

Charity Activities and Social Infrastructure: A Case Study in Singapore

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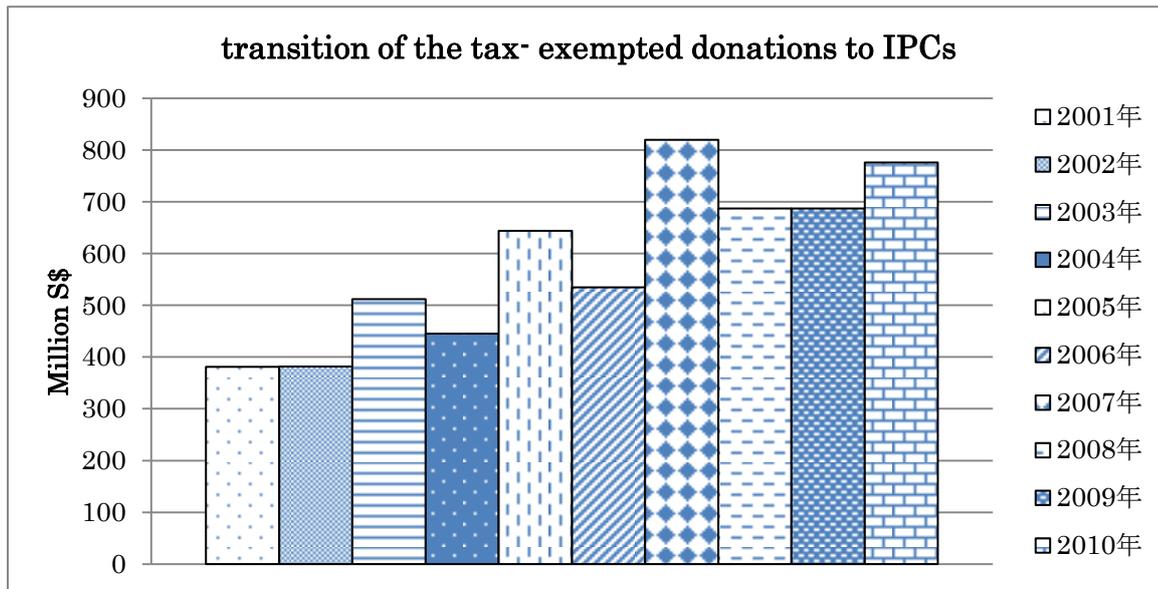
1. Introduction

An increasing number of people in Singapore have been making donations to charities in the recent years. Malaysians are also interested in this Singaporean phenomenon, which the Malaysian Chinese newspaper, *The Sin Chew Malaysia*, reported that donations increased from US\$354 million in 2005 to US\$400 million in 2006, of which 82% constituted donations for large religious institutions, institutions of higher education, and medical institutions. This paper indicates that fundraising methods and branding strategies led to the collection of generous contributions.

According to research by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre in Singapore, personal contributions to charity increased from Singapore dollars (S\$) 958 million in 2008 to

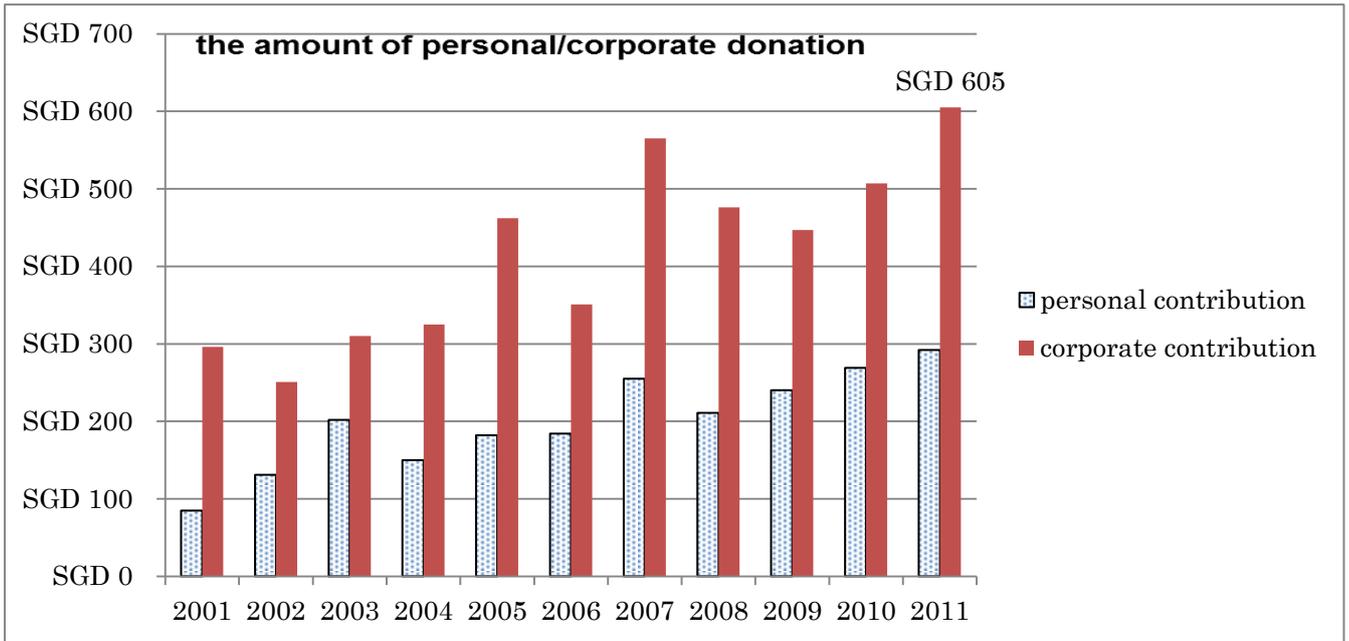
S\$1,067 million in 2010.

Contribution to charity as a percentage of GDP is 1.60% in the US, 0.68% in the UK, 0.12% in Japan, and 0.35% in Singapore. Religious contributions account for 57% of donations in Singapore, and the average amount of personal contribution shows a rising tendency (see accompanying graph).



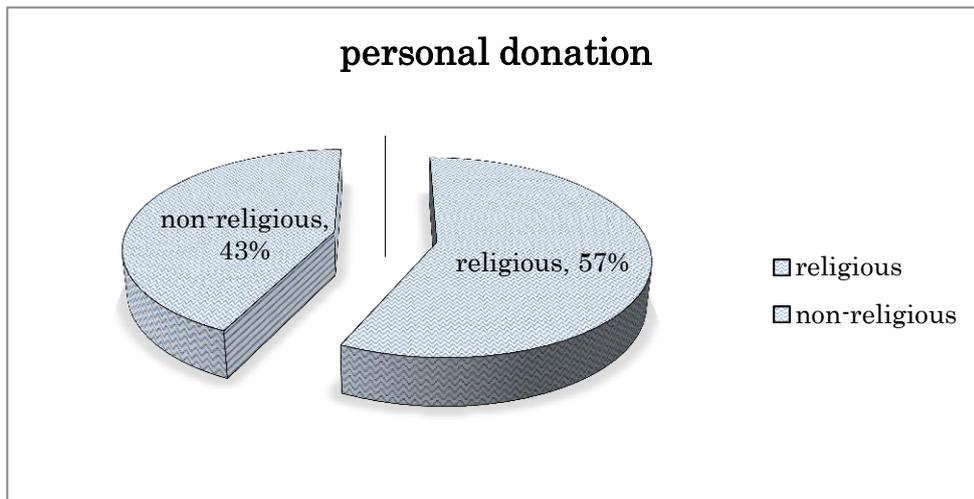
(Source: Commissioner of Charities Annual Report for the year ended 31 Dec 2011)

The amount of personal and corporate donations has also shown a rising tendency in the past 10 years.



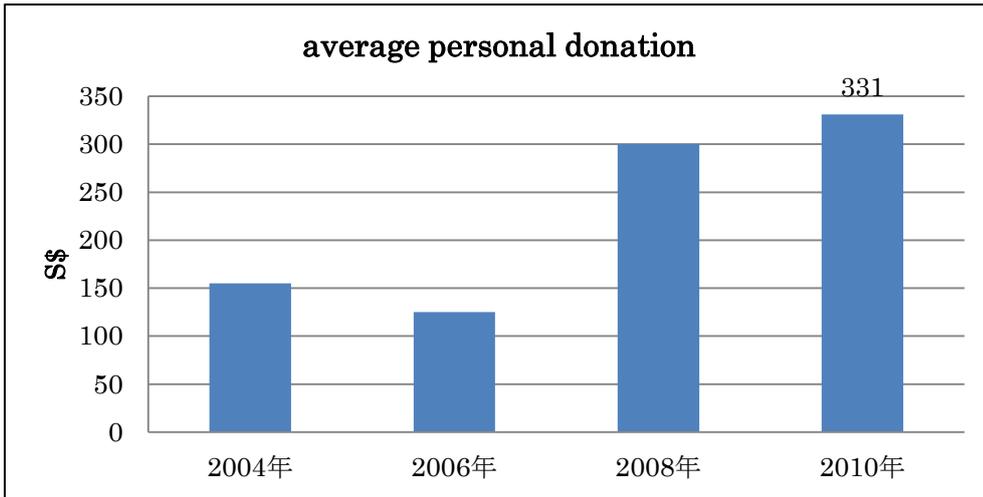
(Source: Commissioner of Charities Annual Report for the year ended 31 Dec 2011)

More than half of all personal donations were made to religious institutions.



(Source: Commissioner of Charities Annual Report for the year ended 31 Dec 2011)

The average personal donation was S\$331, or S\$27 per month, which is not insignificant compared to the average monthly earning of S\$4,263 in 2010ⁱ.



(Source: Commissioner of Charities Annual Report for the year ended 31 Dec 2011)

Personal donations, which are significantly higher than corporate donations in the US and the UK, account for 52.5% of all donations in Japan, and for only 34% in Singapore.

<Tax-exempted donations in Singapore (million S\$)>

	2009 年	2010 年
Personal donation	240 (35%)	269 (34%)
Corporate donation	447 (65%)	570 (66%)

(Source: Commissioner of Charities Annual Report for the year ended 31 Dec 2011)

In Singapore, donations to charity are made not only by the Chinese, but by the Malays and Tamils as well. Mauss [1923 (1954)] said the following about donation in *The Gift* (Essais sur le don?): duty to give a gift, duty to receive it, and duty to return. The duty to return accompanies the feeling of being in debt, so Mauss called it 'reciprocity'.

Is 'reciprocity' applicable in the case of charitable donations in Singapore? Giving a gift is an act of one's own initiative, but other facets to the relationship between the donor and the beneficiary may exist, such as the expectation of a gift on the part of the beneficiary that forces the donor to make a gift. In the case of charity donations, the beneficiary is not the one who

places hope on receiving a gift, but, rather, an outsider who organize the donation, such as a fundraising institution or the public. Godelier [1996 (1998)] criticized Mauss's idea of the gift to the Gods, arguing that it ignored the point of the view of the Gods having superiority over the worshippers.

Since most donations in Singapore are made for a religious purpose, the study examines gifts and exchanges in the religious context.

Another reason behind the study of charity activities in Singapore is the paradigm shift in the understanding of the concept of charity [Cheng 2009]. That paradigm shift started in 2007 with the developments related to the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) affair. Traditionally, there had been the idea of (樂善好施); people were delighted to do good things and give alms. Everyone paid attention to only the attitude for donation, and it was not considered good to focus on the procedures governing the use of the money. However, following the NKF affair, as well as the charitable activities of Ren-Ci, the public perception of charity changed from only 'doing goodness', to 'how to do goodness' or 'to do goodness well'. I investigate this paradigm shift regarding the understanding of charity.

2. Charity Activities in Singapore

This chapter presents a general view of the charitable activities in Singapore in the context of charitable or voluntary donations.

2-1 Charity Activities and Donation

There are many types of charity activities: relief illness, support for reintegration into society, education, arts and culture, and sports; and prevention of cruelty to animals. As of 31 December 2010, 542 organisations were certified as Institutes of Public Character (IPCs) in Singapore.

The following is the case history of NKF. I have referred to the NKF website for the organisation's history. In 1961, kidney specialist Dr Khoo Oon Teik became aware that many of his neighbours were suffering from kidney diseases. His own brother had also died of the disease. In 1969, Dr Khoo and his colleagues gave a charity movie show, which collected the donation, then set up a kidney dialysis unit in the Singapore General Hospital. This was the beginning of NKF. In the 1970s and early 1980s, many people in Singapore died of kidney problems because they could not bear the cost of dialysis, which was S\$4,000 per month. Not everybody could afford the treatment, and in some cases, the patient's family had to sell their houses. In 1982, NKF installed 10 dialysis machines in the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital (广惠肇留医院). The headquarters of NKF was also shifted to this hospital.

In 1986, the Human Organ Transplant Act (HOTA) was approved. Under the Act, the organs of non-Muslimⁱⁱ people, who were aged between 21 and 60 years and had suffered unanticipated deaths, could be used for human transplantation.

In 1987, the first satellite dialysis centre was established at an adjoining residential area to provide inexpensive dialysis to the local people. There are now 13 such satellite centres. In 1995, the Shantang-NKF Dialysis Centre was established in northern Singapore.

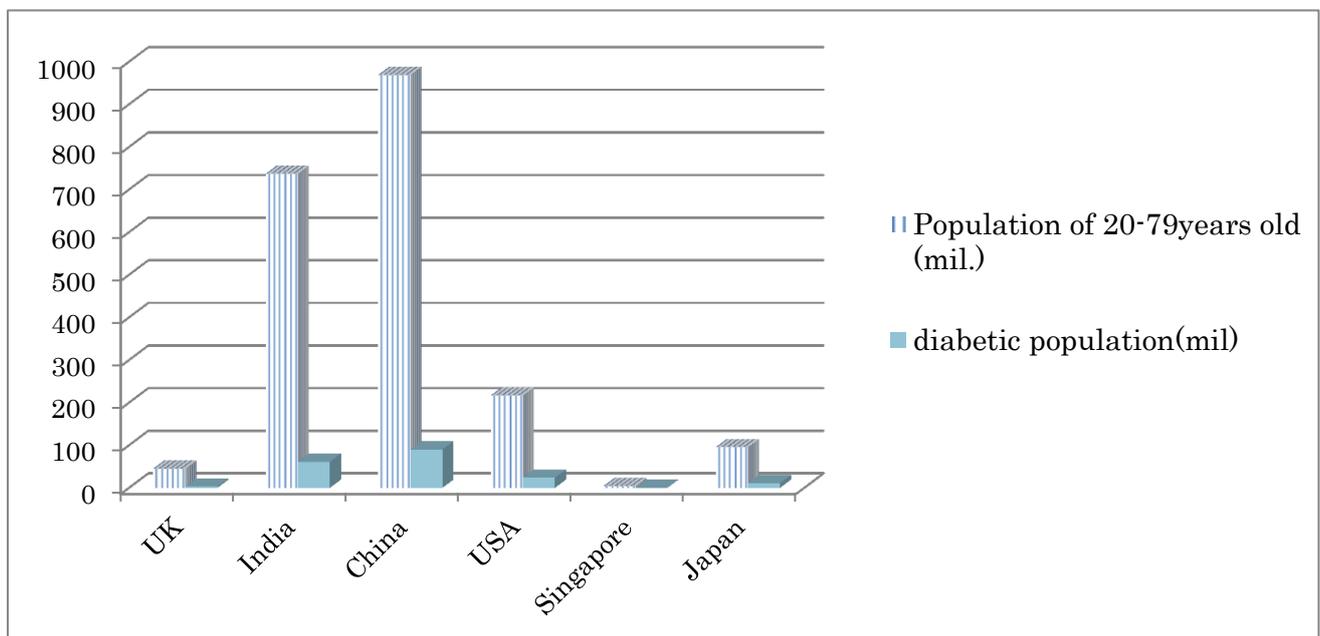
Though NKF was formed as a fully private foundation, it started to raise funds and expand following the appointment of Thambiraja Thamadurai as CEO. As the amount of donations increased, so did criticism and slander for Thamadurai also increased. NKF reportedly promoted, amongst its patients, life insurance products offered by a particular life insurance company in lieu of paying for its own insurance [*The Straits Times*, April 2004]. In the same month this the newspaper also claimed that the CEO's office had a luxurious gold-plated bath tap, and raised suspicions of misappropriation of the charity's funds for personal use by Thamadurai, who subsequently filed a lawsuit against the newspaper. The flow of money and distribution of funds were examined under the legal procedure, which led to the

revelation of the inappropriate use of funds.

After the NKF incident, the government set up a cross-ministry committee in October 2005 to regulate the use and distribution of money donated to charitable organisations.

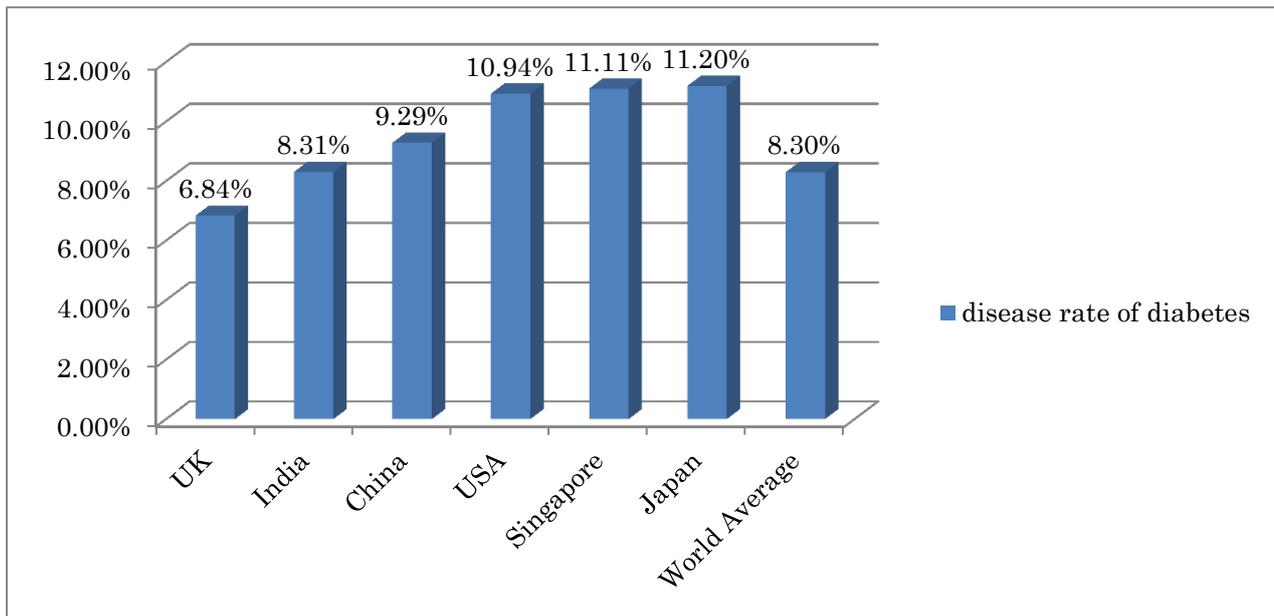
Many people thought that NKF's ability to raise large amounts of money depended on the CEO's personal capability and the appearance of a popular singer and other well-known people in the charity television programme. There was one more reason why the kidney diseases generated much interest in Singapore. According to the International Kidney Association, one in every 10 persons has kidney disease. Diabetes is considered an index of kidney problems. In 2011, Singapore was sixth in the world in terms of the number of diabetics as a percentage of total population. Though the actual number of diabetics was comparatively less, the disease rate was the same as Japan.

<Population in 20-79 years age group(million) and Diabetic population (million)>



(Source: International Diabetes Federation, 2011)

<Disease rate of diabetes>



(Source: International Diabetes Federation, 2011)

2-2 Incentives for donation

Donations were made tax deductible in Singapore on 1 January 2005, the amount of deduction being double the actual donation. However, overseas support was not subject to this provision, and, moreover, there were restrictions on IPC activities, IPC institutions, and charity events. These donations were categorised as:

- (1) Cash donations
- (2) Gift of shares listed on the Singapore Exchange (SGX) or of units in unit trusts readily tradable in Singapore
- (3) Gifts of computer hardware, software, and peripherals
- (4) Gifts of artefacts
- (5) Adoption, commission, or donation of public sculptures
- (6) Gifts of parcels of land or buildings

The tax deduction for donations was increased from two to two-and-a-half times for the period from 2009 to 2015. The taxation method is simple. Tax is deducted from the salary every month, and the donors do not need to submit an income tax return. Though the sharp reduction in tax favours the personal donors, there are more corporate than personal donors.

3. The Relationship between the Activities in Shantang and Social Infrastructure

3-1 About Shantang

Shantang (善堂) in Chinese is as the ‘association which everyone attends voluntarily and does goodness(善) in collaboration with each other’ [Fuma 1997]. The following refers to this goodness:

The basis of Chinese popular religious thought is simply ‘goodness’. This ‘goodness’ is not only a matter of religious thought, but a matter of the entire Chinese basis. The ‘Great Learning (大学)’ refers to the abiding by the highest good, and the Chinese classic text ‘Dao De Jing’ refers to the best goodness as akin to water (上善如水). It is the essentials for the Chinese, who eluded a complicated history. If they lose such a sense of values, they cannot exist anymore [Yoshioka 1974].

In other words, it forms their *raison d’être*. First, they master this idea, in order to realise Confucius ‘Ren (仁)’ and Laozi ‘Dao (道)’.

Fuma mentions Shantang as a charity association which was administered by private citizens, started during the late Ming dynasty [Fuma 1997:33]. Earlier, in the Northern Wei dynasty (AD 386–534), there were similar charities that supported widows, widowers, orphans, and other helpless persons, but these were not named Shantang. At the time, there existed the equal-field system (均田制); if a family had only women, aged people, children, sick persons,

disabled persons, or widows, and no able-bodied men, the government gave fields to the family under the welfare policy.

In the southern Qi dynasty (南齊 AD 479–502), 'Liuji Guan' (六疾館) was built by the Buddhists, which accommodated poor and sick persons. In the Song dynasty (AD 960–1279) and the Yuan dynasty (AD 1271–1368), the government provided clothes and provisions to people as relief measures. In the Ming dynasty, the relief facility (養濟院), run by the government, was founded. It accommodated persons with no one to depend on, though persons aged less than 13 years or more than 50 years were not allowed in this facility. They were sheltered in the temple and trained on skills to help them earn their own living.

In the late Ming dynasty, Tong Shan Hui (同善會) was established as Shantang. The relief facilities and Tong Shan Hui were run under different principles [Lee 2004:242]. In the early Ming dynasty, the prominent man Yang Dongming (楊東明) established the institution as a social gathering in the Yu Cheng prefecture (虞城縣), after which in 1614 Gao Pan Long and Chen-yuxue propagated around the Jiangnan (江南) district.

Later, the sense of morals and welfare work were strengthened in the Jiangnan district, and the activities spread to the Pearl River district in Guangdong and Chaozhou areas.

In the Qing dynasty, the welfare works were diversified into categories such as infant relief (育嬰堂), prevention of infanticide (禁溺子女), making of graves for collapse (義塚), orphan and widow relief (恤孤貧, 恤嫠會), relief for sea-related disasters (救生船), mental hospitals (癲瘋院), accommodation for the blind (瞽目院), homes for aged men (老人堂), and homes for aged women (普濟院) etc.

In the late Qing dynasty, the Hong Kong British Government protectorate was established to protect the immigrants in cooperation with Shantang and, in some cases, to investigate into cases of women being kidnapped from mainland China [Kani 1979:113].

In Singapore, Chaozhou Shantang, which had become prosperous through its activities

in the Guangdong Chaozhou district, was set up in Singapore via Thailand or directly in the country. The Guangdong Chaozhou Shantang had started from Bao De Tong (報德堂), which was established to express respect for Shi Da Feng (稷大峰).

Shi Da Feng was a high-ranking priest of the Song dynastyⁱⁱⁱ (宋代). He was born in a wealthy family came in the second year of the Bao yuan (宝元) era during the Song dynasty (AD 1039), in Wen Zhou prefecture (温州府) in Zhe Jiang province (浙江省). His family name was Lin (林), and he was given the name Lin E (靈噩). After receiving general and religious education, he proceeded to his post as officer in Zhe Jiang province. He was enraged by the political corruption and became a priest to give relief to people. He went to many places, and during a visit to Nan'an prefecture, (南安縣) Quanzhou (泉州府) in Fujian province (福建省) he restored the roads, for which the villagers admired him and called him Da Feng Fashi (大峰法師). He stayed there for 18 years, and after he was 60 years old he moved to Beishan (北山), Chaoyang prefecture (潮陽縣) in Guangdong province (廣東省). At the time, Haopin area (蠓坪鄉) in Chaoyi village (潮邑) was suffering from a drought, poor harvest, and a plague. The bodies of people who had died of starvation were left alone. Shi Da Feng decided to install an altar for relief, prayed to rid the people of their ill luck, and gave them medical services.

There was a river near by the village, which the people used to cross by a boat. However, the boat would capsize sometimes owing to the high waves. One day, after visiting a patient late at night, Shi Da Feng could not return home because the boat service had ended. He then undertook a geological survey, made plans for a stone bridge, and raised funds for its construction. The engineering work started in 1127 and was completed in 1153, 27 years after he died. The bridge was called Luoyang bridge (洛陽橋) as well as Heping bridge (和平橋), and the villagers built the Baodetang Shantang temple (報德堂, now renamed 和平報德古堂) in praise of his good deeds. This Shantang provides a free tea service, memorial services after death, repairs bridges and roads, helps the poor, and provides a free medical service. There are more than 200

Shantang in Chaoshan district (潮汕地区) now.

In 1916, Xiu Teck Shantang Yang Xin She established the first Chaozhou Shantang in Singapore. We Li Shen (吳立声), Tang Si Shun (陳四順), and other persons brought sacred ornaments (聖輿) from Chao Zhou prefecture in China. The Japanese military government era was a turning point in the history of the Chao Zhou Shantang, especially in 1942 [Lee 2005:87]. Wars used to occur frequently, there was a shortage of supplies, unemployed people filled the streets, and sometimes the dead were not buried appropriately. The Japanese military government prohibited people from private activities, but one of Chinese leaders, Lim Shu Sen (林樹森), negotiated about it, and only Shantang was allowed to function for the collection for corpses and to provide relief to the poor. Xiu Teck Shantang made an alliance with five other Shantang, forming the Singapore Chinese Shantang Blue-Cross Relief foundation (新加坡中华善堂蓝十字救济总会). The alliance gave to charity, worked for the medical treatment of injured persons, distributed medicines, tea, porridge, and clothes, collected corpses, and placed the bodies in coffins. Moreover, it prayed Song Da Feng (宋大峰) and recited a sutra. Members of Shantang were exempted from public work (奉侍隊) by the Japanese military government. Many people wanted to attend Shantang, which also opened its door to persons from every ethnic and religious background. It was effective in forging relations across communities [Lee 2009:14–15].

3-2 Involvement and Understanding of the Charitable Activities of Shantang

This section presents a case study on an unnamed Chaozhou Shantang (潮州善堂), referred to as A, which is a branch of main Shantang. A Chinese medical doctor, Mr Chen, established the Shantang in 1942. After World War II, Mr. Zheng, chairman of the main Shantang, supported the construction of the present site. In the 1960s, residential areas were redeveloped into high-rise housing complexes, and the area around this Shantang also changed from villages to densely populated locations. The government was looking for a civil

organization to provide free medical services in each redeveloped area, and this Shantang consented to the proposal. It rebuilt the clinic hall, also commemorating the 25th anniversary for this Shantang. In 1992 the columbarium building (归德楼) was constructed with five floors to put the members' ashes. Applications are now being accepted for new members.



<A Shantang, photo by the author>



< Columbarium building in A Shantang,
photo by the author >

There are two types of charity activities in A Shantang, assisting other activities as well as its own charitable works. For example, the free Traditional Chinese Medical Service has seven Chinese medical doctors and provides free medicines. The patients donate money after receiving medical services. On the first and fifteenth days of the lunar calendar, a free Fu-ji (扶乩)^{iv} consultation session (問事) is held, except in the seventh month. There are two separate buildings for the ancestral tablets and the cremated ash pots.

In the Fuji session, there is one zheng Jizhang (正乩掌) and one fu Jizhang (副乩掌), two Pingsha (平沙) who level the tray, one Chaolu (抄录) who records the Ji session, and one Baolu (报录) who talks with the clients and recites a sutra. These six persons arrive together at around 7 pm. First, they recite the sutra (心經三篇) in front of Song Da Feng. Thereafter, the trainees (鸞生) practise the Fuji session for one hour. During this time, only Milefozu (弥勒佛祖) and Lingyinsi Daojifozu (靈隱寺道濟佛祖) come down. After the practice session, Song Da Feng arrives and the Fuji session is started.



<Fu-ji(扶乩) in A Shantang, photo by the author >



<Traditional Chinese Medical Center in A Shantang,
photo by the author >

At the beginning of the Fuji session, there is no verbal communication with the devotee but the preaching from Song Da Feng for all devotees, following which the consultation starts. The following is a preaching from 1 November (lunar calendar) 2010.

冠首：才能善用、正士分劳。

才高守谦众欢迎，
能人献力步锦程，
善业志获立楷模，
用心感格智随增。

正诚厚道邀为伍，
士品兼优积可承，
分工合作无彼此，
劳栽德树报丰荣。

You must use your talent for the good; a proper person must have good manners.

An able and wise person must be humble, and people will admire her or his noble spirit. A talented person should contribute her or his share to the promotion of welfare and charity, and set a good example for other people with an honest heart. I hope you will soon be on a par with a person who can be considerate in all sincerity. Only a dignified and modest person can respond to this matter. Whatever your work, we must share these ideas, and our efforts will obtain a dazzling success.

Song Da Feng's verse preaches morality and encourages people to do good activities. Mr B, who was a member of this Shantang's board, told me his idea about the goodness and activities in Shantang:

The Teochew (Chao zhou) people think that 'doing goodness' has two dimensions, one is for the ancestors and other is for living persons; we think we must deal with both aspects carefully. In accordance with this idea, we attach greater importance to a funeral. The name 'Seu' in 'Seu Teck Sean Tong' means to do practice, we follow Song Da Feng-Fuji's advice.

In the memorial book, Mi-Zhen [1992] wrote about alms-giving and beneficiary acts:

One day Shakamuni Buddha saw a wealthy man, who had done much goodness and given alms, but was troubled. Shakamuni asked him about the cause. The man had done many charitable activities and donated money for orphanages and homes for the aged. However, when Shakamuni investigated, he found that the money had never been used for charity. Instead, it had gone to someone's own pockets.

Shakamuni told him the man, ‘There are two layers to doing goodness. The donors should carry on only donations, and the beneficiaries carry on only receipt. The thing to do for you is only to donate the money with all your heart. It will become doing goodness. You don’t need to care what happens after donation. It is not your business. If you want to know how the money was spent, you may inquire into that reason, and you should continue to do goodness from your heart’.

You only think about goodness, it will be same as doing goodness, and then it is making donation and effort. It is to do goodness. It is not concerned with what the money is actually spent on. It is doing goodness. Once someone experiences a religious awakening, carry out to do goodness. If a beneficiary puts your idea into practice, the beneficiary also earns salvation. Even if the beneficiary does not put your idea into practice, or leads a life of dissipation, retribution is for this beneficiary. The beneficiary will never return your interest. Someday, in the next generation, this donation money will turn back to you, and you will receive the interest in few hundred years later.

The person who does goodness only donates the money, and does not need to interfere in other matters. This is the essence of doing goodness. Furthermore, the best way of doing goodness is doing goodness in the right hand, and left hand not knowing of it. If you donate 10 dollars today and 10 dollars tomorrow, you calculate the amount of donation. This is expecting do goodness, and we call it ‘positive virtue’ (陽德). The benevolence is not much. ‘Negative virtue’ (陰德) is doing goodness when everyone does not pay attention. The benevolence is much. Many people do charity, and write down the amount of donation, and though this way of expression is a kind

of goodness, these people can't earn much salvation. It is the implicatively virtuous deed (有所為). The non-intentional virtuous deed (無所為) happens when the donor does not write the name and remains anonymous.

In this way, Mi-Zhen discouraged the donor from thinking about a return gift and trying to make an immediate profit. The good deeds will never bear fruit in one generation. The worshipper at Shantang may expect the immediate profit as a return gift, but they should not think in such a way.

3-3 Charity activities and Social Infrastructure

A Shantang built a dialysis centre in the North area (A Shantang-NKF Dialysis Centre) in 1995 and donated S\$1.5 million. The centre has 14 dialyzers and 15 medical staff. In January 2002, the operating annual costs were S\$1.94 million, towards which A Shantang donated S\$200,000. The cost of treatment for a kidney disease patient is S\$3,000 per month in a private hospital but only S\$100 in NKF. NKF had initially asked A Shantang for financial assistance, upon which the committee members of A Shantang decided to assist NKF. This was not a one-time assistance, but annual. It is not easy to keep on supporting NKF. There are now 24 NKF dialysis centres, each of which has an affiliation with a private- or government-operated company.

In addition to Shantang contributing to the regional medical service by supporting the dialysis centres, free traditional Chinese medical centres have been operating in A Shantang since the beginning. The traditional Chinese doctors are certified, and the certification is renewed every year by examination. The doctor writes a prescription and prepares the medicine, which is also given free. Sometimes, the patient makes a donation. And there is another point of view, besides the dialysis centres the Shantang provides the coffin and funeral service for

person with no one to depend on (施棺赠葬) , or invites the annual festival feasts and gives some spending money for the needy. Shantang recreates themselves to relevant to these days' social demands, it's quite resilient institution [Tan 2012].

4. Conclusion

This donation does not signify a donation that involves the expectation of a return gift. In that case, in addition to the donor and the beneficiary, there are outsiders who might insist on a donation. Apart from this, during the research, I discovered another donation that did not involve the expectation of a return gift. This was different from the obligation referred to by Maurice Godelier, that is, a person donates a god or a man represents a god gift [Godelier 1998]. It is not an obligation but a voluntary gift. There is no assumption that making a gift will lead to a return gift. This idea keeps the relationship going between a devotee and the gods.

Cheng [2009] considered charity as the 'haves' holding out a helping hand to the 'have-nots', so it is better for charitable activities to be gone in the future. However, the giving of alms and charity is the root and the trunk of religion^v, we should not consider this idea in a negative light. Furthermore, we have to pay attention to the operating system of NKF. The medical treatment system and the charity system cooperate with each other in this country. The charity system supports one end of the medical treatment system.

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ⁱ The median monthly gross wage of clerical support workers was S\$ 2,100 [Ministry of Manpower, 2011]

ⁱⁱ Muslims are exempted from HOTA. In 1990, the Muslim Transplant Coordinator gave the order for the Muslim kidney donation campaign. The first kidney transplant was operated, in which the kidney came from a Muslim injured in an accident.

ⁱⁱⁱ Because of the Song dynasty’s priest, he is usually called Song Da Feng (宋大峰) in Singapore.

^{iv} Fuji or Fu luan (扶鸞) is a kind of Daoism fortune-telling and automatic writing which uses a

planchette divine forked willow twig; two Fuji masters who possess a religious frenzy keep a forked twig and the twig writes a word on the sandy tray automatically.

^v Prof. Masahiko Togawa pointed out this idea when I read this paper in the Society of Japanese Cultural Anthropology, 23 June 2012. I express my gratitude to Prof. Togawa.