KHIAM: A Form of the Religious Sphere in Yilan County

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the *khiam*, an ethnically distinct religious system in Yilan County. Both the religious and the ethnic aspect of the *khiam* are discussed. A census of fifty-one temples located on the Lanyan Plain serves my survey of the religious aspect of the *khiam*, which uncovers the present situation and the geographical distribution of the local temple community. On the other hand, I employ historical records, pedigrees of the local clans, materials offered by Professor Teng-fu Shih’s *Traditional Villages on the Lanyan Plain: Theoretical Structure and Basic Information* and information I gathered from my own oral history works as the base upon which to discuss the distribution of a “recessive” ethnic group on the Lanyan Plain, the Hakka immigrants from the Zhao’an County of the Fujian Province, China. Further comparative analyses of the geographical distribution and types of the *khiam* and the distribution of the Zhao’an Hakka identify the close relation between the *khiam* and the Zhao’an Hakka. In the last chapter of this thesis, I compare the *khiam* on the Lanyan Plain and that in Xiluo, a town in Yunlin County in western Taiwan. Differences in language and demographical distribution between these two ethnic groups, the formation, changes, and the scale of their *khiam*, and their ethnic identity all show the local and ethnic characteristics of the *khiam* on the Lanyan Plain.

My research methods i.e. general surveys and further observations in local areas as well as analysis of historical records lead me to four discoveries:
1. What is khiam?

*Khiam* is an ethnically distinct religious system, every sub-groups of which in turns undertakes the responsibility to preside at the annual worship ceremonies. The term *khiam* stemmed from the Zhao’an Hakka language, which originally means “locus.”

2. Religious characteristics of the khiam

(a) Statistics of temples: There are forty-eight temples in the entire Yilan County that exercise the *khiam*. Besides, there are three other temples in which the *khiam* was once employed but is no longer performed today.

(b) Statistics of deities: *Sanshan guowang* (三山國王) are the most worshiped deities (15 temples); *Sanguan dadi* (三官大帝, 5 temples) and *Kaitai guosheng* (開台國聖, 5 temples) come in the next place. *Sanshan guowang* are much more often being worshiped than other deities.

(c) Ritual practices: in most temples, *zhongyuan pudu* (中元普渡) is considered as the major ritual of the *khiam* system.

(d) Types of formation: there are three types of formation of the *khiam* i.e. the primitive type (35 temples), the immigrant type (13 temples), and the vanishing type (3 temples).

3. Local distribution of the khiam

In terms of administrative divisions, there are most *khiam* systems in Dongshan. In terms of geographical features, more *khiam* systems appear in mountainous areas than in coastal areas, and more appear south than north to rivers, which, respectively, are distributed in band or are scattered.
4. Local distribution of the Zhao’an Hakka

(a) The Zhao’an Hakka people are intensively distributed in areas along the mountains, and apparently more to the south of rivers.

(b) Twenty-percent marks the average distributive density of Zhao’an Hakka, namely, high density areas refer to those villages in which the number of Zhao’an Hakka households is higher than 20% of the total household number. Villages in which the Zhao’an Hakka households account for less than 20% of the total number are defined as low density areas. It shows that high density areas centralize in Dongshan, Yuanshan, Jiaoxi, Zhuanwei, and a small part of Yilan City and Sanxin. Distribution in Xingzaidi also approximately coincides with the distribution of high density areas.

5. The relationship between the khiam and Zhao’an Hakka

(a) The primitive type of the khiam is positively interrelated to the population of Zhao’an Hakka. The lower the population density of the Zhao’an Hakka is, the greater is the variation in the types of the khiam.

(b) In terms of geographical distribution, the banding distribution of khiam temple community largely overlaps the high density Zhao’an Hakka areas.

This research, I wish, may contribute to broaden the vision of researches on religious spheres. Anthropologists and religion researchers have been placing disciple organizations, inter-temple relations, or traditions of ritual practices in the centrality of religious sphere research. Nonetheless, my adoption of ethnological methods and local studies in this thesis may push the discipline to probe into its other aspects such as the formation of villages in Taiwan and the distribution of ethnic groups. By means of cross
comparison of historical records, documentations, maps, pedigrees, and fieldwork data, I attempt not only to clarify the local distribution of the *khiam* system but also disclose the substantiality of this ethnic group, and the cultural features of the traditional villages on the Lanyan Plain.