

Taiwan's Mythological Theme Parks: Mnemonic Guardians and Uncanny Imaginaries

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This paper analyzes the mnemonic roles of mythological theme parks in contemporary Taiwan. I investigate two popular theme parks, Madou's "Prefecture that Represents Heaven" (代天府) and its single Taiwanese precedent, the "Palace of Southern Heaven" (南天宮) in Zhanghua. I term these sites "mythological theme parks" because they differ significantly in form and function from other popular religious temples throughout Taiwan and China. Though both theme park and temple are loci of social production and reproduction, the nature of interaction at mythological theme parks resembles in many ways that which occurs at the imaginary realms manufactured by secular theme parks. These mythological theme parks feature moral imaginaries displayed in sculptural and animatronic depictions of the afterlife and acts of filial piety. My study addresses both textual sources and ethnographic data, collected while conducting fieldwork during the summers of 2004 and 2005, to evaluate how these mythological theme parks culturally convey the past into the present.

Cultural memory, a term introduced to the social sciences by Jan Assmann (1995) which refers to both a "culture of memory" (*erinnerungskultur*) and "coming to terms with the past" (*vergangenheitsbezug*), can be defined as the processes by which historical events and social pressures assume cultural form, become socially significant, and are eventually transmitted from one generation to the next. Though studies of cultural memory customarily take a specific historical event as their object of inquiry and trace how this event is shaped into a socially, politically, or culturally functional mythology (Fogel 2000; Yoneyama 1999; Morris 2000), I will investigate how general social pressures can be similarly investigated. This atypical category of cultural memory can be seen most clearly in experiences that Sigmund Freud (2003) has termed "uncanny," an unexpected return of urges repressed and forgotten. This feeling of the uncanny, which originates for Freud as an infantile castration complex (2003: 140) can also be viewed as the revelation that the unified subject is always at risk from the recollection of narcissistic impulses. These moments of the uncanny can be viewed as a form of cultural, or anti-cultural, memory in which desires and fantasies not quite socialized are recalled and must be reintegrated into the social milieu.

These uncanny moments, while often individually experienced, have compelling, collective repercussions. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) argues that memory is socially constructed and recollection occurs most forcefully when a memory is located at the juncture of many collective frameworks. Freud (1943) sought, through the process of psychoanalysis, to facilitate a patient's recovery in the reconstruction of individual memories. My analytical framework is inspired by an accommodation of these collective and individual perspectives through the employment of both practice theory (Bourdieu 1977; Connerton 1989) and psychoanalysis (Freud 1961; Lacan 1977). By "practice theory," epitomized by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and his concept of socialized subjectivity or "habitus," I mean an articulation of the ways in which individual identity is both product of, and produced by, collective social forms. While practice theory aspires to allow for individual agency within society, the concept of habitus has been criticized (see Fowler 1997) as inadequate to the task of delineating fully how desire and interest motivate social action. Inspired by Katherine Ewing (1997) and Steven Sangren (2000), psychoanalysis promises a means to push beyond practice theory toward a deeper understanding of how individuals are recruited to the values of their cultures. Despite resistances, often well-founded, to the employment of psychoanalysis as biological—or libidinal—reductionism, a broader conception of desire can reference both individual and collective in the ways that one's primal egocentric or narcissistic impulses are curbed in encounters with society (Freud 1961). It is often the recollection of these collective frustrations that motivates and shapes the production of individual desires.

Claude Lévi-Strauss proposes that for any type of magic to be effective three complementary components must be present: an efficacious magician, a believing patient (or victim), and a stage on which the drama between magician and patient/victim can play out (1963: 168). In investigation of mythological theme parks in Taiwan and the uncanny as a category of cultural memory, I will begin by examining the stage on which these mnemonic processes take place. Secular and religious theme parks are acknowledged as influential sites of cultural production—reinforcing social surroundings through their over-exaggerated depictions of cultural norms and taboos—in East Asia (Hendry 2000; Raz 1999) and abroad.¹ Why are these mythological theme parks religious in nature and what does the emergence of such parks tell us about social change and cultural continuity?

I will next investigate the role of our magicians, the creators or "imagineers"² of these mythological theme parks, and their intended collective effect. As Maurice Godelier reminds us, agency should not be granted to supernatural beings or societal

¹ Note, for example, "Disneyland on the Ganges," a twenty-five acre Hindu mythological theme park currently being constructed in India (McCaul 2005).

² This term, an amalgamation of imagination and engineer, is used by Disney to describe its employees.

structures as, “It is not society which conceals something of itself from men; it is real humans beings who conceal something of their social relations from each other” (1999: 173). Who are the people behind the scenes at these mythological theme parks which provoke the startling resurfacing of uncanny desires and fantasies and strive to entice visitors to do good or scare them from evil? Self-identification of visitors with the animatronic actors and actresses in each fantastical scene is attempted by the park’s creators through strategically placed mannequins in modern dress, casually playing *shangqi* with Daoist immortals in heaven or agonizingly having their eyes poked out as karmic retribution in hell. Yet these mythological theme parks serve as both cultural museum and a fantasy world of inverted social hierarchies akin to that which Bakhtin (1968) discerns in carnival.

I will conclude with a look at the individual patients (or victims) who often willingly participate in these spaces of fantasy. Elderly theme park employees, volunteers, and officials collect a mandatory “donation” or sell tickets to dating couples who ascend into paradise and groups of high-school and college-aged boys who typically descend to visit purgatory. Aging animatronics are maintained for these younger and more malleable participants in the anticipation that delightful visions of heaven and gruesome scenes of hell will motivate moral action. Yet why would visitors willing attend these individually stifling environments? My preliminary research shows that self-identification may occur unexpectedly for some visitors whose desires more closely correspond with the immortals in these scenes than the mortals, torturers than tortured. Participants’ desires are motivated by the opportunity to participate in these egocentric imaginaries whilst being assured that the prohibitions in purgatory will maintain their compulsive urges.

Ethnographic setting

There are two mythological theme parks in Taiwan that prominently feature eschatological fantasies in scenes of heaven and hell. The Palace of Southern Heaven in Zhanghua was opened in 1971. This theme park was originally owned by a Mr. Chen,³ who passed away in 1999 at the age of 86, and is now owned by his son who rarely visits. The Palace of Southern Heaven was constructed and opened with encouragement and cooperation from officials at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven in Madou, which created its own animatronic scenes of the afterlife in 1982. Officials at both mythological theme parks were aided in the production process by spirit mediums called *tangki*.⁴ These intermediaries between theme park imagineers and the gods were

³ This project, and the ethnographic research employed within it, has been approved by Cornell’s University Committee on Human Subjects. All personal names have been changed though place names, which reference well-known locations in Taiwan, have been left intact.

⁴ This is the Taiwanese pronunciation of the Mandarin *jitong/ tongji* (乩童), or divination lads.

queried on crucial questions about the production of representations of both paradise and purgatory. These mythological theme parks were also created by referencing hell scrolls, found hanging in many Taiwanese temples (Donnelly 1990), and eschatologically themed morality books (善書) or spirit-travelogues (遊記), distributed for free at religious bookstands island-wide.

Journey to the Underworld (地獄遊記) and *Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (天堂遊記), produced at Taizhong's "Hall of the Sages and Worthies" (聖賢堂), are the most influential examples of this spirit-travelogue genre. These books were authored and illustrated by Yang Zanru, one of Taiwan's most prolific spirit-writing mediums (see Clart 1996). Depictions of horrific punishments appear throughout sixty-two journeys to purgatory and magnificent rewards are detailed in thirty-six trips to paradise. In these books, adult fans of pop music, deemed sinful, are attacked by large poisonous bees, irresponsible drivers are forced by menacing demons to drag heavy carts up and down rocky hills in a supernatural Department of Motor Vehicles, and unscrupulous business owners are disemboweled by the iron dogs of hell. Correspondingly, paradise reunites households in carefree settings where children are praised for karmic discretions and the elderly are whisked about heaven in sedan chairs in settings similar to those portrayed in both of the mythological theme parks.

Why do these mythological theme parks resonate so strongly with a Taiwanese audience? Paul Connerton states, "It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory" (1989: 3). This shared Taiwanese memory revolves around popular religious texts and mythologies such as *The Scripture of the Ten Kings*,⁵ *Journey to the West*, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, *Mulien Saves his Mother*, and the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. Though the meanings of many of these stories, some of which initially facilitated the propagation of foreign religious ideals in China, have been co-opted and changed (see Eberhard 1967, 10), each of these popular tales includes a memorable journey to purgatory and frightening encounters with ghosts. Also present in these popular tales is the uncanny emergence of destructive desires and their punishment through the principle of cause and effect, didactics that Steven Sangren has proposed resemble in some ways the developmental, Lacanian "mirror stage" (2003: 118). These shared mythologies animate religious ritual, provide the backdrop for Chinese horror films, are illustrated in comic books, and can now be found featured in popular video games.⁶ The moral *mise-en-scene* distilled from these popular tales is so ubiquitous in Taiwan that David Jordan (2004: 59) has termed it the "mental furniture" that consciously and unconsciously accompanies many Taiwanese throughout their everyday actions. These shared didactics are distilled and reinforced in representations at mythological theme parks in the exaggeration of societal mores and taboos, themed environments termed "hyperreal" (Baudrillard 1994).

⁵ See Stephen Teiser (1994) for more on this text and others that shaped historical conceptions of Chinese purgatory.

⁶ Games such as Koei's "Fengshen Yanyi: Legends of Gods and Heroes."

Though these locations feature a strong religious or moral thematic, their production was also influenced by secular amusement parks.⁷ A sculptural representation of heaven at the Light of Buddha Mountain, Taiwan's largest Buddhist monastery, was constructed immediately after its leader, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, visited Disneyland's "A Small World." The two Taiwanese theme parks featured in this study require a mandatory donation or the purchase of a child, student, or adult ticket and large revolving gates ensure that adolescents cannot sneak in through the exits. As participants walk through these imaginative environments, they are supervised on surveillance cameras by employees and each scene's animatronics are turned on by a complex system of motion sensors. Hydraulic floors give way as visitors cross the "Nai He Bridge" into hell and electronic ghosts frighten participants as they drop from the ceiling.

Yet amusement park or haunted house is not the most fitting nomenclature for these locations. Western-influenced haunted houses, recently introduced to Taiwan by Hollywood-based entertainment companies,⁸ feature standard and culturally specific ghostly spectacles, including rotting remains on scooters (Compass 2000). Though profiting from ghostly themes similar to those found at the two locations featured in this study, amusing haunted houses lack the forceful religious didactics that make mythological theme parks influential. Mrs. Li, a thirty-year employee at the Palace of Southern Heaven, enjoins, "This is certainly not an amusement park. It is a religious holy site (宗教聖地)." Religiously informed, these mythological theme parks feature an amalgam of popular Buddhist stories, *Journey to the West* and *Mulien Saves his Mother*, Daoist deities, Xuantian Shangdi (玄天上帝) and Fude Zhengshen (福德正神), and popular Confucianism (see Clart 2003), featured in scenes from moral tales.⁹ The Palace of Southern Heaven and the Prefecture that Represents Heaven also maintain popular religious shrines to local deities. Yet these shrines either attract a small percentage of visitors or are separate from the theme park venues.¹⁰ Though one frightened thirteen year-old participant visiting with his parents believed the Palace of

⁷ Conversely, conventional religious representations of the afterlife have also influenced amusement parks in East Asia. Aviad Raz (1999: 44–5) explains in his study of Tokyo Disneyland that managers converted Cinderella's Castle into a dungeon that houses popular Japanese ghosts and goblins, structured much like the traditional ghost-houses which have been a popular form of amusement for hundreds of years in Japan.

⁸ Nana's Haunted House, labeled Taizhong's "first genuine haunted house" (Compass 2000), was opened for three months in 2000. Also opened in Taipei and Gaoxiong, the haunted house was, "A joint project between a local company and Hollywood-based Mirage Entertainment, which specializes in such ghoulish productions" (Compass 2000). There is also a restaurant in Taipei called "The Haunted House" which serves meals like "Ghost's Head & Brains" and "Rotten Body Parts."

⁹ See Robert Weller (1987) for a more detailed exegesis of this complex religious mixture that appears throughout Taiwan.

¹⁰ The popular religious shrine at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven is one of the most highly trafficked pilgrimage sites in Taiwan. Yet the popular religious rituals, including self-mortification and divination, occur separately from the representations of the afterlife in the rear court.

Southern Heaven to be hell itself, I believe that the term mythological theme park better encompasses the complex origin and roles of these representations of the afterlife.

Representations of purgatory and tales of morality are housed in a three-storey building at the Palace of Southern Heaven. Large signs promising animatronics lead tourists off Zhanghua's Eight Trigram Mountain to this location, yet either the NT\$50¹¹ admission fee or Mrs. Li's rapacious roar for potential customers deters many guests. The animatronics of paradise and purgatory reside within a sculptural dragon 590-feet-long at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven and are open to visitors for the mandatory "donation" of NT\$40.¹² Children, who arrange to meet at these locations with classmates, would often not enter the horrific courts of hell without an adult companion; frequently my role as participant observer. When adolescent groups of classmates arrived they would spend time working up the courage to enter and females often remained outside. Many of the adolescent and college-aged boys, loudly posturing for their female classmates at the theme park's entrance, also required a chaperone through the darker rooms, such as the Palace of Southern Heaven's "ghost house." Tightly clinging to my camera bag, a group of five or six male college students would whimper their way into the vivid visual representations of hell.

The Prefecture that Represents Heaven includes eighteen separate purgatorial scenes while the Palace of Southern Heaven has ten.¹³ Each representation is similar, beginning with the 1st Court's Mirror of Retribution. This Mirror, in which the deceased is forced to watch all of their earthly sins, is portrayed at the theme park in Madou by actual photographs of a partially clothed couple, projected onto the Mirror from the ceiling. Courts two through nine feature socially disruptive sins punished according to the principle of cause and effect. Greedy officials who abuse their authority and make life uncomfortable for the general populace are continually beheaded; girls who read worthless books have their eyes gouged out; those who produce fake medicines and counterfeit alcohol are boiled in woks; those who fail to show proper respect to their parents or elders are ripped apart on Knife Mountain; and those who lie or curse heaven are cut apart with large saws.¹⁴ Mother Meng resides in the final court and serves her "soup of oblivion" to all souls before their reincarnation.

Imagineers and their intended effect

Cultural and moral recruitment at these mythological theme parks is enacted by their imagineers through the display of didactic performance and the manipulation of

¹¹ About 1.50 USD.

¹² About 1.20 USD.

¹³ There are ten courts of hell and eighteen levels, allowing for each type of representation.

¹⁴ The sins commonly portrayed in Chinese and Taiwanese representations of hell upset social norms and have been labeled "crimes of extraction" by Charles Orzech (1994). Those sins and punishments that seem most compelling are often insults to our narcissistic and egocentric being.

memories. The gap between rule and application, code and execution is most effectively bridged, according to Bourdieu (1977) and Connerton (1989), by habit memory or bodily practice. The raw somatic punishment¹⁵ performed at these locations is meant to encourage virtuous action by associating eschatological consequence and reward with bodily memory. Pain inflicted to sensitive areas such as the eyes—linked by Freud (2003) to a fear of castration—is overtly apparent in representations of purgatory and serves to underscore the risk of these unsocialized desires to the socialized subject. As Freud has stipulated, “There are countless civilized people that would shrink from murder or incest but who do not deny themselves the satisfaction of their avarice, their aggressive urges or their sexual lusts, and who do not hesitate to injure other people by lies, fraud, and calumny, so long as they can remain unpunished for it” (1961: 12). Enforcement of private and difficult-to-enforce infractions is facilitated through the induced recollection of forgotten or repressed desires and fantasies and the gruesome depiction of their consequences. In an attempt to circumvent Mother Meng’s forced forgetting and encourage moral action, imagineers from both mythological theme parks have created compelling environments, as literature from Madou explains, “with animatronics and realistic sound effects to induce a corporeal and emotional experience for modern people” (Madou).¹⁶

Though representations of the afterlife as mental furniture are impressive in their ubiquity and forceful grotesqueness, a practice-oriented approach, such as that demonstrated by Bourdieu (1977) and his employment of the term “habitus,” fails to account for the stake that those redesigning, building, and selling this mental furniture have in the instilment of societal norms. Halbwachs explains that within society there exists “a narrower society whose role, it may be said, is to preserve and maintain the living force of tradition” (1992: 129). Theme park officials and employees, who constantly lament “People’s hearts are not what they once were” (人心不古), believe that the contemporary state and family has failed in its role as moral enforcer. Officials from both Zhanghua and Madou express similar social goals and maintain that their objective in opening and maintaining these mythological theme parks is not economic profit or elevated social status,¹⁷ but to reinforce the consequences of evil actions while encouraging citizens to commit virtuous deeds. A brochure from the theme park in Madou submits:

A religious spirit is the stronghold of society’s stability and assists the government in safeguarding public order and security [...]. After this temple was designated as a religious

¹⁵ Hell scrolls are famous for their portrayal of similar acts of somatic violence (see LaFleur 1989).

¹⁶ Interestingly, the sound effects in heaven feature a narration in Mandarin Chinese while those in hell consist of a narration in the local dialect, Taiwanese.

¹⁷ Literature from Madou also prominently features photographs of visiting Taiwanese political leaders, including the current president, Chen Shui-bian, posed with officials from the Prefecture that Represents Heaven.

memorial and tourist site it cooperated with the government in developing a tourist enterprise which sought to implement a revival of Chinese culture. Collecting donations from countries in East and Southeast Asia, our temple raised enough money to build the eighteen-storied hell beneath the large dragon in the rear court. This location will be used to startle people to the realization that they cannot commit evil actions or bully and oppress the kind-hearted. This is done through the depiction of the bitter punishments that people will receive in hell. These scenes will cause those who witness them to abandon evil and pursue virtue. (Madou)

The enforcement of these startling realizations, initiated by theme parks' self-deputized agents of socialization, is sustained by neighborhood volunteers like Mrs. Chen, an English teacher at a Zhanghua junior high school. When Mrs. Chen's students illegally drove scooters to a date with classmates at the Palace of Southern Heaven, she pulled them aside for a stern lecture after allowing them to view the consequences of their evil ways in representations of purgatorial punishment. This younger and boisterous crowd is cause for concern at both theme parks, as the inculcation of filial sentiments is perceived as an increasingly difficult task.

Visitors were once so numerous at both mythological theme parks that the popular idiom, "People mountain, people sea (人山人海)" was often invoked by employees describing these parks' golden days. An elated Mrs. Li, hair died purple as desperate ploy to hide the effects of aging, explained that the Palace of Southern Heaven was once open until ten o'clock every night and received so many donations that it was never forced to charge its many guests. As attendance rates dropped at Zhanghua and entrance fees were introduced, the temple replaced its representation of heaven with a "ghost house" to attract a younger, paying crowd. This replacement of heaven, a sore point for employees, was assuaged by the opportunity to influence this adolescent crowd through the didactics of bodily punishment.

The manipulation of memories, another method of collective influence that allows theme park imagineers to maintain the societal *status quo*, is achieved through the creation of a seductive countermemory. Ann Burlein (1999) expropriates the term countermemory, first employed by Michel Foucault (1977), to explain the processes by which memories are reshaped and appropriated to serve hegemonic—as well as peripheral—social and religious causes. Mythological theme parks and their officials present a carefully constructed countermemory which attempts to reassign harsh recollections of socialization, such as familial and educational violence, as necessary acts of compassion. I assert that the punishments of hell, modeled on the imperial bureaucracy (Orzech 1994), no longer influence participants as a vivid metaphor for the violent Chinese magistrate (*yamen*) system. As a decreasing number of Taiwanese today have personal experience with this antiquated mode of government, the powerful displays of violence at these mythological theme parks, where unfilial children are punished just as harshly as vicious murderers, now references the socializing punishments—or insults to narcissism—endured at home and at school. Mr. Zhang, an

official at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven reiterates, "We firmly believe the saying 'Education today is not sufficient' (教育不夠). Families are rarely together which has caused children to become disobedient."

Public punishment, once within the ambit of the magistrate, is now—as a writer for the Taipei Times explains—"used throughout the nation as a means of forcing students to be obedient, with many schools operating like personal fiefdoms using fear and manipulation to force students to perform well in exams, to ensure the school maintains a high grade average" (Staff 2005). Despite an attempt by legislator Guan Bi Ling (管碧玲), The National Alliance of Parents Association, and the Humanistic Education Foundation to ban corporal punishment in schools by amending the Fundamental Law on Education (教育基本法), physical and mental abuse is regularly visited upon Taiwanese students (Lin 2005). Teachers frequently beat students with bamboo canes or whips, require push-ups or humiliating displays in front of classmates, and write students' names on "blackboards of shame" publicly posted for ridicule. These methods of torture are often employed for minor infractions such as failing to promptly return homework or forgetting classroom supplies such as scissors (Staff 2005). Recent polls show that 65 percent of students admit to being physically punished in 2004, down from 72 percent the previous year (Staff 2005). The minor erosion of this decades-long policy of physical punishment, seen as a key cause for social decay, has prompted outrage from conventional educators and the elderly alike. Zhang Hui Shan (張輝山), the principal of Dongguan Elementary School in Gaoxiong explains, "Corporal punishment is not a moral issue, it is a cultural one. Teachers in Taiwan are not ready for such a change" (Staff 2005). The cultural portrayal of impartial punishment and reward at mythological theme parks serves as comfort to these citizens who increasingly worry about crime and unaccountability.

The representations of heaven and hell created and portrayed by theme park imagineers are designed to replace the memories of harsh discipline with the countermemories of parents and teachers who compassionately cared only for their societal and eschatological well-being. The equivalence in hell of all sin, significant and minor, misappropriates memories of abuse for unintentional, learning mistakes. In these representations of purgatory, the minor infractions of gossip, disrespect of in-laws, reading of worthless books, or living easy lives are portrayed as warranting the same punishment as significant moral or social indiscretions. Theme park employees attempt to introduce and ensure the success of these violent countermemories through a process of misrecognition in which this punishment is divinely administered, and thus always warranted. Zhanghua's Mrs. Li concurs, "Punishment is administered according to the 'wisdom of the gods' (神明知識)." Yet as Orzech explains, depictions of hell employed as representation of divine will serve to hide the true mechanisms of often harsher than necessary socializing violence by placing the unassailable "guilt of victimage onto the victims" (1994: 124). In an attempt to discourage disobedient

behavior, elementary school children were taken to tour the horrific courts of hell on school fieldtrips, recently stopped due to fiscal cutbacks. The appropriation of childhood memories of familial and educational abuse as warranted regrettably allows theme park officials, employees, and participants, as Burlein explains, “to secure their own personal empowerment without confronting larger systems and structures” (1999: 211). These horrific somatic didactics and violent counter-memories, implemented by theme park imagineers to encourage collective compliance and moral action, also carry unintentional individual consequences.

Individual participation and consequence

Why, if representations of the afterlife are *collective* fantasies, would individuals willfully produce and reproduce the socializing power and oppressive hierarchies that these representations introduce and the sublimation of desire that they mandate? Godelier is similarly puzzled as to why people would accept and even seek out social enslavement asking incredulously, “To what extent are [people] convinced that it is necessary to exclude, repress, metamorphose, sublimate the facts for the supreme good of all, and that the restriction of access to power (and/ or wealth) to only one part of society is in the divine, supernatural order of things?” (1999: 178). The imaginary realms of the afterlife portrayed at mythological theme parks provide two interrelated incentives to their participants. Some participants at the Palace of Southern Heaven and the Prefecture that Represents Heaven are enticed by the opportunity to forget collective impositions and entertain narcissistic fantasies by assuming the role of heavenly immortal and hellish torturer. Freud explains that the German phrase *ein unheimliches haus* or “an uncanny house” is often translated into English as “a haunted house” (Freud 2003: 148). These mythological and uncanny imaginaries allow some individuals to stand in a space of ambivalence and recall repressed desires that are both thrilling and illicit. Yet mythological theme parks serve their most important mnemonic function by allowing individuals to remember the frustrating prohibitions that stand in the way of uninhibited enjoyment, thus maintaining tension between the drives (Johnston 2005).

To attract visitors, the animatronic didactics at these mythological theme parks must adhere to a strong thematic and be entertaining (Wong and Cheung 1999). The principal method of entertainment is fear. When asked which hellish character was most frightening Mrs. Zhang, an employee at Madou, replied, “If you haven’t committed sins none of them are scary. If you have committed sins then all of them are scary. ‘If you don’t commit evil deeds, you don’t need to fear ghosts knocking at your door’ (不做虧心事不怕鬼敲門).” As I slowly inched through depictions of hell, the male college students grasping tightly to my camera bag began to relax and laugh when demons administered their gruesome punishments. While terrified children are often

brought to these locations for moral instruction, Mrs. Li explains, "Many college students also come during holidays. They just walk around laughing at everything they see and have a good time." The entertaining anticipation of fear quickly gives way to these younger visitors' desires for individual reward and participation in punishment as they view these outdated and passé depictions of hell.

Because the sins punished in purgatory range from appalling murder to frivolous gossip, it is conceivable that most visitors to these theme parks will have committed at least one of the sins included. Yet these temples have introduced a new doctrine that allows its righteous participants the opportunity to bypass the obligatory stay in purgatory, previously the initial afterlife destination for all deceased in Taiwan (Cohen 1988). As literature from Madou explains, "We hope that people's hearts are transformed and they implement virtuous ideas in creating a peaceful, joyful, and prosperous society. If all turn towards virtue they will rise to heaven and their souls will avoid being imprisoned in hell." While a participant tours these scenes of the afterlife, they stand in a space of ambivalence where, according to this new doctrine of salvation, they will not be punished for past moral indiscretions. What happens when visitors voyeuristically gaze at the tortures of hell and no longer see themselves punished? These ahistorical scenes of divine justice and punishment allow some participants the means to forget and transcend, if just briefly, the impositions of collective life. The portrayal of an ahistorical afterlife invites interpretation with respect to its asocial nature where, just as in memory, characters evoke no feelings of rivalry. Halbwachs explains, "The cult of the past, far from binding the hearts of people to society, in fact detaches them" (1992: 51). This detachment encourages solipsistic reflection, not the instilment of *communitas* intended.

In the search for why individuals with nothing to gain in maintaining an oppressive hierarchy often willing create and participate in representations of the afterlife which repress desires, some scholars have proposed that participants in these spaces of fantasy have access to agency in assuming the role of punisher. Purgatory then becomes the paradigmatic locale where we can entertain the ambivalent feelings towards our family members, specifically our parents as agents of socialization (Freud 1961; Jordan 2004). The opportunity to administer this "righteous" punishment is often viewed as reward for delaying the immediate gratification of a sin and accepting unmitigated social integration. As Freud explains, "Not infrequently the punishment gives the executors themselves an opportunity to commit the same sacrilegious act by justifying it as expiation" (1946: 94). Other visitors to these theme parks may be able to satiate individualistic desires as they forget collective impositions and identify more strongly with the omnipotent immortals in heaven and the powerful judges in hell.

Yet the maintenance of these collective prohibitions, often eschatology's central function, is more crucial to the individual's well-being than their imagined removal. Representations of the afterlife are successful in contemporary society not because they

have afforded some of their participants the opportunity to imagine punishing their parents or other agents of socialization, but because they serve to alleviate the fear that these prohibitions will be taken away. This is evidenced as when freedom for individuals increases, new and stricter guidelines are often self-imposed. As Adrian Johnston (2005: 244) discerns, both Freud (1961) and Marx (1978) mistakenly cling to utopian notions, much like the fantasy realm of the afterlife, of either a pre-libidinal paradise or a post-capitalist horizon. A move beyond these utopian visions is necessary to determine why individuals would willingly submit themselves to the yoke of societal oppression. Johnston, in the anti-utopian turn of contemporary psychoanalysis, purports that due to the dual nature of the drive (*trieb*)¹⁸ individuals have never had and will never attain occupancy within a narcissistic utopia. Johnston explains that the drive is split between the axis of iteration (source-pressure) and the axis of alteration (aim-object) (2005: 149) and it is in this split that desires can never be realized. Johnston proposes that the axis of iteration, with its real and constant demands, can never obtain satisfaction because, “the representational components of the axis of alteration are subject to modification by temporal factors, a pure, undiluted repetition of the initial satisfaction sought by the axis of iteration is, strictly speaking, impossible” (2005: 151). Thus Lacan’s formulation, “La jouissance n’existe pas” (Johnston 2005: xxix).

The afterlife serves its primary function for the individual at this juncture by maintaining tension between the axis of iteration and alteration through the ontogenic and therapeutic imaginary that full *jouissance* exists and is eminently attainable, what I would term a fantasy of frustration. The opportunity to assume the role of just punisher or divine immortal in collectively created representations of the afterlife serve as the carrot on a stick which motivates individuals endlessly searching for an uninhibited *jouissance*. Johnston explains that this pure enjoyment is delayed when the reality principle—the rule of father or law of society—is “employed as a scapegoat for the dissatisfaction of the drives” (2005: 298). Johnston explains:

If ‘external’ constraints are a residual by-product of the inherent antagonism within all drives, then some form of Freudian ‘civilization,’ as a prohibitory *Umwelt* in whatever particular

¹⁸ Johnston builds this anti-utopian foundation by employing Freud’s (1915) earlier conception of *trieb*, which locates the drive somewhere in between psyche and soma. This allows Johnston (2005: 296) to propose that Freud, in his development of the Oedipus complex, missed an even earlier form of subjugation, the somatic demands of an infant’s drives. While most socio-cultural anthropologists would be hard-pressed to accept that the internal conflict within the drive occurs only as a type of objective and universal bodily conundrum, this theory can be usefully applied if we concede that the drive exists somewhere in between the biological and social. Without resorting to a sort of biological determinism or reverting to the Freudo-Marxian fallacies of a pre-libidinal or pre-capitalist society, we can also maintain that it is only after the Oedipus complex—when the social subject has accepted the rule of law—that these fantasies of full *jouissance*, which are culturally not biologically constructed, need to be maintained. In this formulation, the only real individual enjoyment that one can attain from representations of the afterlife is the delay of the pleasure principle through the invocation of the reality principle.

forms, will always be necessary so as to sustain the fantasy of full satisfaction, regardless of whether this fantasy is of a Freudian past that is always-already lost or of a Marxist future endlessly *à venir* (2005: 254).

In a contemporary civilization that rarely punishes—and often rewards—its citizens for overindulgence, notions of purgatory provide the ideal reminder of collective impositions as frustrator and delayer of the drives. These individual prohibitions are a necessary addition to individual fantasy because as Johnston explains, “If one allowed oneself to follow completely the demands of the drive-source, the results would be devastatingly traumatic,” (2005: 298) that is, the collapse of the individual being. Thus fantasies of paradisiacal autonomy can only be maintained in imaginaries with corresponding notions of purgatorial prohibitions.

Despite the naïve hope by officials at Madou that the obligatory stay in purgatory can be avoided, the continued threat of hell and its prohibitions is necessary because it serves as the scapegoat of the ever-unsuccessful drive. While allowing some participants the imaginary space needed to forget, if just briefly, about collective impositions, these representations of the afterlife serve their primary, individual function by forcing their participants to remember the reality principle or “prohibitory *Umwelt*,” invoked as mnemonic at moments when complete satisfaction should be present but fails to materialize, i.e. “I would have obtained complete satisfaction in this way if it were not forbidden.” This manufactured tension between the drives can often be glimpsed when desires long thought repressed re-emerge and individuals glimpse that it is they who are serving as the gaolers of their own desires.

Conclusion

While the literature from Madou’s theme park is often overly optimistic, they are correct in their assertion that attendance at these locations “will ensure the existence of many generations of Chinese society” (Madou). The individual consequences of imagined autonomy and the maintenance of the drives, derived from participation at these mythological theme parks, inadvertently assists in social production and reproduction by providing participants in these processes the space to act out their individualistic fantasies while acknowledging the necessity of collectivities. By investigating these uncanny moments, in which individualistic desires unexpectedly re-emerge or are provoked to resurface, studies of cultural memory can illuminate why both historical events and more general socializing pressures still haunt us.

The cultural continuity of Chinese notions of the afterlife, particularly purgatory, is astounding in contemporary Taiwan. Popular morality books, movies, and mythological theme parks are influential in both collective and individual spheres. Yet the emergence of individualistic desires at these locations carries the unintended consequence of reproducing not just the social systems from whence they emerge, but its unfortunate reliance on the threat of violence to curb violence. The employment of

violence as resistance to a perceived loss of political, social, or religious control is also prevalent here in the United States; from Christian haunted houses that teach through the threat and portrayal of horrific and everlasting punishment¹⁹ to the United States military that deals daily with the retribution of those our nation has—and continues—to violently torture. Perhaps it is time to interpret and interrupt the course and discourse of these violent cultural memories and uncanny imaginaries.

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¹⁹ See George Ratliff's (2001) documentary film *Hell House*.

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