

紛争、正義、記憶と癒し

講演者：Selina Ching CHAN
(Hong Kong Shue Yan University)

Beyond Justice : Religious Ritual after Massive Violence

Introduction

The Hungry Ghosts Festival originated historically from Buddhism in India. In China, it is known as *Yulanpen*, and the story of how Mulian (the Chinese name for Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyāna) saved his mother from punishment in hell through ritual chanting is widely known today. The festival has been practised since 538 AD with Buddhist rituals established by Emperor Liangwudi in commemoration of ancestors (Huang, 2011, p.181). From the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD) onwards, Daoist rituals have also been incorporated into practices at the Hungry Ghosts Festival by the commoners. The meaning of the festival has been expanded from venerating ancestors to commemorating those who lost their innocent lives to misfortune. In Hong Kong, there were at least 118 celebrations of the Hungry Ghosts Festival held at various public places by different ethnic communities in the seventh lunar month in 2014. The festival aims to send off wandering spirits who had died of misfortune. This paper argues that the festival reveals the collective memories of disasters, and also how these memories are very different from the official grand narratives (Chan 2015). Such local memories fill the missing gap in the existing official Hong Kong history which emphasized the capitalistic boom and economic achievements with an apolitical perspective.

Memories Embedded in the Organizations of the Hungry Ghosts Festival

Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour's deep, sheltered waters and strategic location on the South China Sea has attracted many cargo ships, creating the internationally well-known Hong Kong entrepot. As early as the late 19th century, there were many Chaozhou migrants who worked as coolies in piers. Accidents often occurred when coolies moved heavy weights from ships to land and some died. Subsequently, the coolies decided to begin organizing the Hungry Ghosts Festival activities to pacify those who died from such accidents. Organized activities at the Hungry Ghosts Festival were meant to send off the wandering spirits who died accidentally during work or during the process of migrating to Hong Kong. These tragic memories are significantly different from the conventional Hong Kong narratives which primarily focus on the *laissez-faire* system and the successful narrative.

Memories embedded in the organization of Hungry Ghosts Festival also reveals how the Hong Kong people cope with disasters involving deaths caused by accidents through public mourning, especially after the war. In fact, sending off wandering spirits seemed to be an important task of the Hungry Ghosts Festival right after the War. These memories are briefly mentioned by the grand narratives of Hong Kong and the official texts. However, vivid memories of the brutal acts of the Japanese army were recalled by organizers of the Hungry Ghosts activities who lived through the war and passed down to the younger generation. A senior organizer of the festival in western district said that he was told to lock the rice shop owned by his father during the Japanese war and stayed

indoors. He recalled seeing how the Japanese tortured the people in Hong Kong. He said, “everyone has to bow to those Japanese soldiers in the Japanese way. Anyone who did not bow properly would be stabbed in the stomach and pushed into the sea . . . Even for those women who are pregnant, the Japanese would still treat them the same way, stabbing and dumping both mother and child into the sea”.

Another informant from the western part of Hong Kong has similar memories of the war. He said, “I arrived at Hong Kong in 1938 when I was 18 . . . Why did we begin organizing the Hungry Ghosts Festival? It is because a friend who was killed by the Japanese during the war visited me in my dreams . . . Later, relatives who died in Chaozhou during the war also came into my dreams and complained of a lack of proper places to stay and proper clothes to wear. So we decided to perform rituals to pacify these spirits.” Similarly, Mr. Yao, who was interviewed by a researcher at the Center of Asian Studies in HKU also recalled, “We started praying at the Hungry Ghosts Festival from 1943, which was during the Japanese occupation period. Those who worked in ‘Junyi’ Warehouse were predominantly Chaozhou people. They started the praying at the Hungry Ghosts Festival that was held along the pier. They prayed for those who were killed by the Japanese. Some were killed after being accused by the Japanese for stealing things at the warehouse.”(Accession no. : 131, HKU)

While the older informants were able to recall memories of Japanese violence or memories of friends who lost their lives during the Japanese war, most young informants merely heard from oral memories passed down from the older generation. Besides, many other memories of the Japanese war are related to the sudden discovery of massive burial sites at various locations in Hong Kong.

Conclusion : From Healing to Chinese National Intangible Cultural Heritage

To conclude, remembering the grand activities of the Hungry Ghosts festival at different districts of Hong Kong is to uncover the social memories of Hong Kong. Oral narratives recounting the origins of the grand Hungry Ghosts religious performance reveal disaster memories. Although the Hungry Ghosts Festival began in the migrant society of Hong Kong as a religious festival for healing and coping with disaster, it has obtained new meanings as Hong Kong society has become more and more modernized and secularized. The Hungry Ghosts Festival is not only a religious festival, but it has recently also become a representation of Hong Kong culture which has attracted public gaze, especially since decolonization. This is partly due to the pervasiveness of Hong Kong nostalgia among its people at that time. As a refuge for the Hong Kong people in the context of decolonization, nostalgia has also become a wider public concern over local history, cultures, and traditions. Both intellectuals and ordinary Hong Kong people tend to actively remember and create memories related to local cultures. Such an awareness of history and tradition is indeed a common decolonization experience. The Chaozhou Hungry Ghosts Festival officially became Hong Kong’s IC in 2009 and China’s national level ICH in 2011.

References

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