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Yiguan Dao
Recent Development of the [^]Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Singapore,
Malaysia and Thailand

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Recent Developments of the Unity Sect (Yiguan Dao) in Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The Unity Sect (Yiguan Dao) is a lay voluntary religious organization of congregational character. Notwithstanding the fact that the sect remains largely unknown to the general public, it continues to progress with its proselytism at an ever greater rate in the last two decades outside Taiwan and Hong Kong,

Thanks to the pioneering exploration and studies by Mr Li Shiyu (1948), and David Jordan and Daniel L. Overmyer (1986) on the sect in Mainland China and Taiwan, the study of the Sect in peninsular Malaysia (1997) during my Ph.D. program at U.B.C. (1994-1997) aimed also at contributing towards these traditions of scholarly Chinese religious study.

Today, the Unity Sect claims its “worldwide” dissemination, especially with the establishment of its World Federation of I-Kuan Tao Organizations (Shijie Yiguan Dao Zonghui) in America. The pattern of and factors leading to the dissemination of the Unity Sect elsewhere in the world, however, differ very much from region to region.

It is the aim of this paper to focus on the pattern of its dissemination in Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand (the regions with the biggest concentrations of Chinese population in ASEAN countries), especially its recent developments in these countries, so as to enable comparisons be made between the sect’s development in ASEAN countries and in North America at the end of the paper. It is also hoped that such comparisons will give a clearer picture regarding the probability and problems facing the Unity Sect in attempting to gain a firm foothold in the West -- an ultimate goal towards realizing globalization of the sect in the real sense.

Recent Development of the Fayi Chongde Sub-branch In Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand

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The Fayi Branch in Taiwan

The Fayi branch is currently the largest Unity Sect branch in Taiwan. According to Han Wannian (quoted in Lin Rongze 1993:274), the name 'Fayi' is derived from 'Fayi Dadao' (the Great Way of Promoting Oneness), which connotes 'promoting the pervading oneness' (*fayang yiguan*).¹

Although the Fayi branch started its mission in Taiwan as early as 1947, it only began to take root after successfully establishing its first base in Douliu, Yunlin County in 1951. The first important Fayi branch *Fotang*, the Chongxiu Tang ('Hall for Advocating Cultivation') is originally a 'phoenix hall' (*luan tang*) owned by Lin Shuzhao.²

Earlier, in 1949, Han Yulin, Hao Jinde, Zhao Dagu, Chen Hongzhen, Han Wannian and others were led by one Li Qinghe [a novice from Douliu initiated by Han], in seeking opportunities for proselytizing in his hometown. During that visit, Han bought up the 'Youth Photo Studio' (Qingnian Zhaoxiang Guan) located next to the Douliu railway station, and established a *Fotang* on the premises. According to Han Wannian [quoted in Song 1996:125-126], in less than half a year's time Hao, Zhao and Chen, being 'strangers' who resided in Douliu, came under the suspicion of the local authorities. They were then called up to the police station for investigation, and eventually sent to police headquarters (*jingbei zongbu*) in Taipei. Traced through their correspondence, Liu Quanxiang, Li Yuming, Zhang Yutai, Qi Yuxiu and other Fayi branch leaders who had stayed apart were also caught and imprisoned in Taipei

¹ According to Song (1983:127) the name Fayi is in actuality the representative designation for all Fotang in the Tianjin area. Later, the name 'Fayi' was restricted only to the branch originating from the Tongxing Tan in Tianjin, with Senior elder Han Yulin (1990-1995) as its highest leader before he passed away in January 1995.

² Philip Clart (1996b: 1) defines a 'phoenix hall' as "a voluntary religious association of congregational character centring upon communication with the gods by means of the divinatory of 'spirit-writing' (*fuhuan*).

police headquarters, and were eventually released from their imprisonment. Faced with such great blow, they were forced to retreat from Douliu.

When the issue quietened down in 1951, Chen Hongzhen was summoned by Han Yulin to continue her mission. At this point, a *Fotang* was set up temporarily in the rest house (*Taihe lushe*) owned by a sect member, madam Zhan. Lin Shuzhao and Lin Tingcai were among those who 'sought the Way' during that period. Zhan's husband's rejection of the *Fotang*'s attachment to the rest house and created a big problem for Elder Chen. Lin Shuzhao voluntarily offered his 'phoenix hall' to be adapted as the Unity Sect's *Fotang*.

Meanwhile, Lin Tingcai [who at one time worked in the 'special branch' (*qingzhi danwei*)], was promoted to the rank of 'initiator'. With Lin's participation in the mission, the Fayi branch could proselytize the sect under a certain degree of protection. Within two years, more than thirty *Fotang* were established. Viewed from this angle, the Chongxiu Tang is referred to as the cradle of the Fayi branch's development in Taiwan. The fact that most of the Fayi's early important 'dharma assemblies' (*fahui*) were held there, and that the majority of its present leaders were fostered through these 'dharma assemblies' serves well to illustrate its important role in the history of the fayi's development in Taiwan. (cf. Jiang 1992a:256-257, Lin Rongze 1993:276-277, Song 1996:125-129).

The Fayi Chongde Sub-branch³ in Taiwan

Under the principle of 'whoever handles it, should follow it through' (*shuiban shuicheng*), the religious field opened up by Chen Hongzhen naturally comes under her leadership. As pointed out by Lin Rongze (1993:278), the above mentioned concept is in actuality based on the clan ethics (*jiaozu lunli*) deeply rooted in Chinese society. He refers to the Chongxiu Tang as an example of the relationship between a 'mother shrine' (*mu tan*= Chongxiu Tang) and a total of over twenty public temples

³ According to Elder Chen Hongzhen the name 'Chongde' ('Advocate Virtue') derived from a revelation of Jigong, the Living Buddha during a 'dharma assembly' held in Kuala Lumpur many years ago. It was first adopted in naming its cultural and educational foundation, Chongde Wenjiao Jijin Hui, established in 1985. Later, the name 'Fayi Chongde' was used to represent the Fayi sub-branch under the leadership of Elder Chen.

[that originated from it] with the status of its 'children shrines' (*zi tan*). Based on such reasoning, the responsibility to take care of these 'children shrines' could come to no one than Chen Hongzhen herself.

Upon establishing a stronghold in Douliu, Chen Hongzhen expanded to Zhanghua County, where the Guanyin Gong ('Palace of the Goddess of Mercy') in Erlin, and the Daoji Chanyuan ('The Chan Court of Daoji, the Living Buddha') in Tianzhong were built.

Encouraged by Senior elder Han, Chen Hongzhen made an important decision to proselytize in the Taipei metropolitan area in 1968. Between 1968 and 1981, she successfully penetrated the surrounding suburbs of Taipei City, namely Yonghe, Sanchong, Xinzhuang, Taoyuan and Zhongli. By 1991, the total number of *Fotang* had increased rapidly from more than thirty public and family halls to more than 300 'public halls' (*gongtang*), and over 900 'family halls' (*jiatang*), covering most parts of Taipei City and Taipei County.

Today, Elder Chen's 'religious domain' (*daochang*) of the Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan is divided into two main divisions, namely the 'social division' (*shehui jie*) and the 'academic division' (*xue jie*) covering Yunlin, Zhanghua, Taipei, Taizhong, Miaoli, Gaoxiong, Jiayi and Tainan. It has a total of over 140 'initiators' (*dianchuan shi*), more than thirty temple-structured 'public halls' (*da miao*) and more than 4,000 'family halls' at home and abroad. This sub-branch of the Fayi also has the highest percentage of members with a university or college education compared to the rest of the Unity Sect branches in Taiwan. (cf. *LJMX* 1990:4) These constitute the above mentioned 'academic division' of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch, playing the important role of a think-tank that contributed much to the branch's development and innovation in both administrative and theological aspects at a later stage.⁴ Elder Chen attributes the rapid development of the Chongde sub-branch in the last two decades to

⁴ The rise of this 'academic division' is closely related to the operation of its so called 'the meal catering groups' (*huoshi tuan*) which formed informal religious organization in area nearby the campuses, providing meals and lodging facilities to college and university students who were sect members. It began its operation ca. 1973, and continues to operate to this day. Lin Rongze's 1994 paper entitled "Yiguan Dao dazhuan xuesheng huoshi tuan zhi yanjiu". (A study of the Unity Sect's university students 'meal catering groups') and Song (1996:332-349) provide detailed information on these organizations and their roles in the sect.

the participation of this 'academic division', which she described as a 'capital of wisdom' (*zhihui caichan*).

In a recent speech, Elder Chen proudly described the four major characteristic of this sub-branch as:(1) its academic division as a valuable human resource; (2) ownership of its many 'public halls' and 'family hall'; (3) the establishment of its five cultural and educational foundations, namely Chongde in Taipei (1985), Chongren in Taizhong (1986), Chongyi in Gaoxiong (1990), Chongli in Tainan (1990), and Guanghui in Nantou (1989), (4) its management by 'collective leadership and coherent advancement' (*jiti lingdao, zhengti daidong*).⁵

Fayi Chongde Sub-branch and Its Overseas Missions

In 1977, Elder Chen began her overseas missions. Her first stop was in Tokyo. The following year, she visited Singapore, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Bangkok (Thailand). In recent years, the Chongde sub-branch has even reached the U.S.A., central North America, Paraguay, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau. (cf Chongde zhi Guang [CDZG] 1994:13) Nonetheless, the majority of the overseas *Fotang* today are in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Other than the seven major 'religious domains' of 'social division' and the five major 'religious domains' of 'academic division' in Taiwan, there are five major overseas 'religious domains' of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch, namely the Tianyi Gong of Japan⁶, Chongde Wenjiao Hui (Chongde Cultural & Educational Society) of Singapore, Chongde Wenjiao Yanxi Hui (Chongde Cultural and Educational Center) of Kuala Lumpur, Chongde Foyuan (Buddha Court of Advocating Virtue) of Thailand, and the Chongde Daoyuan (Chongde Sanctuary of the Dao) of Alor Setar, Kedah.

⁵ Cf. *Fa Yi Chong De* (magazine), vol.1, No.4, Feb. 1994, pp.12 & 14.

⁶ For a description of the development of Yiguan Dao in Japan, especially on the Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Japan, please refer to Lai Lianjin (1997:344-346).

One common characteristic of these overseas 'religious domains' of Fayi Chongde sub-branch is the adoption of the policy of 'local personnel operating the local organizational affairs' (*bendi ren ban bendi shi*). The adoption of this policy has helped to train local sect leaders who are capable of shouldering the responsibility of running the routine activities of the sect organization independently. The Elder plays the role of spiritual leader who advises, and only offers help (backed up her rich resources in Taiwan) to the local *Fotang* whenever necessary (Soo 1997:203).

Fayi chongde's 'Religious Domains' in Singapore and Malaysia

(i) Singapore

Due to the fact that Fayi Chongde's 'religious domains' (*daochang*) management system are ^{en}centering on 'district' or *qu* as unit of operation, and also the fact that Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia are closely linked to each other geographically, the ^{Singapore religious domain is divided into several districts covering} Singapore *qu*, Johor Bahru *qu* and the Yong Peng-Keluang *qu* of the Johor state in southern Peninsular Malaysia. Added to the Singapore *qu* is the Lide Tan located at the Batam Island of Indonesia. Hence the Fayi Chongde's religious domain of Singapore, 1 'public hall' in Batam, 12 'public halls' in Johor Bahru and 5 'public hall' in Yong Peng-Keluang district.

A study on Table 1 below further illustrates the pattern of distribution of these 'public halls' and the time scale of their establishment, indicating clearly that an almost three-folds increase. The number of the 'public halls' in eight years during the second decade of its proselytism between 1990-98.

Table 1: Numbers of Fayi Chongde's 'public halls' in Singapore between 1980-1998

	Singapore	Johor Bharu	Y P-Keluang	Total
1980-89	6	3	2	11
1990-98	17+1(Indonesia)	9	3	30
Total	24	12	5	41

Source: *Singapore Fayi Chongde's Religious Domain 20th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine* (1999:64-67)

Back in 1977, the first *Jiatang* ('family hall') in Singapore was set up in Zhu Chaoxing's resident. Borned in Kuala Selangor, Malaysia, Zhu joined the Singapore army, and was sent to Taiwan to undergo his army training programme. He met Zhuang Qiugui, a sect member of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan, and had 'sought the Way' there. After marriage, Zhu and Zhuang stayed in Singapore.

Led by Zhuang, Elder Chen Hongzhen began her first missionary trip to Singapore. It was in the first Fayi Chongde's *jiatang* of Zhu's resident that the first 'dharma assembly' was held. Seven housewives, including Wu Suqin and Madam Zhu nee Chen Jinmei⁷ were recruited as sect member during this congregation. Following that, 'dharma assemblies' were held at *jiatang* in 1978, 1979, and twice in 1980. Eventually, the first *gongtan* ('public hall'), Chande Tan, was established in 1980 to cater for the congregation of its growing sect members. In the following year (1981), Ende Tan, another *gongtang* was established. This was followed by three more *gongtang* established in the year 1985 alone. Its Evangelistic headquarters (*zongtan*) in Singapore, however, was completed in 1990.

Faced with competition with other already well established Yiguan Dao branches⁸ in Singapore, and also the spatial constraint for established 'religious fields' within Singapore, the Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Singapore extended its 'religious domain' across the Singapore-Johor Bahru causeway to the southern State of Johor in Peninsular Malaysia. The two 'districts' (*qus*) penetrated by the Singapore Fayi Chongde's 'religious domain' into Malaysia are Johor Bahru, the capital of Johor State, and Yong Peng-Keluang as mentioned above. Easy accessibility of road (by means of the Causeway, and now, the additional Second Link between Singapore and Johor State) and rail transportations, beside the more expensive air transportation, also help strengthening the relationship of Fayi Chongde's sect members in Singapore and the Johor State relatively closer to each other, compared to Kuala Lumpur *qu*'s Fayi Chongde 'religious domain' which doubled as national Evangelistic Center (*daowu zhongxin*) for Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Malaysia. For the convenience of sect

⁷ Wu is among the first batch local members to be promoted to rank of 'initiator' later in 1983, while Madam Zhu [Zhu Chaoxing's mother and Huang Tiancai's mother-in-law] is the one responsible for leading Elder Chen Hongzhen to extend her religious field to Malaysia.

⁸ For examples, the Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan of Xingyi branch and the Baoguang Jiande of Baoguang branch had landed in Singapore since 1971. To date, the former owned about 1,000 *Fotang*, while the latter owned 1,7000 *Fotang* in Singapore. [IKTGC (no. 114) 2001.3:8-9].

members in both Johor Bahru *qu* and in Yong Peng-Keluang *qu*, two ‘public halls’ were established by Singapore Fayi Chongde’s ‘religious domain’ in 1986.

The adoption of the policy of ‘local personnel operating the local organizational affairs’ along with the standardized style of Fayi Chongde’s sub-branch management by collective leadership and coherent advancement’ [inspired by Elder Chen Hongzhen and practiced in all her overseas religious domains to date] helped localizing sect leaders who are familiar with the local evangelistic surroundings, thus avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings that could deter the advancement of its proselytism. Besides, this practice also helped consolidating both sect leaders and sect members who promoted the sect under collective banner of Fayi Chongde sub-branch. Ultimately, it is hoped that all these overseas ‘religious domain’ will identifying with the ‘mother *Fotang*’ of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan as the root of their origins, and the center from which the ‘mandate of Heaven’ (*tianming*) of propagating the Way being conferred to them. Until 1998, there were altogether 13 local sect leaders being promoted to the rank of ‘initiators’ to take charge of the routine religious affairs of the Singapore Fayi Chongde religious domain.

(ii) Malaysia

There are two (out of five) major overseas Fayi Chongde sub-branch’s ‘religious domains’ in Peninsular Malaysia, namely the Kuala Lumpur Fayi Chongde Cultural and Educational Center (Jilongpo Chongde Wenjiao Yanxi Hui) located at the Federal capital city of Malaysia, and the Chongde Daoyuan (Chongde Sanctuary of the Dao) of Alor Setar, in the northern state of Kedah.

(a) Kuala Lumpur Fayi Chongde (KLFC) ‘Religious Domain’

To date, the KLFC ‘religious domain’ (*daochang*) takes charge of 51 ‘public halls’ covering a wide geographical spread that cut across the states of Kuala Lumpur (Federal territory), Klang (Selangor), Seremban (Negeri Sembilan), Taiping and Teluk Intan (Perak), Kuantan and Mentakab (Pahang) Melaka, Muar (Johor) and Sabah in

East Malaysia. Notwithstanding this, most of the *Fotang* are concentrated in Kuala Lumpur *qu* and Klang *qu*.

Initially, the KLFC began with a humble 'family hall' set up in Zhu's residential house. It was Zhu Chaoxing's mother, Madam Zhu nee Chen Jinmei, the novice who 'sought the Way' during the first 'dharma assembly' held in Singapore, who invited Elder Chen to extend Fayi Chongde's 'religious field' to Malaysia. Moved by Madam Zhu's sincerity, Elder Chen visited Kuala Lumpur on January, 1978 and had Fayi Chongde's first two 'family halls' respectively set up in Zhu's and Huang Tiancai's residents in the morning and evening of the same day. A total of 41 novices 'sought the Way'. The first 'dharma assembly' was held with only six participants attended by Elder Chen and six other sect leaders from Taiwan.

During Elder Chen's second visit to Kuala Lumpur in September, 1978, 200 novices were recruited within her two-week stay. Besides, a third 'family hall' (Lai's 'family hall'), was set up, and served as venue for the second 'dharma assembly' held in Kuala Lumpur. Eventually, the first Kuala Lumpur's 'public hall', Tongde Tan, was set up in September 1984. Huang Tiancai, among the first batch of novices who 'sought the Way' in Kuala Lumpur was the first local sect leader who was promoted to the rank of 'initiator'. Following the advancement of the sect in Kuala Lumpur Fayi Chongde 'religious domain', six more local sect leaders were selected and conferred the 'heavenly mandate' as 'initiators' in August, 1991. The third batch of 'initiators' was appointed in 1994. To date, there were about 16 'initiators' serving the KLFC 'religious domain'.

To cater for the growing number of sect members and the need for a spacious congregational venue, the land located at Persiaran Titiwangsa, Kuala Lumpur was identified as the site for Kuala Lumpur Fayi Chongde's Evangelistic headquarters in 1991. The new building was completed and being commemorated in November 1993.

Earlier in 1983, a ‘public hall’, Meiguang Tan, was established in Klang by one ‘initiator’ Su Xiaozhou from Taiwan. Between 1988 to 1995 about 12 ‘public halls’ were established in Klang *qu*.

In Seremban, one Taiwan ‘initiator’, Chen Shuixing, established the first ‘public hall’, Peide Tan, in 1987. A new Seremban *qu* propagating center, the Negeri Sembilan Chongde Cultural and Educational Center (Senmeilan Chongde Wenjiao Guan) was completed in early 2000.

Since early 1990’s, the KLFC Cultural and Educational Center had been actively involved in organizing various social-cultural activities. With the support of its mother body in Taiwan, a series of public talks, focusing on the theme of creating a ‘loving and caring society’ by guest speakers from Taiwan were held. Music nights were put up by Taiwan Chongde’s choir. Charitable medical services were organized, offering free treatment to local patients. Along with this operation, forums on health care were also held. Besides, KLFC Cultural and Educational Center has also organized Chinese arts charity exhibition to raise fund for its cultural and educational activities. Blood donation, visiting old folks homes and orphanage homes in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya areas, photography contests, and so on also from part of its many activities. All these activities aimed at intensifying its public exposures by means of ‘cultural packaging’ (*wenhua baozhuang*) [cf. Soo 1997:203-204].

(b) Chongde Daoyuan in Alor Setar

The Chongde Sanctuary of the Dao (Chongde Daoyuan) is located at Alor Setar, in the northern state of Kedah. To date, its ‘religious domain’ covers five *qus* that spread across the states of Perlis (Kangsar *qu*), Kedah (Alor Setar *qu* and Sungai Petani *qu*), Penang (Penang *qu*), and Perak (Ipoh *qu*), with a total of 34 ‘public halls’ served by 10 ‘initiators’.

Led by one Malaysian student, Luo Zesheng, who ‘sought the Way’ in 1979 while studying in Fengjia University of Taiwan, Elder Chen visited Alor Setar, and had the first ‘family hall’ (Luo’s family hall) set up in 1980. Following that, a ‘public hall’ (Yuanzhen Tan) was established on February 1982. Later, the Alor Setar Fayi Chongde ‘religious domain’ extended its ‘religious fields’ to Sungai Petani (Kedah),

Penang, Ipoh (Perak), and Kangsar (Perlis), with their first ‘public halls’ established respectively in 1985, 1986, and 1987 (for both Ipoh and Kangsar).

The first Ipoh ‘public hall’, Jinde Tan, was established in 1987 by one Huang Huixiang, who ‘sought the Way’ while working in Alor Setar. Huang was transferred back to her hometown, Ipoh, in 1987. Since then, she began her missionary work diligently, and was later promoted to the rank of ‘initiator’. Due to growing number of sect members in this *qu*, the old building of this ‘public hall’ was demolished and replaced by a new building (completed and commemorated in May 1999) which doubled as liaison center of the Ipoh *qu* (Yibao *qu* Lianluo Zhongxin). Currently, there are 6 ‘public halls’ and 16 ‘family halls’ in this Ipoh *qu* of the Alor Setar Fayi Chongde ‘religious domain’.

Fayi Chongde’s ‘Religious Domain’ in Thailand

Earlier, in 1976, there was one Taiwan Fayi Chongde’s initiator’, Su Xiaozhou, who through business connections, came to know of a Taiwanese businessman in Bangkok by the name of Zhang Zhineng. Su’s proselytism attempts eventually moved Zhang, who ‘sought the Way’ in 1978, and had a ‘family hall’ set up in his residence. The first Thailand Fayi Chongde ‘public hall’ (Taide Tan) was established in Bangkok in the same year. Zhang later became the first one who was promoted to the rank of ‘initiator’ (1983) in Thailand Fayi Chongde ‘religious domain’. Until 1994, there were altogether 18 local sect leaders promoted to the rank of ‘initiators’. Zhang Zhineng, however, was appointed as chairman to the ‘Chongde Court of Buddha’.

To date, the Thailand Fayi Chongde ‘religious domain’ is divided into five ‘districts’ (*qu*), with Bangkok as its center of proselytism. There are 24 ‘public halls’ in **Bangkok *qu*** that spread over the regions of Bangkok, Samut Prakan and Suphan Buri. The **Phathom *qu*** has 14 ‘public halls’ which spread over the regions of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The 20 ‘public halls’ of **East *qu*** spread over the regions of Chonburi, Chantha buri, Royong, Pattaya, Trat, and Chachoeng Sao. While the **North East *qu***’s and the **North *qu***’s ‘public halls’ spread over the regions of Saraburi, Nakhon

Phanom, Ratchasima, Khonkaen, Ubon, Buriram,, Siaket, Lopburi, Udon, Yasothon, Sarakham, Buri Ram, Lampang, Chiangmai, Chiengrai, Phichit, Phayao, Uttradit, and Kamphaeng Phet.

In short, the 110 'public halls' of Thailand Faiy Chongde 'religious domain' covers nearly all major city-towns in Thailand. The Evangelistic Center, 'The Chongde Court of Buddha' (Chongde Daoyuan) located at Nakhon Phathom, however, was completed and commemorated on January 1997. the Thailand 'religious domain' of Faiy Chongde claimed that it has about 300,000 sect members to date. In recent years, the number of novices who 'sought the Way' increased at the rate of 30 to 40 thousand annually.⁹

⁹ Cf. Commemoration of Thailand Religious Domain's Chongde Court of Buddha Souvenir (1997:33-34).

Table 2

Distribution of Fayi Chongde "Public Halls" in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore (1970s - 1990s)

Year	1970s	1980s	1990s	Total
Thailand	1	12	97	110
Malaysia	1	22	61	84
Singapore	-	6	18	24
Total:	2	40	176	218

Table 3

Distribution of Fayi Chongde "Public Halls" in Its Four Major Overseas Religious Domains Of Thailand, Kuala Lumpur, Alor Setar, and Singapore (1970s – 1990s)

Year	Singapore	Kuala Lumpur	Alor Setar	Thailand	Total
1970s	-	1	-	1	2
1980s	12	9	8	12	41
1990s	29	23	26	97	175
Total:	41	33	34	110	218

Chart 1: Distribution of Fayi Chongde "Public Halls" in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore (1970s - 1990s)

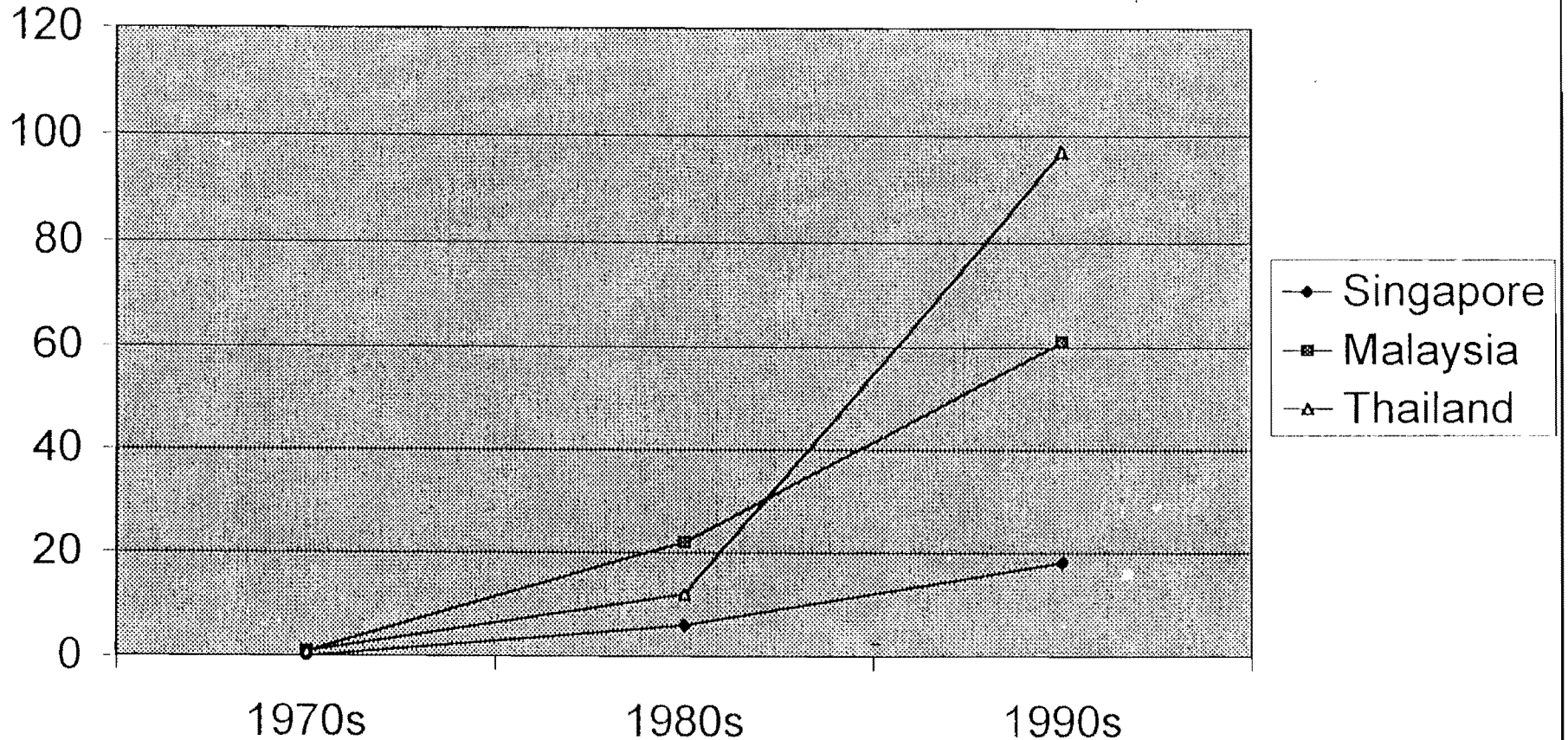
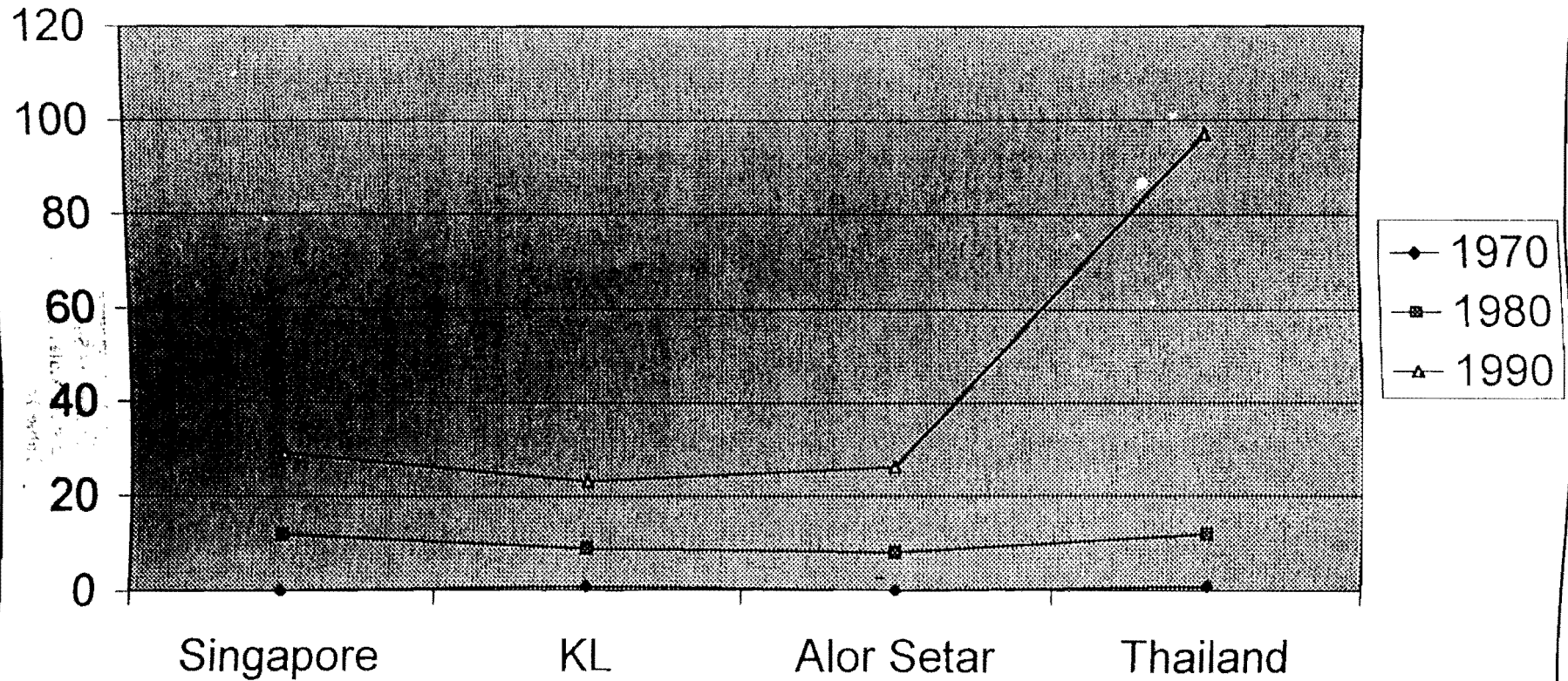


Chart 2: Distribution of Fayi Chongde "Public Halls" in Its Four Major Overseas Religious Domains of Thailand, K L, Alor Setar and Singapore (1970s - 1990s)



Comparative Survey Among Fayi Chongde's Overseas 'Public Halls' and/or Religious Domains in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand

A quick reference to Table 2 and Chart 1 indicate that collectively, Chongde overseas 'public halls' in the three countries are increasing at a considerable rate from only 2 *Fotang* in late 1970s to 40 *Fotang* in 1980s, and to 176 *Fotang* during the 1990s!

Among the three countries listed, Thailand's 'public halls' (*gongtang*) increased tremendously by 87.6% or 85 units in 1990s compared to the decade before. Singapore stands second position, showing an improvement of 66.6% or an increment in 12 units of 'public halls'. While Malaysia's growth rate came only after Singapore, indicating a growth rate of 63.9% or an increase in 39 units of 'public halls', although it positioned second in terms of total number of 'public halls' in the list.

Table 3 on the other hand, taken into account the number of 'public halls' owned by the four major overseas 'religious domains' (*daochang*) of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan. Among these four major overseas religious domains, Thailand shows tremendous advancement in its proselytism. This is indicated by an increase of ~~87.6%~~^{70%} or 85 units of its 'public halls' between 1980s and 1990s. Alor Setar 'religious domain' stands second showing an increase of ~~69.2%~~^{22%} or 18 units of its 'public halls' in 1990s over the previous decade of 1980s. While Kuala Lumpur's and Singapore's 'religious domains' positioned the third and fourth in the list, indicating an increase of ~~60.9%~~^{151.5%} (or an addition of 14 units to its existing 'public halls') and ~~58.6%~~^{141.7%} (or an addition of 17 units to its existing 'public halls') respectively.¹⁰
(using 1980s as base year).

A glance at the distribution of the 'public halls' in the above mentioned four major overseas 'religious domains' of Fayi Chongde sub-branch in

¹⁰ It must be noted that the Singapore 'religious domain' cut across the boundary of the northern state of Johor in Peninsular Malaysia. It also includes one unit of 'public hall' at the Batam island of Indonesia (cf. Table 1).

Taiwan as shown in Chart 2, indicates generally a steady rate of increase in proselytism during the 1980s compared to its initial stage in late 1970s. There is, however, a higher rate in its proselytism during the 1990s, particularly the 'religious domain' of Thailand, which is indicated by a steep increase in the chart.

Concluding Remarks

At this point, it is important to indicate some of the main reasons behind the success story of the Fayi Chongde's overseas 'religious domains'. As we have seen, the division of the administrative unit of the 'public halls' into *qu*, taking charge by a 'religious domain', could have cut across the state boundaries or even the boarder of neighbouring countries, is not uncommon even among the 'religious domains' of Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan. This is mainly due to the practice of the clan ethics and the principle of 'whoever handles it, should follow it through' as already discussed elsewhere in this paper.

Notwithstanding the complexity of this operating principle, there are supporting institutionalized structure and operating mechanism within the Fayi Chongde organization that help to formulate effective operating programs for all its religious domains, both in Taiwan and elsewhere overseas.

The planning of the five-year sectarian educational program (*daochang wunian jiaoyu*), which first came into being in 1984 after the 'confidence crisis' (*xinxin weiji*)¹¹ in early 1980, that brought about an abrupt stand-still of the Fayi Chongde 'religious domain' in Taiwan for more than half a year. It took the 'religious domain' of Fayi Chongde two years to recover and resume its proselytism. Since then, the 'academic division' played an important role in its theological and curriculum constructions. One important step taken by the Fayi Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan was to change its emphasis in

¹¹ The 'confidence crisis' was due to the negation of the authenticity of its 'spirit-writing' by sect members (cf. Song 1983:135, Soo 1997:226-227 and Wu Jingyi 1998:23-24).

proselytism from the traditional devices of divine revelations (by means of spirit-writings) to that of the study and disclosure of the 'sublime meanings' (*weiyang dayi*) concealed within the canonical texts of the three religions (particularly that of Confucianism) [cf. Soo 1997: 226 -227]. The sectarian educational program (planned in accordance with this change of emphasis) first launched in Taiwan, and later extended to its overseas religious domains in late 1980s. The operation of this sectarian educational program eventually brought about a more academic approach and contents of proselytism, emphasizing the teachings and the practice of 'Confucian ethics' (*Rujia lunli*), and the 'Way of Confucius and Mencius' (*Kong-Meng zhi dao*) in its sect members' routine life [Soo 1997: 221].

The adoption of a management system centering on 'districts' or *qu* as units of operation in the late 1980s along with the forming of a joint committee known as *zhong-yizi ban* in every *qu*, help to consolidate the religious organization. It comprises of a planning group (*zhongzi ban*) and an executive group (*yizi ban*) that cut across different levels of sect leaders, which work together to ensure that all policies formulated at the highest level will be implemented accordingly (cf. Soo 1997:201-202).

The organization of administrative unit into nine departments (*zu*) of evangelistic affairs (*daowu*), sectarian education (*banwu*), public relationships (*gongguan*), kitchen duties (*chuwu*), clerical work (*wenshu*), servicing (*fuwu*), reception (*jietai*), general affairs (*zongwu*), and documentation (*dashiji*), further scrutinized the division of labors and confinement of jobs assigned to each department. Overall, the activities carried out by the *Fotang* at all levels will become even more organized and structured (cf. Soo 1997:202).

The achievement of the aim of 'the three many and four good' (*sanduo sihao*)¹² put forward by Elder Chen Hongzhen helps to motivate the sect members to become responsible individuals, contributing to the advancement of the religious domains in proselytism besides advancing the *Dao*.

12. The 'three many' (*sanduo*) referred to 'many newly recruits, many attendants in the two-day 'dharma assembly' for novices, and many attendants in the classes of sectarian education'. The 'four good' (*sihao*) referred to 'good in learning the *Dao*, cultivating the *Dao*, preaching the *Dao* and advancing the *Dao*' (cf. Soo 1997: 203).

Finally, the aim towards achieving "standardized religious domains in the year 2002' (*maixiang erlinglinger nian biao zhun dao chang*) within the Fayi Chongde religious domains in Taiwan and abroad, will eventually bring about a standardized operating mechanism, which lead the three divisions of 'academic, social, and the youth' (*xue jie, shehui jie, qingshaonian jie*) together (*sanjie yi yuan*) in advancing of the Dao and achieving the aim of realizing the 'Homeland of the Maitreya' (*Mile jiyuan*) in this world, which denotes the realization of an Utopian world of 'Grand Unity' (*datong*) as taught by the grand master Confucius.

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