

Flesh Bodies, Stiff Corpses, and Gathered Gold: Mummy Worship, Corpse Processing, and Mortuary Ritual in Contemporary Taiwan

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It is well known that Han fear the metaphysical pollution they associate with death and especially corpses. Traditionally they believe family members of the recently deceased are temporarily polluted and those who work handling corpses are permanently polluted; people try to avoid such polluted others for fear that sickness or other unfortunate events may follow contact.¹ Yet strewn across the countryside of both China and Taiwan, and scattered throughout accounts in Buddhist historical texts, are mummified corpses venerated as deities: granting requests, sending dreams, enshrined, worshipped, often gilded, sometimes installed inside or below a religious statue or decorated to look indistinguishable or nearly so from a statue. What happens to most bodily remains? How is it that most corpses are feared, whereas certain others are worshipped? Are these divergent evaluations of corpses due to conflicting religious systems, or does it depend mainly on the identity of the corpse? The following article focuses on these questions as they apply to contemporary Taiwan. First, I describe in detail corpses that are worshipped, since their existence is less recognized or is mistakenly assumed to be nothing but a Buddhist aberration within an otherwise universal pattern of corpse avoidance. Next, I describe corpses that are feared and show changing attitudes toward bodily remains. Finally, I suggest how divergent attitudes toward bodily remains can be placed into the broader context of Han religious beliefs.

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In this article, all words in the Taiwanese Hoklo 福佬/鶴佬 language have been Romanized according to the system presented in Dong, *Taiwan Minnanyu cidian*, and when possible the Hoklo words in quotations from other authors have been adjusted to conform to this system. Note that the particular Han characters given to correspond to certain Hoklo words are contentious, as no system for writing Hoklo has been universally accepted.

¹ For description of funeral specialists and beliefs regarding pollution among the Cantonese, see Watson, "Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society"; and Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones."

Fieldwork and Definitions

The following article initially developed out of an effort to place Buddhist mummies such as those Bingenheimer and I previously described within the broader context of popular religious beliefs.² Consequently, I draw both on notes I made while writing this previous article (2002–2003) as well as on later conversations and observations mainly from the summer of 2004 and the summer and fall of 2005. Noteworthy informants for this article include the employees, devotees, and religious professionals at temples I visited (in Taipei 台北 City, Taipei County, Jilong 基隆 City, Tainan 台南 County, Jinmen 金門 County, and Gaoxiong 高雄 County); a sculptor of religious statuary (in Taipei City); two geomancers (one from Taipei City, one from Xinzhu 新竹 County); one bone collector (in Taoyuan 桃園 County); two Daoist priests (a “black-headed” priest [*heitou daoshi* 黑頭道士] from Taoyuan County, and a “red-headed” [*hongtou daoshi* 紅頭道士] priest from Taipei County); and two employees in funeral parlors (in Taipei City). The sculptor of religious statuary, who has also lacquered five flesh-body bodhisattvas (and who has extensive inside information and photographs to prove his work), has been the most helpful informant. This sculptor, whom I will call “Mr. X,” owns a shop in an old district of Taipei in which he sells statuary and other religious paraphernalia. His grandfather lacquered one Buddhist mummy and his father another, and Mr. X’s family has been in the business of making religious statuary for five generations (or six, if Mr. X’s son is included). I also gave standardized interviews to ten taxi drivers (in Taipei City) to elicit their acquaintance with and acceptance of various legends and ideas regarding corpses. All the taxi drivers were men whose ages ranged from about thirty to sixty. Five grew up in rural areas. In terms of ethnicity, seven were Hoklo, two were mainlanders, and one was Hakka 客家人. Furthermore, I spoke informally with roughly two dozen other people in locations throughout the western half of Taiwan about topics relevant to this article as opportunities arose.

The following inquiry focuses on the popular religious beliefs of Taiwanese Han. Now I will provide brief definitions to help the reader grasp what I refer to by several key terms as they are used in this article. By *beliefs* I mean ideas that dispose informants to behave in certain ways in certain contexts, whether this behavior is verbal (stated belief) or physical (enacted belief). *Religious beliefs* I understand as a subcategory of *cultural beliefs*—that is, beliefs that are shared by a sufficient number of members of a given population to qualify as *cultural* rather than merely idiosyncratic. As I use the term, to qualify as *religious*, a belief must involve, presuppose, or be closely identified with a set of beliefs that involve *supernatural beings*, that is, beings that allegedly exist but cannot be fit into the taxonomy used by contemporary biologists. In contrast to religious beliefs, *naturalistic beliefs* are predicated on the assumption that events occur due to impersonal, law-like processes which are in principle testable. *Popular* religious beliefs are relatively widespread and not confined exclusively to any particular religious group or groups. Finally, by *Taiwanese* I mean anyone

² See Gildow and Bingenheimer, “Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan.”

who is a citizen of the Republic of China, and by *Han* I mean anyone who identifies themselves as Han and who many others who identify themselves as Han would agree is Han.

Deified Corpses

The enshrined, worshipped mummies of Buddhist monastics, almost exclusively monks, have already been the topic of previous research.³ Most commonly called “flesh-body bodhisattvas” [*roushen pusa* 肉身菩薩] today, but also called by other names including “whole-body relics” [*quanshen sheli* 全身舍利], “dharmic bodies” [*fati* 法體] and (once they have been touched up and gilded) “golden bodies” [*jinshen* 金身], these corpses have mummified in a number of ways, often through chemical procedures involving desiccants such as charcoal, lime, or salt, along with air-tight burial environments, and with a protective lacquer coating added after exhumation. Other corpses are said to have mummified naturally after undergoing ordinary burials or after resisting incineration during cremation. Regardless of their mode of production—even if the process was “aided” by chemical means—for devotees the fact that these mummies fail to decompose was and is today attributed to the virtue of the deceased; preservation methods are thought to merely assist in the process. And unlike ordinary, stiff, sometimes putrid corpses, such Buddhist mummies are often said to be nice-looking, pliant, smelling of sandalwood, and radiating tranquility.⁴

The historical origins of this practice in China are opaque and contested. Evidence suggests that both the occurrence and the subsequent conscious practice of mummification in Buddhist circles preceded efforts at doctrinal explanation, according to which mummies, like certain bone relics (tiny pellets or fragments, called “*śarīra* bits” [*shelizi* 舍利子], and porous irregular shapes, called “*śarīra* flowers” [*sheli hua* 舍利花]), were produced through the virtue of the deceased. Unlike the relatively impersonal bone relics, however, the souls of these flesh bodhisattvas persist inside the mummy, and they are worshipped as fully conscious agents capable of communication and interaction as they bestow favors and provide guidance to devotees.⁵

³To orient the reader, I include a brief description of Buddhist mummies, but for more details and references, see Demiéville, “Momies d’Extrême-Orient” (on Buddhist mummies in Asian history); Sharf, “Idolization of Enlightenment”; Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 148–169 (on Buddhist mummies in Chinese history); and Gildow and Bingenheimer “Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan” (descriptions of six Buddhist mummies in Taiwan today and analysis of trends in their worship).

⁴Both the published and unpublished photographs I have seen of mummies before they are touched up reveal that they can initially look rather less attractive and partially decayed. Han Buddhists believe the aroma of sandalwood announces the arrival of a bodhisattva or signals that a recently deceased person has successfully been reborn in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss [Xifang jile shijie 西方極樂世界].

⁵Although Buddhist doctrine states that all sentient beings lack substantial “Selves,” and this doctrine has been interpreted by some scholars and contemporary Buddhists to signify that Buddhism denies the existence of the soul, in practice both ordinary Taiwanese as well as most Buddhists explicitly

While Buddhist mummies are better known, there are also non-Buddhist mummies associated with the diffused popular religious beliefs or with Daoism (the distinction between these two is difficult) in both Taiwan and China.⁶ Therefore, the worship of mummies is not a Buddhist aberration within an otherwise universally “corpse-rejecting” religious environment. Before we examine extant non-Buddhist mummies in Taiwan, I will describe three such mummies which were said to have once inhabited Taiwan.

A Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911) gazetteer for Jinmen County mentions a corpse that was enshrined as a deity, purportedly during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907). The story goes that Chen Yuan 陳淵, who was the Horse Pasturage Marquis [Muma hou 牧馬侯] during the Zhenyuan 貞元 reign-era (785–805), was actually a divine spirit. After he died in a seated posture (the posture in which many future deities, flesh-body bodhisattvas, and eminent monastics often die), locals used clay to sculpt his bodily remains into a statue and made a shrine for it. However, this same gazetteer also notes that Chen Yuan has a tomb and hence casts doubt on the account that his body was sculpted into a statue.⁷ More recent gazetteers do not mention the mummy,⁸ and I was unable to find anyone in Jinmen, even among the elderly locals in the village in which his shrine is located, who had ever heard that Chen Yuan’s body had once been enshrined.

A more detailed account of a worshipped mummy comes from nineteenth-century Canadian missionary George MacKay:

In 1878 a girl living not far from Tamsui (Danshui 淡水) wasted away and died, a victim of consumption. Some one in that neighborhood, more gifted than the rest, announced that a goddess was there, and the wasted skeleton of the girl became immediately famous. She was given the name Sien-lu-niu (“Virgin Goddess”), and a small temple was erected for her worship.⁹ The body was put

believe in or hold other beliefs that presuppose the existence of one or more souls if by “soul” we mean a sentient, non-corporeal entity which, after a being’s death, comprises its post-mortem identity. For the claim that Buddhism denies the existence of souls, see Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 51–66. For a critique of claims that Buddhism denies the existence of souls, see Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 56. For a description of soul-belief among Taiwanese, see Harrell, “Concept of the Soul.” For this belief among Chinese Buddhists, see Welch, *Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 181–185. For evidence of soul-belief in a Taiwanese Buddhists monastery with an enshrined, mummified monastic, see Gildow and Bingenheimer, “Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan,” 109–115.

⁶ On the difficulty of the distinction in modern and contemporary Taiwan, see Schipper, “Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies”; and Lee, “Daoist Priesthood and Secular Society.” For accounts of bodily preservation, mummification, and Daoism in early China, see Cedzich, “Corpse Deliverance,” 10–23.

⁷ Lin, *Jinmen xianzhi*, 100.

⁸ For instance, see Jinmen Xianli Shehui Jiaoyuguan, *Jinmen xianzhi*, 1:469.

⁹ “Sien-lu-niu” almost certainly transliterates the Taiwanese Hoklo word *sian¹lu²nioo⁵* 仙女娘 [Mandarin: *xiannü niang*]. Today the term *xiannü* usually refers to the souls of deceased, unmarried

into salt and water for some time, and then placed in a sitting position in an armchair, with a red cloth around the shoulders and a wedding-cap upon the head; and seen through the glass, the black face, with the teeth exposed, looked very much like an Egyptian mummy. Mock money was burned and incense-sticks laid in front. Passers-by were told the story, and as they were willing to worship anything supposed to have powers to help or harm, the worship of this new goddess began.¹⁰

Unfortunately, I have been unable to find this mummy or any references to it in historical records, but later in this article I describe one possible candidate.

Another similar and unambiguous reference to mummification and deification of a woman appears in the booklet titled *Dafeng Nantian gong Cai Guanyin fozu zhuan* 大豐南天宮蔡觀音佛祖傳 [Account of Buddha-ancestor Cai Guanyin of Nantian Temple of Dafeng], published by the management of Nantian Temple in Dafeng, Tainan County.¹¹ During my fieldwork at this temple in September of 2005, elders in the temple and neighboring residents confirmed and expanded on the account given in this publication. Temple elders told me that the booklet was based in part on what they had heard from their elders decades ago. An account of the mummification and deification of Cai Guanyin 蔡觀音, based on this booklet, follows:

Cai Yuanyang 蔡鴛鴦 was born in 1876 in what is now the isolated rural village of Dafeng, Tainan County. After a minor fall that occurred because of difficulty in keeping her balance due to her bound feet as she was following a procession for the bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 in 1888, she spent the remainder of her life in sealed confinement [*biguan* 閉關] inside her family home in a room referred to as a meditation chamber [*jingshi* 靜室 or *chanfang* 禪房].¹² From this time onward she also maintained a strict vegetarian diet consisting of

women who are given offerings in temples, sometimes called “maiden temples” [*guniang miao* 姑娘廟], which are specially built for them.

¹⁰ MacKay, *From Far Formosa*, 127. As Lin Fushi rightly points out, MacKay may have simply heard an account of this mummy, quite possibly from a recent convert to Christianity, rather than observed the mummy himself. See Lin, *Guhun yu guixiong*, 103–104.

¹¹ See Dafeng Nantiangong Guanli Weiyuanhui, *Dafeng Nantiangong Cai Guanyin fozu zhuan*.

¹² It is not uncommon for religious professionals in Taiwan such as Buddhist monks and spirit-mediums [*jitong* 乩童] to undergo solitary retreats for religious training. For Buddhists, such retreats are called *biguan*. For Buddhist solitary retreats in twentieth-century China, see Welch, *Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 321–322. Perhaps the monastic known best for his time spent in solitary retreat is the Pure Land monk Miaolian 妙蓮, who underwent two solitary retreats of ten years duration each. For descriptions of Miaolian’s solitary retreats, see Zhong Shipan, “Wangsheng youfen,” 7–13; and Zhenhua, “Jinghe Miaolian fashi,” 14–18. Spirit-mediums sometimes undergo solitary retreats of seven to forty-nine days duration as part of their initiation procedures. Such retreats are called *zuojin* 坐禁, *shoujin* 受禁, or *anjin* 暗禁. For mention of retreats of spirit-mediums in contemporary Taiwan, see Huang Wenbo, *Taiwan minjian xinyang*, 95.

only cakelets, fruit, water, and sugarcane juice. For the next two decades, she spent much of her time in meditation and also performed many miracles involving prognosis, clairvoyance, and projection of emanation bodies [*huashen* 化身]. Using such powers, she performed deeds such as saving a sugarcane field from a hungry cow by warning the farmer, giving advice to farmers in accordance with future weather and agricultural trends, saving fishermen from disaster at sea, destroying a snake lair with lightning, possessing a mute person so that he could speak for her, predicting the date of her mother's death and making arrangements for her burial with an emanation body, and leaving her physical body to study the Buddhadharmā in Longhuyan 龍湖岩, a nearby Buddhist monastery primarily dedicated to Guanyin.¹³

Several days before her death in 1911, Cai Yuanyang ordered a Buddha shrine [*fokan* 佛龕, an ornamental cabinet with an open front or with doors in the front, in which religious statuary and soul tablets are enshrined] as well as other items such as clothing and a cap. On the day of her death, she bathed, changed into new clothing, and put on the “five buddhas cap” [*wufo mao* 五佛帽], rings, jade bracelets, embroidered cloth shoes, and a monastic robe [*jiasha* 袈裟, Skt. *kaṣāya*]. She then entered the shrine and assumed a seated meditation posture. The shrine was sealed with red silk and then red bricks, but with a door in the front. Four purification censers [*jinglu* 淨爐] were placed at the four corners and day and night she was “bathed” in the smoke of sandalwood incense.¹⁴ When she died, seated in the shrine, she looked as if she had entered into meditative absorption [*ru ru chanding* 如入禪定].

Ten-some days after she had entered the shrine, a curious outsider with a torch snuck into her room and accidentally burned the silk surrounding her shrine, damaging her flesh body's left shoulder. Later when the shrine was officially opened, except for the left shoulder her entire body was undamaged. She looked dignified and peaceful, and her face with its intact eyes looked golden and lifelike. Nevertheless, because of her damaged shoulder, she wielded a divination instrument [*fu ji* 扶乩; i.e., her soul controlled a special kind of writing implement for communication with manes that most likely one or two spirit-mediums held during a séance] and thereby gave instructions for her body to be buried rather than remain worshipped in its damaged condition.¹⁵

¹³ Despite the numerous references to Buddhism here, Cai Guanyin (as well as Yunü, below) is more representative of popular religion and not Buddhism as I use the term to label beliefs and practices that are primarily derived from texts regarded as canonical by Buddhist monastics. Her closer connections to popular religion can be seen from the eclectic nature of the religious terminology used to describe her, a lack of connection to monastic Buddhism, the architecture and iconography of the temple in which she is enshrined, and the nature of her relationships with other deities and with devotees.

¹⁴ In Taiwanese popular religion, smoke from incense is commonly used to purify objects (or to remove external impurities), but here it may have also served to “smoke” the body.

¹⁵ Throughout this article, I often use the term “manes” rather than “soul” or “souls” in order to clarify that these are souls of beings that were formerly but no longer alive. Some emic terms for manes include *gui* 鬼 [ghost] in its broadest sense as well as *wanghun* 亡魂 [deceased soul].

After she was buried, the god Shengdi 聖帝 [i.e., Guangong 關公, one of the two primary deities in Nantian Temple at that time] possessed a spirit-medium and ordered that a statue be sculpted of Cai Yuanyang as she had appeared when her shrine had been opened, and that her Buddha bones be placed inside this deity statue [*jiang fogu naru shenzun zhong* 將佛骨納入神尊中; in place of traditional secondary burial in an urn in the ground] and that this statue be consecrated with an eye-dotting [*kaiguang dianyan* 開光點眼] ritual and enshrined in Nantian Temple.¹⁶

Today Cai Yuanyang and her principal image in Nantian Temple are known as Cai Guanyin and devotees regard her as an emanation body of Guanyin that is especially efficacious. Branch temples for her have been established throughout Tainan County and temple elders tell me people from all around Taiwan have commissioned hundreds and smaller, replicate images [*fenzun* 分尊] of her for their personal shrines. I declined when I was offered a replicate image for “ten thousand plus” [*yiwān duo* 一萬多] NT dollars (NT\$10,000 in September 2005 was equivalent to about US\$323.) When I questioned the temple custodians [*miaogong* 廟公] and elders regarding whether the bones were actually placed inside her statue, eventually I learned that the bones were instead placed in an urn which is now located under the statue’s seat. I was given permission to enter the locked, inner shrine area as well as another locked area containing this original statue of Cai Guanyin and other relics, but I was not allowed to root around under her seat, which is now covered by her statue’s long, thick robes, to confirm the existence of an urn full of bones. However, through a slit in the front of her robes I did spot what appeared to be a ceramic container below the image’s seat.

Other likely sources on pre-Republican era mummy worship either in Taiwan or in southern China do not mention first-person accounts of the practice.¹⁷ Among these sources, de Groot does cite historical texts describing several worshipped, mummified corpses that existed hundreds of years ago, only one of which appears to have been Buddhist.¹⁸ The accounts of corpse veneration and mummification I found in several other sources all concern Fujian Province, which has extensive historical and cultural links to Taiwan. For instance, the *Linshui pingyao* 臨水平妖 [Pacification of the demons at Linshui] describes the mummification and deification of Lady Linshui [Linshui furen 臨水夫人], concerning whom, after she died, a Daoist master told people she had spiritual attainments and directed them to

¹⁶ People with special powers are sometimes believed to have been born with special bones called “Buddha bones” or “bones of a transcendent” [*xiangu* 仙骨]. See Huang Pingying, “Taiwan guniang fengsi,” 76 (mention of special bones in deified women); Schipper, *Taoist Body*, 58 (mention of special bones as a prerequisite for Daoist masters); and Potter, “Cantonese Shamanism,” 255–256 (description of special bones in Cantonese spirit-mediums).

¹⁷ For instance, there are no first-person accounts for southern Taiwan in Campbell, *Sketches from Formosa*; none for Fujian in de Groot, *Religious System of China*, or Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*; and none for eastern-central China in Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*.

¹⁸ de Groot, *Religious System of China*, 4:132–134.

preserve her flesh with charcoal so that her presence could remain to expel demons and dispense protection.¹⁹ The *Mindu bieji* 閩都別記 [Unofficial records from the Min capital] tells the story of the sixteen-year-old girl Cai Hongxiang 蔡紅享, whose soul could fly away from her body and would go to save sailors from accidents at sea. She died in a seated posture while seeking spiritual training from Lady Linshui and her death is referred to as “corpse deliverance” [*shijie* 尸解]. Afterwards, members of the Cai lineage requested that her body be kept as a deity [*liu roushen wei shen* 留肉身爲神]. A temple was constructed for her and she became the efficacious Grandauntie Cai 蔡姑婆.²⁰ Finally, several contemporary scholars have recorded oral accounts that the corpses of several Fujianese people who became non-Buddhist deities were mummified and deified, and some publicly worshipped up until the Cultural Revolution.²¹

Even if a corpse is not later enshrined, in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist contexts links are sometimes made between both the pleasant smells and non-decay of a corpse and the virtue of the deceased. For recent examples from a Buddhist context, the autobiography of the monk Xuyun 虛雲 (1840?–1959) describes the following special corpses: a dead Buddhist chicken whose “appearance did not change for several days”; a lay disciple who died seated and whose “complexion remained fresh”; a nun who died in sitting posture and who for several days “looked exactly as if she were alive” and who was surrounded by a “rare fragrance”; a woman’s corpse found below a stūpa whose “face was fresh as if she were still alive”; a Buddhist bird that loved staring at Buddhist statuary and for whom “when it was cremated, there was no smell”; and Xuyun’s himself, during whose cremation “the air was filled with a rare fragrance” and “in the ashes were found over a hundred larges relics of five

¹⁹ *Linshui pingyao* 16.245–246. The legends about Lady Linshui give different dates for her birth. Some say she was born in 766, others say in 904. See Baptandier, “Lady Linshui,” 105.

²⁰ On Grandauntie Cai, see He Qiu, *Mindu bieji*, 3:276.57–60. According to this text, Grandauntie died during the Wanli 萬曆 reign-era (1573–1619). For more on the term *shijie*, see Cedzich, “Corpse Deliverance,” 1–68, esp. 2, 10–12.

²¹ For mention of Mazu 媽祖, see Schipper, *Taoist Body*, 42, 166; for Lady Linshui, see Baptandier, “Lady Linshui,” 136; and for Sagely King Guo [Guo shengwang 郭聖王], see Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults*, 137–138 and Dafeng Nantiangong Guanli Weiyuanhui, *Dafeng Nantiangong Caiguanyin fozu zhuan*, 24. It is perhaps significant that Sagely King Guo is one of the two primary deities who was worshipped at Nantian Temple where Cai Guanyin’s statue and bones are enshrined, and that Cai Guanyin devotees regard Sagely King Guo as one of her primary protector-deities [*hufa shen* 護法神]. Perhaps Cai Guanyin wanted to emulate Sagely King Guo’s mummification. Mr. X claims that the main statue of Lady Linshui in her original temple in Fujian now contains her bones, which are inside two urns installed within the image’s chest. Mr. X believes that Lady Linshui’s corpse was once a mummy but that it was destroyed by the Red Guards. He believes Lady Linshui was the first case of a woman becoming a “flesh-body”; he had also heard of Sagely King Guo’s mummification but had heard nothing about Mazu’s purported mummification. Mr. X’s grandfather immigrated to Taiwan from Fuzhou 福州, which is not far from Lady Linshui’s home temple (interview by author at Mr. X’s statuary shop in Taipei, 8 July 2005).

different colors.”²² Likewise, disciples of the monk Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947) believed that his heart’s failure to burn during cremation proved he was a bodhisattva.²³ From a non-Buddhist context, the fact that the female corpse that washed up on the shore of Lie Island 烈嶼 (in Taiwanese territory) in 1949 “miraculously” failed to decay helped establish its owner as the new goddess Wang Yulan 王玉蘭.²⁴ Furthermore, an August 2003 television news story in Taiwan reported that a fifty-two year old man evidently starved to death in his home but that his corpse failed to decay after nine or more days and “looked like a mummy.” The news story noted that this man frequently made prostrations to Buddhas in his personal Buddha shrine and mentioned that neighbors wondered if his corpse’s failure to decay could be attributed to his religious practice.²⁵

Next, we turn to mummies that are worshipped in contemporary Taiwan. Besides the six Buddhist mummies Bingenheimer and I have previously described,²⁶ I have seen three other alleged mummies and have heard rumors of several other potential mummies. While I have not tried to verify the rumors about two mummies (one in Taipei County, one in Gaoxiong County), rumors about four others turned out to be false leads. For instance, at least seven people told me there was a flesh-body bodhisattva in the Jiuhua shan 九華山 area of Miaoli 苗栗 County. But when I visited this area, I found only the lifelike, bronze statue of the nun Wuming Biqiuni 無名比丘尼 (1930–1985) enshrined in a monastery. However, this statue contains her relics and is called her “golden body” [*jinshe* 金身]. The resident nuns explained to me that many people call the statue a flesh-body bodhisattva because it looks so lifelike, and they hinted that the deceased nun was cognizant of the surroundings through the statue.²⁷ Other false leads have also led me to statues, including (1) to Cai Guanyin (described above) in Tainan County, (2) to a bronze, realistic but smaller-than-life-sized replicate image of the mummy Gongga 貢嚙 in Tainan City, and (3) to the lifelike statue of Ancient Buddha Dingguang [Dingguang gufo 定光古佛] in Danshui which locals call a “flesh-body Buddha” [*roushen fo* 肉身佛] because it was carved to look realistic and sometimes seems to be alive.²⁸

²² Xu-yun, *Empty Cloud*, 54, 58, 81, 107, 113, and 212, respectively.

²³ Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 151.

²⁴ Szonyi, “Virgin and the Chinese State,” 88.

²⁵ This story aired on *Huashi xinwen* 華視新聞. For a print version of this story which lacks the speculations about religious causation and instead quotes a forensic doctor who attributes the corpse’s dark brown color and failure to decay to starvation, see Lü, “Nanshi si munaiyi,” 66–67. For a similar, recent case from Hubei Province of an ordinary but pious old woman whose body had not decayed after three years and which purportedly gave off a subtle fragrance, as well as further discussion of *roushen* in China and a photograph of the mummy, see “Xianghe nainai roushen cang aomi.”

²⁶ Gildow and Bingenheimer, “Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan.”

²⁷ My informants, in contrast, had claimed the “flesh-body bodhisattva” was an actual corpse, not merely a lifelike statue. For more on Wuming Biqiuni (also called Fuhui Biqiuni 福慧比丘尼) and mention of her statue, see Li, “Crafting Women’s Religious Experience,” 219–225. Note that the term “golden body” is also used to label ordinary sculpted or cast statues of a deity.

²⁸ For mention of Gongga, see Gildow and Bingenheimer, “Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan,” 95. For a description of Ancient Buddha Dingguang, see *Taiwan roushen chengfo chuanqi*, 261–269.

In Gaoxiong County today there is also one corpse currently sitting in a large, sealed urn in hopes that he will become a flesh-body bodhisattva. This potential mummy-to-be is the body of Buddhist monk Shi Kaifeng 釋開豐 (1930–2004), a highly controversial figure in both Buddhist and psychiatric circles. Kaifeng’s corpse was refrigerated and then placed in a large urn ninety-seven days after his death. According to journalists who reported on the ceremony in which Kaifeng’s body was sealed in the urn, black aloeswood incense powder, black aloeswood blocks (reportedly about 180 kg of these first two materials were used), a golden lotus-shaped pedestal, small blocks of sandalwood, charcoal, lime powder, and yellow cloth were placed in the urn along with the body. This sealed urn was then placed inside or directly in front of (accounts vary) a large, bronze statue made in Kaifeng’s likeness and was surrounded by large quantities of charcoal, silt, and sandalwood blocks.²⁹

Of the several mummies rumored to exist in Taiwan, I have found the following three, all of which are non-Buddhist and female:

- (1) Yunü 玉女 (1820?-1837?); enshrined in either 1836, 1837, 1842, or 1846 at Yunü Temple 玉女宮 in Taipei City
- (2) Dexiu 得修 (1926-1993); enshrined in 1999 at Cian Temple 慈安宮 in Jilong City
- (3) Mingjie 明潔 (1918-2003); enshrined in 2004 at Yuantian Temple 元天宮 in Tainan City

However, the authenticity of Yunü [Jade Lady] as a mummy is questionable, and I cannot verify that the principal image of worship actually is a corpse. Unlike the other mummies, to me this image looks like any other religious statue. Local informants have told other researchers both that the body was burned when the Japanese burned the surrounding village and the remains placed under the deity’s table, and that the Japanese intentionally burned the body with gasoline, and the damaged remains were then installed inside the deity’s statue.³⁰ The temple attendants I spoke with claim that the image contains the body, and it is possible that the body, or what remains of it, has been surrounded by layers of clay and/or lacquer and sculpted to look like an ordinary statue. When I showed photographs of Yunü’s image to Mr. X, he instantly told me that the image is “merely a sculpture,” claiming that the statue’s small size and especially the small size and shape of the head clearly reveal that a human body could not be contained within.³¹ If the statue does not contain a body, perhaps it contains bone

²⁹ Cai, “Shi Kaifeng zuo gang”; Zhang, “Longfatang Shi Kaifeng zuogang”; and interview, Mr. X, 8 July 2005. For a description of the mental asylum Kaifeng founded, see Wen, “Hall of the Dragon Metamorphoses.”

³⁰ Wen Chongyi et. al., *Xihe de shehui bianqian*, 148; Huang Pingying, “Taiwan guniang fengsi,” 84.

³¹ Mr. X says that mummified bodies shrink largely due to shrinkage of joints. Scientific research on a mummified monk in Thailand indicates that the mummy lost twenty to thirty percent of its body size due to dehydration. See Xiao, “Tai chanseng danda.” Nevertheless, for Mr. X, the crucial clue in determining the statue to be merely a sculpture was the shape of the head. Mr. X also emphasizes that real flesh-body bodhisattvas should have more pronounced curvature along the spine than ordinary

relics, just like the bronze statue of the nun Wuming Biqiuni mentioned previously.

As Lin Fushi has speculated, the fact that this purported mummy supposedly dates to the nineteenth century and is located close to Danshui raises the intriguing possibility that this is the same mummified “goddess” that MacKay saw in the late nineteenth century.³² However, this is difficult to verify, since we do not know the identity or exact location of the mummy MacKay mentioned, nor do the dates of that mummy match up with those of any of the several accounts we have for Yunü.

At Yunü Temple, a stone plaque engraved in 1999 and titled “Yunü niangniang zhenji yu Guandu Yunügong yange” 玉女娘娘真跡與關渡玉女宮沿革 [The true achievement of Jade Lady and the history of the Guandu Jade Lady Temple] records the unusual childhood of Lin Yunü 林玉女. The plaque records that she was born in 1820 on Guanyin’s birthday (2/19 on the lunar calendar) and that as a child she was extremely pious, refused to eat meat, and was educated to read sacred books. Her soul sometimes departed from her body to learn from the goddess Mazu, and her prayers for rain were efficacious. One day in 1837, after she had bathed and begun seated meditation, an image of herself emerged from her body along with a burst of rainbow-colored light and then flew up into the sky, leaving behind her lifeless material body, which local people then somehow “sculpted,” dressed up, and enshrined as if it were an image.³³ Purportedly, this is the same statue we see today, although seven years ago it underwent facial remodeling to look more like a girl than a woman, as can be seen by comparing the present image with earlier photographs of the image. A current employee of the temple tells me she had suggested a deal to Yunü: she would fix up Yunü and her shrine, and in return she hoped Yunü would protect her health and beauty. Today Yunü functions like many other goddesses, granting requests, saving those in danger, and possessing spirit-mediums. According to temple records, her worship has spread to some two dozen descendent temples or shrines around Taiwan with replicate idols [*fenshen jinzun* 分身金尊], which sometimes are brought on pilgrimages to the original temple in Guandu, especially on the date Yunü ascended to heaven (5/15 on the lunar calendar).³⁴

I am aware of three other sources on Yunü’s life besides the 1999 plaque. A 1969 stone engraving in the temple gives a highly abbreviated version of Yunü’s life and gives her years of birth and death as 1825–1846. Second, a small booklet written by a government official investigating local customs reports on Yunü’s benevolent activities (helping fishermen find fish, curing illness, protecting young children) and gives the same history as the 1999 stone

statuary. On the other hand, Mr. X’s grandfather once added a steel rod along the back of one mummy for support, and Mr. X himself wrapped another mummy in sheets of fiberglass reinforced plastic (FRP). The steel rod and FRP were subsequently covered by lacquer, cloth, and gilding (interviews at Mr. X’s shop, 8 July 2005 and 14 September 2005).

³² Lin Fushi, *Guhun yu guixiong*, 104–105.

³³ According to local oral tradition, the corpse resisted decay and looked especially lifelike. See Wen Chongyi et al., *Xihe de shehui bianqian*, 148.

³⁴ For more on the history of and cult surrounding Yunü during the 1970s, see Wen Chongyi et al., *Xihe de shehui bianqian*, 148–151.

plaque, but has fewer details and gives her years of birth and death as 1825–1836.³⁵ Finally, an article in a folklore magazine gives the same history as is told in the booklet, but here her dates are given as 1825–1842.³⁶ The booklet appears to be based on oral history and the article appears to be based mainly on the booklet. While at this point we cannot be certain about the links between Yunü's statue today and mummification without a radiograph, the local story regarding Yunü shows us that at least some non-Buddhist Taiwanese today worship what they believe is an enshrined corpse.

The authenticity of the other two non-Buddhist mummies has been verified by Mr. X, who personally coated them with a protective coating of lacquer. Both have also been reported on in Taiwanese newspapers, and photographs are available of the people who were mummified before their deaths and after mummification but before they were lacquered and gilded.

The mummified body of spirit-medium Dexiu 得修 (lay name Huang Tangzhen 黃堂珍) was enshrined in September 1999 and Kuomintang 國民黨 (KMT) presidential candidate Lian Zhan 連戰, along with other KMT dignitaries, attended this ceremony as one stop on his campaign. In fact Lian had the honor of performing a consecration [*kaiguang* 開光] ritual, which involved painting a dot of cinnabar between the gilded mummy's eyebrows. As part of the ceremony, Lian gave a short talk and Legislator Wang Jinping 王金平 praised Dexiu's achievement and asked everyone present to vote for Lian for president.³⁷ The following account of Cian Temple is based on a booklet produced by the temple (the temple Dexiu founded), as well as on the testimony of Mr. X and the author's fieldwork during the summer of 2005.³⁸

During her life, Dexiu served as a spirit-medium for the gods Santaizi 三太子, Gin²a²kong¹ 囡仔公, and Qitian dasheng 齊天大聖 (the title of the monkey god [Sun Wukong 孫悟空] from the *Xiyouji* 西遊記 [Records of a Journey to the West]). The booklet provides a 1969 black-and-white picture of Dexiu being paraded around the streets while possessed by Santaizi. In 1968, Guanyin personally gave her the Dharma name “Dexiu,” and in 1981, following the orders of the Jade Emperor [Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝], Dexiu “achieved the Way and rose into the realm of the bodhisattvas” and was granted the name “Dashi pusa” 大世菩薩. According to the booklet and to a devotee at her temple, by the time she died Dexiue had been engaged in ascetic activities for decades, observing practices such as never lying down and eating small quantities of a very limited range of foods.

In 1993 she predicted her own death, which in some writings about her is called a “feather metamorphosis” [*yuhua* 羽化], implying attainment of status as a Daoist transcendent [*xian* 仙], but her death is also called “[attaining] nirvana and rising to heaven” [*niepan*

³⁵ Pan, *Guandu Yunügong shilue jianjie*, sec. 2, “Yunü niangniang shilüe” 玉女娘娘史略.

³⁶ Xie, “Guandu Yunüniangmiao,” 22–23.

³⁷ Ma, “Lian Zhan fang nanxian”; Zhu, “Simiao an jinshen.”

³⁸ Jilongshi Cian'gong Dexiu Fati Pusa Jinshen Anzuo Dadian Choubei Weiyuanhui, *Jingjin kuxiu butui daoxin*.

shengtian 涅槃升天], mixing Buddhist and Daoist terminology. Following her death and in accordance with her instructions, her body was placed in a large barrel, which was sealed and placed in a stone chamber behind a hall in the temple. In 1999 her body was removed from the barrel. Much of the flesh, as well as hair and fingernails, were still intact, adding to the miraculous nature of this mummification. Finally, Mr. X. was hired. He specified that the body be kept in an air conditioned chamber, and he took steps to first make sure that the excess water and fats which the body still contained drained out before he lacquered and gilded it. Two photographs in the booklet mentioned above show her brownish black, emaciated mummy wearing a red undergarment and tied to a bamboo rack by red cloth strings for support.³⁹ Today Dexiu's daughter acts as a spirit-medium who in some respects corresponds to the type recent gazetteers call "divine aunties" [*ang¹yi⁵* 尪姨], and she interacts with the deities Guanyin Bodhisattva of the South Seas and Santaizi to help clients resolve their personal problems.⁴⁰ Some clients believe that Dexiu, whose seated, gilded body (see figure 1) is enshrined in the main hall next to where the daughter performs her services, helps her daughter with this divine work.



Figure 1. Dexiu's lacquered and gilded face. (Photograph by Marcus Bingenheimer, 2 April 2005.)

The most recent mummy is that of Mingjie (lay name Deng Yuzhi 鄧玉治), a laywoman

³⁹ I learned that the rack and ropes were adjusted gradually to force her body into the posture it was to have after it was gilded and lacquered.

⁴⁰ On *ang¹yi⁵* in the Taipei and Jilong areas, see Jilongshi Zhengfu, *Jilongshi zhi*, 124–125; and Wang, *Taipeishi zhi*, 147–148. According to a paper slip at the temple, the categories of problems one may ask about are as follows: marriage, career, luck, health, wealth, and family luck.

and former abbess of the syncretic Yuantian Temple in Tainan City. Reportedly once a Christian, in 1950 she received a dream from a god which directed her to change her residence to that of the temple's current location and carry out spiritual cultivation. According to informants and to a newspaper article, she died in late 2003 at age 88 and was not gilded and lacquered until several months later. It was not until after a devotee received a message from Mingjie, which temple authorities verified by means of casting divination blocks [*puah⁸pue¹* 跋柁], that it was decided to lacquer and guild her body, which it would appear from a newspaper article had reached its current state with little outside assistance.⁴¹ Mingjie's son, Zeng Mingxiong 曾明雄, states that he believes his mother's mummification was a blessing which resulted from her spiritual cultivation.⁴² However, Mr. X gives additional details about the mummification process prior to adding the lacquer: he kept Mingjie's body in a confined room in which large quantities of aloeswood incense were continuously burned for five months (according to Mr. Zeng, five months and fifteen days). When interviewed, Mr. X spoke of the need for the body's water and oils to drain away. He then smiled and called this room a "baking chamber" and compared the process to smoking meat.⁴³

Zeng confirmed in an interview most of what Mr. X and newspapers articles had stated. He told me that both before and after her death, Mingjie's devotees sought and still seek her assistance, especially for healing various illnesses which doctors have been unable to heal. I observed a middle-aged woman giving reports to Mingjie's mummy and tossing two coins (in place of using divination blocks [*pue¹* 柁]) in order to divine Mingjie's instructions. When I requested to enter the glass-sealed chamber enclosing Mingjie so as to better photograph her, Zeng politely told me this was not possible because there was an ultraviolet germicidal sterilization lamp shining inside the chamber (which I later learned that Mr. X had recommended be placed there to avoid possible future legal troubles).

I learned from Zeng that for the last twenty years of her life, Mingjie was not simply a vegetarian, but abstained from eating grains and lived on nothing but vegetable broths, medicinal broths, and tea. Zeng also gave me an account of Mingjie's final days that differs from that presented in the sheet of paper available at the temple.⁴⁴ In the temple literature it appears Mingjie died without apparent cause during her three days of fasting and sealed confinement. However, Zeng told me that she had cut her ear while removing a growth there and afterwards felt sick for the following several months prior to her death. A doctor found no sickness and so Mingjie decided to fast for three days. In Zeng's oral account, Mingjie survived this fast but felt very weak. It was not until shortly after the three days of fasting were concluded that she died while seated on a chair in her daughter's house. After her death,

⁴¹ Xin, "Yuantiangong Mingjie dashi."

⁴² Interview by author at Yuantian Temple, 2 September 2005. See also Wu, "Yuantiangong nü shifu"; and Xin, "Yuantiangong Mingjie dashi."

⁴³ Interviews at Mr. X's shop, 8 July 2005 and 14 September 2005.

⁴⁴ Temple literature: a sheet of paper entitled *Mingjie xianshi jianjie* 明潔先師簡介, 2004, printed by the temple management committee and, according to Mr. Zeng, written by one member of that committee (not himself).

her body was moved back to Yuantian Temple and placed on her bed there in hopes that her soul would return and she would revive.⁴⁵ After twenty days of lying on the bed her body had still not rotted and the skin began to look more youthful than it had in life. It was at this time that a devotee received a message from Mingjie that she wanted to have her body enshrined as a “golden body” [*jinshen* 金身]. Note that the written versions of her death (with no cause indicated, and seemingly *during* her three-day fast and sealed confinement) and mummification (no mention of months of being smoked in the “baking chamber”) differ from the oral versions (death possibly linked to a sickness following a cut on her ear, with death in her daughter’s home *following* the three days of fasting). Accounts of other mummies previously described have likewise been adjusted, although I cannot cover every detail here, and most likely accounts of earlier mummies such as Cai Guanyin have also been adjusted so they are portrayed as more divine and in control of their own deaths and postmortem fates.

Despite the various means Mr. X uses to assure successful preservation of bodies, when speaking of the various flesh-body bodhisattvas he has helped prepare, he claims that he “merely adds a protective layer” to the bodies and that the failure of the bodies to decay is essentially a result of their spiritual cultivation. From his speech, I infer that Mr. X might be willing to help preserve other flesh-bodies if the price is right, the chance of success is high, and the individual to be mummified was basically a good person. He reports that he refused to help Kaifeng because he thought the fact that the corpse had been previously refrigerated was a bad method. Furthermore, he expresses reservations because Kaifeng was of a more questionable character (as Kaifeng had installed a statue of *himself* on the top of his temple, which did not seem right to Mr. X). Mr. X expresses hesitation about accepting more cases, however, because he thinks “there should not be too many [flesh-body bodhisattvas]” and the role of his work should just be to help preserve the bodies of those who have undergone spiritual practices during their lives to become flesh-body bodhisattvas.

Many more details could be given on these non-Buddhist mummies and their devotees. We could also analyze their similarities (e.g., vegetarian diet and often limited range and quantity of food intake, worship of Guanyin, method of mummification) and differences (e.g., premortem marital status, postures and clothing, different modes of interaction with devotees).⁴⁶ But for our purposes here, we have already given a sufficiently clear picture of

⁴⁵ The belief that a person’s soul can return to its body—or enter the body of another deceased person—is not uncommon. Besides general references to the belief, I heard the following alleged cases. One taxi driver told me about a woman in Yunlin 雲林 County who several years ago came back to life one or two weeks after death when her soul re-entered her body. Her family had been keeping her body in the household’s main hall [*zhengting* 正廳] during the interval between her death and revival. Another taxi driver spoke with me about the bodies of two people which, some thirty or forty years ago, came back to life but with different people’s souls inside them; these cases occurred in Yunlin and Pingdong 屏東 Counties. For beliefs in pre-modern China regarding postmortem revival due to the return of the soul or entry of another person’s soul, see de Groot, *Religious System of China*, 4:123–142.

⁴⁶ It is also significant that all confirmed non-Buddhist mummies were religiously gifted women. But as this article intends to present of a broad overview of several categories of bodily remains, I forgo analysis based on gender. For a study of female ghost cults which does emphasize gender and which

these mummies, and have established that in non-Buddhist as well as better-known Buddhist contexts, the failure of flesh to rot is sometimes understood as a result of the virtue of the deceased, and that sometimes corpses are intentionally preserved so as to preserve the power of the deceased.⁴⁷ Now we turn to look at special corpses that are reviled rather than venerated.

Ancestral Remains

Ordinary corpses are feared but eventually they rot away and become less dangerous. To the extent that they adhere to traditional beliefs about souls and geomancy (and probably most Taiwanese would state that they believe in or at least act as if they believe in some of these beliefs), Taiwanese regard the corpse as either good (auspicious) or bad (inauspicious), implying potential benefit or harm to the living. In the previous section we have seen cases in which undecayed corpses are regarded as good, but most such corpses are regarded as bad, and they are discovered during the process of exhumation for reburial.

Native Taiwanese Han (as well as Han in the Chinese provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi) practice secondary burial, which involves exhuming bodily remains after a number of years (in Taiwan, typically five to twelve years, depending on locality),⁴⁸ and placing the bones into ceramic jars that are eventually reburied in the original or in a new location—although some jars are just left above ground, abandoned.⁴⁹ Perhaps as a euphemistic term for respect and indicating their potential value to the descendants, the

also briefly mentions several of the mummies discussed above, see Huang Pingying, “Taiwan guniang fengsi.”

⁴⁷ Baptandier mentions another reason that Linshui furen was apparently mummified: to prevent her from becoming a “bone demon.” As will be discussed later, in popular religion the boundary between deities and ghosts is porous and flexible. See Baptandier, “Lady Linshui,” 136.

⁴⁸ Huang, who did research along the southwestern Taiwanese seacoast, reports a traditional saying among Taiwanese Han that children should not be reburied, those who died under age thirty should be reburied after five years, and those who died over age forty should be reburied after six to twelve years. See Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 181. A Hakka geomancer I spoke with in northern Taiwan (in Xinzhu County, on 25–26 June 2005) likewise told me that the older the deceased was at death, the longer it takes for the body to decay—and he seemed to think this might be explained by the fact that the bodies of older people contain less water. This informant told me the in his experience Hoklo and Hakka burial and reburial customs are basically the same. The minor differences are that Hoklo tend to have more elaborate funerals and better coffins, wait longer to perform secondary burial, and belong to the Sanyuan 三元 school of geomancy, whereas Hakkas tend to belong to the Sanhe 三合 school of geomancy. For a variation on ordinary secondary burials practiced by some Hakka (and from my observations, some Hoklo and sinicized plains aboriginals as well), see Martin, “Hakka Mausoleums in North Taiwan.” For discussion of secondary burials in a rural Hoklo village in southern Taiwan, see Tsu, “Religious Ethnography of Chinese Village,” 178–204.

⁴⁹ The historical origin of the custom is uncertain. Evidence suggests it was indigenous to non-Han ethnic groups such as the Viet or Yue 越 peoples who inhabited southeastern China in areas where secondary burial is still practiced. See Ling, *Zhongguo bianjiang minzu*, 398–399.

collected bones are referred to as “gold” in Hoklo: gathering bones is “gathering gold” [*khioh⁴kim¹* 扶金] and the ceramic jar to hold them is a “gold bushel” [*kim¹tau²* 金斗]. The time, location, and orientation of burial, exhumation, reburial, grave construction, etc. are decided by a geomancer if the family can afford one.⁵⁰ After exhumation, the bones are washed, dyed red, dried in the sun, reassembled into a skeleton and tied together with red silk thread and with a thin willow branch fitted through the empty spinal canal of the assembled vertebrae. If the skull still has teeth they are extracted (so the ancestor does not “eat the descendants”), and if the skull has been smashed, an outer support or a substitute “skull” of paper and silk must be made with eyes, ears, nose, and mouth painted onto the “skull.”⁵¹ Then all the bones are reassembled into a squatting position inside the jar and charcoal is packed into the empty spaces to support and preserve the bones (we have already seen that charcoal, a desiccant, is also employed in the production and preservation of enshrined mummies). If buried in a favorable geomantic location, the bones will channel beneficial energies to the descendants, bringing them good luck.⁵² A recent Taiwanese farmer’s almanac claims this influence occurs because bones contain iron, which somehow interact with the magnetic field [*cichang* 磁場] and with the geomantic energy in the surrounding terrain [*diling* 地靈] to

⁵⁰ In recent decades, cremation has become increasingly popular in both China and Taiwan, a trend accelerated by laws against and fines for burial in China, and diminishing land and high cost for graves in Taiwan, especially in urban areas. Also, Taiwanese have increasingly turned to comprehensive, corporate funeral service providers that arrange for all aspects of mortuary rituals and procedures. I base the account that follows on the traditional model primarily as reported in Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*; Wang, *Taipeishi zhi*, 121–136; and informants I spoke with in 2003 and 2005, especially two geomancers. Other sources give similar accounts of secondary burial but which are basically similar but vary with respect to certain details such as procedures for determining whether to exhume the bones or not, length of time before exhumation, means of drying and placing the bones, etc. For more on secondary burial, geomancy of the grave, and corpses that do not rot in Taiwan, see Thompson, “Death, Food, and Fertility”; Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 163–219; and Chen, “Taiwan de shigu fengsu.” For technical notes on how to perform initial and secondary burial written by a practicing geomancer, see Huang Chunlin, *Sanyuan sanhe dili*, 310–313.

⁵¹ De Groot reports similar practices for late nineteenth century Amoy, including the placement of pieces of charcoal in the jar, which he writes was for better preservation of the bones. See his *Religious System of China*, 3:1058. Ling also reports similar practices from three locations he observed in Taiwan in 1953. See Ling, *Zhongguo bianjiang minzu*, 755–756. Many informants expressed fear about the intact teeth of corpses; one elderly woman from Taizhong County even stated that if the teeth of living parents are too hard, they will “bite away” at the fate or good fortune of their living descendants; she then proudly showed me her cavity-filled mouth. On the other hand, based on his observations, practicing geomancer Xie denies that teeth affect descendants. See Xie, *Zangfan shili*, 285.

⁵² The geomantic effects of an ancestor’s corpse on posterity also occur after the first burial, but most informants stated or inferred that usually geomancy can be improved by secondary burial. In fact, the first burial is also called the “inauspicious burial” [*xiongzang* 凶葬] and the secondary burial the “auspicious burial” [*jizang* 吉葬]. On the other hand, one Hakka taxi driver (who grew up in Xinzhu County and was about sixty years old) stated the only reason to bother with secondary burial was if the body was buried in a public cemetery and had to be removed for another body after a number of years (typically seven); if the family had land there was no need to bother with secondary burial.

produce the results of geomancy [*fengshui* 風水].⁵³ Probably the reference to iron and its interaction with the magnetic field is an attempt to dress up more traditional, geomancy-based accounts with the trappings of modern science. I have heard other seemingly scientific accounts to explain geomancy as well as similar accounts to explain other supernatural phenomena such as karmic causation [*yinguo* 因果], sympathetic resonance [*ganying* 感應], and spirit possession [*shenming fushen* 神明附身] in which terms such as “magnetic fields,” “energy fields” [*nengyuan chang* 能源場] and “electric waves” [*dianbo* 電波] were used. Whereas geomancers tend to describe geomancy as a mechanical process controlled by impersonal laws, and sometimes supplement traditional ideas with seemingly scientific ones, non-specialists often describe geomancy in more personalistic terms. That is, they give credit for the fortune or misfortune stemming from the tomb to the active agency of the ancestor’s soul. In these accounts, ancestors who are comfortable in the grave send good fortune, whereas those who are uncomfortable (for example, if the jar containing bones has a leak or contains ants) send misfortune.⁵⁴

The exhumation I observed was performed by and for Hakkas five years after the old man’s death, and was much less elaborate than those described by Huang or Tsu.⁵⁵ The bone collector [*jiangushi* 檢骨師 or *tugong* 土公] had prepared gasoline to burn off undecayed flesh. Fortunately, the maggot-covered corpse was totally decayed except for some hair clinging to the skull, which was scraped off and later burned along with the coffin, cloth shoes, funerary clothing, and shroud. This successful decay may have been facilitated by the fact that a thief had previously drilled through the side of the coffin to steal the old man’s ring. Nylon gloves and socks on the corpse facilitated the recovery of numerous tiny finger and toe bones. The bone collector and his wife, along with relatives of the deceased, together placed the bones on a metal rack, where they were cleaned with wire brushes and an air pump, and then dried with a blowtorch (see figure 2).⁵⁶ The bone collector’s assistant told me that some bone collectors claim that the sacrum can change shape according to how the person behaved in life—for example, it can become deformed if the deceased had committed major sins.⁵⁷ He also said that the bones had to be thoroughly dried, as the bone marrow contains moisture which, if it is not eliminated, will cause mold to grow on the bones and thereby cause bad

⁵³ Xu, *Tianwen lishu*, 74

⁵⁴ Weller, *Unities and Diversities*, 147–155; Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 175–190; Tsu, “Religious Ethnography of Chinese Village,” 199–200.

⁵⁵ See Huang Pingying, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 180–193; and Tsu, “Religious Ethnography of Chinese Village,” 181–189. I observed the exhumation in Taoyuan County, on 20 August 2005.

⁵⁶ More traditionally, the bones would have been dried in the sun or smoked in a confined chamber, for days or even many weeks, until they were thoroughly dry. Using a blowtorch speeds up the process and allows the bones to be installed in the urn on the same day they are exhumed.

⁵⁷ Notice that this constitutes another example (besides those we have already seen of non-decay or mummification) of how a person’s moral behavior in life is believed to directly affect his or her body.

luck to descendants.⁵⁸ Before the bones were installed, the man's artificial teeth and artificial knee were removed to be thrown away, "because he didn't have these when he was born." (I noted that babies do have hair, but nonetheless his hair was not interred; also, if the man had teeth, these would have been extracted, I was told.) The bones were packed tightly into an urn, where they were interspersed with charcoal (see figure 3), which everyone said was to preserve the bones. However, the bones were not reassembled into squatting position (although the skull was placed in the middle on the top of the pile), nothing was inserted through the vertebral canal, and no consecration rituals were performed. The eldest son of the deceased recommended that I bring back this practice to America, because otherwise the remains of our forebears will not endure and "nothing will be left [of them] at all."



Figure 2. Supplies for preserving and extracting liquids from bones: charcoal, rack, and blowtorch. (Photograph by Douglas Gildow, 20 August 2005.)

⁵⁸ According to another informant, if the bones contain moisture when interred, the urn holding them can sometimes pop open [from the pressure of vaporized water?], which of course would be bad for the descendants.



Figure 3. Inserting bones and charcoal into the burial urn. (Photograph by Douglas Gildow, 20 August 2005.)

Later that day, at a time the bone collector (who, unlike some bone collectors, could also do simple geomancy) determined was geomantically auspicious, the urn of bones was temporarily placed into a stage-left side chamber in the lineage mausoleum and presented with offerings of incense and foodstuffs. After a number of years, this urn and the other urns in this chamber will be formally installed in the permanent chamber located directly behind the mausoleum. Some of the bones in this side chamber had been cremated and hence were in smaller urns than those which had not been cremated.

However, in other cases, upon exhumation it is not uncommon to find that the corpse has not decayed, in which case it is categorized as a “shaded corpse” [Hoklo: *im³si¹* 蔭屍 or *im³sin¹* 蔭身]. Corpses can be found in a large range of states. Only those that are relatively well preserved—sometimes even almost perfectly preserved albeit dehydrated—are called “shaded,” but even a few scraps of flesh clinging to the bones is undesirable.⁵⁹ Taiwanese

⁵⁹ Huang saw one corpse which despite its shrunken face and sunken features was entirely intact; he also recounts the dubious claim of one bone collector that he had once exhumed a shaded corpse that was in such a good state that it would have been able to perform sexually with a prostitute. See Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 210–213. Yang recounts seeing his aunt’s shaded corpse, whose body, facial features, and clothing were all intact. See Yang, “Yinshen,” 32. Shaded corpses can also be distinguished depending on whether they are desiccated “dry corpses” [*ganshi* 乾屍], waterlogged

ethnographer Huang Wenbo 黃文博 writes that such intact corpses are frequently uncovered, and records a colloquial Hoklo saying: “[out of every] ten tombs, [there are] nine shaded [corpses].”⁶⁰ According to geomantic ideas that guide the bone collectors and geomancers that often carry out or can be consulted for secondary burials, shaded corpses are bad, as they bring misfortune (such as sickness, bad luck, career failure, and natural calamities) to descendants. Huang writes that Taiwanese believe the intact corpse “shades (i.e., protects or provides shelter for) its deceased soul” [*ziyin wanghun* 自蔭亡魂] but harms descendants.⁶¹ This conception of a well protected ancestor’s soul harming descendants would seem to contradict Ahern’s informants, for whom fortune stems from an ancestor’s comfort. Nevertheless, like other Taiwanese, Ahern’s informants feel disgust and dread toward corpses that do not rot and find ways to make rotting occur.⁶²

Traditionally, the failure to rot seems to have been attributed to something about the land in which the corpse was buried. Ahern’s informants speak of “covered corpse lands” [*gaishidi* 蓋屍地: i.e., lands which cover or shelter the corpses buried within—this image of corpses

“water shades” [*shuiyin* 水蔭], or soft and swollen (due to moisture) “bean curd shades” [*doufuyin* 豆腐蔭] (resembling bean curd). For various accounts and color photographs by another geomancer of exhumations, including partially decayed corpses, see Xie, *Zangfan shili*; some of his accounts of shaded corpses may be found on pages 51–52, 152–153, 218, 220, 228, and 331–332.

⁶⁰ Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 203. In Mandarin this phrase is *shi ge mu jiu ge yin* 十個墓九個蔭. This fraction is probably exaggerated, but regardless of whatever the actual incidence of shaded corpses is, ordinary people regard them as undesirable aberrations. My Hakka geomancer informant told me that six or seven years ago, when bodies were quickly sealed into coffins, half or more than half of the bodies exhumed were shaded corpses, but now that bodies are typically refrigerated for some time before being placed in coffins, less than half become shaded corpses (discussion with author, 25 or 26 June 2005). A Hoklo, black-head Daoist priest refused to generalize about the percentage of corpses which become shaded corpses; he said it depended on the ground, but that in certain “shaded corpse grounds” [*yinshi di* 蔭屍地], most of the corpses became shaded (telephone conversation with author, September 2005). Mr. X told me that twenty to ten years ago, many coffin makers cut corners in their work and did not bother to leave the required hole in the coffin in which a loose block was placed for the gravedigger to knock out as he placed the coffin into the grave. Therefore, the gravedigger would knock on the coffin, pretending to break open a hole in it to facilitate rotting, but actually no hole would be made—so without air circulation, it was easy for the corpse to become “shaded.” These days, however, he told me people are more aware of this problem and make sure the coffin has a hole in it before it is buried (interview with author, 14 September 2005).

⁶¹ Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 195, 210. A taxi driver also told me that becoming a shaded corpse is good for the deceased but bad for the descendants. This belief might be related to the prevalent notion that one’s karmic blessings [*fubao* 福報], also called one’s “allotment of blessings” [*fufen* 福份] or the desirable elements of one’s fate [*mingyun* 命運] is to some extent shared with that of one’s family members and that this pool of blessings is a limited good. Thus for instance among the staff and faculty at a private high school in Taipei, a rumor is circulating that the impressive longevity of the school’s founder has excessively drained the family’s stock of blessings and has led to the early death and serious illness of her children.

⁶² Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 204.

being “covered” fits nicely with the image of their being “shaded”].⁶³ Writing of Guangdong, Demiéville mentions similar “corpse nourishing grounds” [*terrains nourriciers de cadavers*, almost certainly translating *yangshidi* 養屍地].⁶⁴ For contemporary Taiwan, Huang writes that shaded corpses can occur due to at least six reasons, and my geomancer and bone collector informants also mention several of these reasons: (1) chemicals ingested by the person before death such as tonics, preservatives, insecticide, antibiotics, etc. act to preserve the body; (2) coffins built of materials that are too thick or unable to decay; (3) environment inside coffin becomes a vacuum due to failure to drill adequate holes at the base of the coffin prior to burial; (4) ground around the coffin is too hard, preventing air circulation, or too dry, and thereby acts as a desiccant; (5) tombs made with cement or limestone prevent the body from decaying or act to desiccate it; and (6) corpses in deep tombs become waterlogged and therefore fail to rot.⁶⁵ Another geomancer informant told me that traditionally corpses fail to rot due to poor geomantic siting of the grave resulting in “*yinyang* imbalance” and failure of the corpse to disperse energy, but later he attributed most shaded corpses now to the fact that coffins today are too thick.

So while the causation of shaded corpses today is sometimes conceived in modern scientific terms, other conceptions (e.g., “land that covers or nourishes corpses”) are more vague, and the effects of the corpses themselves are more mysterious. Taiwanese do not dwell on the mechanics of this baneful influence; rather, the important thing is for them to deal with the shaded corpse by removing its flesh. For this they often hire geomancers and bone collectors to carry out the operation, which Huang writes is performed in one of several ways, including: (1) reburial in another location, (2) wetting and reburying the corpse, (3) scraping off the flesh, (4) cremation, and (5) removal of flesh by chemicals such as caustic lime solution.⁶⁶ Which method to use is controversial. My geomancer informant from Taipei as well as two taxi drivers noted that cremating the corpse severs the descendants’ relationship with the deceased (so they won’t be either cursed or blessed by it), although two taxi drivers explicitly denied this view, stating that the positioning of an ancestor’s cremated bones still has an impact on descendants. Geomancer Xie writes that he disapproves of violent methods of dealing with shaded corpses such as scraping or cremation because these seem inhumane and also because they destroy the spiritual energies inside the bones. Xie also recounts a saying that the souls of those who are cremated will be locked inside an underworld prison

⁶³ Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 204. I have not been able to verify the significance of the term *im*³ 蔭 [shaded] in the compound *im*³*si*¹, “shaded corpse.” In Hoklo, *im*³ often signifies protection. On the other hand, originally the term might conceivably have been inspired by cooking terminology, as *im*³ can also mean “to salt” or “to pickle” through a process of soaking foods in soy sauce inside air-tight jars over several months, as in the terms *im*³*sinn*⁷*a*² 蔭豉仔 [salted soybeans] and *im*³*kue*¹*a*² 蔭瓜仔 [salted cucumber or pickled melon]. Shaded corpses, like these foods, often have a darkish complexion, resist or have resisted rotting, and are generally formed in airtight environments. Hence other potential translations for *im*³*si*¹ might be “protected corpse” or “pickled corpse.”

⁶⁴ Demiéville, “Momies d’Extrême-Orient,” 144

⁶⁵ *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 196–199.

⁶⁶ *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 199–203.

and unable to be reborn for five hundred years. Although he is not sure if this saying is correct, he notes that spirit-mediums who try to contact the souls of cremated dead are unable to locate them.⁶⁷ Both my Taipei geomancer informant and Huang note that chemical removal of the flesh is now the most common technique.⁶⁸

Most of my informants attributed the formation of shaded corpses to impersonal processes, but other Taiwanese speak of the active agency of the deceased's soul in keeping the body from rotting. For instance, one taxi driver told me shaded corpses are formed if the deceased dies with unresolved anger. And Yang writes that Taiwanese have three explanations for why the corpse does not rot, all of which are based on the deceased soul's agency: (1) the deceased had unresolved things to say to the living so wants to stay around to give final words, (2) the deceased likes this world and so is unwilling to leave this world for the next, and (3) the deceased is afraid to go to the netherworld because he or she expects to be punished there for the bad deeds committed during life.⁶⁹ Taiwanese can explain shaded corpses, just as they can explain geomancy in general, in terms of either impersonal processes or the personal agency of supernatural entities.

Demonic Corpses

Besides the relatively passive shaded corpse, in popular belief there are other, more active corpses that inspire outright terror. In rural Taiwan several decades ago, a ritual called a "cutting" [*geduan* 割斷] was performed to assure corpses would not come back to harm those present at the funeral. Villagers believed a corpse could turn into a powerful monster [*iau¹kuai³* 妖怪], and had a story about this having occurred in a neighboring town:

His (i.e., the deceased's) relatives had built a shed next to the house to cover the coffin but had left chinks in the roof so that the sun and moon were able to shine on it. Because of this the corpse was able to turn into a *iau¹kuai³* with long white hair, huge fangs, and a long tongue. The dead man's soul was able to leave the corpse and cause sickness and other

⁶⁷ Xie, *Zangfan shili*, 51–52, 90.

⁶⁸ Ahern's informants claimed they never scraped off flesh—they claimed that to do so would be like killing the ancestor—nor did they mention cremation or chemical removal as an option. Instead, they used the gentle methods of burial in a new location or simply wetting the corpse with a bit of expectorated alcohol, or exposing it to the open sky and waiting for it to rot. See Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 205. The 1988 Taipei City gazetteer states that flesh is removed with a knife or water is placed on the corpse, which is then reburied for ten days, by which time rotting should have occurred. See Wang, *Taipeishi zhi*, 135–136. My Hakka geomancer informant (from an isolated mountain region of northern Taiwan) was not familiar with using chemical or scraping methods to remove the flesh (for that would be bad to do), and said he added a bit of water to the corpse and reburied it—he emphasized that adding alcohol (as some people still do) was bad because alcohol kills germs. In contrast Watson writes that Cantonese in the New Territories scraped off every scrap of residual flesh on the bones. See his "Of Flesh and Bones," 180–181.

⁶⁹ Yang, "Yinshen," 32.

troubles for the people in the area.⁷⁰

Thompson notes the belief in 1981–1982 Yunlin County that a cat in the vicinity of a corpse could trigger the corpse to transform into a zombie, which would seize the nearest person.⁷¹ Most of my informants were at least familiar with such legends and said their elders had told them such stories. For instance, eight taxi drivers had heard about cats animating corpses. Several told me that the whole point of holding a wake around a corpse was to prevent animals, especially cats, from disturbing it. Their concrete ideas differed. For instance, one said a cat must actually jump *over* the corpse to animate it, and that the corpse will then simply sit up and then lie down again. One attributed cats' power to animate corpses to the fact that "cats are basically evil" and that "they often don't die when you would expect them to die in accidents." Another claimed the cat will cause the deceased to become a violent or evil ghost [*ligui* 厲鬼 or *egui* 惡鬼]. All the taxi drivers expressed moderate to extreme skepticism regarding these stories. One suggested that elders told such stories to the younger generation to scare them and control them. An elderly woman gave the most details, saying the cat had to be black, but with white, oily feet, and that the animated corpse would tightly grasp the first thing it found and then become an ordinary corpse again. If it grasped a person, the person would die; therefore, if one encounters such an animated corpse one should give it some object to grasp.

For late-nineteenth century Amoy, de Groot records similar beliefs regarding corpse animation by cats as well as the belief that sunlight or moonlight could change a corpse into a *jiangshi* 殭屍/僵屍, ["stiff (and animated) corpse"], which does not decay and is prone to kill passers-by with its great strength.⁷² De Groot also cites many stories from historical texts describing malicious and often man-eating corpses that could project specters or that could themselves physically arise to attack.⁷³ Among my informants, one reported a saying that if dogs enter a cemetery and bump into the tombstones, then the corpses below are in the process of developing into *jiangshi*. In such cases, people will dig up the graves and destroy the corpses before they can turn into *jiangshi*. However, this informant could recall no specific case in which this was actually done. Another informant told me about rumors of several dangerous *jiangshi* on the loose in rural Taizhong 台中 County in 1992 or 1993, which was purportedly reported in the local press. The informant recalls that *jiangshi* movies

⁷⁰ Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 172–173.

⁷¹ Thompson, "Death, Food, and Fertility," 83.

⁷² Today the character used is usually 殭 rather than 僵, but the *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典 shows that both characters are possible and that one meaning of 殭 is *jiangying* 僵硬 [stiff and hard] (*Hanyu dacidian*, digital version 2.0, s.v. "殭"). The *Guoyu huoyong cidian* 國語活用辭典 states in a note on usage that whereas both characters refer to stiffness, 殭 should be used to refer to corpses (*Guoyu huoyong cidian*, 2nd ed., s.v. "僵"). Several informants claimed that zombies are called *jiangshi* because they are *jiangying* [stiff and hard], and movies about them portray them as such. Note that dictionaries and historical texts sometimes define or use *jiangshi* 僵屍 to mean "stiff, undecayed corpse," that is, equivalent to what we have been calling *yinshi* or "shaded corpse." For one such example, see de Groot, *Religious System of China*, 4:133.

⁷³ de Groot, *Religious System of China*, 1:43, 1:106, 5:726–762.

were popular at this time and speculates that the movies were a factor in stirring up these rumors.

Zombie-related beliefs in contemporary Taiwan do not appear to be very strong today, especially among the young. Although I did not research this topic in rural areas, those Taipei residents I asked who believed in zombies said that *jiangshi* still existed only in Jiangxi Province or western Hunan Province, China. In their conception, such *jiangshi* were corpses of people who had died away from home. Supposedly, sorcerers can be hired to animate them with charms [*fu* 符] and to drive them back to their hometowns by night for burial. This activity is called “driving corpses” [*gan shi* 趕屍] and stories and movies present such corpses as much more docile and passive than other *jiangshi* zombies, which go around killing innocent people and drinking their blood.⁷⁴ Unlike the fearful villagers cited above, many Taiwanese today are probably more likely to think of zombies when recalling popular movies and television shows (especially those made in Hong Kong and popular some fifteen to twenty years ago) which even included cute, misunderstood *jiangshi* who wanted to make friends, perhaps modeled on the alien “E.T.” in Steven Spielberg’s 1982 film *The Extra Terrestrial*.⁷⁵ Students who hang decorations from their backpacks might think about zombies when deciding which stuffed or plastic dolls they want to buy for this purpose—among the Hello Kitties, Spidermans, and other popular cartoon figures, a cute zombie is also available, although these days Western-style ghosts and vampires are more popular than *jiangshi*.

Besides people’s more lighthearted attitudes toward zombies today, fears of death pollution in general also seem to be lower. For example, the expensive-to-attend yet nevertheless extremely popular exhibition of “plastinated” corpses, held in the Taipei for six months during 2003 and later in other locales, featured preserved corpses in all manner of poses and states of dissection and was widely hailed as artistic, educational, charity promoting (encouraging organ donations) and health-promoting (for example, by displaying the effects of smoking on the lungs). There was even an exhibit in which one could pick up, squeeze, and otherwise fondle a plastinated human liver and brain. Some people were afraid to attend but many others were not.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Jiangshi* meant something else to two other informants, who called the buried corpses of ancestors which do not rot *jiangshi* rather than *yinshi*. Taiwanese ethnographers speculate that shaded corpses have been the inspiration for legends about *jiangshi*. See Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 194–195; and Yang, “Yinshen,” 32.

⁷⁵ *Jiangshi* movies are briefly mentioned in Huang Wenbo, *Taiwanren de shengsixue*, 194. For the classic *jiangshi* movie which heralded the *jiangshi* craze, see *Jiangshi xiansheng* 殭屍先生 [Mr. Vampire], directed by Ricky Lau, 96 min., 1985, DVD.

⁷⁶ One day during the period of this exhibition, a Taiwanese friend was having a meal with a group of about twenty secondary school teachers. All were invited to attend for free, but about six refused to go. My friend claims she knows they were afraid of (intangible) “dirty things” [*zang dongxi* 髒東西, signifying ghosts] at the exhibition but were probably embarrassed to admit this. The other teachers attended with great enthusiasm. This exhibition is called *Body Worlds*. The English/German website claims that from 2002 to 2004, during which it traveled to places in Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, some 4.1 million visitors attended the Asian exhibition. See Institute for Plastination, “Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies,” <<http://www>.

Patterns of Contextualization

We have seen that some Taiwanese, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, believe a corpse's resistance to decay is reflective of its special power. This idea parallels the belief that people whose cremated bones resist complete pulverization and form into relics [*śarīra* bits and *śarīra* flowers] possessed unusual powers, some of which remains in the bone relics.⁷⁷ Decay-resistant corpses may be venerated as bodhisattvas or deities, or they may be feared as active threats (zombies) or passive threats (shaded corpses). Ancestors which rot properly can improve the luck of descendants by channeling geomantic energies, but if cremated some Taiwanese believe they lose this power. People use substances such as charcoal, lacquer, and salt to preserve bodily remains that are beneficial (clean bones, flesh-body bodhisattvas), and take measures to destroy or remove the flesh from baneful remains (shaded corpses, potential zombies). Instead of being striking exceptions, mummies and their veneration seem to fit rather inconspicuously into the set of practices and beliefs regarding bodily remains.

Below I will categorize different types of bodily remains and show how these categories correspond to other categories in Taiwanese popular religion. First we will look at other inhabitants of that domain, the most prevalent of which are manes, souls of the dead. In popular belief, the three important kinds of manes are gods, ghosts, and ancestors.⁷⁸ The boundaries between these three categories are fluid. Ghosts in particular are prone to being transformed into gods or ancestors.

A simplified typology of these beings follows.⁷⁹ *Gods* [*shen* 神] are manes which during life had great virtue. They are worshipped in temples that are often located in public or scenic places, and golden-colored spirit money is burnt for them. People worship a god in order to obtain blessings or favors, and worship regularly on the god's annual birthday [*danchen* 誕辰]. *Ghosts* are manes who died violently or who are without descendants that worship them.⁸⁰ They are believed to be dangerous because they are emotionally distraught or lacking in necessities (food, spirit money) that descendants could regularly provide. Sometimes they

bodyworlds.com/>. For an article in the Taiwanese media describing and evaluating the exhibit, see Qiu, "Chaotuo shengsi?"

⁷⁷ Some of the most famous relics in Taiwan today are the *śarīra* flowers of the monk Guangqin 廣欽 (1892–1986). For a photograph, see Kan, *Taiwan gaoseng*, 44.

⁷⁸ Those gods discussed here are the manes of virtuous dead and that resemble medieval Christian saints or immortalized Greek heroes in that they were once humans (although in Han religion, some were also personified animals). Other "gods" in popular religion include the impersonal god Heaven [Tian 天] and beings existing prior to human beings.

⁷⁹ This summary is primarily based on Yu, "Making a Malefactor a Benefactor," but also draws from Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors"; Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God"; and Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, & Ancestors*.

⁸⁰ Here the term ghost [*gui* 鬼] is used in a narrow sense. Emic terms that Taiwanese use to refer specifically to this type of manes include *guhun yegui* 孤魂野鬼 [lonely spirits and wild ghosts], *ligui* 厲鬼 [malevolent ghosts], *egui* 惡鬼 [evil ghosts], and the euphemistic *hao xiongdi* 好兄弟 [good brethren].

cause trouble for the living, such as accidents and illness, and they are propitiated in far-away and dangerous places, often at night, or by individual families outside their doorstep. People propitiate them to prevent or remove misfortune, especially during the seventh lunar month. *Ancestors* [*zuxian* 祖先 or *kong¹ma²* 公媽] are manes of one's patrilineal forebears (biological or fictive) and their wives. They interact almost exclusively with their descendants and generally look out for their descendants' well-being. They are especially remembered and worshipped on their annual death day anniversaries [*jichen* 忌辰] and on the last day of the lunar year.

Whereas gods and ancestors are basically benevolent and do not cause people trouble unless insulted or provoked, ghosts attack people in order to attract attention or out of malice. If the haunting ghost is an anonymous evil force or manes of a long-deceased and unknown person, the way to deal with it is to exorcise it with the help of an exorcist or god. If on the other hand the ghost is of a known person, it might be placated and perhaps even transformed into an ancestor or into a god, depending on whether its hauntings and powers are private (limited to one family) or public, respectively. For instance in the case of the ghost of an unwed daughter disturbing her natal family, the family may find a man to "marry" the ghost in a "netherworld marriage" [*minghun* 冥婚]. Subsequently, the man and his descendants (by his human wife) will be obligated to make offerings to the ghost's soul tablet. In the case of a man who died without male progeny, the family may have the ghost "adopt" a young male child (such as the son of the ghost's brother), who will then be obligated to worship the ghost/ancestor. Through either "spirit marriage" or "spirit adoption," a family ghost without a patrilineal line of descent can be changed from a needy, dangerous ghost into a cared-for, benevolent ancestor. On the other hand, sometimes to placate a powerful haunting ghost that affects an entire community, people will establish a shrine for it and worship it as if it were a god. If the ghost then behaves well and even has the power to fulfill their prayers, the ghost may eventually transform into a full-fledged god, especially after several generations have passed and its ghostly origins are gone from living memory.⁸¹

Arthur Wolf proposed that popular conceptions of manes correspond to the social categories of the living, as follows:

gods:ghosts:ancestors::
*officials:strangers (esp. beggars, bandits):elder kin*⁸²

While this formulation does not always fit perfectly, nevertheless it still holds for many areas and helps us to perceive correspondences between different sociocultural realms.⁸³ Perhaps

⁸¹ See Jordan, "The Family Ghosts," in *Gods, Ghosts, & Ancestors*, 138–171.

⁸² Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors."

⁸³ For instance, some gods are more like parental figures, clumsy buffoons, or regional warlords than rational bureaucratic officials. See Shahar and Weller, "Introduction: Gods and Society in China"; Lane, "Left Hand of God"; and Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China*. Yet despite the fact that some gods were originally unfilial daughters, patricides, etc., in terms of their relationships with devotees they generally behave in relatively predictable ways and are hence suitable for mutually beneficial, reciprocal

we could formulate a similar analogy between manes and bodily remains, as follows:

*gods:ghosts:ancestors::
deified corpses:demonized corpses:clean bones*

Just as gods, ghosts, and ancestors are all basically the same kind of entity (i.e., manes), the various kinds of corpses and bones are all basically human bodily remains. But each kind of corpse or bodily remains has differing degrees and kinds of power, and consequently they are treated differently. Thus, people worship deified corpses (as they worship gods), fear demonized corpses (as they fear ghosts), and generally gain benefits from clean bones (as they do from ancestors). In this formulation, *shaded corpses* are an intermediate category, located between truly demonized corpses and clean bones. As others have shown, there are likewise manes dwelling inside soul tablets that are treated as intermediate beings between ancestors and ghosts.⁸⁴ And just as family ghosts can be transformed into ancestors (through kinship-producing rituals), shaded corpses can be transformed into safe, clean bones (through physical procedures plus rituals).

However, this analogical formulation is in some ways misleading because the corpse or bones are really just the places of residence for the soul that lives within. It is more accurate to say that deified corpses, demonized corpses, and clean bones are containers or resting places for the types of being who dwell within or are associated with them, who in popular religious belief basically *are* gods, ghosts, and ancestors, respectively. These three kinds of manes can exist without a residence, but often they exist inside or can move in and out of artificially constructed residences (usually: gods dwelling inside consecrated images made in their likenesses, ghosts dwelling in abandoned images or images that did not undergo consecration, and ancestors dwelling in soul tablets [*shenzhu paiwei* 神主牌位]).⁸⁵ Sometimes, however, the

relationships, unlike most ghosts. Also many gods have less than impeccable personal lives (as drunkards, patronizing prostitutes, voyeuristic, etc.). See Shahar and Weller, "Introduction: Gods and Society in China." Yet this fact does not necessarily counter the image of gods as officials unless we make the dubious assumption that officials are all expected to be moral exemplars.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Yu Kwang-hong, "Making a Malefactor a Benefactor," 44–47.

⁸⁵ For consecration rituals in Taiwan, see Thompson, "Consecration Magic in Chinese Religion." But note that not all consecrated statues are believed to literally contain a deity at all times: sometimes the statues are more like temporary resting spots for the deities. Furthermore, statues may also be conceived of as analogous to "telephone lines" to contact the deity who dwells elsewhere. See Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, 67. In some modernist Taiwanese Buddhist interpretations, Buddhist statues are symbolic instruments that help the devotee's mind to focus so he can contact the being it represents, which does not dwell in any statue. See Shengyan, *Zhengxin de fojiao*, 83. Nevertheless, the monk who wrote this account still performs consecration rituals for statues. Finally, one middle-aged woman living in Taipei told me none of the statues she sold at her shop had been consecrated, because actually all the power in a statue is a cumulation of the thoughts a worshipper has had in its vicinity (discussion with author in woman's shop, summer 2004). She cited the Buddhist doctrine that "all is created by the mind" [*yiqie wei xin zao* 一切為心造] to justify this view. She assured me that if I were to buy one of her

residences are bodily remains.

By saying deified corpses, zombies, and ancestral bone *basically* are manes which can be categorized as gods, ghost, and ancestors, I mean to qualify this equation. That is, they are dwelling places for manes that we can categorize as gods, ghost, or ancestors in a generic sense, if we define these terms broadly, as follows: gods are “manes who project their power in generally helpful or moral ways beyond the confines of their own family,” ghosts are “manes who project their power in generally harmful or immoral ways beyond the confines of their own family,” and ancestors are “manes whose influence is generally confined to their own family.” The beings I have discussed are special types of manes in that their existence is always closely linked to, and is imagined in the immediate presence of, their bodily remains. Hence they are not prototypical representatives of these three generic categories.

Furthermore, some types of zombies are probably not ghosts at all. Unfortunately, I do not have much data on zombie beliefs in contemporary Taiwan, partly because probably most Taiwanese have never heard concrete accounts of zombies and do not take stories about zombies seriously. And according to many accounts, corpses that are briefly animated by cats do not seem to have personalities. In fact, they do not seem to even be very cognizant of their surroundings at all, and hence they differ from ghosts. Other zombies are said to behave more like typical ghosts in that they are cognizant beings that go around causing harm, but unlike many ghosts, they are not propitiated with offerings and probably could never be transformed into gods.⁸⁶

Ambiguities in the Categorization of Corpses

Sometimes whether or not a certain spiritual being is a god or a ghost depends on whom you ask. Some gods were originally ghosts, and informants disagree about whether or not a certain being is a god or a ghost. The same ambiguities can arise when Taiwanese evaluate mummified corpses.

The practice of Buddhist mummification has become marginalized within the Taiwanese Buddhist community.⁸⁷ Whereas the first flesh-body bodhisattva in Taiwan, Cihang, was one of the most famous monks in the country, later mummies have been less prominent figures.

statues, as long as I didn't have bad thoughts near or in relation to the statue, nothing evil would enter into it.

⁸⁶ In contemporary Taiwan there are other types of manes, closely linked to bodily remains, which are more clearly ghosts or intermediate beings between ghosts and gods. For instance, sorcerers can control special ghosts called fetus- or infant-ghosts [*xiaogui* 小鬼] by mutilating and storing the corpses of dead fetuses and infants. See Moskowitz, *Haunting Fetus*, 150, 163–165. And Taiwanese also propitiate or worship a variety of the manes of abandoned or anonymous corpses, which are often buried in mass graves. See Yu, *Making a Malefactor a Benefactor*, 47–51. However, as far as I am aware, such bodily remains are not mummified corpses, although some may resist rotting longer than ordinary corpses.

⁸⁷ Gildow and Bingenheimer, “Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan.”

The greater the social capital of the organization surrounding a mummified monastic, the greater power it has to push its interpretation that, for instance, the mummification of its founder is a miracle demonstrating sainthood. Therefore, mummies with less social capital have been ignored—unrecognized as flesh bodhisattvas—by the Buddhist establishment, and they remain relatively unknown outside the small cult that surrounds them.

Rather than just politically ignoring claims about the “flesh bodhisattvahood” of a particular mummy (as other Buddhists are prone to do), or even mocking such beliefs as superstitious nonsense (as secularists are prone to do), some Taiwanese may regard it as a shaded corpse. The educated geomancer from Taipei I spoke with eventually told me his unambiguous opinion regarding the flesh-body bodhisattva Yingmiao 瀛妙, who was enshrined near his office.⁸⁸ Yingmiao’s corpse had not undergone any special preparations after burial, and had been discovered after he was exhumed for secondary burial after ten years. The geomancer was reluctant to criticize Buddhist clerics directly, but eventually said, “Well, they [Buddhists] think it’s an incorruptible adamantine body [*jin’gang bu huai shen* 金剛不壞身],⁸⁹ but we [geomancers] think it’s just a shaded corpse, nothing more.” As a professional geomancer in a patrilineal line of geomancers and living near a Buddhist mummy, this man had the motivation and the theoretical tools to analyze the mummy according to the principles he knew best. Most Taiwanese, however, have neither the motivation nor the background knowledge to analyze mummified corpses or possible contradictions between systems. This observation echoes Stevan Harrell’s finding that very few villagers—only one of the sixty-six villagers he interviewed—fell into his category of “intellectual believer,” meaning someone who uses folk beliefs to understand the world around him in a systematic way and evaluates beliefs in light of their consistency with other beliefs.⁹⁰

For instance, at the monastery where the Buddhist mummy Yingmiao 瀛妙 is enshrined, I met an elderly man in the spring of 2002, Mr. C, who was visiting the columbarium tower [*linggu ta* 靈骨塔; structure in which cremated bone ash is kept] on the monastery grounds to pay respects to a deceased relative. He told me about the mummified Buddhist master in the main hall, and some time later told me about his experience exhuming his father’s bones. Mr. C said his father still had most of the flesh on his body eight years after burial, and that it had been removed before secondary burial. If Mr. C thought there was a contradiction between worshipping a gilded mummy on the one hand and having had flesh removed from his father’s corpse on the other, he evinced no such feelings. My sense is that C felt no need to compare the two kinds of corpses. He was perfectly happy to trust the Buddhist nuns to look after the bone ash of one relative and accept that the deceased abbot of the monastery was special because his body did not decay. And he was also happy to trust the specialist who exhumed his father’s corpse and advised him to remove its flesh. Many people who visit monasteries, such as Mr. C, view monasteries as they would the many temples of popular

⁸⁸ Interview in his office in Beitou 北投 District, spring 2002.

⁸⁹ *Jin’gang bu huai shen* is another phrase used by Buddhists in Taiwan to describe a corpse that is supposedly unsusceptible to decay.

⁹⁰ Harrell, “Modes of Belief,” 57–59.

religious belief, as places to pray, make offerings, and perhaps gain benefits from the “deities” (whether traditional gods, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, or sacred mummies) therein. And they regard monastics as specialists, providers of services, for ritual functions such as funerals and storage of bone ash. They do not attend regular Buddhist sermons or read Buddhist books. Such people are no more interested in spending time learning the details of religious beliefs and rituals than an overcommitted, technologically challenged academic wants to spend time learning how central processing units function just after his or her computer crashes.

One middle-aged Taiwanese woman who drove me to see the Buddhist mummy Puzhao 普照 in southern Taiwan treated the mummy as *both* a deity and a ghost.⁹¹ She gave everyone in our car a small red packet of rice, salt, and dried banyan leaves. The packet would absorb “dirty things” and prevent them from coming home with us if we left the packets in a temple—she specified that these packets were a good precaution to take because, after all, Puzhao was a corpse. When we arrived at Puzhao’s temple, however, she bowed to him and offered him incense as if he were a god. Yet shortly after arrival, she reportedly smelled the faint odor of rotting flesh—something neither I nor my scholarly friend could detect—and she felt sick to her stomach. For this woman, Puzhao was perhaps an intermediate being between ghosts and gods.

My Hakka geomancer informant came up with multiple and contradictory theories about successful mummification in the course of one long conversation: it is merely a chemical process; it is a Tibetan practice that he does not understand; only advanced practitioners can do it; truly advanced practitioners who have understood emptiness do not become mummies; and accounts of monks who mummify without chemical assistance are lies.⁹² Another relatively unsystematic thinker I pushed to explain his thinking about corpses was an employee in a traditional funeral parlor in Taipei.⁹³ He voluntarily told me about shaded corpses before I brought up the topic myself, but when I asked him why people destroyed most corpses but worshipped others he tried to escape my persistent questioning and was obviously at a loss. Finally, probably eager to get rid of me, he found a reason for mummy worship: “[Because] they were [spiritual] cultivators!” [*tamen shi xiuxing ren* 他們是修行人]. Just as, for instance, a few *virtuous* suicidal virgins become goddesses but most become ghosts, most mummified corpses become shaded corpses but a few virtuous ones can, especially with institutional backing, become objects of worship.

Conclusion

We have seen how Taiwanese categorize and evaluate human bodily remains and how such concepts correspond to their concepts of manes. Corpses are normally expected to decompose or be reduced to ashes through cremation. Corpses are dangerous during the time

⁹¹ These observations were made in Gaoxiong County, 30 August 2005.

⁹² Late-night discussion with author in a restaurant in Xinzhu County, 25 or 26 June 2005.

⁹³ Discussion with author held in a funeral parlor in Wenshan 文山 District, January 2004.

when they are presumed to be undergoing decay, but after they decay properly they become safer and can become more beneficial to descendants.

Those corpses that resist decay, even those for which artificial methods were employed to bring about mummification, demand special attention and are believed to have extraordinary powers. Certain legendary decay-resistant corpses such as *jiangshi* are thought to be especially dangerous. Other mummies called shaded corpses are very bad for descendants but innocuous to others. But people influenced by religious traditions that claim nondecay signifies sanctity may regard the mummified corpse of a respected or beloved person as a kind of deity, and will attribute the mummification to the intentional agency and special powers of the deceased's soul. How many and which people accept the mummy as a deity depends on the identity of the mummy during life as well as the degree of similarity between the religious affiliations of the mummy and those of the potential believers. Religious organizations with a lot of social capital and which manufacture or discover the mummy of a beloved teacher have a better chance of having their mummy widely accepted as an object of worship. Yet people such as geomancers may still regard such deified corpses in the same manner as they regard the mummified corpses they discovered during the process of secondary burial, as inauspicious shaded corpses.⁹⁴ Geomancers tend to attribute mummification to naturalistic causes, including causes described in modern scientific terms as well as in traditional geomantic terms. Other Taiwanese, in contrast, sometimes attribute mummification to "religious" causes, that is, to the agency of the deceased's soul, although many Taiwanese today are also familiar with and accept the naturalistic reasoning of specialists and modern science.

Not surprisingly, people's moral evaluations influence their perceptions and reactions to mummified corpses. People who find a mummy which they then deify often describe the mummy as lifelike, inspiring, peaceful, and fragrant; the fact that the mummy's fingernails and hair are intact or purportedly have even grown inspires awe and devotion.⁹⁵ In contrast, legends and movies about *jiangshi* portray them as stiff and hard, and the fact that their hair and nails grow while they are supposedly dead arouses fear, as *jiangshi* often kill victims with their long fingernails. Finally, shaded corpses which look lifelike inspire fear or disgust rather than admiration. In fact, one shaded corpse which had developed a bronze hue inspired strong disgust and nausea in the geomancer and others exhuming it, yet as far as I can tell from the tiny photograph and written descriptions provided, to me this corpse looks and sounds more

⁹⁴ Yang also indirectly raises the possibility that the mummy of the highly venerated Buddhist monk Cihang is a shaded corpse. See Yang, "Yinshen," 32.

⁹⁵ For instance, we have seen that Yunü's mummy was described as lifelike; Cai Guanyin's as lifelike, dignified, and peaceful; Dexiu's as having intact facial features, hair, and fingernails; and Mingjie's skin as looking more youthful than it did in life. In addition, the mummy of the Buddhist monk Cihang was described as lifelike, with soft skin like that of a living person, and his hair, bodily hair, and fingernails were said to have grown while he was interred. On Cihang, see Yan, "Cong Cihang fashi yuanji," 2; and Yang, "Yinshen," 32. Likewise, the mummy of Qingyan was described as soft, and that of Yingmiao supposedly smelled of sandalwood and had dignified features and amber-colored skin. See Gildow and Bingenheimer, "Buddhist Mummification in Taiwan," 99, 124–125.

attractive than any of the photographs I have seen of ungilded deified mummies.⁹⁶

In short, from the perspective of popular religion, different bodily remains are linked to the presence of different kinds of manes, namely gods, ghosts, ancestors, and intermediate beings between these categories. In special cases, corpses resist destruction. Such destruction-proof corpses should be cremated, reduced to bones, feared, or gilded and worshipped, depending on whose corpse it is, who manufactured or discovered it, and whom one asks.

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⁹⁶ For mention of a lifelike shaded corpse inspiring fear, see Yang, "Yinshen," 32. On the bronze colored shaded corpse, see Xie, *Zangfan shili*, 218, 220. For a published photograph of an ungilded Buddhist mummy, see Kan, *Taiwan gaoseng*, 89.

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