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“The transmission of Chinese civilizational techniques to Southeast Asia: networking, Daoist rites, spirit possession, and hybrid ritual forms”

Mauss pointed out that civilizational techniques include techniques of the body (self-cultivation and spirit possession). Rituals are technical machines for the manipulation of time and space. This paper traces a range of civilizational technologies brought by Chinese sojourners and migrants to Southeast Asia. These include networking between temples, common surname groups, and regional associations - these techniques have led to new and surprising network effects. Daoist ritual techniques were spread to Southeast Asia by different regional Daoist ritual masters, but also by sectarian groups such as Xiantianjiao and Yiguandao. The latter mixed in modes of modern management with Daoist ritual elements. Spirit possession is widespread around Southeast Asia, and remains central to much of Chinese religious expression in that area, as in many parts of China. There is clear evidence of ritual change and regional variation in the spirit possession rites of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, but also of the spread of mix of Chinese spirit medium rites and techniques with Thai mediumism (Nine Emperor Gods) and on Dayak groups in Kalimantan. The paper concludes by examining hybrid ritual spaces/processes that have developed in Southeast Asia.

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