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Ghost Marriages among the Singapore Chinese. By Mrs. Marjorie Topley, Department of Social Studies, University of Malaya

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There is a form of ghost marriage which exists among the Singapore Chinese and is known as *Yin Ch'ü* (*Ts'ü*).¹ This takes place at a ceremony or group of ceremonies 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, although I have heard of marriages being arranged for members of Straits-born Hokkien families. However, the Cantonese are certainly quite open about the fact that they perform them, whereas the Hokkiens I have questioned have been most reluctant to admit it.

In the Cantonese section of that part of Singapore known as the *Ta P'o*² there is in fact a ghost marriage broker's sign hung up in a doorway of a Taoist priest's home. The broker announces that he is willing to undertake the search for a family which has a suitable deceased member with a favourable horoscope whom it would be willing to give in marriage. Such marriages usually take place in the home of the family arranging for the ceremonies regardless of whether the deceased relative is male or female, but sometimes a temple is used. I have witnessed part of such a marriage in the temple of the City God in Singapore, and was told by the caretaker that nowadays temples are used increasingly for many of the rites that were traditionally performed in the home. This is partly as a result of the crowded conditions of urban life, and partly due to the modern prejudices of younger members of many Chinese families.

Ghost marriages appear to take place for any of the following reasons: to acquire a grandson after the death of the son of the family; to acquire a living daughter-in-law after the death of an unmarried son, when a younger son wishes to marry and his elder brother has died before taking a wife (according to Chinese custom a younger son should not marry before his elder brothers; a ghost marriage is, therefore, sometimes arranged for an elder brother so that the younger may then proceed with his own nuptials without fear of incurring the disfavour of his brother's ghost); to prevent any catastrophe that might take place as a result of the unhappiness of the ghost of a deceased son, daughter or betrothed who, finding itself without a spouse in the other world, decides to take its vengeance on its own or its betrothed's family; and to cement a bond of friendship between two families.

If the son of a family dies before marriage, and therefore, presumably, without issue, his parents may desire to adopt a grandson, in order to ensure continuance of the family line. It is usually possible for a family in this position to adopt a son, ideally from a relative of the same surname, or, as sometimes happens in Singapore, from a stranger, without further ceremony. However, they may resort to the practice of adopting a grandson, giving the deceased a mate first, arranging for the match to be made with some suitable young girl who had died recently. The proposition will be made by the usual go-between of traditional Chinese marriage, and if it is accepted there will be a combination of wedding and funeral rites, during part of which the deceased bride will be removed from her own grave and taken to that of her new 'hus-

band,' perhaps in another cemetery. Her spirit will be 'led' by a medium or priest to the scene of the ceremony. After the ceremonies have been completed, the grandson is adopted and from then onwards he will worship the woman as if she were his own mother. Occasionally a live girl is taken as wife for the dead man, but I am told that this is rare and the family must be suitably rich to tempt the girl or her family to accept. Chinese friends have told me however, that they have come across cases where a girl, already betrothed to the deceased, has gone through a ghost marriage after his death. When such marriages take place the new daughter-in-law is expected to take a vow of celibacy. During the marriage ceremony a white cock is substituted for the dead groom. It is taken for a ride in the bridal car and accompanies the bride on her formal visits to relatives after the ceremony. I have come across one woman, a Cantonese from the Shun Te district of Kwangtung, who, terming herself a widow, after some time confessed that she was married to the 'ghost' of her betrothed in this way in China. Afterwards, she came to Singapore to work, and was expected to remit money to her 'husband's' family regularly.

Cases where a betrothed man marries his deceased fiancée seem to be not unknown, and a young Cantonese, who worked with me once, told me that his elder brother was married in this manner. It was pointed out however, that such a marriage could be no handicap, because although the dead woman would remain his first wife, there was nothing to prevent him marrying again. In this case, the dead girl's parents had insisted on the marriage, although his own parents had not been keen. The girl's parents had paid all the expenses.

Cases of ghost marriages for elder brothers appear to be quite common in Singapore, and one Taoist priest told me that this type and ghost marriages to avert bad luck are the most usual. I have come across several instances of the latter kind, of which two of the more interesting are given below.

The first case was recounted to me by a Chinese man who has a Cantonese mother and Hokkien father; the second was in part witnessed personally. In the first case, the marriage took place when my informant was six years old. His mother had borne another son, who after a week or so had suddenly died. The mother had been very distressed and so the family had adopted another son for her. Not long afterwards, the adopted son became seriously ill. Western and Chinese medicines were tried but with no effect. A Cantonese female medium was called in. In a trance the first dead son spoke to his mother through the medium, saying that he was angry because he had no wife in the other world and wanted a marriage to be arranged for him. Against the father's wishes the mother had a ghost marriage performed in their home. The adopted son's illness, however, became worse, and the medium was recalled. The son then said that he was grateful for his first wife but would now like a concubine. However, apparently even this did not satisfy him for the adopted boy died soon after this second ceremony was performed.

The ceremony that I witnessed took place at the City God temple, a temple popular with Cantonese women. It was performed on behalf of a woman of about 45, married with four children. She told me that she was suffering from some kind of malignant growth in the womb and had been to both Western and Chinese-style doctors, who had said that they could do nothing for her. One of her children had then become ill, and soon after her husband lost his job. This string of calamities led her mother-in-law to insist that she see an itinerant Taoist priest. He inquired in detail into her past history and discovered that when about 16 years of age she had been betrothed to a man who had subsequently died. The priest then announced that the various troubles that had befallen her were being caused by this man. As she was already married she was told that a dead woman must be found for

him. This was arranged by the priest who also conducted the ceremony. Ceremonies of different kinds lasted from 7.30 p.m. to 4 a.m. at a total cost of \$200 (about £23); the necessary ritual paraphernalia being provided by the priest. Unfortunately I was not allowed to stay to the end of the performance. The priest had especially invited me along on the understanding that I took photographs for him, but the woman was against it, saying quite justifiably that as she had spent so much money she did not want any spectators. However, during the part that I witnessed, various preliminary purification rites took place, paper and bamboo houses, furniture, cars and servants were burned for the couple, and locks of the dead girl's hair and her nail clippings were laid on the altar for the dead man. I was told by the priest that the initial rites of purification to remove evil influences were usual and

always the same, but that he varied the later ceremony according to how much he charged. The key part however, involved the calling down of the dead man's ghost and the announcing to it that these things were being done for its benefit.

Marriages of deceased persons in order to cement a social bond between two families appear to have been more common in the earlier days of immigration and I have come across no recent cases. However, in a Straits Chinese magazine, now defunct (*circa* 1908), I came across a note criticizing this practice as being 'old-fashioned' and a waste of money.

Notes

¹ Literally: *yin*, shade, dark, mysterious; *ch'ü*, to take a wife.

² *Ta* meaning big, great; and *p'o*, the sound of the third of the three characters given by the Chinese for the three syllables Sing-a-pore.

REVIEWS

GENERAL

The Gift. By Marcel Mauss. Translated by Ian Cunnison, with an Introduction by E. E. Evans-Pritchard. Pp. xiv, 130. London (Cohen & West), 1954. Price 12s. 6d.

36 This is a translation of the *Essai sur le don* first published in the *Année Sociologique*, 1923-4. The text is complete but the voluminous footnotes have been condensed and placed at the end of the book where they still fill nearly 50 pages. Professor Evans-Pritchard's Introduction is no more than that, and does not amount to a critical commentary. The translation seems to me barely satisfactory. This, after all, is a most important text and the translation should do more than convey the general meaning, it should be precise. Dr. Cunnison is too often satisfied with approximations. A notice such as this must be sparing in quotations, but if the reader will examine the English text at pp. 70-71 and compare it carefully with the corresponding French original at p. 267 of *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (1950), he will see very well what I mean. 'Concepts which we like to put in opposition' is not an adequate rendering of 'Ces concepts de droit et d'économie que nous nous plaçons à opposer,' nor is 'purely interested and utilitarian production and exchange'—whatever that may mean—the equivalent of 'la production et l'échange purement intéressés de l'utile.'

Quite apart from the inadequacy of the translated text the condensation of the footnotes represents a serious loss. Referring to the same passage, the reader may note that p. 267, note 3, of the French text, which to my mind throws a most revealing light on Mauss's thinking, is omitted altogether. The next two footnotes are condensed into one, and further condensed in translation, with very strange results. Mauss had written:

M. Malinowski a fait un effort sérieux¹ pour classer du point de vue des mobiles, de l'intérêt et du désintéressement, toutes les transactions qu'il constate chez les Trobriandais; il les étage, entre le don pur et le troc pur après marchandage.² Cette classification est au fond inapplicable.

¹ *Argonauts*, p. 177.

² Il est très remarquable que, dans ce cas, il n'y ait pas vente, car il n'y a pas échange de *vaygu'a*, de monnaies. Le maximum d'économie auquel se sont haussés les Trobriandais, ne va donc pas jusqu'à l'usage de la monnaie dans l'échange lui-même.

It is clear that the second footnote refers to Malinowski's discussion of 'Trade, Pure and Simple' which appears at pp. 189-90 of *Argonauts* at the end of the section on types of exchange which begins at p. 177. It is also apparent that what Mauss is emphasizing as remarkable is that in Trobriand barter (*gimwali*) there is no trading of *vaygu'a*, the ceremonial valuables which Mauss, unlike Malinowski, refers to as 'money.' But in Dr. Cunnison's translation brevity and careless phraseology combine to produce this:

Malinowski made a serious effort to classify all the transactions he witnessed in the Trobriands according to the

interest or disinterestedness present in them. He ranges them from pure gift to barter with bargaining, but this classification is untenable.¹

¹ *Argonauts*, p. 177. Note that in this case there is no sale for there is no exchange of *vaygu'a*. The Trobrianders do not go so far as to use money in exchange.

This surely is a statement which must make all good Malinowskians raise their eyebrows very high indeed.

The *Essai sur le don* is rightly regarded as compulsory reading for all students of social anthropology working in this country. All concerned are to be commended for making available to us this English text. I only wish the job had been rather better done. Let those who can stick to the original.

E. R. LEACH

Hungarian and Vogul Mythology. By Géza Róheim. Monog. Amer. Ethnol. Soc. Vol. XXIII. New York (Augustin), 1954. Pp. 86. Price \$2.75

37 Géza Róheim, who died in 1953, was an encyclopaedic scholar of Hungarian origin, who combined an interest in folklore, anthropology and psychiatry. His work *The Gates of the Dream*, which well illustrates his psychological approach to the humanities, was published the day before his death. *Hungarian and Vogul Mythology* has been published posthumously after editing by Dr. Esther S. Goldfrank.

The Magyar of Europe was of the same origin as the Vogul of Western Siberia. The latter has an abundant mythology, but the Hungarians possess only what survives in the mediæval *Gesta Hungarorum*. Róheim believes that traces of ancient Ugric mythology are embedded in the history of these chronicles, and that all these myths are totemic in origin. He goes further, claiming that analysis of the Gander-Chief, or World-Surveyor-Man, the central figure of Vogul mythology, reveals an Œdipus complex and the dream origin of the shamanistic flight myths. He also detects a relationship between the Ugric shaman and the North American tribal hero. A Hungarian writer and his American readers, limited no doubt to a select company interested in these things, are thus conveniently brought into touch.

Perhaps American will be more sympathetic than British scholars with the interpretation of the mythology, since psycho-analysis has stronger support in the United States than here as providing the key to the understanding of man, including his mythology. Yet, even if his interpretation of Hungarian myths is received with agnostic reserve, Dr. Róheim's monograph provides a useful introduction to a lesser-known field of folklore. There is an ample bibliography for those who would enquire further; and there are three short informative appendices on the Uralic, Altaic and kindred peoples and their languages, on the Hungarian Chronicles, and on Ugric ethnic names. A map, as frontispiece, illustrates the philological data of the first appendix.

D. W. GUNDRY