

THE HAUNTING FETUS

Abortion, Sexuality,
and the Spirit World
in Taiwan

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Chinese anthropology/religion

The Haunting Fetus focuses on the belief in modern Taiwan that an aborted fetus can return to haunt its family. Although the topic has been researched in Japan and commented on in the Taiwanese press, it has not been studied systematically in relation to Taiwan in either English or Chinese. This fascinating study looks at a range of topics pertaining to the belief in haunting fetuses, including abortion, sexuality, the changing nature of familial power structures, the economy, and traditional and modern views of the spirit world in Taiwan and in traditional Chinese thought. It addresses the mental, moral, and psychological aspects of abortion within the context of modernization processes and how these ramify through historical epistemologies and folk traditions.

The author illustrates how images of fetus-ghosts are often used to manipulate women, either through fear or guilt, into paying exorbitant sums of money for appeasement. He argues at the same time, however, that although appeasement can be expensive, it provides important psychological comfort to women who have had abortions as well as a much-needed means to project personal and familial feelings of transgression onto a safely displaced object. In addition to bringing to the surface underlying tensions within a family, appeasing fetus-ghosts, like other dealings with supernatural beings in Chinese religions, allows for atonement through economic avenues. The paradox in which fetus-ghost appeasement simultaneously exploits and assists evinces the true complexity of the issue—and of religious and gender studies as a whole.

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Preface

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I am also beholden to several people who gave various stages of this project very careful readings and without whom this book would be far weaker. They are Jonathan Brookfield, Barbara Folsom, Tim Naughton, Gary Seaman, and Robert Weller. Paul Katz made extremely detailed comments both on the manuscript and on my translation of Dragon Lake Temple's red contract (Appendix). My students at Lake Forest College showed great patience when I inflicted an earlier version of my manuscript on them, and they gave me excellent feedback.

Chapters 4 and 5 are revised versions of an article published in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica* (Moskowitz 1998).

This book is based on my Ph.D. dissertation at the University of California, San Diego. I could not have completed this project without the help of my dissertation committee; F. G. Bailey, Joseph Esherick, David K. Jordan (chair), Richard Madsen, and Michael Meecker. I was blessed with an extraordinarily supportive and insightful committee, and for this I am grateful. David Jordan and F. G. Bailey, in particular, were so detailed and prompt in their feedback on every stage of this project that I was the envy of my peers. The unwavering support and good advice of all of my committee members throughout my graduate career have given me the strength to carry through this project. Each of them has served as an inspiration in his own way, both as a teacher and as a scholar.

Thanks also to the staff in the UCSD anthropology department; especially to Marian Payne and Kae Knight for their help with bureaucratic and financial matters, and to J. C. Krause, whose infinite patience and impressive efficiency allowed me the luxury of staying in Taiwan to write my dissertation. My family has been wonderful, both in their unflagging emotional support and in their patience with my prolonged time abroad. Thanks, especially, to my father, who allowed me to use his painting as the cover design for this book.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the help of my editor, Patricia Crosby, who believed in my project and who has consistently been both amazingly efficient and extremely helpful, single-handedly eliminating many a stereotype I might have held about the nature of publishing.

Many of the strongest points of this work are the result of the insights the above-mentioned people have provided. Its weaknesses are not only my own, but often the result of a stubborn tendency on my part to ignore good advice.

I Introduction

WHEN I was a child my mother showed me a picture of one of her college friend's sculptures: a life-sized work of a woman in a long evening gown crafted in the medium of snow. It has been over twenty-five years since I saw that picture, yet the image and elegance of the work, rendered all the more beautiful by its ephemerality, still remain vivid in my imagination. This book holds a bit of the same meaning for me as a fixed record of a transitory moment in time. And it is with some apprehension that I relate the story of these temples, for in presenting them I fear that I can only describe a brief period of experience, whereas the events I speak of are part of a larger continuum. Even as I conducted my research and wrote this book, certain temples' popularity ebbed and waned. One temple stopped appeasing fetus ghosts altogether, whereas another that had annually appeased a little over a thousand fetus ghosts in the years previous to my investigation is dealing with over five thousand fetus ghosts a year at the time of this writing.

Yet, if particular aspects of certain temples are shifting, the basic elements of the belief remain the same, in that the meanings attributed to abortion and fetus spirits form a continuous link from the past to the future which crosses religious, generational, and economic boundaries. Thus, while particular details about certain temples are likely to become outdated, the concerns that I raise here should continue in importance for some time to come.

I had already lived in Taiwan for a year and a half before I first heard of the Taiwanese belief in the haunting fetus. In February 1995 I was studying Chinese in Taipei and discussing what was at that time my proposed dissertation topic on family planning in Taiwan. My

teacher mentioned fetus ghosts in passing, assuming that I knew all about them. At first I did not really register her words, and it was only after a few minutes that I stopped and said, "Back to what you said about fetuses that return to haunt their mothers. . . ." After that discussion I began to question others as to whether or not they knew about fetus spirits. To my surprise, every person I asked had heard of fetus ghosts and most said that they believed in the spirit's existence. A good friend of mine took the haunting fetus as such a natural part of the world that she incredulously asked me, "Don't you have them in the United States?"

My understanding of Chinese and Taiwanese¹ culture draws upon the year I lived in mainland China (July 1988–June 1989) as well as the years that I have lived in Taiwan: a total of one year in the south of Taiwan in the late eighties and early nineties, and five years in Taipei, the nation's capital in the north, from September 1994 to September 1999.

The majority of interviews for this topic were conducted between April 1996 and August 1998, with a handful of subsequent interviews. Examination of written documents preceded this by approximately one year. I interviewed forty-three women and twelve men who had direct experiences with fetus ghosts and/or who were appeasing fetus ghosts, and ninety-three people with friends or relatives who had had such experiences. I also had informal conversations with countless others who had heard of the phenomenon and held opinions about it, even if they had had no direct contact with the spirits. Those interviewed were primarily Taipei residents, but I also conducted interviews in Miaoli, Taizhong, Tainan, Gaoxiong, and in several smaller cities on the western coast. I also interviewed Buddhist and Daoist masters who dealt with fetus ghosts.² These included interviews in Taipei at two loosely affiliated Buddhist temples and with a Daoist master who worked out of his home, a Daoist temple just outside of Miaoli (in northwest Taiwan), a Daoist temple in the city of Douliu (in mid-west Taiwan), a Buddhist temple and three Daoist temples in Gaoxiong (in southwest Taiwan). I have also been witness to hundreds of people appeasing fetus ghosts at Dragon Lake Temple in Miaoli County.

Many people I have spoken with, both American and Taiwanese, assume that those who appease fetus ghosts are uneducated and therefore superstitious and gullible. The fact that Taiwanese newspapers are full of academics being taken in by one deception or another did

not seem to enter into their opinions on the subject. Although I knew some appeasers who were illiterate, I also met believers who were educated at the best universities in Taiwan, and a few who had earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States. A brief list of some of the people I interviewed who had appeased fetus ghosts includes a company president, a farmer, several housewives, saleswomen and -men, a scuba instructor, secretaries, laborers, a prostitute, university students, teachers in both lower education and technical colleges, and many others.

I should emphasize that, though this belief is thought to be a bit bizarre by many, for the most part the people whom I interviewed were well-adjusted members of society, holding jobs and fulfilling their roles within their families. Many of the Americans whom I knew in Taiwan thought the idea of fetus ghosts was the stuff crazy people's dreams were made of. What they did not know is that many of them were close friends with people who had told me of their experiences with fetus ghosts.³

Belief in fetus ghosts is best known in Japan, where it is quite prevalent; but it has also been documented in Korea (Tadesco 1999) and in a Buddhist congregation in Hawai'i (Hughes 1999). I have also spoken with people from Hong Kong, Spain, and Russia who told me that their countries have this belief.⁴ I also met one woman who, in the early 1990s, went to a private Catholic high school for Colombian immigrants in the United States. She told me that the nun who was teaching them warned her class that if they had abortions, the spirits of the fetuses would come back to haunt them.⁵

The most informative interviews tended to depend on *guanxi*⁶ in that they depended on my friendship with that person or with her or his friends. Failed attempts to arrange interviews were usually the result of the unlikelihood of future relations, which meant that the people in question had less reason to spend the time and energy telling me about their experiences.

One example of a failed interview occurred in August 1998 when I went to a Buddhist temple in Muzha in the suburb of Taipei city. I had guessed from the advertisement that the religious master might be reluctant to meet with me, so I went directly to the temple. The temple was really just an apartment with, I am told, an area for prayer set up on the second floor. When I got there, the Buddhist master's wife was not going to let me in. We were talking through the intercom

at the entranceway when one of their clients arrived and she had to open the door. When I had explained my project, she said, "We don't deal with fetus ghosts." Somewhat surprised, I responded, "Um, but I have this advertisement." I showed her the advertisement with her husband's picture prominently displayed above a list of things he was able to do, one of which was to help appease fetus ghosts. She paused for a long moment and then said, "Well . . . he used to let the magazine that made the advertisement use his picture, but he never dealt with fetus ghosts himself."

Another example is a temple in Taizhong. I had a friend call to obtain its address. When she called, the temple representatives refused to give her its location, insisting that they pick her up at the train station. Because she did not have a chance to tell them why she was calling, one can presume that they used this approach for every caller. Thus, my interviews tended to be with temples that had less to hide. In general, the more exploitative Daoist and Buddhist masters were less likely to be willing to be interviewed unless I had connections with one of their better-paying customers. Judging from the costs of other Daoist and Buddhist services that contacts have told me they paid, it is probable that many people are charged more than the average amounts I will cite here.

To protect the identity of those I interviewed, I use fictional names for everyone except people who have published religious tracts or short stories about fetus ghosts—namely, Cai Wen, Lin Jianyi, Xu Qiongyue, and Zhong Xing. In two cases I have also changed identities further by altering their occupations and the cities where they lived. Even in these cases, however, I preserved the information, such as their religious backgrounds, that I thought was relevant to the belief itself.

Another preliminary point to mention is that of language. In three of my interviews I had assistants translate from Hokkien (Taiwanese) to Mandarin Chinese. I conducted all of the other interviews in Chinese and without assistants. Also, I taped two of the Taiwanese interviews so that I could have them transcribed into Chinese. On the whole, however, I found that the tape recorder made the people being interviewed uncomfortable, and it was only when the interviews were supposedly over and I had stopped taping that they began to give me more interesting information. After this, I did not use a tape recorder but took notes either during or immediately after the inter-

views. Because of the sensitive nature of this research, I tried to let the person being interviewed direct the course of conversation. While I might ask questions to clarify a point they had made, I relied on a casual conversational model of interviewing. In many cases interviewees raised issues I would not have thought to ask about, and I believe this style of interviewing made them more comfortable and candid about their personal lives. My interviews with religious masters were more formal, and I asked more specific questions. I was, however, careful to let them speak their minds about issues I had not raised.

Being faced with women talking to me about their abortions was a moving experience, the emotional impact of which I cannot begin to convey. Many people have asked me why I chose such a morbid topic. In fact this is fairly easy to explain. Here was a subject that had not been addressed before for Chinese or Taiwanese religion, an issue so fundamental to my country of origin that some have compared it to a modern civil war. In addition, it is a perfect junction for religious and gender studies, and it is integrally connected to economic change and modernization.

One woman in her seventies who was visiting Dragon Lake Temple with her children and grandchildren had a more interesting explanation, however. When she asked me why I had chosen this topic, I gave her the rather innocuous response that because we did not hold this belief in the United States I thought it was interesting. She looked at me for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders and said: "Yes, but why you and not someone else? Maybe you were aborted in your last life. That would make sense. Perhaps this was your fate."

Abortion and the Spirit World

Faye Ginsburg has outlined the American antiabortion movement's use of fetal images beginning in the 1970s, pointing out that those images became an important and effective part of the pro-life campaign in the United States (Ginsburg 1989: 104). Imagine if this movement could not only use images of infants to represent aborted fetuses, but could portray them as speaking directly to the parents of their sadness and suffering in a way that would be taken seriously by those who have had or are thinking of having abortions. Stories of fetus ghosts do just this.

The maladies that the haunting fetus spirits (*yingling*) cause are similar to those brought about by other kinds of discontented ghosts that inflict sickness, injury, or death. Yet *yingling* are distinctive in a number of unusual ways. In exploring the significance of the haunting fetus we can learn how women and men come to grips with abortion and how this affects their relationships with their spouses, lovers, children, and other family members. The appeasement can be financially exploitative, yet it provides important psychological comfort to those involved in the choices that lead to abortions as well as a much needed means to project personal and familial feelings of transgression onto a safely displaced object, thereby bringing underlying tensions to the surface and providing a means of working out those problems.

The appearance of fetus-ghost appeasement in the mid-seventies seems to have been inspired by the Japanese practice. Its substantial growth in the mid-1980s seems to have reflected the legalization of abortion in 1984, which in turn led to a great deal of discussion in the press of abortion and related issues concerning morality. Therefore, a study of this belief also provides us with a means of monitoring the ways in which religious conceptions, as well as traditional concerns with sexuality and self-restraint, family structure, and morality, are shifting to meet the new demands of a modernizing Asian society.

The belief in fetus ghosts provides a perfect focal point to examine both religious and gender theory, and to investigate the ways in which the two overlap. An examination of who is held responsible for abortion, and of who is affected by the *yingling*, provides a view of conceptions of parenthood, morality, and the heavens. In examining Chinese perceptions of the spirit world we not only further our understanding of gods and ghosts but also explore the cultural belief systems that lie behind everyday interactions of the living.

In conducting my fieldwork I discovered that there are in fact two different kinds of fetus spirits in Taiwan, neither of which has been systematically studied. The first, which I call fetus ghosts (*yingling*), is the primary focus of this work. The second, a literal translation of which would be "little ghosts" (*xiaogui*), I call fetus demons because they are associated with evil. Although both are fetus spirits, the issues surrounding the two are so different that they are quite clearly two separate ghosts. Fetus ghosts exemplify a concern with guilt and redemption, and are highly personal because people pray on behalf

of a ghost of their own flesh and blood. Fetus demons are concerned with what might be called more traditional black magic and arise when sorcerers use evil spells using the spirits of other people's dead fetuses. While those appeasing fetus ghosts are primarily female, those dealing with fetus demons are male; whereas those appeasing fetus ghosts are interested in healing the wounds of both their families and their ghosts, fetus demon worship allows for the expression of greed, loathing, and revenge.

Belief in fetus ghosts and fetus demons provides an excellent point of comparison for contrasting images associated with abortion and the very different ways in which people react to these issues. With fetus-demon sorcery, there is a pronounced lack of emotional attachment to the spirit, and the images of abortion and death as evils that can be manipulated for one's own benefit serve to highlight people's fears and hopes in a way that highly contrasts with most fetus-ghost appeasement. This is useful not only in exploring other aspects of conceptions of fetus spirits, but also as a point of comparison helping us to better understand the belief in fetus ghosts.

A Historical Overview of Taiwan

It is hard to fathom the extent of change that has occurred in Taiwan in the last century. The Dutch occupation of Taiwan from 1624 to 1662 was perhaps too long ago to have a lasting effect, but the Japanese occupation from 1895 to 1945, the huge influx of mainlanders fleeing the communists in 1949, and the American military presence from 1947 to 1975 have all had a profound influence on contemporary culture in Taiwan. Also, American aid and foreign political pressure, as well as exposure to foreign music, movies, and travel, have influenced Taiwan dramatically. I will not attempt to explain why these changes came about—that would be a book, or several books, in and of itself. But just to outline some of the differences that have taken place in Taiwan in the last century: Taiwan's population rose from a little over three million in the early 1900s to seven times that number in the late 1990s. Many people currently in their mid-fifties had arranged marriages, and I have talked with people in their thirties who told me that their mothers were "sold" into marriage against their will. Although matchmaking continues to be strong today, to marry a woman against her will is now illegal. At the beginning of the cen-

tury it was common for families to consist of five to ten children, whereas now couples usually have only one or two offspring. In the 1950s the majority of the population lived in rural areas, whereas most Taiwanese today live in urban areas. The average life expectancy has more than doubled in this century. In the early 1900s many people did not attend high school, and a very small percentage attended college—women were not allowed to attend university at all. By the late 1980s, a little over 30 percent of all high school graduates attended college or university, and almost half of them were women. A generation ago, most women worked in the home and most men worked on the family farm. Now, the majority of unmarried women and men work outside of the home and to some degree have their own income, with a corresponding greater autonomy from parental control. Twenty years ago it was universally expected, if not always the case, that a woman would remain a virgin until her marriage. Whereas once a woman was expected to marry her first boyfriend, dating is now common, and, especially in urban areas, this often includes sexual activity, although this is still contested ground.

Abortion was legalized in 1985 and, while it is hard to know the degree to which this actually changed abortion rates, it gave state legitimization to the practice and brought the issue to the forefront of public discussion. The press, though still censored behind the scenes, has far greater freedom than ever before. Martial law was lifted in 1989, free presidential elections were implemented in 1996, and people who had once been imprisoned for their ideas are now writing popular fiction or running for government office. It is in this setting that belief in fetus ghosts emerges as a serious religious force.

The Religious Setting

Steven Harrell (1974) suggests that religious doubt is more prevalent in Taiwan than one might expect. While I do not debate this point, a good deal of this argument depends on where one draws one's lines. For instance, Harrell repeatedly cites the Chinese saying "half belief and half doubt" (*ban xin ban yi*), emphasizing the nonbelief in this phrase (Harrell 1974). It is true that this is a common phrase and expresses doubt, but the people who use the term more often than not shape their actions around religious beliefs. Indeed, Harrell

acknowledges that *ban xin ban yi* includes the fear that "there are enough examples pointing to [religious and superstitious practice] working that one ignores them at one's peril" (Harrell 1974: 86).

I maintain that when people shape their actions around the possibility that a belief might be true, it is for all intents and purposes belief, albeit a qualified one. Accepting this definition, the vast majority of people in Taiwan believe in ghosts. The few who say that they do not think that ghosts exist quickly add a qualifier, often fearfully waving their hands back and forth for emphasis, "But I'm not saying that ghosts do not exist!" lest they anger a spirit with their statements. In other words, there are those who doubt but few who do not believe. Belief in fetus ghosts is less universal than belief in ghosts in general, although it is still quite common. Fetus-demon sorcery, as an offshoot of a fairly heterodox belief, is indeed small—yet it exists.

Sometimes people agree on the broader prescribed beliefs of ghosts and gods while disagreeing on the details. Much of Taiwanese religion is very flexible in beliefs, so no two temples, or indeed people, share the exact same conceptions of their religious participation (Jordan 1972: 28; Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 212). Thus it often happens that certain practices, or sometimes entire belief systems, are questioned. In the cases of fetus-ghost appeasement and fetus-demon sorcery there are some agreed-upon outlines, but on the whole the ways in which one appeases such spirits, and the true nature of the ghosts, are often left to the interpretation of the particular religious master appeasing them. This contestation can be seen in the images of fetus ghosts, the fees, and the wide array of gods and goddesses that are appealed to for appeasement.

Of course, such contested interpretations are not limited to the belief in fetus ghosts and fetus demons. Religious practices in Taiwan are very open to interpretation and diversity, and as a result there is often a fine line between whether or not an individual's religious interpretations or actions will be deemed to be true by others. Jordan and Overmyer (1986) give a wonderful example of the ways in which support within a sect can be given and withdrawn. After a spirit medium delivered a divine revelation that other temple members should contribute money for him to buy a truck (with divine instruction on where to get the best deal, no less) the spirit medium lost credibility and was dismissed from the temple (Jordan and Over-

myer 1986: 169–171). Margery Wolf provides an account of a woman who was diagnosed as having mental problems rather than being a shaman, as she claimed (M. Wolf 1990).

I once witnessed a similar example of contested religious interpretation at Dragon Lake Temple, a fetus-ghost temple in Miaoli. A pregnant woman in her mid-twenties fainted because of the heat and her husband looked like he was about to panic. A short stocky man in his mid-forties started to shout at her as if she were possessed by a fetus ghost. The first time he shouted she didn't wake up. The second time he addressed the fetus ghost that he assumed was causing this problem, screaming in a high-pitched shriek, "Go back to the temple, you don't belong in this woman!" and she looked up at him groggily. By this time, of course, there was a crowd of gawkers. The woman was clearly displeased and embarrassed that this man had drawn so much attention to her. After a while the crowd wandered off. So as not to lose his moment of glory the man shouted, "It's OK, you can go now," for the most part to people's backs as they were walking away.

Now does this count as possession or not? Clearly the man thought so, but the onlookers were openly laughing at him. Certainly, most of the people at this temple believed in fetus ghosts or they would not have been there. What they did not support was the stranger's claim to having the power to exorcise the spirit, though one might guess that had the master of the temple done the same thing it would have been taken as a legitimate exorcism.

On a larger scale, one can find many people who believe in ghosts and gods but reject the idea that aborted fetuses can become ghosts. As I will discuss in the following chapters, the images of fetus ghosts vary tremendously among believers, and the practice of appeasing these spirits is enmeshed in an ongoing debate concerning religious orthodoxy, morality, and modernization.

Gendered Realities of Religious Belief

Abortion is so prevalent in Taiwan that one scholar has asserted that Taiwanese people "regard abortion as a natural part of life" (J. Wang 1981). This statement, while accurately portraying the frequency of abortion in Taiwan, misleadingly suggests that there is no emotional investment in the process. Women in Taiwan have abortions, not because it is an easy choice, but because they are placed in a structural

position that within their culture makes bearing that particular pregnancy difficult. Reasons might include being a single mother, the pressure to bear a male heir (combined with the fact that the fetus is female), economic difficulties, and many others. When faced with these dilemmas, a woman, her husband, or her husband's parents might decide that she should have an abortion. There is a wide range of societal and psychological pressures involved, however, and it would be a mistake to think of abortion in Taiwan as a routine matter. Confucian filial responsibility to continue the family line, the Buddhist belief that it is sinful to kill any form of life, and prevalent Taiwanese conceptions of women as nurturers all lead to personal anxiety and familial disharmony when an abortion occurs.

This study is in a sense a continuation of Shahar and Weller's (1996) attempt to examine gods and ghosts that do not fit in with the far more studied bureaucracy of the spirit world. Not surprisingly, in leaving the world of bureaucratic hell one also leaves a hypermasculinized image of the hereafter in favor of establishing women's domain in conceptions of the spirit world.

As Brigitte Bapandier has suggested in speaking of the symbolic meaning of religious washing, both of newborns to welcome them to the world of the living and of the dead to ease their passage to the next world, the presentation of femaleness in Taiwanese religion can be seen as a "commentary on femininity and on the social role of women, which appears between the lines" (Bapandier 1996: 117). Traditional associations with women, death, and pollution are fundamentally linked to sickness and decay (Ahern 1975a, 1988; Sangren 1996; Seaman 1981). As Steven Sangren has suggested, religious belief has differing emotional meaning according to one's gender—both by virtue of women's and men's differentiated gendered life experiences and because of their different structural positions within their patrilineal lines (Sangren 1996: 152–153).

We see this with women and fetus ghosts, as for the most part women take the blame for the spirits of aborted fetuses. Yet, in an important way, fetus-ghost appeasement gives women the opportunity to right these perceived wrongs and to reinforce more life-affirming images of women's religious roles. If women are blamed for the infant spirits, so are they credited with restoring order and supernaturally based familial harmony.

Along the same lines, Emily Ahern asks the important question,

"Are the ideology and practice of death in Chinese society different, depending on one's gender?" (Ahern 1988: 164). She goes on to ask: "Could it be that buried within these practices and symbols of birth, marriage, and death is another view of how these experiences interrelate, one that is derived from women's own quite different experience of life and that is stamped with a quite different message?" (Ahern 1988: 164). Approximately 70 percent of those appeasing fetus ghosts are female, and because the meaning and experience of abortion are ultimately experienced and perceived differently according to one's gender, the above-mentioned questions form a founding basis for this book. Although I do not want to discount male participation in this practice, there are many cultural factors in Taiwan which place abortion and fetus-ghost appeasement in women's domain.

It is rare for a religious belief in Taiwan to cater specifically to women. As Huang and Weller have noted, although women have traditionally been in charge of day-to-day prayers for the ancestors, the fact that these forefathers are their husbands' ancestors means that such religious practice "offers little more to women than housework does" (Huang and Weller 1998: 387). Huang and Weller go on to explore a fascinating women's religious movement, the religious group Ciji, and the ways in which women participating in this organization strengthen their status as women by working toward social good in an urban environment that is increasingly evincing a "market-oriented morality" (Huang and Weller 1998: 392). Appeasing fetus ghosts has many of the same resonances, but on a more private level in that many of the women appeasing fetus ghosts believe themselves to have become a part of what they see as a greater social moral decay. In appeasing their aborted fetuses, they strive to redefine themselves as moral beings by making up for their perceived sins. Because women now have greater access to their own financial resources than they once did, an increasing number of temples are willing to perform such duties to meet this new demand.

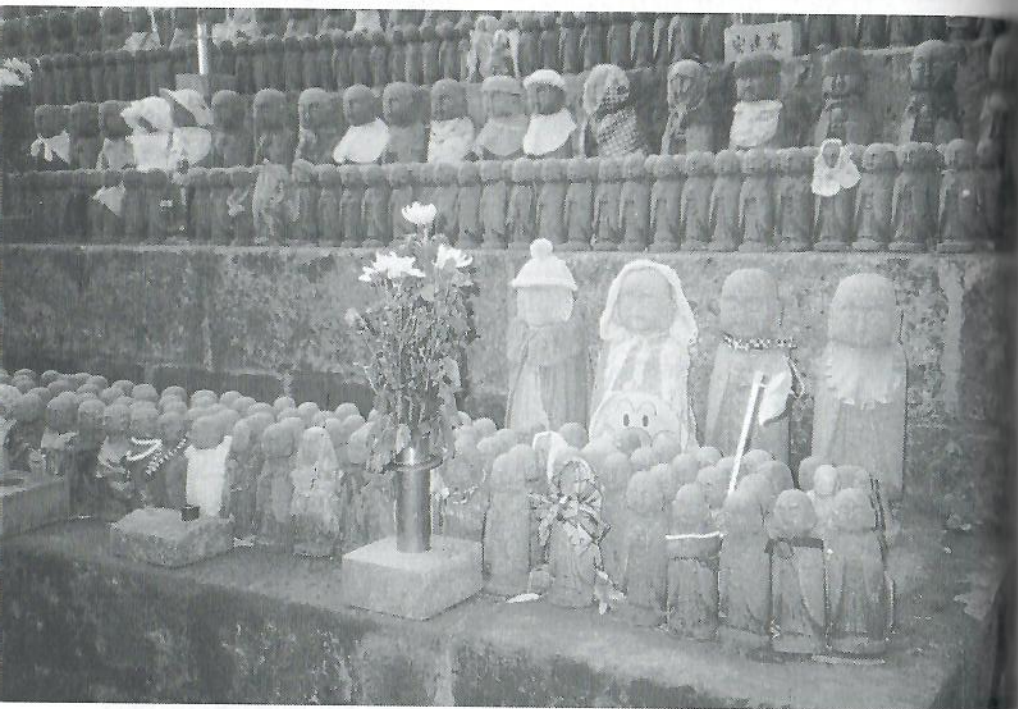
Yet an equally important question in this study is how men feel about abortions and belief in fetus ghosts, both of which are commonly thought to be in a woman's sphere of influence. Men often have a large say in the decision to have abortions, and the negative connotations of the act in both religious and social spheres certainly influence them in profound ways as well.

The Haunting Fetus

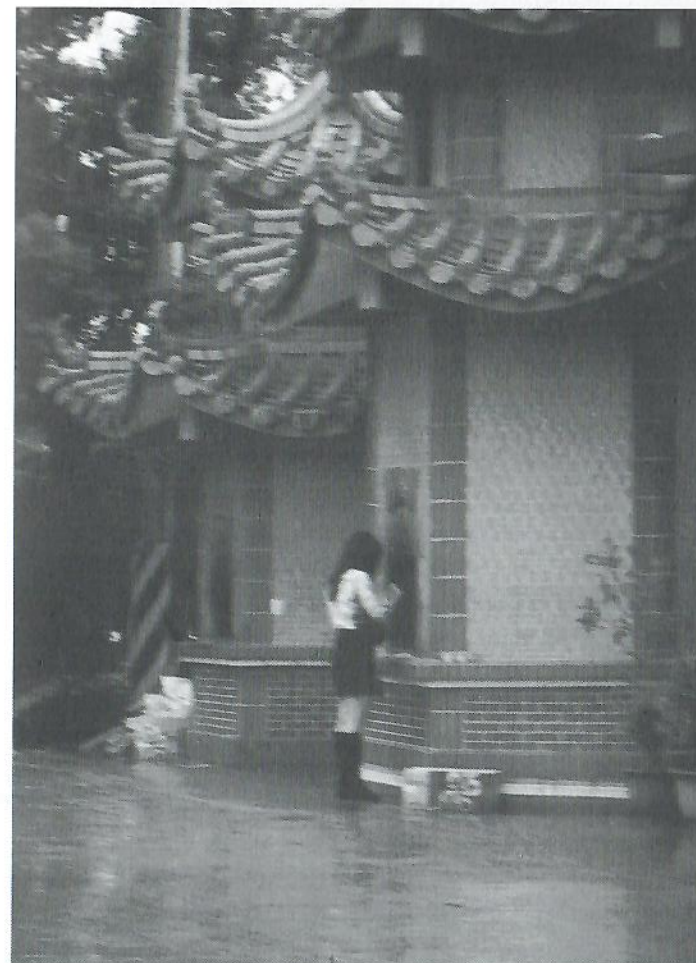
In the following chapters I will examine this "new" ghost in Taiwan. As we trace the reintroduction of the belief from Japan to Taiwan in the mid-1970s and 1980s, we witness an intriguing story of greed, healing, religious adaptation, and modernization. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, newspapers in Taiwan began to react to this new trend, voicing the assertion that practitioners of fetus-ghost appeasement used images of the *yingling* to frighten women or exploit their guilt to make money, a criticism that has been echoed by Helen Hardacre (1997) in her work on the practice in Japan. This is in many cases a valid criticism, but such an approach often overlooks the full complexities of this new religious practice.

Instead of focusing on women's structural or symbolic weaknesses as an end point for analysis of gender relations in Chinese culture, several scholars have examined areas in which women have traditionally been seen to be marginalized or even victimized, and have explored the ways in which these same women have used such structural conditions to their advantage. This has been shown in the familial and community setting (Ahern 1975a; M. Wolf 1968, 1972, 1974) and in religious belief and taboo imagery (Ahern 1988; Furth 1994). It is true that images of fetus ghosts are sometimes used to convince women to pay large sums of money.⁷ Yet I argue that fetus-ghost appeasement also provides important services. This belief gives psychological comfort to women who have had abortions. It also creates an outlet that can be used to vent unspoken resentment toward one's family members, allowing for the expression of grievances ranging from the abortion itself, to intergenerational conflicts and marital tensions.

I should conclude this introduction by emphasizing that this is a record of some of the strongest emotions of the human race. While researching the belief in fetus ghosts it was impossible for me to remain a detached observer at all times. If I am successful in the following pages, while including things that might be bizarre or even humorous to an American reader, I hope that I have also conveyed the beauty, the sorrow, and the hope that I have witnessed in relation to this belief.



Hase-dera Temple, Japan. Jizō statues wearing garments hand-knitted by the people appeasing the ghosts.

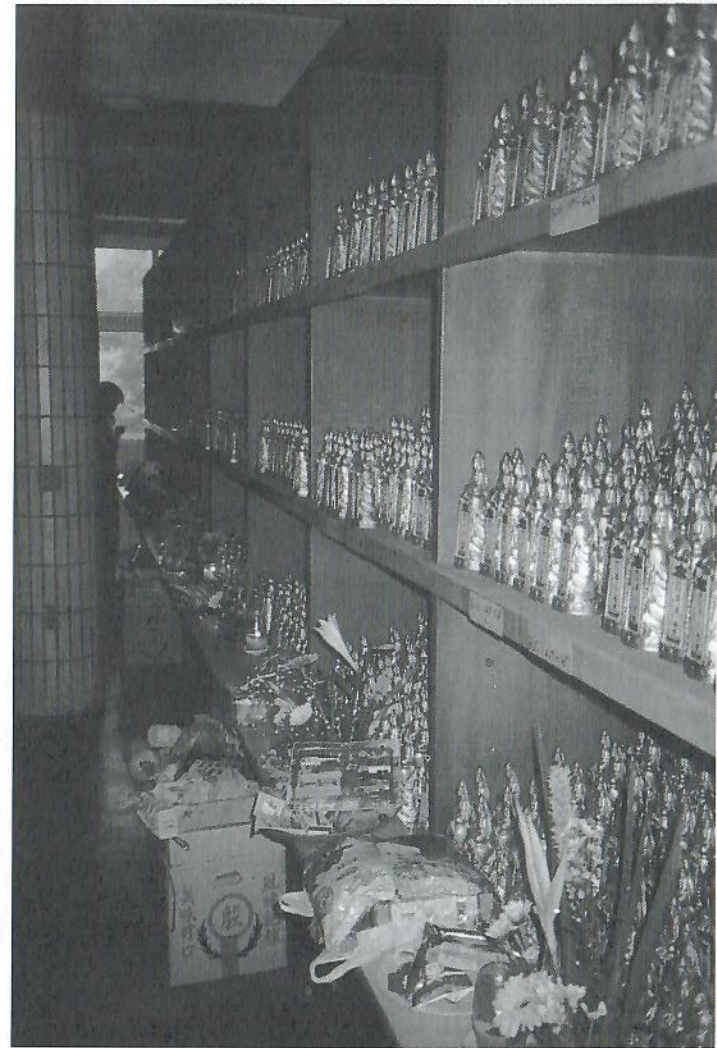


Dragon Lake Temple courtyard. Worshiper burning money for the fetus ghosts and the gods.



Above: Dragon Lake Temple courtyard during the semiannual ceremony. Worshippers follow a Buddhist chanting group.

Below: Praying on the main floor of the fetus-ghost building at Dragon Lake Temple.



Fetus-ghost statues and gifts on the lower floor at Dragon Lake Temple.



Above: Fetus-ghost statues at Dragon Lake Temple.

Below: Dragon fountain at Dragon Lake Temple.



The cover of one of Teacher Lin's morality tracts. The drawing shows a little girl doing mischievous things because she is being controlled by ghosts.

Written and Visual Media



Outside of Ms. Xu's temple, Taipei.

IN the previous chapter I outlined six different personas of fetus ghosts and used examples from urban myth, people's own accounts, newspaper articles, and morality tracts. I now turn to visual media and other written accounts of the ghost. These accounts provide a further illustration of the diversity of portrayals of fetus ghosts. Also, as did the morality tracts I have already presented, these accounts help to shape people's views of the spirit and provide potential appeasers with conceptual frameworks of how one should deal with the ghost.

Yingling: The Movie

A movie came out in the early 1980s entitled *Yingling* (Ding n.d.). I was expecting a horror movie where fetus ghosts maimed, mutilated, and destroyed. Instead, it turned out to be a drama that set out to discourage abortion and to present conceptions of fetus ghosts and ways to appease them. In this movie the fetus ghost was by and large portrayed as a victim rather than a malevolent or harmful spirit.

The plot of the movie revolves around two women. One is an unmarried college student named Mingming who is impregnated when she is raped by her classmates. The other woman is Mingming's boyfriend's older sister, Mrs. Li. The movie begins when Mingming sneaks out of her house to join her boyfriend, Wang Kai, at a disco. Wang Kai is greeted by a female friend and goes to dance with her. Mingming, left on her own, is given drugged chocolate by two classmates, who later lure her to their van and rape her.

Later, a group of students is sitting in a sex-education class including Mingming, Wang Kai, and the two students who raped her.