



The Transformation of "Three Hills Kings" Belief: From Mainland China to Taiwan

Yiching Tsai

Zhaoqing University, Foreign Language Department,
1st Donggang Road Zhaoqing Guangdong, China

2039299858@qq.com

Abstract. The review of the origin and evolution of "Three Hills Kings" belief in Taiwan, echoed the overseas cultural identity activities to find their roots and incense from the Ancestral Temple in Jiexi County, as the originator of more than 6,000 temples in Southeast Asia. It is clear that "Three Hills Kings" belief is an extremely valuable cultural tourism resource and a rare united front cultural resource in Guangdong Province. By discussing the origin and evolution of "Three Hills Kings" belief in Taiwan, on the one hand, highlighting the historical facts of the same origin and root of Taiwan and China through the same activities will strengthen cultural identity and achieve peaceful reunification.

Keywords: "Three Hills Kings", Taiwan, Jiexi Ancestral Temple.

1 Introduction

The early reclamation people from China to Taiwan were mainly Zhang, Quan, and Canton, while Zhang was the majority and Canton was the smallest one. The southern Fujian culture of Zhang and Quan had a leading position with comprehensive advantages in the development of history and local culture. Thus, the corresponding belief of "Mazu" is also the mainstream in Taiwan.

However, the Hakka people are the second largest group of immigrants from eastern Guangdong or western Fujian after Zhang and Quan, and at the same time, the Hakka people brought folk beliefs to Taiwan. The Hakka people believe in complex gods, among which "Three Hills Kings", "Dingguang Ancient Buddha", "Yimin Ye", "Dharma Lord" are the most prosperous beliefs. Due to "Three Hills Kings" is considered to be the most unique Hakka belief that an indicator image has gradually established as if there is a Hakka family, there would be "Three Hills Kings" as well.

"Three Hills Kings" is the protector of the Chaoshan people and the overseas Chinese. The Belief could be traced back to the Sui Dynasty, appeared in the Tang Dynasty, and was canonized in the Song Dynasty with a history of more than 1,400 years. "Three Hills Kings" temple in Jiexi Hepo (Fig.1.), Guangdong Province, is the ancestral temple of more than 6,000 "Three Hills Kings" temples in China and abroad. There have been more than 410 "Three Hills Kings" temples in Taiwan over the past

few hundred years, which had become a historical imprint of the settlement and development of Guangdong people crossing the sea to Taiwan.



Fig. 1. Jiexi Ancestral Temple.
(Referring to the www.jxsszm.com)

“Three Hills Kings” temples in Taiwan attach great importance to the relationship between inheritance and enlightenment and emphasize that the incense of the temple is distributed from the ancestral temple. Thus, whenever the temple is built or expanded, worshippers must be sent to the ancestral temple to worship the gods to get the blessing and spiritual power(Fig.2.).



Fig. 2. Group of Taiwan Worshippers
(Referring to the www.jxsszm.com)

In general, the worship of “Three Hills Kings” has been regarded as a symbol of the same root and origin, and that has become a symbol of ethnic and cultural identity by the people in Taiwan and China. It is sure that the contemporary value of research about “Three Hills Kings” is significant.

This study will sort out the origins of “Three Hills Kings” belief and clarify the process of its rhetoric in Taiwan. And then, this study will explore the transmutation process of how “Three Hills Kings” beliefs interact nowadays in Taiwan (Fig.3.), especially analyze the combination or transformation of the beliefs of characteristics in various ethnic groups in Taiwan.



Fig. 3. “Three Hills Kings”.
(Referring to the www.jxsszm.com)

2 “Three Hills Kings” Related Literature Research

Although there have been lots of discussions of “Three Hills Kings” in recent years, the study of the “Three Hills Kings” began earlier in Taiwan than in China in the 30s to 40s of the 20th century^[1]. From 1934 to 1993, there are 68 research articles collected by Qiu Yangui's "Catalogue of Studies on the “Three Hills Kings” in Taiwan"^[2, 3].

After the cross-strait exchanges of Taiwan and China, the first "Jiexi County “Three Hills Kings” Ancestral Temple Academic Seminar" was held in Jiexi County, eastern Guangdong Province on 4th and 5th October 1992. After that, the Ancestral Temple Association of “Three Hills Kings” also discusses the forms, types of sacrifices, settlement beliefs, and folk beliefs of “Three Hills Kings” by holding lots of seminars to promote the exchanges of faith across the Straits.^[4]

This paper will use anthropological and historical research methods to analyze the changes in “Three Hills Kings” belief in Taiwan. In particular, referring to Qiu Yangui's summary of the four types of “Three Hills Kings” belief in Taiwan: (1) Guild Hall Type, (2) Fu Lao Immigrant Type, (3) Aboriginal Prevent Type, (4) Chaozhou Type^[5]. In this paper, I would follow the four types to analyze the integration phenomenon of various beliefs in cultural transplantation and the significance of the "indigenization" of “Three Hills Kings” beliefs in various places. By discussing the variation of “Three Hills Kings” in Taiwan, we can confirm the inheritance of different religions presented by the continuous creation and transformation of local folk beliefs and also see the influence of the local historical context.

3 The Historical Origins of the Faith of “Three Hills Kings”

“Three Hills Kings” refers to the three high mountains of Jinshan, Mingshan, and Dushan of the west of Jieyang County, Chaozhou Prefecture, Guangdong Province. Chaoshan is located in a hilly area surrounded by mountains, the folk worship of early Chaoshan residents should be related to mountain stone worship.

In terms of history, Lintian Ancestral Temple was built in Sui Dynasty as the ancestral temple of “Three Hills Kings” more than 1400 years ago. In the Tang Dynasty (819), Han Yue briefly served as the official of Chaozhou for 8,9 months, which not only had a profound impact on the development of Chaozhou but also elevated “Three Hills Kings” from minor gods to local gods privately worshiped by the people.

After the temples were built in the Tang and Song dynasties, officials and literati continued to go to worship, and the folk spread many legends and stories of “Three Hills Kings” showing how they protect the country as a role of loyalty and courage. In the Yuan Dynasty, “Three Hills Kings” belief was thriving and many temples were built in Chaozhou, Meizhou, and Huizhou. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, officials did not ban and destroy local beliefs out, and this also made the Hakka and Fulao people who later moved to eastern Guangdong accept “Three Hills Kings” belief.

According to the survey, there are currently more than 240 large-scale “Three Hills Kings” temples in the Chaoshan area and various places^[6]. In general, the images of “Three Hills Kings” is constantly processed in the inheritance of generations, and made it the most prominent local god among the gods believed by the people of eastern Guangdong later^[7].

4 The History of “Three Hills Kings” in Taiwan

“Three Hills Kings” belief was introduced to Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty with the immigration of eastern Guangdong, and the Chaozhou people and the Hakka people believed in this local deity. In the official book of Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty, the folk belief of “Three Hills Kings” was listed in the “Waizhi”, “Miscellaneous” or “External Edition”, but the gods subject to orthodox rituals were not included. Although a small number of officials had a tolerant attitude towards the folk belief, “Three Hills Kings” was written in the “Ceremonial Record to strive to include the legitimacy of the ceremony.”^[8]

Due to Hakka people in Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty were praised by the imperial court as “righteous people” for their meritorious service in helping the government many times, this is also the reason why “Three Hills Kings” belief can develop steadily in Taiwan. The belief has transformed from a local god to the role of “Wang Ye Gong”, and has been worshiped by the general believers for his miracles with many spiritual experiences.

According to the statistics of the Taiwan Provincial Department of Civil Affairs in 1987, “there are a total of 145 “Three Hills Kings” temples registered in 18 of Taiwan's 21 counties. Since some temples are scattered in remote villages and have been

in the process of destruction or renovation, it is not easy to make a complete and correct number of statistics.

However, according to the proportion of distribution areas, the four counties of Yilan, Pingtung, Changhua, and Hsinchu are all important towns for Hakka immigrants in the Ming and Qing dynasties, thus the "Three Hills Kings" temples in Yilan County has the most number.

Take "Three Hills Kings" in Yilan area for example, it was originally the belief of the Hakka family as the guardian deity of the reclamation period brought by the Hakka family in the Qing Dynasty, and it was recognized by the Southern Fujian ethnic group as the role of "Wang Ye Gong", it can be said that "Three Hills Kings" of the Southern Fujian ethnic group contributed to the prosperity and assimilation of the belief in Yilan area.

For example, the people regarded the Great King "Jinshan" who was good at medicine and daily theory, the Second King "Mingshan" who was good at geography and feng shui, and the Third King "Dushan" who was good at driving away evil spirits and abstaining. This makes "Three Hills Kings" belief which originated from the Hakka homeland, mixed with elements of "Minnan Wang Ye", and enshrined by the local people.

The two beliefs have the same name but different meanings of protection, which can be regarded as a successful example of "localization". This is also characteristic of Taiwan's beliefs that are different from China's native beliefs after combining.

5 The Union of "Three Hills Kings" with Other Faiths in Taiwan

This part will discuss the rituals of "Three Hills Kings" after combining them with other beliefs, especially how the belief developed from the early regional activities of local gods to cross-regional beliefs. The assimilation process of the Hakka guardian saint belief and the belief of "Wang Ye", the largest ethnic group in southern Fujian, is a representative combination of localization. At present, the temples in Taiwan with "Wang Ye" as the main deity account for about one-ninth of all temples, with a total number of more than 700. "Wang Ye" is originally a powerful ghost, and ordinary people regard "Wang Ye" having the function of driving away the plague and the epidemic, as a god of healing, protecting the land and people.

The belief in Yilan area mentioned above obviously differs from the Hakka area or the original hometown, while the local "Three Hills Kings" belief is influenced by the culture and religion of southern Fujian, such as "Wang Ye", "Five Camps", "Tiger Master" and other belief elements to form a pluralistic phenomenon in the Fulao area in Taiwan. Such as the Daxing Zhenan Palace in Yilan Dongshan area also enshrines "Tiger Master" in addition to "Three Hills Kings" using its attracting wealth power.

As for "Three Hills Kings" belief in the Hakka area of northern Taiwan, there are also some mutations, such as the Yimin Temple in Hsinchu Hsinpo area, which is based on the belief of "Yimin Ye" that appeared in the process of Taiwan's local social development, and also incorporates "Three Hills Kings" belief. And "Three Hills

Kings" belief in Horbolun Lin Zhao Palace in Changhua forms a branch belief model with "Five Camps" to protect believers and cooperate with the activities of the Qisheng.

As we all know, Taiwan is a traditional Chinese immigrant society, and the belief in the local gods of the original country not only comes from Guangdong Province by the Hakka people, on the other side, Zhangzhou immigrants believe in the "Kaizhang Holy King" , Quanzhou Sanyi people worship "Guanyin Buddha", Tongzi people worship "Baosheng The Great", Zixi people worship "Qingshui Ancestor" , which have also become a symbol of geographical relations based on ancestral identity.

Therefore, "Three Hills Kings" as the main belief also combined with "Mazu", "Heavenly God", "Land God", "Wu Gu Ye", "Xuantian God", "Sanguan Emperor", "Guanyin Bodhisattva", "Emperor Guan" etc. to form the characteristic festivals and sacrifices of the temples. "Three Hills Kings" throughout Taiwan promotes the corresponding parade around the border and the birthday of temples in various places to get the participation of believers and the mobilization of sacrifices.

For example, it is clear to see the contrast in the content between "Three Hills Kings" Autumn Festival" and "Mazu" Spring Festival" in Taichung Dongshi. "Mazu" and "Chenghuang" two gods have the divinity of patrolling the territory that everyone agrees in Taiwan. On the other side, "Three Hills Kings" and "Emperor Guan" are both calm, stable, and immobile images, and by breaking the stable basic structure of the village by using the mobility of the former Gods to strengthen the combination of the crowd. Therefore, the festival held by "Three Hills Kings" temple in Yongzi Palace celebrates three times a year by holding a static ceremony of birthday prayer recitation the night before the birthday. In contrast, during the event of "Mazu" going out on patrol, "Three Hills Kings" also participated in the ceremony of ascending the palanquin and retreating with "Mazu" accepting the joint palm visit of the roadside people, and showing the most solemn respect of "Mazu" to highlight the spirit of the holy sacrifice ceremony. From the activities in this area, it can be inferred that "Three Hills Kings" is not the only main god, but the phenomenon of the existence of multiple gods. The belief in "Three Hills Kings" was also under the influence of multiple gods, from the early image of the mighty martial god to mix with elements of "Mazu" nowadays.

Judging from the above analysis of the coexistence of the main god and other gods in the temple of "Three Hills Kings", the change in the status of the main god is actually because it is influenced by other gods in the multi-god competition relationship wherein it is located. This is a characteristic of Taiwanese belief. Although it is a festival held for the main god of "Three Hills Kings", sometimes it must be held in conjunction with other god-worshiping activities, so that the festival attracts more people to join, and the pattern of worship is expanded.

However, this is inseparable from the original "martial god" image by itself. Generally, it could be concluded that "Three Hills Kings" gradually transformed from the boundary stone god and mountain god worshiped by Fujian and Guangdong in the Chaoshan region to a god with social worship significance, and the image gradually improved with official recognition. During the Taiwan immigration period, because of the image of an escort savior and calming the war, people built a temple in the

reclaimed settlement to worship and that become a protective deity related to reclamation.

6 Brief Conclusion

The history of Taiwan is a history of immigration and development, and most of the ancestors who migrated to Taiwan were from Fujian and Guangdong. "Three Hills Kings" is a symbol and proof of Guangdong's immigration to the island, born from the belief in the mountain god into the image of the "Martial God".

After 4 hundred years, "Three Hills Kings" followed ancestors to Taiwan through the combination of early regional local gods and has now evolved into a cross-regional belief. And with the local squires driving temple fairs, celebrations, tours, retreats, and other activities, "Three Hills Kings" belief nowadays combined with modern social art and cultural activities.

For example, the Management Committee of the Three Hills Kings Temple also formulated the "Ancestral Temple Festival" concerning historical data and folk rituals to make the festival activity more standardized and process-oriented in 2007. In addition, by organizing incense groups to go to the ancestral temple to celebrate incense, cultural exchanges between Guangdong and Taiwan have been promoted.

According to incomplete statistics, in the past 20 years, more than 600 groups, nearly 100,000 people had gone to the ancestral temple in China to pay homage to the ancestral temple. Thus when the hometown had to restore the ancestral temple of "Three Hills Kings", the believers in Taiwan generously assisted and donated a huge amount of donations, which shows the reverence of the Taiwanese believers' recognition and support for their belief. By discussing the origin and evolution of "Three Hills Kings" belief in Taiwan, this paper highlights the historical facts of the same origin and root of Taiwan and China which could achieve peaceful reunification.

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