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Taiwan's Enchanting Demon and Monster Stories

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Taiwan's diverse and rich folklore features a great many stories about deities and ghosts, but local demons and monsters lurk in obscurity. Fortunately, some enthusiasts of Taiwan's demon and monster tales have compiled local stories, enabling people to scrutinize how these ghouls and evil creatures are embedded in vernacular culture. One notable enthusiast is Mr. He Jing-yao, who earlier this year published a compilation of demon and monster tales that spans three centuries of Taiwan's history.

Mr. He says it was his immersion in Taiwan's history which led him to stumble upon the world of local monster stories. Mr. He points out that the value of such tales lies in their links to local history. For example, Kaohsiung's distinct geographic features are behind various legends. Legend has it that Mount Banping, a mountain in Zuoying that runs northeast-southwest, was inhabited by a monster deer back in the Cing-dynasty, which ruled Taiwan between 1684 and 1895. Whenever the monster roared, its supernatural power would cause a fire.

It was widely believed the monstrous deer possessed a

pair of fangs. Similar tales of monster deer exist in every region. One legend says the monster deer is in fact a mountain god. Whenever it roars, it will bring about a downpour or cause flooding within three days. Many believe the sound of such deer is like that of a crying baby. Because the mountainous parts of Greater Kaohsiung receive more rain than the lowlands, inhabitants used to attribute floods to the monster deer and its supernatural powers. The deer that dwelt on Mount Banping even evolved into a creature that could create fire. Until now, a statue of the deity guards the Mount Banping area against fire.

In Meinong District, by contrast, a supernatural deer was seen as a benevolent deity. Legend has it that an elderly monster deer was roaring all the way from the mountains to flat lands at Meinong sometime before Tomb Sweeping Festival in the second month on the lunar calendar. Local folk regarded it as a warning there would be torrential downpours. Their fears were realized within three days. Fierce rains whipped through the area and the rivers rose. Mercifully, the flood did not bring the devastation the





villagers had feared. From that time on, Meinong residents passed down a tradition of worshipping rivers, Tudi Gong (the Earth Lord), and the celestial emperor Yu Huang Dadi in the second month on the lunar calendar, paying tribute to these deities and praying for a peaceful and prosperous year. As part of the event, Taiwanese drama troupes perform for the deities.

Back in the Qing-dynasty, a monster monkey was a *bete noire* in Kaohsiung's Fongshan District. Legend has it that the monkey harassed local women and stoked fears throughout the neighborhood. A senior official, Mr. Fang Bang-ji, was also a Taoist priest who possessed magical powers. Seeing how much trouble was caused by the monkey, Mr. Fang conducted a rite, invoking his magic in a bid to defeat the simian. During the epic battle, while Mr. Fang tried to complete the rite, continuous thunderstorms reflected the ferocity of the struggle between good and evil. Finally, a powerful bolt struck the ground, making a hole and fatally injuring the beast. The troublesome monkey was gone for good.

Interestingly, legends depict many monsters as having certain human characteristics. It is recorded that, in Dashu District's Jiucyutang in 1909, the Wu family was attacked by stones which some people believed were thrown by naughty fairies. The sight of mysterious stones hurtling toward the house frightened local residents.

Some stories feature creatures with endearing character traits. One legend of the Hla' alua Tribe in Namasia District concerns friendly interactions between a ghost and a child. Many believed that ghosts could travel freely between the human world and the afterworld. This story is about a child left alone at home while the adults were working outside. A naughty ghost suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and the child was petrified. The youngster burst into tears. To comfort the child, the ghost then made grilled sticky-rice cake. When the adults returned home, they commented on the sticky-rice cake. The child told them about the ghost who had emerged from the ground, and grilled the cake until it was permeated with oil. Surprisingly, the ghost then disappeared, and was never seen again.

Like folk tales in other countries, Taiwan's legends often carry messages that aim to encourage people to realize the virtues of good deeds and proper behavior. Legend has it that even a water ghost usually considered to be the most malevolent of spirits-could attain the position of "Chenghuang" (a lord of the moat and walls, in other words a god overseeing a town or city) if it continually cultivated itself.

As these unique stories have evolved and circulated, the demons and monsters which exist somewhere between reality and imagination serve as a lively bridge between generations, and breathe life into local custom and traditional culture.

Diyue Temple's Ji Sheng Troupe

Spectacular Performances by the Eight Generals

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Established in 1940, Diyue Temple, on Hechuan Street in Gushan District, honors gods and demigods associated with hell. The temple's main deity is Mount Tai Emperor Ren Sheng, ruler of the afterworld. Other hell deities worshipped here include Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and Judge Deity Li Dashen. (Dashen means great deity.) Popular legends about hell add a mysterious ambiance to this temple, so many approach the images of these afterworld deities with a sense of awe. Surprisingly, the temple does not seem to intimidate local residents. Rather, they engage in all kinds of social activities in the temple's courtyard.

Mount Tai in Shandong Province is known as one of China's five great mountains. It is associated with immortality. Legend has it that the emperors of old prayed for longevity at Mount Tai. In addition, Fongdu Hill, on the western side of Mount Tai, is widely believed to be where a dead spirit rests in peace. Such legends are manifestations of Mount Tai Emperor Ren Sheng's enormous powers and ability to reach up into heaven and down into the afterworld.

Mr. Wang Kun-can, chairman of Diyue Temple's management committee, points out that most temples have three entranceways, with the one in the center being reserved for deities. Visitors should heed a simple system of etiquette, customarily entering through the door on the right side as you approach from outside; this is called the dragon gate. They should leave by the left side (as seen from outside, the right side from the perspective of those exiting). This signifies escaping from a tiger's mouth. Those who comply with religious etiquette are believed to attract blessings and enjoy better luck. Only in Ghost Month, the seventh month of the lunar calendar, do ghosts have the privilege of traveling freely between the afterworld and the human world. For this reason, temples customarily close their central entranceways during Ghost Month. This means the deities do not have to supervise ghosts. In effect, they have a month-long vacation.

However, Mr. Wang points out, Diyue Temple does not close the central door because the temple is responsible for all matters concerning the realms of hell ruled by Mount Tai Emperor Ren Sheng. Interestingly, Mr. Wang says a ghost can appeal through the deities enshrined at Diyue Temple during Ghost Month if that ghost has suffered an injustice. According to Mr. Wang, because Diyue Temple is led by Mount Tai Emperor Ren Sheng (who was certified as a divine entity by an emperor during the Qing Dynasty, which ruled China between 1644 and the creation of the Republic

of China in 1912), this place of worship serves both human beings and ghosts.

Diyue Temple has helped invigorate local religious culture through its support of Ji Sheng Troupe since 1949. The troupe, which performs at temple events as the Eight Generals (also known as Ba-Jia-Jiang, revered as gods of the underworld), is coached by Mr. Wu Sin-fu. A former performer himself, Mr. Wu says the Eight Generals patrol in front of the Judge Deity Li Dashen, clearing the way amid ghosts and demons. In 2016, the troupe was recognized as an intangible cultural heritage by Kaohsiung City Government's Bureau of Cultural Affairs, in part because the troupe member's elaborate movements are strictly based on the Eight Diagram Battle Array. Furthermore, the movements will vary depending on the precise route and venue. During



pilgrimages, the Eight Generals encounter devotees who beseech them to visit their homes in order to expel evil spirits.

Anecdotes about the Eight Generals abound, underscoring their popularity in folk culture. The Eight Generals wear straw sandals when embarking on a pilgrimage. When the journey is completed, they must return to Diyue Temple and inform Mount Tai Emperor Ren Sheng that they have accomplished their mission. The Eight Generals then leave behind the used straw sandals for pious



individuals to collect. It is said these used sandals can ward off evil, so devotees customarily place them under beds.

Ji Sheng Troupe performs the Eight Generals in various villages and towns. However, unlike some other performance troupes, they never accept paid engagements. Rather, the troupe performs only when a deity has made a request.

The fierce and intimidating makeup worn by the Eight Generals during their performances is eye-catching. While working on the makeup for General Sie, played by Mr. Wang Yuan-cai, and General Fan, played by Mr. Wang Jia-hui, makeup artist Mr. Hong Wun-long explains that their appearance must be daunting, so as to scare away ghouls and evil entities.

Mr. Wu Sin-fu says that once the makeup is completed, the troupe member acting on behalf of a deity is equivalent to that deity. This position comes with holy responsibilities, and troupe members have to obey a set of strict rules. The night before starting a pilgrimage, they must sleep over at the temple, where the air is permeated with the smell of burning incense. While on duty, the Eight Generals are expected to eat vegetarian meals, abstain from sex, and remain silent. Mr. Wu says that if ghosts become aware the generals are men disguised deities, the troupe's efforts will be in vain. But behind these fierce faces, there are rich human characters.

When Mr. Wang Yuan-cai, a veteran who has served in the troupe for nearly 40 years, is in his makeup, his posture and appearance is highly convincing. But after the photographer has finished, Mr. Wang's appearance is less heroic; he walks slowly with a slight stagger, the result of a truck accident when he was 36, in which he suffered pelvis fractures, necrotic tissue, and severed nerves. Mr. Wang says he feels that if Mount Tai Emperor Ren Sheng had not rescued him, he might have died. As a result, he is devoted to serving the deity. He realizes he does not have a huge influence, but he seizes every opportunity, and give the best performances he can during pilgrimages. Ji Sheng Troupe possesses a group of skilled veterans like Mr. Wang. When recruiting new members, Mr. Wu Sin-fu emphasizes that decency is the primary criterion.

Mr. Wang Yuan-cai's son, Mr. Wang Jia-huei, is now 16. He followed in his father's footsteps by joining the troupe two years ago, becoming the youngest member. Mr. Wang Jia-huei confesses that some of his classmates at school may have the wrong impression about his participation in the Eight Generals. As a result, he works harder and is more self-disciplined than before. He now earns the respect and admiration of his peers.

Behind the imposing makeup and clothing of the Eight Generals, the members of Ji Sheng Troupe take on the weighty responsibility of acting on behalf of deities, bridging the afterworld and the human world, just as their performances are at the interface of religious tradition and local culture.

Touring Historical Zuoying's Old Fongshan City

©English translation: Hou Ya-ting

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Kaohsiung's Zuoying District is considered a culturally significant part of the city and beholds many historical sites. Some of these heritage sites are currently being restored by Kaohsiung City's Bureau of Cultural Affairs. Kaohsiung City Government is making endeavors to promote Zuoying District's heritage sites to more people, with the hopes of cultivating a greater appreciation for local culture and history. The bureau sought out Kaohsiung's Old Fongshan City Culture Association to partner with them in developing tours of the refurbished projects. Since 1999, Kaohsiung's Old Fongshan City Culture Association has been preserving historical sites in Zuoying District.

In order for the public to get an up close and personal view of the refurbished sites, the organization provides professional guides to lead half-day trips around Old Fongshan. However, tours will only be available until November. They take visitors on a trip through time to various sites that date back as far as the Ming Dynasty. The sites include most of Taiwan's significant historical periods including relics from the Kingdom of Tung Ning which was ruled by the Jhang Family, to the Manchu Qing Empire, to Japanese colonial rule and finally the ROC on Taiwan.

Some may consider a historical trip to be rather uninteresting. However, Kaohsiung's Old Fongshan City

Culture Association has facilitated animated guides and the tour has been well received among participants of all ages. Kaohsiung's Old Fongshan City Culture Association can also tailor tours for people of all ages. On June 24, eight families of young people and their parents were given a tour by one of the association's most senior guides, Mr. Chen Jhen-rong.

The first stop was Old Fongshan City's East Gate. Along the way, Mr. Chen Jhen-rong interacted with the young group members and tested their historical knowledge by asking them a variety of questions. One of these questions included, "Where did the name Kaohsiung come from?" The young participants answered promptly, indicating they already had some foundation in local history.

Kaohsiung had been previously known as Ta-kao (meaning bamboo forest) by the Makadao Tribe, a branch of the Pingpu aborigines. During Japanese colonial rule, it was pronounced Takau, in Japanese, but in Kanji it was written 高松 and pronounced Kaohsiung, in Mandarin. Mr. Chen Jhen-rong then explained that Zuoying had also once been a Ming-dynasty historical site and where Jhang Cheng-gong's troops had set up their military base. When the group reached the East Gate, Mr. Chen pointed out that the slope in front of the East Gate resembled a soaring phoenix and it was from this that the area got its



name Fongshan (Phoenix in Mandarin).

Mr. Chen Jhen-rong pointed out that during the Jhang Family rule (1661-1683), Zuoying was considered to be a very strategic location. But the region's defense walls weren't built until the Manchu Cing-dynasty took control and Taiwan (Tung Ning as it was known at the time) fell under Emperor Kangsi's rule. The Manchu Emperor had fully understood how strategic Zuoying was and didn't want it to be vulnerable or to fall into rival empires' hands.

He explained that during Japanese colonial rule, Zuoying was transformed into a restricted military area. As a result, residences and temples were relocated out of the area. Later, when the ROC government took over Taiwan, three naval villages were established there. The naval villages had now been relocated, but some of the naval villages have been preserved as historical sites. Later the government administration was relocated from Zuoying to Fongshan and the residents previously from Zuoying called it, "The old town" and Fongshan, "The New Town".

After the walking tour of the historical sites, Mr. Chen then took the tour back to the association's office, to learn the process of stone tablet printing. This hands-on activity would demonstrate how printing was carried out back in the Manchu Cing Dynasty. This type of printing has often been found at local archaeological sites, and Mr. Huang hoped the young participants would get an understanding of how invaluable stone tablets were. He explains how they have been preserved and studied in academic research. The association provided mini stone tablets, which bore the inscription that appears above the Fongyi East Gate. Mr. Huang was the activity leader and taught the young people how to emulate the process. Step by step, he showed them how to attach the rice paper to the model tablet, glue the rice paper on and then rub it smooth with a bristled brush. He then applied ink, which permeated through the rice paper, creating a readable inscription. It was really exciting for the young participants to create their own copy of the historical wall's inscription.

At the end of the demonstration, Mr. Chen Jhen-rong expressed how much he had appreciated the young



people's enthusiasm. They too had enjoyed the walk around the historical sites and learning about the local culture. They had also enjoyed answering Mr. Chen's questions and doing the stone tablet printing activity.

The association offers two historical routes around Zuoying's Old Fongshan City Wall. The first is the North-East Route which takes people around Old Fongshan East Gate. They will then see the city's moat, the former Guangong Taoist Temple, forts that were built during Japanese colonial rule, the former Sinlong Temple, Old Fongshan City's North Gate and Dragon Tiger Tower.

The second is the South-West Route which includes the three-hundred years old Sinlong Well, Old Fongshan's South Gate, the old army sentry located on Zuoying Ave. and Bisheng Road, Old Fongshan's West Gate, a Japanese shrine, Triangle Park, the Cing-dynasty Administration Office and Waisinlong archaeological site.

Kaohsiung's Old Fongshan City Culture Association

 <https://www.facebook.com/OldCity813/>

Yongan's Singang Fishing Village

©English translation: Hou Ya-ting

©Photos by Wu Ke-wei

Yongan's Singang Fishing Village is located along Kaohsiung's gorgeous south-eastern, coastline. Its unique scenery and deep blue Taiwan Strait are truly captivating. It is a spectacular part of Kaohsiung.

Shihban Road runs through Yongan's Singang Village, which is famous for its aquaculture grouper farms. Since farmers knew it was important that regional trust was essential for their businesses to grow, they have collectively adopted "diamond water", which comes from a local CPC liquid natural gas plant. They discovered that by adopting higher quality, lower temperature water, the grouper

become more invigorated and stronger. Farmers also work together on skill development, production and marketing. These efforts have paid off and Singang Fishing Village has developed a great reputation for its aquaculture.

Over the years, the Village has developed its own local culture. Singang Community Development Association was established to maintain traditions, the village's identity and restore its coastlines. Mr. Su Guo-jhen is the Director of the board. He has organized voluntary activities for local residents to participate in, including a series of Taiwanese beach seines and beach cleanups.





A Taiwanese beach seine is a traditional fishing technique and now more a community activity done at gatherings. The fishing method is carried out with two fishing boats. The fisherman on the two boats each holds one side of the gigantic fishing net. More than a dozen people will then encircle the fishing net on the beach. This was a tradition dating back to early times when they need people to control the fishing nets instead of the modern machines that are now used.

Growing up in Singang Fishing Village, the beach was a special place for Mr. Su Guo-jhen. He used to spend a lot of good time on it when he was a child. Mr. Su Guo-jhen's best childhood memories were when he would participate in Taiwanese beach seines. He remembers how everyone would come

together as a community. Hence, when Mr. Su Guo-jhen and local residents began to revive Singang Fishing Village's maritime culture, they hosted a series of Taiwanese beach seines. He felt the activity had been successful in promoting Singang Fishing Village's cultural identity.

During another beach cleanup, volunteers found a discarded boat, armor blocks and drift wood, which they transformed into an art installation. This was the first coastal park collaborative that had been created by locals. This created renewed confidence in the village, and residents hoped they could attract more visitors to the region. Elderly residents proposed to lead a series of Taiwanese beach seines with visitors dragging fishing nets and present the beach's history. Visitors could also experience traditional fishing and visit grouper farms. There they could feed and hold the groupers. During the tour, the fish farmers would also teach visitors how to make miniature bamboo rafts, grouper shaped soap and earrings made out of grouper scales. Visitors can also have lunch in the village and enjoy local grouper, while chatting with locals. Residents hope by attracting more visitors to the region, it will create a more modern and lively image of the village.

See Singang Fishing Village's tourist information on their Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/kaoxingang>



Exploring the World of Board Games

©English translation: Hou Ya-ting

©Photos by Wu Ke-wei

Smart phones have had a tremendous influence on how people communicate. They have made people more antisocial and even at dinner parties they just get onto their phones. Even when they should be chatting with their friends and family, they start lining with their friends or checking their Facebooks. However, board games have recently made a comeback. They provide a way to maintain communication and keep people off their phones. They require full participation and sometimes even teamwork.

Taiwanese families have enjoyed playing board games for decades, traditionally Chinese Chess, Chinese Checkers, Go and Mahjong. Today, there are more than 90 thousand board games worldwide and information regarding each of them can be found on www.boardgamegeek.com. It is the world's largest board game website and ranks the games into three categories. It also provides general descriptions about



the games. It is considered one of the best websites that gives the most comprehensive information about board games.

Board games allow players to transform and carry out role plays. In Pandemic, players can become medical specialists, farmers in Agricola and gem merchants in Splendor. Board games can also teach people how to strategize, such as in Rummikub. Board game consultant, Mr. Cai Fong-ren discusses how board games have become more elaborate, realistic and sophisticated. People can use their imaginations and engage in role plays that reflect the real world. Mr. Cai Fong-ren points out that Monopoly is a good example of this, where successful landowners can amass a fortune by acquiring land and assets. Another such game is Carcassonne, which is a tile-placement game. Players acquire property and influence while building a city. Players can often relate to board games through their own life experience.

There are an estimated 43 board game stores in Kaohsiung, and clients of all ages are most welcome. Board game groups even tour the stores and play with other groups. Enthusiastic players even organize board game tournaments and are always looking to attract new players. There are even researchers that go around lecturing about the games and its related psychology.

In a modern time of smart phone addiction, board games are making a comeback. In world of increasing pressure and digital communication, board games create great opportunities for social interaction and escape from stress. It only takes approximately 10 minutes to learn the rules and leads to hours of fun and new friendships.



**For more board game information,
go to the following websites:**

<https://goo.gl/tbvHZL>

<https://goo.gl/qyE3Rh>

<https://goo.gl/wRFHeb>



Cycling along Yancheng Road

■ Illustration by Macaca



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