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# BELIEFS OF THE SACRED SPIRIT: A STUDY OF POSSESSED CEREMONY IN KELANTANESE VILLAGE.

<sup>1</sup>EYO LENG YAN, <sup>2</sup>ROSDEEN SUBOH

Drama Department, University of Malaya, Malaysia  
E-mail: <sup>1</sup>eyolengyan@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>rudin@um.edu.my

**Abstract** – The Peranakan Chinese community's belief of sacred spirits and deities remains strong to this day. They worship these spirits in the home, in temples and the workplace to seek protection and wellbeing, and to be granted wealth and prosperity. These spirits and deities are celebrated in grand ceremonies every year as a way of commemorating and showing appreciation for their protection of humans. Utilising the field research method, this study was conducted in Kampung Pasir Putih, a Chinese Peranakan village in conjunction with the Datok Janggut (sacred spirit) site transfer which took place on January 5, 2018. This study aims to examine the process behind the 'possessed ceremony' or known as 'lok tang' by the local community, including casting some focus on intercultural relations.

**Key words** – Sacred Spirits and Deities, 'Lok Tang' ceremony, Kelantan's Peranakan Chinese, Intercultural Relations

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study of spirits and possession isn't a new field of exploration and it has been observed that of late, a lot of researchers are becoming interested in conducting research into this area (Spino, M. E., & d'Andrade, R. G., 1958; Lewis, I. M. 1971; Pounds, W., 1990; Boddy, J., 1994; Jackson, P. A., 1999; Caciola, N., 2000; Murni Hermawaty, 2008; Atkinson, Q. D. & Bourrat, P., 2010; Muhamad Luthfi Abd. Rahman, 2011; McNamara, P. & Bulkeley, K., 2015 and Romiduk Maryoto Simambela, 2015). Spirit possession refers to an external power that enters an individual's body and in turn imbues that person with extraordinary powers or makes him stronger than usual (Boddy, 1994). In western culture, this kind of behaviour is associated with interpretations of mental illness, demonology and others (Mischel, 1958). Intrigued to know more in depth about this 'possession', I conducted a study related to the 'possessed ceremony' or 'lok tang' spirit of Datok Janggut (sacred) that continues to be practiced by the Peranakan Chinese community in Kelantan. Most of Kelantan's Peranakan Chinese comprises Hokkien farmers who migrated from the extreme hardship of China more than 300 years ago. The settlements of Kelantan's Peranakan Chinese are concentrated along the banks of the Kelantan River to make it easier for them to obtain their source of water for agricultural activities. The Peranakan Chinese who have experienced cultural assimilation share a similar lifestyle with the Malays in terms of dressing, economic activities, architecture, leisure activities, food and speech (they speak in Hokkien mixed with Malay in the Kelantan and Siamese dialect). However, in terms of religion and belief, they still adhere to the religion and beliefs of their ancestors.

The Peranakan Chinese community are Buddhists and strongly believe in sacred spirits<sup>1</sup> and deities<sup>2</sup>. They

worship various spirits and deities, including Datok Janggut (beard), Datok Api (fire), Datok Kolam (pool) as well as the seven 'Datok' brothers, namely Datok Merah (red), Datok Putih (white), Datok Panglim Hitam (black), Datok Biru (blue), Datok Kuning (yellow), Datok Merah Jambu (pink) and Datok Hijau (green) as well as Ho Ya (tiger spirit). Meanwhile the deities that are worshipped include the God Naah (Tai Zhi), Guan Gong (the God Guan Seng Tir Kun Fa Zhu Gong, the God Wu Kong (Monkey God), Tu Pek Kong (Gods of Prosperity), Ngo Kok, Tiu Koo Seng Kun (the God Kwan Seng Tee), Heng Tu Keng Choo, Ji Gong, Goddess Ma Zhu (Goddess the Sea), Goddesses Guan Yin and others. They believe that these sacred spirits and Gods can protect them from calamities, provide them with good health and wealth and healing.

## II. POSSESSED CEREMONY OR 'LOK TANG'

These sacred spirits and Gods often appear during 'lok tang' ceremony, entering the body of the person chosen to be the intermediary (known as Tang). Tang Ki is the name given to the person who has been possessed and he will often exhibit mannerisms and characteristics of the spirits or Gods that have entered his body. It is believed that the spirit which possesses the body of the person chosen as the intermediary enables that individual to communicate with the Gods, dispense advice to devotees and cure a person's illness. In order to explain more in depth about this 'lok tang' ceremony

<sup>1</sup> Spirits that inhabit the earth. These spirits are regarded as highly respected individuals. When they passed, people begins to idolise and worship them.

<sup>2</sup> These deities, believed to have existed in ancient Chinese history, were great, honourable and highly respected. When they died, their spirits were believed to have gone to the heavens and became Gods.

<sup>3</sup> Spirits that inhabit the earth. These spirits are regarded as