

What Makes the Spirit Medium So Popular?

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This paper deals with the Chinese spirit medium and the socio-cultural factors related to its persistence and recent surge of popularity in Taiwan. Locally referred to as *dang-ki* or *ji-tong*,¹ the spirit medium serves as a bridge between humans and the supernatural world. Through trance rituals, a *dang-ki* can be possessed by a deity and serves as the deity's mouthpiece, thus, allowing a direct communication to take place between mortals and supernatural beings.

Such "communication" could be understood as a form of divination. During a divination séance, the spiritual being is asked to give information regarding a variety of issues for which the worshiper failed to find a satisfactory answer with human means or resources. Issues frequently brought in front of the deity include: causes of illness, sources of misfortune, reasons of familial disharmony, business

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1 *Dang-ki* is the romanization of a Taiwanese term, 童乩, a spirit medium. Such spirit medium is also called 乩童 *ji-tong* in Mandarin. Because we are primarily concerned with the spirit medium in Taiwan, we will use the term "*dang-ki*" throughout the paper except when quoting other sources.

prospects, career plans and marriage prospects. During the trance ritual, the deity takes questions and requests from the petitioner and instructs the petitioner through the mouth of *dang-ki*. In this fashion, the deity explains past events/current conditions, foretells the future and/or prescribes remedies or plans of action. By following the deity's instruction, the petitioner believes that he will recover from his illness, avoid the misfortune, restore familial harmony, and foretell the outcome of a business venture, career move or the compatibility of a proposed match that he is contemplating.

The practice of consulting a deity through possession and ritual trance of a *dang-ki* is commonly found in Fujian, Guangdong, Taiwan and other overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asian countries populated by immigrants from Fujian and Guangdong. The cult of *dang-ki* has a long history and has been the subject matter of scholarly research for quite some time beginning with the publication of J. J. M. de Groot's *The Religious System in China* (1892-1910) and Alan J. A. Elliott's *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore* in 1955. Since the 1960's we have witnessed the publication of dozens of articles and monographs, in Chinese, English and other languages, which deal specifically with the cult of *dang-ki* or treat it as part of the Chinese folk belief system. We can divide this literature into the following categories according to the researchers' perspectives:

1. Folkloric: The main concern of the folklorist is the documentation of the belief and practice of *dang-ki* as a part of Chinese folk religion. Basically descriptive in nature, these authors (e.g. Liu Chiwan, 1981; Dong Fang Yuan 1975) investigated spirit mediumship's regional variation or studied it as an island-wide custom. Folklorists emphasized details of the belief system and the format of trance rituals including the types of deities that possess the medium as well as

the working relationship between *dang-ki* and Taoist practitioners.

2. Social Historical: In describing the practice as found in mainland China and Taiwan, social historians (e.g. D. Sutton 1989, 1990; Sung Kwang-yu 1995, 96) were also concerned with regional variations as well as changes over time. Furthermore, social historians are increasingly interested in exploring the sociocultural factors that perpetuated the cult of *dang-ki* in Chinese communities despite the fact that it was deplored and sometimes prohibited by political and social elite in the past. Folk religion, to a social historian, is not only a coping mechanism for psychological stress caused by the unknown. It has often been used as an organizational framework that allows people to foster and advance their social, economical as well as political interests.

3. Anthropological: Pioneered by B. Gallin, Li Yih-yuan, M. Cohen and M. Freedman, there has been a sizable group of cultural anthropologists devoted to the study of Chinese culture since the 1950's. Their works were primarily focused on selected communities in Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Most of these anthropological works were ethnographic in nature, aiming at providing a holistic view of the ways of life of the communities under study. Regardless of its topical foci, almost all of the ethnography published in the past three decades touched upon the cult of *dang-ki*. Collectively, they have provided us with a rather detailed picture of the spirit mediumship as seen in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. These anthropological accounts (B. Gallin 1966, A.J. A. Elliott 1955, Li Yih-yuan 1976, D. Jordan 1972, and H. Gates 1987) describe and explain the *dang-ki*'s social and personal background, including the process through which an individual was selected to become the mouthpiece of the deity, the kind of training that he might have to go through in order to be recognized by the commu-

nity as the selected one, and the pattern of possession and trance ritual. It also includes discussion on *dang-ki*'s social status in his community, the varieties of service he provided to his client and community, and, of course, the types of functions this particular cultural institution fulfilled.

4. Psychiatric: *Dang-ki* spirit mediumship had caught the eyes of modern psychiatry as early as 1953 when Dr. Lin Tsong-yi coined the term "*hsieh ping*" (邪病) (cf. Wen, Liu, Chen, Chao and Huang 1992) to describe the spirit possession phenomena that he observed in the Tainan area. Since then, there has been a group of psychiatrists trying to investigate the physiological, psychological, social and cultural factors underpinning the spirit possession phenomena (e.g. *ibid.*). In addition, they have also been pursuing special topics that treat *dang-ki* as mental patients; (e.g. Si Yi-shun and Cheng Hue: 1987) and as indigenous healers (Tseng W.S. 1976, 1981; Kleinman, A. 1975, 1980). The findings of these psychiatric studies could be briefly summed up as follows: *dang-ki* trance and possession is imbedded in the Chinese folk belief in god, ghost and ancestor and the asymmetrical relationship between human and supernatural beings. When the *dang-ki* practices his craft, he is a healer who not only prescribes herbal medicine, charms and rituals to cure the illness, but also explains the "root" causes of such ailment or life crisis that the patient was facing. Thus, the spirit possession phenomenon assists people to cope with social and psychological stress, disruption and suffering in their lives.

Integrating the finding of these various disciplines, we begin to see a detailed picture of the *dang-ki* and some of the reasons why such a belief system, disparaged and suppressed by social elite and government authority in the past, persisted in the religious landscape in contemporary Taiwan. The cultural roots supporting this practice, such as the belief in supernatural beings and their power to either

inflict illness and misfortune or bestow good fortune and protection to their worshipers are still very much intact and alive in Taiwan today. In addition, the *dang-ki* as a healer is often efficacious in treating chronic biomedical ailments and mental problems because the client has a firm faith in the healer as an authoritative figure with supernatural ability (Tseng 1976:174). As researches in the new allopathic field of psychoneuroimmunology have shown that whenever an ill person's hope is raised, his nervous system relaxes and this in turn, strengthens his immune system and allows healing to occur.

Having had a general profile of the *dang-ki* and some of the more important factors that contributed to the persistence of his practice, let us now turn to the main issue of this paper, i.e., what are the sociocultural factors that could account for the growth of the *dang-ki*'s surging popularity in the last two decades? Let us start by looking at some recent trends.

Since the economic boom of the 1970's, there have been many new temples built and old ones refurbished in Taiwan. Worshipers are flooding temples, large and small, new or old. Spending on religious activities has also been significantly increased in recent times, including cash donations to temples and sponsorship for religious festivals. In other words, economic development seems to have provided people with the ability to do what they wanted but were unable to in the past. Different communities are building new temples or expanding and refurbishing old ones to compete with that of their neighbor's. In addition, as economic activity diversified, e.g., new crops and methods of farming were introduced and new businesses and enterprises entered, greater risk and uncertainty also occurred that needed to be addressed. To gain confidence and ease the anxiety of entering uncharted waters, people turn to their traditional coping mechanisms. They visited temples and sought advice and protection

from their deities. And, a direct communication with a deity, through a medium, seems to be favored by many believers.

As the demand for their service has increased, more spirit mediums have become available in community-based temples nowadays or can also be found in alternative places of worship. Generally referred to as *shen-tan* (神壇) and located in urban neighborhoods, these alternative places of worship are usually established by individuals in their living quarters where they worship their patron deity and open their shrine to the public. Private *shen-tan* are usually affiliated with *dang-ki* or some other kinds of spirit medium, if the owner is not one himself. A typical example of this new type of worship place is the Ming-te Tang in Nankang, Taipei where Scott Davis conducted a long-term anthropological study of *dang-ki* practice. As Davis described it,

Ming-te Tang is a small *shen-tan* facing the Tsong-yang Street in Nankang. It is located in a rented apartment of a *dang-ki* and his family. Originally the *Ming-te Tang* was the living quarters of the family and, is five meters wide and seven or eight meters deep. It now has two altars, one large and one small where...twenty-five statues of deities have been enshrined. Together with seven or eight persons who live in the *shen-tan*, the place is frequently overcrowded with many worshippers who came for consultation (1997:278, original text is in Chinese, translation mine).

Such privately owned and operated *shen-tan* was a rarity in Taiwan before the 1960's but has become a common feature in Taiwanese cities and suburbs since then (cf. Li 1999:329-330). Most of them have a resident or affiliated spirit medium, another indicator of the popularity of *dang-ki*.

As spirit mediumship becomes more popular in recent times, it

have also become more professionalized and somewhat commoditized. Unlike the *dang-ki* found in the rural villages who were usually part-times practitioners chosen by a deity to serve members of his community, the mediums who practice at *shen-tan* seldom have community sponsorship and practice their craft more like a small business than a community service. As Li noted in 1976, “within the last decade, the *dang-ki* have become even more popular in Taiwan, and several different *dang* kinds of practice have developed. One of these is the professional *dang-ki*, who practices full-time, opens a “clinic” at his home or in a temple, and is available for consultation during specific hours.” (1976:181) Hill Gates also observed the same trend in the modern city of Taipei a decade later. Gates remarked, “mediums are extremely common in Taiwan; there are three or four within a few minutes’ walk of Prosperity Settlement which is not exceptional. Many set up as small businesses, charging a fee for consultations” (1987:181-82).

The popularity and professionalization of spirit mediumship has continued and intensified in recent times as reported in scholarly journals and on the internet. Jordan Paper, for instance, reported in the *Journal of Chinese Religion* that a “Republic of China Medium Association” (中華民國靈乩協會) was founded and registered with the government in 1989. This professional association has “62 organizational members and 1,940 individual members,” and has been rather active in promoting spirit mediumship. For example, this association co-sponsored the International Conference on Chinese Religion participated by scholars from Taiwan and abroad, held in Taipei, in September 1989 (1990:164-65).

On March 22, 1999, the Yahoo News printed the following headline on its website, 乩童學開講 (Classes on Spirit Mediumship Inaugurated!), and reported that the first class on spirit mediumship

commenced on March 21, 1999. It not only attracted temple keepers and other religion specialists but also people from all walks of life, including college students. The story went on to identify the sponsors and their intention of offering such workshop: to let the general public understand the “true mission of *dang-ki*” so that they will not be taken by fraudulent slicks and, I might add, to gain greater acceptance and respectability for spirit mediumship.

Many observers have claimed that *dang-ki* popularity surged with the growth of the game of *ta-jia le* (大家樂) (cf. Hu 1997). Keenly interested in predicting the winning numbers of the lotto game, gamblers left no stone unturned. They tried various ways to forecast the winning numbers of the next drawing, including turning to traditional divination. Once it is reported that a certain deity and his medium at a particular temple, or more likely, a *shen-tan* has correctly predicted the winning numbers of a drawing, the news spread like a bush fire. Sure enough, this temple or *shen-tan* will soon be visited by dozens, if not hundreds of devotees from near and afar as the next drawing approaches.

The cult of *dang-ki* has spread from villages and small market towns to the suburbs and neighborhoods in the major cities in Taiwan. In a sense, this phenomenon could be considered as an example of the “universalization” of a little tradition—a folk tradition went through certain changes and became part of the popular culture, if not yet part of the great tradition of society. Modernization and economic development do not necessarily replace traditional beliefs with secularism and scientific materialism. Li Feng-mao (1997:12) noted that as economic development continued and urbanization intensified, there was also a significant change in the demographic structure in Taiwan. People moved into urban and suburban areas away from their extended family and kinship networks in the rural area.

After such relocation, these migrants began to face the challenge of urban-living as a nuclear family or as singles. Facing the new environment and having to cope with it as individuals without the support of an extended family or a large kinship network, these rural-to-urban migrants usually experienced a sense of isolation, anomie and psychological stress. Without the counseling service provided by professional agencies, they turn to religious groups, such as the *shen-tan* described by Davis (1997:275). People who frequent a particular *shen-tan* or a neighborhood temple, Li Feng-Mao continued, have the potential to become a quasi extended family which could fill the void of the primary group and provides them with the needed emotional and psychological support (1997:14). To expand on Li's argument further, traditional beliefs enter the cities in Taiwan with the rural-to-urban migrants. Thus, a modified cultural institution, from community-supported temples to member-supported *shen-tans* emerged in the city and became a place of worship where traditional rituals, such as consulting with a *dang-ki* could be continued and a social network could be developed by the migrants in their new residence in the cities.

What we have seen so far is that spirit mediumship has persisted because it has continued to fulfill social and psychological functions and has adapted to the new urban environment. We are also presented with some explanations as to why this folk belief and ritual have become more popular among the people in Taiwan today. These factors are: a) Economic prosperity provided the needed resources to support folk belief and ritual; b) Rapid economic development presented new business opportunities as well as new risks and anxiety, and people need the additional assurance from the supernatural realm to be comfortable with their decisions; c) Urbanization and the changing demographic structure uprooted many people from their

kinship and community networks and the *shen-tan* emerged to fill the gap, thus, bringing the cult of *dang-ki* into the suburbs and cities and making it a more popular and noticeable phenomenon.

To explore other relevant factors that may provide additional insight into *dang-ki*'s popularity, let me turn to the practice of "spirit/ghost marriage." Recorded and first reported by Li Yih-yuan, ghost marriage took place when a mother began to dream about her deceased daughter who died young and unmarried. During such dreams, the deceased daughter complained that she was "cold" and "lonely" in the other world. When such dream recurred, the mother and her family would then consult a *dang-ki* to ascertain the significance of her dream, although she might already have some ideas about what her deceased daughter wanted. When a *dang-ki* confirms what was suspected, i.e., the deceased daughter had reached marriageable age and wanted her family to marry her to someone, the family usually tried to comply. They would pick an auspicious day and go to some place where there was usually not much traffic, and placed a "bait" on the roadside waiting for the chosen one to show up. Sooner or later, a man would come by and take the bait which was usually a small package containing something that used to belong to the deceased. When that happened, the relatives of the deceased, hiding somewhere nearby, would suddenly appear and begin to address the chosen one with kinship terms as if he were already married to the deceased. A matchmaker would then be sent to the man's house to negotiate the marriage. Upon a successful negotiation, a date would be set and the deceased daughter, represented by a spirit tablet, would be married to the man in a simple ceremony. A few days after the ceremony, the spirit tablet was placed in the groom's family altar with other ancestral tablets and worshipped as one of the ancestors of the family (cf. Li 1968).

Such traditional ghost marriage, like traditional spirit mediumship has also gone through modification in recent times as reported in a study by David Jordan (1972:141-41) and in my own research (Chen 1977). The modified ghost marriage became very popular and has been documented in Taiwan, especially in the greater Tainan area since the late 1960's. In this modified version, the ghost's intention to get married is usually revealed during a trance ritual when a client was consulting the *dang-ki* to find out what was causing the misfortune or why certain illness has strike the client or his family. After inspecting the situation, the deity identifies the root cause of the misfortune or illness as a certain female ghost who is causing such misfortune or illness in order to catch the client's attention. Faced with such a situation, the client is usually a bit skeptical and frequently seeks a second opinion by either consulting another *dang-ki* or, more likely, asking the same medium to have another séance just to be certain. If the second or third opinion turns out to be the same as the first one, a ghost marriage will soon take place. Unlike the traditional type where the deceased daughter's family would go out and bait for the groom, in the modified version, the *dang-ki*, or the deity will identify who is the ghost or, as the case maybe, who is the man that the ghost has her eyes on. Also different from the traditional type Li reported, the marriage ceremonies both Jordan and I witnessed were much more elaborated. The ghost bride was no longer represented by a mere wooden tablet. She was represented by a live-size mannequin beautifully dressed in Western style wedding gown and was sent, like a real bride, by a red taxi cab to her new groom's house. When the ceremony was over, the mannequin would be undressed and the spirit tablet placed inside the mannequin would be enshrined together with those of the groom's other ancestors and be worshipped accordingly.

This new type of ghost marriage was widely reported during the early 70's not only in the Tainan area where both Jordan's and my field sites are located, but also in other parts of the island. With a wide geographic distribution, ghost marriage also had a high frequency of occurrence. For example, in the village where I studied, I witnessed over a 14 month period 23 cases of ghost marriages that involved one of the members in the village, living or deceased, as a marriage partner. Ghost marriage suddenly became a widespread phenomenon and the talk in the village. People in my field site were saying, "we know about ghost marriage but it never happened in our area until recently. We heard that it occurred in some places in the past but it only occurred once in a long time!"

Many villagers as well as myself seemed perplexed by the apparent eagerness of so many female ghosts wanting to get married. Then, in one of the seances the local deity gave us some important insight. Through his *dang-ki*, the deity explained that the main reason for the eagerness was due to the fact that more and more married couples are now practicing modern contraception, drastically cutting down the chance for ghost to be reincarnated and prolonging their stay in the other world. As no one takes care of these female ghosts² while they are waiting for the diminishing chance to get back to this world, the suffering female ghosts petition the Jade Emperor and receive his permission to motivate their living relatives to help them get married so that they can have someone to worship them.

2 When a man dies as a single and without an heir, it is possible for his relatives to arrange for him an heir who will worship him as an ancestor. Through such worshipping and sacrifice, the male ghost, while waiting in the other world, will have someone, i.e. his adopted heir, to provide him with food and other necessities to "live" as a ghost in the other world. When a girl dies young and single, it is not acceptable, according to the "patrilineal ideology" for her to have an adopted heir to take care of her afterlife.

Let us keep this “supernatural” explanation in mind while we look at other relevant facts. I should quickly point out that there was a *dang-ki* in both Jordan’s and my field site who was more or less specialized in ghost marriage (1972:141) and had obvious financial interest in arranging such ceremony. The wife of my village medium had a “bridal shop” renting wedding dresses and providing make-up for the ghost brides in the area. Another related incident that might help to explain the increase of ghost marriage was that the *dang-ki* who specialized in ghost marriage was observed visiting the township office where he studied the household registration. There he, like all anthropologists who do their fieldwork in Taiwan, could have access to detailed record on all the families in the area including those having daughters who died young. Such information is extremely useful when the *dang-ki* seeks a female ghost to marry a man who is suffering from illness or stricken by some unexplainable misfortune. The same information could also be very convincing when a doubting client was confronted with details of her daughter’s death, such as the age, date and the cause of death.

What we are witnessing is this: to prescribe ghost marriage as a solution to problems and to have such prescription accepted by his clients, the *dang-ki* must be able to pull together a number of seemingly unrelated social phenomena and cultural assumptions and make them into a coherent ideology. Let us see how this is accomplished. By indicating that the female ghost was “cold”, “lonely” and somehow not comfortable in the other world, the *dang-ki* essentially reminded his clients that the patrilineal Chinese kinship system has a serious structural gap, i.e. it did not have any provision for the after-life of the unmarried female ghost. These unhappy female ghosts are potentially the most dangerous and need to be properly accommodated in order for her relatives and possibly all members of her commu-

nity to have a peaceful life. The adoption of modern contraception decreases births, thus prolonging the suffering of these female ghosts and frustrating their hope to get back to this world through reincarnation. So, to placate these potentially harmful spirits, humans must find some way to alleviate their plight. Arranging for them to be properly married so that they could be worshipped as someone's deceased wife/mother is one of the culturally acceptable solutions. What we have demonstrated above could very well be seen as an example of entrepreneurship. The *dang-ki* synthesized a number of seemingly unrelated social phenomena and cultural assumptions into a coherent ideology to support and popularize the modified ghost marriage.

Could the same kind of entrepreneurship be "responsible" for the growth of *dang-ki's* popularity in Taiwan today? Before answering the above question, let us also examine some other relevant socio-cultural factors related to the surge of *dang-ki* popularity.

First, the drastic change in Taiwanese political economy. Since 1980, political liberalization has progressed and there has been an intensification of ethnic identification among Taiwanese people. This includes the increased usage of the Taiwanese language as well as the revival of Taiwanese culture, ranging from literature and fine arts to popular culture and local cuisine. The resurgence of pride in and identification with Taiwanese culture has allowed the reintensification of folk religion, the cult of *dang-ki* with its theatrical appeals being the most noticeable. Hill Gates observed in a working class neighborhood of Taipei that:

ethnic identity owes much to the people's participation in folk religion, which explicitly links the natives to the soil and history of the island. In 1980 I was told of the ever-growing presence at religious

celebrations in the south of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of spirit mediums who show their spiritual powers by feats of self-mutilation (1987:65).

The following news on the Yahoo website underscores Gate's linkage of spirit mediumship to the celebration of Taiwanese ethnicity. The headline read as: "Ji-dong (乩童) Demonstrated Their Feat; The Public Witnessed the Spectacle." Following the headline, the news story reported that there was a "*dang-ki* village" in Puzi, Jiayi boasting that they used to have more than one hundred *dang-ki*. The village had a carnival on May 2, in which more than ten *dang-ki* participated by demonstrating feats of mortification (cf. Yahoo News, May 3, 1999).

Taiwanese folk religion is not only enhanced by the recent cultural revitalization, it might have also been "empowered" by the increasing scholarly attention directed at it. The revived interest in *qi-gong* (氣功) and other energy fields in the universe, both locally and internationally; by lay people as well as scholars, may have contributed to the popularity of folk religion by enhancing its respectability. For example, Sung Kwang-yu, a researcher at Academia Sinica, in a recent article dealing with spirit medium (乩) observed that:

We humans like all other organisms are basically vessels that generate certain waves and simultaneously receive such waves generated by others. Most "normal human beings" can only radiate their waves within a certain frequency and within a certain range. Beyond such range, most normal beings would not be able to discern such waves. Some individuals, however, are naturally endowed with greater sensitivity and capable of receiving waves from a wider range than others. These individuals can hear, see and sense certain message that ordi-

nary humans cannot, thus, they have become individuals who can communicate with spiritual beings (通靈人). Some can develop such special capability through meditation.... We find such individuals who can communicate with spiritual beings in every society. Some societies consider them to be living sages while other societies see them as individuals possessed by evil spirits. Many theologians of the past often neglected the importance of these individuals and ended up with various theories on religion that often missed the point (1996: 191-2; original text is in Chinese, translation mine).³

The validity of Sung's proposition is beyond the scope of this paper. Our immediate concern here is that there are many studies like the one mentioned above that try to prove or explain such energy or *chi* (氣) and spirituality or *ling* (靈) in scientific terms. And, these studies have greatly heightened the public attention on things supernatural, thus, contributing to the revival and "legitimacy" of traditional folk belief system.

To conclude this preliminary inquiry into the growth of *dang-ki*'s popularity, let me summarize the most plausible explanations examined in my paper. Taiwan's rapid entry into a fully industrialized country raised its people's material standards of living, but generated greater psychological stress and uncertainty. Demographic

3 The original text I quoted here is in Chinese. The paragraph quoted in the paper is as follows:

我們人類和所有的生物，基本上是一個發波器，也是收波器。一般所謂「正常的人」，只能接收和發射某個特定頻率範圍之內的波，超過這個範圍，就無能為力了。可是就有些人天生的敏感一點，接收外來波的幅度比正常人寬一些，於是他就可聽到、或者可以看到、或者可以感覺到某一些異乎常人的信息，而成爲「通靈人」；有的人透過打坐功夫也可以得到這種特殊的功能……這種「通靈人」在任何社會都有，只是有的社會將他看「聖人再世」，有的社會將他看成是邪魔附身。以前學者研究宗教的時候，都忽略了通靈人的重要性，才會有各種搔不到癢處的宗教理論。

shifts from rural to urban areas added a sense of personal estrangement. Allopathic medicine is often inadequate in healing the kind of suffering brought about by rapid industrialization and the changes that come with such a process. In fact, scientists searching for ways to cure chronic illness and mental problems have observed, and indeed validated, the efficaciousness of spirit mediumship in these areas of healing. In a society that has a long-established spirit mediumship, *dang-ki* and his practice might have been revived for its effectiveness in treating such ailments. The political empowerment of Taiwanese has no doubt facilitated the re-establishment of a once disparaged and forbidden religious practice as a symbol of ethnic pride and identity.

Finally, with my comparison to the religious entrepreneurship demonstrated in the recent changes in ghost marriage, I suggest that the role of the practitioners and the socioeconomic factors that motivate them to synthesize various cultural knowledge and social phenomena into a new ideology that expanded *dang-ki*'s foothold is also vitally important.

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靈媒信仰的盛行

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摘 要

本文描述近一、二十年來臺灣地區靈媒信仰的盛行並探索其社會文化因素。

傳統的靈媒信仰與臺灣地區漢人的民間信仰近年來大行其道。教育、經濟的發展並沒有如一般人所想像的使人民的生活更「理性」化。相反的，我們在臺灣各地所看到的是民間信仰的興盛與精緻化。究其成因，有下列幾項：

- 一、工業化及都市化的過程破壞了原有的社區、社會網絡，代之而起的是都市中小社區內的神壇林立，靈媒也由鄉間隨著信徒而擴展到都市。
- 二、經濟發展、商務澎湃使得民眾經常要有所取決，而靈媒的「解惑」、「指點」的功能正好滿足市民們在多樣、多變的商機中需要有所取捨的功能。
- 三、近年來臺灣地區對「本土文化」的重新評價與肯定，使得民間信仰也隨著「本土化」而更受民眾的肯定、接受。

關鍵詞：靈媒信仰、本土化、社會變遷、傳統醫療、民間信仰