

THE *TANG-KI*'S COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

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The ritual costume of the *tang-ki* comprises two items of clothing; firstly a stomacher (*tou-ioe* 肚兜 pinyin *du dou*) which is worn over drawstring trousers and secondly, a ceremonial apron named *lengkoon* (龙裙 pinyin *longqun*) the *tang-ki*'s three-panel 'dragon skirt'. The stomacher symbolises the *tang-ki*'s status as naked, child diviner. The dragon's skirt is an article of a general's costume borrowed from Chinese opera and marks the *tang-ki* as a warrior. To these two ritual articles of clothing (the trousers being functional rather than symbolic), can be added a travelling cloak (plate 1).



Plate 1 (left): A *tang-ki* dressed in a *tou-ioe* stomacher and a dragon skirt or *longqun* worn over matching trousers. He also wears a travelling cloak to signify that he is a god who has travelled from the spirit realm into the mortal world. Plate 2 (right): A member of the public who went into a spontaneous trance at a *tang-ki* event had his shirt and shoes removed to satisfy the need for ritual exposure, a legacy of ancient rain-making ceremonies. Photos: Author

Ritual exposure, performed nudity:

Because the stomacher is an undergarment it is emblematic of nudity. An actress playing the role of a wanton woman is likely to signify this status by wearing a stomacher for costume. The Chinese baby who wears a stomacher is to all intents and purposes nude. The stomacher is there to protect against colic and is not worn for the sake of modesty.

Thus the bare-chest *tang-ki* who wears a stomacher signals that he is a naked child. The nudity of the *tang-ki* is performed ritual exposure, a legacy from the *tang-ki*'s rain-making shaman ancestors. In fact the most important requirement of a *tang-ki*'s costume is that it offers ritual exposure. This tenet is fulfilled by a *tang-ki* who performs with his torso bare and his feet unshod. A spectator who goes into a spontaneous trance at a temple ceremony is likely to have his shirt and shoes removed by helpful fellow-spectators (plate 2). Thus a *tang-ki* is considered acceptably dressed even if he is wearing a pair of modern jeans as long as he is without shirt or footwear.

The stomacher:

The stomacher is known in the Hokkien dialect as *tou-ioe* (肚兜 pinyin *du dou*) literally 'stomach-sash'. It is a lozenge-shaped bib tied with string around the neck and the waist. This is the traditional undergarment worn by Chinese babies and is worn by the *tang-ki* as an emblem of his eternal youth (plate 3).



Plate 3: The *tou-ioe* or stomacher is an emblem of youth.



Plates 4a and 4b: A medium paints on make-up. Later in a trance and dressed in costume complete with hat, he is the Toa Ah Peh, the elder hell deity incarnate. Photo: Author.

New costume trends that theatricalise a *tang-ki*'s role as a god incarnate:

Recent fashion since the 1980s, theatricalise the role of the *tang-ki* through elaborate costumes and make-up. Often the principle of ritual nudity is eschewed. The Goddess of Mercy, Jigong the drunken *arhat*, Justice Bao and Elder and Second Grandpas are performed by *tang-kis* wearing full opera-style robes complete with distinctive headdresses. Guanyin's white veil, Jigong's double-peaked monk's cap, Justice Bao's winged magistrate's hat and Elder and Second Grandpas' tall demon's head-dresses, are integral items of costumes which are not set aside but are worn throughout the trance performance (plates 4a and 4b).