University of Alberta

Modernity and the Supernatural in Taiwan: Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors Revisited

by

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Abstract

This research examines how religious and supernatural beliefs have changed with the rapid modernization and increased standard of modern, scientific education in Tainan, Taiwan. Participants in my project were between the ages of 20-40, had at least some post secondary education, and were from Tainan or had lived in Tainan for a significant amount of time. Tainan, a city of over 750,000 people, is one of Taiwan's oldest cities and is a traditional cultural stronghold. Through a look at beliefs about and experiences with Taiwanese ghosts, gods and ancestors, I explore how modernization has affected beliefs about the supernatural for young adults in Taiwan who are struggling to balance their filial obligation to honor what has been passed down for generations and preserve what makes their culture unique with their desire to be seen as modern and progressive in the global arena of transnational cultural flows.

Preface

In 2005 I went to Asia in search of a steady job and the opportunity to explore other cultures. I had greatly enjoyed traveling to Europe in 1999 and, after graduating with my Bachelors in Sociology focused on the topics of science and religion, I aided in the analysis of the findings of Dr. Lidio Valdez's archaeology site in Ayacucho, Peru in 2003. Some friends of mine had taught English in Taiwan and said it was a great place to live so, after a two month trek around Southeast Asia, I moved there. While traveling through Thailand I did some research on where I wanted to live in Taiwan. Tainan seemed the ideal place for me because it was well known for its many temples and its active traditional culture. With few other foreigners, it provided many opportunities for exploring a culture that is in some ways vastly different than my own. In January, 2006 I set out to build myself a life in Tainan with nothing but a few thousand Canadian dollars, and my curiosity for other cultures.

I had been in Tainan for a few months when, while leaving a restaurant near a Zheng Cheng Gong[1] (called Koxinga by the Dutch) temple, I came upon a religious procession in a narrow alleyway. The Eight Generals came first (*ba jia jiang*) with their fearsome costumes and martial arts displays. Their faces were painted in bright colors, they had large fangs sticking out of their mouths, and carried a variety of weapons which the used with martial skill to make way for the god. A spirit medium came next (*jitong* in Mandarin or *dang gi* in Taiwanese[2]). He wore black pants, had a red sash

[1] Appendix A contains the characters, tones, and translations for the Mandarin names and words I use

[2] Taiwanese is a localized dialect of Southern Min, which originates from Fujian Province, China (Debernardi 1991). The majority of immigrants who came to Taiwan in the 1600s came from Fujian.

around his waist, and was without a shirt. He was also carrying a club with spikes sticking out of it. He stopped in the alleyway not two feet from me and proceeded to rake the top of his head with the club until droplets of blood started running down his face. I had never seen anything like it and was overcome with curiosity over what would possess a person to do that (at that point I had no idea he was actually possessed). A palanquin came last carried by eight men with the idol of the god who the Eight Generals were protecting and which possessed the spirit medium. This procession was the catalyst that started my current research project. At the time, I was teaching English to adults and was three years away from even beginning my Masters. Regardless, I always kept graduate school in mind and loved researching foreign cultures. I had been in contact with Dr. Jean DeBernardi for some time about doing a Masters degree and, since she had done similar projects in Malaysia and Singapore, she gave me her support and ethical clearance through a project she was working on. I am greatly indebted to Dr. DeBernardi for her support. Soon after my first encounter with the Taiwanese gods, I began mapping out all the major temples in Tainan city, visiting popular temples in the countryside (mainly Dai Tian Fu in Madou and Nan Kun Shen), and interviewing temple organizers and spirit mediums about their spiritual beliefs and practices.

I lived in Tainan for two and a half years and spent my free time doing interviews, visiting temples, and attending religious festivals with the help of my Taiwanese students, friends, and coworkers. I cultivated a relationship through repeated interviews with a temple organizer, Mr. Li, at a moderately large Emperor of the Dark Northern Heavens (Xuan Tian Shang Di) temple in Tainan city, and developed strong ties to the Chen family through my friendship with their son Adolf (Wei Lun). When I returned to do my fieldwork in the fall of 2010 I stayed with the Chen family and am

greatly indebted to them for their hospitality, their patience in answering all of my many questions, and their care in treating me as if I was one of their own. When I lived in Tainan I had spent most of my holidays with them and was invited to many of their family functions. Three senior men in their extended family are spirit mediums and go into trances where they are possessed by the spirits of Daoist deities like the God of War. During these events they advise the public at shrine séances or at family occasions. Because of their deep experience and knowledge of Daoist traditions, the Chen family has been invaluable as collaborators in my research. Adolf in particular went out of his way to help me with translation and driving me out to temples and festivals.

I am also indebted to Mr. Kuo, my martial arts teacher; Wei, a Buddhist monk whom I befriended in my first month of living in Tainan; and my students and coworkers from the English schools I taught at. I visited my martial arts teacher once a month in Taichung (the second largest city in Taiwan) while I was living in Tainan. His martial arts research organization hosted competitions and conferences that often happened at temples and coincided with large temple events. Wei lived in one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Tainan, Fahua temple. We met once every few weeks for tea or to go to the hot springs. Mr. Kuo, Wei, my students, and my coworkers were all very helpful in answering my many questions about Taiwanese religion and culture.

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Introduction

After being back

in Canada for two years and starting my Masters in Anthropology, I returned to Taiwan seeking to understand how the people of Tainan could reconcile their beliefs about the supernatural with their modern scientific education. The data that I collected upon returning to Taiwan for three months in the fall of 2010 comes from interviews I conducted with people who lived for the most part in Tainan. My experience living in Tainan from 2006-2008 provided me with the background knowledge of Taiwanese[3] religion and its place in modern Taiwanese society. Later this experience would help me address the questions of this research project more fully. With knowledge of Taiwanese religious beliefs and practices, as well as an intimate knowledge and experience of the culture at large, I wanted to know how people in Tainan were able to harmonize (or not) their high level of education, which placed a strong emphasis on the hard sciences, with their multifaceted beliefs about the supernatural and the role of religion in modern life. Like many East Asian countries, modernization was rapid and unsettling. Compared to Canada, it seemed like the modern and the deeply traditional were in constant collision with each other in Taiwan, and the focus of this study is to examine how the newest generation of adults in Tainan is managing the differences.

The following pages are my attempt to understand how well educated and modernized Taiwanese people reconcile their traditional spiritual beliefs with the

[3] There is some dispute about the difference between Taiwanese and Chinese religion (Katz 2003:113-115). Taiwanese religion has its foundation in Chinese religion but has developed some idiosyncrasies since Taiwan separated from China in 1949.

scientific mindset of their modern, science-focused education system. I examine what has changed about religious belief and practice, and why belief in the supernatural persists regardless of having a relatively high standard of modern, scientific education. I start with a brief history of Taiwan and an exploration of the effects of modernization that have already been studied there. This background is to give a sense of the religious landscape in which my research takes place. I then will outline the methodology of my research, and present my data and analysis. Throughout my analysis I will be comparing previous works done on supernatural beliefs in Chinese and Taiwanese religion to the data I collected during my fieldwork. By doing this comparison I hope to discern changes in spiritual belief and practice. Lastly, I will be entering into debates on the relationship between science and religion through examining what my participants believe the role of science to be with respect to the supernatural, and how that compares to Western notions on the subject.

Multiple Modernities

> One of the Big Surprises of "late capitalism" is that "traditional" cultures are not inevitably incompatible with it nor vulnerable to it.
>
> Marshall Sahlins 1999:xvii

A Brief history of Taiwan

Taiwan is an island of marginality. It is situated on the outskirts of China and rebels often retreated there in order to regroup and retake the mainland (Weller 2000:478). In the last 200 years a variety of rulers have governed it. The Dutch made it a colony in the 1620s. After the Ming Dynasty fell, the Ming rebel Koxinga (Zheng Cheng Gong) fled to Taiwan, where he ousted the Dutch in 1661 (Jones 2003:13; Wills 1999:88-95). China, under the Qing Dynasty, later retook the island in 1683. After the Sino-Japanese war of 1895-94, Taiwan was ceded to the Japanese by China and remained a Japanese colony until the end of World War II (1945) (Jones 2003:19; Lamley 1999:202). Under Japanese control, Taiwanese temples were a source of social organization that led to rebellion (Weller 1999:344-350). As a result, the Japanese colonial government demolished many temples, replacing many of them with Shinto shrines. Regardless of this attempt to dismantle temple centered social organization, many of the temple festivals persisted and were disguised as agricultural and athletic competitions. Not until the end of World War II did Japan return Taiwan to China and the local population had a chance to release their pent up desire to rebuild temples.

In 1949 Chiang Kai Shek (Jiang Zhong Zheng) and the Guomindang (the nationalist political party of China) retreated to Taiwan after the Communists defeated them on the mainland (Weller 2000:478). During their governance of Taiwan, the Guomindang attempted to revive traditional Confucian values to aid in modernization (Yang 2008:332) and to defend against westernization and Communism (Tsai 2004:51-55). Their idea was that Taiwan's new national self was to be created out of a golden cultural past as well as a prosperous modern future. This project to modernize Taiwan discouraged the development of Buddhism and Daoism, as well as sought to rid modern Taiwanese society of what was perceived as the superstitious faith in spirit mediums (Madsen 2008:296-297). The Guomindang were friendlier to Christian organizations because of their ties to the United States. Christians helped to modernize Taiwan by building hospitals and universities while Buddhist and Daoist organizations were denied the right to build institutions. Regardless of this repression, Christianity peaked in the 1950s and 1960s while Buddhism, Daoism, and folk religion have since flourished (Chu 1994:94; Madsen 2008:297; Tsai 2004:44). Eventually, the Guomindang loosened their restrictions on Buddhists and Daoists as they came to realize the potential for these organizations to manage social welfare projects that the government did not want to pay for (Madsen 2008:317). The following is a look at the three Chinese religions in Taiwan and research done on how they have been affected by modernization.

Confucianism: A Third Epoch

When East Asian countries first began to modernize, modernizers blamed Confucianism for the inability to defend themselves against Western imperialism

(Esposito 2009:252-253). They associated Confucianism with the social and scientific stagnation, as well as the political despotism, that led to the fall of the imperial states in China (1912) and Korea (1910). East Asians first saw rapid modernization as a result of Westernization, but later recognized it as coming from a fusion of Western technology and reformed Confucian social policy. They then began to see Confucianism as part of their own unique version of modernity. People in emerging East Asian nation-states saw the Confucian emphasis on education, strong family connections, individual discipline and self sacrifice, and harmonious group relations as favourable for their stability (Bonnett 2006:278; Espositio 2009:245). Confucianism developed strong states dedicated to collective success as well as counteracted the fragmenting alienation of modernity. In Taiwan, Guomindang members considered Confucian values as necessary for the development of a new Chinese society (Tsai 2004:55). The government advocated Confucian values, as did Buddhist and Daoist organizations. Buddhist charitable organizations, like the Buddhist Compassionate Relief Association (Ciji), promotes traditional roles for women as defined by Confucianism, but gives them greater value than in the patriarchal culture from which they came (Pacey 2005:454-455). As well, Daoist temples, like the Enacting Heaven's Business temple in Taipei, use Chinese literary classics like *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Yan Yi)* to teach traditional Confucian values (Madsen 2008:303). These Confucian reformists see the modernization of Confucianism as a Third Epoch in its evolution.

Part of this revitalization effort has been the maintenance and celebration of Confucian temples like the Tainan Confucian Temple. This temple displays the wisdom of Confucius on various tablets and is a center for the celebration of all things

traditionally Taiwanese. The veneration of Confucius as an exemplary teacher is not only because of his extraordinary wisdom, but because of the humanity he demonstrates in making his teachings accessible to all (Wei 1987: 82-86). Modern East Asian states celebrate Confucius because he embodies ideals that, if internalized and cultivated, can lead to a harmonious society. The ideals portrayed through him, and other mythological Chinese personages, are not of a person born with extraordinary or supernatural abilities. Instead, they are of someone who attains personal wisdom through the process of human growth in a quest for knowledge as an act of community service.

Buddhism: A Pure Land on Earth

Buddhism is the imaginative leap that connects all of East Asia (Bonnett 206:320). It spread from India to East Asia where it became more popular than in its country of origin. Like Confucianism, Buddhism was regarded negatively when East Asian countries began to modernize (Esposito 2009:167-214). East Asians, particularly the Chinese Communists, believed it to be a parasitic superstition. At its height, though, Buddhism was closely tied to the state and social stability (Humphrey 2008: 512-513). In Taiwan, government officials regarded the power of Buddhist organizations suspiciously as they did all non-government organizations (Madsen 2008:316-318). As the teaching of "this worldly Buddhism" became more popular and Buddhist organizations increasingly became involved in social welfare projects, government officials came to recognize the value of having these organizations pay for social services the government would otherwise have to. This emphasis on engagement with the world rather than

asceticism came from the mainland with the people who fled the Communists in 1949 (Pacey 2005:445-448). Refugees from China brought the teachings of Taixu (1890-1947) and his disciple Yinshun (1905-2005) to Taiwan. Taixu's teachings promoted a "Pure Land for the human world" (Pacey 2005:445) that was in part a reaction to criticism by Christian missionaries about Buddhism's lack of commitment to bettering the lives of the living. Taixu also saw his Buddhist vision as a way of strengthening Chinese society against foreign influences. While Taixu sought to refocus Buddhism away from asceticism and toward engagement with the world, Yinshun went a step further in opposing the worship of bodhisattvas and seeking to rid Buddhism of its more supernatural elements. This type of Buddhism has a strong following in Taiwan. Since the end of martial law (1987) Buddhist charitable associations have flourished (Madsen 2008:295-318). These new forms of religious practice are particularly popular with the middle class as they strive to address modern problems and reconcile science with traditional beliefs.

Richard Madsen and Scott Pacey look closely at the three largest Buddhist charitable associations in Taiwan (Madsen 2008:298-303, Pacey 2005:445-453): The Buddhist Compassionate Relief Association (Ciji), Buddha's Light Mountain (Foguangshan), and Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan). Julia Huang looks particularly at the history and works of Ciji in her book, *Charisma and Compassion*. Ciji was founded by a Buddhist nun named Cheng Yen. The story of Cheng Yen starts when, as a young girl, she had a reputation for filial piety and the bodhisattva Guan Yin intervened in the illness of her mother. Huang's account of the founding of Ciji is related to two events in Cheng Yen's life. The first was at a hospital where she observed that an Aboriginal

woman could not get treatment because she lacked the necessary finances. The second involved meeting some Catholic nuns who criticised Buddhists for their lack of engagement with things that benefited society directly. These experiences inspired Cheng Yen to start Ciji as a Buddhist charitable association that would be engaged with the world through the development of infrastructure projects like hospitals and schools. Though it started off small, Ciji grew quickly. It involved lay Buddhists heavily in its philanthropic work and is particularly popular with women (Pacey 2005:449-451). Because of the strong involvement of women and its commitment to Confucian values, Ciji translates the traditional domestic roles and virtues of women into the religious sphere (e.g. humility, compassion, patience, obedience, etc.). As well, members of Ciji see their charitable work as enacting the spirit of Guan Yin, the bodhisattva that appeared to Cheng Yen when she was younger (Huang 2009:17-29).

The stories of Foguangshan and Fagushan are similar to that of Ciji (Madsen 2008:300-303, Pacey 2005:451-454). The leaders of both refer to the influence of Taixu and Christianity in inspiring them to promote a “this worldly” version of Buddhism that engages in various charitable works. They also both involve lay Buddhists and women heavily. Xingyun, the founder of Foguangshan sees his movement as a return to earlier Buddhism and claims that disengagement with the world was a misunderstanding of its true nature. He stresses the modernization of Buddhism (progress, adaptation, democracy, freedom, etc.) while maintaining a traditional theology (e.g. five precepts, ten good acts, six perfections, etc.). Xingyin advocates the involvement of Buddhists in politics as a part of their commitment to being engaged in worldly affairs. This

involvement in politics stands in contrast to Ciji's policy which forbids political involvement.

Fagushan was founded by Shengyan in 1989 and differs from the other two organizations in its use of environmental imagery and its emphasis on meditation (Pacey 2005:453-454). Through the purification of the mind, members of Fagushan strive to protect their spiritual, social, living, and natural environments. Clergy and lay members teach and practice this commitment to the purification of the mind through meditation. This practice of Chan (or Zen in Japan) Buddhism is based on rationality rather than mysticism or magic. All three organizations are alike in de-emphasising the supernatural and mythological elements of Buddhism (Madsen 2008:305).

In some ways, as these Buddhist associations strive to adapt to a modernized Taiwan they have confirmed what modernist theorists have expected about modernization leading to secularization. They define themselves more as cultural traditions or philosophies rather than religious movements, and in an effort to gain legitimacy in a modern context they have distanced themselves from supernatural beliefs and the stigma of superstition (Madsen 2008:305-306). In adapting their core values to modern conditions and downplaying or removing the otherworldly element of their practice they have gained support from the large, educated middle class that has developed rapidly in Taiwan.

Other scholars like Robert Weller (2000:493) have claimed that modernization does not necessarily lead to secularization. Regardless of how modernization has led to a more secularized type of Buddhism, other types of Buddhism have retained their

supernatural beliefs. The first friend I made in Tainan was a monk named Wei. He lives and works at the over 300 year old Fahua Temple in Tainan. This temple differs from newer ones in that is has a lot of features that are similar to Daoist temples (e.g. architecture, statues of a wide range of spiritual beings, fortune sticks, and divining blocks). In the same city you will find newer temples that lack these features, are more simplistic in design and decoration, and are less fused with Daoism. At Fahua Temple they still believe in the supernatural and participate in rituals for the dead, especially during the Hungry Ghost Festival. As well, in Fang Long Shih's study of maiden death practices in Taiwan, she notes that maidens who have the money reserve a place for their ashes in Buddhist temples where nuns can take care of them after death (2010:133-134). This practice also continues to acknowledge the supernatural in a Buddhist context.

Daoism and Folk Religion: Persistence and Maintenance

> The temple does not sell food or flowers to offer to the gods, and the glossy magazine it publishes shows no pictures of such sacrificial offerings. But crowding against the sidewalks adjacent to the temple are dozens of peddlers (mostly women in typical farmers' garb) selling materials for such offerings. The temple officially disavows the peddlers. There is a red line on the edge of the sidewalk, and any peddlers who cross it are driven away by the temple's security guards. The peddlers stand in the street just across the line. This, however, violates city laws. Every few hours, city police drive up on motorcycles and force the

> peddlers to retreat to the other side of the street. But after ten minutes, the police leave and the peddlers return. Business is brisk.
>
> Richard Madsen 2008:309-310

This quote describes a Daoist Temple in Taipei that, like the Buddhist associations mentioned above, aims to rid itself of the supernatural elements of its practice to favour a more secular approach to religion. As is demonstrated through this story, though, folk beliefs and practices regarding the supernatural in Taiwan persist despite official disdain and legal condemnation. During his research in 1994, Hai Yuan Chu found that the majority of people in Taiwan still believed in folk religion regardless of modern education (1994:92-93). Though the total number of believers has decreased, the number of temples and festivals has increased. The persistence of Daoist worship and temple festivals can be partially explained through the application of Arjun Appadurai's ideas on the production of locality (Appadurai 178-179). Though the persistence of Taiwanese Daoism goes against Appadurai's assumption that locality is fragile, his explanation of how localities maintain themselves is useful. He sees locality as relational rather than spatial, and neighbourhoods as characterized by their ability to socially reproduce themselves. In the context of Taiwanese Daoism, relational locality stems from the family as the fundamental unit of religious practice, and how nested networks of relations radiate outward from that (Weller 1999:341-359). The belief in and worship of the kitchen god is representative of the family. After worship of the kitchen god comes the worship of local community gods like Tudi Gong (The Earth God). Next, in an expanding network of social relations, comes more universalistic and translocal gods like Guan Gong (God of War). Both Guan Gong and Tudi Gong are

believed to have domain over wealth (among other things) but Tudi Gong is a subordinate god who is in charge of the neighbourhood or village whereas Guan Gong is of higher status and looks after the wealth of a much larger network like a nation (Duara 1988:786). In the imperial pantheon of Daoist heaven, the more local a god is and the smaller its social network of influence, the lower its position in the heavenly bureaucracy (Weller 1999:345-349). Weller notes that as modernization has increased people's geographical mobility, the popularity of universalistic gods, like Guan Gong, also has increased.

Appadurai claims that one way neighbourhoods and their social networks are reproduced are through rituals (1996:179). He points out that "space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action" (Appadurai 1996:180). In Taiwanese neighbourhoods, which are centered on a temple, this ritual maintenance of locality is visible in the touring of processions through their jurisdictions and ritual connections (Yang 2008:342). Resembling the tours made by magistrates in the imperial past (Weller 1999:343), these processions serve to reinforce the inclusion of a spatial area into a set of social relations (Feuchtwang 2001:63, 83). Not only do the processions demark the ritual territory of a temple and its god, but also they serve to reaffirm connections between temples in two ways. The first way is by recognizing the origin of a temple's spiritual ancestor (Yang 2008:340-341). Each temple derives its spiritual power from incense transfer from an older temple. Members see returning to the temple of origin as renewing and strengthening the legitimacy of a temple and, as Mayfair Yang's research

on Mazu temples in Taiwan demonstrates, temple communities will go to great lengths to connect their power to the original temple.

The second way through which processions maintain social networks is on a more local level (Bosco 1994:426-430). In the process of demarking ritual territory, a procession will visit other temples in the area to affirm social and spiritual connections. I questioned temple organizers about this connection in 2008 and found that the decision about temples to visit in a large city was determined by a friendship between the temples. Before the god of honour went out to survey the neighbourhood, friendly temples and their gods would come to pay tribute. The networks created by these practices serve to reinforce traditional beliefs and practices among dedicated members. They help to buffer folk religion against the transformative forces of modernization.

Spirit Mediums: Keeping the Supernatural Alive

The presence of spirit mediums in Taiwanese folk religion also aids in perpetuating belief in the supernatural. The role of spirit mediums in Taiwanese Daoism and folk religion has both changed and persisted through modernization. As Taiwan has modernized, spirit mediums have moved increasingly into urban areas (Tsai 2004:44-46). The attitude towards spirit mediums during modernization has become ambivalent because they are associated with superstition. As well, they are seen to be a remnant of individualistic and utilitarian folk religion. In some cases, this individualistic utilitarianism causes folk religious practices to flourish because they resonate with the capitalist ethic (Weller 2000:482). Taking this ambivalence to heart, though, a group of spirit mediums

formed an association called the Moral Maintenance Movement as a reflexive attempt to professionalize mediumship and respond to contemporary moral and political issues (Tsai 2004:45-46). This association distinguishes between different types of spirit mediums. *Jitong* are the traditional utilitarian type mediums who engage in self-mortification, while *lingji* are believed to mediate through the heart instead of the body and use morality books to promote a better way of life.

Inspired by the moral degradation and disorder of modern society, the Moral Maintenance Movement strives to win back lost respect by reviving the Chinese tradition of the Dao through the missions of *shouyuan* (collecting origin) and *datong* (great unity) (Tsai 2004:47-49). *Shouyuan* concerns universal salvation through the teachings of the Dao, which originate from the Eternal Mother who created human beings. Spirit mediums understand their role in *shouyuan* to be as mediators between heaven, earth, and humankind. In particular, they spend a lot of time mediating resentment carried by lost souls who continue to molest the living after death. These lost souls, or ghosts (*gui*), have entered this unstable state because of feelings of unfulfillment left over from their lives (Tsai 2004:48), and having no one to pay respect to them after they have died (Weller 1999:343). They include people who had no family or veterans who came over from the mainland with the Guomindang and resent never having fulfilled their mission to retake China. I will explore Taiwanese concepts about ghosts in more detail in chapter four.

Datong refers to the utopian vision of a harmonious coexistence between the different peoples and nations of the world (Tsai 2004:49). This mission is specifically about resolving situations like that of the tension between China and Taiwan. Having

deified the former political leaders of the two nations (Chiang Kai Shek and Mao Zedong), the mediums hope to resolve the antagonism between the two, which they see as being part of the shared karma of the Chinese and Taiwanese people. The idea is that the resentment between Chiang and Mao continues to affect relations between the two nations, and if the resentment can be resolved in the spirit world, then harmony will follow in the material world. Though official history is one of progress, the mediums' version of history is one of resentment and they see it as their job to resolve this historical bitterness to bring harmony to the present. Resentful souls of all kinds are believed to be the source of many of society's problems.

Three stories told to Yi-jia Tsai during research with this medium association demonstrate how relatively contemporary political figures have entered into the realm of the supernatural (Tsai 2004: 58-59). In an effort to bring peace to Taiwan and China, spirit mediums have channelled Mao and Chiang's predecessor Sun Yat-sen, the founder of modern China. According to the mediums of this association, Sun Yat-sen was not only deified as an ordinary person after death but was a reincarnation of a deity, the Spirit of Royal Prerogative. In channelling the spirit of Sun, the mediums hope that Mao and Chiang can be reasoned with and their resentment resolved. The mediums maintain that the antagonism between the two must be resolved if the Chinese people are to progress to the next stage of civilization.

The second story involves Mao, Chiang, and the Emperor of Japan (Tsai 2004: 59). In a meeting of the mediums the spirits of all three descended. Mao was resentful toward the Japanese Emperor for the massacre of Nanjing. Chiang, who they believed to be the brother of the Emperor in a past life, mediated the dispute by suggesting that the

Emperor resolve his guilt through having Japan use its economic power to aid China in modernizing.

The last story involves Chiang's troops and the Emperor of Japan (Tsai 2004: 60). Before he passed away, the Emperor was very ill and had slipped into unconsciousness but would not die. The mediums claimed that he was undergoing a trial in the spirit world for the Chinese soldiers he had killed. The soldiers would not let him die because they wanted him to suffer for what he had done to them. Since the soldiers were from Chiang's army, the spirit mediums channelled him to mediate the dispute. Chiang convinced the Emperor that he needed to pacify the soldiers though acts of virtue, and convinced the soldiers to observe the higher virtue of returning evil with good. The soldiers were obliged to obey Chiang because he was their commander in life and, as was predicted by the mediums at the meeting, the Emperor died three days later.

Religious modernization in Taiwan is not as simple as becoming more secular or not. Rather, modernization is multidirectional and polarizing. Confucianism has been integrated into strategies for building stable and uniquely East Asian nation-states. Some popular forms of Buddhism have redefined themselves as more rational and philosophical rather than religious. They have stripped away ritual, asceticism, and supernatural belief to focus on 'this worldly' works that benefit society. In these contexts, both Confucianism and Buddhism have defined themselves as returning to a Golden Age rather than creating an entirely new interpretation. However, older forms of Buddhism endure that revere the supernatural, and Daoism has remained persistent by reproducing itself through ritual and the reinforcement of social networks. Spirit mediums also remain engaged with the supernatural world, but change to suit modern

expectations and problems. The religious landscape of Taiwan demonstrates how adaptable rooted indigenous traditions can be, and how complex cultural change through modernization can be.

A Note on the Three Chinese Religions

> Mr Chang, are you Confucian?
>
> Naturally. The sage Confucius shaped our government, education, and way of living for around two thousand years. All of us are Confucians at heart.
>
> Buddhism does not appeal to you, then?
>
> Indeed it does. Shakyamuni Buddha taught us how to escape from aeons of wandering in the world of dust. I am devoted to his teaching.
>
> At all events, you are not a Taoist?
>
> Why not? The Taoist sages were adept at living in accord with nature, indifferent to loss and gain. And some Taoists are wonderfully skilful in teaching how to achieve a joyous and vigorous old age. Look at our poetry and painting and you will see we are all of us Taoist in spirit.
>
> And what of ancestral spirits?
>
> Naturally one sweeps their tombs at the Pure Bright festival and makes offerings before their spirit tablets at the proper times. Otherwise they would feel neglected.
>
> So, in fact, you subscribe to four or five religions?
>
> What a strange way to put it! Why reject anything that cannot be known for certain. Each of the Three Teachings – Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism – is admirable in its way.
>
> John Blofeld 1974:31

In this invented dialogue, John Blofeld vividly demonstrates the integrated and open nature of traditional Chinese religious belief. As Charles Jones has cautioned us, we must not confuse ideal types with empirical realities (2003:1). Though I have looked at research done on each of the three religions separately, Taiwanese people draw from a variety of traditions when dealing with everyday problems. With the introduction of Christianity, occupation by the Dutch and Japanese, waves of Chinese immigration, and the spread of modern mass media, the frontier island of Taiwan is, as Jones describes it, an "environment highly conducive to accelerated change" (2003:4). This environment has led to a wide variety of interpretations and fusions of not only the three traditionally Chinese religions, but also outside influences. The participants in my research grew up and live in this diverse religious landscape. In the following pages I will outline the methodology of my research and then explore some of the ways spiritual beliefs have changed and remained the same among a particular demographic of young adults from Tainan.

Methodology

My data comes from the two and a half years I spent living in Tainan (January, 2006 – May 2008) as well as the more than three months I spent there in the fall of 2010. While living in Tainan, I spent my spare time interviewing spirit mediums and temple organizers. As well, I attended more than twenty temple celebrations and ceremonies. The English classes I taught were an invaluable source of information about Taiwanese religion as my students were all aware of my research interests. My students, my martial arts teacher, the Chen family, Wei, and my many Taiwanese and foreign friends in Tainan provided me with information about temple ceremonies (i.e. time and place of events, meaning behind what I saw at the events) and were happy to answer any of my questions. During this time I kept detailed notes of all I saw and was told.

Upon returning to Tainan in 2010 I collected more qualitative data through focused interviews with more than twenty Taiwanese people. These interviews explored how modern education has influenced individual's spiritual beliefs. I set three demographic conditions for participating in these interviews. The participants had to be between the ages of twenty and forty. I chose this age range because people of these ages grew up after Taiwan modernized and yet were raised by parents and grandparents who lived in Taiwan when it was primarily agrarian. Their parents and grandparents socialized them into a traditional Chinese religious worldview but they grew up when Taiwan raised its standard of education significantly relative to previous generations. The second condition I set was that they had to have some post-secondary education. Post-secondary education usually encourages people to think for themselves. I wanted people who had a higher likelihood to have questioned what they had been

taught about religion and spirits, and to see what effect education into a modern scientific worldview would have on their beliefs about the supernatural.

The last condition I set in choosing my participants was that they live in Tainan, be from Tainan, or have lived in Tainan for a significant length of time. Most Taiwanese people recognize Tainan as a conservative stronghold politically and culturally. Having lived there for two and a half years, I found the people there to be very religiously active. Most weeks it is common to hear fireworks, see traffic redirected, and see offerings laid out for religious celebrations. I decided to move to Tainan because of this reputation, and it did not disappoint. The end result was that the person who had lived in Tainan the least had been there for two years but came from Kaohsiung, only forty minutes away by train. The next least was five years and three others grew up in Tainan but lived elsewhere in Taiwan. These three factors combined to give me participants who had spent some time in a publically religiously active place, had their thoughts and beliefs about religion and the supernatural stimulated on a consistent basis, and had an education which encouraged them to question what they had learned growing up. This was also the demographic that I tended to associate with the most while living in Tainan. I began each interview with an exploration of the participants' religious backgrounds and establishing whether or not they believed in the supernatural and why. Once I established their belief or non-belief, I asked what they thought of the idea that science cannot prove the existence of the supernatural. In chapter five I analyze their responses in the context of the philosophy of science and debates about the roles of religion and science in modern society. I had a variety of questions about their beliefs and practices that I asked (see Appendix 2), but each interview provided unique insights

into certain aspects of belief and practice in Taiwan. I will use the data from these interviews to demonstrate broader generalizations that I came to while doing research over the course of my entire time in Taiwan.

I did eleven of the interviews in English and I have provided excerpts below. For the participants who spoke in English, their ability was at an advanced level but not perfect, so I have lightly edited the interview material to correct for grammar mistakes and repetition. I have endeavored to change as little as possible and remain true to the ideas my participants were trying to convey. For the interviews in Mandarin, my host, Adolf, translated for me while I recorded the interviews and took notes. While living previously in Tainan, Nicky Tsai and Alley Wang also aided me by providing translation services. I have spent a total of ten months studying Mandarin for two hours a day, five days a week at National Cheng Kong University in Tainan, so I can understand some but I needed help with the finer details. Along with excerpts from my English interviews, I will use material from the translated Mandarin interviews, my notes, and what I could discern with my limited understanding of Mandarin.

Gods

> Unless a religion can hold its place in the front of science and of morals, it may only gradually, in the course of ages, lose its place in the nation, but all the power of statecraft and all the wealth of the temples will not save it from eventually yielding to a belief that takes in higher knowledge and teaches a better life.
>
> Edward Tylor 1898:372

British anthropologist Edward Tylor, an evolutionist who saw science as superseding religion, noted in 1898 that in the modern era science challenged the relevancy of religious traditions. During rapid modernization Taiwanese religious beliefs have been confronted by an increasingly higher standard of modern scientific education and outside influences, but things have not gone as Tylor would have expected. The increase in scientific education has led many young Taiwanese to reevaluate their spiritual beliefs and practices, but scientific education has not necessarily led to a rejection of religion. This next section explores how the participants in my research have responded to the challenges of being modern educated and spiritually faithful.

Accessibility and agency

Taiwanese Folk religion is modeled on the human world, particularly the ancient Chinese imperial government (Feuchtwang 2001:19; Jordan 1972:40; Wolf 1974:134;

Yang 1961:144). In his study of the religious beliefs of the people in San Xia, Arthur Wolf describes the Taiwanese supernatural world as "a detailed reflection of the social landscape of traditional China as viewed from a small village" (1974:175). While his research took place among more "poor and politically impotent" (Wolf 1974:131) laymen, my research took place among urbanized and educated people in Tainan (the fourth largest city in Taiwan), so I thought I would review his works and the works of others who have studied among similar populations to compare what they found to my research data.

At the top of the celestial government are the Jade Emperor (Yu Huang Da Di), his generals, and his officials. He and gods of such high stature are relatively inaccessible to ordinary humans much in the same way a president is inaccessible to a county's citizens. Only the most privileged may have an audience with gods as pure as the Jade Emperor (DeBernardi 2006:86). According to Steven Harrell, lower gods like Tu Di Gong are much more accessible to worshippers (1974:200) and, like their living bureaucratic counterparts, must report the activities of their constituents to their superiors. The inaccessibility of gods is one reason why many of the people I spoke to were unsure about the existence them. Seven of the people I interviewed expressed skepticism about believing in something they have not seen or experienced. Jack, a 35 year old chemical engineer, expressed this skepticism during our interview:

> Jack: I believe in gods but I have never seen them so I am kind of wondering.

Interviewer: Before you said not yet. Why did you say not yet? Do you think the gods will come visit you or…

Jack: Because I wonder if the gods actually exist or not.

Seeing is believing, and lack of direct experience has led many young adults in Tainan to question the existence of gods. Some of the people I interviewed emphasized the psychological aspect of religious worship rather than belief that the gods actually existed:

Ivy: I trust a saying that everyone controls his life.

Interviewer: Why do you go pray to the gods then if you think you have complete control over your life?

Ivy: Just for comforting myself and reinforcing my ideas.

This approach to religion is similar to the beliefs of the Buddhists organizations I mentioned in chapter two (Ciji, Fuoguangshan, Fogushan) that downplay the existence of the supernatural but still find comfort in spiritual practices. This excerpt also exemplifies another theme that was present in many of my interviews, the emphasis on personal agency. Eric Liu compares two theories on the effect of religiosity on personal mastery in Taiwan (Liu 2009:774-788). The relinquishing control theory predicts that people who are more religious and view their lives as being controlled by a divine being or beings experience a lower sense of personal mastery. In contrast, personal empowerment theory predicts that people who believe they can collaborate with a divine being or beings to solve problems during uncertain times experience a greater sense of personal mastery. In the case of Daoists, Liu states that "the life goal of Taoists is not to carry out plans laid out for them by god(s) but, rather, to live in harmony with

the Tao through cultivating *qi* and thereby avoid falling into the extremes of *yin* and *yang*" (2009:776). The participants in my research confirmed this belief in personal mastery and responsibility when I asked them about superstition and the limits of worship. Twelve of the people I interviewed defined superstition with phrases like “to go to god too much” (Mary). My host, Adolf, also told me a story regarding this about a friend of his uncle who is a Taiwanese business man in China. His uncle’s friend’s business was constantly up and down and at the time he was almost broke. His explanation for this man’s misfortune was that he went to consult gods, fortune tellers, and *feng shui* consultants about everything. Adolf believes that the gods wanted us to have control over our lives and, like other participants; he believes that the gods were only there to give advice and help. They believe that gods are not to be blindly followed and going to gods for help serve to increase one’s sense of personal mastery.

A strong feature of Taiwanese culture is faith in the human capacity for self transformation. This faith is made explicit through Confucian values concerning the virtue of continual learning and self cultivation (Wei 1987: 73). According to Confucius, sagehood could be attained by even those with the most humble beginnings. Throughout his life he maintained that he was not a sage and that regardless of his status as a teacher he was also and always would be a student. Even as a teacher he believed that his students had to come to wisdom on their own terms. He saw learning to be an intensely personal experience and believed each person’s path to sagehood was unique. The ideals of continual self cultivation and personal transformation make Confucian virtue accessible to all (Wei 1987: 73), which stands in contrast with many versions of Christianity whose ideals, as embodied by Jesus and Mary, are unattainable to the common person. These Christians are expected to go through Jesus or Mary to

obtain divine inspiration while Taiwanese Daoists, Confucians, and Buddhists can reach divinity through self cultivation and can even attain godliness through their efforts. Mary, a 34 year old business administrator, addressed this topic when we talked about the missionaries she met in Japan:

> Yes, because they always say Jesus will give me wisdom. Because after I believe in Jesus everyone will tell me how wonderful Jesus is. But I still doubt ….really? really? Jesus can do everything for you? I still doubt because Buddhists will say they cannot help you. You have to do by yourself, but Jesus says he will do everything for you. You will become smarter, build your wisdom. I think how come? You have to do it by yourself. If you want to become smart you have to read a book or get some experience so Jesus maybe…hmmm…it's not true.

This emphasis on self cultivation and personal mastery was present in most of my interviews. Young Tainanese adults see religion and the supernatural as another resource to be used in achieving their personal goals and extending their influence into uncertain circumstances.

The All Inclusive Pantheon

Typically, Taiwanese gods are distinguished by three qualities: whether their name is a title or their identity, whether they are martial (*wu*) or civil (*wen*)), and whether they were human or born purely of the supernatural (Feuchtwang 2001:61; Marshall 2006:134; Wolf 1974:136-140; Yang 1961:156-164). One the one hand, Tu Di Gong governs a neighborhood or community and is considered a position granted to

people who lived exceptional lives (Feuchtwang 2001:102-105; Wolf 1974:140-141). Guan Gong, on the other hand, was a general who lived in the third century at the end of the Han Dynasty whose outstanding loyalty and martial ability gave him an honored place in the afterlife. After starting his divine career as a protective door god on Daoist and Buddhist temples, he eventually worked his way up to being one of the most venerated gods in Daoism (Duara 1988:781-783). Worshippers call upon Guan Gong whose status as a martial god and fearsome countenance scare away evil spirits and enforce oaths. Bao Sheng Da Di also started his path to godhood on earth, but is considered a civil god whose knowledge of medicine can help cure many illnesses. In contrast to Guan Gong and Bao Sheng Da Di, who were living humans who became gods through meritious action and superhuman abilities, gods like the Monkey King (Sun Wu Kong) and the Jade Emperor have origins that are less certain and more mythological. For example, Emperor of the Dark Northern Heavens (Beiji Xuantian Shangdi) was born out of the Jade Emperor's desire to enter the Western paradise (usually associated with Buddhism) (Seaman 1987). Mythology states that the Jade Empower sent Xuantian Shangdi to earth where he lived five lives as a human before cultivating enough merit to reclaim his godhood and be appointed Emperor of the North.

Considering the wide variety of gods included into the Taiwanese pantheon, it is not surprising that many of the participants in my research expressed openness in including non-Taiwanese gods into their notions of divinity. When asked if she believed in gods, Mary answered:

> Mary: Yes, I believe that maybe god exists.
>
> Interviewer: God or gods or both?

Mary: Ah….both.

Interviewer: God as in a Christian one God or gods as in Daoism, many gods.

Mary: I think all of them exist.

Daphne, a 32 year old Mandarin teacher at National Cheng Kong University in Tainan, expressed a similar openness while relating to me her experience going to a fortune teller or, as she called her, a 'teacher':

Daphne: Recently I went to church with some friends. Ok, he is my boyfriend and he said if we are going to get married maybe we need the same religion. It is easier to educate kids or something. So I went with him, and other friends. I started to kind of believe there is a god who takes care of us. Specifically takes care of me because when I went to go see that teacher [fortune teller] and asked her about our god, which god is taking care of us, she said my god is Saint Maria. Since that day I start to think…hmmm… when I go to church maybe I can feel like I am talking with her. It makes more sense when I go there. It makes it meaningful when I go to church. She also told my cousin that her god is from India, Furaonusheng, a goddess. She is very rich. If you grow rice you will have a big of harvest. She is in charge of that; whether you can get a lot or a little. I think the god who takes care of you; its character is very similar to your personality. Because when she said my god is Saint Maria I asked about her personality, every god has a personality too. She said

> her personality has a lot of mother's love and I see that this kind of personality is strong in me, stronger than others. And my cousin has that Indian goddess' personality. She can take charge of everything and everything she takes charge of grows very well. Her friend's god is Taiyangshen – Apollo. Apollo's personality is very shiny, very bright, and her friend is that kind of personality.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think it is strange that your god would be a Western goddess?
>
> Daphne: I don't care it if is a Western or Eastern god. I just want to know that some god takes care of me. It feels good.

Sofia, a 31 year old Mandarin teacher who used to teach in Tainan with Daphne, also goes to church and worships a wide variety of Daoist and Buddhist deities. Though she was baptized, she does not consider herself a 'real Christian.' She says she mainly did it because her mom did not want to go alone, and she did not start going to church by herself until she moved to the United States. She enjoys singing in church, though, and expressed to me her belief that there was not just one religious path. She expressed her belief that people need to respect different ways of practicing spirituality. Sofia, Daphne, and Mary all expressed an inclusive spiritual belief that is open to accommodating a wide range of supernatural beings and forces from a variety of cultures. All three of these women have lived in other countries and have had a significant amount of contact with foreigners who have exposed them to an assortment of religious ideas and deities. Robert Weller notes that "the inherently decentralized

structure of Chinese religion, combined with its complex multivocality, created a resilient free space" (1994: 115). This free space enables young Taiwanese people like Mary, Daphne, and Sofia the flexibility to interpret the beliefs and practices they have been exposed to into an inclusive spiritual worldview. As is demonstrated through the variety of gods that can be found on a spirit medium's altar in Taiwan and the variety of purposes they serve, Taiwanese religious practitioners and worshippers are open to anything that will fulfill their needs and are particularly utilitarian in their approach to religion. The meaning behind their spiritual practices is not as important as their practices' efficacy in solving real world problems. As John Blofeld noted from his travels in the early part of the 20th century in China, Chinese people had "a genius for harmonising any number of conflicting doctrines. Of intolerance there was none" (1974:31).

Conflicting Values and Accountability

The wide variety of gods in Taiwanese Daoism operate in a hierarchy that changes depending on time and place, and each temple, shrine, and household may worship a different pantheon based on ancestry, personal preference, and experience (Feuchtwang 2001:26; Harrell 1974:193; Jordan 1972:41). Arthur Wolf describes the hierarchical bureaucracy of heaven in Chinese and Taiwanese religion as a "parallel system" that is not necessarily superior to the human world (1974:143-162). He states that "it is not only bureaucratic organization that is replicated in the world of the supernatural; gods also display many of the most human characteristics of their worldly counterparts, including their fallibility" (Wolf 1974:143). Stephan Feuchtwang, in his

book *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial* Metaphor, also explores this divine imperfection while researching Tudi Gong in Taiwan. One of his informants described the current Tudi Gong in one area as a replacement for the previous holder of that position because the previous Tudi Gong was guilty of extorting offerings from worshippers. The present Tudi Gong took the former to divine court, won his case, and was appointed the new Tudi Gong of that area after his death (Feuchtwang 2001:102-105). The idea that gods could have shortcomings was also expressed by one of the participants in my research. Jane, a thirty-four year old former professor of political science, believed that spiritual beings were not superior or inferior to humans and that they just lived in a different space. Taiwanese people describe gods as being no different that magistrates or policemen and, according to Wolf, they are not obliged to answer prayers. Worshippers must give gods small gifts with the promise of larger gifts on the delivery of the favors that people asked of them. Gods can be bribed to make positive reports to their superiors (Feuchtwang 2001:61-61), and they are known to punish those who offend them. People expect them to punish anyone who violates the traditional moral code and anyone whose death is particularly unusual is seen as being supernaturally administered. Worshipers also expect them to be morally upright and reject petitions with dubious purposes, but gods have been known to avenge private wrongs (Wolf 1974:163). Because so many of the gods were human at one time, they retain some of the flaws of their former humanity while reaching for yet higher heavens through meritious action.

This view of the gods is at odds with what some of the participants in my research expressed when asked about the necessity of burning spirit money for them.

Taiwanese people offer different kinds of spirit money to different supernatural beings. Worshipers offer gold spirit money to gods, silver to ancestors, and regular 'money' to ghosts and the newly dead (Feuchtwang 2001:19-20). People in Taiwan have become more committed to environmental ethics during modernization and many of them have started questioning the burning of spirit money because of pollution and environmental protection issues:

> Jack: I don't like spirit money, because it will make air pollution and damage the environment. It produces too much trash, because this spirit money comes from trees, and if you cut the trees for spirit money I think it is meaningless.
>
> Interviewer: So if the government wanted to get rid of burning spirit money would you have a problem?
>
> Jack: It is very hard because of the old people, if you forbid this kind of religion; they will become angry because this is the tradition from the ancestors. You must follow it or you disrespect your ancestors. My parents, when I was little, they burned lots of spirit money. Now they have changed. So they burn just a little spirit money. They have changed, maybe from some education or because burning spirit money pollutes our environment.
>
> Interviewer: So what is your parents' education?
>
> Jack: My parents just finished junior high school, and my father likes nature so he often goes hiking. When he sees our environment ruined

> or destroyed he will be in a bad mood, and from this he will say if we can save something we should try to save it.
>
> Interviewer: So why do you think he still burns a little bit of spirit money instead of burning no spirit money?
>
> Jack: We cannot dismiss our tradition. So we keep a little tradition and we burn a little spirit money. If we do not burn a little spirit money we will not respect our traditions. I think my parents are uncertain about this, to burn or not burn.

Filial piety, a Confucian value highly praised in Taiwanese culture, compels people to respect their ancestors and thus their traditions. But with the standard of education having risen rapidly and pollution becoming a major issue in Taiwan, people are caught between respecting their ancestors and respecting their environment. Young people in Tainan are changing their expectations about how gods should be treated and how acceptable their humanlike fallibilities are. Karen, the 35 year old owner and operator of a Mexican restaurant who had gone to college, stopped going to the spirit medium whose advice she used to follow in part because the god was involved in helping a businessman that dealt in gambling. Daphne had this to say about the burning of spirit money:

> Interviewer: Why do you think people burn so much?
>
> Daphne: Because they want ghosts or ancestors or gods to give them more money, or help them make more money. If you give them more

> they will think this family treats us very well, so we should treat them well too.
>
> Interviewer: Do you agree with this belief?
>
> Daphne: I think no, I don't believe that. I think gods; their love is as much as you can imagine it. So even though you don't have money they will take care of you. That's a real god. If your god depends on how much you give them I don't think that is a good god.

In contrast to the belief that gods should be plied with gifts to receive favor, Daphne believes that a real god doesn't need gifts and "their love is as much as you can imagine." Other participants repeated this point of view and stressed that the only thing a true god needs is one's belief and respect. When asked about whether the lack of Daoist temples in Australia was a concern for her for when she moved there, Bess (a twenty-three year old secretary with a Bachelors degree in English) stated that there was nothing to worry about because the true temple is in her heart. Most participants echoed this sentiment. They believed that it was better to burn less spirit money for gods or none at all, but that there had to be some way to show respect for the gods and that traditional customs had to be honored. Though Daphne said she is not particularly religious, she was dating a Christian and had been to church a few times. Even if they have not been converted to Christianity, many people in Tainan have had contact with Christian ideas and that also influences their expectations about Daoist and Buddhist deities. This influence appears in the origin story of Ciji (see pp. 12). The founder, Cheng Yen, received criticism from Catholic nuns on Buddhists' disengagement with the earthly

world, and this inspired her to create an organization that directly addressed social issues (Huang 2009:17-29).

This change in expectations about gods comes at a time when Taiwan has become a vibrant and sometimes violent democracy. Politicians have been shot during campaigns[4] and physical fights sometimes break out during parliamentary sessions. Modern values of equality and government transparency have grown in this emerging state and if, as Arthur Wolf points out, Taiwanese religion is a reflection of the social landscape, then political changes in the social landscape are being reflected in religious beliefs and expectations.

Keeping in Touch

Worshippers in Taiwanese religion communicate with gods in a variety of ways (DeBernardi 2006:91-94). The most indirect way is to light incense and pray. Worshippers also may contact gods through throwing two kidney shaped wooden blocks called *buabui,*[5] which are rounded on one side and flat on the other. With these blocks they can ask the gods yes or no questions. If the *buabui* come up opposite sides the answer is yes, if they end up with both rounded sides up then the answer is no, and if both flat sides come up the gods is laughing. A worshipper must get yes three times in a row to get a truly affirmative answer. If they want a more detailed response from a god a petitioner can pull a divination slip (*qiu qian*). Next to the main altar there is a box of sticks with numbers on them. They must choose one stick and then throw the *buabui*

[5] This word is Taiwanese. In Mandarin they are called *zhe jiao* but everyone I spoke to called them by their Taiwanese name.

to see if it is the correct one. Once they chose the correct stick, a petitioner goes to another box near the altar that has a small drawer for each number. Each drawer contains a paper slip that has proverbial advice on it and nearby there is usually an attendant to help interpret how the advice pertains you the petitioner's question.

An even more direct way of contacting a god is through a spirit medium (*ji tong*). Once a god has been summoned a petitioner may ask all manner of detailed questions. Spirit mediums may function as exorcists, fortune tellers, and give advice on a wide range of topics. One way that a god can communicate through a spirit medium is by spirit writing (Jordan 1986:36-63; Marshall 2006:134). At the Emperor of the Dark Northern Heavens temple I frequently visited in Tainan they had spirit writing sessions every Wednesday. During these ceremonies the god would possess a spirit medium and with the help of three attendants he would carry a small version of the palanquin they used in processions to write characters on a table. Sitting at one end of the table was an interpreter and sitting across from him was the petitioner. Using the palanquin to do spirit writing is just one of many ways mediums perform this ceremony and they sometimes write entire books in order to guide their worshipers (Seaman 1987:11-23).

Circumventing all intermediary devices the most direct way to be in contact with a god is through dreams and visions. One participant, Christine Wu, a twenty-six year old office manager and medical assistant at a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM for short) and chiropractic integrative clinic, related to me how she believed a god visited her twice through dreams. She had gone to worship a god and on this occasion only prayed to the main altar while neglecting the smaller ones on each side. Later she had a dream she was in the temple where a snake appeared to her and went to the two

side altars. She took this to mean she should have prayed at all three altars and went back to the temple later to correct her mistake. Another story she related to me was about when she got lost coming home from the hot springs in the mountains and stopped at a shrine to pray for help. She vowed to return if they found their way and they got home shortly after. A year later she had a dream about the same god after which she realized she forgot to return to the shrine to give thanks and went there to do so shortly after the dream.

The gods also make appearances in public for a variety of reasons. Like the magistrates of old, they will do inspections of the surrounding neighborhood or village according to the lunar calendar (Weller 1999:343). They will go out from temples in processions to celebrate their birthday, ascension day or any other days that are special to their personal history or the history of the temple. As well, they will visit other temples on their gods' special days to show respect and to join in the celebration. Celebrations usually include spirit mediums performing a variety of things (often including self mutilation), puppet shows, singing, fireworks, feasting, and the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The wide variety of rituals used to communicate, celebrate, and supplicate Taiwanese gods can be complex in their attention to detail. I once asked a temple attendant about how they decided to construct their temple and after he pulled out a rather large book with a detailed calendar and tried to explain it to me I had to politely give up. Time, place, *feng shui*, the particular god, and many other considerations came into play and the complexity of religious rituals was another reoccurring topic in my interviews. When asked about how religion has changed, the

participants in my research often answered that it has become simpler and more convenient:

> Jack: When I was a child my parents usually *baibai* (prayed) during the beginning and middle of the month, constantly. When I was in junior high school they seldom *baibai* at home. Originally they would *baibai* in front of our house but then it became less and less. They said the ceremony must be easy and not too complicated. So it changed from being complex to become easier.

As well:

> Daphne: I never think about that….maybe they….I don't know if many people change but I think there are more and more modern people like me don't really practice, prepare *baibai,* or remember what day to worship gods. Young people don't know those details so much.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think this is a good or bad thing or what do you think about this change?
>
> Daphne: I will say that is a good thing because I don't really like complicated steps. Even when we are burning ghost money, my father, he doesn't think we need to do that. He thinks we just need to burn a check.

While I was out in the Tainan county visiting temples I arranged to have an interview with one of the committee members of Madou's Five Kings Temple (Dai Tian Fu), Mr. Lin. He lamented the younger generation's disrespect for the traditional ways and the need to make things simpler and more convenient for them so they did not have too many rules to remember. He also recognized that some of this simplification was out of necessity because people in the city often could not afford the space for shrines and the time to devote to complicated rituals. One example of this need for simplification is regarding the ritual *kai guang* (opening light). This ritual sanctifies an image of a god through the painting of cinnabar or blood on the eyes of the image. At Beigang, one of Taiwan's oldest and most popular Mazu temples, I participated in a day long *kai guang* ceremony where a Daoist priest used blood from the flap on a rooster's head to paint the eyes of a Daoist riding a tiger and other idols. My martial arts teacher, whose interest in the ritual brought us there, informed me that in the past this ritual could take up to forty-nine days and cost a very large sum of money. In modern times, though, people often cannot afford the time or the money to do it the traditional way, so ritual specialists have lowered prices and reduced the time it takes to do the ritual.

Mr. Lin's disapproval over the simplification of rituals contrasts with the increasingly festive and grandiose nature of temple celebrations. Julian Pai comments on a shift in temple celebrations toward more pomp and splendor as different temples and performance groups try to outdo each other (2003:39). Stephen, a thirty-nine year old chiropractor and TCM doctor who lived in California for sixteen years, answered the question of religious change in Taiwan with a similar sentiment:

> A lot more celebrations with …you know…god's birthdays. There seems to be more activities going on throughout the year compared to how I remember. Like you talk about the Five Generals' birthdays. I see more of that compared to how I remember it.

Another aspect of Mr. Lin's concern for the future of religion in Taiwan was that younger people came to temple festivities for the show rather than to show respect to the gods. This shift toward showmanship is epitomized in the dance troupe Dian Yin San Tai Zi.[6] Traditionally, puppets, which are very large and operated from inside, can be used as mediums for a god's power if they are sanctified through the *kai guang* ritual. During his research Feuchtwang was told that these puppets have the power to perform exorcisms and other ceremonies (2001:199). Dian Yin San Tai Zi uses puppets of gods known as the Three Princes (San Tai Zi) to do modern style line dancing to popular music for entertainment purposes. Younger people tend to think that this kind of display modernizes religion and makes it more appealing while people like Mr. Lin see it as a farce and disrespecting toward the god.

The gods continue to play an important role for young, modern Taiwanese people but expectations about them have changed. Worshippers expect gods to answer prayers without the need for lavish offerings or bribes. Young people expect to take responsibility for their lives and only turn to the gods for help when they need clarity or have reached the limits of their own agency. With increased exposure to other religious traditions, they expressed an openness and flexibility for integrating other spiritual ideas

[6] A video of Dian Yin San Tai Zi:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbN1WIwwuWY&feature=fvsr

and beings into their worldview. With modern life being so fast paced, religious specialists also have simplified rituals in order to satisfy the need for convenience. In the next section I will be looking at supernatural beliefs that are closer to home for most Taiwanese people. While gods reign down blessings from far away heavens, ghosts and ancestors sometimes may walk among the living and play a more direct role in Taiwanese people's lives.

Ghosts and Ancestors

> Lady Wu said to her son, "Confucius claimed that 'ghostly spirits manifest inexhaustible potency.' He also said, 'Pray ye to the spirits dispersed above and concentrated below.' We may not doubt such things as ghostly spirits."
>
> *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*
>
> Luo Guanzhong 1991:222-226

A Continuum of Spiritual Being

Lady Wu admonished her son, Sun Ce ruler of the Southlands, for executing a powerful Daoist monk in his crusade to rid the land of what he deemed to be wasteful superstition. Tormented by the ghost of the man he had killed, his stubborn refusal to acknowledge the power of the supernatural quickly led to him getting sick and dying. Though many of the young people I interviewed were skeptical about the existence of gods, only one gave me a definitive no when asked if he believed in ghosts (though he had dreamed about the ghost of his stepfather), eleven told me about personal experiences they had with ghosts, and two gave me secondhand ghost stories. According to Jean DeBernardi, belief in ghosts predates even Confucianism and continues to this day (2006: 175). Traditionally, the Taiwanese believe that humans have more than one soul. According to David Jordan's research they have two souls (1972: 31-41). One soul is earthly and impermanent but necessary for life, and the other is

immortal and celestial. After death the earthly soul dissolves while the heavenly one continues on in the spirit world. According to Wolf's research, humans have three souls and after death one soul goes to the family shrine, one to the grave, and one to hell (1974:175). In traditional Taiwanese belief, a soul may enter into the world of shades, which is similar to the world of the living, or it may go to hell to atone for its mistakes and eventually be reincarnated (Jordan 1972:32-36). In the world of shades a spirit can be content if it receives offerings which are usually the obligation of living family members to give. If relatives make the proper offerings for the dead during the funeral, then a soul destined for hell may bribe the judges of hell to be more lenient (DeBernardi 2006:87; Wolf 1974:175).

Taiwanese people traditionally distinguish between the dead (*linghun*), the good dead (*xian* or *shen),* and the bad dead (*gui*)[7] (Jordan 1972:34-36). *Linghun* is a neutral term for the spirit or soul of the dead. If they dedicate their life to the salvation of others and attained extraordinary abilities in life, then a person may become a *xian* or a *shen* in death. A *xian* is an immortal who is on the path towards becoming a *shen*. A *xian* may be worshipped similarly, but worshippers consider a *shen* to be more powerful. One thing that distinguishes a *xian* or a *shen* from the normal dead is that they are worshipped by people who have no family connection to them and believe them capable of miracles. If people were bad in life and no one makes offerings to them, then they become hungry ghosts (*gui*) that have the potential to cause problems for the living.

In the world of shades, the afterlife is much like the world of the living and the descendants of the deceased make offerings of money and paper items of all kinds (e.g.

[7] The word *gui* can also refer to evil spirits who are not human.

cars, houses, laptops, etc.) so that their ancestors are provided for (DeBernardi 2006:87-90). Those who have someone to make offerings to them are called ancestors (*zu qian*) while those who are without people to make offerings become ghosts (*gui*), although one person's ancestor may be another's ghost (Harrell 1974:193; Wolf 1974:173). Ghosts occupy the opposite end of the continuum of supernatural beings from gods, and somewhere in the middle are ancestors. Whereas believers consider gods to be pure, high class former kings, generals, and officials; ghosts are dirty, low class peasants, beggars, thieves, and other people of ill repute. They act like beggars and bullies even though they may not have been so in life. Without people to worship them in the world of the living, ghosts may be reduced to a low class in the world of shades. The story of Guan Gong (aka Guan Yu) demonstrates this flexible and relative continuum of supernatural beings in Taiwanese religion.

The story of Guan Yu begins in the late Han dynasty (184 AD) during the Three Kingdoms period. He was a blood brother and general of Liu Bei, leader of the Shu kingdom. Guan Yu epitomized loyalty and righteousness through his sense of honor and his devotion to the common people (Moody 1975:193). In *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Yen Yi*) Guan Yu dies an untimely death at the hands of the Southland (Guanzhong 1991:584-588). Before he dies, he vows to seek vengeance on his enemies in the afterlife. Soon after his death his spirit appears to a monk at the Jade Springs Hill looking for his head where he instead receives instruction on Buddhist doctrine. In this area his spirit manifested itself often to protect the common people, so they built a shrine to honor him and worship him as a god. After his appearance to the monk, his spirit leaves to seek vengeance on those who killed him and possesses a general of the Southland to berate their lord and kill the general. The king of the

Southland then sent his head to the kingdom of Wei as a gift. There it comes alive and reviles the king of Wei, once a respected friend of Guan Yu's, for being a traitor to the Han Dynasty. Lastly, after hearing of his blood brother's death Liu Bei gathers his officials and initiates funeral services befitting of a revered ancestor. Even the king Wei had a wooden body made to go with the head and had similar services.

Due to his upright character and the supernatural powers attributed to him after his death, Guan Yu has become one of the most venerated deities in both Chinese Buddhism and Daoism. His biography was written sixty years after his death by Chen Shou and has references to "his vanity, overconfidence, and ignorance on matters of strategy" (Duara 1988:780). Over time the negative elements of his story changed and eventually disappeared as he became revered as a divine being. His inception as a divine being began in the 5th century (300 years after the time period of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) when he appeared as a ghost to a Buddhist monk looking for his head and in turn received instruction in Buddhist faith (Duara 1988:779-791). Afterward he became established as a protector of Buddhist faith. The earliest temple dedicated to him was built in 713 A.D. and was attached to a Buddhist monastery on Yuquan Mountain. Daoist temples also adopted him as a protector god. Eventually, his domains of divine influence spread from loyalty, protection, and war to include wealth, literature, secret societies, and more.

In the afterlife, Guan Yu manifests as god, ghost, and ancestor depending on his relationship to the people in the story. To the ruler of the Southland and his generals he appears a dangerous ghost with the power to possess, terrify, and kill. To the king of Wei, he appears as both ghost, through the possession of his head, and as ancestor, though the rites and honors the king of Wei gives him during the funeral services. In the

Shu Kingdom his family and cohorts also regarded him as an honored ancestor, but to the common people of the Jade Springs Hill he is given even greater honors and revered as a god of protection. The story of Guan Yu demonstrates how the relationship one has to them plays a large part in whether a spirit is considered a god, ghost, or ancestor. Though designation as a god is more evident through veneration by those who have little personal history with the spirit while it was a living person, the distinction between ghost and ancestor is less clear.

Typically, in western culture we associate any experiences with a phantasmal person as a 'ghost experience' regardless of our relationship with the spirit. However, in Taiwanese culture a ghost is not just a dead person but a dead stranger, and "the malicious among them are malicious for the same reason strangers are malicious" (Wolf 1974:172). If ancestors are slighted in some way by their descendants they too can act maliciously (Wolf 1974:160) and in either case the Taiwanese go to great lengths to avoid such encounters.

Spiritual Collisions

Ghosts are typically asocial and individualistic beings who have the same desires as the living and most people of Chinese descent consider them dangerous (DeBernardi 2006:87-90; Weller 1994:343; Wolf 1974:151,169-172). If people do not give proper offerings to them, ancestors can be harmful too, but if they are satisfied they will cause no trouble and might even be helpful. Wolf distinguishes between ghosts who are actively harmful and may have been malicious individuals while living and those who are passively harmful as Taiwanese people think any contact with ghosts can bring about misfortune (1974:169). As Charles Emmons notes from his research on

supernatural beliefs in Hong Kong, some ghosts are not necessarily evil but just seek to satisfy their desires (1982:21), which is why they are known as 'hungry ghosts'. Ghosts are not only those without someone to worship them, but also can be people who were hatefully wronged (e.g. murdered) or died prematurely. Hatefully wronged ghosts are usually seeking vengeance while ghosts who died prematurely (i.e. suicide or some other traumatic event) often are intent on stealing a living person's soul to take their place for their allotted lifespan so that they can move on to the world of shades (Emmons 1982:22).

The stories I was told in my interviews about encounters with spirits[8] loosely fall into two categories. Post-mortem experiences involve an encounter with a spirit within a short time of a person's death. Hauntings includes experiences that happen long after a person has died and are tied to a specific place. Here is a haunting story my host, Adolf, translated for his mom over dinner one night:

> We were living in a rented house. While we were moving there, the neighbors kept asking us 'why do you want to live in that house? It is famous for being haunted.' However, we still stayed at the house and didn't get have any problems during the period we lived there. According to the neighbors, people who lived in the house before had problems and experienced some unusual things. Previous experiences of the tenants included the strangulation of an old man taking a nap in a rocking chair, and the doorbell ringing and but the tenants saw nothing from the balcony.

[8] I use the term spirits here to refer to both ghosts and ancestors.

However, it was strange that we never had any weird things happen. One day my oldest sister invited us to move to her new house. She said that there were some spare rooms for us. So that we could save money, we accepted my sister's help and prepared to move. We never had any strange experiences until the night before we left the house. That night I heard the sound of steps from the stairway and the sound was getting closer and closer to the door. I felt a bit scared and was thinking it was a thief or a ghost. My husband was sleeping deeply at the time. I was staring at the door and saw a lady with white dress and long black hair moving close to me aside the bed. I could see the lady's face very clearly. The lady was facing down at me and seemed to want to say something. At the moment, I pretended to be calm, covered my head with a quilt, and then fell asleep.

My sister was shocked and asked 'did you see her "the landlord."' My sister and my grandfather knew 'the lady' and as they had gone to her funeral. The scary thing was that all the descriptions of her matched what she has looked like in the coffin.

Afterward we might have figured out why we lived safely and peacefully there. I am a devout religious person [Daoist] and made offerings on every special date in our religion. The 'lady' was never hungry when we lived there, so she didn't want me to leave there or wanted to say thank you. After we moved out of there, the 'lady's' two young daughters heard of what had happened. They told to me they needed to rent out

> the house to pay for their living expenses and after we lived there no tenant got hurt.

This haunting story demonstrates the belief in relatively benign ghosts that when satisfied caused no trouble, but, like the living, when driven by hunger can act maliciously. It also demonstrates how one person's ghost can be another's ancestor.

The Chinese and Taiwanese have various explanations for why some people can see ghosts and others cannot. People who can see the supernatural are said to have *yin/yang* eyes. A monk in Hong Kong told Emmons that it depends on how much one meditates because people who meditate are more likely to see ghosts (1982:184). On the island of Penang, Malaysia Chinese immigrants believe that people who have bad luck can see them (DeBernardi 2006:89). A spirit medium I interviewed in 2006, Mr. Fu, said that people who are born with a low *bazi* can see ghosts, and every other Taiwanese person with whom I discussed the topic repeated the same thing. A person's *bazi* is a number calculated by a fortune teller based on the when a person is born. The number indicates the strength of one's life energy (*qi*). A light number means one's *qi* is weak and that person is more prone to bad luck and seeing ghosts, while a heavy number means one's *qi* is strong and his or her luck is good. Karen's friend, Rose, explained to me that each world (Heaven, Earth, the world of shades, and Hell) is like a wave that vibrates at a different frequency. A person with weak *qi* has a vibration that is closer to the world of shades so they can see ghosts and ghosts can see them. A fortune teller told Stella, a Mandarin teacher I met in Tainan, that her *bazi* was low and so she would be more likely to see ghosts. Stella claimed not to be a religious person and in

practice did only what her filial duty required of her, but she related to me this post-mortem story of her experience with a ghost:

> I was walking on the beach one night with a friend. Suddenly the police drove up and we saw them drag a dead body out of the water. For three days after this experience I felt very strange. I would start crying randomly for no reason and I felt very uncomfortable in crowds. At one point I was sitting on the balcony at our dorm and I really felt like jumping. I was so distraught I called my mom in Ping Dong and she told me to come back home. I went back home to my mom who took me to a spirit medium. The spirit medium gave me some special alcohol to drink, recited something I couldn't understand, used a ritual object on me, and gave me some charm water to drink. Before I saw the dead body on the beach I did not have any suicidal thoughts or problems and after I went to the shrine the thoughts went away and I did not have any more problems.

John, a thirty year old civil engineering research assistant at National Cheng Kung University, also had experiences with spirits. John started seeing spirits when he was about fourteen and was told he had the potential to become a spirit medium. However, after some of the frightening experiences detailed below, he went to a temple to have his *yin/yang* eyes closed and has not seen a ghost since.

> I was living in a dorm when at midnight I had to get up to go to the washroom. I got scared when a door slammed in the washroom and said hello because I thought it was someone else. I was happy to not be alone. When I finished using the toilet it flushed itself and scared I

> opened the door to my stall. The one next to me was still closed so I said hello again but no answer. I wanted to tease the person in the stall so I looked under and saw no one there. I even sprayed some water into the stall but there was no response until all the toilets and urinals flushed at the same time and the light flickered. After this I felt cold all the time and didn't feel better until at fifteen years old I had my *yin/yang* eye closed.

After this first experience John said he would have out of body experiences often and ghosts would come to him for help. He said that while he was living at home his ancestors must have protected him because he did not start having experiences with ghosts until he moved away for school.

Here is another story he related to me about the time when he lived away from home:

> I moved to another dorm after the bathroom experience. My new roommate said he saw a ghost and wanted to exchange beds. His bed was close to the window. One night I kept hearing what I thought was a cat crying. The next night I heard the same cry but closer. The third night it was just outside the window and after I asked my roommate to exchange beds again but he wouldn't. The next night the cry seemed under my window and when I opened my eyes I saw a green light, human shaped figure. I covered my face and the crying stopped after a long time. So I opened my eyes again to see eye to eye with the ghost. I freaked out and started calling out to many gods for help. I felt

> something heavy on me, couldn't speak, and started to hear the crying again. Day came and the ghost finally left. It was two days before summer vacation so I just slept on the floor by the door for the rest for my time there. It was during that summer that I had my *yin/yang* eye closed. Later I was told that the school built a new dorm next to the one I had stayed in and they dug up a baby skeleton near my window.

These stories demonstrate how frightening and unsettling experiences with ghosts can be. Emmons notes that feelings of cold and sleep paralysis are common themes in stories about ghosts (1893:151-4). Sleep paralysis often happens during the hypnogogic state (the state between total wakefulness and sleep) and the experience of sleep paralysis in connection to a ghost visitation was common among the people of Tainan. In Mandarin they have a specific phrase for it - *gui ya chuang*, which literally translates to “ghost press bed.”

Rick, a twenty-seven year old salesman for his father’s company and close friend of my host, told me this next story. When I first interviewed him he seemed reluctant to go into detail about it. Usually the locals of Tainan do not tell stories of this nature when foreigners are around. The topic of ghosts rarely ever comes up between foreigners and locals. Locals have learned that most foreigners regard such things as backward superstition and do not want to be labeled as such. As my reputation in the city for being open to stories about supernatural encounters grew, people in Tainan where happy and even eager to tell them to me. After Rick got to know me better he told his story to Adolf who translated it for me later. It quickly circulated through my network of Taiwanese friends as one of the most fearful ghost stories around.

The first weird event was when he moved into the house. He was used to turning off the light before going to bed. The first night he stayed in his room, he turned off the light as usual. Then he heard footsteps on the tile. At that moment he was thinking about whether he locked the door before going to bed and whose footsteps they were. He was pretty sure he locked the door. He was filled with a creepy feeling. He tried to open his eyes a crack but there was a small palm covering his eyes and he saw a child about five years old. The scary thing was that it had no eyes, nose, or lips. It was a figure with a human shape but not totally. He covered his face quickly with the bed sheet and repeated '*a mi to fuo*' [a Buddhist mantra] again and again until daytime came. The next day he didn't tell anyone about this and tried to be calm.

After this experience he went to temples for amulets and never turned off the light while sleeping. He didn't see the child again until one day when he got very drunk and turned the light off when he went to bed. At night, the footsteps came again. He was pretty annoyed at that point and the alcohol gave him the courage to shout at the child. He lifted the bed sheet and opened his eyes to show his anger and saw the child was see-through and bending down looking at him without facial features. All the courage and anger were quickly replaced with a horrified feeling. He covered his whole body and repeating '*a mi to fuo'* until dawn. After that he collected as many amulets as he could and hung them on the walls in his room. He had at least ten of the amulets on his walls. They

> didn't seem to work though because one day he noticed all the amulets were turned around. During the time they lived there, his family's situation was getting worse and worse, so he told his mom to find the other place to rent. After they moved to a new place, their situation became better and now they have their own house and business.

Rick's story demonstrates some of the more terrifying elements of ghost stories in Tainan. The faceless, transparent baby made audiences shiver in fear and disgust. According to the end of the story, the presence of a ghost brought bad luck on his family which could only be avoided by moving to another house.

Though people usually encounter and deal with individual ghosts, the Hungry Ghost Festival (aka Ghost Month) in the seventh month of the lunar calendar gives people the opportunity make offerings to them en masse (DeBernardi 2006:87-88, Weller 1994:130). During this month, Taiwanese people believe the gates of hell are opened and the ghosts allowed a reprieve from their torment. People offer copious amounts of food and ghost money in front of houses, businesses, shrines, and temples to placate ghosts in the hopes that they will not linger to cause misfortune to the living. During this time, people follow taboos recognized to minimize interference and molestation by ghosts (e.g. no swimming after dark, do not get married, do not hang a small light outside your house, etc.). Assurances are given by temples and the officials of hell, though, that all the wayward ghosts will be rounded up by spiritual soldiers and sent back to hell through special ceremonies.

During my first summer of living in Tainan there was a double Ghost Month. Every few years the designers of the Chinese calendar do this to sync the lunar calendar to the solar one. I was also in Tainan for the successive Ghost Month and during this

time people told many ghost stories in my English classes. When I arrived in the fall of 2010 to do my fieldwork, Ghost Month was coming to an end. The air was thick with the smoke of offerings for many days and one morning, shortly after Ghost Month had ended, family members of my host rushed his dad into the dining area as a malicious ghost had attacked him. Adolf related to me some of the details later:

> My father is an almost retired mechanic now. Only few old patrons come to him for repairs. I remembered that day I finished work and arrived at my home to see my dad sitting on a chair and my family crowded around him. My mom was putting some Chinese herbs on his leg to relieve his pain. I came to ask what happened to him and she said he might have offended a spirit. My dad said he had been fixing his customer's car sometime near dawn under Bai-an bridge where there was a shrine nearby. At that time, Ghost Month had just passed. My dad said he saw a black round shape beside him. He felt curious and kicked it. Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain on his right foot. He fell down on the ground and saw a square mark on his foot. He could not even stand up by himself. Finally, his friend drove him home. There was a really clear square on his foot. Since the injury was caused by a spirit, we persuaded my dad to see a *jitong* (Chinese spirit medium) for help. He was my uncle and has a shrine. The god's name is Shui-fu. We went there together and my uncle prepared something. He did some Daoist rituals to exorcise the ghost and the bad side-effect from the ghost (e.g. aura or *qi*) for him. My dad's pain lasted for a week before healing.

Spiritual collisions, as Jean DeBernardi calls them (2006:7, 69, 100, 105-109), like those above are avoided by Taiwanese people at all cost. Unusual illnesses (especially those that confound modern doctors) and persistent bad luck are often attributed to such encounters. In order to deal with these unfortunate events Taiwanese people visit spirit mediums, have special rituals, and have specific forms of worship for ghosts that differ from how they treat gods (Harrell 1974:194).

Spiritual Visitations

Not all encounters with spirits are frightening and harmful. Generally, encounters with ancestors are less unsettling unless one has offended the deceased relative. When the topic of pollution and spirit money came up, the majority of young people I talked to believed that burning money for deceased relatives was fine. Some participants recognize the cultural and psychological value in it for those mourning the deceased. Nina, a thirty-five year old project assistant for English education at National Cheng Kung University with a Masters in Drama, had to say about this issue:

> Nina: Ghosts money…hmmm…ya…sometimes I think that is a different situation. One type is for the temple. Sometimes people go to the temple and they will do this but this money for the gods, gods' money. And the other kind of money is for relatives, parents who already passed away. I think the money for relatives has more feeling. It means a lot to the people who burn it. And for the temple, I think you can save your money. You don't need to buy the money for the gods. They are

> already rich enough I think. But about the ghost money, your parents passed away, relatives, I think it's kind of hard to stop it. Anyone, even a person who claims that he is never ever superstitious, when he or she meets this kind of situation, he might be persuaded that if he burns some ghost money for his relative it will make him feel better.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you think they will do it even though usually they are not superstitious?
>
> Nina: Why…because they are human and this is Chinese tradition, it is about our Taiwanese tradition. We have been told since we were children and when it comes to you, some way, somehow you will believe that. We try to believe that.

Nina was not particularly religious. She did not go to temples and participate in ceremonies unless her mother asked her to, but she recognized that burning ghost money still had value and had done it herself. Not only does it help mourners deal with the passing of their relatives but, like temples in general, it is also a symbol of Taiwanese culture and identity (Weller 1994:116).

Post-mortem experiences can occur with relatives as they may come to visit the living from the afterlife to ask for help or assure their relatives that they are ok. Tomas, a twenty-eight year old teacher's assistant with a Bachelor's degree in Information Management, had a visit from his step father one night shortly after his step father's death:

> My step father, he died probably three years ago, I sometimes dreamed about him. He told me that he didn't have money, or just I need some money or something like that. I told my mom and my mom just went to a temple to ask them how can we burn money for him, not just buy ghost money to burn it, because if you burn it lots of ghosts will take it and we should employ a specialist. So when we employed a specialist he did a ceremony and burned it for my stepfather and after that, a few days later, I dreamed about him. He just said thanks.

John also had an amicable visit from a deceased relative:

> I was lying in his bed and felt someone holding me up. I thought it was my bunkmate kicking me but I kept getting higher and higher. I closed my eyes and ignored it because I was really tired. Eventually I opened my eyes and thought I was in the sky. I saw my body, put myself through the roof, and flew around in the sky. Then, I felt someone calling me and followed quickly. I eventually met my grandpa who could also leave his body. We chatted and my grandpa told me to go back or my body would be in danger. The total time I was gone was about three minutes. My grandpa died the same day at 2am and I left my body around 3am.

Rather than disturbing spiritual collisions that bring bad luck, these visitations with the spirits of deceased relatives are harmless and can even be helpful as people go through the grieving process.

In contrast with belief in gods, belief in spirits appears to have changed little. This lack of change is in part due to the wealth of personal stories, like the ones above,

which people in Tainan tell about them. While living in Tainan and doing my fieldwork I noticed that ghost stories engaged audiences more than any other genre. People leaned forward to hear all the gory details and had animated responses of revulsion and fear as the story reached the point of contact with the ghost. Fear of ghosts is very real for the people of Tainan.

The popularity of telling ghost stories in Tainan contrasts sharply from my own cultural background where people rarely ever tell ghost stories for fear of being thought of as crazy. People's response to such stories is that there had to be some scientific explanation for it. For example, as I related the story of Adolf's dad's encounter to a friend back home, his immediate response was that Adolf's dad must have touched the muffler with his leg or something like that. Regardless of their scientific education, the people I met in Tainan did not resort to psychological or physical reductionism when it came to encounters with spirits. For them, spirits are very real and rarely did I ever heard them question their existence. The stories they tell about encounters with spirits serve to reinforce belief in the supernatural, and the more personal the experience the stronger the reinforcement. These stories range from frightening tales of malicious attacks like what happened to my host's father, to more benign tales of visitations from relatives who have recently passed on. Whether they consider a spirit an ancestor or a ghost (*gui*), people from Tainan differ from one person to the next and their belief depends on their relationship to and experience with that particular spirit. People in Tainan also derive psychological value from these stories and experiences. Being able to provide for relatives in the afterlife through making offerings and being visited by them (or hearing of others who have been visited) lessens the sense of discontinuity that death brings into their lives and aids in the grieving process. The ritual practices

surrounding death also aid in maintaining a distinct sense of Taiwanese identity at a time when modernization had bombarded Taiwan with conflicting beliefs and practices. In the next section I will explore how the participants in my research responded to the lack of scientific proof for the existence of spirits.

Science, Superstition, and the Supernatural

> Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear and punishment and hope of reward after death. It is therefore easy to see why the Churches have always fought science and persecuted its devotees. On the other hand, I maintain that cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest incitement to scientific research…in this materialistic age of ours the serious scientific workers are the only profoundly religious people.
>
> Albert Einstein 1973:358-359

The Religion and Science Debate

This quote from Einstein highlights the ambiguous nature of the relationship between religion and science. In this section I will be using the data I collected to wade into ongoing debates about the relationship between religion and science in modern society. In his recently published book, *Religion and Science in Context: A Guide to the Debates*, William Drees recognizes that the debate has up until now been mainly a Western one that examines the relationship between Christianity and science in Europe and the United States (Drees 2010:7-8, 17, 20-21). In Europe, where science is more widely accepted as the dominant worldview, the debate is centered on apologetics for religion. In the United States, theologians and philosophers of science make apologetics for science because about 40% of people there consider the theory of evolution false and feel threatened by scientific elitism (Drees 2010:12). Drees acknowledges the

absence of other cultural perspectives on the debate and as far as Asia is concerned, little research has been done on the topic. Drees also admits that social scientific perspectives on the relationship of religion and science have been underrepresented. Below is my attempt to add a Taiwanese perspective on the relationship between religion and science as well as a social scientific one. It is more speculative than what I have presented thus far but I hope to take it further in my Ph. D research with comparative studies.

Ian Barbour identifies four ways through which science and religion interact: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration (Barbour 1997: 77-105). It is a commonly accepted truth in the West that the relationship between science and religion is one of conflict. In the history of science this relationship is exemplified in stories about Galileo Galilei and Charles Darwin. Westerners see both of these scientific figures as having dispelled the superstition of religious belief. Albert Einstein also hints at this assumption in the opening quote to this section where he says “it is therefore easy to see why the Churches have always fought science and persecuted its devotees” (Einstein 1973:358). Scientific materialists (or naturalists as Robert Park calls them [Park 2008:44]) have largely perpetuated this perceived victory of science over religion. Scientific materialism is the belief that the scientific method is the only reliable path to knowledge, and that matter-energy is the fundamental reality of the universe. With these epistemological and metaphysical assumptions, scientific materialists see religion as being false because it lacks tangible public data that can be verified experimentally and empirically.

On the other end of the conflict spectrum are the Biblical literalists (Barbour 1997: 82-84). These Christian fundamentalists believe that the bible is empirically true, and have no tolerance for evolutionism and any other scientific theories that contradict their holy scripture. This type of religious belief has grown since the 1970s because of rapid cultural change and what fundamentalist perceive as the moral degradation of modern society. Feeling alienated and confused by modernization, people look to the Bible for certainty and guidance. In examining these two extremes, which perpetuate the separation of science and religion as distinct and conflicting institutions, Barbour concludes that they both suffer from an impoverished notion of how science really works.

Barbour also identifies integration as another way through which science and religions can relate (Barbour 1997: 98-105). Natural theologians describe this relationship using ideas of intelligent and teleological design in nature. That there is an order to the universe suggests to natural theologians that there is a Supreme Being who has created it to be this way. A theology of nature integrates theories of evolution with Christian religious beliefs by presuming that God creates though the laws that govern the universe as well as through chance. These examples and those above in the conflict model demonstrate some of the vast range of possibilities in the relationship between science and religion. Through an examination of my participants' responses to questions about science and the supernatural I will take a closer look at the integration and independence perspectives.

Integration and Independence

I began each interview with an in-depth questioning of my participants' religious background, practices, and beliefs, as well as their experiences with the supernatural. Once I firmly established their belief in the supernatural, I sought to challenge their belief from a scientific materialist perspective. I found that it was not as nearly as contentious an issue as in North America (being from North America I am used to it being a heated topic) and that they answered my challenge with thoughtful consideration. Their answers generally espoused three perspectives:

1. Science will eventually explain the supernatural
2. Science is incapable of explaining the supernatural
3. Science has not disproved the existence of the supernatural so why not believe it

The first view is exemplary of Barbour's relationship of integration. Participants pointed out many of the problems science has yet to solve (e.g. a cure for cancer) and the incomplete nature of scientific knowledge. They assumed that evidence of the supernatural is beyond the reach of current technologies and theories to grasp. This idea is best expressed through my interview with Stephen:

> Interviewer: Do you think there is any conflict between being a modern person and believing in the supernatural?

> Stephen: Hmmm, no, I don't think there is a conflict. I just think there are things that I just can't explain therefore I choose to accept it as something that does exist even though I can't prove it. Until it is proven I will say that there is something out there that I believe in. It is something that, I guess it is a force that cannot be seen at the same time though I know it's there, it's like the air.
>
> Interviewer: So, even if science doesn't prove it you will still believe it based on….
>
> Stephen: Based on pretty much that if you cannot see it, it doesn't mean it's not there. So, I think we, as human beings, are still learning a lot about ourselves and everything around us, and our knowledge is not fully developed in many ways. Our brains are not functioning to their full potential. So I think, we found out about gravity what, a couple hundred years back. Before that nobody knew what gravity was until Newton came along then people started talking about gravity. So, eventually I think a lot of things will be explained, but doesn't mean it's not there.

Stephen and others expressed their belief that future scientific knowledge will eventually catch up to our experience with regard to things like the supernatural.

The participants in my research held the second perspective of independence more frequently. They believed that some things would always exist beyond the reach of science. Some of them explained that the supernatural was non-physical and thus

beyond the ability and scope of science to investigate. This view agrees with the United States National Academy of Sciences statement that "science and religion are based on different aspects of the human experience" and that "because they are not part of nature, supernatural entities cannot be investigated by science" (Drees 2010:13-14). Park would disagree with this view, though, as he states that this kind of compartmentalization "is essential for understanding how otherwise rational people can hold absurdly superstitious beliefs" (2008:50). Atheists and scientific materialists commonly use this kind of harsh criticism because they assume that religious people are victims of some mass delusion that only science can save them from. Park's underlying assumption and the message of his book, *Superstition: Belief in the Age of Science*, is that "science is the only way of knowing – everything else is just superstition" (2008:215).

I encountered the above sentiment frequently when the topic of my research into Daoism and spirit mediums came up with other Westerners in Taiwan. They assumed that if science had not proved it to be real then it was superstition. By contrast, Stephen referred to the inconsistencies between theoretical and practical knowledge when responding to this type of statement. He believed that there was valuable knowledge that existed outside the confines of scientific institutions:

> It sounds like there is a major conflict between to two ideologies, but to me I think in a lot of things there is no clear cut line. A lot of times, being a doctor and treating a patient, you don't know. There are a lot of things you can't explain. It is not in the book, but it works. Just because it works on this person doesn't mean it will work on another person. So, is

> that scientific? It doesn't mention that in the book. Everything has to be published and thoroughly examined and then it becomes common knowledge. But what about the things that never get published, and never get fully examined but still work. That's why they call it 'practice,' you are always practicing different things, trying to perfect your skill, and also the treatments.

In practice Stephen uses what he has learned and continues to learn to better treat his patients, but if he limited himself to only what has been published and accepted as scientific knowledge then this passage from our interview would indicate he believes his practice would suffer. According to him, no amount of research can fully address the complexities of medical practice and human health. For Stephen, effective knowledge exists outside of commonly accepted scientific research that for whatever reason has yet to be legitimized by scientific methods.

Another issue that contrasts with the belief that something is not real until science has proven it so is regarding traditional ecological knowledge. Though I would agree with Park on many of the other statements he makes in his book regarding pseudoscience, improper use of scientific findings to make authoritative claims, and the importance of science in dispelling ignorance, as an anthropologist I cannot ignore the efforts of many of my colleagues in trying to build legitimacy for other ways of knowing like traditional ecological knowledge. On the one hand, it is hard to ignore the accumulation of another culture's knowledge, which is passed on through generational transmission and the collective life experiences of a community, just because their knowledge was not discovered through the means of modern science (a methodology

that originated in Europe and which they may only now be getting familiar with). To dismiss this knowledge because it has not been legitimated through modern scientific methods is to deprive us of a wealth of accumulated knowledge from other cultures. On the other hand, it is also hard to ignore the power of science to dispel ignorance and beliefs that exist only in our imaginations. For us to take advantage of all the knowledge in our 'Culture of cultures' (as Marshall Sahlins puts it [1999:xx]) we must find a way of accommodating both science and traditional knowledge.

The third answer that my participants gave regarding science's inability to prove the existence of the supernatural may shed some light on the issue of compartmentalization and the relationship of other systems of knowing and modern science. Mary stated this perspective quite clearly in our interview:

> Interviewer: Do you think a person can believe in science and also believe in ghosts and gods?
>
> Mary: Ya, I believe.
>
> Interviewer: Really? But science cannot prove that ghosts and gods exist.
>
> Mary: Science cannot prove it, but science cannot deny it.

Notable philosopher of science, Karl Popper, argues that proper science sets out to falsify theories rather than confirm them (Popper 1998:7). He claims that if one seeks confirmation of a theory they will find it everywhere, and that the most compelling evidence that confirms a theory is found through trying to falsify it. Mary's statement

that "science cannot deny it" supports her belief in the supernatural by giving her no scientific reason not to believe in it. After using what resources are available to me through the University of Alberta as well as Google Scholar and the internet in general, I have yet to find any compelling scientific research on whether or not ghosts or other supernatural beings exist. People have attempted to induce experiences with the supernatural using infrasound and electromagnetic fields, but results have been inconsistent and inconclusive.[9] Typically, the people conducting the experiments assume that experiences with the supernatural are the result of some natural phenomena that is being interpreted incorrectly.

Television shows about experiences with ghosts have also become popular in the West (e.g. *Ghost Hunter)* but often operate under the above assumption, are lacking in their understanding of proper scientific methodology, and usually sacrifice scientific methodology for dramatic purposes. For the scientific community at large, studies about the supernatural follow the guidelines of the National Academy of Sciences and lack any serious attention. So, until the existence of the supernatural can be sufficiently falsified or verified, Taiwanese people who believe in the supernatural feel that without evidence for or against it they are justified in their belief.

However, Taiwanese people do not believe in just anything that science cannot falsify. The existence of dragons is also a common theme in Chinese folklore, but unlike ghosts no one has ever seen a dragon outside of a dream state and belief in ghosts has the weight of a significant amount of past and contemporary anecdotal evidence behind

[9] An article about such experiments from *Wired* magazine http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2009/10/scientifically-haunted-house

it. Though anecdotal evidence is not sufficient in building a scientific theory, Popper notes that "historically speaking all - or very nearly all - scientific theories originate from myths, and that myth may contain important anticipations of scientific theories" (1998:8). This line of inquiry led me to wonder why scientific materialism and the belief that something is not real until science has proved it is so popular in Western worldviews. If science is based on falsification and the supernatural has yet to be confirmed or falsified, why are many people in the West so reluctant to believe in the supernatural? And why do participants in my research have relatively no problem accepting both the supernatural and science when they have received the same level of scientific education as people in the Western world whose tendency is to try and reduce it to misunderstood physical or psychological causes?

Science vs. Religion, Natural vs. Supernatural, Dualism vs. Holism

Modern science has its foundations in Western culture which has a history of tension and dualism with respect to religion and science. Dualism in Western philosophy can be traced back to the 16th century philosophers like Rene Descartes, one of the key figures in the Scientific Revolution, who argued that mind and body were separate. Since that time, scientific institutions and ideas have increasingly come to compete with religious ones in the West. Robert Campbell identifies the arenas in which this competition takes place by applying Max Weber's analysis of religion to the institution of science (Campbell 2001: 30-40). He recognizes that there is something about science that makes it appear more credible and unified than religion. Campbell claims that this

confidence is based on the technological and conceptual effectiveness of science but notes that:

> to deny the empirical aspect of religion as manifested in its continued existence as a cultural and social force is as absurd as arguing that science is a purely conceptual system, detached somehow from the phenomena it attempts to explain and from its practitioners. (2001: 30)

Using Weber's analysis of religion, Campbell highlights some of the similarities between science and religion (as cited by Fuller in Campbell 2001: 32). Weber identified five categories of religious thought: mystery, soteriology, theodicy, magical causation, and saintliness. In terms of mystery, Campbell notes that the deeper the scientific inquiry the less accessible it becomes to others be they lay people, scientists in other fields, or even scientists in the same field. This inaccessible mystery (or accessible to only the few privileged and educated) contributes to a sense of magical causation between understanding how something works and its application to practical problems. In this regard we may ask how much does a pilot really understand about aerodynamics or a computer user understand about computing science? The engineers who designed the equipment have an understanding of the fundamental mysteries that operators may take for granted and in some way perceive as magical.

Soteriology (a program for salvation) is tied up with the notions of theodicy (an explanation for suffering) and is reminiscent of religion in science for its ability to give people hope. Modern promises of salvation through science are central to the mythology of science and the notion of progress (Campbell 2001: 32-33). Scientific

materialists like Park believe science to be the only path to salvation and relief from suffering. To those who see no salvation outside of science, it is all things to all people. As Campbell points out, people who believe this strongly in science fail to recognize that science, like religion, also defines that from which they need saving. This feature of science is demonstrated through the medical profession which defines illnesses through its knowledge to cure them. In the context of the pharmaceutical industry, health care researchers have levelled criticism at companies that promote cures for illnesses they have a hand in defining. Through a study of research sponsorship and results, Mark Freidberg and his associates found that "studies funded by pharmaceutical companies were nearly 8 times less likely to reach unfavorable qualitative conclusions than nonprofit funded studies and 1.4 times more likely to reach favorable qualitative conclusions" (Freidberg, 1999: 1455). An obvious conflict of interest exists based on the profit motive that makes these practices seem disturbingly less than scientifically objective. This example brings to light the question of scientific objectivity and highlights the misconception that science is beyond scrutiny and untainted by subjectivity.

Lastly, Campbell explores the role of saintliness in science and religion (Campbell 2001: 32). He refers to saintliness as the idea that there are special individuals who stand out because of their extraordinary capabilities. Such individuals become objects of reverence in either religion or science, and their stories become part of the mythological canon. With scientific materialists, people like Charles Darwin and Galileo Galilei are revered as heroes of the scientific method for having dispelled the superstition of religion. Unlike Copernicus, who claimed heliocentricity was an interesting speculation, Galileo asserted that it was a literal truth. This assertion led to his condemnation by the Church, which maintained that the sun revolved around the

earth. Galileo eventually recanted, but many scientifically educated people see him as a hero who was persecuted by ignorant religious opposition. The attribution of heroic qualities to Galileo is somewhat misplaced though, according to Paul Feyerbend (as cited in Fuller 1995:104-107). According to Feyerbend, Galileo also found opposition in the scientific community of the time because his reasoning was poorly constructed. As well, he promoted his ideas primarily through propaganda rather than the force of his logic in converting people to his cause. Only in hindsight, similarly to Guan Yu from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, did people forgot his faults and established him as a hero figure for science. There is no doubting the truth of his findings, but according to Feyerbend his methodology was not as scientific as most people believe.

Stories like this have led to the current assumption in the West that religion and science are at odds with each other. Morton Klass argues, though, that the dualism inherent in the Western worldview, in particular the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, may not be present in other cultures:

> I challenge the anthropologist who would insist on assigning the *di*[10] to the supernatural universe and the landlord to the natural universe to set forth how, from such an ethnocentric perspective, one might cope with such a sequence of events and with the underlying shifts in perception about the nature of reality. (1995:30)

Here Klass refers to his work with South East Asian farmers in Trinidad for whom "*di* exists as much as does the landlord, and he is certain that the slighting of either will endanger the rice harvest of the following year" (1995:29). This is just one example of

[10] A *di* is a spiritual being associated with the land.

how people can misapply their own categories of thought in trying to understand other worldviews. In pre-modern China religion was not a distinct institution. Rather, it was integrated and diffused throughout social life. The concept of 'religion' (*zong jiao*) as a separate institutional category is relatively new to Mandarin (Feuchtwang 1991:141). The Chinese borrowed it from the Japanese who acquired it from the West.

C.K. Yang notes that the Chinese state was inseparable from theological myth and that:

> the hierarchy of supernatural powers was closely patterned after the structure of the temporal government, and the two systems were considered to be in intimate cooperation in the maintenance of the enthicopolitical order (Yang 1961:181).

Freedman also makes the case for an *official* Chinese religion as being an integrated part of a 'total system' that combined a variety of religious traditions which conferred political power through the Mandate of Heaven (Freedman 1979:352).

Although Confucian rationalists occasionally tried to redefine rituals according to their psychological values rather than their supernatural efficacy (Yang 1961:48-53), the integration and diffusion of religion prevented the idea that science and religion were separate institutions that could be at odds with each other. Due to the fragmenting and institutionalizing affect of modernization, this kind of integration and diffusion is not as present in modern Taiwan. Rather, my findings support the idea of independence and compartmentalization among the people of Tainan as the most popular way to relate religion and the supernatural to science. Besides there being a

lack of psychological or physical reductionism used in explaining the supernatural, my findings do not indicate that the Taiwanese have any unique way of dealing with the cognitive dissonance that sometimes arises when a person has a scientific education and belief in the supernatural.

As is demonstrated in Stephen and Mary's responses to the lack of scientific proof for the supernatural, some Taiwanese people have a healthy scientific open-mindedness. Park, who states "openness sets science apart from all other ways of knowing" (2008:32), might not agree with me though, since he believes that if something cannot be proven or disproven then it is of no significance (2008:89). As a scholar who has a preoccupation with scientific as well as religious social phenomena, I would have to argue that concepts of divinity and the afterlife have great significance in people's lives. These mysteries and uncertainties beyond the edge of the known are what both religions and science attempt to answer. A certain amount of compartmentalization and independence is necessary when relating science to religion because each has specific limits and scope. Religion deals with the salvation of the soul and passage into the afterlife while science addresses the more material aspects of our reality. Much of the conflict in the West comes from conflating and blurring the roles and scope of religion and science. However, there are some places where, whether it is human imagination or objective phenomena beyond the reach of current science, the border between the material world of science and the spiritual world of religion is made clear. One of these areas is medicine.

The Backup Plan

The people I met in Taiwan (and many people I have met in my ten years of going to Sweat Lodge ceremonies in Canada) circulate a wealth of stories about people unable to find cures for their illnesses through modern medical science and, as a last resort, turn to spiritual healers of some kind for relief. DeBernardi also recognizes the tendency of Chinese people who have unusual illnesses to go to spirit mediums when they cannot be treated by modern medical means (DeBernardi 2006:5,105). Karen told me of how something like this happened to her sister:

> My sister found out she got thyroid tumors three years ago, she went to see the doctor and did all the tests. The doctor told her it wasn't looking good so they better do surgery. So she did the surgery and they took the tumors out. A year later, she came home for holiday. One night we went out to buy some food she told me she could feel some tumors on her neck again. So, she went back to the doctor for a checkup and the tumors had regrown. She was worried and told me not to tell my mom and dad. A few weeks later I was drinking with my friends and my friend has a gift (spirit medium). I asked the god about my sister and told him her situation. He told me to tell my sister to come to see him and he will help her. So my sister came to see him and he told my sister he can help but it will be hurt a lot. I saw him put his hand on my sister's neck and rub it. After that he told my sister she had to do that three times, so my sister came down to Tainan three times to let him fix her. After three

> treatments he told my sister to go back to see the doctor. She went to see the doctor and doctor said there is nothing on her neck.

Christine had a similar story about her sister. After a trip to Hualien, in northeastern Taiwan, her sister had trouble with seizures. Like Karen's sister, she went to doctors to try and solve the problem but nothing they did had any effect. Not until she visited a spirit medium who performed an exorcism on her did she get better. Bess also related to me the trouble she had with a blistering sprained ankle that doctors spent three months trying to heal with no results. However, after visiting a spirit medium it got better in three weeks. These stories act to reinforce belief in the efficacy of supernatural treatment and the existence of spiritual beings who can help them where modern medical science has failed. In Bess's opinion, there are some problems that modern medical science cannot solve (e.g. a ghost following someone) but religion can and vice versa. In her mind each type of medicine has its function. Generally, people go to modern medicine first to solve their health problems, and only when it has failed them do they seek out spiritual medicine. If the spiritual medicine proves to be effective, then their belief in the supernatural is reinforced and the story that person tells of it can reinforce belief for others much the same way personal stories about encounters with spirits can.

My host, Adolf, referred people turning to spiritual means as a last resort as 'the backup plan.' He not only applied this idea to medicine, but also for when personal agency fails. He explained that whenever he had exhausted his abilities and options trying to solve a problem and got no result, he would go to the gods for help. He knew that he could rely on the gods as long as he did his best to solve the problem on his own

and had treated others with respect and kindness. To the Taiwanese people who participated in my research, appealing to the supernatural is another option at their disposal for solving real world problems and increasing their sense of personal mastery. When science and personal agency fail, people will turn to religion and the supernatural to extend their range of influence in achieving a goal. They see no contradiction in having both scientific means and supernatural when it comes to solving problems.

To dismiss Taiwanese belief in the supernatural as superstition is to ignore the logical consistency of their belief and its basis on experiences that cannot be falsified or verified by current scientific means. As C.K. Yang notes: "in actual usage superstition is a subjective term for it is generally employed by nonbelievers to signify disapproval of such beliefs or acts" (1961:3). The participants in my research defined superstition as believing and trusting too much in something without investigating the truth for oneself. According to their definition of superstition, a person can be just as superstitious about science as about religion if they accept what they are told without reflecting on it. I have to admit that this section leaves me with more questions than answers. Some of these questions require a more in depth look at the historical development of the scientific method in both the West and East Asia. This topic is something I hope to explore further research.

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to answer two questions: how has modernization changed religion in Taiwan (or more specifically Tainan), and why do supernatural beliefs persist there as modern scientific education becomes more widespread. Regarding the question of religious change, as an 'island on the edge,' Taiwan is a fertile soil for a wide diversity of interpretations of modernity. As Robert Weller states:

> Taiwan, like much of the world now, challenges the early modernization theorists' expectation that economic development would necessarily walk hand in hand with the replacement of traditional customs by new ideologies. (1994:115)

Many traditional religious customs remain relatively unchanged by modernization in Taiwan and new interpretations of cultural foundations have also arisen.

The values of Confucianism persist and have been touted as the foundation for a specifically East Asian form of modern society. Although blamed for East Asia's weaknesses during colonial times, modernization has revitalized Confucianism. The Confucian ethic that emphasizes education, strong family connections, individual discipline, self sacrifice, and harmonious group relations is favourable for the stability of modern East Asian nations. Buddhism continues to be ascetic and otherworldly for some Taiwanese people, but has also risen to the challenge of more 'this worldly' philosophies through the spread of Pure Land Buddhism (which places an emphasis on charitable works). Daoism and folk religion have also tried to adapt to modernization. Temple committees endeavor to contemporize both Daoism and folk religion with entertaining

and trendy festivities to attract tourists and young people. As well, some spirit medium organizations have refocused mediumship away from individual utilitarianism and more towards serving society as a whole. Regardless of these changes, though, traditional spiritual beliefs and practices persist alongside new ones. Proponents of new forms of spiritual belief and practice have not entirely rejected the older beliefs but seek to refocus them on modern circumstances and redefine them in terms of modern economic, political, and social ideologies. And, while some have turned away from their traditional Chinese religious roots to embrace other religions, many Taiwanese people have demonstrated their openness and flexibility by reinterpreting religious beliefs from other cultures and integrating them into their own systems of spiritual beliefs and practices.

In the case of ascendant spiritual beings like gods, saints, or bodhisattvas, expectations among the young adults of Tainan reflect changes in the expectations about leaders and values in all aspects of society. The expectation that gods require large sums of money and bribes is declining among young people. Young worshippers expect gods to love and help adherents unconditionally while receiving only belief, respect, and faith in return. They also believe that gods are not to be followed blindly and turned to for every little problem. This kind of fatalism and belief in predetermination is decreasing as adherents desire to think for themselves, take responsibility for their own lives, and exercise their agency to the fullest extent possible. Gods are treated as respected consultants and expected to help out in those uncertain areas of life that are beyond the reach of direct personal agency.

Rituals also have changed as Taiwan has become more modernized. The fast pace of modern life has forced some religious practitioners to simplify their rites and

make them more convenient for worshippers. People no longer have the time for rituals that can last over a month long, and most young people are too preoccupied with other areas of life to learn and appreciate the multitude of steps required to perform rituals according to Chinese tradition.

As people struggle to keep up with the fast paced changes of modernization, death remains a constant that even modernization cannot shake. While the Taiwanese gods are elusive and their presence is distant, ghosts and ancestors remain much closer to home. Personal stories of spiritual collisions and, to a lesser extent, visitations were quite common among the people of Tainan. No doubt my presence and knowledge of my research encouraged such stories to be told, but on their own the people in Tainan remain fearful of spiritual collisions. Unlike Westerners, rarely did I hear them dismiss experiences with the supernatural as mistakenly psychological or physical in nature. These encounters with death and the afterlife leave a strong imprint on their psyches. The experiences and the circulation of stories about them remain a foundation for persisting belief in the supernatural that modernization and modern education in Tainan has had little effect on. The kind of empathy and engagement that they elicit is similar to stories about car accidents in my own culture. For those telling the story (particularly if it involves *gui*), the experience is shocking, unexpected, unforgettable, and very unsettling. When the story begins, some people have to walk away because the subject matter makes them very uncomfortable, whereas others get so drawn into the story they cannot leave regardless of their discomfort. Some people in Tainan told me that even talking about ghosts may attract them because they know they are being talked about and become curious. Often when they tell these stories people are animated in their exposition and audiences become more engaged in these stories than any others I

heard in Tainan. People empathize with the story teller easily and, during the moment of contact with or revelation of the supernatural element; they show strong physical and psychological signs of revulsion and fear (e.g. tense bodies, disgusted and fearful facial expressions, shivers and shakes of uncomfortablility, etc.).

In contrast to belief and expectations about gods, beliefs about the dead have not changed very much. The people of Tainan are fearful of ghosts and the bad luck they bring. They also still value burning ghost money for their ancestors and fear retribution if such practices are neglected. They continue to find spiritual and psychological value in worshipping the dead and derive a collective sense of Taiwanese identity from such practices.

When confronted with the fact that science has not verified the existence of the supernatural, the Taiwanese I studied responded like many people in modern societies who have persistent beliefs in the supernatural do; by compartmentalizing their scientific and spiritual beliefs. To a lesser degree some sought to integrate the two by claiming that one day science would develop the technology to pierce the veil between the world of the living and the world of shades. Logistically and culturally their most interesting response was 'why not believe in the supernatural?' With insufficient evidence for or against the existence of the supernatural, they see no good reason not to believe. As well, the circulation of personal stories of encounters with supernatural beings and of effective spiritual remedies that worked when modern medical science failed allow the people of Tainan to feel justified in maintaining their belief in the supernatural. To them these stories are evidence of supernatural efficacy. In accordance with a utilitarian ideology, many people in Tainan see the supernatural as another tool

through which to exercise their personal mastery and a backup plan for when modern science and personal agency has reached its limit.

This project begs the question of why we in the West are so quick to reduce stories of the supernatural to psychological or physical causes, and has encouraged me to explore the historic specificity of our disbelief in further research. With the variables I have controlled for in this research project (age, education, and place) I have opened up the possibility for a variety of comparative studies I would like to follow up with in the future. It is possible to conduct the same project in a Western culture to see how attitudes regarding the supernatural in modern societies differ. Changing the age and education variables can reveal how different generations conceive of this topic in the same place. And changing the place the research is conducted (e.g. conducting it in Taipei which is a much more cosmopolitan and modern city than Tainan) can highlight how different levels of modernization and outside influence have affected spiritual beliefs and practices. These are just some of the possibilities I hope to explore in further research.

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Appendix A – Mandarin words

Pinyin	Character	English
bai bai (Taiwanese)		pray
da^4 tong^3	大統	great unity
gui^3	鬼	ghost (bad)
gui^3 ya^1 chuang^2	鬼壓床	sleep paralysis
feng^1 shui^3	風水	geomancy
ji^1 tong^2	乩童	spirit medium
kai^1 guang^1	開光	open light (eyes)
ling^2 hun^2	靈魂	dead person (neutral)
qiu^2 qian^1	求籤	divining paper
shen^2	神	good dead
shen^2 ming^2	神明	god
shou^1 yuan^2	收源	collecting origin
wen^2	文	civil
wu^3	武	martial
xian^1	仙	immortal
yin^1 yang^2	陰陽	
zhe^4 jiao^3	擲筊	prayer blocks
zong^1 jiao^4	宗教	religion
zu^3 xian^1	祖先	ancestors

Names/place names	Characters	English
Ba^1 Jia^1 Jiang	八家將	Eight Generals
Bao^3 Sheng^1 Da^4 Di^4	保生大帝	God of Medicine
Bei^3 Ji^3 Xuan^2 Tian^1 Shang^4 Di^4	北極玄天上帝	Emperor of the Dark Northern Heavens
Chan^2	禪	Zen
Ci^2 ji^4	慈濟	Compassionate Relief
Dai^4 Tian^1 Fu^3	代天府	(temple name)
Zheng^4 Yen^2	證嚴	(Buddhist monk)
Dian^4 Yin^1 San^1 Tai^4 Zi	電音三太子	Third Prince dance troupe
Guan^1 Gong^1	關公	God of War
Guan^1 Yin^1	觀音	Goddess of Mercy
Guan^1 Yu^3	關羽	3rd century general
Guo^2 min^2 dang^3	國民黨	Nationalist Political Party
Fo^1 Guang^1 Shan^1	佛光山	Buddha's Light Mountain
Fa^3 gu^3 shan^1	法鼓山	Dharma Drum Mountain
Jiang^3 Zhong^1 Zheng^4	蔣中正	Chiang Kai Shek
Ma^1 zu^3	媽祖	Goddess of the Sea
Nan^2 Kun^1 Shen^1	南鯤鯓	(temple name)

San[1] Guo[2] Yen[3] Yi[4]	三國演義	Romance of the Three Kingdoms
San[1] Xia[2]	三峽	(town in northern Taiwan)
Sheng[4] yan[2]	聖嚴	(Buddhist monk)
Sun[1] Wu[4] Kong[1]	孫悟空	Monkey King
Tai[4] Xu[1]	太虛	(Buddhist monk)
Tu[3] Di[4] Gong[1]	土地公	Earth God
Xing[1] Yun[2]	星雲	(Buddhist monk)
Yin[4] Shun[4]	印順	(Buddhist monk)
Yu[4] Huang[2] Da[4] Di[4]	玉皇大帝	Jade Emperor
Zheng[4] Cheng[2] Gong[1]	鄭成功	Koxinga

Appendix B – Interview Questions

English Name Chinese Name:

Age: Sex:

Current Residence (including how many years):

Hometown:

Highest level of education:

Occupation:

Political Party:

1. Did your family immigrate to Taiwan in 1949 or earlier?
2. How well do you speak Taiwanese?
3. Is your family religious? If so, what religion(s) do you follow?
4. Do you consider yourself religious? If so, what religion do you follow and why?
5. What are your specific religious practices?
6. Why do you think people go to the temple? Why do you?
7. Do you believe in gods? ghosts? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever had any experience with a ghost or god?
9. Do you believe a person can believe in both science and ghosts/gods even though science has not proven the existence of them?
10. Do you believe science will eventually explain everything?
11. Where did you learn about religion?
12. Do you think you will get more or less religious as you get older?
13. Will you raise your children to be religious? If so, what will you teach them? What will you do with them? If not, why?
14. Have Taiwan's traditions and religions changed since you were a child? How?
15. What do you think about how burning ghost money contributes to pollution?
16. What do you think about people who want to stop the burning of ghost money, or those who want continue it despite the pollution?
17. What do you think superstitious means? Give some examples of practices you consider superstitious?
18. Do you think people were more or less superstitious in the past? Why?
19. Do you think a person can be modern and believe in gods/ghosts?
20. What do you think the role Taiwan's traditional religious culture will play in Taiwan's future?