



The Invisible and the Visible Communicating with the Yin World

In the absence of the institutional propagation of religious knowledge, how do people form an understanding of the yin world (*yinjian*), the Chinese spiritual realm where ancestors, spirits, and ghosts dwell, in contrast to the yang world (*yangjian*) where we live? Based upon fieldwork conducted in 2005, 2006, and 2010 in rural Chaling, Hunan, this article explores how the annual observance of the Ghost Festival, the time when souls are said to return to the world of the living, instills beliefs about the yin world. Elaborating on spirit mediums through whom villagers communicate with deceased family members, it examines how spirit possessions shape and are shaped by villagers' understanding of the yin world. Traditions and assumptions engrained in local life enable a dialogue between the dead and the living, while the depictions of the afterlife through spirit mediumship embody images and visions of the yin world, making the invisible visible.

KEYWORDS: yin world (*yinjian*)—internalization—embodiment—spirit medium—reproduction of tradition

The fifteenth day of the seventh month is colloquially called Zhongyuan 中元. For several days, people hang ancestors' pictures or use wooden tablets, and offer wine and food in front of them in the mornings and evenings. On the fifteenth night, they set out melons, fruit, and other offerings. This is called "giving ancestors a farewell banquet" (*jian zu* 饯祖). They burn paper clothing and money outdoors, worship, and see them off. FU and TAN (2002), chapter 6

FROM THE inception of modern scholarship on Chinese culture and society, Chinese popular religion and its crucial rituals of ancestor worship remain a lasting concern. Most studies focus upon delineating either the system of religious symbols, or the relationship between this system and social structures. Yet I wonder, in the absence of a formal ecclesiastical structure and the institutional propagation of religious concepts, why and how rural people believe in these religious symbols and ideas. What are their experiences and processes of negotiation and acceptance? How do people verify and reconfirm religious ideas as meaningful in everyday practice? How do people form, for instance, visions of the otherworld, or yin world (*yinjian* 阴间), the Chinese spiritual realm where ancestors, spirits, and ghosts dwell, in contrast to the yang world (*yangjian* 阳间) where we live?

Geertz suggested the need to explore the complex and everlasting process by which religious symbols shape and are shaped by the human experience of the world:

The notion that religion tunes human actions to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order onto the plane of human experience is hardly novel. But it is hardly investigated either, so that we have very little idea of *how*, in empirical terms, *this particular miracle is accomplished*.

(GEERTZ 1973, 90, emphasis added)

Hence the questions I address are how the represented, socially constructed symbolic system, and visions of the yin world in particular, are internalized in individuals and groups. How do the processes of internalization integrate daily life and religious experiences as a whole in contemporary rural China?

With these questions in mind, in 2005, 2006, and 2010, I conducted intensive fieldwork in the rural areas of Chaling (茶陵), a southeastern Hunan 湖南 county bordering Jiangxi 江西 Province. An underdeveloped agrarian county with a pop-

ulation of 594,000, Chaling was my husband's home town, and all of his relatives lived in villages.¹ As my topic, contemporary popular religious practices, was both politically and culturally sensitive, my in-laws and their networks provided rare access for me to enter local life and the community. While conducting this research, I lived with my parents-in-law and was deeply involved in family and village life, both as a daughter-in-law as well as an ethnographer.

This article focuses on how the annual observance of the Zhongyuan Festival (*zhongyuan jie* 中元节, also called *guijie* 鬼节, Ghost Festival), the time when souls are said to return to the world of the living, instills beliefs about how to envisage and communicate with the yin world. It introduces the rituals and practices of spirit possession through which villagers communicate with deceased family members and examines how the practice of local spirit mediums shapes and is shaped by people's shared understanding of the yin world.

Such practices are mastered and internalized unconsciously and carry meaning that is "transmitted in practice, in its practical state, without attaining the level of discourse" (BOURDIEU 1977, 87). The problem for the ethnographer is how to capture in the field and then represent in writing these practical, often bodily, routines and shed light on their productive meaning that lies beyond discourse or the consciousness of local villagers. My methodological inspiration came from folklorist SKLAR (1994), who suggested using the researcher's own body and bodily intelligence as a point of access for the study of cultural practice as corporeal knowledge. Drawing upon her bodily experiences in working with corporeal cultural expressions and practices, especially religious experiences, Sklar proposed a form of participant observation called kinesthetic empathy, namely, "the capacity to participate with another's movement or another's sensory experience of movement," and "a skill involving bodily memory and bodily intelligence." Close corporeal imitation rather than merely distanced visual observation in fieldwork, she argues, "can provide clues to experiences that are usually considered to be inaccessible. It can open avenues toward understanding the way cultural knowledge is corporeally constituted" (SKLAR 1994, 14, 15). Although religious practices and experiences in Chaling are not solely corporeal knowledge, Sklar's suggestion nevertheless opens ways to consciously reflect on ethnographers' fieldwork experiences and explore their methodological potentialities.

What I endeavor to capture and represent in this article, therefore, are villagers' feelings and experiences that are beyond full consciousness or articulation through the lens of my feelings and bodily experiences of imitation and participation in living and working together, by being intensely involved in village life. As a Chinese brought up in a medium-sized city in western China, for me, Chaling's village life is both familiar and strange. My identity as the daughter-in-law not only engages me in everyday social relations and responsibilities, but also provides me with a natural position in local life, much better than does the label of ethnographer, which is meaningless for villagers.² "Do as they do," the maxim of my fieldwork, offers me the most revealing way to feel, to understand, or even to embody local views. My ethnographic narrative consequently is colored by subjective experience

and feelings. I am using my position as an insider not to say that I understand the local culture better, but because I am part of a physical regime that is itself part of the world of belief. Drawing on deep participant observation and kinesthetic empathy, this article features my personal engagement with local life.

SPECIAL GUESTS: INVISIBLE BODIES

Compared with the conviviality of other yearly celebrations in Chaling, the atmosphere of the seventh lunar month was a bit tense, and I could sense there was a special caution when people spoke or acted.³ Villagers said that the yin world was celebrating a one-month break and all souls, that is, ancestors and wandering ghosts, were allowed to briefly visit the yang world. People were busy observing the “halfway point of the seventh month” (*qiyue ban* 七月半, the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month), hosting their ancestors. As souls in the yin world were present in some way, cautions and fears flickered now and then.

People told me that before the 1950s, celebrations would start from the first day when every lineage welcomed their ancestors back (*jie gongji ma* 接公叽嬷, “welcoming ancestors”) into their lineage halls where each family would take turns to offer meals (*xiafan* 下饭) until the lunch of the fifteenth day.⁴ During the 1950s, celebrations became shorter and simpler, and remained so until recent years, when more elaborate celebrations have again become the norm. As there was no lineage hall in Anzhou village where I lived, people invited ancestors to their own houses. Depending on the size of the kin group, the invitation date was flexible, usually falling sometime around the twelfth day. Because my mother-in-law lived with my second brother-in-law, she invited our ancestors to their shared main hall on the evening of the twelfth day and offered three meals on the thirteenth. She also suggested that I offer one day’s three meals as she did for I had never done this before. Each of my brothers-in-law offered one meal on the fifteenth day.⁵

On the sixth day, the market day of nearby Lingfang (聆舫) township, I began to see people carrying large paper boxes passing by my door (FIGURE 1). My mother-in-law told me that these people must have lost family members or close relatives within the last year and the boxes they carried were packed with paper-made life necessities, such as clothing, domestic appliances, and cars. These families had to invite their ancestors back by the eleventh day. On the twelfth day before 11 a.m., family members and relatives gathered in the room where the deceased passed away. They carefully closed all the doors and windows, killed a duck, dripped its blood onto the boxes and burned them. This process was called burning new clothing (*shao xinyi* 烧新衣) and was intended to send daily supplies to the recent dead. The family kept all doors and windows shut until the smoke had dispersed naturally, thus preventing other ghosts from robbing their ancestors of the supplies.⁶

When I accompanied my mother-in-law to the market town for the next gathering on the ninth day, villagers crowded around several kinds of stands selling incense, paper money, firecrackers, ducks, and a variety of paper objects, such as



FIGURE 1. A woman carries two paper boxes and packets of money paper. (All photos by author.)



FIGURE 2. A stand of paper boxes.



FIGURE 3. The inside of a paper box: clothing and a bath towel.



FIGURE 4. Villagers buy packets of spirit money.



FIGURE 5. The two tables for souls: the inside for ancestors, and the outside for ghosts. The center of the wall facing the opened front door is the domestic altar.

clothing, jewelry, and daily appliances. Like most people, we did not need to buy the large boxes and hence merely got the basic set: some paper money, incense, firecrackers, and a duck (see FIGURES 2, 3, and 4).

On the morning of the fourteenth, a hot early August day, I awoke at 6 a.m. and walked to my mother-in-law's house to *xiafan*. Walking along the village road in the early morning, I saw through every open front door a square table in the center of the main hall under the domestic altar (*shentang* 神堂), on each of which there was a wooden ancestral tablet, an incense pot, an oil lamp, and some bowls.⁷ These were for making offerings to ancestors. Clearly, every family had invited their ancestors. Yet without exception, outside of the front door, on the right, there was a lower square table with bowls and another incense pot; these implements were for the outside, unattended ghosts (FIGURE 5).

When I arrived at my mother-in-law's house, she had made a pot of hot tea and bought some buns, a common food for breakfast. As I had filmed her inviting ancestors and offering three meals the day before, I felt that I roughly knew what to do. Actually, all the ritual steps in three meals were identical except for the food: buns and tea for breakfast, ten dishes, rice, and wine for lunch, and cookies and wine for dinner.

My mother-in-law helped me prepare the tables, two high square tables joined together in the main hall and a lower one outside. On the side near the domestic altar of the high tables, there was an oil lamp, a stack of paper money, a can to be



FIGURE 6. Amid the smoke of incense and firecrackers, food is offered to ancestors.

used as an incense pot, and a wooden ancestral tablet facing the front door. All of these items she moved from the altar on the invitation day. We placed three bowls and three pairs of chopsticks on each of the remaining sides and on the outside table. Then we divided the buns onto three plates, two on the inside tables, one on the outside.

I picked up eighteen sticks of incense and lit them on my mother-in-law's kitchen stove.⁸ Moving back to the main hall and standing in front of the tables facing the wooden tablet, I bowed three times and put the incense into the pots on the tables and domestic altar, three sticks in each. Walking toward the front door, I bowed three times and placed the incense into two cans hung on the doorframe. Standing in the front yard and facing the outside road, I bowed three times. A neighbor passed by, smiling and greeting me: "You are doing *xiafan* yourself?" "Yes, I'd like to try," I replied, and inserted three sticks into a small hole in the ground. Holding the remaining three sticks, I returned to the kitchen, bowed three times, and placed them in a can on the stove. Walking back to the main hall, my mother-in-law instructed me, "It is time for the tea." I then poured some tea into each bowl on the tables. "The oil lamp and the firecrackers," she reminded me again. I lit the oil lamp, set off a short string of firecrackers in the front yard, and stood aside (FIGURE 6).

The ancestors were supposed to come at this moment. Some people were talking loudly on a television show playing in the bedroom, and two preschoolers, my niece Meijiao and nephew Shihuan, were romping around, though my mother-in-law constantly warned them not to touch the benches surrounding the tables or

stay on the threshold: “Don’t disturb your ancestors or block their way!” My sister-in-law was chatting with a neighbor in the front yard. Explosions of firecrackers burst out every now and then—other people were doing *xiafan* as well.

Meijiao looked hungrily at the buns on the tables and kept asking “Are they finished?” “Not yet, they’ve just sat down!” my mother-in-law replied seriously. After a while, she asked me to add tea, and I poured another round of tea into each bowl, and waited to the side. Except for avoiding touching the benches or standing in the doorway, people continued their activities. The main hall was as noisy as usual, or more precisely, it was as if ordinary guests were being hosted. The only difference was that these guests were invisible.

After about ten minutes, my mother-in-law called the children, “Come and do a *bai* (拜). [May the ancestors] bless you to live one hundred years and are good at school work” (*baoyou ni bai bai sui, hui dushu* 保佑你百百岁, 会读书).⁹ Meijiao and Shihuan came over, naughtily and clumsily, and each folded hands and bowed three times toward the high tables, that is, doing *bai* (FIGURE 7).

After their *bai*, I picked up a stack of paper money, burned it in front of the tables, some inside and then outside, and set off another string of firecrackers to send them off. The breakfast portion of *xiafan* was thus completed. Pouring out some tea on the ground from each bowl and putting the rest back in the pot, I collected the bowls on the high tables, then washed and placed them upside down on the tables. Children immediately climbed on the benches, each taking a bun and



FIGURE 7. A little boy does *bai* toward the invisible ancestors during *xiafan*.

eating hungrily. I went to the outside table, poured out all the tea on the ground and then took the buns back. After cleaning all the bowls, I sat down, eating the buns on the plate with other adults.

The lunch offering was more grand. As I could not handle the old-fashioned wood stove, I was exempted from cooking, and my mother-in-law prepared ten delicious dishes, including chicken, pork, fish, tofu, and some vegetables. “But it is still your *xiafan*,” she confirmed, “as long as you burn the incense.” At noon, I did the same thing as at breakfast, bowing, burning incense, lighting the oil lamp, and setting off firecrackers. I first offered wine, then washed all the bowls and put rice in them, and later added another round of rice, so the process lasted longer than the breakfast. The food smelled so appetizing that Meijiao repeatedly asked about the guests, “Are they finished?”

After lunch, my mother-in-law asked me to help her to make money packages (*bao* 包). We cut the large sheets of money paper into small pieces and divided them into stacks. At the market I saw specially formatted envelopes (FIGURE 8) but we simply wrapped up each stack with another piece of paper money. Using the wooden tablet for reference, my mother-in-law guided me in writing the addresses of my husband’s late father and grandparents. She also asked me to address some for her parents in her own name. My husband, who did not return and played no part in the celebrations, as a rule, was the sender. Close ancestors receive more packages but the number that every dead person receives is even, which, she explained, ensures carriers easy delivery. “How about the duck blood?” I recalled that we had bought a duck. “Oh, I’ll kill it for the dinner and drip the blood onto them,” she replied, “They said that it makes the money tax free in the yin world.”

When I went back to my first brother-in-law’s house, he was making money packages as well. As an elementary school teacher, his handwriting was good, but he preferred to use address labels printed out from his computer: “This looks much clearer and neater” (FIGURE 9). Except for occasional help with the cooking, making packages is, it seemed to me, the male villagers’ only duty in the observance.

The dinner offering was more like afternoon tea with only cookies, fruit, and wine. I repeated the same procedure as before and shared the cookies and fruit with others after it. Mother-in-law killed the duck, heated up the leftovers from lunch, and we had another delicious meal.

When the outside got dark and cooler, as usual, neighbors went out, and sat down casually in their front yards, chatting freely. My in-laws are easygoing people, and the summer evening chats in our front yard often lasted several hours. I usually joined them, chatting, listening, and asking questions. They told me that the next day was the day of package burning (*shaobao* 烧包) and, very often, it would rain, the so-called “package burning rain” (*shaobao yu* 烧包雨). After midnight, sure enough, it began to rain slightly.

The fifteenth day was overcast. As it seemed it was going to rain again, around 3 p.m. my in-laws, along with several neighbors, decided to burn the money packages. This time I joined my first sister-in-law. She placed a bowl of buns on a high table in the main hall as usual, lit up incense, *bai*, and stuck them in different pots,

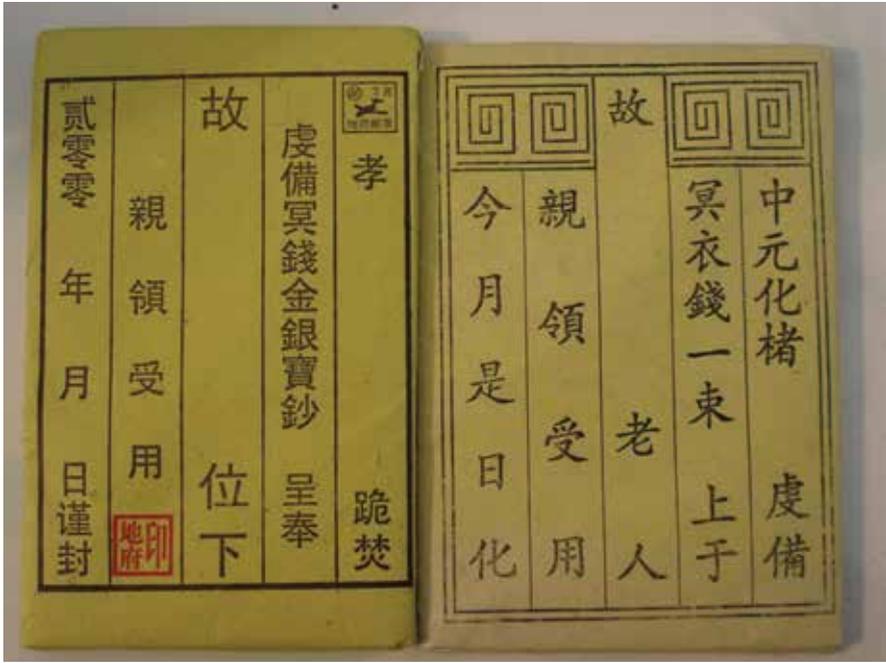


FIGURE 8. Two types of specially formatted envelopes for paper money packages.



FIGURE 9. Money packages with printed address labels and stained with duck blood.

inside and outside, and burned paper money in front of the high table. After a while, she put the buns, a bottle of wine, the money packages that her husband had made, a long string of firecrackers, and a bunch of incense onto a big bamboo plate. Then she asked Mingzai, her son, to carry them to the back of her house, the bank of the Mi River (洙水) that ran along the village.¹⁰ Setting off a long string of firecrackers in the main hall, she picked up two bundles of dry rice straw prepared beforehand in the front yard (where her husband was playing cards with neighbors) and followed her son to the riverside.

Neighbors (mostly housewives) came one after another. Greeting and chatting with others, each family spread the money packages on a rice straw pad laid out on the ground, carefully grouping them for different individuals. Lighting up the packages and incense, my sister-in-law bowed toward the packages, inserted the incense on the ground, held up the buns for a while, poured out all the wine on the ground, and set off the firecrackers (FIGURE 10). After making sure that every package was completely burned, everyone returned home. Almost at the same time, firecrackers burst out here and there. A cloud of smoke and ashes enveloped the whole village. Rites conducted in individual houses for several days finally surfaced in a public space, giving ancestors a grand, collective send-off (FIGURE 11).

When I returned to my mother-in-law's house, the low table outside the door had disappeared; the wooden tablet was already back on the domestic altar. The celebrations were over. We had a delicious dinner together hosted by my second brother-in-law.

After the dinner, when it was just dusk, my first brother-in-law suggested we go home. On our way back, I noticed that almost all the houses had closed their doors, including our neighbors who were usually fond of chatting on summer night. My brother-in-law told me, "They say tonight there are a lot of ghosts outside who are collecting and counting money!" He and his wife then closed their door around 8 p.m. and went to bed soon after.

Sitting in front of the window in my room, overlooking the Mi River, I jotted down notes and thoughts that came into mind, imagining the various souls outside, who were searching, picking up their money and gifts, and fighting. It was quite dark and silent. There was no light on this eerie, moonless night. Occasionally, dogs barked in the distance. I was thus initiated into the world of rural life, into a world where the two realms of yin and yang are closely interrelated.

As a Chinese ethnographer with an atheist education from childhood, I felt I was in a somewhat different time and space with a different sense of reality and imagination. For me, the world in which several days' drama-like festive observances had been communicated was too far away from my own experience to verify its actuality, yet for the villagers, this world, being clearly part of their overall world view, was so familiar that it constantly mingled with their daily lives. Bourdieu once stated that "belief is thus an inherent part of belonging to a field.... One cannot really live the belief associated with profoundly different conditions of existence, that is, with other games and other stakes, and still less give others the means of reliving it by the sheer power of discourse" (BOURDIEU 1990, 67,



FIGURE IO. Burning paper money packages for ancestors.



FIGURE II. A village enveloped in the cloud of smoke and ashes of burning paper money.

68, emphasis in original). If one considers Chaling's local life as a field, the beliefs of the yin world were obviously not something imposed from without, but deeply rooted in the cultural and social conditions of existence, and closely tied to the generative structure of local life, or to use BOURDIEU's term, the *habitus*, "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (1977, 78). As an embodiment of visions of the yin world, performances of the visit of invisible ancestors in the seventh month turned the imagined world into reality in every detail by its ritual construction of time and space, thus instilling and reproducing these ideas in people's minds and bodies.

Initiated at this significant moment in local seasonal rhythm, about six months after the lunar New Year, I witnessed and participated in the communication between yin and yang, which recurs in different festival forms throughout the year. Not only do traditional Chinese festivals closely relate to agricultural and cosmological alternations, but they also mark a special temporal and spatial configuration that the yin interacts and communicates with the yang (TEISER 1989, 206; AIJMER 2003, chapter 21).

DOMESTIC ALTARS AND GRAVEYARDS: THE FESTIVAL CALENDAR

What I performed during *xiafan* (hosting)—burning incense and paper money, *bai*, and setting off firecrackers—was just part of one crystallized instance that epitomized villagers' routine interactions with the yin world on different occasions. These form the annual calendar of festivals, which I group into two types by the spatial center involved: domestic altars or graveyards.

Major festivals center on domestic altars. These are the lunar New Year (*chunjie* 春节), the Duanwu Festival (*duanwu jie* 端午节), the "halfway point of the seventh (lunar) month," and the Middle Autumn Festival (*zhongqiu jie* 中秋节). Although the above four festivals each involve different observances, all are reunions in two respects. The first reunites people with ancestors and the spiritual world through *bai* and offering incense, paper money, and food, usually conducted by housewives, as the hosting that I performed in *xiafan*. The routine is to offer three sticks of incense for each of the following places in the house: the domestic altar, the front door, the front yard, the stove, and the back door (if one has one). The incense offered in the listed locations are, respectively, for ancestors, heaven (*tian* 天), earth, the stove goddess (locally called *siming niangniang* 司命娘娘, Lady Director of Destiny), and unknown troublemakers (*xieshen* 邪神, deviant deities).¹¹

The second is that they reunite living family members and relatives by sharing meals on square tables under domestic altars. The New Year celebrations are the clearest example. People working outside return home and enjoy reunion dinners (*tuanyuan fan* 团圆饭) with family members on the eve of the New Year. From the first day of the new year, villagers pay visits and return visits among kin, relatives, neighbors, and friends, greeting each other with "Happy New Year," which is called *bainian* 拜年, literally, *bai* to extend New Year greetings. *Bainian* between kin involves hosting (*qingke* 请客) and returning feasts (*huanxi* 还席) by turns,

including visits that transcend one village. People thus spend the holiday season busily in taking part in feasts from one house to another, as hosts or guests. Hosting and participating in feasts renews and reinforces social relations and networks, whether these be ties of blood, marriage, business, or friendship. The feasting rounds therefore mark the beginning of a new social and cultural cycle. Although the other three festivals do not involve renewal on such a large scale, people who work in nearby cities would return if possible and have reunion meals with their family members. Married brothers, like my in-laws, host meals for each other by turns as they do during the New Year.

Reunions and visits are not limited to the living but, as AIJMER (2003, 155) notes, also extend to the dead. Villagers communicate with ancestors not only through domestic altars but also by visiting graves. Three times a year, every family visits their ancestors' graves: the eve of the lunar New Year, the festival of Qingming 清明 (Festival of sweeping the graves), and the *shiyue Zhao* 十月刖 (The Zhao offering in the tenth month).¹² Visits during the New Year are like *bainian* in the yang world, villagers told me, as the deceased also celebrate the New Year in the yin world at the same time. Some informants explained that the other two visits are for putting up and taking down mosquito nets for ancestors, for they always fall in the late spring and early winter (NAQUIN 1988, 45). Although varying in meaning, activities in the three visits are basically the same. The visits involve offering food, cooked meat, and fruit, bunches of incense, stacks of paper money, strings of fire-crackers, rice wine, and sometimes an individual ancestor's personal favorites, such as cigarettes or special dishes.

Seen in this way, maintaining relationships in two realms—among the living and between the living and the dead—is a crucial concern of annual festival celebrations. Festivals centering on domestic altars mainly reinforce connections between the living, without forgetting to contact those in the yin world by incense. Festivals engaging in graveyards focus on renewing ties between the two worlds. Structurally speaking, however, both the New Year and the seventh month represent something in between, though in different ways.

The New Year, the most important festival in Chinese life, represents a combination of both reunions under domestic altars and at surrounding gravesites. It fits well with the overall celebration scheme by renewing every possible aspect of life. Celebrations during the seventh month, on the other hand, offer an interesting twist. This is the time that the deceased actually pay return visits. At this time, the spatial center is still the domestic altars, but those who occupy places of honor are not the living but the dead, the invisible bodies of ancestors, though married brothers usually take turns to host feasts after they have entertained special guests.¹³ In this regard, celebrations in the seventh month not only signify another combination similar to the New Year after exactly six months, but epitomize the basic way of communicating with the yin world, namely, hosting feasts enveloped in incense smoke.

“It is in the dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured according to the mythico-ritual oppositions that one finds the form par excel-

lence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the em-bodying of the structures of the world,” BOURDIEU (1977) argued, “that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enable to appropriate the world (89).” He then illustrated insightfully how houses, structured under basic generative schemes of a society, engrained people’s world view through daily and ritual interactions between their bodies and living space (BOURDIEU 1977, 89–95). In this regard, Chaling’s domestic altars and graveyards, the centers of all festival celebrations, symbolize perfectly the intertwining relationship between the yin and yang. Located in the center of local dwellings, domestic altars represent the linchpin of quotidian life and are witness to the continuation of everyday routines; at the same time, as the location where bodies offer incense and *bai* in ritual transformations, they transcend temporal and spatial separations, reunite the living and the deceased, and bridge the yin and the yang. As physical evidence of the deceased, graveyards similarly offer a tangible trace to grasp and interact with the otherworld. The yin world, sensed through incense, *bai*, offerings, and hosting (*xiafan*) in inside (domestic altars) and occasional outside (graveyards) everyday interactions, manifests itself as it both resembles and differs from everyday life. Yearly festival practices, encoded with the basic generative structure of local life and seasonal rhythms, hence reproduce the habitus, and condition and shape how people envisage the yin and its relationship with the yang world.

POSSESSED BODIES: ASKING *MEIYE*

During the seventh month, the time of year when the yin and yang are the closest, ancestors are not merely invisible guests. They can manifest themselves in possessed bodies.

The full treatment of Chaling’s spiritual mediumship is beyond the scope of this article. Centering on mediumship practiced in the seventh month, here I will only sketch out the basic picture to examine how it influences people’s visions about the yin world and what kinds of ideas are at play on these occasions.

There are two kinds of spirit mediums in Chaling: amateurs and professionals. The former are normal villagers who can be possessed by spirits, yet they are liable to the control of the yin world only in the special temporal and spatial configuration of the seventh month. During the seventh month, some families, especially those who have recently lost members, might try to contact their ancestors in their homes through practicing “shaking ancestral tablets” (*dian zupai* 颠祖牌). Gathering in front of a domestic altar in a family’s main hall, various people, such as family members and neighbors, volunteer in turn to hold that family’s ancestral tablet on their shoulders and walk around, attempting to be possessed by souls. Only a few people can succeed and those who do suddenly fall into a trance, throw away the tablet, and speak in the voice of a particular ghost. Those witness to this then ask them various questions about the soul’s life in the yin world, and test them with family secrets that are beyond the entranced person’s knowledge to see whether they are frauds or not. Those entranced cannot wake up unless someone touches

them. Once someone has succeeded in being possessed the news spreads quickly in the village, attracting many bystanders. Most of those entranced, whether men or women, have little or no education. The souls they can call down are not limited to their ancestors or acquaintances.

This fascinating practice impressed my husband during his childhood in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although the practice continues in Anzhou, some of my knowledgeable informants from other villages said that not every village had this tradition.¹⁴ I did not hear of any successful cases during the seventh month of 2005, but in 2006 my in-laws told me that an older woman of around fifty years of age was possessed by a man's soul (not an acquaintance) and many of her answers surprisingly accorded with that man's character.¹⁵ In 2010, I witnessed such an occasion, within which a relative of my husband (a retired timber worker) easily raised the soul of my late father-in-law. The dialogue between the raised soul and my in-laws ran smoothly for more than two hours, mainly asking his impression of the current visit and testing his knowledge of new family affairs, both of which were popular topics in these kinds of extraordinary dialogues, and I will talk more about this later. But as this relative should have been familiar with most of the family affairs that people questioned, it is perhaps not very surprising to see that he gave some correct answers.

More common and more skillful are the professional spirit mediums, who are generally referred as *meiye* 梅爷 (Lord Mei) and generally come from other villages than their patrons. Consulting these mediums is called asking *meiye* (*wen meiye* 问梅爷), though different *meiye* rely on two different kinds of tutelary spirits: General Meishan (*meishan jiangjun* 梅山将军; see FIGURE 12) or the Third Lady (or the Three Ladies; *san guniang* 三姑娘; see FIGURE 13). One *meiye* told me that General Meishan was actually three brothers (one three years old, one five, and another seven) and the Third Lady was the third of four sisters (the first three were in their twenties, while the fourth was a teenager). They were not real brothers or sisters, but gods worshipped in the Hall of Fanluo Immortals (Fanluo Xian 范罗仙) in Yantang (严塘) Township.¹⁶ Different spirit mediums thus call down and pray for assistance from different aspects of General Meishan or different ladies, each of whom also has a distinct character.

The *meiye*'s routine services usually include inspecting homes (*chajia* 查家), telling fortunes, writing magical charms or making curative water, and acting as a protective godmother for children (*jiming* 寄名), all of which are beyond the power of amateur spirit mediums to provide. During the seventh month, both professional and amateur mediums can *diaohun* 调魂 [raise souls].¹⁷ *Chajia* means that spirit mediums send their tutelary deities to visit clients' houses, identify reasons for disturbing problems (such as frequent illnesses or misfortunes), and offer remedies. *Diaohun* means that their tutelary deities go to the ghosts' world and seek out souls at their clients' request; the souls in question then possess the spirit mediums and speak through their bodies with their relatives.

During my fieldwork, I visited six spirit mediums in six villages scattered in two townships, four in Lingfang Township, relying on General Meishan, and two in



FIGURE 12. The statue of General Meishan in Fanluo Immortal Hall.



FIGURE 13. Statues of the Three Ladies enshrined in the Fanluo Immortal Hall, each one wearing layers of clothing offered by worshippers.

Yantang Township, relying on the Third Lady. Ranging from their late twenties to their fifties, all of the mediums were women with little or no education, married with children, and their practices provided the main income for their households. Villagers who had consulted them differed in their opinion of which *meiye* were efficacious (*ling* 灵) and which were fraudulent, and mostly, they went to those in the same township but not the same village. But the three most reputable were all in Lingfang, attracting people from other townships, the county town, neighboring counties, and even other provinces.¹⁸ Interestingly, two of them were born in Anzhou village, and one of them had been my in-laws' neighbor before her marriage.¹⁹

Each of the mediums began to practice within the past ten years, usually after a serious illness, falling into a trance, or behaving strangely at some point during the seventh month (see, for example, DUBOIS 2005). The souls who possess them announce their spiritual identities, trying to force them to become their mediums (which they term *dizi* 弟子, disciple) by imposing an illness or strange behavior. Professional and amateur spirit mediums thus differed in the souls who possessed them: the former by General Meishan or the Third Lady, the latter by the souls of ordinary deceased people. Being a professional spirit medium is not considered respectable in Chaling. Owing to pressure from family or neighbors, many initially refused to be mediums, yet later yielded to what they described as unbearable or constant bodily pain and mental anguish. Their family would then seek out a master who could perform a ritual called *shangkun* 上捆, which binds the deity and the spirit medium together.²⁰ If the ritual cures the medium, it signifies that she has successfully established a relation with the deity and can start to practice. One material result of the ritual is a sacred chair, on which *meiye* sit throughout their practice. This kind of small wooden or bamboo chair is common in local families, but the sacred chair is forbidden from any other person's touch for fear of offending the deity.

All *meiye* practiced in their own houses where a room was used especially for consultation. Usually in one corner in that room there is an altar table with an incense pot, an oil lamp, and other ritual paraphernalia for making charms and curative water. In addition, there are stacks of paper money, bunches of incense sticks, and bottles of beer and rice wine brought by clients. The sacred chair is in front of the table or at one of its sides. Facing the chair, there are lines of small chairs, stools, and benches for clients. The surrounding walls are usually full of red pennants expressing thanks by patients who have been healed, testimonial banners from godchildren, and different paper-made god images.

All *meiye*, it seems to me, can easily enter or leave an entranced state at will, which villagers vividly called *shangma* 上马 (mounting the horse) and *xiamā* 下马 (dismounting the horse) respectively. Though varying from one *meiye* to another, *shangma* usually involves bowing toward the altar, offering incense and paper money, and using lit incense and paper money to purify the sacred chair by circling around it. Very often, only a few minutes after they sit down on the chair some simple bodily movements are manifested, such as covering the face for a

while, yawning, or jogging their feet up and down. Then they fall into a trance. This entails subtle changes in voice, tone, facial appearance, bodily gesture, and language style, all of which vary from one spirit medium to another. In this state, some of them took on strange facial expressions or bodily movements, while others were not too different from their normal appearances. General Meishan is male, and therefore when they possess spirit mediums, the latter become heavy smokers and drinkers. Like little boys, mediums possessed by Meishan are naughty, sometimes childish, and fond of joking with their clients.²¹

When they practice *diaohun*, after deities find the soul whom clients seek, their general demeanor changes again, acting as the requested person. After deities send off the soul, *meiye* are back to their deities' styles. In consultation sessions during the seventh month, therefore, *meiye* constantly change back and forth between their own tutelary deities and various souls while they are in an entranced state. Many clients confirmed that when *meiye* are possessed by a particular soul, they show some unique personal character traits of that person, such as the voice and habitual bodily actions.²² *Xiama*, or sending off the deities, is easy as well. *Meiye* merely offer incense and paper money for chairs and altars and are back to their own selves, talking and behaving like normal villagers. Mediums do not have fixed schedules of sessions, rather their sessions depend on their own chores and clients' random visits. They can do *shangma* and *xiama* several times a day. Unlike those amateur spirit mediums "shaking ancestral tablets" who are selected and possessed directly by souls, professional *meiye* are chosen and hence always mediated by their tutelary deities in communicating with the yin world. As deities are more powerful than people's souls, *meiye* seem to have more access to the yin world than amateurs, yet both of them, or more precisely, their bodies, are chosen as windows for people to glimpse the mysterious world.

For the whole of the seventh month, the *meiye*'s consultation rooms, especially those of the more reputable ones, were packed with clients, mostly waiting for *diaohun*. Trucks carrying groups of people from neighboring counties parked in their front yards. Consultation sessions began from the early morning, and after one or two hours' lunch break, continued to the late afternoon. According to my observations, I classified clients into roughly two groups. Most of them came for concerns about the newly dead, especially parents or those who suffered violent deaths. Others experienced family crises, illness, or misfortune, hoping to discuss with their ancestors and pray for blessings (AHERN 1973, 235; EMMONS 1982, 189).

In general, *diaohun* begins with seeking souls. The clients, mostly several people in the same family, *bai* and offer incense and paper money on the altar table and then sit down in front of the *meiye*. They then provide the soul's name, time of birth and death, family address (usually village and township names) to her.²³ The deity then starts to look for the soul in the yin world. Unlike the cases in Hong Kong and Singapore, no *meiye* in Chaling ever described detailed scenes along the journey (ELLIOTT 1955, 137; POTTER 1974; AHERN 1973, 228–35). Sometimes, *meiye* asked for more information about a dead person, such as height and appear-

ance for easier identification, or talked with other ghosts encountered on the way for guidance.

Although lacking detailed descriptions of scenes on their journey, I did witness some *meiye* take advantage of this opportunity to delineate basic information about the yin world in the authoritative voice of her possessing deities. People's life-span determined the duration of their stay in the yin world before reincarnation, one *meiye* claimed, and those who lived no more than sixty years would be there as long a time as in the human world. Those who lived longer than that would be there for only sixty years.²⁴ They cannot, of course, raise souls that have reincarnated. Along with relatives and acquaintances that have passed away, most souls lived freely in communities similar to their former villages, though those who died young and violently would be punished in prison for three years, and only after that could they receive items previously burned for them. But all are allowed to visit their home during the seventh month, especially before the fifteenth day. I heard many of these same ideas from various villagers during funerals or on other occasions. More importantly, as part of the basic views of the other world, they not only provide the premise for people to come to consult *meiye* from the very beginning, but also make possible subsequent communication.

It usually takes only a few minutes for the deity to bring up the soul in question, and she or he then speaks through the *meiye* in the first person. From then on, what took place with *meiye* or amateur spirit mediums follows the same general pattern.

Some *meiye* move toward their clients, even holding their hands throughout the conversation. In the beginning of the conversation, clients often asked some specific questions to test whether the soul is fraudulent or not. Most common testing questions are about numbers, thus intending for exact answers. For example, how many children did one have? How many money packages did one get last or this seventh month? Some people asked about the way or the place of death, especially violent deaths about which family members had doubts. Correct answers would lower clients' suspicion and lead them to engage in more relaxed, emotional conversation with the souls—sometimes clients and *meiye* both burst into tears. Many admitted later that—especially when the souls had given unexpectedly correct answers—they felt as though they were really talking with their dead family members. Even if the soul could not pass this initial test, the clients would continue the conversation, though always keeping an eye on further testing. But in most cases, some answers were right, while some not, and many clients remained vigilant throughout the conversation, careful not to reveal too much information. Later they discussed whether the mistakes and answers accorded with their situations as a whole to evaluate a *meiye*.

After the initial test, conversations between souls and their family members proceed as question-and-answer sessions, though almost any question can be raised as a testing one. The most common topics relate to three groups of concerns. The first group centers on visits and hosting in the seventh month, the most important annual interaction and communication between the yin and yang. Before the fifteenth day, clients asked whether they had received the money packages from

last year, how many they want this year, and whether they need anything special. Very often, the souls would respond concretely, asking for shower towels, reading glasses for gambling, motorcycles for doing business, and so on. After the fifteenth day, the questions would be whether or not they returned during *xiafan*, whom they saw in the house when they visited (especially if there were new family members, such as new babies or newlyweds), and whether they received the packages burned on the fifteenth.

The second group of questions focuses on the soul's life in the yin world. Some people asked the souls of those who died of illness: "Have you been cured? How is your health there?" Some responded that they had been healed, while others were still being treated. Many wondered about their professions and their life there: "What are you doing there? Have you gotten married? Who are your neighbors?" Most souls specified their way of life: teaching, doing business, becoming a village head, living with relatives and acquaintances who had passed away, and so on. These could be testing questions, because villagers generally assumed that the deceased continued their worldly blood relations, professions, and friendships there. An important topic in this category is about tombs, or to use people's words, "How is the place where you sleep?" Many souls talked or complained about their living conditions, asking for planting trees for shade, installing tombstones, improving roads to the graveyards, and so forth. Villagers generally agreed that ensuring that souls are comfortable in graves was crucial for descendants' well-being, and some souls related certain illnesses or misfortunes to their discomfort in tombs and other carelessness in ritual performances.

The third group of questions concerns relationships and connections between ancestors and their descendants, which represent people's main aim of visiting *meiye* and *diaohun*. Typical questions are "Have you recently returned home? Do you know what has happened in the family?" Being testing questions, they embody crucial underlying assumptions about ancestors, about their connections with this world and the living. Local people generally assume that ancestors are responsible for taking care of and protecting their offspring, just as they did when they were alive. Regular communication through offering incense on domestic altars on festival occasions means that villagers hold that ancestors are aware of important changes in family life, such as marriages, new babies and houses, or crises, such as illnesses, accidents, and misfortunes. Dutiful ancestors should stay around their families, return occasionally without invitation in addition to the seventh month, and give a helping hand when needed.

Conversations between souls and their relatives often ended with requests and promises. People promised to burn more money or to renovate tombs in exchange for help and blessings, while ancestors promised to use saved money to buy something that their descendants desire. In addition to general help, villagers assumed that ancestors can influence two important aspects of descendants' lives through the payment of money to yin authorities: life and life-span. Very often, souls claimed that they bought lives for newly born children, especially sons, which cost a large amount of money or even their houses. In daily speech, one can also hear

people refer to some children as “bought by ancestors.” Similarly, they can extend people’s life by money.

Conversations usually stop when souls say they want to go and then leave. The *meiye* goes back to her deity’s identity, collects her service fees, and moves on to another client.

From such a brief description, whether the clients considered the *meiye* fraudulent or not and regardless of how many correct answers and mistakes they figured out, what came into play are underlying assumptions, imagination, and visions about the yin world ingrained in local life. These assumptions make it possible for these conversations to take place from the very beginning.

Meiye are peasant women whose lives are limited to their households. Thus they do not know most clients who come from other villages. Long and vivid dialogues between diverse souls and their relatives are really amazing and impressive, especially when these reveal correct information.²⁵ Such experiences were a captivating topic of summer night chats during the seventh month. Since *diaobun* is not a required practice during the festival celebrations, some people have never consulted *meiye* while others have firsthand experience or have family members who have consulted *meiye*. Most villagers debated about which *meiye* was the most efficacious and which were frauds. In my neighborhood, I only knew one man who claimed that though he had visited many *meiye* he thought they were all fraudulent.²⁶

It is intriguing to note that ideas underlying *diaobun* are quite familiar, recurring frequently in Chinese views and practices related to ancestors: they are about the relationships and continuities between the worlds of yin and yang, between life, death, and regeneration; they emphasize mutual reliance between the two worlds, especially between ancestors and offspring (AHERN 1973, 237–44; WATSON 1988, 9). Death is not the ultimate end and total disappearance, but rather a transformative continuation. Souls have maintained most, if not all, life traces including professions, family relations, acquaintances, personal characteristics, and even illnesses. To a great extent, though invisible, they are still family members up until the time they reincarnate and disappear from the direct memory of the living.²⁷

Near the end of my fieldwork in 2006, a young Taoist that I worked with had a serious motorcycle accident in which he knocked down a girl. The girl was in a coma and the young man was arrested. Villagers attributed it to his bad luck, his careless driving, and most importantly, *zuxian mao ling* 祖先有灵 (“his ancestors are not efficacious”). In the case of someone who has a narrow escape, by contrast, people would say *zuxian you ling* 祖先有灵 (“one’s ancestors are efficacious”). Apparently, ancestors’ *ling* and protection offer a ray of hope for people in crisis. As deceased yet caring parents, they are still actively involved in people’s lives for a long time.

CONCLUSION: SHAPING THE BODY AND SHAPING THE COMMUNITY

Although all the ideas *diaobun* bring into play are familiar, they are still of great significance. What is most impressive is the minutiae of everyday life in the yin world narrated by human voices, memorable yet traceless. The fleeting voices,

claiming to be from the other world and transmitted through possessed bodies, blur the boundary of life and death. These bodies and voices reify imaginations and visions about the yin world, making the invisible visible, or, to be more exact, audible. On all the other occasions, such as funerals or meal offerings in the seventh month, the yin world is merely a figurative realm existing in imagination, but lacking in detail. Yet suddenly, the yin world manifests itself in something sensible, something with tangible materiality: entranced bodies and familiar voices. I argue that it is this materiality, embodied in bodies of spirit mediums, that engraves the most indelible memories and impressions of the yin world on people's minds. The embodied yin world and the sensible materiality of the spiritual yin world, though seemingly paradoxical, lays a solid foundation for the free flow of ideas and imagination about this mysterious realm.

Immersed and engaged fully and freely in local tradition, spirit mediums' deficiency in school education and literacy, it seems to me, helps them to avoid the confusions and conflicts brought on by modern science, thus being more susceptible or more inclined to the influence of generative schemes and views that deeply underlie and structure local life. "Practical belief," Bourdieu argued,

is not a "state of mind," still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines (beliefs), but rather a state of the body.... Enacted belief, instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton that "leads the mind unconsciously along with it," and as a repository for the most precious values, is the form *par excellence* of the "blind or symbolic thought." (BOURDIEU 1990, 68, emphasis in original)

In this regard, communally shared ideas and visions of life and death, the relationship and communications between ancestors and offspring, between yin and yang, manifested in local life structures, rhythms, and practice patterns, have engrained spirit mediums from childhood, making them the most knowledgeable, authoritative, and embodied representations of the local view of the yin world. Moreover, words voiced in an entranced state, as tangible traces of the other world, offer a sense of materiality of the spiritual realm of the yin world, thus having a decisive impact on local world view and practices. In other words, spirit mediums, no matter whether amateur or professional, shape and are shaped by local traditions. On the one hand, their seemingly extraordinary bodily potency and capability is deeply rooted in their upbringing and experience of local life, in which the yin and the yang are interrelated realms that regularly communicate and meet with each other. Their entranced bodies, on the other hand, in crystallizing visions of the yin world, not only reveal how intensive the body shaping and honing can be in local traditions, but also embody the acme of yearly communications and mingling between the yin and yang.

NOTES

* I am deeply indebted to my informants in Chaling, especially Liangwen and my in-laws, though all the names of people and villages in this article have been changed to preserve their identities. I benefited greatly from the suggestions of Nathan Sivin, David Hufford,

and Dan Ben-Amos that guided my research. This research was supported by Projects of the National Social Science Foundation of China (Zhongguo guojia shehui kexue jijin 中国社会科学基金) in 2010, No. 10CSH034, as well as by the Scientific Research Foundation for the Returned Overseas Chinese Scholars, State Education Ministry (Jiaoyu bu liuxue huiguo renyuan keyan qidong jijin 教育部留学回国人员科研启动基金).

1. From the official website of Chaling government, <http://www.chaling.gov.cn/index.php?mod=part&pid=52> (accessed 1 April 2012).

2. Before first long-term fieldwork conducted in 2005, my stay in Chaling never extended beyond one or two weeks.

3. The following description about the festival and ritual procedure is mainly based upon my experience in 2005, with changes observed in 2010. In 2005, I lived with my first brother-in-law.

4. In Chaling dialect, *gongji* is the colloquial word for *zuxian* 祖先 (ancestors), and *ma* means grandmother. *Ji* 叽 is a common suffix for forms of address. For example, dad is *dieji* 爹叽; see HUNAN SHENG CHALING XIAN DIFANGZHI BIANZUAN WEIYUANHUI (1993, 644).

5. As I had no separate house, I was to offer meals in my mother-in-law's home. My first sister-in-law invited ancestors to her own house on the fourteenth evening, so on the fifteenth, the breakfast offering was at my second sister-in-law's main hall (shared with my mother-in-law), and the lunch offering was at my first sister-in-law's.

6. People had different interpretations about the blood. Some said that only houses stained with animal blood could have efficacy (*ling* 灵), that is, departing souls would be guaranteed to find and get them, and other ghosts would not dare to rob them. Others held that the blood marked those items as tax-free in the yin world. In 2010, I noticed that instead of a closed room, the *shao xinyi* ritual usually took place in the yard in front of the house and was presided over by the Taoist or Buddhist ritual specialist who had been in charge of the funeral of the dead person.

7. Upon awaking, villagers immediately open their front doors. Unless there is no person at home or nearby, front doors remain open until they go to bed at night.

8. Although she lived with my second brother-in-law, the two had separate stoves and kitchens.

9. As success in the national university entrance exam is the most important way to improve rural children's life and social status, studying well is a common expectation for parents.

10. In 2010, I noticed that most families had begun selecting sites nearer to their houses for burning money packages, such as the roadside near their houses, although the riverbank was usually said to be easier for souls to pick up packages and leave the village.

11. Villagers generally agreed about the meaning of incense burned at domestic altars and stoves but differed on that in other locations. Some insisted, for example, that incense on the doorframe, regardless of front or back, is for door gods, while that in the front yard is for heaven.

12. According to FU and TAN (2002, chapter 6), worship performed in ancestral halls on the first day of the tenth lunar month was called *zhao* offering (*zhaoji* 刱祭).

13. As souls are free during the seventh month, villagers avoid going to or passing graveyards.

14. An eighty-five year old neighboring woman told me that she saw this kind of practice in her childhood in her natal family as well.

15. They also mentioned that another Anzhou woman, who was then working in Shenzhen (深圳), Guangdong (广东) Province, suddenly fell into trance while walking on the street.

16. The temple's name might come from four ladies' different surnames: Fan 范, Luo 罗, Xiao 肖, and Gao 高. But in the temple, I saw statues of only three goddesses, plus General

Meishan. Another *meiye* suggested that the seven sisters and brothers referred to the Seven Monsters of Meishan (*meishan qi guai* 梅山七怪) in the popular novel *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演义 (“The story of conferring titles on gods,” attributed to Xu Zhonglin 许仲琳 (?1567–1620). Although the *meiye* had not read it, this novel has been circulated through various popular genres, including a recent TV version. Furthermore, Meishan, as some scholars contend, is the name of a subculture area with unique religious practices in central Hunan (mainly Xinhua 兴化 and Anhua 安化 counties); see, for example, LI (1997). Its relation to Chaling’s General Meishan is not clear yet. On the other hand, in Hong Kong and Singapore, one of the spirit mediums’ tutelary deities was called the “Third Lady” or the “Third Aunt”; both referred to the Buddhist goddess Guan Yin 观音; see ELLIOTT (1955, 137) and EMMONS (1982, 199). But in Chaling, no villager linked the Third Lady to her, and a separate hall was dedicated to the statue of Guan Yin in Fanluo *Xian*. Except for the youngest lady, the three elder ones can possess people.

17. Services and techniques vary from person to person. Those who call down the *san guniang* can raise souls all the time. Different *meiye* charged slightly different fees for each service, but all were very cheap, roughly ranging from 1 to 15 yuan (\$0.125 to \$2). *Diaohun*, for example, the most expensive one, was only around 10 yuan (around \$1.25) for one soul in 2005; see POTTER (1974) and EMMONS (1982).

18. Their reputations have changed over time as well. As I was told in 2010, the death of one *meiye*’s husband from cancer clearly damaged her reputation.

19. Both of them began to practice after getting married, though one behaved strangely, dancing, singing, and running all over Anzhou village for half a year before her wedding. Another told me that she continued her practice during her pregnancy; see also POTTER (1974). No *meiye* allowed me to take photos or videos when they were in a trance, nor were they particularly forthcoming at other times. I have interviewed two *meiye* and observed their consultation sessions several times, but much deeper investigations are still needed.

20. No *meiye* that I interviewed wanted to tell me who performed the rite of *shangkun* for them. My informant Liangwen, a master paper sculptor, who is responsible for paper sculptures offered in religious rituals and funerals, said competent carpenters could do this, and Taoist Master Dingsheng told me that he could do it, had he not lost the necessary scripture.

21. One *meiye* told me that her tutelary Meishan was so young that he was unwilling to raise souls when she began to practice. The deity cried when a competing spirit medium derided him for lacking of ability and started this service thereafter; see also POTTER (1974, 220).

22. In AHERN’s (1973, 242) cases in Taiwan, possessing ghosts did not show unique personalities.

23. The information required varies slightly from one *meiye* to another.

24. Some informants held that the time that souls stayed in the yin world was exactly the same as their life span even if they lived longer than sixty years.

25. Unlike cases in Taiwan (AHERN 1973) and Hong Kong (POTTER 1974), most souls that *meiye* raised were not from their villages (both natal and resident). As they had few chances to know every client’s life and family affairs, their ability to correctly disclose some private information was striking.

26. He was around sixty and with basic education.

27. AHERN (1973, 236–37) is insightful in pointing out that ancestors cease to exist in the yin world for the living once memories of them fade. Chaling’s assumptions about life-span and a soul’s stay in the other world might represent an attempt to quantify memories with the important number of sixty in Chinese cosmology.

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