

Department of National Heritage
Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia

INVENTORY

ELEMENT: Wangkang Ceremony

Background

Wangkang Ceremony originated from China. The ceremony was brought to Malaya (Malaysia) by Hokkien immigrants during the Ching Dynasty (1644 to 1911). The ceremony comprised several stages, among which were the construction and the worship of a holy barge, a gigantic procession and a Taoist service supported by local shamans' rite. Wangkang Ceremony derived from the word "Wangkang" which referred to ordinary Chinese barge but it is much smaller, about 18 feet long by 9 feet wide which become the most prominent object for the ceremony. It is beautifully painted and decorated with silk lanterns and banners and streamers, miniature lancers and swords. Wangkang Ceremony was first held in Melaka in 1845. Later, it has been held in 1891, 1905, 1919, 1933, 2001, 2012 and recently in 2017. The ceremony was held to invite evil and wandering spirits that exist in that area onto the barge. These spirits are believed to be responsible for the occurrence of epidemic that can cause misery, disease or chaos in the world. The ultimate purpose of the rituals is to send off these malevolent forces, in return bestow positive energies to the locality.

Since 1919 until the present, the Baba Nyonya community has started the effort to document all the articles and photographs of Wangkang Ritual. In 1933, the Melaka Guardian also attributed memento of Wangkang Ceremonial and Procession in their edition which were also being preserved by the Baba Nyonya community until today. In 2012, Yong Chuan Tian Temple have organised series of seminars by experts from Taiwan, France, China as well as Malaysia on Wangkang ceremony to the public at large, in order to enhance the awareness and also to promote understanding and the safeguarding of this culture. In the same year, Yong Chuan Tian Temple has also launched a facebook page and a set of postcards with photos of Wangkang (1919,1933, 2001 and 2012) together with commemorative postage stamps to mark the event. Recently the Baba community is calling for its people to donate any articles and photographs of the Wangkang Ceremony which are being kept by the community to Yong Chuan Tian Temple in preparation for the construction of a Wangkang Museum.

Another particular feature is the extensive and thorough use of Hokkien language during the ceremony, where currently Mandarin speaking along with simplified

Chinese characters are the norm among Chinese communities of Melaka. The ceremony offers an opportunity and a socio-cultural environment to perpetuate older linguistic practices.

The implementation of this ceremony portrays how people lived in Melaka harmoniously with mutual understanding and respect of the local culture, regardless of race or colour. The successful implementation of this ceremony shows great cooperation and tolerance by all parties, especially the people and the state government. It is indirectly a medium that can foster inter-ethnic relations in Melaka.

In addition, the implementation of this ceremony is believed to be able to restore peace, health and prosperity to the community at large through collecting and sending of the wandering souls that are not guarded to a different world. Therefore, the implementation of this ceremony is seen as an important medium that can demonstrate a concern that exists among the people of Melaka to create well-being in society.

The main culture bearers and practitioners of the Wangkang Ceremony are the Hokkien ethnic particularly the temple guardians and devotees, ritual priests (Saikong), spirit mediums (Tangchi), mediums' assistants (Fuluan), musicians (Sam Tans Wuying) and lay worshippers who take part in rituals and ceremonies at temples dedicated to the Ong Yahs. There is no restriction for gender participation. However, the males are mainly involved in performing the ritual part of the ceremony whereby the females are largely involved during the procession, especially in sweeping the roads before the arrival of the Wangkang, the performing arts group during the parade as well as preparing meals for the ceremony.

Ritual priest perform ceremonies which involved conveying the wishes of the communities to the Ong Yahs through prayer and petition sheets. They also perform prayers for the wandering souls to be invited into the Wangkang barge. Spirit mediums represent Ong Yahs in human form to instruct devotees to build Wangkang as well as to come out with a date for the procession. The Ong Yahs will decide the spirits mediums as the commander in chief for the whole ceremony. The spirit mediums are commander in chief for the whole ceremony. However, nowadays the medium assistants have slowly taken over the duty of the spirit medium.

Wangkang Ceremony adheres to the spirit of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and contributes to fostering harmony and tolerance as the foundation for sustainable development among various ethnic groups in Melaka, Malaysia as a whole and other people in the world. It involves the participation of multi-culturalism, ethnics and races in the State of Melaka. The involvement of various races can be seen especially during Wangkang procession around Melaka. All people regardless of race and religion may attend and witness the parade. The practice in the Wangkang ceremony are open to all: everyone can take part, regardless of their age, occupation, race or religion. Wangkang is also made by natural material such as wood and paper. Therefore, Wangkang Ceremony does not

have any qualities or features that are not compatible with existing human rights instruments.

Community

1. Hokkien Chinese community in Melaka
2. Baba Nyonya community in Melaka
3. Indian Community in Melaka

Association

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