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Tragedy and Hope for Happiness Stories from the Girl Temples

Piotr Adamek

Translated by Jacqueline Mulberge SSpS

A German Catholic young woman is venerated on the Island of Pulau Ubin, to the east of Singapore. An “influx”¹ of mainly Chinese pilgrims comes regularly to her temple, the “Berlin Sanctuary” (Bolin yuan 柏林苑), Lady Datuk Temple² (Nadu guniang miao 拿督姑娘庙) or simply the shrine of the German Girl (Deguo guniang miao 德国姑娘庙) as it is called. A Barbie doll that represents the German girl stands on the altar among articles that we associate with a young woman, such as hairbrushes, perfume, lipstick or necklaces.³ A pink musical box plays sweet melodies. Flowers and incense are offered. And prayers are said. According to legend, about 100 years ago the young woman lived here on a coffee plantation with her family.⁴ When World War I broke out, all the Germans here were taken prisoner by the British soldiers. Only a young woman of about eighteen was able to flee into the forest, soon got lost, however, and fell to her death from a cliff. People began to take flowers and incense sticks there. Later, Chinese workers built a small temple on the hill where an urn with the ashes of the young woman,⁵ a Catholic cross and a stone from the place where the body was found were kept.⁶ The belief is that the spirit of the young woman brings luck to the one praying. It is also said that disrespectful behaviour in the temple is punished, that a shadow is seen, that one suddenly begins to speak German⁷ ...

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- 1 www.vimeo.com/46995736 (accessed on September 5, 2021). See also video material about the temple here. For another video film see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nw_dQmej8ts (accessed September 5, 2021).
- 2 Datuk is a high Malay honorific title. Datuk Gong (Nah Tuk Kong) is also the name of a guardian spirit or earth deity in Southeast Asia. Cf. <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/datuk-gong--the-god-of-the-chinese--indians-and-malays-073119502.html?linkId=19260841> (accessed September 5, 2021).
- 3 www.beokeng.com/disptemple.php?temple=german-girl-shrine (accessed September 5, 2021).
- 4 Two German families – the families of Daniel Brandt and Hermann Mühlinghaus – were found on the island. However, the identity of the girl remains unknown to this day. See: www.nparks.gov.sg/pulau-ubin/heritage/places-of-interest/german-girl-shrine (accessed September 5, 2021).
- 5 The urn was stolen around 1974, allegedly to use the strong spiritual power of the spirit for magical rituals, cf.: www.unmyst3.com/2009/06/ubin-german-girl-temple.html (accessed September 5, 2021).
- 6 www.nparks.gov.sg/pulau-ubin/heritage/places-of-interest/german-girl-shrine; www.remembersingapore.org/2012/10/13/german-deity-at-ubin (accessed September 5, 2021).
- 7 www.what-when-how.com/haunted-places/ubin-german-girl-temple-pulau-ubin-singapore-haunted-place (accessed September 5, 2021); for further information cf. also Samuel J. Burris, “The White Girl of Pulau Ubin,” in: *Changi*, November 1993, pp. 28-29; Jeff Belanger (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Haunted Places: Ghostly Locales from*

A comparable story and similar temple can be found in Taiwan. On the shore of Kending 墾丁 (Sheding 社頂, Pingtung County) on the south coast of Taiwan a “Dutch princess” (*Helan gongzhu* 荷蘭公主) is worshiped on the left hand side altar in the Temple of the Wandering Spirits (Wanying gong miao 萬應公廟). Supernatural power is ascribed to her. Offerings to her include flowers and personal items of women, as well as small model ships, all in the hope of attaining happiness. There are several legends aiming to explain the origin of the temple, all reporting a tragedy. One of them refers back to the 17th century when part of Taiwan was a Dutch colony. It is said that in 1641 a Dutch ship arrived with a Princess Margaret⁸ who wanted to see her Danish lover Maarten Wesseling. The crew was attacked by the locals on the shore and all were killed, including the Princess.⁹ Another tale relates that 200 years later, in 1867, the American ship “Rover” had an accident on the southern coast of Taiwan. There again, the captain Joseph W. Hunt and his wife were murdered by locals, which one suspects could have been the beginning of the legend of the “Dutch Princess.”¹⁰ During the Japanese epoch in Taiwan, a fisherman is reported to have found human bones on the shore in 1931, and he took them to the nearby Temple of the Wandering Spirits. Since much misfortune happened in the next few years, they asked a medium (*jitong* 乩童) for help, who suddenly began to speak in English. Only after the translation did people learn that a few hundred years ago a “red-haired princess” (*hongmao gongzhu* 紅毛公主) was murdered there, who cannot get back to her ship and therefore brings disaster to the people. A paper boat in which they tried to send the “princess” to the sea, came back. Through the medium the “princess” explained that she wanted to stay in that place and she requested a third of the Temple of the Wandering Spirits, which was immediately granted her.¹¹ Thus disaster was averted and the “Dutch princess,” also called the Eight Treasures Princess (*babao gongzhu* 八寶公主), has been venerated as a patron saint ever since. In 2008 an elderly woman disappeared in the mountains. When she was found five days later, she told of a naked woman with long hair who wanted to steal her clothes and who led her astray in the mountains. A medium who was asked explained that it must have been the angered “princess” who would let ten people of the village die. After this caused a general panic in the place, a reconciliation ritual was performed which brought salvation.¹²

Around the World (Franklin Lakes, NJ 2009), pp. 264–265; www.frische-medien.de/kunden/fgg (accessed September 5, 2021). Completely new research on the origin of the shrine of the young German woman and its current development as a place of interest in Singapore is found in William L. Gibson, “Unravelling the Mystery of Ubin’s German Girl Shrine,” in: *biblioasia* 17 (2021) 3, <https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg/vol-17/issue-3/oct-dec-2021/ubinsgermangirlshrine> (accessed October 9, 2021).

8 There is an attempt to identify the princess as a granddaughter of Maurits of Orange (1567–1625) and as the girl in Rembrandt’s painting “The Nightwatch,” cf.: Shi Wencheng 石文誠, “Helan gong zhu shangle an? Yi duan chuanshuo, lishi yu jiyi de jiaocuo licheng” 荷蘭公主上了岸? 一段傳說、歷史與記憶的交錯歷程, in: *Taiwan wenxian* 臺灣文獻 60 (2009) 2, p. 186. Peter Kang, “Seeking ‘Roots’ in Taiwan. ‘Red Hair’ and the Dutch Princess of Eight Treasures,” in: J. Bruce Jacobs – Peter Kang (eds.), *Changing Taiwanese Identities* (Abingdon 2017), p. 32.

9 www.chinatimes.com/hottopic/20150610004309-260809?chdtv (accessed September 5, 2021).

10 Peter Kang, “Seeking ‘Roots’ in Taiwan,” p. 31.

11 Shi Wencheng, “Helan gongzhu shangle an?” p. 187.

12 www.storystudio.tw/article/gushi/the-princess-of-netherlands (accessed September 5, 2021).

The Girl Temple Phenomenon

These two stories are not an exception but form part of a complex phenomenon of folk religiosity, the girl temples (*guniang miao* 姑娘廟), that proliferated among the Han Chinese, and particularly in Taiwan. It is believed that unmarried, deceased women cannot be venerated in the ancestor temple, nor in the house of their own family.¹³ It is only through marriage that a woman has the right, after her death, to have an ancestral tablet and be included among the ancestors on the altar in the house of her husband and thus to be venerated. Girls who die young or unmarried become – according to belief – “lonely spirits” (*gu gui* 孤魂 or *gu niang* 孤娘), who roam round in anger.¹⁴ To avoid this, families arrange so-called spirit marriages (*minhun* 冥婚) and the woman is thus enabled to belong to a lineage.¹⁵ If the spirit marriage is difficult to achieve, the family of the deceased girl may also leave a red envelope containing money, valuables and the daughter’s belongings on the street. The man who picks up the things would obviously have to accept the marriage proposal.¹⁶

Another solution is to erect a girl temple in which the spirit of the girl can be venerated and thus appeased. Such temples are scattered around all of Taiwan. Often there is only a small house with a limited group of local visitors. There are, however, also larger girl temples, as e.g. in Shiding 石碇 (New Taipei City). Sometimes the spirit of the girl is venerated in part of another temple, as e.g. in the temple of the earth deity (Tudi gong 土地公). The general name of the girl temples – *guniang miao* – is often supplemented by the family name of the girl (such as Pan guniang miao 潘姑娘廟) or replaced by another title (such as Yunü gong 玉女宮).¹⁷ Differently from the temples of deities (so-called “light temples,” *yang miao* 陽廟) the majority of girl temples are counted among the “dark temples” (*yin miao* 隱廟). Only a few girl spirits were promoted to *shen* 神 (deities) “because of their spiritual power,” such as Lady Jade of the Guandu Yunü gong 關渡玉女宮 in Taipei.

There are different reasons why a girl temple is set up, e.g. if a girl rendered great service to the community during her lifetime, if she appeared after her death and helped people, if she asked people for sacrifices in a dream, etc. Most Taiwanese avoid *guniang miao* as impure “dark temples.” There are, however, others, especially women, who ask the “girl” for blessings or healing and who have themselves consecrated as her *yangnü* 養女 (adopted daughter).¹⁸ They give the *guniang* various objects for women, flowers and jewellery, which they believe will please her. Men come to the girl temple to ask for wealth and luck in gambling. Generally, however, it is considered dangerous, as a *guniang* is very easily angered if she thinks of her unmarried status or, conversely, wants to marry the man as her chosen

13 Lin Fushi 林富士, *Gugui yu guixiong de shijie: bei Taiwan de ligui xinyang* 孤魂與鬼雄的世界: 北臺灣的厲鬼信仰 (Banqiao 1995), p. 100.

14 On the topic of girls’ ghosts cf. also: Huang Pingying 黃萍瑛, *Taiwan minjian xinyang ‘guniang’ de fengsi – yi ge Taiwan shehui shi de kaocha* 臺灣民間信仰‘孤娘’的奉祀——一個臺灣社會史的考察 (Banqiao 2006), pp. 15-35.

15 On spirit marriages cf. also: Huang Pingying, *Taiwan minjian xinyang ‘guniang’ de fengsi*, pp. 37-68.

16 Jhang JhuCin, “Examining Cultural Discourses in Taiwanese Gender and Sexual Minority. Tongzhi Family-of-Origin Relationships,” in: *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2019, No. 33, p. 131.

17 Huang Pingying, *Taiwan minjian xinyang ‘guniang’ de fengsi*, pp. 75-76.

18 Prostitutes also consider “the girl” a kind of patron saint. Cf.: Meir Shahar – Robert P. Weller (eds.), *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu 1996), p. 32.

one and pursues him. That is why in most girl temples they do not ask for a happy marriage, although, e.g. in Chen guniang miao 陳姑娘廟 in Tucheng 土城 (New Taipei City) a blessing for engaged couples is popular.¹⁹ Laughing and quarrelling are also forbidden so as not to anger the “girl.”

Tragic and hopeful stories are associated with each girl temple: Stories of the “girls” who usually died tragic deaths, and stories of people who met them in dreams or awake and were punished or given gifts. Some such stories are presented below.

The Famous Lady Jade and Two Other Girls

Among the temples in Taipei, the Lady Jade Temple in Guandu (Guandu Yunü gong 關渡玉女宮)²⁰ on the north-western edge of the city has a special status. According to a legend, a girl was born here two hundred years ago (1820) to the Lin Family 林. For her family, which had only recently come to Taiwan and until then had no children, she was a gift of the goddess Mazu – the sea goddess who, in around a thousand temples, is the most venerated in Taiwan.²¹ Both the parents had prayed and fasted a long time at the Mazu Temple there. At the birth of the girl already, neighbours claimed to have seen a colourful light and sensed a pleasant scent. The clearly very talented, spiritual girl had eaten no meat from the age of three, often meditated in the temple and at home and became a nun (*xiangu* 仙姑). Since she repeatedly stated that she was directly taught by the goddess Mazu, she was considered to be a reincarnation (*lingtong* 靈童) of Mazu.²²

In times of need she always helped the local community. Thus it is reported that around 1836, during a great drought, she appeared in a dream to an official. When the official recognised her during a visit to the temple and asked her for rain, it actually began to rain. Two years later, when the girl was eighteen, she died suddenly during a meditation or – according to another version – was directly taken up to heaven.²³ After her death, a temple with a golden statue of the girl was set up in her parents’ house and those praying were said to have experienced many miracles.²⁴ The Lady Jade Temple in Guandu is an example of how a “girl” effectively supported local society, became a goddess and the original “dark” girl temple became a “light temple.”

19 Bai Shunyu 白順裕, *Taiwan de ligui xinyang – guniang miao yu minghun* 台灣的厲鬼信仰—姑娘廟與冥婚. Online: host.nljh.tyc.edu.tw/~psy1646/姑娘廟與冥婚.htm (accessed September 5, 2021).

20 No. 222, Lane 301, Section 3, Dadu Road, Beitou District, Taipei City.

21 It should be noted that Mazu, like Lady Jade, is said to have perished unmarried at sea as a girl named Lin Mo-nian 林默娘 in the 10th century while trying to save her family. Many miracles were reported after her death, so she was eventually recognised as the patron goddess of fishermen and seafarers. On Mazu and her position as the patron saint of Taiwan, see also: Jacob Tischer, *Mazus neue Heimat. Interpretationen und Institutionen einer chinesischen Göttin in Taiwan* [*Mazu's New Home, Interpretations and Institutions of a Chinese Goddess in Taiwan*] (Berlin 2014).

22 www.sites.google.com/a/ktu.tw/temple/1-1 (accessed September 5, 2021).

23 <https://bobe.nownews.com/20180516-21491?state=news> (accessed September 5, 2021).

24 Cf. the video about the celebration of Lady Jade's bicentenary in February 2020: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8L5fdQp4P2E (accessed 5 September 2021).



Altar of the Su Girl Temple in Zhongshan, Taipei. Photo: Fr. Adamek.

Taipei's other two girl temples did not make the grade. They are in the central part of the city in Zhongshan 中山 and Guting 古亭.²⁵ Both temples are in small, simple houses directly on the street and freely accessible. In the very light Zhongshan temple there is no statue but the spirit tablet of a girl of the Su family. There are many cut flowers there. Small lamps are lit in reverence. Once in a while there are prayers and incense sticks are lit. Quite different, the temple of Guting, located by a passageway, makes a dark, heavy impression. Its stone columns are decorated with figurative reliefs. A large table takes up almost the entire room. The altar space is enclosed by bars. Behind them, it is difficult to make out any statues. Incense is also burned there.

According to the tradition written on the wall plaque of the Zhongshan

Girl Temple, installed in 2007, a girl named Su Caiyun 蘇彩雲 was born “at the end of the Qing period” in Dadaocheng 大稻埕 – a district of Taipei. When a severe pest epidemic broke out in Taiwan a few years later, “countless” people²⁶ died, among them also the girl from the Su family. She was buried and her parents had a small temple built on her grave, so as to be able to sacrifice to her. Some 40 years later, in 1949, there was an incident that reminded the people of the “girl.” A tricycle driver – a man from the Mainland who lived in the house next door to the little girl temple and who did not understand the local customs – wanted to enlarge his house. In order to do that he began to destroy the temple with a hammer. Suddenly the hammer slipped out of his hand and injured the man seriously, so that he had to give up his plan. It was clear to all the neighbours that the “girl” Su was defending her temple. In 1964 the Chen 陳 family, who took care of the temple, as well as some other neighbours, believed they saw the appearance of Su *guniang* who wanted to see a play.²⁷ The specially arranged puppet show gathered all the neighbours from the area,

25 The Su Girl Temple (Su *guniang miao* 蘇姑娘廟), also called Su *shan tang* 蘇善堂, is located in Taipei's Zhongshan district (No. 56-3 Section 2, Xinsheng North Road, Zhongshan District, Taipei City). In Guting, the Girl Temple, known as Guting Difu Yingong miao 古亭地府陰公廟, is located on Roosevelt Road – one of the city's main streets (No. 1, Tong'an Street, Zhongzheng District, Taipei City).

26 In the years 1896–1917, the plague epidemic in Taiwan claimed 25,000 lives. The Taipei region was hardest hit. See: www.blogkhc.blogspot.com/2020/02/blog-post_15.html; www.accuspeedy.com.tw/L02_library_2/040_Infect_disease/13_mouse_plague.htm (accessed September 5, 2021).

27 The Taiwanese puppet show *budaixi* 布袋戲 is traditionally performed in temples.



Interior of the Su Girl Temple in Zhongshan. The Su Girl Temple has two altars. The actual Su girl altar (white, see also photo on the previous page) is somewhat hidden to the right of the door in this photo. The second, dark red altar belongs to the earth deity Tudi gong. The two tall, round ovens are used for burning paper money: golden (*jinzhi* 金紙) for Tudi gong (customary for deities) and silver (*yinzhi* 銀紙) for the *guniang* (customary for ancestors and spirits). The plates in the front left of the picture are for offerings, such as fruit and other food. One's offerings may be taken home after some time (when the *guniang* has "eaten") and eaten there. The boxes on the wall to the right contain paper money and incense sticks, with the two compartments clearly separated and labelled: one for Tudi gong, the other for the *guniang*. Next to it is another offering box for donations. Photo: Fr. Adamek.

who offered fruit and flowers to the "girl" and worshipped her. It was believed that this would avert disaster. Four years later, when state inspectors wanted to renovate the temple, they naturally asked the *guniang* for permission and for her instructions. By casting *jiaobei* 筊杯 (small half-moon pieces of wood) on the ground after a prayer, one was also able to find out the birthday of the "girl," which was destined to be the temple feast.²⁸

The history of the girl temple in Guting – Difu Yingong miao 地府陰公廟 – on Roosevelt Road also has a tragic beginning. It is reported that after a flood water catastrophe around one hundred years ago, the body of a young girl was found in that place. When the people cast *jiaobei* and asked the "girl" for instructions, she expressed the wish for her own temple where she could be venerated and she promised in return to protect the place from disaster.²⁹ According to research, the temple was built at the end of the Qing dynasty in the field of the Lai 賴 family on the outskirts of the settlement to keep the spirits of the deceased outside the city. The image of a "dark deity" (*yin gong* 陰公) was placed on the altar. Even if today the temple stands in the middle of the pavement, it still remains untouched after decades. It is said that Henry Kao Yu-shu 高玉樹 (1913–2005), when

28 Cf. also: www.historicalpiggy.com/2017/09/21/sugoddess (accessed September 5, 2021).

29 www.newton.com.tw/wiki/古亭地府陰公廟 (accessed September 5, 2021).



The Difu Yingong miao in Guting, Taipei. Photo: Fr. Adamek.

from the temple, many plays are organised in front of the building and large sums of money are donated for the upkeep of the temple.³¹ Above all, prayers are offered for happiness and safety and thanks are given for graces received.³²

Seven Temples

In New Taipei (New Taipei City), which surrounds the capital Taipei, seven girls' temples are located. They are all dedicated to a specific girl, of whom in most cases, as is usual, only the family name is known. The most well-known are the two *guniang* temples in Shiding 石碇, where Wei Bian xiang 魏扁仙姑³³ and in Sanxia 三峽, where Huang Weiniang 黃尾娘 are venerated.³⁴ The other five are in Ruifang 瑞芳 (Lan guniang miao 藍姑娘廟), in Xizhi 汐止 (Hong guniang miao 紅姑娘廟, also called Taiyuan Defu ju 太原德富居),³⁵ in

he became mayor of Taipei³⁰ and began large reconstruction of the street, ordered the temple to be torn down because it blocked the passage of the pedestrians. The neighbours, however, no longer felt safe and soon rebuilt the temple. It is also reported that when excavations for the nearby metro station began, the cranes and construction machinery kept having inexplicable breakdowns that only stopped when the chief engineer, who was a Christian, went to the girl temple and offered incense. In the year 2000, when they wanted to widen Roosevelt Road, they first decided to remove the temple. Due to protests by the people in the vicinity the temple was saved that time again. It was even renovated and adapted to the surroundings. Until today the people believe in a strong, effective, spiritual power

30 Henry Kao Yu-shu was twice mayor of Taipei: from 1954 to 1957 and from 1964 to 1972.

31 <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/society/paper/108358> (accessed September 5, 2021).

32 www.newton.com.tw/wiki/古亭地府陰公廟.

33 No. 22-1, Dahuge, Shiding District, New Taipei City.

34 No. 218, Sanshu Road, Sanxia District, New Taipei City.

35 No. 112, Section 2, Xiangzhang Road, Xizhi District, New Taipei City.

Shulin 樹林 (Tu guniang miao 涂姑娘廟),³⁶ in Xindian 新店 (Shen guniang miao 沈姑娘廟)³⁷ and in Tucheng 土城 (Chen guniang miao 陳姑娘廟 or Xingfu miao 幸福廟);³⁸ they are generally small and simple and are obviously mainly visited by the people of the neighbourhood. There is often only sparse information to be found about the little temples and their history.

In the temple of Shiding a young woman named Wei Bian 魏扁 is venerated. According to the text on the plaque in the temple from the year 1993, she was born in 1864 and died in 1879 due to illness (according to another version she committed suicide out of disappointed love). She was buried in a forest that belonged to the Wei family. Since she was an only child, there was no one to care for her grave and offer sacrifices. Later on the forest was sold by relatives of the Wei family to a certain Zeng Gui 曾桂. Shortly thereafter he



Altar of the Wei Girl Temple in Shiding.
Photo: Fr. Adamek.

36 No. 216, Lane 37, Xinxing Street, Shulin District, New Taipei City.

37 No. 96, Anxiang Road, Xindian District, New Taipei City.

38 No. 83-4, Longquan Road, Tucheng District, New Taipei City.

suddenly developed a serious foot disease for which no doctor was able to help him. Four years later he desperately visited a fortune-teller and heard about the “suffering, lonely” “girl” that was asking him in this way to “collect her bones” (*jian gu* 撿骨) and to rebury them.³⁹ Zeng Gui did that and built a temple for Wei *guniang*, after which his feet healed. Soon local people began to visit the temple, believing that they experienced blessing and spiritual power. In 1951 the son of Zeng Gui built a larger temple. Nowadays many people come “from afar” to Shiding to ask the “girl” for health and wealth.⁴⁰ Women also come here – other than in the majority of the girl temples – to pray for a good husband. Some become adopted daughters of the “girl.” In addition there are many tourists. Often parents who have lost a young daughter bring her spirit tablet to the Shiding temple, because they believe they can give her peace in that way. Over 100 spirit tablets are stored there.⁴¹ After consultation with the temple, the parents should first write the name of the deceased as well as their dates of birth and death on red paper, which they place in a pot with sand and three

incense sticks. After that they bring their “girl” to the temple, generally in a cart, while they constantly call her name en route and explain the way to her. In the temple a ceremony is then performed and the name of the girl immortalised on a plaque.⁴² The present-day temple is a roomy building with two floors. In one large room upstairs the statue of the *guniang* is displayed, protected by two golden dragons. Flowers are offered on a stone altar. Many cupboards along the walls store offerings of women’s clothing, ladies handbags and various smaller items for women. These may also be taken home and used which – as they believe – can soon



A shelf with various items for women in the Shiding Temple.
Photo: Fr. Adamek.

39 There is a belief that collecting the bones after six to twelve years has a calming effect on the soul of the deceased: <https://wukong.toutiao.com/question/6714294827036442891> (accessed September 5, 2021).

40 www.blog.xuite.net/hn85011982/twblog/137684368 (accessed September 5, 2021).

41 www.web.archive.org/web/20140714230635/http://tour.ntpc.gov.tw/page.aspx?wtp=1&wnd=136&id=1248c9ba45700000a01a (accessed September 5, 2021).

42 <https://cn.sonhoo.com/bdf/r9jf/3vzl/1puazjsb.html> (accessed September 5, 2021).

bring about a wedding.⁴³ Several tables with about twenty armchairs are set up in front of the altar, allowing visitors to comfortably spend several hours in the temple. A reading room with many books is also available, as well as its own Facebook page.⁴⁴

A plaque on the wall also relates the origin of the girl temple in Sanxia. A certain Huang Xiangsheng 黃亨生 came to Taiwan in 1756. His son built a house in Sanxia and had three sons, and then in 1813 a daughter, Huang Weiniang 黃尾娘. On a very cold winter day the family was trying to get warm beside a fire. A fire broke out and the then 17-year-old girl perished in the flames. After a few years the young woman returned to her family in a dream and “demanded to become ‘a girl.’”⁴⁵ After that the family gave her some land as a “dowry” and built a small temple for her. Today the renovated temple stands directly at the crossroad of a main street in Sanxia. A bus stop is named after her. The temple is a small, brick house with the portal decorated with reliefs. Inside fruit and items for women are offered before a statue of the “Holy Mother” (*shengma* 聖媽). On the walls hang numerous red bags, each containing a piece of paper with the names of girls and the ashes of incense burned in their veneration.⁴⁶ Similar to Shiding, they were brought by the parents of girls who died young to give them eternal rest. The little temple is visited by many venerators who believe their problems will be effectively solved there. There is a second, small girl temple in Sanxia – the Zhentou guniang miao 圳頭姑娘廟 on a hill street three kilometres from the centre in a sparsely inhabited area. A few urns stand there on a shelf, there is an empty, walled altar table outside the building and a few chairs. Here, too, lamps burn in the interior of the temple and gift offerings are laid before the statue in the centre.

On a north eastern headland in Bitou 鼻頭 (Ruifang) about 200 metres from the sea, between two mountains, stands a temple dedicated to two girls from the Lan family, the Lan guniang miao 藍姑娘廟. Incense and burning lights are on the altar, as well as an ancestral tablet with two names: Lan Meiyang 藍美英 and Lan Pengzai 藍樺仔. Two portraits of the girls used to hang on the wall.⁴⁷ It is said that the two young women were killed in a landslide in 1951.⁴⁸ Like the “girl” in Sanxia they appeared to their brother in a dream some time after their death and asked for a temple. In response he built a small “chapel” in the place where the two had died. The local inhabitants proclaim that the “girls” very reliably fulfill all the wishes of the faithful, especially helping in the acquisition of money. However, all promises made had to be kept and the gifts had to be repaid in some way. Around 2010 a Mr. Chen 陳 of Taoyuan announced that the “Lan Girl” had sought him as medium and had asked him to decorate the temple anew.⁴⁹ After that it was renovated. In 2018 a soldier who was serving on guard duty near the Lan Girl Temple reported that an

43 www.setn.com/News.aspx?NewsID=438537 (accessed September 5, 2021).

44 www.facebook.com/GuNiangMiao (accessed September 5, 2021).

45 S. Turner Bryan (ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Malden, MA – Oxford 2016), p. 238.

46 Cf. Arthur P. Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” in: Arthur P. Wolf (ed.), *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford 1974), pp. 148–149.

47 The two portraits are apparently no longer there after a recent renovation.

48 www.rts.com.tw/v2/tr/2012/lmsjj/tr_lmsjj.htm (accessed September 8, 2021).

49 <https://blog.xuite.net/love620721/twblog/121237494>; www.rts.com.tw/v2/tr/2012/lmsjj/tr_lmsjj.htm (accessed September 8, 2021).

officer had drunkenly kicked the door of the temple. In the night the soldier thought he “sensed” a strange figure and in the morning the officer awoke with a long, deep cut in his face. Two days later the officers went into the girl temple, to ask the “girl” for forgiveness.⁵⁰

There is very little information about the other four temples in New Taipei City. The girl temple in Xizhi was built on a small mountain road outside the city in 1912.⁵¹ It is dedicated to a girl of the Hong 紅 family. This temple, renovated in 1988, is only about one and a half metres high and – unlike most of the larger temples – has no door. Inside the temple there is an altar with a spirit tablet and a vase for incense. Who the girl was could not be established.

The temple of the girl of the Tu family (Tu guniang miao 涂姑娘廟) in Shulin is located on a small street in a residential area and borders on an apartment house. On an inner main altar is a statue of the “girl” and sometimes a figure of the earth deity is placed on an offering table in the middle of the room. As was explained, the earth god is supposed to keep the *guniang* under his control, because even if she “resembles a *shen* 神 (deity, good spirit), she is still a *gui* 鬼 (an unpredictable spirit, ghost).”⁵²



Shen Girl Temple in Xindian with a vessel for incense in front of the door.
Photo: Fr. Adamek.

The histories of two girl temples in Xindian and Tuchen also seem to have been forgotten. Even those living near the temples were unable to give any information about them.⁵³ In Xindian it is only known that a Shen *guniang* 沈姑娘 is venerated there. The small red brick temple is in a side road, not far from an abandoned coal mine. There is an incense vessel in front of the door, a pink shelf with some items is to one side. Inside, on an altar,

50 <https://forum.gamer.com.tw/C.php?bsn=60201&snA=18430> (accessed September 8, 2021).

51 <https://pp4668.pixnet.net/blog/post/229929519-%2833路%29汐止區鄉長厝大埤-荷池-北港口獅仔頭山> (accessed September 8, 2021).

52 <https://home.gamer.com.tw/creationDetail.php?sn=2989253> (accessed September 8, 2021). On the topic of “ghosts” and “spirits” in Chinese belief cf. also: Hu Baozhu, *Believing in Ghosts and Spirits* (Sankt Augustin 2021).

53 www.ivynimay.blogspot.com/2013/05/1020526.html; www.facebook.com/TaiwanTempleStory/posts/238949709991087 (accessed September 5, 2021).

is a statue of the “girl” with a golden crown; food offerings are made there.⁵⁴ The temple in Tucheng is located in the mountains above the city and is dedicated to a girl of the Chen 陳 family. It is often called Xingfu miao 幸福廟 – “Temple of good fortune.” There is a spirit tablet standing on the altar, ladies’ shoes are placed beneath the altar. A small temple of the earth god, one metre high, stands directly on the righthand side of the girl temple. Especially lovers “from all over the world” come there to receive a blessing for their marriage.⁵⁵



Altar of the Shen Girl Temple in Xindian.
Photo: Fr. Adamek.

Despite the changes in Taiwanese society in recent decades, people still go to a girl temple with their various requests and many believe they will be heard. Among the people and on the internet, happy or tragic stories are told, self-experienced or fictional, meant quite seriously or with a pinch of humour, stories that tie in with the popular religious *guniang* belief. One man regrets having forgotten to ask the “girl” for a blessing for his lottery ticket, which would certainly have brought him the greatest prize.⁵⁶ A boy tells about a “truth or dare” bet with his friends on the popular news portal ETtoday.⁵⁷ Since he lost, he had to steal and eat an apple from the girl temple in Taipei. When he and his three friends were riding their motorbikes from Yilan 宜蘭 back to Taipei shortly afterwards in the evening, the boy suddenly got a severe stomach ache and everyone noticed a strange smell. Then he had seen a girl on the road smiling strangely, suddenly felt paralysed and could not negotiate a curve. Thus he landed with broken bones in hospital, convinced that it was a punishment from the “girl” for his theft in the temple.⁵⁸ This is one more way of perpetuat-

54 www.ivynimay.blogspot.com/2013/05/1020526.html; pictures can be found under <https://home.gamer.com.tw/creationDetail.php?sn=2989367> (accessed September 5, 2021).

55 www.facebook.com/TaiwanTempleStory/posts/238949709991087.

56 www.rts.com.tw/v2/tr/2012/lmsjj/tr_lmsjj.htm (accessed September 5, 2021).

57 ETtoday xinwenyun (ETtoday新聞雲): www.ettoday.net.

58 www.ettoday.net/daemon/post/44623 (accessed September 5, 2021).

ing the phenomenon of girl temples in Taiwanese society,⁵⁹ by foreshadowing disaster – as in the past – or by harbouring a hope of good fortune.

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59 For today’s development see: Wu Xuanci 吳宣慈, “Cong guniang miao xinyang yu chuanshuo tantao Taiwan nüxing jiaose bianqian” 從姑娘廟信仰與傳說探討臺灣女性角色變遷, in: *Guoli Huwei keji daxue xuebao* 國立虎尾科技大學學報 32 (2014) 1, pp. 69-83.