

# The 'New Funeral Culture' in Taiwan

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## INTRODUCTION

“From ancient times, as described in the *Book of Rites*, our Chinese culture has attached the greatest importance to the *Dao* of cultivation of life and attending to the ceremonies of death. The rituals of death and mourning in particular are deeply embedded in the people’s hearts and lives. Looking at today’s society in Taiwan, with regard to funerary and mourning practices, there are pluralistic traditions, rich in variety, nothing is too strange. This has led to ignorant and persistent ceremonies, ceremonies neither sorrowful nor happy. Such ostentatious and wasteful displays are seen everywhere, extravagant and corrupt practices have become the norm. Therefore, we must work towards mourning and funerary practices that are true ceremonies of respect, those that are frugal, simple, and sincere...”<sup>1</sup>

Death calls for rituals. Rituals can be viewed by the State or by religious authorities as “true ceremonies of respect”, codified and performed in the proper way; or they can tell a story that considerably departs from the creed that is supposed to inspire them. How is death dealt with in today’s Taiwan? How does the time-space of codes and rituals provide for “proper ceremonies”, and does it succeed at all in doing so? Most notably, what do these reforms tell us about the living? Do these reforms reflect how the Taiwanese see themselves or whom they aspire to be? Though this paper can

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<sup>1</sup> Taipei Municipal Government Funerary Services Office: “End-of-Life” Services Handbook (*Taipei shi binzang guanli chu bian. Tianian fuwu shouce*, 2001), page 23.

suggest only provisional answers, it might help us to grasp the way basic human experiences are narrated, ritualized and recorded in contemporary Asian societies. As will be explained later on, this exploration, in the context of recent transformations in Taiwan's funeral culture, will concentrate on only one aspect of the disposal of the dead and of the consequent mourning process, i.e. it will deal with the "columbarium", a pagoda for storage of crematory ashes as well as for urns containing bones exhumed during the "second-burial" ritual.

Since the publication of the classic works *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society* (ed. Freedman, 1970); *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (ed. Wolf, 1974) and *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, (ed. Watson and Rawski, 1988)<sup>2</sup> Taiwan has experienced not only rapid economic growth, but also the development of democracy and civil society, which in turn has led to a religious renaissance. These economic, social and cultural transformations have even affected funeral, mourning, and burial rites and practices, so that scholars and the media in Taiwan now speak of "the new funeral culture" and have begun to analyze the reasons for and ramifications of these developments. The list of secondary works in Chinese is long and growing.<sup>3</sup> As far as I know, there is nothing in English about death, mourning, or funerals in Taiwan except for Marc Moskowitz's 2001 book *The Haunting Fetus*, about the popular practice of appeasing fetus-ghosts. However this book does not address ideas about death in general nor does it deal with burial rites and practices.

At the present time, "village Taiwan," with its strong lineage ties described in the above-mentioned works, has radically changed. At present, 68.65% of the population live and work in cities; the dense population in the metropolitan areas puts housing, transportation, and natural resources at a premium. Taiwan's population density is second in the world to Bangladesh. From 1940 to today, Taiwan's population grew from 7.39 million to 22,276,672, according to the Ministry of the Interior statistics. The nuclear family form predominates and family members have dispersed to live and work across Taiwan, in mainland China, Asia, and around the world.

These transformations might explain the recent change burial rites and practices, specifically in the form of the *linggu ta*, "columbaria,"

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2 The first two books in fact were based on fieldwork in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the New Territories while only two and one-half chapters in the last book address Taiwan.

3 For this short paper I have relied upon the Ministry of the Interior's *Journal of Community Development, Special Issue on Hospice Care and Funerary Service*, No. 96, December 2001 [*Shequ fazhan jikan: linzhong guanhuai yu binzang fuwu zhuanji*]; and Huang Weixian, "Research into the Modernization of Taiwan's Funeral Industry: The Case of Taipei" [*Taiwan binzanghe xiandaihua de yanjiu: Taipei diqu de lizi*] (Master's thesis, Dept. of Sociology, National Chengchi University, 2002).

for storage of crematory ashes as well as urns with the bones exhumed during the “second-burial” ritual. Historically, while most Taiwanese utilized private family plots or public cemeteries, there were always some others (Buddhist devotees, or army veterans originally from mainland China who had few if any relatives in Taiwan; or the destitute) who chose cremation and turned to the *linggu ta* traditionally run by some Buddhist temples and by the government as well. However, in the past ten to fifteen years other “new-style” *linggu ta* parks (catering to adherents of Taiwan popular religion, Buddhists, Christians, and agnostics) owned by savvy business entrepreneurs and operated by professional “funeral service directors” have amassed fortunes and are seen by some Taiwanese (and political parties) as a business investment. Taiwan’s funeral and burial services industry is estimated to be a ten billion Taiwan dollar market; competition is great and smaller family firms must fight to keep their market share in the face of large firms rich in “hardware” and “software”.<sup>4</sup>

I will compare the award-winning Jin Bao Shan on the northern Taiwan coast, (which began as a garden-park cemetery in 1977 and added an ossuary pagoda in 1987) ranked as the number one funerary service provider in Taipei by the Taipei City government in 2002, with Jia Yun Baota in southern Taiwan; describe their settings, their philosophies, and detail the multi-religious “services” each offer, including funeral insurance plans, bereavement counselors, and performance of *zhao du* rituals to assist the souls of the deceased to pass through purgatory, especially victims of violent death and “the trapped souls of unborn babies,” the latter first widely practiced in Japan.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before looking at the rise of the *linggu ta* parks in the 1990s we must review the historical background and cultural context of this recent development. Before 1949 most Chinese in Taiwan could trace their family roots to southern China and the Fujian coast; custom dictated burial in private family tombs or local community cemeteries (Christians and Muslims had their own cemeteries while Buddhists cremated the deceased and placed the urns in ossuary pagodas). A second burial of the bones of the deceased took place after seven years, often being reburied at another site. People died at home, not in hospitals and the body was kept for days as the family members undertook mourning rituals; family and friends would come to pay respects during a period of over a month. In 1951 the Nationalist

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<sup>4</sup> See Tsai Wen-ting, “Making Money off the Dead: Rosy Prospects for Taiwan’s Funeral Industry,” [http://www.sinorama.com.tw/en/search/ “making money off the dead”](http://www.sinorama.com.tw/en/search/“making%20money%20off%20the%20dead”)

government built the first public mortuary but the public was slow to utilize its services.

With the economic take-off in the 1970's not only did the standard of living increase dramatically for most people, their disposable incomes rose too, enabling more people to spend greater amounts of money on life rites such as weddings and funerals. Funerals and mourning increasingly became institutionalized and commercialized. While the end of martial law in 1986 was good for democracy and the growth of civil society, it also allowed the free growth of unscrupulous funerary companies and practices that resulted in fraud and waste. Some popular practices like karaoke and strip shows for the deceased were also introduced. As a sensationalist article in *Time* (Asia) reported, some sectors of the funeral and burial industry at one point were rife with criminal elements and cases of bribery, extortion, and intimidation have been reported. Pressure from consumers via the media and legislative representatives has resulted in visible legal and industrial reforms.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, as is the case in Japan and Hong Kong, land in Taiwan has now become too scarce and too expensive to be used for cemeteries. The trend in Taiwan is towards having more power and decision-making in the hands of local governments and each area is responsible for developing their economy; thus precious land can no longer be allotted for cemeteries. Also environmentalists hope to curb landslides that have resulted from over-development of hillsides, and to reduce the traffic jams, noise, litter and air pollution from traditional funerary practices. In addition consumer groups have voiced concerns about fraud and safety issues (fire, floods, earthquake worries) involved with the funeral industry. Thus the central and local governments have begun to regulate and "modernize" the funeral industry.<sup>6</sup>

In 1983 the government issued the "Regulations for Cemetery Facilities Management" and from the '90s issued other guidelines and held public information lectures to disseminate information about funerary reforms. But even these measures "could not keep pace with the needs of today's changing society," so that on July 17, 2002 the central government promulgated the new "Funerary Management Regulations" and the "Demonstration Plan to Improve Mourning and Burial Facilities." Since 1983 the government has promoted

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5 See Mark R. Mitchell, "Grave Stakes," in *Time* (Asia)  
<http://www.time.com/time/asia/news/printout/0,9788,129947,00.html>

6 Paul R. Katz has shown however that in other areas such as local temple culture, the current government in Taiwan, true to its championing of indigenous cultures, has stepped back from such regulating, controlling and "modernizing" policies typical of the modern Chinese state. Paul R. Katz, "Religion and the State in Post-war Taiwan," in *The China Quarterly*, June 2003, Number 174, pages 395-412.

cremation in preference to traditional burial, not only due to shortage of land and for ecological preservation; but also because the government criticizes *fengshui* as a “superstitious practice that should be reformed.” The government has promoted the wearing a simple black robe at funerals rather than the hemp mourning dress. Funeral practices to be regulated or eradicated include: the disturbance to neighborhoods caused by 24 hour recitation of prayers for the dead by ritual specialists at funerals conducted in ones’ home; loudspeakers blaring funeral music and the wailing of hired mourners; keeping the body of the deceased at home for a period of mourning; burning of excessive amounts of spirit money and other burnt offerings; funeral processions with loud gaudy trucks (“flower trucks,” *hua che*) with hired mourners that cause traffic delays and noise pollution; funeral tents set up on the street in front of the home of the deceased which block traffic and pedestrians’ movement; funeral ceremonies which include young female strippers in “flower trucks.” The keywords for funerary reformers are solemn, dignified, simple, frugal, ecological, and hygienic.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of 2001, there were 3,022 cemeteries in Taiwan for traditional-style graves of which 2,919 were public and 103 private, with Tainan and Pingdong counties in southern Taiwan having the greatest number. Cemeteries in Keelung City, Tainan City, and Taoyuan counties were nearing full capacity. Also, as of late 2001, Taiwan had 304 ossuary “pagodas,” *nagu ta* or *linggu ta*, (to store post-cremation funeral urns), [257 public, 47 private; compare with 178 total ossuary pagodas in 1993]with Zhanghua County, Yunlin County and Tainan county [central, south Taiwan] having the most. The columbaria in Taipei City and Kaohsiung City were already near to full capacity. In recent years, utilization of cemeteries has been falling while the numbers of new ossuary pagodas are increasing. As of late 2001, 18.9% of the deceased in Taiwan were buried in cemeteries while 71% of the deceased were cremated (compare with 52.20% in 1996) and their remains placed in columbaria.<sup>8</sup>

#### NEW DIRECTIONS IN LIFE AND DEATH STUDIES

Anything related to death and dying were previously taboo topics in Taiwan, but the last ten years has seen the rise of a new field of studies—“Life and Death Studies”—an amalgam of ideas from Taiwanese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Taipei Municipal Government Funerary Services Office: “End-of-Life” Services Handbook (*Taipei shi binzang guanli chu bian. Tianian fuwu shouce*, 200 1, pages 23 -4.

8 Ministry of the Interior, Report of the Office of Statistics, Week 35, August 30, 2002.

9 To mention but a few Chinese works: Bosco Lu, S. L, editor, *Life and Death Studies* [*Shengsixue*], Fu Jen University, School of Law, Department of Religious Studies, 2001; Lin Qiuyan, editor, *Life and Death Studies* [*Shengsixue*], Hongye Press, 2002; Huang Wenbo, editor, *Life and Death Studies in Taiwan*, [*Taiwan de shengsixue*], Changmin Culture Press, 2000.

There has been greater public discussion and dissemination of information about death with dignity, hospice care, writing up a legal will, living wills, organ donation, and funerary insurance. These reflect recent developments in the academic fields of health care, sociology, social work and counseling, as well as the professional funeral service industry “imported” from the US, Japan, and Europe, which always has great drawing power in Taiwan. It is astounding to see how quickly these new ideas and practices have changed public policy and private enterprise in Taiwan and are already part of the public discourse.

From a utilitarian angle, we could view this drive to promulgate Life and Death Studies as an attempt by government and religious authorities, especially the leading Buddhist institutions, to “rationalize” and “modernize” the popular Taiwanese funeral culture. Especially, to transform traditional Chinese taboos against death: It seems that Buddhists in particular hope to bring death and dying from the polluted marginal realm into “normal” daily discourse; “to be honestly faced” rather kept at a safe distance via formalistic and costly rituals. But whether Life and Death Studies will lead the Taiwanese onto paths of spiritual and contemplative inquiry rather than simply offer more commercial choices and materialistic solutions remains to be seen.

### THREE CASE STUDIES

#### A) JIN BAO SHAN ENTERPRISE GROUP:<sup>10</sup>

The Jin Bao Shan Enterprise Group includes five different companies: Jin Shan Cemetery Company; Jin Bao Shati Enterprises, Zhenji Construction Company, and Jin Bao Shan Cultural and Tourism Company.

Jin Bao Shan is located in a beautiful spot on the northeast coast facing the Taiwan Strait, with the Yang Ming mountain range behind. Founded by former civil servant Cao Rizhang in 1977 as Taiwan’s first “garden-park” cemetery, Jin Bao Shan’s motto is “Care for life, respect nature” and “provide a model of filial honor for society.” Jin Bao Shan’s mission includes the promotion of a “professional funerary service that treats you like family” as well as promoting art, religion, culture, and tourism.

It added a striking “golden” ossuary pagoda in 1987; the company claims this is the first privately operated *linggu ta* in Taiwan apart from those connected with Buddhist temples. A few years later,

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<sup>10</sup> This section relies on the information available on their website, <http://www.memory.com.tw>, and also in the promotional materials kindly given to me free of charge by the Jin Bao Shan office.

another ossuary/ash repository structure was built in the style of a modern church, called "Sunshine Park." The first floor is a space dedicated to "ritual and performance activities." Jin Bao Shan was the first memorial park to obtain the international ISO9001 service rating in 1997, the same year they began their "Life Ceremony Service Covenant," an investment plan which one plans well before death. This is a service that begins even as the person is dying, providing counseling if necessary to the individual and family, to death, burial, the immediate mourning process and continues to honor the dead on important holidays of mourning and remembrance. For the upcoming Qing Ming (Tomb-Sweeping) Festival in April, for example, Jin Bao Shan will provide free shuttle buses for their clients and also hold a ceremony presided over by Buddhist masters (for a fee however).

Jin Bao Shan boasts a panel of advisors such as artists and Buddhist masters and professionals in life and death studies, law, accounting, architecture, local government, and public relations. Works by the famed-sculptor Zhu Ming figure prominently on the site and there is an exhibition hall filled with art from the private collection of Jin Bao Shan's founder Cao Rizhang. A number of Taiwanese people formerly prominent in the performing arts, including singer Teresa Teng, are buried here, but in graves, not in the Ossuary Pagoda! Since the land is privately owned, there are still cemetery plots for sale, including Chinese half-circular tombs, Western tombstone sites, and fancy mausoleums. The price for this grand setting, elegance and luxury is high: although I could not obtain prices for the cemetery plots and mausoleums, it must be very expensive, for the prices of a single unit in the Ossuary Pagoda or Sunshine Park repository (not including maintenance and other extra fees!) range from NT\$ 100,000 to 590,000. A family site for four persons costs as much as NT\$ one million. (US\$1 equals about NT\$34).

#### B) JIA YUN PAGODA-MEMORIAL PARK

Jia Yun Pagoda-Memorial Park, located in the southern city of Jiayi, is one of the many businesses run by the Dongyue Enterprise Group.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Qiu Ruitang, who began in clothing manufacture, built up Dongyue Enterprises Group over several decades. Dongyue claims to operate companies in the following fields: direct sales, insurance, construction, advertising, information, and science and technology. They also run the "White House KTV" parlor, the "Hawaii Love Motel," and something called Dongyue Leisure and Entertainment

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11 This section relies on the information provided on the Jia Yun Baota website, <http://www.pagoda.com.tw>. Unfortunately I have not yet had the chance to visit Jia Yun Baota and compare the actual site with the website materials.

Company. Mr. Qiu has been a practicing Buddhist for over 30 years and has been long-standing Honorary Board-chairman of the Buddhist Youth League.

According to him, the top six investment choices for businesses are 1) ossuary pagodas 2) bonds 3) artworks 4) antiques 5) the stock market and 6) real estate, and so he too decided to build a columbarium, but place it in a spacious memorial park setting, totaling 149,550 square feet. "The humanistic landscape is part of Chinese tradition ... this Ossuary Pagoda and Memorial Park also has the functions of education, culture, and leisure." Jia Yun Baota claims to be a "holy, eternal, dignified, caring," cemetery and hopes to be at the forefront of the ongoing revolution in the funeral services industry whose "software and hardware" are being developed apace. Jia Yun Baota goal is to "keep the gold and discard the dross" with regard to traditional mourning and burial rituals ("keep the gold and discard the dross" has been a slogan for cultural modernizers in China since the May 4th Movement in 1919!) Jia Yun Baota's motto is "Simplified, Dignified, Respectful, and Scientific," and with those four principles endeavors "to create life's sublime value and draw a beautiful close to life's journey."

First, a description of the Memorial Park, the setting for the Columbarium: Jia Yun Baota hopes overall to recreate the traditional landscape of Southeast China in the Suzhong-Wuxi-Hangzhou region. There are over 45 "attractions" including large and small pavilions, a traditional Memorial Arch, lotus pools, a lily pond, an Art Wall, an Art Square, Dragon Sculpture, the Earth (Tutelary) God, Buddha Island, various Buddhas and Bodhisattva statues, including those of a Giant Buddha, Guanyin and Dizang Wang Pusa (Jizo), the 18 Arhats area, a pool for releasing pet fish into the wild, Rare Flowers and Grasses area, a "Cultivate your health" walking path (I guess paved with large stones, walking barefoot across it is a form of acupuncture), and a parent and child play area, and an exhibition hall.

As for the Ossuary Pagoda itself, the ground floor is a large hall for holding ceremonies and for paying respects to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The floors above hold the memorial urns for ashes and/or bones of the deceased. Each floor is dedicated to a specific religion, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestants, and a "General Area." While the major influence at Jia Yun Baota seems to be Buddhism, the website introduces mourning and burial traditions from Daoism, Christianity and Yiguandao as well. The pagoda is managed "by professionals," and operations within the pagoda are computerized: the records of its clients; temperature and humidity is centrally controlled and light and ventilation are claimed to be very good. The

pagoda's construction complies fully with government regulations for fire and earthquake safety and a *fengshui* master supposedly gave the site high marks.

There are a number of options when selecting the size and quality of the site (like a drawer) to store the urn; according to the website the price of the "drawer" is reasonable, NT\$ 150,000, compared with HK's NT\$ 400,000 or Japan's NT\$ 600,000. The drawer can be legally rented, sold, or transferred to others.

Jia Yun Baota also charges management fees, different for different clients. Part of this is to pay for the "post-sale services:" Buddhist monks who work full-time at Jia Yun Baota recite prayers for the deceased twice daily. On the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, the monks hold the "*Zhui En*" ceremony and a large-scale version of this each spring and fall. The management sends out reminders to family members when the anniversary of their loved one's death approaches and also to remind the family of other important times to pay filial respects such as *Qing Ming* Festival and *Pu Du* in August.

The website stresses the importance of *fengshui* not only in your home and office but also when choosing a resting place for the funeral urn, for "the spirits of the dead affect the living..." On this note, it is interesting that the longest, most detailed section on this website is that concerned with "appeasing the fetus-spirits."

There you find a solid black web-page, and in the middle, an incongruous picture of a perky four-month old non-Chinese baby in diapers (more like an ad for baby skin-care products!) Then some questions: "Are you peaceful in your heart? How's your health? Your love-life? Is your family life happy? Are you sleeping well? If not, there's something you should know..." and then goes on to explain about how fetus-spirits trapped in the underworld not only suffer, but cause suffering in the living, ie their mothers and fathers. For a fee of NT\$12,600 the afflicted can appease the fetus-spirit by having the monk undertake the "*zhao du*" rituals in the spring, fall, and during *Pu Du* in August. This price also includes a spirit-plaque and offerings such as incense and flowers.

When Marc Moskowitz was conducting his fieldwork on the appeasement of fetus-spirits, he noted that setting up an urn in a pagoda for a *yingling* (fetus-spirit) was very rare, unless the baby died of natural causes, since aborted fetuses have neither funerals nor graves. Usually parents turn to specialists in temples or shrines to seek help with the rituals to appease the fetus-ghosts. While these

rituals had some historical precedent in Taiwan before the 1970s, this practice, on a large scale, commercial form, seems to have been imported from Japan from the mid-1970s on.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, both Jin Bao, Shan and Jia Yun Baota appeal to Taiwanese in upper income brackets who can afford these luxurious services and/or Taiwanese who have a more “cosmopolitan” world-view, that is, who are familiar with ideas and practices outside of Taiwan. Most Taiwanese in fact take for granted that idea or good imported from Japan, the US, or Europe must be superior and represent the most modern and sophisticated choice for consumers. Yet the two places reflect the differences in consumers’ expectations in north and south Taiwan: Jia Yun Baota is designed literally as a theme park with a variety of attractions, attaches great importance to *fengshui* and offers the service to appeasing fetus-spirits, while Jin Bao, Shan, designed as a modern “sophisticated” sculpture park, makes no mention of either *fengshui* or *yingling* but stress instead the fulfillment of filial duties.

#### C) TAIPEI MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT’S FUNERARY SERVICES

However citizens without the means or inclination to use the services of private funerary service companies turn to public services such as those of the Taipei Municipal Government. Taipei operates two large Funeral Centers for the city’s residents. There are four different price levels offered depending on time, day, and content: the least expensive “package” is around NT\$ 18,500 (including price of cremation and a place in an ossuary pagoda) and the most expensive is around NT \$31,650. Extra fees are charged for storing the bones of the deceased in a pagoda and for recitation of the sutras by Buddhist monks. These low prices reflect the minimal content and services they provide. Public pagodas, while legal and supposedly up to minimal safety standards, are not built with aesthetics or tourism or *fengshui* in mind. There are no “post-sale” services or 24-hour management. and the urn drawer cannot be resold or transferred to others.

There are still some cemetery plots available in Taipei’s public cemeteries, at prices ranging from NT\$ 73,200 to NT\$ 221,700 (not including any other fee involved with the deceased) but these plots can be occupied only for seven years, after which the bones are collected, placed in an urn and then in an ossuary pagoda. The fact that consumers will have to pay twice for burials must convince most to simply pay for a place in a pagoda from the start.

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<sup>12</sup> See *The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan*, [University of Hawaii Press, 2001] page 182, note 2 and pages 34-39.

These city Funeral Centers also sponsor group funerals each Thursday, simplified in content and at a reduced price (like group weddings presided over by the Mayor), however I do not know how popular either initiative is with the public. Low-income families can apply for funeral services provided by the city at reduced prices or free of charge.<sup>13</sup>

Some Taiwanese forgo repositories altogether and have stipulated that after death their ashes be scattered in the sea or in the forest. This might increase in popularity in the future especially as family size shrinks and family members disperse around the globe, no longer readily available to carry out yearly mourning rituals.

#### CONCLUSION: WHOSE “NEW” FUNERAL CULTURE?

We have just presented a brief introduction to the rich topic of funeral and burial reforms in Taiwan today. What, after all, do these reforms tell us about the living?

The funerary reformists (government, industry, religious institutions) declare that reforms are necessary in order to keep up with the pace of social and environmental change, to take “the best” from old and new and organize it so that it can “purify social customs.” The reformists want the funeral industry to be regulated and professionalized as in the fields of construction, medicine, law, etc. and “life and death studies” to be a regular part of the schools’ curriculum and a lively part of public discourse.

The impetus behind these reforms is several-fold: First we see how powerful the Buddhist religious establishment has become in Taiwan so that it can shape public discourse and transform the language and concepts associated with “life and death.” Second we see the power of the consumer and of the citizen who can appeal grievances to the media and/or legislative representative, which at least in the case of funeral/burial industry reforms, has seen constructive results. Third and perhaps most importantly, the impetus behind these reforms is the powerful drive by many Taiwanese to establish themselves firmly in the middle classes and beyond, and by all means possible prove their being modern and international (ie American, European, and/or Japanese)

Materials related to the new columbaria and to the funeral reforms refer often to such terms as “scientific… professional…

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<sup>13</sup> Taipei Municipal Government Funerary Services Office: “End-of-Life” Services Handbook [ *Taipei shi binzang guanli chibian. Tianian fuwu shouce*, 2001 ], pages 6-8, 25-7.

sophisticated... tasteful... dignified..." far removed from the "hot and noisy" world of popular religious practices.

Yet, privatization of social services is the way of the future in Taiwan. How far can the state go in directing and regulating private funerary enterprises? The reformers may find it difficult reconcile the traditional role of the Chinese state as arbiter and sculptor of the people's moral universe with Taiwan's current environment of neo-liberal government-policies, promoting an open and competing market, and a free civil society. For over a century Chinese modernizers strove "to keep the gold and discard the dross" with regard to Chinese traditional culture and customs, even that champion of popular culture Mao Zedong said the same. But Mao was no believer in the free-market economy, in which the people may choose to pay great sums for a place in a columbarium, hire Buddhist monks to appease the trapped soul of a fetus, or hire young women to sing karaoke, dance, and strip at funerals, pleasing both the living and dead. Perhaps Robert Weller explains all these contradictions best:

People in split-market cultures feel a push toward increasing commodification and utilitarian exploitation of resources — human, natural, and divine. On the other hand, they also develop strong reactions against a perceived deterioration of shared community and family moralities. While this tension is sometimes phrased as an argument between market and antimarket moralities, it may be better viewed as a split market culture. Both sides of the argument have roots in tradition, just as both sides are in some ways reflexes of the market itself. Thus Confucianism ... (is) offered ... simultaneously as the key to capitalist success and as the answer to the resulting moral vacuum. While ghosts and some spirit mediums cater to individuals and private profit ... gods and bodhisattvas offer instead community and universal moral worlds. All are thriving at once." <sup>14</sup>

These contradictions are mediated through an allocation of space and a set of evolving rituals that rely on traditional storytelling while structuring new ways of expressing mourning and hope. Paying attention to the funerary space-time of Taiwan allows one to enter into a national psyche that tries endlessly to reconcile the individual and the communal, the traditional and the contemporary, the local and the international at the very junction where such oppositions break down — namely, the time of death.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Weller, *Alternate Civilities: Democracy and Culture in China and Taiwan*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999, page 100.