

## 序二

■ Professor Kenneth Dean <sup>1</sup>

This volume is a deeply insightful, multi-sited ethnographic study of the development of the Dejiào (Teachings of Virtue), a salvationist folk charitable religious movement founded in Chaoyang, Guangdong Province in the 1930s. Dejiào has now spread worldwide, mainly in Chaoshan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, but also in Australia, Europe, and the United States. Dejiào emphasizes the common origin of the five teachings, worshipping the masters of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, and Islam as ancestral teachers. The main activities of the Dejiào consist of preaching, charity, and spirit writing, known as the “three pillars”. At present, there are more than 300 Dejiào organizations worldwide.

This book builds on the solid foundations of academic research on Dejiào in the 1990s provided by scholars such as Bernard Formoso’s *Dejiào: A Religious Movement in Contemporary China and Overseas: Purple Qi from the East* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), and Chen Jingxi 陈景熙, who has written extensively about the religious movement in Southeast Asia, to bring our understanding of this constantly evolving movement into the 21st century. The core issue discussed in the book is the construction and

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development of the transnational networks of the Dejiao Charitable Groups. The book asks the following questions:

How are the core values or practices of the Dejiao groups manifested in their transnationalism? How do the Dejiao transnational networks function through the production of literature and classics and various celebratory events and the development of spirit writing practices? How are personnel, assets, ideologies, and deities circulated through this transnational network? How do the Dejiao groups integrate resources through this transnational network? What influence have the economic, political, social, and cultural elements behind religious consciousness and rituals had on this transnational network? How do the Dejiao groups unite these nodes in the transnational network? How do they consolidate the relationships between them? What dispersibility does this network have? What are the interactive relationships between the transnational network of the Dejiao groups and other social organizations?

The book also explores the interactions between individuals as agents and the transnational development of Dejiao congregations. The book discusses the roles that women have played in the Dejiao. It asks what kinds of modern predicaments and challenges Dejiao faces.

In answering these questions in detail through numerous case studies, the book illustrates the modern history and developmental trajectory of Dejiao and its rapid development of a transnational network. From a broader comparative sociology of religion approach, this book takes Dejiao as a case study in order to discuss new developmental models of emerging Chinese folk religious charity groups in modern society. Here the author engages with discussions by David Palmer and other scholars about the nature of such “born-transnational” religious movements, and their potential developments in the 21st century.

To provide a brief overview, Chapter 2 discusses the early development of Dejiao in the Chaozhou area during the Japanese invasion and its gradual development of a transnational network through its expansion into Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore. This chapter focuses on processes of localization that enabled the Dejiao congregations to achieve stability in multiple different countries with different policies regarding minority religious groups.

Chapter 3 “Performance of Transnationalism in Contemporary Dejiao Development” first distinguishes the specific set of deities worshipped in distinct Dejiao congregations in different countries in Southeast Asia, then explores how these localized pantheons of Buddhas and immortals were constructed and are presented in each site. Three dimensions of ritual activity in each congregation are explored – namely the production and circulation of scriptures and writings, the rise of transnational ceremonies and gatherings, and the use of spirit writing as a means of transnational exchange. In this way beliefs are linked to specific sets of ritual actions. This chapter examines mechanisms for the establishment of transregional ties within Dejiao – for example, the inviting of groups representing different congregations scattered across the Southeast Asian region to vibrant spirit writing sessions in Bangkok – that would lead in time to the development of a transnational network.

Chapter 4 “Capable Persons Spread Teachings: How Individuals Join and Weave Transnational Networks” explores the role of “capable persons” – individuals who are active within their own congregations and who also work to establish transnational networks. Through careful participant observation and intensive interviews, the author reveals how individuals are drawn into the circle of Dejiao rituals and spirit writing, building up their faith in the deities through continuous interactions with them via spirit writing, so that they can voluntarily and proactively participate in the affairs of the

Dejiao assemblies, devoting their time, energy, and capital. The practical interactions that people experience within the Dejiao assemblies and the spiritual inspiration they receive from these ritual activities are personally meaningful. The attraction and conversion of new members, usually drawn from the highly mobile Teochew diaspora, builds on the connections of these new converts while providing an important platform for them to expand their personal business networks while augmenting the transnational networks of the Dejiao. Whether it is a matter of building, consolidating, or operating the transnational network, it is necessary to first draw people into the Dejiao faith. Women play key roles in supporting these developments, but rarely claim leadership roles. Nonetheless, their contributions are central to the consolidation of new transnational connections. The increasing importance of roles for women have been observed in many spheres of religion in contemporary Asia.

Chapter 5 “Construction and Overlap of Transnational Networks” focuses on the institutional structure of the various congregations and how these structures are expanded and transformed through the development of transnational networks. This includes a discussion of how the congregations interact with other social networks, tracing back to the process of building secondary regional networks before constructing transnational networks. The dense networks of localized Chinese regional, clan and trade associations in various parts of Southeast Asia provide a source for the establishment of links intersecting with Dejiao congregations, especially within the far-flung transnational network of Teochew (Chaozhou) associations. These intersections form the basis for building the Dejiao transnational network.

Chapter 6 “Leveraging Cross-Network Combinations” discusses cross-network interactions and combinations between Dejiao networks and other social organizations. Mutual leverage between different kinds of associations

and networks is an effective expansion strategy for developing transnational networks. There can be many possibilities for combined approaches. This chapter takes up the mutual leverage between Dejiao congregations and the Taiwan Kaohsiung Cultural Institute, Hong Kong's Jinlan Guan, the Dongjing Yuanfo Association and other examples to discuss this issue via specific case studies. This chapter demonstrates how cross-network ties with other social organizational networks expand by leveraging each other. After initially completing localization and stabilizing development locally, the Dejiao congregations began to seek small-scale regional affiliations. Then, affiliations and interactions constantly transcended regions and national borders.

Chapter 7 concludes the book by exploring the contemporary status of the Dejiao transnational networks and their dilemmas, the self-positioning of Dejiao, and the modernization challenges faced by contemporary Dejiao Charity Groups. The force of the salvationist/survivalist message that was spread during a period of crisis by the founders of the movement, and the mystical features of its emphasis on spirit writing and communication with immortals and Buddhas both clash in the contemporary era with the need to rationalize and institutionalize, especially in order to attract younger members and adapt to secular governmental expectations. Nevertheless, Dejiao assemblies are highly adaptable, good at localization, and adaptive to different socio-political-cultural environments. In many cases they have downplayed messianic messages and instead developed an attitude of positive world-affirmation, confirmed through the strong overlaps between transnational business networks and Dejiao networks. The commercial prosperity of Dejiao adherents underlies the success of the spread of its transnational network, as Weber would have expected.