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Toothless Ancestors, Felicitous Descendants

The Rite of Secondary Burial in South Taiwan

Abstract

This paper attempts to do two things: first, it describes the secondary burial as it is performed in south Taiwan; and second, it analyzes the symbolism of the rite. Although often mentioned by anthropologists in their writing on Chinese funerary and burial practices, secondary burial itself has seldom formed the focus of scholarly investigation. The narrative part of this paper thus fills a gap in the English ethnographic literature. The analytical part shows that the traditional understanding of secondary burial as a rite of purification is inadequate. It emphasizes that the rite has three related goals, namely, purification of the remains, revival of the purified bones, and definition of the geomantic property of the grave. This paper concludes that while primary burial merely expunges the polluting corpse from the community, secondary burial directly manipulates the corpse to completely eliminate it as a source of danger to the living.

Keywords: Taiwanese religion—mortuary system—geomancy—secondary burial

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER is twofold. First, it gives a step-by-step account of the rite of secondary burial as it is performed in a south Taiwan village. Second, it interprets the rite's symbolism in the context of the Chinese mortuary system. Despite its popularity in southern China and its controversial nature, secondary burial has received little scholarly scrutiny compared with funeral rituals and ancestor worship.[1] POTTER (1970) and FREEDMAN (1979) discussed it mainly in connection with geomancy, neglecting the actual process of exhumation and re-interment. Although AHERN (1973) and WATSON (1988b) have established important links between certain procedures of secondary burial and concepts of inheritance and purity, neither has offered a full account of how the rite is performed. By carefully describing a secondary burial, this paper does more than provide fascinating folkloric information for English readers; it demonstrates that the rite has a more complex symbolism than has been articulated by Ahern and Watson. Although both authors have rightly stressed the centrality of the separation of flesh and bone in the course of reburial, they have overlooked other aspects of the rite that convey different but significant messages. This paper shows that secondary burial is a rite of partial revival that consists of three stages—namely, purification, revival, and consecration. The first two stages focus on the physical remains: the first rids the remains of dangerous attributes while the second animates the "cleaned" bones and reconstructs the whole skeleton. By contrast, the third stage deals mainly with the grave, transforming it into a geomantically beneficial site.

Empirical data for this paper were collected in a community that will be called Fountain Village. It lies in the western part of Hengchun 恒春, the southernmost portion of Taiwan. Until the mid-nineteenth century, this hilly and windy region (then known under the name Langjiao 郎嶠) was a frontier where the rule of Qing 清 law was tenuous and Han Chinese immigrants from Fujian 福建 and Guangdong 廣東 lived precariously among the aborigines.[2]

It was only after the 1870s when the Qing government began belatedly

to consolidate its administration of the region that large numbers of Chinese poured into the newly established Hengchun County 恒春縣. According to the census of 1889, Fountain Village had 75 households with over 500 adults. (There was no mention of aborigines in the village.) Just over a hundred years later, in 1992, the village has grown to some 400 households with over 3,000 people. Although the present villagers claim southern Fujian (Hokkien) ancestry, their claim is difficult to validate historically. Not only were there Hakka 客家 (from Guangdong) communities throughout the region, but intermarriage between Han Chinese (Fujian and Hakka) and aborigines was also common in the frontier era. Nonetheless, nowadays the villagers as well as their neighbors in surrounding communities all speak southern Fujianese as their first language.[3]

I witnessed multiple performances of secondary burial while residing in Fountain Village in 1988–1989 and then during several short stays in 1991–1992. In most cases the specialist who performed the rite was the keeper (*zhuchi* 主持) of Huashansi 華山寺, one of the four main temples in the village. However, on several occasions I have observed the rite performed by specialists hired from outside the village. My description below documents the ritual routine of the temple keeper, who has patiently answered my questions as well as loaned me his manual of incantations. Admittedly, it is difficult to assess how "representative" his performance is, although a comparison of my data with those by HUANG (1989) and XU (1984) shows that similar techniques are being employed throughout Taiwan.[4] Since my observations in Fountain Village seem to conform to a broader pattern, I hope this study will contribute to a better understanding of the manner in which Chinese in Taiwan imagine and manage death.

DESCRIPTION

Preparation

In Fountain Village the descendants' concern for their ancestors extends beyond the funeral, which nowadays always ends in an immediate burial.[5] Besides worshipping daily the ancestral tablets on the family altar and tending the graves once every year at Qingming 清明, the villagers are also concerned with the physical structure of the family graves and the condition of the remains inside them. Usually, a few years after the initial burial, they open the grave to extract its contents for ritual treatment and re-interment in a new site. The local expression for this practice is *shigu* 拾骨 or "gathering bones." If asked why they need to do so, the villagers offer different explanations. Some simply maintain that local customs oblige descendants to have secondary burials performed for their ancestors. Others are prepared to be flexible, claiming that the rite is not mandatory since not everybody can

afford the time and expenses. Nevertheless, further inquiry reveals that most villagers have at least one deceased parent or grandparent who has gone through a second, sometimes even a third, burial.[6] So it appears that while many villagers are prepared to consider secondary burial optional in principle, they act as if it were really mandatory. Whatever the specific reasons for a secondary burial, many villagers express the sentiment that in doing so they are only acceding to the explicit demand of an ancestor. In fact, the deceased sometimes needs to press rather hard before the descendants are willing to go ahead with a secondary burial. This is because, besides being costly, opening a grave to remove its content has potentially disastrous consequences. Properly constructed, a grave not only appeases the deceased by providing him or her with a secure abode (*yinzhai* 陰宅) but also ensures the descendants of peace and prosperity by harnessing beneficial geomantic forces (*fengshui* 風水) on their behalf. For many villagers the good fortune of a family —formulaically expressed as "wealth, sons, and longevity" (*cai zi shou* 財子壽)—is the direct consequence of its possession of auspicious ancestral graves. In fact, the link between geomancy and grave is so strong that in local usage *fengshui* denotes both the physical grave and its geomantic aspect.[7] Moreover, the ancestor is believed to be so jealous of the tranquillity provided by the grave that if unduly violated he or she will certainly seek revenge on those responsible. Therefore, unless the villagers are convinced that a secondary burial is justified, they will not take the risk.

The first inklings that an ancestor may be yearning for a secondary burial are usually inexplicable misfortunes that befall his or her descendants (e.g., a male descendant is involved in a series of accidents, his wife suffers from chronic drowsiness, or his child develops a strange and stubborn ailment). Recurrent troubles rather than isolated mishaps are more likely to be suspected as the work of a restless ancestor. A common means for determining the cause of such troubles is spirit mediumship. The message can come either directly from the ancestor or via a deity. Once it is established—i.e., after double-checking with one or more spirit mediums and extensive discussion among the descendants—that an ancestor cannot be propitiated by anything less than a secondary burial, a senior male in the family will approach the keeper of Huashansi.[8] In his consultation with the temple keeper, he will briefly explain the reason for the decision and try to set up a date for the rite. Sometimes the date is determined by another seance. More often, the temple keeper simply looks up in the almanac the nearest day marked as appropriate for *qizan* 起攢[9] or "commencing exhumation."[10] The almanac makes a distinction between primary and secondary burial: days suitable for the former are not necessarily so for the latter. All secondary burials—whether it is for the first, second, or third time—are treated as the

same in terms of calendric calculation. However, the villagers themselves maintain a terminological distinction between the first secondary burial and all subsequent ones: while the first is called *qizan,* the rest are called *fanjin* 翻金 or "unearthing gold."

In preparation, the ritual specialist assembles these items: a burial urn, some ritual money and incense, a black umbrella, a straw mat, pieces of red gauze, some red threads, a bottle of rice wine (or water), some red ink and a writing brush, and some charcoal. He must also make sure that he takes to the graveside the geomancer's compass[11] and the manual of incantations. Before describing the rite, I will briefly explain the function and meaning of these items.

The burial urn is a cylindrical ceramic container less than a meter in height. It is euphemistically called *fengjin* 豐金 or "gold in abundance," and its surface is covered with brown glaze and auspicious symbols in bas-relief. The standard design has a dragon on both sides of a seven-story pagoda or a fireball. Some bear patterns of phoenixes.

Ritual money and incense sticks are for the ancestor and the Soil God (Houtu 后土) when they are worshiped before exhumation and after re-interment. Both items are also used as a propitiatory offering for the Earth Spirit (Dilinggong 地靈公). Moreover, the flame of ritual money has purifying power.

The black umbrella is used to keep the skull in the shade when it is being retrieved from the earth. It is discarded at the old grave afterwards. The exhumed remains are spread on the straw mat to dry under the sun. The mat too is left behind after use.

Rice wine, red ink, the writing brush, and the red threads and gauze are for use in preparing the exhumed remains for replacement in the burial urn. Rice wine is used to clean the bones of dirt, and the writing brush is used for dabbling red ink onto the bones. The red threads are used for tying up the larger bones into bundles and the pieces of gauze are for wrapping up the smaller bones in packets. Charcoal is used to hold the bones in place by filling up the space between the bones and the inner wall of the urn.

The geomancer's compass is not employed to actually determine orientations (the grave has already been constructed according to geomantic requirements) but serves as a symbol of the ritual specialist's authority when he consecrates the new grave. The book of incantations contains passages that the ritual specialist recites to bring the secondary burial to completion.

The descendants are responsible for preparing the food offerings. The ancestor gets small bowls of cooked pork, fish, squid, chicken, eggs, vegetables, and flat rice cakes. This food is flavored and cut into bite size pieces like the dishes served for a regular meal for the living. By contrast, the Soil God

gets a slab of pork, a whole chicken, and a whole fish, all of which is cooked but unflavored, according to the standard way of preparing offering (*shengli* 牲禮) for the deities.[12] A few additional rice cakes are used for the appeasement of the Earth Spirit.

The amount of labor needed for a secondary burial is quite moderate. In addition to the ritual specialist, who is responsible only for retrieving, treating, and re-assembling the remains, it is necessary to hire two gravediggers. Sometimes the male descendants do the digging themselves. Together the ritual specialist and the gravediggers cost about NT$ 3,000 (1991): the former gets about 2,000 for his work and for purchasing the necessary items while the latter get the remaining 1,000. In the case where the corpse is only partially decomposed, the ritual specialist is paid an additional NT$ 3,000 for performing the unpleasant job of cleaving the joints and scraping the flesh off the bones. The single most expensive item for a secondary burial is the new grave, which carries a price tag of at least NT$ 40,000.

A typical grave in Fountain Village has three main parts: a burial mound in the back, a ritual area in the front, and a gravestone in the middle. A semicircular wall shores up the earth mound, while the ritual area is finished with cement and its border outlined by a curb. Standing between the two is the gravestone. As the focal point of worship, it bears the particulars of the deceased: the name, date of birth, place of origin in China, and names of male descendants. At the base of the gravestone is a small concrete platform for incense and offerings. Since cremation is not practiced in the village, the grave for primary burial has to be large enough to accommodate a full-size coffin. The burial pit is about two meters in length and one-and-half meters in width and depth.

On the curb that marks the boundary of the ritual area are three features essential to a properly constructed grave: (a) a statue of the Soil God; (b) a water outlet (*shuikou* 水口); and (c) a "gold incinerator" (*jinlu* 金爐). The Soil God is a terrestrial deity associated with the dead and the fertility of the earth. It has the function of guarding the water outlet and monitoring the geomantic influences (which behave like water) that circulate in and out of the site. Built in the shape of a gourd, the gold incinerator is the place where ritual money is burnt, and thus remitted to the other world. The grave for secondary burial has the same structure as that for a primary burial. The only difference is that the former has a smaller burial mound since there is only a round concrete hole beneath it holding the burial urn.

THE RITE

Stage I

Exhumation begins once the ritual specialist, the gravediggers, and the

descendants have assembled at the graveside.[13] The rite starts with the grave's spiritual occupants being warned of the imminent destruction of the grave. The ritual specialist, joined by the most senior male descendant, informs the Soil God and the ancestor of the relocation plan. In his prayer he identifies the deity who has chosen the day for the rite and requests both spirits to grant the descendants "peace and prosperity" (*ping'an shunshi* 半安順事). He ends the prayer urging the spirits to leave swiftly. The ritual specialist and senior male descendant present incense, fruit, and ritual money as offerings.

After the spirits are assumed to have departed, the ritual specialist smashes the gravestone and the image of the Soil God with a plough. He then opens the grave in a ritual called "breaking the earth" (*potu* 破土). Positioning himself on top of the burial mound, he sinks the plough into it five times, once in each of the four directions and once in the center. At the same time he intones a spell:

The day is auspicious and the time is right. 口吉時中
The time is auspicious and the hour is propitious. 時吉時良
Right now I break the earth. 今時破土
May all be well and prosperous! 萬事吉昌

When the ritual specialist performs the earth breaking, all others take a few steps back and turn their heads to avoid watching his action.[14] Once the grave is ritually opened, the descendants and gravediggers take over to remove the earth mound.

The digging slows down when it is about to reach the wooden coffin. After carefully exposing the lid of the coffin, the gravediggers climb out of the burial pit to make way for the ritual specialist. Putting on plastic gloves and a mask, he enters the pit to remove parts of the rotten coffin lid, exposing the lower part of the corpse. Cutting through layers of darkened shrouds with a pair of scissors, he retrieves the leg bones. Proceeding methodically, he works his way up from the legs to the torso and then to the head. All the remains are carefully collected so that nothing is lost among the darkened soil and wood fragments. The unearthed pieces are handed over to the descendants, who lay them out on a mat. Besides the bones, accessories like gold rings and jade pendants worn by the deceased are also recovered and counted. Then comes a critical moment. When the skull is about to be extracted, the black umbrella is held up to block the sun from shining directly on it.[15] Once the skull is taken out of the burial pit, however, the umbrella is no longer needed. After all the remains have been retrieved and identified, they are moved to a more spacious location nearby where they are left to dry

under the sun. Meanwhile, the ritual specialist double-checks the number of bones under the watchful eyes of the descendants. Their vigilance stems from the fear that an incomplete skeleton will nullify the efficacy of the rite.

An hour or so later—during the interval all present share snacks and wine—the ritual specialist motions the descendants to start cleaning the bones. Ritual money is used to rub off the dirt and a small quantity of rice wine is used as a solvent to facilitate the process. The job of pulling all the teeth out of the skull is reserved for a female descendant, who throws away the extracted teeth without ceremony.[16] The accessories that were buried with the deceased are also cleaned: those made of jade are particularly cherished as talismans for infants and small children to wear. The cleaned bones are carried over to the site of the new grave.[17]

Stage II

Before being put into the urn, the bones need to undergo another round of treatment. First, they are arranged roughly in the form of a human. Then, using a writing brush and some red ink, the ritual specialist traces lines and puts dots on the surface of each piece of bone. He covers the skull with criss-crossing lines, the hand and leg bones with long lines that run their full lengths, and the smaller pieces with dots here and there. He explains that the red ink represents blood whereas the lines and dots represent blood vessels (*xuemai* 血脈). Every piece must be so stained.

To facilitate placement in the urn, bones belonging to the same part of the body are either wrapped into packets or tied up into bundles. The phalanges are put in into four parcels. Bones from the lower and the upper limbs are tied into four bundles. The ribs are similarly bound, and a red thread is passed through the spinal column to reconstruct the backbone. Thus prepared, the remains are ready to go into the urn.

Three conditions must be satisfied for the replacement to be considered proper. First, the bones must be arranged in such a way that the skeleton appears to be in a "fetal" position, i.e., arms and legs folded in front of the ribs and spine. Second, no part of the skeleton must come into contact with the inner surface of the urn. Third, the face of the skull must be aligned with the fireball or pagoda symbol on the outside of the urn.

The ritual specialist first purifies the inside of the urn with the flame of ritual money. More ritual money is laid on the bottom as a cushion. The phalanges, shins, and femurs go in first, followed by the astragali and the coccyx. They are held in place by charcoal. Then the spine goes in, standing vertically supported by charcoal. The ribs, hand bones, and shoulder blades follow. Finally, the skull is carefully lowered into the urn. The descendants are asked to examine if it has been properly aligned. A layer of red linen and

a piece of red thread are laid over the skull before more charcoal is poured in, leaving only the very top of it visible. Then the lid is put on, aligned, and sealed.

With the help of a male descendant, the ritual specialist positions the urn by the burial pit, but he has to put it into the hole by himself. He drops some burning ritual money into the hole to purify it and then sends in the urn uttering these words:

First, I send in the heavenly opportunity.	一進天時
Second, I send in the earthly advantage.	二進地利
Third, I send in the treasure.	三進財寶
Fourth, I send in felicity.	四進吉利

As the ritual specialist places the urn into the burial hole, the descendants and gravediggers again move away from the grave and avoid watching the ritual specialist. Then the gravediggers finish the job by sealing off the pit with a heavy concrete lid and heaping earth over it until a small mound is formed. Although the physical task of re-interment is over at this point, there are still rituals to be performed before the entire undertaking can be considered complete.

Stage III

The last part has three ritual components: (a) worship of the re-interred ancestor and the Soil God, (b) propitiation of the Earth Spirit, and (c) consecration of the new grave.

Once the new grave has been sealed, offerings are laid out again in front of the gravestone. One by one those descendants who have been absent begin to arrive, some accompanied by their spouses and children. The presence of children has an immediate effect on the atmosphere at the graveside, turning the hitherto sullen gathering into a jovial family reunion. A set of meat offerings is provided for the Soil God while the ancestor receives his or her share of food in bowls. As in the beginning, the ritual specialist and the oldest male descendant offer incense, and the ritual specialist reports to the ancestor that his or her wish for reburial has been fulfilled. He also reminds the spirit of the duty to look after the descendants. Then the rest of the family comes forward to pay respect to the ancestor. A large amount of ritual money is burnt in the gold incinerator. But even while the women are still busy with worship, the men have already begun to drink, smoke, partake of the food offerings, and play with the children.

Besides the ancestor and the Soil God, the Earth Spirit too needs to be propitiated (*xietu* 謝土) for the violation it has suffered from the construction

of the grave. Circling to the back of the burial mound where a bamboo staff and two pieces of half-buried red brick mark the alignment of the grave, the ritual specialist offers the Earth Spirit some incense. He beseeches the spirit to protect the grave and the remains and offers paper money as an appeasement. Then, in rapid succession, he pulls out the bamboo staff, stuffs several rice cakes into the hole left in the ground, kicks loose the pieces of brick, and walks away quickly.

Last comes the consecration of the grave in three parts. In the first part, the ritual specialist climbs onto the burial mound to "summon the dragon" (*fulong* 呼龍).[18] Holding up the geomancer's compass with his right hand and overlooking the descendants gathered below, he reads aloud from the manual of incantations:

I am holding a compass and waving it. 手拿羅經搖一搖
The twenty-four mountains[19] *come to pay homage.* 二十四山總來朝
I am holding a compass and flashing it. 手拿羅經照一照
The twenty-four mountains shine in brilliance. 二十四山總榮耀
I am holding a compass and the spirits of the eight trigrams. 手拿羅經八卦神
In the beginning Pan Gu separated Heaven, Earth, and Human.[20] 盤古初分天地人
The yin-yang methods of the Somber Maid of Nine 九天玄女陰陽法
Heavens produced Yang Jiupin[21] *in the human world.* 作造人間楊救貧
The year is smooth, the month is profitable, and nothing is under prohibition. 年通月利無禁忌
[Today] is the right time for the venerable Yang to secure the grave. 正是楊公安葬時
A phoenix takes off from the South Mountain Rock.[22] 南山石上鳳凰飛
Today the mouth of the noble dragon[23] *will be opened.* 今日打開貴龍口
In the front are mountains that support this beautiful [site]. 前面有山山拱秀
In the back [are mountains forming] a barrier that guards the dragon foundation. 後面有屏鎮龍基
On the left is the Azure Dragon that brings treasure. 左有青龍送財寶
On the right is the White Tiger that presents farmland. 右有白虎進田庄
The Scarlet Bird in the back brings numerous male descendants. 後有朱雀人丁旺
The Black Warrior in the front guards the Brilliant Hall. 前有玄武鎮明堂
Horses coming up to the front of the [burial] mound [bring] prosperity. 馬到山前人富貴
Deer coming up to the back of the [burial]

mound bring male offspring. 鹿到山後旺兒孫
This is my burial; let me pronounce the judgment.[24] 此是吾葬聽吾斷

From this point on the ritual specialist's incantation requires the participation of the descendants. Each of the following wishes (demands?) he utters elicits a resounding "Yes!" from the descendants.

First, let there be numerous male descendants! [Yes!] 一要人丁千萬口
Let them be numerous as grasshoppers! [Yes!] 子孫螽斯盛
Let our wealth increase by itself! [Yes!] 財寶自豐盈
Let our oxen and horses increase by themselves! [Yes!] 牛馬自成群
Let us own tens of thousands of acres of farmland! [Yes!] 田庄千萬甲
Let our wealth and lives last forever! [Yes!] 富壽綿綿長
Let us pass the civil service examination at
an early age! [Yes!] 登科及第早
Let us have good fortune and great wealth![25] *[Yes!]* 福祿山福崇
Let our family become as wealthy as Shi Chong's![26] *[Yes!]* 家似石崇富
Let our lives last longer than the South Mountain! [Yes!] 壽比南山長
Let us be blessed with numerous sons and grandsons![27] *[Yes!]* 千祥兒孫福
Let [our family] be illustrious and noble forever! [Yes!] 貴顯永無疆
Let our family be blessed with
good fortune, high ranks, and wealth! [Yes!] 福祿富家門

Reverting to a monologue at this point, the ritual specialist continues:

For ten years we have venerated our ancestor. 十年敬祖宗
[Our reverence] has deepened as months and
years passed. 以年共月深
Suddenly the auspicious site yields gold.[28] 基地忽然生金
Male descendants will have the
good fortune to produce more male descendants. 兒孫自有兒孫福
Male descendants will be blessed
with peace, wealth, and high positions. 子孫平安得財祿
The yin-soul is invited to enter its [new] abode. 奉請陰魂入厝來
Male descendants in later generations will be wealthy. 兒孫代代發大財
If the grave is three centimeters [fen] *too deep, there*
will be tens of thousands of male descendants in 風水作深三分
the future generations. 代代成萬群
If the grave is three centimeters too shallow, 風水作凸三分
[our family] will produce sages. 代代出聖人
Building the grave on Taiwan, the male descendants 風水葬在台灣嶼
will own half the land in Taiwan. 子孫台灣田庄佔一半

Building the grave on Taiwan, the male descendants will live longer than Peng Zu.[29]	風水葬在台灣島 子孫壽命勝彭祖
Building the grave on Taiwan, the [male descendants] will come up first in the civil service examination.	風水葬在台灣山 登科第一名
[They] will ride on a white horse in a gold saddle and have banners erected at the portals [of their home].	白馬掛金鞍 門前立旗竿
The male descendants will become high officials for generations to come.	子孫代代做大宮

The second part of the consecration ritual is called "releasing water" (*fangshui* 放水). It activates the grave's function as a geomantic device that captures only beneficial cosmic forces. As the term "wind and water" (*fengshui*) indicates, geomantic forces are thought to behave like a fluid. An auspicious grave should be able to collect streams of propitious forces for the benefit of the descendants. But the grave must not be a passive and undiscriminating receptacle, for the descendants will suffer if it cannot prevent noxious forces from entering. Hence the grave's mechanism of selection must be established. Toward this end, the ritual specialist pours water onto the ritual area, the burial mound, and the ground surrounding the grave while murmuring this spell:

I am holding a Green Dragon Vase.	手拿青龍瓶
In the beginning Pan Gu partitioned Heaven, Earth, and Human.	盤古初開天地人
I release water to the East.	放水放東方
The East represents jia, yi, *and Wood.*	東方甲乙木
May future generations be blessed with official emoluments!	子孫代代受財祿
I release water to the West.	放水放西方
The West represents geng, shen, *and Metal.*	西方庚申金
May future generations be blessed with millions!	子孫代代發萬金
I release water to the South.	放水放南方
The South represents bing, ding, *and Fire.*	南方丙丁火
May future generations proliferate to ten thousand!	子孫代代旺人丁
I release water to the North.	放水放北方
The North represents ren, kuei, *and Water.*	北方壬癸水
May future generations be blessed with riches!	子孫代代都富貴
I release water to the Center.	放水放中央
The Center represents mao, ji, *and Earth.*	中央戊己土
May future generations live as long as Peng Zu!	子孫代代壽命同彭祖
Let good water flow in and bad water flow out!	好水流入壞水流出

When water is released on the mountain, future generations will become high officials. 放水放上山 子孫代代做大宮

These magical words make the water outlet function properly, allowing only beneficial geomantic forces in while keeping malignant ones out.

The third part of the consecration ritual is the "sowing of the five grains" (*sawugu* 撒五谷). The ritual specialist casts handfuls of seeds (sometimes adding iron nails as well) onto the burial mound while walking around it.[30] In the meantime, he intones:

I am holding a half bushel of the five grains. 手拿半斗五谷神
In the beginning Pan Gu partitioned Heaven, Earth, and Human. 盤古初開天地人
I cast the five grains to the East. 撒五谷撒東方
The East represents jia, yi, *and Wood.* 東方甲乙木
May future generations be blessed with official emoluments! 子孫代代受財祿

The incantation continues in the same way as in the water releasing ritual. Only the end varies:

When the five grains are cast onto the ground, we will have male descendants and farmland in the four regions! 五谷撒落地 子孫田園滿四界

Lastly, he picks up a container filled with coins and candies. After instructing the children to kneel before the gravestone, he showers them with handfuls of money and goodies. As the children scramble to catch the symbols of ancestral blessings in the air or pick them up from the ground, the secondary burial reaches its final and the most cheerful moment.

Interpretation

In this part I discuss the symbolic meanings of secondary burial from three angles: (a) purification, (b) revival, and (c) geomancy. They correspond to the three stages of the rite respectively. Since only Ahern, Freedman, and Watson have commented on the secondary burial at some length, I try to position my interpretation vis-à-vis theirs, building on their insights but also pointing out their inadequacies.

Purification

Both Ahern (1973) and Watson (1988b) have interpreted the secondary burial as a purification ritual centered on the symbolic opposition between flesh and bone. Ahern saw the dualism as representing two forms of ancestral

authority: flesh stands for the authority the deceased must give up after death whereas bone stands for the authority he or she can hold on to. The secondary burial is thus a symbolic statement that the descendants inherit part of the authority (social status and economic resources) of the ancestor while acknowledging that they continue to live under his or her shadow. Watson saw the same opposition as an expression of the tension between yin (flesh) and yang (bone), female and male, and bad and good luck. For him, preserving the bone at the expense of the flesh expresses the ideology of patrilineage and the ritual quest for yang and purity. While Ahern and Watson emphasized different things in their interpretation, they are in agreement that secondary burial transforms the polluting corpse into pure bones. However, my description above shows that the aim of purification is achieved not just by separating flesh from bone.

As described in Part I, rituals in the first stage eliminate the noxious aspect of the corpse, which is primarily (but not exclusively) associated with the decayed flesh. Normally, since no soft tissue is likely to remain after several years of interment, bone cleaning entails little more than wiping the dirt off the bones. However, it occasionally happens that upon exhumation a corpse is found to have not fully decomposed. In that case the cleaning process becomes complicated and gruesome. Half-decayed corpses are known as *yinsi* 陰尸, or "shadow corpses," and are considered very unlucky by the villagers. They believe that a corpse that "refuses" to relinquish his or her corporeal form "eats up the good fortune of the descendants" (*chi zisun fu* 吃子孫福).[31] In other words, such a corpse not only brings no benefit to the descendants but also depletes their stock of good fortune. According to the ritual specialist, the way to deal with such a threatening corpse is to pour rice wine all over it before exposing it to the elements for a fortnight or two. Sometimes he makes a few incisions in the muscles and tendons with a knife to hasten the process of decay. After the period of exposure, decomposition has usually completed its course, making the bones ready for cleaning. In the event that some bits of tissue still remain, he simply scrapes them away with a knife.[32] This ensures that the corpse will be transformed into a pile of clean and disjointed bones. The insistence that the bones must bear no trace of soft tissue—to the extent that a blade is applied to the body of the deceased (ritual fratricide? cf. AHERN [1973])—indicates how determined the descendants are in preventing their happiness from being undermined by a dead relative.

The same concern lies behind another ritual procedure in the bone cleaning process. This is the act of pulling out all the teeth from the skull and discarding them at the old grave. Neither the ritual specialist nor the villagers could offer an explanation for this custom. Nonetheless, seen against

the backdrop of the villagers' strong suspicion of partially decomposed corpses, it is not difficult to discern a connection between the corpse's propensity to "eat up" the good fortune of the descendants and the threat posed by a skull "armed" with teeth. Indeed, without this connection, it would be hard to explain why the descendants want to permanently disfigure the skull.

Purification in the first stage is thus achieved by a double denial: the ancestor is denied not just a fleshy human form but also the ability to "eat" like a human. Not being able to eat presumably also prevents the ancestor from ever regaining the flesh he or she has lost and so ensures his or her continual existence as a skeleton. However, making the bones dry and clean is not an end in itself but a preparation for the second stage.

Revival

In contrast to the first stage, rituals in the second stage turn the bones into an efficacious skeleton with the potential to benefit the descendants. This transformation is achieved in two steps: (a) animation of the bones and (b) reconstruction of the complete skeleton. Though important and rich in symbolism, these rituals have received no comment from Ahern, Freedman, or Watson. As described above, the ritual specialist meticulously animates the bones by drawing "blood vessels" on them and thereby re-introducing life force into them. This technique is analogous to the ritual known as "opening to the light" (*kaiguang* 開光), which is regularly performed to infuse inanimate objects with a spiritual force, which can be a deity, an ancestral spirit, or simply "life force" (*qi* 氣). This is achieved by putting red dots with a brush on designated parts of an icon or an ancestral tablet. The red ink, which is sometimes mixed with blood drawn from a rooster, symbolizes the life or yang force that is being transmitted. The ritual makes an otherwise inanimate object efficacious or spiritually potent (*ling* 靈), and it is performed on the bones to achieve the same effect.

Nonetheless, the secondary burial does not stop at producing a heap of bones that is potent but in disarray, for the ritual specialist goes on to put the pieces together—reconnecting the bones to reconstruct the whole skeleton. With the animated bones arranged in the form of a person lying supine, he either ties the pieces belonging to the same body part together or wraps them up into a packet. A thread is put through the spinal column to reconstruct the backbone. (Needless to say, the red threads and gauze used have the same symbolic meaning as the red ink used for animation.) In this way when he deposits the bones into the burial urn, they will not become mixed up. In fact, he takes care to arrange the bones in such a way that the skeleton takes a "fetal" position with the pelvis at the bottom, legs and arms folded in front

of the ribs, the backbone upright, and the skull at the top.[33] Hence, what goes into the burial pit at the end of the second stage is not just a confusing pile of harmless bones but an efficacious and properly reconstructed skeleton.

In sum, what Ahern and Watson took to be central to the secondary burial—namely, the separation of flesh and bone—turns out upon closer analysis to be but the first phase in a long and complex ritual process. However, even the revival of the skeleton is not the end, for it is followed by more rituals in the third stage.

Geomancy

Although Ahern and Freedman have commented on the close relationship between secondary burial and geomancy, neither has made use of any internal evidence from the rite to support his or her view. As my description shows, geomancy informs the grave consecration rituals that conclude the secondary burial. This section discusses (a) the symbolism of the grave consecration rituals and (b) the nature of geomancy as seen through the same rituals.

The incantation in the first grave consecration ritual, i.e., the "summoning of the dragon," is particularly revealing. The first part of it stresses the ritual specialist's authority in geomantic matters. It asserts that he is in command of the spirits of the eight trigrams as well as the twenty-four cosmic forces. It also affirms the divine character of geomancy, comparing the ritual summoning to the act of creation and tracing the origin of the art through the master-geomancer Yang Jiupin to the Somber Maid of Nine Heavens. After reciting the superior features of the grave, it adds that the ritual specialist alone can define the geomantic properties of the site: "This is my burial; let me pronounce the judgment." The second part is the "judgment": it is in fact a "wish list" that contains all the good things that the descendants hope to obtain as a result of the secondary burial. Since the ritual specialist has already pronounced authoritatively on the grave's superior geomancy, he can now articulate the benefits that will flow from it: male offspring, wealth, high positions, long lives, etc. The descendants reiterate their earnestness by responding in unison to every blessing named by the ritual specialist with a resounding "Yes!". The last part has two notable features. First, the opening statement declares that the descendants have worshiped the ancestor for ten years, their reverence for him or her has deepened over time, and the ancestor's grave has started to produce "gold" as a result. In other words, it links filial piety to the benefits ("gold") that come from the grave. Interestingly, this statement is followed by a proviso that suggests geomancy operates independent of human effort—or more specifically, human error. The stipulation that "if the grave is three centimeters too deep, the

descendants will become wealthy, but if it is three centimeters too shallow, the descendants will become sages" effectively guarantees geomantic benefits to the descendants under all circumstances.

The next ritual, the "releasing of water," fortifies the geomancy of the grave. By activating the water outlet to allow beneficial influences into the grave while excluding noxious ones, it provides an additional safeguard that the site will have nothing but beneficial consequences for the descendants. As opposed to previous rituals that define the geomantic properties of the grave, this selection mechanism ensures that the site is impervious to negative influences from without. With this line of defense in place, the next ritual of sowing five grains turns on the theme of fecundity and prosperity. The casting of seeds draws out the life-giving power of the grave mound, while the dispensing of money and sweets in front of the gravestone enacts the bestowal of ancestral blessings.

The whole secondary burial thus unfolds according to this sequence of symbolic transformation: the first stage separates flesh from bones; the second stage animates and then reconnects the loose bones; and the third stage endows the grave with desirable geomantic features. Only when the purified and revived remains are combined with geomancy, is the secondary burial considered complete. However, although it is clear that bones and geomancy must come together to produce the desired results, the exact nature of this combination is unclear.

FREEDMAN (1979) and AHERN (1973) have come to opposite conclusions on this issue. Fieldwork in Hong Kong led Freedman to see geomancy as an impersonal and amoral system. As he understood it, if the bones are deposited on the right spot, then the descendants will benefit regardless of their moral worth or their ancestor's volition. Ahern, though, reported a different approach to geomancy in a north Taiwan village. There, geomancy was understood in terms of the ancestor's feeling and the ritual obligations of the descendants. If the ancestor is satisfied with the condition of his or her grave and the worship rendered by the descendants, he or she will reward them. Ahern surmised that the difference in interpretation might be explained by the fact that her informants were non-specialists while Freedman's were professional geomancers (although Freedman did not say who his informants were).

Evidence from Fountain Village indicates that geomancy is both mechanical/amoral and personal/moral. The ritual specialist's incantation in the summoning of the dragon sheds useful light on this issue. As discussed above, the first part makes no reference to the ancestor, let alone his or her feeling and preferences. Instead, its main thrust is that the efficacy of geomancy is contingent upon the ritual specialist's expertise. However, the

third part introduces information that complicates the issue. On the one hand, it attributes ancestral blessings to the descendants' fulfillment of ritual obligations. It maintains that before the grave can produce "gold," the descendants must worship the ancestor with ever deepening respect. In other words, the benefits of geomancy are a consequence of the filial actions of the descendants. On the other hand, the same text seems to contradict itself just a few lines later, stipulating that the descendants will reap geomantic benefits no matter what the grave's technical merits are, being too shallow or too deep simply makes no difference.

In sum, the rite of secondary burial lends itself to two opposing interpretations: parts of it seem to suggest the mechanical perspective while other parts embody the personal perspective. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that although the incantation recognizes the agency of the descendants, it does not accord the same recognition to the ancestor. In other words, our ethnographic data confirm Freedman's observation that the ancestor is powerless in influencing geomancy but contradict his more general claim that geomancy is entirely mechanical. Meanwhile, although our evidence agrees with Ahern's on the anthropomorphic interpretation of geomancy, it casts doubts on her identification of the mechanical interpretation of geomancy with the professional viewpoint. This is because the ritual specialist's incantation, which should no doubt be regarded as representing the "professional" perspective, contains both the mechanical and personal perspectives. Instead of identifying a particular view with one social group, it may be more accurate—at least in the context of Fountain Village—to conclude that the villagers generally assume that geomancy is influenced by some combination of ancestral volition, filial action, and the technical merits of the grave. Beyond this broad and vague notion, there is just no clear agreement on the precise logical relations between the relevant variants.[34]

Conclusion

The aim of secondary burial is to produce a "toothless" ancestor both in the literal sense of ridding the skull of its teeth and in the metaphorical sense of rendering him or her powerless to harm the descendants. It begins with a corpse that is ambiguous in character but ends with a skeleton that is not just pure and efficacious but also in a (geomantic) position to bless the living. In other words, it aims to eliminate a fundamental ambiguity in the character of the dead—namely, its potential as both a threat as well as a blessing to the living. The rite achieves its aim by acting on the symbolic opposition between what is dangerous and what is benign in the corpse: it discards the former (flesh) while retaining the latter (bone). Moreover, the bones that are being retained are ritually animated and deposited in a geomantically sound

grave. This ensures that the bones will become an active source of good fortune for the descendants. That the bones are animated is significant as it endows them with a spiritual quality that makes the skeleton, though originally part of the corpse, more akin to the animated spirit-tablet than to the decayed flesh. There is thus an interesting parallel between primary and secondary burial. Both seek to suppress the harmful side of the dead while enhancing their beneficial potential using rituals of rejection and retention. Whereas primary burial banishes the corpse but retains the spirit, secondary burial gets rid of the flesh but preserves the spirit-filled bones. In each case the deceased is ritually divided into two parts, one harmful and the other beneficial. And in each case the harmful part is deemed material and corruptible whereas the beneficial part is deemed spiritual and durable. In this sense, secondary burial carries the symbolic manipulation of primary burial to its extreme: while primary burial merely expels the corpse, secondary burial eliminates the corpse by further breaking it down and so, in theory at least, completely neutralizes the dead as a threat.

NOTES

1. Secondary burial was severely criticized in Ming 明 (1368–1643) and Qing (1644–1910) times by members of the literati-official class for its association with the superstition of geomancy as well as its desecration of the grave and the corpse. Examples of diatribes on this can be found in the local gazetteers of Fujian and Guangdong. Criticism of the practice continued through the Japanese period (1895–1945) down to the present day. I have heard skeptical opinions about the custom from more than one informant in Fountain Village.

2. The historical description given here is based on *Hengchun xianzhi* 恒春縣志 by ANONYMOUS n.d.

3. Chinese terms are romanized according to Mandarin pronunciation.

4. HUANG's (1989) description reflects the practice around Tainan City 台南市 in the south where he did fieldwork. XU's (1984) research is particularly useful for comparative purpose, as it includes observations made in different parts of Taiwan. Although rich in detail, both studies offer little analysis of the rite's symbolism.

5. For funerary and burial practices in the nineteenth century, see the classic studies by DE GROOT (1897–1901) and DOOLITTLE (1865). More recent studies can be found in the collection edited by WATSON and RAWSKI (1988). Ethnographic data on funerary practices in modern China can be found in DEAN (1988).

6. I came across a case in which the remains of a grandfather had been moved three times. The most recent reburial (which I observed) was prompted by an oracle that attributed the cause of a serious traffic accident suffered by the family of the oldest son to defects in the grandfather's grave.

7. See TSU (1997) for a discussion of the relations between burial sites and geomancy in nineteenth-century Taiwan.

8. Villagers may hire someone from outside to perform the rite. Funeral specialists (called Daoists or *sigong* 司公) from neighboring villages also provide this service. The temple keeper

is the only specialist in residence.

9. This is sometimes written as *jingzan* 敬攢 or "to exhume respectfully." The second character *zan* can mean either "to dig" or "to cover [with earth]." On the basis of my conversation with the temple keeper, I think *zan* here indicates the first meaning rather than the second.

10. The day that the temple keeper decides on is credited to the principal deity of Huashansi, the Buddha [sic] Guanyin (Guanyin Fozu 觀音佛祖). Hence, in theory the time of all secondary burials is divinely decreed. On the other hand, out of practical consideration, most secondary burials are conducted in the dry season from September to March to facilitate excavation and treatment of the remains.

11. See FEUCHTWANG (1965) for an explanation of the composition of the geomancer's compass.

12. See AHERN (1973), THOMPSON (1988), and WOLF (1978) for discussions of the classificatory scheme of offerings.

13. Neither the ritual specialist nor the villagers seem to care much about choosing an auspicious hour for the rite's performance. The rite can be performed at any time during the day. This contrasts with the practice in Singapore where the Chinese perform exhumations only at night.

14. See WATSON (1982) for a description of similar behavior among Cantonese villagers in Hongkong and a discussion of the "aversion points" in a funeral when the participants direct their eyesight away from where the action is taking place.

15. The villagers believe that it is inauspicious for the skull to come into direct contact with sunlight. It appears that the deceased's transition from the world of the dead to that of the living must be symbolically rendered less abrupt by preventing the sun from shining directly upon the "face" of the dead. Although the descendants are always anxious to keep the skull in the shade of the umbrella, the ritual specialist takes exception to their "superstition." He believes that originally the umbrella was used to block the foul air trapped in the coffin from gushing out and overcoming people standing nearby.

16. Should one of the teeth prove hard to dislodge, it is believed the woman needs to blow on it several times to "loosen" it. But the specialist claims that all one needs to do is twist the tooth in a particular way.

17. Not all exhumations are followed by immediate re-interment. Some families prefer to defer the final disposal. In such cases the bones are arranged, put into an urn, and stored away at some secluded location. Reasons for delay vary: some lack money to build a respectable new grave, others wait until a geomantically perfect site can be located, still others simply procrastinate. The specialist points out that some families simply forget to rebury their ancestors, which confirms FREEDMAN's (1979) and Rubie WATSON's (1988) observations that in the New Territories of Hongkong many of the exhumed remains are never reburied. On the other hand, one villager admitted to me that his family deliberately leaves the urn of an ancestor unburied on a spot rumored to have been marked for development. If the rumor proves to be true, the family stands to receive handsome compensation for the removal of the urn.

18. About one-third of this text is recorded by ŌFUCHI (1984, 471) as used by Daoists in Tainan.

19. That is, the twenty-four "breaths" (*qi*) in the universe.

20. Pan Gu is the mythical giant who created the world by first differentiating the primeval chaos into Heaven and Earth and then populating the world with human beings.

21. According to tradition, Master Yang is the human founder of the art of geomancy. See FEUCHTWANG (1965) for a survey of the basic concepts and terminology of geomancy.

22. South Mountain (*nanshan*) is a standard metaphor for longevity, as in the congratulatory saying *shoubi nanshan* 壽比南山 that wishes a person's life-span be comparable to the eter-

nal presence of mountains. "South" also represents the auspicious direction of yang, spring, and life.

23. The "dragon" refers to the grave as a geomantic site

24. The verb *duan* is normally used in the judicial sense of ruling on a case. Here it denotes an authoritative proclamation that defines the geomantic properties of the grave.

25. This line is apparently corrupt, but the general meaning is quite clear.

26. Shi Chong is a person of the Jin 晉 dynasty (265–420) whose wealth is legendary.

27. Although the meaning of the first two characters (*qianxiang*) in this line is unclear, the general thrust of the sentence is clear.

28. "Gold" refers to two things here. First, it denotes the blessings (i.e., wealth) that the ancestor bestows on the descendants. Second, it is a euphemism for the remains, as secondary burial is also called "unearthing gold" (*fanjin*).

29. This is a legendary figure who supposedly lived eight hundred years.

30. The seeds include rice, corn, and a variety of beans. Usually, only the beans sprout later. The nails are a play on the sound of the word *ding* (nail, 釘), which also means "male descendants" (*ding* 丁). See AHERN (1973) for a similar custom in north Taiwan.

31. According to AHERN's informants, the failure of a corpse to decompose after several years of interment is due to the special geomantic quality of the burial site, which is called *gaisidi* (蓋尸地) or "corpse covering land" (1973, 204).

32. AHERN's informants insist that forcible separation of flesh and bone is impermissible, for it is tantamount to "killing" the deceased (1973, 205). She interprets this taboo as a sign of the living's reluctance to "cannibalize" the dead (209). But XU's research shows that the taboo is not uniformly observed throughout Taiwan (1984, 492).

33. THOMPSON (1988) argues that the grave of secondary burial is symbolically identical with the womb. Since my informants did not make any suggestion to this effect, I have refrained from speculating on this point.

34. The "contradiction" or "ambiguity" in the villagers' approach to geomancy (and by extension, secondary burial) is more apparent to us as researchers than to them as practitioners. As BOURDIEU points out, the ethnographer's "synoptic illusion" tends to encourage him or her to "construct a lacuna-free, contradiction-free whole" (1977, 98). Rather, geomancy and witchcraft are very much alike in that both are open to alternative, competing, and from our perspective inconclusive interpretations (MAIR 1969, 76–138). In fact, the villagers' explanation of how the water outlet functions shows the same "contradiction." On one hand, it is supposed to be a "mechanical" device whose function is activated by the ritual specialist. On the other hand, it is also said to be guarded by the Soil God, who displays anthropomorphic attributes.

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