Abstract

Since 18th Century, large influxes of Chinese from the Southern provinces of China had migrated to South East Asia countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. Meanwhile, they also brought along their customs and practices, which are part of the little tradition. As Singapore becomes urbanized, many traditional customs and folk beliefs have also undergone great changes. However, some are still deeply rooted in the society. Spirit marriage is one of them. Spirit marriage is still widely practiced among the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia. This takes place in a ceremony at which two deceased persons, or more rarely, one living and one deceased person are married. Such forms of marriage appear to be more common among the Cantonese than other dialect groups. Thus, the rite under study is particularly practiced by the Cantonese in the Temple of City God in Singapore.

The focus of this study focuses on the significance of the spirit marriage ritual and explaining the persistence of such folk belief in a highly modernized society. This study will approach the topic through a close outline of the development of spirit marriage practice in ancient China and a close examination and interpretation of the newspaper reports on spirit marriage and the Spirit Marriage Ritual (Minghun ke 《冥配科》). The Spirit Marriage Ritual is a text used by Cantonese priests for carrying out the spirit marriage ritual in the City God Temple.

In Chapter One, the development of spirit marriage practice in
ancient China will be examined in depth to illustrate that spirit marriage is a folk practice which originated in China thousands of years ago. It is by no means an "invention" by the Singapore Chinese but it has been localized after being brought over the South China Seas by the early Chinese migrants. Chapter Two, Three and Four will focus on a close examination of the *Spirit Marriage Ritual* on the reasons for carrying out the ritual, its religious significance and the Chinese interpretation of the "other world" respectively.

All in all, this study will illustrate through the development of spirit marriage that it originated from China and has been localized. Furthermore, the detailed account and analysis of spirit marriage ritual have shown that it is influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism teachings. Therefore, this folk practice is not just a superstitious practice.