

Local Society and “Tablet for the Lord of Ten Thousand Years” during Zhu Yigui Incident

Wen-liang Lee

ABSTRACT

It has been frequently mentioned in historical literature that a wooden tablet for the Lord of Ten Thousand Years had been consecrated by yimin, literally “righteous people” and to whom this title was awarded by the Qing state in honor of their effort, in southern Taiwan during the Zhu Yigui Uprising of 1721. The extant tablets of about 50 centimeters high are all installed on pedestals in different temples together with other deities for worship by believers. Local people call these tablets “Dragon Tablets,” signifying their imperial origin as bestowed by the emperor. Nevertheless, in reality, these tablets are often replica either produced by the local gentry or the temples. The fact that the tablets were usually affiliated to religious institutions manifests the close relation between religious institutions, the local society and the state.

Even after the Uprising, the tablets for the Lord of Ten Thousand Years continued to play a role in bridging the local society with the state. The tablets were enshrined by yimin, the majority of who were of Guangdong ancestry. Yet, it came originally from a temple located in a village of Fujian immigrants. The temple had great significance in the transitional process during which Guangdong immigrants finally became the dominant group among yimin. Moreover, when the yimin collaborated with the Qing army to suppress the Uprising, more than three thousand military yimin had escorted the tablet to the prefectural city and enshrined it in the Pavilion of Long Longevity. After the turmoil was over, yimin welcomed the tablet back home and placed it in a local temple hereafter. The consecration of the tablet by the Pavilion of Loyalty and Righteousness henceforth made the temple the most significant symbol for the solidarity of Guangdong immigrants in southern Taiwan throughout the Qing rule. Whenever communal feuds or local disturbance arose, they gathered in the Pavilion, took oaths, recruited military men, allotted rations, and commanded mercenaries. Up to the present day, both the Pavilion of

Loyalty and Righteousness and yimin are still closely related to the making of Hakka ethnic identity and both have been essential to understanding the long history of Guangdong immigrants in southern Taiwan.

Keywords: Hakka, Communal Feuds, Precious Volumes, Folk Religion, Lishe System, Yimin