

Apotheosis of Neglected Spirits in Tainan

Wen-feng Tai

ABSTRACT

The apotheosis of neglected and malevolent ghosts is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in the folk religion of the Tainan area, especially along the coast. Numerous places of worship known as “Marshal Temple” and “General Temple” can be found there. In addition to the worship of various marshals and generals of unknown provenance, the main object of veneration is a deity named after some natural phenomena, such as mountains, sea, water, or wind. Deities related to mountains include Marshal Zhenshan and City God Zhenshan; those related to the sea include Marshal Zhenhai, General Zhenhai, Marshal Youhai, and City God Zhenhai; those connected with water include General Youshui and General Qingshui; and those connected with wind include Marshal Tengfeng.

Deities now known as *Yu-ying-kung* (有應公), the lonely ghosts that ask and you shall receive), Lord Wanshan, and Lord Dazhong used to be neglected ghosts but were transformed into deities by folk religion practitioners living along the Tainan coast. These deities were promoted from malicious ghosts of relatively low status; thus, they do not occupy very high positions in the local folk religion pantheon, and are given titles such as “marshal” or “general” rather than “his royal highness.” After being upgraded to the status of deity, Lord Dazhong began to be called Marshal Zhenhai, Marshal Tengfeng, or Marshal Zhenshan. Once a malicious ghost is promoted to the status of marshal or general, he gains the ability to control a particular natural phenomenon. For example, Marshal Tengfeng has the ability to pacify the wind and waves, and Marshal (General) Zhenhai has the ability to calm the ocean.

The appearance of an *kimsin* (金身, the statue of deity) is the most important indication of the apotheosis of a neglected ghost. Following apotheosis, a deity may undergo a process of multiplication whereby his duplicates take up residence in a number of branch temples. This process is related to the emigration of the deity’s followers, and at a set time every year the duplicates return to the mother temple to call on the ancestor

deity and make offerings. Once the apotheosis is complete, the deity's former shrine loses its function as a place for commemorating abandoned ghosts and is transformed into a local *zhuang miao* (庄廟), a *jiaotou miao* (角頭廟), or even a mother temple in its own right.

Keywords: Neglected Soul, Lord Dazhong, Marshal Zhenhai, Marshal Tengfeng