
1940 *Xingzhou shinian* 星洲十年 [A Ten-Year History of Singapore]. Singapore: Sin Chew Jit Poh.
- He, M.S. 何綿山
1996 'Qiantan Fujian fojiao de tedian' 淺談福建佛教的特點 [An Overview of Some Common Features of Buddhism in Fujian], *zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 [Religious Studies] 2: 67-71.
- Hong, M.H. 洪美華
1992 *Qingdai minjian mimi zongjiao zhong de funü* 清代民間秘密宗教中的婦女 [Female Participants in the Secret Religions of the Qing Dynasty]. MA thesis, National Taiwan Normal University.
- Huang, Y.P. 黃育榿
1883 *Poxie xiangbian* 破邪詳辯 [A Detailed Refutation for the Destruction of Heterodoxies] Vols. 1-2, *Chinese Rare Books, ANU Open Research Library, The Australian National University*, available at <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/116799> (accessed 9/5/2018).
- Huang, Y.P. 黃育榿, and Mizuho, S. 澤田瑞穂 (eds.)
1972 *Jiaozhu Poxie xiangbian* 校註破邪詳辯 [Annotation of 'A Detailed Refutation for the Destruction of Heterodoxies']. Tokyo: Dōkyō kankō-kai.
- Huang, Z.R. 黃子榮
2009 *Dashanjiao fojiao fazhanshi chutan: yi xiantian jiaopai zhaitang, fosi, jingshe weili* 大山腳鎮佛教發展史初探—以先天教派齋堂、佛寺、精舍為例 [A Preliminary Study on the Buddhist History of Bukit Mertajam: Taking the Examples of Vegetarian Halls of the Way of Former Heaven, Buddhist Temples, and Viharas]. Penang: Buddhist Digest.
- Hui, Y.F. 許耀峰
2011 *Strangers at Home: History and Subjectivity among the Chinese Communities of West Kalimantan, Indonesia*. Leiden: Brill.
- Johnson, D.
1995 'Mu-lien in Pao-Chuan: The Performance Context and Religious Meaning of the Yu-ming Pao-ch'uan', in David Johnson (ed.), *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies*, pp. 55-103. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kelley, D.E.
1982 'Temples and Tribute Fleets: The Luo Sect and Boatmen's Associations in the Eighteenth Century', *Modern China* 8/3: 361-391.
- Ko, D.Y.Y. 高彥頤
1995 *Teachers of the Inner Chambers Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Kuah-Pearce, K.E. 柯群英
2003 *State, Society and Religious Engineering: Toward a Reformist Buddhism in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern University Press.
- Lee, C.H. 李志賢
2009 'Charity, Ritual and the Business Network of Teochew Charity Halls in Singapore', *Asian Culture* 33: 37-55.

- 2017 *Lanshi chunqiu: Xinjiapo chaoren shantang kao* 藍十春秋——新加坡潮人善堂考 [The Investigation of Teochew Charity Halls in Singapore]. Singapore: Blue Cross Charity Association.
- Li, T.L.S. 李世瑜, and Naquin, S.
- 1988 'The Baoming Temple: Religion and the Throne in Ming and Qing China', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48/1: 131–188.
- Li, Y.C. 李玉珍
- 2012 'Nü zhaitang kongmenhua deqiji: cong zhaigu dao biqiuni xiuxingfangshi de zhuanbian 女齋堂空門化的契機—從齋姑到比丘尼修行方式的轉變' [The Opportunity for Buddhicization in Female Vegetarian Halls: The Conversion of Vegetarian Nuns to Bhikkunis in Terms of Self-Cultivation Methods], in Zhao W.Z. 趙文宗 and Liu Y.G. 劉宇光 (eds.), *Xiandai fojiao yu huaren shehui* 現代佛教與華人社會 [Contemporary Buddhism in Chinese Society], pp. 66–105. Hong Kong: Red Corporation Limited.
- Lim, C.K. 林水椽 and Loh, C.S. 駱靜山 (eds.)
- 1984 *Malaixiya Huaren shi* 馬來西亞華人史 [The History of Chinese in Malaysia]. Petaling Jaya: The Federation of Alumni Associations of Taiwan Universities.
- Lin, B.A. 林博愛
- 1939 *Nanyang huaren jizhuan* 南洋名人集傳 [Biographies of Prominent Figures in Nanyang]. Penang: *Nanyang minshi zuanxiuguan bianjibu*.
- Liu, Y.J. 劉一蓉
- 2005 *Minnan caigu yanjiu* 閩南菜姑的研究 [A Study on Vegetarian Nuns in Minnan, Fujian]. PhD thesis, Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Lo, H.L. 羅香林
- 1962 *Liuxing zai gan minyue ji malaiya zhi zhenkongjiao* 流行在贛閩粵及馬來亞之真空教 [The Spread of Chen K'ung Chiao in South China and Malaya]. Hong Kong: *Zhongguo xueshe*.
- Mair, V.H.
- 1989 *T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Nadeau, R.L.
- 1990 *Popular Sectarianism in the Ming: Lo Ch'ing and His 'Religion of Non-Action'*. PhD thesis, The University of British Columbia.
- Naquin, S.
- 1985 'The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China', in D. Johnson, A.J. Nathan, and E.S. Rawski (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 255–291. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2000 *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- National Library Board
- 2018 'Feeha Cheng Seah Temple 飞霞精舍', *Donors Showcase*, available at: <http://www.nlb.gov.sg/donors/feeha-cheng-seah-temple/> (accessed 9/5/2018).
- National University of Singapore
- 2017 'Mapping Chinese Temples of Singapore', *Department of Chinese Studies & Department of Geography*, available at: <http://www.nusgis.com/temples/> (accessed 9/5/2018).
- Ngai, T.M. 危丁明
- 2015 *Sumin de yong heng: Xiantian dao jiqi zai gang-ao ji dongnanya de fazhan* 庶民的永恆：先天道及其在港澳及東南亞的發展 [The Eternity of Common Folk: Xiantian Dao and its Development in Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia]. Taipei: *Boyang chubanshe*.

Ngoi, G.P. 魏月萍

- 2016 'Malai xiya minjian zongjiao de rujia hua yu gonggongxing, yi zhenkongjiao wei fenxi duixiang 馬來西亞民間宗教的“儒家化”與“公共性”：以真空教為分析對象' [The Confucianization and Public Consciousness of Popular Religion in Malaysia: A Case Study of Zhenkong Jiao], in Ngoi G.P. 魏月萍 and Park S.J. 朴素晶 (eds.), *Dongnanya yu dongbeiya ruxue de jiangou yu shijian* 東南亞與東北亞儒學的建構與實踐 [Modern Confucianism and Public Consciousness: The Construction and Practice in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia], pp. 129–143. Singapore: Centre for Chinese Language and Culture, Nanyang Technological University.

Ong S.H. 王琛發

- 2012 'Chongxin faxian qinglianjiao zuizao zai Nanyang de liuchuan 重新發現青蓮教最早在南洋的流傳' [Rediscovering the Earliest Trace of the Azure Lotus Teaching in Nanyang], in *Shehui wenti yanjiu congshu bianji weiyuanhui bian* (ed.), *Huidang, jiaopai yu minjian xinyang: Di er jie zhongguo mimi huishhe shi guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 會黨、教派與民間信仰—第二屆中國秘密社會史國際學術研討會論文集 [Secret Societies, Religious Sects and Folk Culture: Conference Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the History of Chinese Secret Societies]. Beijing: *Zhishi chanquan chubanshe*.
- 2013 'Qinglianjiao xia Nanyang: Malaiya zui zao de yaochi xinyang 青蓮教下南洋—馬來亞最早期的瑤池信仰' [When the Azure Lotus Teaching Sailed South to Nanyang: The Earliest Queen Mother Cult in Malaya], *Huaren wenhua yanjiu* 華人文化研究 [Chinese Cultural Studies] 1: 47–58.
- 2016 'Luelun wanqing qinglianjiao dui quanzhen nanzong dangong de jicheng 略論晚清青蓮教對全真南宗丹功的繼承' [A Study on the Azure Lotus Teaching and its Inheritance of Alchemical Practices in Quanzhen Daoism], in Ching Chung Koon Association of Studies in Quanzhen Daoism 青松觀全真道研究中心 et al (eds.), *Di sanjie quanzhen dao yu laozhuangxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 第三屆全真道與老莊學國際學術研討會論文集 [Conference Proceedings of the 3rd Conference on Quanzhen Daoism and Philosophical Thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi], pp. 128–134. Wuhan: Central China Normal University Press.

Ooi, K.G.

- 1992 'Domestic Servants Par Excellence: The Black & White Amahs of Malaya and Singapore with Special Reference to Penang', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 65/2 (263): 69–84.

Overmyer, D.L.

- 1978 'Boatmen and Buddhas: The Lo Chiao in Ming Dynasty China', *History of Religions* 17(3/4): 284–302.
- 1981 'Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society', *Modern China* 7/2: 153–190.
- 1991 'Women in Chinese Religions: Submission, Struggle, Transcendence', in K. Shinohara 篠原亨一 and G. Shopen (eds.), *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in Honour of Prof. Jan Yün-Hua*, pp. 91–120. Oakville: Mosaic Press.
- 1999 *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.

Ownby, D.

- 2016 'Redemptive Societies in the Twentieth Century', in J. Kiely, V. Goossaert, and J. Lagerwey (eds.), *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850–2015*, pp. 685–727. Leiden: Brill.

- Palmer, D.A.
2011 'Minguo jiushi tuanti yu zhongguo jiu du zongjiao: Lishi xianxiang haishi shehui xue leibie? 民國救世團體與中國救度宗教：歷史現象還是社會學類別?' [Chinese redemptive societies and salvationist religion: historical phenomenon or sociological category?], *Minsu quyiyi* 民俗曲藝 [Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore] 172: 21–72.
- Pregadio, F. (ed.)
2013 *The Encyclopaedia of Taoism*. London: Routledge.
- Salmon, C., and Lombard, D.
2003 *Klenteng-klenteng dan masyarakat Tionghoa di Jakarta*. 2nd ed. Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka.
- Savage, V.R. 薩維奇, and Yeoh, B.S.A. 楊淑愛
2013 *Singapore Street Names: A Study of Toponymics*. 3rd ed. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions.
- Sawada, M. 澤田瑞穂
1975 *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū* 增補寶卷の研究. Tokyo: Dōkyō kankōkai.
- Scott, G.
2005 *Heterodox Religious Groups and the State in Ming-Qing China*. MA thesis, University of Toronto.
- Seiwert, H.M., and M, X.S. 馬西沙
2003 *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History*. Leiden: Brill.
- Seow, W.K. 蘇慧娟
2013 *The Dissemination of Xian Tian Dao in Nanyang: A Case Study of Hakka An Tang in Malaysia*. MA thesis, National University of Singapore.
- Shek, R.H.C. 石漢椿, and Noguchi, T. 野口鐵郎
2004 'Eternal Mother Religion: Its History and Ethics', in Liu K.C. 劉廣京 and R.H.C. Shek 石漢椿 (eds.), *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*, pp. 241–280. Honolulu: University Of Hawai'i Press.
- Shiga, I. 志賀市子
2013 *Xianggang daojiang yu fuji Xinyang: lishi yu renting* 香港道教與扶乩信仰：歷史與認同 [Daoism and Spirit-writing in Hong Kong: History and Identity]. Songjun 宋軍 transl. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Show, Y.R. 蘇芸若
2017 *Baojuan (Precious Scrolls) Literature and Female Culture during the Ming-Qing Periods: An Exploration of Texts, History and Ritual Practices*. PhD thesis, National University of Singapore.
- 2018 'A Localized Female Religious Space: A Case Study of Chinese Vegetarian Halls in Singapore and Malaysia', *Huaren zongjiao yanjiu* 華人宗教研究 [Studies in Chinese Religions] forthcoming (in Chinese).
- Smith, R.J.
2015 *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Soo, K.W. 蘇慶華
2004 'Bincheng de xiantian dao zhipai: guigen dao chutan 檳城的先天道支派—歸根道初探' [A Branch of the Way of Former Heaven in Penang: An Overview of Guigen Dao—the Way of Returning to the Roots], in *Ma xin huaren yanjiu: su qinghua lunwen xuanji* 馬新華人研究—蘇慶華論文選集 [Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore: Selected Essays by Soo Khin Wah], pp. 1–34. Kuala Lumpur: Soka Gakkai Malaysia.

Su, M.W. 蘇美文

- 2015 'Shi yiqie nüzi tongqu zhengjue: riju shiqi jueji fashi dui fojiao nüzi jiaoyu zhi tuidong 使一切女子同取正覺：日據時期覺力法師對佛教女子教育之推動' [Enlightening All Women to Obtain the Right Awakening: Master Jueli's Promotion of Buddhist Women's Education in Japanese Colonial Taiwan], *Zhonghua keji daxue tongshi jiaoyu xuebao* 中華科技大學通識教育學報 [China University of Science and Technology Journal of General Education] 6: 37–76.

Tam, Y.F. 譚翼輝

- 2012 'Xianghua foshi 香花佛事 (incense and flower Buddhist rites): A local Buddhist funeral ritual tradition in southeastern China', in P. Williams and P. Ladwig (eds.), *Buddhist Funeral Cultures of Southeast Asia and China*, pp. 238–260. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tan, C.B. 陳志明

- 1985 *The Development and Distribution of Deijiao Associations in Malaysia and Singapore: A Study on a Chinese Religious Organization*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- 2002 *Chinese Minority in a Malay State: The Case of Terengganu in Malaysia*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.

Tan, G.K., and Tan, B.H.

- 2002 'Devonshire Road Chye Tng', *The Peranakan: Quarterly Newsletter of the Peranakan Association* (January–March): 9–11.

Haar, B.J. ter

- 1992 *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*. Leiden: Brill.

Toh, T.C. 杜忠全, and Shi X.S. 釋學山

- 2010 'Zhumo fashi dui dama hanchuan fojiao de gongxian: yi mafoxueyuan dui zhaitang fojiaohua zhi yingxiang wei kaocha 竺摩法師對大馬漢傳佛教的貢獻—以馬佛學院對齋堂佛教化之影響為考察目標' [The Contribution of Ven. Chok Mor to Malaysian Chinese Buddhism – The Influence of Malaysian Buddhist Institute over the Vegetarian Lodges as Objective of Investigation], in Guo L.H. 郭蓮花 and Liang Q.M. 梁秋梅 (eds.), *Malaixiya fojiao: Huigu yu qianzhan 馬來西亞佛教—回顧與前瞻 (Retrospective and Perspectives of Malaysian Buddhism)*, pp. 171–181. Petaling Jaya: The Buddhist Research Society of Malaysia.

Topley, M.

- 1954 'Chinese Women's Vegetarian Houses in Singapore', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27/1 (165): 51–67.
- 1963 'The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 26/2: 362–392.
- 2011 *Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore: Gender, Religion, Medicine and Money*. Singapore: NUS Press and Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Watson, J.L.

- 1985 'Standardising the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ("Empress of Heaven") Along the South China Coast, 960–1960', in D.G. Johnson, A.J. Nathan, and E.S. Rawski (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 292–324. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wolf, M.

- 1972 *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 1975 'Women and Suicide in China', in M. Wolf, R. Witke, and E. Martin (eds.), *Women in Chinese Society*, pp. 111–141. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Wu, Junqing 鄔雋卿
2016 *Mandarins and Heretics: The Construction of 'Heresy' in Chinese State Discourse*. Leiden: Brill.
- Yang, C.K. 楊慶堃
1961 *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yau, C.O. 遊子安
2015 'The Xiantian dao and Publishing in the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Area from the Late Qing to the 1930s: The Case of the Morality Book Publisher Wenzaizi', P. Clart transl., in P. Clart and G.A. Scott (eds.), *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China, 1800–2012*, pp. 187–232. Boston/Berlin/Munich: De Gruyter.
- Yau, C.O. 遊子安, and Ngai, T.M. 危丁明
2011 'Xiantiaodao de zunkong chongdao—Xianggang daode hui fuqing tang, shanqing dong de yuanliu he bianqian 先天道的尊孔崇道：香港道德會福慶堂、善慶洞的源流和變遷' [Worshipping Confucius and Promoting the Dao: The Origin and Development of the Fuqing Tang and Shanqing Dong of the Xiantian dao's Hong Kong Ethics Society], *Minsuquyi 民俗曲藝* [Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore] 173/9: 59–99.
- Yü, C.F. 于君方
2001 *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Zhang, K.Z. 張崑振
2003 *Taiwan de lao zhaitang 臺灣的老齋堂* [Taiwan's Ancient Vegetarian Halls]. Taipei: Yuanzu wenhua.
- Zeng, Y.P. 曾雨萍
1994 *Qingdai minjian mimi zongjiao nü zongjiaoshi yanjiu 清代民間秘密宗教女宗教師研究* [A Study of Female Religious Leaders in the Secret Religions of the Qing Dynasty]. MA thesis, National Taiwan Normal University.
- Zhongshan tang 眾善堂
2012 *Zhongshan tang jiushi zhounian jinian tekan 眾善堂九十週年紀念特刊* [Ninetieth Anniversary Commemorative Special Issue of the Hall of Abundant Goodness]. Kuching: Zhongshan tang [Hall of Abundant Goodness].
- Zhou, S.L. 周紹良
1987 'Mingdai huangdi, guifei, gongzhu yinshi de jiben fojing 明代皇帝、貴妃、公主印施的幾本佛經' [A Study of Buddhist Scriptures Printed and Circulated by the Ming Dynasty's Emperor, Concubines, and Princesses], *Wenwu 文物* [Cultural relics] 8: 8–11.
- Zhou, Y.M. 周育民
1993 'Qinglianjiao de yuanliu jiqi yu tiandihui de guanxi 青蓮教的源流及其與天地會的關係' [The Origin of the Azure Lotus Teaching and its Relationship with the Heaven and Earth Society], *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao 上海師範大學學報* [Shanghai Normal University Journal] 3: 107–113.