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Contributions to	The Editor, <i>East Asian History</i> Division of Pacific and Asian History Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies Australian National University Canberra ACT 0200, Australia Phone +61 2 6125 3140 Fax +61 2 6125 5525 Email marion@coombs.anu.edu.au
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Subscription Enquiries to	Marion Weeks, <i>East Asian History</i> , at the above address, or to marion@coombs.anu.edu.au
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# MARTYRS OR GHOSTS? A SHORT CULTURAL HISTORY OF A TOMB IN REVOLUTIONARY CANTON, 1911–1970

史 Virgil Kit-yiu Ho

Chinese school pupils in Taiwan and Hong Kong are taught to admire the bravery as well as the modernist outlook of the “Father of the Nation” (*guofu* 國父), Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 (1866–1925), on the basis of an historical anecdote. One day, they are told, the young hero together with one of his closest and equally rebellious friends, Lu Haodong 陸皓東, raided the village temple and vandalised the statues of the three deities there. Their act is described not as sacrilegious, but heroic. Sun is praised as a born revolutionary, and this deed, among many others, is taken as an early sign of his abilities. This incident was interpreted as being a conscious act of blasphemy that demonstrated the “progressive foresight” of these young men; it was an act that showed superstition was the result of ignorance and had to be uprooted if China was to be rescued from backwardness so that it could enter a new era of progress and modernity.<sup>1</sup> This anecdote was used by the Guomindang 國民黨 (hereafter as GMD) to educate the young on the importance of saving China by adopting fundamental changes not only institutionally but also in terms of its political culture. The traditional system of supernatural beliefs was attacked as being irrational, unscientific and backward. It would have no place in the project of modern state-building. Sun and the “progressive” Nationalist Party that he symbolized were hailed as being the brave vanguard that dared challenge the mighty forces of “feudalistic superstition” and that would be capable of leading China along the historic path of modernity. Some even acclaim Sun as a prominent atheist, while, in contrast, his ardent political opponent Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–

This study originated as a conference paper presented at Leiden University in July 1999. I must thank the Division of Humanities, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, for giving me a travel grant to attend this conference entitled “Ghosts and Modernity in East Asia.” I must also thank all the participants in this conference from whom I learned a great deal about this topic. I owe thanks to the following scholars for their insightful comments and their much-needed encouragement during the preparation of this paper: Mark Elvin, Göran Aijmer, Jan van Bremen, W. J. Boot, Frank Dikötter, Chong Weoi-lien, Daniel B. Stevenson, John Knight, Sebastian Tse, Geremie R. Barmé, and the two anonymous reviewers of this article for *East Asian History*.

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<sup>1</sup> Jiang Xingde, *Guofu de yisheng* [Life of the Father of (our) Nation] (Chongqing: N.p., 1944), pp.63–5; Shu Jun, *Zhong-shanling lishi dang an* [Historical Archive on the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum] (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1999), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Xiao Wanyuan, *Sun Zhongshan zhixue sixiang* [Philosophical thought of Sun Yat-sen] (Yichang: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1981), ch.3.

<sup>3</sup> James Cantlie and Sheridan S. Jones, *Sun Yat Sen and the awakening of China* (London: Jarrolds & Sons, 1912), p.77.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu Zhixin, *Zhu Zhixin ji* [Collected works of Zhu Zhixin] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), vol.2, pp.151–8; Rudolf G. Wagner, “The canonization of May fourth,” in *The appropriation of cultural capital: China’s May fourth project*, ed. Milena Dolezalova-Velingerova and Oldrich Kral (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.95–7.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp.2–11, 287–90; Prasenjit Duara, “Knowledge and power in the discourse of modernity: The campaigns against popular religion in early twentieth-century China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1, (Feb. 1991); C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese society* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1961), pp.374–7.

<sup>6</sup> J. Megan Greene, “GMD rhetoric of science and modernity (1927–70): a neo-traditional scientism?” in *Defining modernity: Guomindang rhetorics of a new China, 1920–1970*, ed. Terry Bodenhorn (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp.23–31; Mitani Takashi, “Nankin seiken to ‘meishin daha undō’ (1928–1929)” [The Nanjing government and the “Movement to eradicate superstition,” 1928–1929] in *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, 445 (April 1977): 8–11; Rudolf Wagner, “The canonization of May fourth,” pp.98–101.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Jingyu and Liu Zhiqiang, *Peiyang junfa tongzhi shiqi Zhongguo shehui zhi bianqian* [Social changes in China during the Beiyang warlords period] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1992), pp.314–18. Its impact in Canton was far less impressive, despite its sporadic successes in some areas such as regulating the fortune-telling trade and shops selling religious paraphernalia. Fengsu gaige weiyuanhui, ed. *Fengsu gaige congtan* [Social customs reform journals] (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Tebishi Danghu Xuanchuanbu, 1930), pp.262–70.

1916) is scorned for his advocacy of superstitious practices and for formalising Confucius worship into a state cult.<sup>2</sup>

Young readers of the anecdote with which I started this essay are, however, rarely told that Sun was a baptised and, apparently, sincere Christian at least at one point in his life. In a letter written to his mentor James Cantlie shortly after he became the president of the new Republic in 1912, Sun expressed thanks for the latter’s “earnest prayers” on his behalf and was glad to tell him that “we are going to have religious toleration in China, and I am sure that Christianity will flourish under the new regime.”<sup>3</sup> Nor are they given any clue that the nascent Republic and many of its supporters were hardly perfect exemplars of the kind of modernity in which so-called modern Western secular values and non-religious scientific rationality supposedly reigned supreme.

Superstitions were widely denounced by the modernizing Chinese élite for being one of the key features of China’s backwardness. The call to suppress superstitious beliefs became a common catch-phrase of statesmen, politicians, and intellectuals alike.<sup>4</sup> In official discourse and rhetoric since the early years of last century, the agenda of China’s modernization project included in its long list of issues that the state was engaged in actively promoting: the faith in positivist scientism, the secularisation of cultural and social institutions, the repudiation of China’s backward history, an advocacy of objectivity and empiricism, and so on. Modernity, in theory, has little room for traditional customs, values and beliefs, all of which are intermingled with ignorance and superstition, things that supposedly work in opposition to the dogmas of progress, scientism, secularism and rationalism.<sup>5</sup> The project of modernity was already gradually emerging in official writings and intellectual discourse from the late-Qing period, and it was increasingly institutionalised by the Nationalist regime in Nanjing after 1928.<sup>6</sup> Under the influence of this cultural force many traditional Chinese festivals were subsequently de-spiritualised in both form and content. The Qingming 清明, or Grave-sweeping Festival on 5 April, for instance, was replaced with a Tree-planting Festival, one totally devoid of any of the reverential or spiritual connotations related to the original. Many other popular religious festivals gradually died out, owing to the popular acceptance of the officially-promoted ideology of “science and civilisation.”<sup>7</sup> With the founding of an uncompromisingly agnostic socialist state in 1949 an entire tradition was obliterated as part of the purge of supernatural beliefs, and this continued until the early 1980s when the world of the numinous re-emerged and began once more to attract untold numbers of adherents.

This paper sets out to examine the nature of the avowed agnosticism of China’s revolutionary élite. In spite of their overt denunciation of popular “superstitious” beliefs, it remains unclear if the cult of martyrs that they actively promoted was not itself just another form of “superstition,”

or was it, as C. K. Yang suggests, a calculated act of the government to lure public support to the party-state. The monumental tomb of the seventy-two martyrs in Canton 廣州, the object of investigation in this study, provides us with clues with which to answer some of these questions. The construction of the grave complex, the layers of symbolic meanings it embodies, and the rituals that its mourners performed, can, I argue, all be interpreted as reflecting the revolutionary élite's attitudes towards the disposition of the mortal remains of their comrades. Although the local administration in Canton had tried to introduce "modern" mortuary rites into the official mourning ceremony annually held at the tomb, it is important to know how much of those traditional (or imperial) practices of worshipping martyrs survived such a new form of commemoration. Was it neo-traditionalism, instead of being a radically new innovation, that had eventually emerged to replace the old traditions? In spite of new social and political circumstances, the powerful rhetoric of modernity may not have been strong enough to uproot this "deep-seated element in the Chinese culture"—the cult-like veneration of men of exemplary deeds faded only slowly from the minds of tradition-minded or modern-educated officials and scholars.<sup>8</sup> Also, a study of how the ordinary people construed this monumental tomb will tell us something about popular responses to this official project of modernity, and to what extent they shared the modernist interpretations of the Republicans and the Nationalists regarding the symbolic meaning of the tomb. No matter how hard the new regime tried to publicise the achievements of its modernisation projects, the resilience of tradition and socio-cultural continuity hung over it like a spectre, so to speak.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, this paper will, it is hoped, make some contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of modern China.

### *From Grave to Monument*

The famous Yellow Flower Mound, or *Huanghua gang* (黃花崗 hereafter *HHG*), lies in what was once a north-eastern suburb of Canton. Here a tomb was built for the seventy-two "martyrs"<sup>10</sup> who were either killed in action, or executed after a brief trial, following an abortive uprising that attempted to topple the Manchu administration in late April 1911. This incident was the last of the ten uprisings masterminded by Sun Yat-sen, arguably the founding father of the Revolutionary League (*Tongmenghui* 同盟會), which helped destabilize Guangdong 廣東 province, though without much success, between 1905 and 1911. Numerous works in Chinese have been published about this doomed uprising in Canton on 27 April 1911 (equivalent to the 29th day of the third month in the third year of the Xuantong 宣統 reign). Here it will suffice to say

<sup>8</sup> C. K. Yang, *Religion*, pp.372–3.

<sup>9</sup> An experience shared by many modern societies, including those in the West. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press), pp.287–309.

<sup>10</sup> From the Manchu government's point of view, they were indisputably rebels. Such a negative view was also commonly held by news journals at that time, such as the Hong Kong-based Chinese daily *Huazi ribao*. This paper would portray the dead rebels as "martyrs" or "heroes" only after the fall of the Manchu court in 1912.

<sup>11</sup> Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), chs.3, 5 and 6; Harold Z. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen and the origins of the Chinese revolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1968), chs.4 and 8.

<sup>12</sup> Xu Xu, ed., *Huanghua gang* [The yellow flower mound] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), pp.155–8.

<sup>13</sup> Guangzhoushi Wenwuzhi Bianweihui, ed., *Guangzhoushi wenwuzhi* [An account of the antiquities of Canton city] (Guangzhou: Lingnan Meishu Chubanshe, 1990), p.149; Pan Dawei, “Zishu Xinyou nian” [A reminiscence composed in 1911], in *Guangdong wenzhi xubian*, ed. Guangdong Wenzhi Bianyin Weiyuanhui [A sequel to the collected works of Guangdong writers] (Hong Kong: N.p., 1987), vol.2, pp.321–3.

<sup>14</sup> *Huazi ribao* [Hong Kong daily], 2 May 1911.

that the uprising, like most of its preceding events under the “leadership” of Sun Yat-sen, failed mainly as a result of poor coordination, ill preparation and an optimistic over-estimation of its own military strength.<sup>11</sup> In the subsequent days of fighting and executions, more than one hundred “rebels” were said to have been killed and only seventy-two bodies were eventually recovered, collected and buried without ceremony in four contiguous mass graves at *HHG* in early May, with the help of a local charity hall and a journalist of *Tongmenghui* background.<sup>12</sup>

There are some unresolved puzzles concerning the early history of this grave. In the official version of the event and the recollection of the journalist, Pan Dawei 潘達微, the Manchu authorities originally planned to dump the seventy-two bodies into a mass grave called Stinking Mound (*Chou gang* 臭崗)—an uncovered sinkhole used as a burial ground for the bodies of unclaimed prisoners executed in Canton. Pan was unhappy with this arrangement for he believed that the bodies of these “revolutionaries” did not deserve to be treated like those of criminals. As a result, he lobbied a number of local charity organisations and was eventually promised by one the use of a site that had been purchased as a burial ground for its members. The site, as Pan recalled, was called Red Flower Mound (*Honghua gang* 紅花崗), which was never used for any mortuary purpose and henceforth was considered to be land unpolluted by death. Pan also wrote that he later changed its name to *HHG* because he found the words “yellow flower” more “powerful and beautiful.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the greatest enigmas about the early history of this tomb is the fact that the *HHG* existed before the burial took place. The account of events published in Hong Kong, which followed closely the turbulent events of the last days of Manchu rule in Canton, contain discrepancies between Pan’s and the GMD reconstructions of the same event. The newspaper report revealed that two days after the uprising was crushed a few local charity organisations had been requested by the authorities to help collect the dead bodies of the insurgents in different parts of the city. It was also reported that many bodies were placed in front of the Provincial Assembly, which was located outside the eastern gate of the walled city and not far from the infamous mass grave for criminals. Thereupon, government officials took photographs of each body before they were coffined and, perhaps, dumped into the Stinking Mound nearby.<sup>14</sup> On the seventh day following the uprising, we learn from the same newspaper that the Boards of Directors of at least four charity organisations requested a prominent member of the local gentry to mediate with the Governor for official permission to have the bodies buried properly. The report also mentioned that since some of the bodies were so bloated that their original coffins were now too small for them, it was necessary to have them transferred to larger ones. When everything was done and official permission received, the coffins were carried by a



team of porters to a burial ground called *HHG*.<sup>15</sup> There is no mention in these reports of any change of name of the burial site, although the enthusiasm of Pan was noted. Extant late-Qing 清 maps of Canton prove the existence of Red Flower Mound, which was not far from the Stinking Mound outside the East Gate of the walled city, but it was at least one kilometre southeast of *HHG*. It was very unlikely that Pan, himself a native Cantonese, did not know Red Flower Mound at least by name, given its proximity to the infamous Stinking Mound. The problem, therefore, is where exactly were these bodies originally buried? One may conjecture endlessly and a true account of events will probably never be possible. One hypothesis is that the remains of these insurgents were initially dumped into the infamous sinkhole, but were later retrieved by Pan and others who had them sub-sequently buried “properly” at *HHG*. It is important to note that a travelogue published in 1922 described *HHG* as “originally a burial ground for unclaimed bodies” (*luan zang fenshan* 亂葬墳山). If this is true, these bodies, therefore, were seemingly just removed from one dumping ground to another, though the latter was, in a relative sense, more “respectable” than the former (which was used for decapitated criminals).<sup>16</sup> To maintain the dignified image of these revolutionary martyrs and to avoid any blasphemous implications regarding these national heroes, the role of the Red Flower Mound (perhaps even the Stinking Mound) in this drama has to be separated from the romanticised official narrative of the event.

Nevertheless, only days after the bodies of the revolutionaries had been buried in four mass graves at *HHG*, isolated small groups of young men and women were seen making sacrificial offerings to the new graves. The graves, however, were left in a crude state and remained undecorated until 1918, when the first attempt was made to create some prominent monumental mortuary architecture for them. This construction project had an undisguised political motive: the tomb was intended to be a symbolic tool to legitimize the Nationalist camp led by Sun Yat-sen and his group who were based in Canton. During the Republican period, the tomb was renovated several times, in 1922, 1924, and 1934, each resulting in more decorative structures being added to the old ones, and the boundary of the gravesite was expanded and demarcated. Each phase of these renovations and expansions coincided with the political expansion of the Sun Yat-sen-led government (1922 and 1924) and the separatist regime of Chen Jitang 陳濟棠 (1934). Each phase of expansion represented a progression in utilizing this monumental tomb as a means to reinforce the image of different political regimes as legitimate heir to the Republic. Henceforth, as the history of the Chinese Republic progressed, the name *HHG* appeared more and more often in official and semi-official literature about the Revolution and the Republic. Each version of this politicised image of *HHG* revealed a progressive distortion and exaggeration of

<sup>15</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 5 May 1911.

<sup>16</sup> Jie Fu, “Huanghua gang jiyou” [An account of a trip to Huanghua gang] in *Xin youji loukan buibian* [A new collection of travelogues] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1922), vol.5, *juan* 29, p.6.

**Figure 1**

A painting by Pan Dawei of Huanghua gang. Pan Dawei was lauded for his heroism in giving the seventy-two martyrs a proper burial following the bloody suppression of their uprising (source: Xiu Jinhua ed., *Huanghua gang gongyuan [The Huanghua gang Park] (Guangzhou: Lingnan Meishu Chubanshe, 2001), p.42*)



<sup>17</sup> Zhang Yili, *Huanghua gang* [The Yellow Flower Mound] (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1983), p.18.

<sup>18</sup> Guangdong Sheng Jinchukou Gongsi and Guangdong Keji Chubanshe, eds, *Guangzhou zhinan* [A guide to Guangzhou] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Keji Chubanshe, 1981), pp.29–30.

both the uprising and its political significance, an important subject that can only be dealt with satisfactorily in a separate article.

It is clear that the *HHG* monument that we see today had come a long way from its humble origins. The original mass graves of the insurgents, though impossible to identify exactly, lay inconspicuously somewhere on the north-eastern slope of the now imposing tomb structures.<sup>17</sup> The present impressive memorial structures, and the large park that surrounds it, were basically completed by 1935 when the entire complex was declared a public park, symbolising the state's intention to weave the cult that this monument represented into the public life of the citizens, as well as secularizing the function of this cluster of mortuary structures and tombs. The state preferred the tomb to be remembered and revered by its subjects as a revolutionary monument of contemporary relevance, not a grave with any “superstitious” meaning.

Today, the seventy-two martyrs' tomb complex stands conspicuously on the top of a gentle mound, facing south, and is flanked by a park of 160,000 metres square which charges its visitors a modest entry fee. Under the management of the atheistic socialist state, the tomb was further de-spiritualised to become a secular monument to historical memory. In contrast to those city guides to Canton published in the 1930s, which described *HHG* as a tomb and a monumental symbol of the Republican revolution, present-day official guides refer to the place both as a tomb of the seventy-two martyrs and a park for the people. Officially, the site is now called the *HHG* Commemoration Park (*Huanghua gang jinian gongyuan* 黃花崗紀念公園). A “typical” description of this place begins with a brief history of the uprising and its historical significance, and ends with a graphic of the park and the many species of sub-tropical flowers that it now boasts.<sup>18</sup> The secularised tomb is given an unmistakably mundane purpose.

### *Ghosts and Heroes: the Enigma*

<sup>19</sup> *Guangzhou minguo ribao* [Republican Daily of Canton], 7 March 1924; *Guofu quanji* [The collected works of Sun Yat-sen] (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1989), vol.7, p.74.

In the park at *HHG* stands a stone stele that is sheltered inside a Chinese-style pavilion. On it is inscribed an official edict proclaimed by the civil and military authorities in Canton in 1924 about the government's decision to prohibit further unauthorised burials in the proximity of the seventy-two martyrs' tomb at *HHG*, and to re-draw the boundaries of the cemetery by ordering the removal of all commoners' graves within it.<sup>19</sup> This document revealed at least two interesting points which are rarely

mentioned in either official or unofficial guides to the tomb: that it had been once popular for families of deceased military or civil officials to have their loved ones buried near the tomb, and that there were also quite a few commoners' graves in the vicinity of HHG. This practice of "burying in proximity" (hereafter *fuzang* 附葬), as it is called in this official proclamation, provides us with an important hint that this monumental tomb might be construed as something more than just an ordinary monument or grave in the secular sense.

This practice of *fuzang* was not new to China. It had been a popular practice since time immemorial and is still so in rural Guangdong today.<sup>20</sup> Popular belief holds that graves are a source of efficacious supernatural power for the living, a belief sometimes so strong that people would try all possible means to have their

<sup>20</sup> It was, and still is, common to find "new" (in relative terms) graves in close proximity to those of imperial tombs in northern and central China. See Ann Paludan, *The Chinese spirit road* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), illustration nos. 77 and 241. These are evidence of civilian attempts to take advantage of the good *fengshui* of the locale: most of these royal tombs were built on sites believed to be rich in geomantic energy. Sometimes, this burial practice of *fuzang* might take a different form and was employed by the imperial bureaucracy. For example, shortly after the crushing of the 1911 Canton Uprising, the Qing administrators in Canton were ordered to install the spiritual tablets of the fallen soldiers into the official Temple of Loyalists and Martyrs (*Zhonglie ci*). This was similar to the mortuary practice of *fuzang*. See *Huazi ribao*, 11 May 1911, 3 June 1911.

**Figure 2**

*On this stone stele is inscribed an official announcement concerning 1) the geographical boundaries of the Huanghua gang graveyard; 2) a prohibition against further burials in the graveyard without official approval; and, 3) the removal of civilian graves within the precinct (source: Xiu Jinhua, Huanghua gang gongyuan, p. 45). The erection of this stele indicated the growing "problem" of unapproved burials that were taking advantage of the positive geomantic forces in the area generally*



<sup>21</sup> *Shen bao* [Shanghai daily], 15 June 1872.

<sup>22</sup> Guo Bo, *Zang jing* [Classics on funerary practices] (originally c. 265–385), in *Xiangmu xiangzhai shu* [Books on determining grave and house sites], ed. Liu Jing (Haikou: Hainan Chubanshe, 1993), pp.34–5.

### Figure 3 and 4

*Some of the “obscure” graves behind the major monument. Many of these graves date from the Republican period. Those interred were from a variety of backgrounds, and included the mother of a military officer and a few men identified only by names (photographs by the author)*



recently deceased relatives buried near an auspicious ancestral gravesite belonging to another lineage or an agnatically unrelated household. This could lead to violent disputes between rural communities as this source of supernatural blessing should be reserved for the exclusive use of the agnatic line of the deceased and must not be stolen, or shared-and-hence-diminished (*fenbo* 分薄) by an unrelated third party.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, even though one may argue that only direct living descendants of these ancestors were entitled to the virtue of the ancestors, since it was believed that only they shared the same quality of geomantic potent-energy (*qi* 氣) in their bones as their ancestors, and henceforth both were linked through a particular bond of mutuality (*ganying* 感應),<sup>22</sup> any uninvited graves of outsiders located within the vicinity of the site

therefore could disturb the flow of the natural forces of energy in the area and damage the efficacy of the tomb as a source of blessing.<sup>23</sup>

General Chen Jitang, the military head of the Guangdong separatist government between 1928 and 1935, reportedly purchased a large tract of land near the ancestral grave of Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全), the self-proclaimed emperor of the Heavenly Kingdom of Peace (*Taiping tianguo* 太平天國, 1850–64). On the advice of some masters of geomancy, he removed the remains of his deceased mother to this auspicious new gravesite, which was supposedly benefited by its proximity to the “divine pit” (*zhen xue* 真穴) of the Hong family. His intention was clear and simple: to seek supernatural blessings for the prosperity of his family and for the consolidation of his political power in South China.<sup>24</sup>

In the present-day Pearl River Delta area, villagers are still keen to locate ancestral graves near to those of outstanding citizens or villagers, especially of well-to-do families. Once such a spot is identified, villagers, to appropriate the geomantic potent-energy concentrated in that locality, would bury the remains of their deceased close kin in the vicinity so that their own family could benefit. As a result, it is not uncommon for households of substantial social influence to purchase a large tract of burial land for their own exclusive use. In the Pearl River Delta area, many of these family cemeteries are demarcated by low concrete walls. This practice of “stealing” the supernatural blessings from the ancestral grave of another family, one of the many ways to manipulate the geomantic potent-energy in nature (*feng shui* 風水) to foster one’s fortune, shows that graves, to many Cantonese, mean a lot more than being just a storage place for the remains of a deceased person, for they are also an important symbolic and supernatural asset. A well-chosen grave is important in the sense that it facilitates the harvesting of supernatural power, or potent-energy forces, released from the dead body buried underneath, and the living descendants would be therefore substantially rewarded by such an auspiciously located site. Otherwise, the deceased may feel uneasy and could become malevolent by preying on the living.<sup>25</sup> The physical remains buried in a grave are always understood to be a supernatural agent, commonly regarded as an ancestor or ghost, but rarely a corpse in the secular sense.

Could that prohibitive stone stele in *HHG* be an official effort to put an end to similar conscious infringements on an auspicious gravesite? Could this possibly happen to *HHG*, a tomb that was praised in Nationalist publications as “a holy site for the Chinese Republic” (*Zhonghua minguo shengdi* 中華民國聖地)?<sup>26</sup> In official discourse, *HHG* was, and still is, described not so much as a grave of the seventy-two martyrs, but more emphatically as a monument that symbolizes revolutionary commitment, political identity, patriotic loyalty to the nation-party-state, and the political legitimacy of the Nationalist regime. *HHG* as a monument was portrayed as a place where mourners were expected to evoke collective historical

<sup>23</sup> Hugh Baker, *Ancestral images* [Hong Kong: *South China Morning Post*, 1981], Appendix 2; Yi Li, *Yubai yu sheng'en* [The sea of desires and the grace of god] (Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990), pp.167–70. Göran Aijmer, *Burial, ancestors and geomancy among the Ma On Shan Hakka, New Territories of Hong Kong* (Gothenburg: Institute for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Bo Hansui, “Furong Zhang fengshui pianju” [The scam about geomancy in Furong Zhang] in *Nantian sui yue: Chen Jitang zhu Yue shiqi jianwen shilu* (A veritable record of Guangdong under Chen Jitang’s rule), ed. Guangzhou Shi Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Yanjiu Weiyuanhui (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), pp.350–1.

<sup>25</sup> Guo Bo, *Zangjing*, p.42; Göran Aijmer and Virgil Ho, *Cantonese society in a time of change* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2000), pp.179–85.

<sup>26</sup> Geming Xianlie Zhuanji Bianyin Weiyuanhui, ed., *Geming xianlie zhuan* [Biographies of revolutionary martyrs] (Taipei: Yunhai Chubanshe, 1971), section on Pictures.

<sup>27</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua ji* [A compilation of works commemorating (the martyrs buried in) the Yellow Flower Mound] (Guangzhou: N.p., 1919), pt.1, pp.1–5b. The orations delivered at the annual commemoration ceremonies at the tomb from the late 1920s to 1939, emphasized that the Nationalist Party expected these political obligations from participants in these events. For example, see *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 29 March 1936.

<sup>28</sup> According to the interviews conducted by the author during his field work at *HHG* in April 1999.

<sup>29</sup> *Guangzhou zhinan* [A guide to Canton] (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Shizhengfu, 1935), pp.167–8; Xu Xu, *Huanghua gang*, pp.22–3.

<sup>30</sup> Canton Municipal Archives, *Zhi/zheng/* 618/5/77.

memories of the revolutionary past, to commemorate, as a way of learning, the meaning of martyrdom for the nationalist revolution, and to reconfirm their faith in and unreserved commitment to the Party.<sup>27</sup> Heavy emphasis on *HHG* as a secular object—a revolutionary monument—results, in extreme cases, in the total eclipse of the mortuary function of the site in the minds of political pilgrims. Some young students in present-day Canton opine that *HHG* is not a grave at all because they believe there are no corpses buried there and that the monument was built merely to commemorate the 1911 Revolution.<sup>28</sup> To these youngsters, the only meaning of this place is a thoroughly de-spiritualised one, the one that has been constructed and defined by the state through its official rhetoric.

Even though *HHG* is sometimes described in official (GMD and Communist) literature as the resting place of the seventy-two martyrs, the tomb is largely taken to be a secular site. Standing in front of the tomb, a mourner is supposed to reminisce and commemorate (*jinian* 紀念) the selfless acts of sacrifice of these heroes, and to be touched by this historical memory.<sup>29</sup> Any supernatural reading of the tomb is carefully removed and strictly controlled.

But before exploring further the symbolism of *HHG*, it is useful to examine briefly a similar situation involving another set of graves at Red Flower Mound devoted to four other martyrs of the anti-Manchu revolution. The area Red Flower Mound, as already pointed out in the above, was a stone's throw away from the dumping ground for unclaimed bodies (largely executed criminals) during Qing times. It is not known if this place was still in use as a mass grave after the fall of the Manchu regime, although it was certainly a popular spot for executing criminals and political dissidents during the Republican period. In 1928, the Canton Branch Office of the GMD requested that the military wing of the government stop using the place as an execution ground. The reason was that the blood of those “devilish” Communists and armed criminals had polluted, and would continue to pollute, the graves of these heroic martyrs nearby at the Red Flower Mound.<sup>30</sup> This was more than demanding respect for a tomb: it was an act to maintain the spiritual purity, and hence the supernatural power, of an afterlife abode.

Similarly, the phenomenon of *fuzang* at *HHG* reminds us that the tomb was not perceived by everyone as being a secular burial place, but more as a spiritual site operating under the system of popular religious beliefs in ghosts and geomancy. As a socio-cultural and religiously symbolic place, the *HHG* tomb was persistently construed by some, even perhaps many, in ways that differed significantly from those in officialdom, and was visited by worshippers or mourners for its spiritual efficacy. In a pilgrim's mind, the tomb could be a memorial dedicated to the seventy-two martyrs, as much as a grave in the supernatural sense. Depending

on one's point of view, the physical remains buried beneath the tomb could be perceived in a number of possible ways: perished heroes of the revolution, ghosts (malevolent or benevolent), or both.

### *An Un-Earthly Reading of the Tomb*

The practice of *fuzang* was a clue to the existence of an alternative non-secular use being made of the martyrs' tomb. The perception of *HHG* as a grave in the popular religious sense was even more vividly revealed through mortuary rituals that the mourners performed there, and by the pages of eulogies that scholars and officials composed to commemorate the seventy-two martyrs.

From the start, the original four crude mass graves at *HHG* were clearly not perceived as being just a revolutionary monument in the secular sense. All extant evidence indicates that during the early days of their existence, these crude graves were worshipped as the spiritual abode of the seventy-two martyrs and malevolent spirits. According to a newspaper report, isolated groups of "concerned people" were seen mourning at the four mass graves in *HHG* during the first two months following the ill-fated uprising. Many of these mourners who were mainly "scholars of great talent," brought with them chickens (it is not recorded whether they were cooked or live) and pots of rice wine as sacrificial offerings to the graves. On one occasion, a group of about fifty young women, all dressed in plain clothes, visited the graves with six Westerners. All these female visitors were said to come from respectable families. They bowed to the graves and made offerings of floral wreaths and bouquets.<sup>31</sup> In this part of China, rice wine and chickens were, and still are, commonly used as sacrificial food for ancestors, or ghosts, if one is not related agnatically to the recipient spirit.<sup>32</sup> Both floral wreaths and bouquets were also commonly used by Christians, Chinese or foreign, as offerings at graves. In the eyes of the early pilgrims, the seventy-two martyrs were seemingly revered as spirits rather than merely heroes of the revolution.

Not long after the inauguration of the Republic, another group of thirty men and women from Canton and Hong Kong paid homage to the graves of the martyrs. They brought with them fresh flowers, firecrackers and written commemorative couplets. After sacrifices had been offered, they cut twigs of pine and cypress to take home as memorabilia, or so it was reported.<sup>33</sup>

This was a strange mixture of traditional Cantonese and "modern" Christian customs. Firecrackers are a ritual device whose symbolic functions include the warding off of evil spirits from a locale, and, with their red paper flakes shattering on the grave after exploding, balancing the *yin* (female/negative 陰) force with the *yang* (male/positive 陽) energy

<sup>31</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 26 June 1911.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Wolf, "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors," in Arthur Wolf, ed., *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp.176–81.

<sup>33</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 13 November 1911; Xu Xu, *Huanghua gang*, p.4.

<sup>34</sup> Aijmer and Ho, *Cantonese society*, pp.179–85.

<sup>35</sup> *Zhongguo difangzhi minsu ziliaohuibian*, *Huadong bian* [Extracts of local gazetteers materials on social customs in China: the section on East China] (Beijing: Shumu Wenxian Chubanshe, 1995), vol.2, pp.616, 619, 683, 688, 731, 943, 968, 1043; Göran Aijmer, “Qingming festival in China”, *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18 (1978): 74.

<sup>36</sup> There is a third possible suggestion that comes closer in meaning to the customs of the Naxi (or Nakhi) people in south-west China. The twigs may be a symbolic device that carries the *yin* ancestors from the graves to their *yang* counterparts in ancestral tablets at their living descendants’ homes. Ma Changyi, *Zhongguo linghun xinyang* [The cult of spirits in China] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998), pp.268–9. This interpretation, however, does not tally with Aijmer’s observation at Qingming festivals in Central China. Aijmer, “Qingming festival,” pp.68–71.

<sup>37</sup> *Shen bao*, 28 November 1911.

represented and endowed by the red-colour paper flakes and the thundering noise of explosion. The comfort of an after-life abode is hinged very much upon this ritualistic manipulation of the two cosmic forces and the need to keep them in harmony, otherwise the spirit residing there, regardless of whether it is one’s ancestor, could become a malicious ghost.<sup>34</sup> Taking home twigs of pine or cypress, or even more commonly willow branches, and to have them placed above the entrance to a mourner’s home, is still a common practice that forms part of the annual grave-sweeping rituals during the Third Moon of the Chinese lunar calendar in this part of China.<sup>35</sup> As it is understood in the popular mind, the twigs, be they pine or willow, are taken home as a powerful amulet that possesses the power to drive away any malevolent spirits from its owner’s household. This protective power is believed to be coming from the ancestors whose graves have just been properly “swept”—a grave has to be properly “swept” and regularly worshipped so that an ancestor will feel comfortable and content with the after-life abode; a contented spirit will not harm living people. This custom is also probably a precautionary measure taken by grave-sweepers since cemeteries are commonly considered to be dangerous places where malicious spirits roam. An amulet such as the twigs mentioned above, would ensure that none of the ghosts would follow the grave-sweeper home.<sup>36</sup> The twig was a mystical object rather than just a piece of memorabilia.

In the fall of 1911, the newly-founded Republican administration organised a mass visit to the graves at *HHG*. The event was participated in by thousands of supporters of the new regime, including soldiers, labour unionists, members of the city’s guilds, the Red Cross, Overseas Chinese representatives, and women. A team of martial art masters, who did lion dances and drum beating, also followed the procession from the city to the gravesite. They carried with them a cupboard in which were placed one cock and one dog, and on the outside of the cupboard was written in large characters the idiom “Not a cock crows nor a dog barks” (*jiquan wu jing* 雞犬無驚), meaning peaceful security. Upon arriving, the military band played martial music and the mourners bowed three times to the graves. Tens of thousands of firecrackers were set off on the spot. A man called “broken-tooth Cheng” (*bengya Cheng* 崩牙成), in all likelihood a local Cantonese opera actor, dressed in mourning costume and acting like a “son mourning for his dead parents,” offered bolts of silk as sacrifice and burned loads of spirit money in front of each grave. After the mourning ceremony was over, someone erected a revolutionary flag beside these graves and hung up on two pine trees eulogistic poetic couplets. In his description of these activities held in *HHG*, a reporter noted that “these martyrs are [treated] as if they are still alive.”<sup>37</sup> In this procession and ceremony, symbols associated with funerary rites and the popular belief in spirits were vividly displayed. The bogus filial mournful son and his



offering reflected the mortuary nature, in addition to the political purpose, of the rituals performed. The firecrackers, the lion-dance and the drum beating were all symbolic tools conventionally employed to ward off demons. In other words, this graveyard was apparently treated as a place where malevolent ghosts roamed. The cock and the dog were somewhat odd, but also conveyed supernatural meanings. In this part of China, dog's blood and hair were believed to possess exorcising power and hence were commonly used as talismans. The cock was considered to be "the chief embodiment of the element of *yang*, which represented the warmth and life of the universe." A white cock was sometimes "placed on the coffin in funeral processions to clear the road of demons" since it was believed to be "a protection against baneful astral influences and to be the only capable guide of transient spirits."<sup>38</sup> The event, therefore, clearly embodied some non-secular and supernatural meanings, and the rituals performed were intended to be an exorcism, hidden behind a secular purpose that was aimed at exemplifying political virtues.

All the above newspaper reports indicate that from the beginning people visited *HHG* not solely for the secular purpose of commemorating a past political event, and thereby to evoke or salute the heroic deed of these martyrs. Their visits were also an act of religious worship in which the dead heroes were revered, and pacified, as ghosts.

As mentioned earlier, the *HHG* tomb that we see today is not the original sepulchre but the culmination of various phases of construction and renovation stretching over seventy years. The crude original graves were located in an obscure depression. Such a state of affairs was not acceptable to the victorious Republicans. Early plans to construct a grand monumental tomb to replace the original ones, however, were never realized because of the military and political chaos that marred the early years of the Republic. Large-scale construction began only in 1918, but was soon interrupted by the collapse of Sun's regime in Canton the following year. It was resumed in 1921. By 1924, when the announcement of the prohibition against *fuzang* was made, the basic structures and layout of the present-day *HHG* were by and large completed. Of the various phases of construction, an important first step in the history of the tomb was taken in 1918. In that year, the original crude graves of the martyrs were dug up and relocated to a much more conspicuous and prominent site on the top of the mound. The new tomb was oriented to face southeast. Both the choice of this present site and the positioning of the tomb reflected the planner's respect for the traditional symbolism of directions, which was an important geomantic principle in the choice of an auspicious gravesite. A south-facing, or southeast-facing grave, according to a classic manual on funerary practices, could help pacify the element of darkness (*yin*), since the element of fire or brightness (*yang*) was strongest in the south and the east. Moreover, by

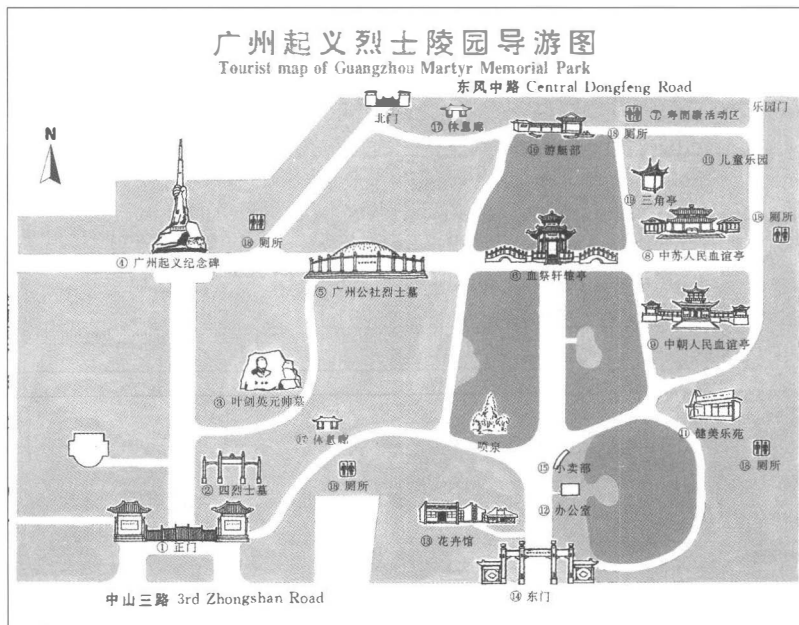
<sup>38</sup> C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese symbolism and art motives* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1941), pp.62, 199–200.

**Figure 5**

*A overview of the layout of the seventy-two martyrs gravesite complex. The north-south axis and the man-made lake are two of the many features that were purposely created to invoke geomantic blessings from the grave*

**Figure 6**

*And the map of another martyr memorial park in Canton. The location of the various monumental objects and the graves in this park suggests that reference had probably been made to traditional and supernatural principles of graveyard design*



placing a tomb on an elevated location, the cosmic energy of Nature could be tapped and amassed, for it was commonly thought that mountain ranges and mounds were veins along which this supernatural and highly auspicious source of cosmic energy flowed.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, in 1934, the lower part of the broad southern “spirit road” (*mudao* 墓道), which ran straight from the tomb to the southern entrance of the cemetery, was dug up and a small pond was built crossed by a pair of curved stone bridges. Water for the pond was channelled from a nearby stream.<sup>40</sup> The positioning of the pond, which cut through the “spirit road,” could, in the parlance of geomancy, help retain the cosmic energy of Nature to the benefit of the tomb—this fits well with the traditional geomantic principles of a good gravesite. The landscape of this cemetery was so designed that the auspicious power of the tomb could be released in full.<sup>41</sup> Given the serious attitude that most Cantonese adopted in relation to the management of death, the choice of the present site and the positioning of the various structures within this complex were unlikely to have been accidental or unrelated to religious considerations. In all likelihood, the tomb was relocated in such a way so as to bring maximum supernatural benefit to its worshippers, including the political authorities, who visited the place once or twice a year.

After the GMD had established its power base in South China in the mid-1920s, HHG underwent several small-scale renovations leading to the installation of further “decorative” objects at the monument. Among these ornaments were stone statues and sculptures with overt religious meanings. Examples included a pair of lions, and floral wreaths and censers, all carved from

<sup>39</sup> Guo Bo, *Zangjing*, p.35; Yi Ding, Yu Lou and Hong Yong, *Zhongguo gudai fengshui yu jianzhu xuanzhi* [Geomancy and the selection of architecture placement in ancient China] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Kexue Chubanshe, 1996), Ch.3.

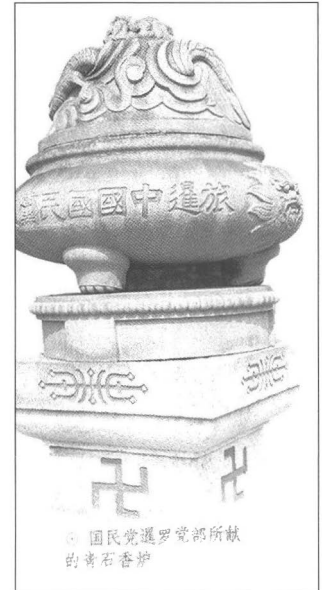
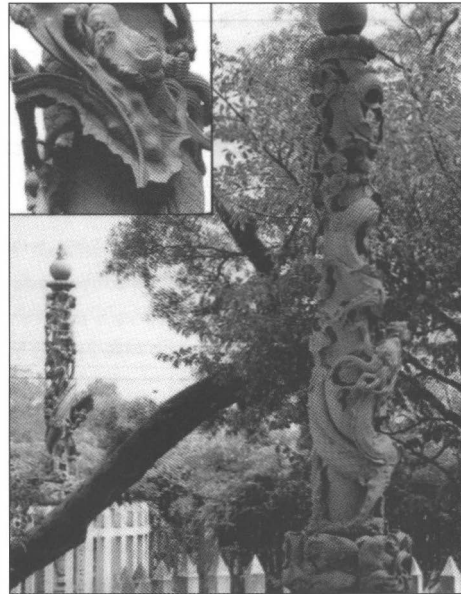
<sup>40</sup> Huang Peixian, “Huanghua gang qishier lieshi mu xiujian jilue” [An account of the building of the seventy-two martyrs’ tomb at Huanghuagang], in *Yangcheng wenwu bowu yanjiu* [A study of historical relics of Canton] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1993), p.186.

<sup>41</sup> Guo Bo, *Zangjing*, pp.35–7.

granite and placed near the tomb. Two censers, one made of copper and the other of stone, were installed on either side of the tomb.<sup>42</sup> Further down the southern “spirit road” were two more censers, donated by the GMD, decorated on four sides with the Buddhist swastika motif (*wan* 卐). According to C. A. S. Williams, the term swastika is derived from the Sanskrit *su* “well” and *as* “to be,” meaning “so it be,” denoting the resignation of spirit. The character, a homophone of *wan* or ten thousand, is said to have come from Heaven and describes “the accumulation of lucky signs possessing ten thousand efficacies.”<sup>43</sup> It also symbolizes immortality and infinity,<sup>44</sup> in this context, of the souls laid underneath. In 1926, the GMD Annam (Vietnam) office donated a pair of stone-carved ornamental mortuary pillars with the motif of “dancing dragons ascending the sky.”<sup>45</sup> They were installed at the end of the western “spirit road” of the tomb. All these stone lions and

**Figure 7**

*Two stone-dragon columns at the old entrance of the graveyard (left), and one of the stone-carved incense burners (right), which were presented by the GMD Branch Office in Siam along the “spirit road” south of the grave (source: Huanghua gang jinian gongyuan jianjie [Introduction to Huanghua gang Commemorative Park] (Guangzhou: Huanghua gang jinian gongyuan, n.d); Xiu Jinhua, Huanghua gang gongyuan, p.21. The symbolic functions of these stone objects, together with other stone-made paraphernalia installed in the graveyard, help both manifest and reinforce the supernatural side of the monument*



**Figures 8 and 9**

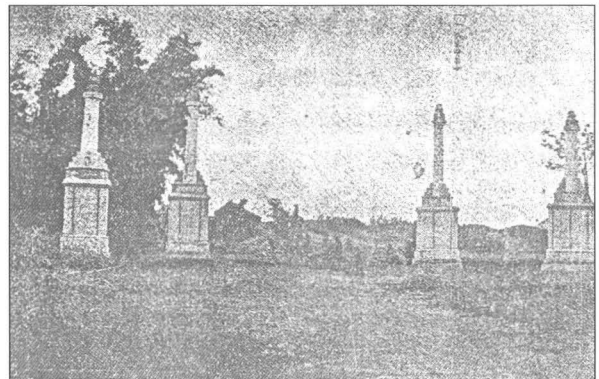
*During the 1920s, the “spirit road” leading from the original entrance to the grave was lined with iron obelisks (bottom) on which stone representations of human skulls and skeletons were installed. These reminded pilgrims of the spiritual nature of the place (source: Huanghua gang qishier lieshi shiliao [Historical Sources on the 72 Martyrs of Huanghua gang] n.p., n.d). The obelisks are no longer extant*

<sup>42</sup> Jie Fu, “Huanghua gang jiyou,” p.7.

<sup>43</sup> C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines*, pp.381–2.

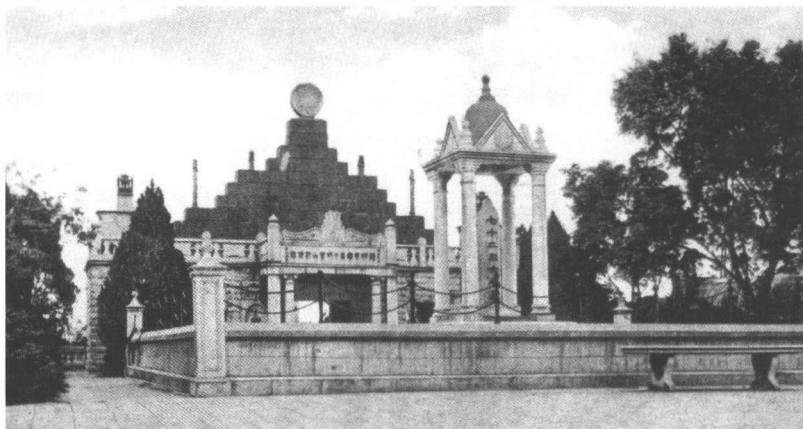
<sup>44</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, *A dictionary of Chinese symbols* (London: Routledge, 1986), pp.280–1.

<sup>45</sup> Huang Peixian, “Huanghua gang,” p.185.



**Figure 10**

A postcard of the monument featuring a photograph taken in 1936 after the original Statue of Liberty on top of the pile of donors' stones (all of them donated and representing different overseas branches of the GMD) had been replaced with the official insignia of the GMD (source: Xiu Jinhua, *Huanghua gang gongyuan*, p.48)



<sup>46</sup> C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines*, pp.132–41, 253–5.

<sup>47</sup> Jie Fu, “Huanghua gang jiyu,” p.7.

<sup>48</sup> One can still find these installations in front of old police stations in present-day Hong Kong, which are commonly believed to possess effective exorcising power. Some villages in the New Territories of Hong Kong also point similar cannons at their rival villages as a geomantic means to direct all the inauspicious *feng shui* to an enemy settlement.

<sup>49</sup> C. K. Yang, *Religion*, pp.158–64.

<sup>50</sup> This contrasted with what the French had done to many of their religious buildings after the 1789 Revolution. James A. Leith, *Space and revolution: projects for monuments, squares, and public buildings in France, 1789–1799* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), ch.4. Also see Michael Paul Driskel, *As befits a legend: building a tomb for Napoleon, 1840–1861* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993).

dragons seemingly served an important religious function other than mere ornamentation: they were powerful symbolic guardians of the tomb set up to ward off demons. These stone dragons were also supposed to be able to induce the return of Nature's cosmic energies to the site.<sup>46</sup> Although no longer there, one contemporary travelogue recorded that near the tomb there were two rows of antiquated cast-iron cannon.<sup>47</sup> These old objects were obviously not merely for decoration, they were also geomantic devices aimed at fending off unwanted spirits in the area—a “tool” still commonly used by people in South China.<sup>48</sup>

Some stone ornamentalations for the tomb, such as a statue of

liberty (which was locally known as “the statue of the Goddess of Liberty”, *ziyou nüshen xiang* 自由女神像), the official emblem of the GMD, the inscriptions of seventy-two branches of the GMD (both national and abroad) and so on, embody powerful political meanings. There is, also, no shortage of traditional popular religious symbols and objects that reminded a worshipper, or a mourner, of the supernatural dimension of the monument. Similar to the imperial cults of deified men,<sup>49</sup> politics and religion were extrinsically fused in the cult of the seventy-two martyrs. The Republican revolution and the trend of secularisation it had unleashed did not succeed in de-spiritualising the tomb and the cult it had engendered.<sup>50</sup>

### *Spirit Soldiers?*

Since 1911, one of the many social and cultural reforms engineered by the new Republican élite with a modernist outlook were the campaigns to uproot popular religions, which were labelled as being “a principal obstacle to the establishment of a ‘disenchanted’ world of reason and plenty” in China. Prasenjit Duara sums up these campaigns as follows:

The period from 1900 until 1930 saw different movements and campaigns attacking rural religion. Images of popular gods were desecrated or forcibly removed from rural temples, and the temples themselves were refashioned into elementary schools and offices for local

governments ... We can discern two phases in this movement: a first, from 1900 until just after the establishment of the Republic around 1915; and a second that began after the ascendancy to power of the Nationalist Party ... in 1927 and lasted until *circa* 1930. The regional focus of the first period was the north China plain, where the modernizing regime was strongest; the focus of the second period was the lower and central Yangtze valley, where the Nationalist Party was strongest. In the first phase, the campaigns were led by enthusiastic administrators in cooperation with rural leaders; in the second phase, the leadership was principally in the hands of the Nationalist Party activists.<sup>51</sup>

In Canton, the early years of the Republic did not witness any large-scale campaign attacking popular religions, though occasional and seemingly disorganized attacks were reported. For instance, in late December 1911, a team of militiamen were reported to have marched into the City God Temple (*Chenghuang miao* 城隍廟) where they decapitated all the statues inside, smashed all religious paraphernalia, and then set fire to the pile of vandalized objects. They stopped inflicting further destruction only after government soldiers had intervened.<sup>52</sup> Unknown persons also vandalized a popular Goddess of Mercy Temple (*Guanyin miao* 觀音廟) in the suburbs; all the statues in it were decapitated.<sup>53</sup> In 1912, when the Canton administration demolished parts of the city walls to pave the way for the construction of modern carriage-ways, policemen and militiamen were said to have destroyed a number of small neighbourhood shrines in the process. Many of these forcibly removed

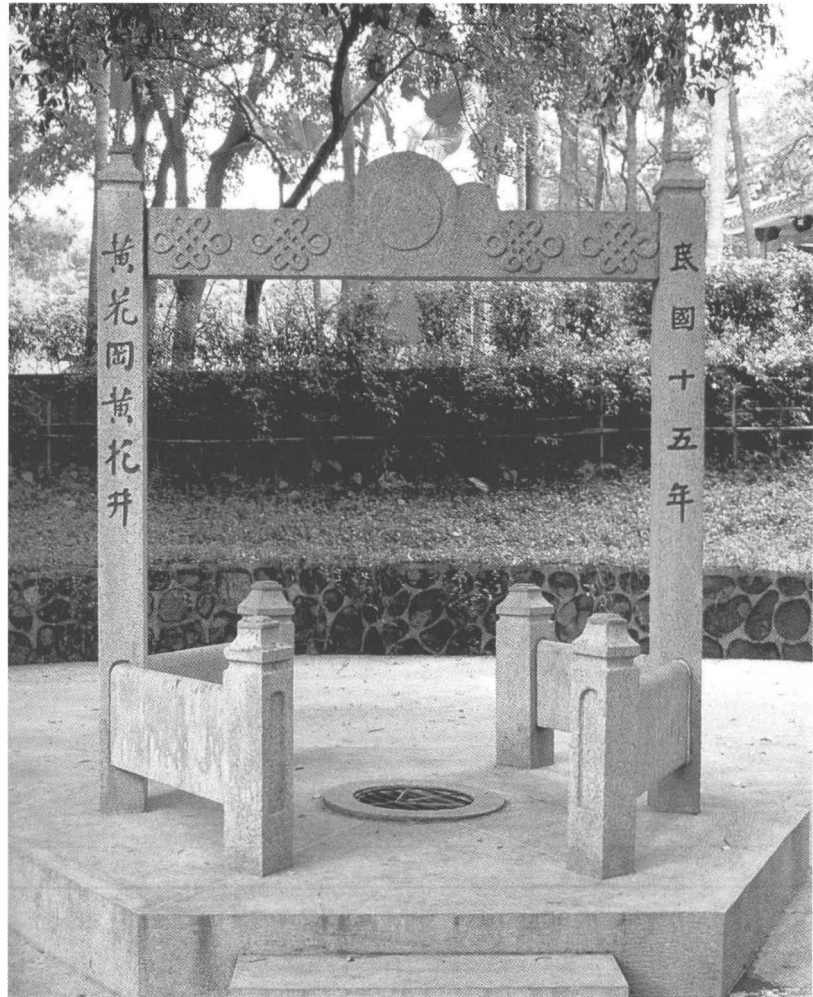
<sup>51</sup> Duara, "Knowledge and power," p.75.

<sup>52</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 18 December 1911.

<sup>53</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 8 February 1912.

**Figure 11**

*The Huanghua Well (Huanghua jing) is located deep in a bamboo forest at the Huanghua gang Park. Many older people in Canton believe that the well was originally situated within the compound of the Guangdong Military Government Office inside the old city. It was later removed to the present site, they claim, mainly because some believed that the well could help quench the thirst of the martyrs buried nearby (source: Xiu Jinhua, Huanghua gang gongyuan, p.31)*



<sup>54</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 9 January 1912.

<sup>55</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 14, 26, 29 April 1913; 1 May 1913.

<sup>56</sup> “Zhengshitang lizhiguan cheng wei yiding zhonglie ci zhuijili ji yuezhang qing jianhe wen bing piling” [Request to the Council of State’s Rites Bureau to endorse an application concerning the rituals and music for ceremonies at Temples of the Martyrs], *Guangdong gongbao*, 18 August 1915, in Canton Municipal Archive, *zheng* 100/931/1–9.

<sup>57</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 28 December 1911.

<sup>58</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 28 December 1911.

wooden statues of various deities were dumped at street corners, while some were handed over to local museums for safekeeping as historic relics. Some journalists praised this measure, together with the government’s decision to replace the lunar with the Gregorian calendar,<sup>54</sup> as part of the new state’s determination to wipe out superstitions.<sup>55</sup> The new administration, no doubt, helped promote secularisation in the society. But how successful was it?

The fact that the Republican élites were a motley of people who did not share a monolithic view of popular religion is not a revelation. It is, therefore, not surprising that the government sometimes acted counter to its professed anti-superstition stance. In 1915, for instance, the provincial government of Guangdong (which was not alone) had received an order from the central government in Beijing on the imminence of re-implementing public official worship of those who had died for the country (*zhonglie ci zhuijili* 忠烈祠追祭禮). Details of how to conduct such worship were also listed in the edict. Two things about this reinstated official ritual showed clearly that it was intended to be a religious event: that sacrificial pigs and lambs were used as offerings, while throughout the text the objects of worship were often referred to as gods (*shen* 神).<sup>56</sup> Events of public worship at *HHG* provide us with further and rare information to test the sincerity and commitment of these “modern” élites in their efforts to transform contemporary culture and society by secularising mourning rituals and etiquettes at this supposedly revolutionary memorial.

After the downfall of the Manchu regime, groups of pilgrims or worshippers visited *HHG* at various times. Nearly all of the known groups were related either to the Republican government or to local modern schools. The following are some of the reports of what they did while at *HHG*:

(1) One group of militiamen from Xiangshan 香山 county offered sacrifice to a fellow native who was buried recently at *HHG*: he was killed accidentally when making a bomb.<sup>57</sup>

(2) A simple burial for Zhou Da 周大 took place there. Zhou was an expert in explosives. He was also accidentally killed when making a bomb for a team of suicide bombers, a unit of the northern expeditionary force against the Manchus. Two of the mourners, a scholar and a former colleague, presented a eulogy in the form of couplets at Zhou’s grave. The last stanza of the couplets reads: “[We] look southwards to invite [your] spirit to return, [and] look northwards as [our] expeditionary forces march onwards.”<sup>58</sup>

(3) A large group of infantrymen went to offer sacrifices to the tomb of Ni Yingdian 倪映典, a leader of the abortive New Army Uprising (*Xinjun qiyi* 新軍起義) in Canton in 1910, who was killed in action and buried in a location near *HHG*. This group of soldiers carried with them effigies of late-Qing officials which were clad in imperial robes made out of paper, and on the hats of these paper figures were written the

words “sacrificial objects” (*jipin* 祭品). Three of these sacrificial objects were made of flour. On their procession to the tomb, which was led by teams of lion-dancers, bystanders threw stones at the effigies. Upon arriving at *HHG*, the effigies were dismembered (*poujie* 剖解) and offered to the spirits residing at the grave. The mourners at the scene applauded.<sup>59</sup>

(4) Men and women soldiers from two militia groups marched to *HHG* where they paid homage to the martyrs. Their procession was led by lion-dancing teams. These “soldiers” were leaving Canton to fight the imperial forces in central China.<sup>60</sup> Similar sacrificial offerings made by departing northern expeditionary forces were reported in the local press in early and mid-1912.

(5) Sometimes, the sacrifice took a very bizarre form. One afternoon in late December 1911, about one month after the fall of the Qing administration in Canton, twenty-three persons, in all likelihood prisoners of war, were led by a team of republican militiamen and marched to *HHG*. One by one these prisoners were disemboweled alive, their livers (which were probably consumed raw by the militiamen present)<sup>61</sup> and “other things” were cut out, their genital organs (a detail left blank in the original report) were severed and stuffed into their mouths.<sup>62</sup>

Before proceeding further, it should be noted that in nearly all these reports the terms *ji* 祭 and *si* 祀, both meaning “to make sacrifice,” were used when describing ritualistic acts performed at the tomb. These terms embody a strong religious connotation that differs markedly from the term *jinian* 紀念 (to commemorate, to remember); the latter is now commonly used in official Chinese publications when describing the socio-political functions of monuments or special days of remembrance.<sup>63</sup> In classical usage, both *ji* and *si* refer to a religious act of presenting sacrificial offerings to ancestors, deities, or spirits; they refer to “the boundary” and “the moment” in which humans and gods were in touch with each other, the moment when living descendants met their ancestors.<sup>64</sup> In the participants’ minds, these acts were apparently more to do with religious worship than political remembrance.

Returning to the above-mentioned cases of sacrifice at *HHG*, it seems that mourners perceived the place to be the spiritual abode of the martyrs. In popular religious belief in this part of China, if a person died of unnatural or violent causes, such as being killed in war or by capital punishment, his/her soul would be deprived of the “natural right” of becoming an ancestor and, hence, would become a malevolent ghost that marauded around aimlessly.<sup>65</sup> Following this line of thinking, it is not difficult to understand why some of these pilgrim groups needed the exorcist services of lion-dancing teams whose performances provided both secular amusement and, more importantly, generated the cosmic energy of fire, *yang*, which helped pacify other malicious spirits in the area.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the bizarre practice of “making human sacrifice” (*shengji*

<sup>59</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 12 and 13 January 1912.

<sup>60</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 19 January 1912.

<sup>61</sup> Consumption of raw human gall and livers were believed to cure chronic illness, to strengthen one’s martial spirit, and also to drive away malicious spirits. Zheng Yi, *Hongse jinianbei* [The red memorial] (Taipei: Huashi Wenhua Gongsi, 1993), chs.1 and 2; Virgil K. Y. Ho, “Butchering fish and executing criminals: public executions and the meanings of violence in late imperial and modern China,” in *Meanings of violence: a cross cultural perspective*, ed. Göran Aijmer and Jon Abbink (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), pp.155–6.

<sup>62</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 21 December 1911.

<sup>63</sup> Qi Kang, *Jinian de ningsi* [Pondering commemoration] (Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> *Xiao Jing Shu*, cited in the dictionary *Cibai* [The sea of words] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1948), p.982.

<sup>65</sup> Ma Changyi, *Zhongguo linghun*, pp.208–9; *Guaishi congshu* [A compilation of strange happenings] (Hong Kong and Guangzhou: Sheng kang Wuguitang, c. 1930s–40s), pp.7–10.

<sup>66</sup> Hugh Baker, *Ancestral images: A Hong Kong Album* (Hong Kong: South China Morning Post, 1979), p.89.



<sup>67</sup> A similar case of human sacrifice was reported in Wuhan. A Qing government informant, who was held responsible for the arrest and subsequent decapitation of three revolutionaries, was apprehended by the victims' colleagues, an act that was attributed to the supernatural assistance of Heaven. He was subsequently executed, possibly at the three victims' graves, and his life offered to the spirits of these heroes as a "sacrifice" (*ji*). *Huazi ribao*, 19 January 1912.

<sup>68</sup> J. M. M. de Groot, *The religious system of China* (originally published in 1901, reprint ed., Taipei: Southern Materials Centre, Inc., 1989), vol.4, p.377.

<sup>69</sup> *Shen bao*, 1 August 1911.

生祭, meaning literally "to sacrifice raw") also indicated that the popular perception of these martyrs was that they were ghosts, because slaughtering livestock on a religious site was, and still is, a ritual commonly performed to pacify restless or dangerous spirits. In the Pearl River Delta area most sacrificial food offered to ghosts during the annual Hungry Ghost Festival (*Yulan penbui* 盂蘭盆會) is un-cooked. In this case, making a human sacrifice was no doubt an act of revenge for the death of the seventy-two martyrs. But it could also be interpreted as being an extraordinary form of religious activity intended to pacify seventy-two highly menacing ghosts (malevolent because of the unnatural cause of death).<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the blood, which was a source of the auspicious *yang* fluid and a highly treasured life-reinforcing medicinal element,<sup>68</sup> of these sacrificed humans was poured into the graves to empower the spirits with even greater supernatural energy and, henceforth, beneficent power for the worshippers. This also helps us to understand why so many local militiamen went to the tombs to make sacrifices before departing on the northern expeditions during the early months of the Republic. It was a political gesture as much as an act of supplication for a blessing from the spirits.

It is important to note in passing that no matter how hard the official propagandists tried to portray the seventy-two heroes as icons of revolutionary martyrdom, they failed to prevent commoners from perceiving the victims of violent death as ghosts and, at times, malicious ghosts. This popular perception had caught the attention of local reporters. For example, three months after the martyrs were interred, a journalist wrote the following headline in a report on the popular sentiment in Canton: "Canton residents are still afraid of the revolutionaries—The malicious ghosts of HHG are still on the prowl" (*Yueren you xiangjing yi gedang yi: HHG zhi ligui wei sui* 粵人又相驚以革黨矣: 黃花崗之厲鬼為祟).<sup>69</sup> Although the report itself was about the hysterical reactions of some local residents to rumours of another imminent uprising, the attribution of this menace to the haunting and revengeful spirits at HHG indicated that the reporter, and perhaps other people too, interpreted this event from a supernatural perspective in full cognisance of the ghostly side of this incident. Another report detailed a case of strange happenings that took place shortly after the 1911 uprising in the Yahe Tang 雅荷塘 area near the eastern end of the walled city, not far from the Provincial Assembly where the corpses of the killed rebels had been temporarily dumped before their subsequent burial at HHG. A teenage girl was reportedly so disturbed by this event that she felt ill. She spoke incoherently, though at times she claimed in her mostly incomprehensible utterances that she was a revolutionary. Her "superstitious" parents, we are told, had no doubt that the malevolent spirits of some of these seventy-two martyrs had possessed their daughter. They asked around in search of efficacious charms to exorcise these ghosts and eventually secured one from a popular temple



whose resident deity was known to have succeeded in pacifying other “Party ghosts.” The girl subsequently recovered. The reporter gave this news item a fitting title: “Why not pray at HHG?” (*he bu dao yu HHG* 何不禱於黃花崗).<sup>70</sup> There is no way of knowing whether this was a rare or an isolated incident, or just one of many that went unrecorded. These martyrs, nonetheless, were actually perceived by some as being roaming ghosts, rather than just revolutionary heroes in the secular sense.

It is tempting for historians of modern China to take official anti-superstition rhetoric at face value and trust that the “new revolutionary élite” was actively trying to secularise the country by discouraging religious belief and disassociating themselves from all sorts of supernatural practices.<sup>71</sup> Public veneration at HHG, however, tells a different story. Between 1911 and 1924, Sun Yat-sen, the “founding father” of the Republic, had composed no fewer than four eulogies that were presented to the martyrs at HHG on days of official commemoration. The full texts of these eulogies can be read in Sun’s collected works. It suffices here to point out that in these texts, Sun consciously associated these martyrs with spirits. For instance, Sun’s eulogy in 1912 ended with the passage: “Heaven is so disgusted by these Manchu barbarians that it has eventually decided to take away the mandate from them and, therefore, the smell of sheep and goats [meaning the barbaric Manchu] are cleansed from all over China ... . I hereby sincerely inform you spirits [*xianling* 先靈] that Han sovereignty has now been restored. You spirits in the underworld can now rest in peace. I beseech you, please accept my sacrificial offerings.”<sup>72</sup> In 1921, Sun’s eulogy began with the words: “Today is the tenth anniversary of the martyrdom of the seventy-two revolutionaries. Sun Wen 孫文, the President [of the Republic of China], hereby offers to the spirits of these martyrs wine and other sacrificial food ... .”<sup>73</sup> One year later, in 1922, Sun’s eulogy started with a similar appeal to the seventy-two spirits, but concluded with the following passage:

I, the President [of the Republic of China], command the army to fight against [the enemies of the Republic], and in this matter [I have] never [been] complacent. With the support of the heroic spirits of you martyrs, which are still fearless as if possessed of the force of life, we are able to win [the war]. As a result, our sorrow is limited. With the union of this force of life [*jing* 精] and the primordial energy [*yuan* 元], Heaven and man rejoice perpetually. Alas! Attending this mournful occasion [I] see in the sky a mourning flag hailing [the return of] you spirits. With red lychees and yellow bananas I hereby offer you as sacrifice the best fruits in South China. [All of] you lived the lives of remarkable men, and have now become heroic ghosts. You martyrs alone can set a good example [for those of us who are still alive]. May this offering be acceptable to thee!”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 19 May 1911.

<sup>71</sup> Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious trends in modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), ch.4.

<sup>72</sup> Sun Zhongshan, *Guofu quanji*, vol.9, p.563.

<sup>73</sup> Sun, *Guofu quanji*, vol.9, p.604.

<sup>74</sup> Sun, *Guofu quanji*, vol.9, pp.609–10.

<sup>75</sup> Sun, *Guofu quanji*, vol.9, p.621.

<sup>76</sup> In the two eulogies Sun composed and offered at the tomb of the first Ming-dynasty emperor in 1912, and many other eulogies to martyrs in different parts of China throughout the early years of the Republic, the Father of the Republic did not hide his intention to petition the supernatural agents, be they the spirits of revolutionary martyrs or the spirits of the Ming emperors or Heaven, for assistance in realizing his political aims and military plans. For example, when Sun visited the tomb of the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, soon after his inauguration as President of the Republic, he composed a prayer, the last sentence of which read: "The spiritual influences of your grave at Nanjing have come once more into their own. The dragon crouches in majesty as of old, and the tiger surveys his domain and his ancient capital ... Your people have come here today to inform your Majesty of the final victory. May this lofty shrine wherein you rest gain fresh lustre from today's event and may your example inspire your descendants in the times which are to come. Spirit! Accept this offering!" Cantlie and Jones, *Sun Yat Sen*, p.162. For more instances, see Sun, *Guofu quanji*, vol.9, pp.556–61. This was, however, not an uncommon practice for senior statesmen in those days. Li Yuanhong, Provisional President of the Republic, made similar requests to Heaven and the spirits of the Ming emperors for supernatural assistance in governing the country. See *Huazi ribao*, 30 October 1911.

<sup>77</sup> The notes are attached to the preface of that volume, and were also published in newspapers in Canton and Hong Kong.

<sup>78</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, Section on *shi*, pp.1–2.

In 1924, Sun's last eulogy, made a year before his death, was also marked by many allegorical references to religiosity. As in his earlier eulogies written for the tomb, he recalled what a difficult task he had been entrusted with to fight for the honour of the Republic and to what extent he had succeeded in making progress in that direction. He then wrote that he wished "all these gentlemen with extraordinary quality would rise up from their tomb and to turn themselves into thousands of millions of living bodies [to assist our military campaigns] ...".<sup>75</sup> It would seem that in Sun's mind the martyrs and their tomb were endowed with a powerful supernatural quality that, once invoked, could be instrumental to the success of his military campaigns and to the goal of building a strong nation-state under his rule. *HHG* was no doubt revered as a monument for patriotic remembrance. It was, however, also an extraordinary historic relic, worshipped as a collective tomb endowed with supernatural power.<sup>76</sup>

More evidence of the occult cult of *HHG* can be found in an official compilation of mourning texts (including eulogies, poems, prose pieces, and couplets) entitled *Bixue Huanghua ji* 碧血黄花集 (lit. "A record of loyal blood at the Yellow Flower"), which were composed by "the élites" in Canton to commemorate the Uprising and delivered at the tomb in May 1919. In the introduction, the senior statesman Lin Sen 林森 wrote that the commemorative activities at the tomb were intended to arouse patriotic feelings among the people so that they would sacrifice themselves fearlessly and selflessly for the sublime cause of the Nationalist revolution led by Sun's regime in Canton. In a public announcement for the commemorative event that also detailed the protocols to be observed by mourners, the organizing committee stressed that in response to the official campaigns against superstitious beliefs and other negative social customs, sacrificial food, incense and other paper-made spiritual items would not be offered at the tomb.<sup>77</sup> Instead, only fresh flowers were to be offered. Mourners were asked to line up, three to five abreast, and to bow to the tomb. A mat platform was erected on which mourners were to stand and recite their eulogies. On another platform speakers were invited to deliver speeches recounting the heroic deeds of the martyrs. Such a programme of mourning was believed to be able to "arouse a sense of Republican history" in the minds of the mourners and, in particular, school students.<sup>78</sup>

The faith of these good citizens in "civilizing," or more appropriately secularising, the mourning rituals for martyrs is beyond doubt. It would be naïve, however, if we jump to the conclusion that the new urban élites were all assuming a modernist outlook and, henceforth, would strip the tomb of its original religiosity. It is true that in the dozens of pages of literary compositions dedicated to the martyrs, at least half give voice to sorrowful remembrance, recount their brave deeds, or praise their selfless sacrifice for the cause. A substantial number of them, however, openly acknowledge the existence of a supernatural dimension to the monument. Examples of this abound and they include:

(1) The eulogy by Chen Jiongming 陳炯明, then the head of the Army and Governor of Guangdong, began with a lamentation that the young Republic was facing great difficulties. It ended with Chen's plea for the spirits of the martyrs to "command immediately [the forces of] wind and thunder in order to take the lives [of our enemies]" and, he added, "this is what I, Jiongming, most sincerely wish you, the unfaltering country-loving gods [to help us to achieve] ..."<sup>79</sup>

(2) Lin Hengping 林衡平 wrote in his eulogy that public worship at HHG was discontinued after Yuan Shikai had "usurped" political power in 1912. This negligence, he added, had angered the spirits in the tomb so much that "both gods and men are infuriated and [Yuan] had subsequently died because his soul [in punishment] was taken away [by the gods] ...". This eulogy concluded with the author's appeal for further supernatural interference in earthly political affairs: "[I] look forward to the coming of genies in their chariots from the north[ern sky] [who will] drive away all inauspicious comets so as to restore the principle of the people's rights and to preserve peace [in China] ..."<sup>80</sup>

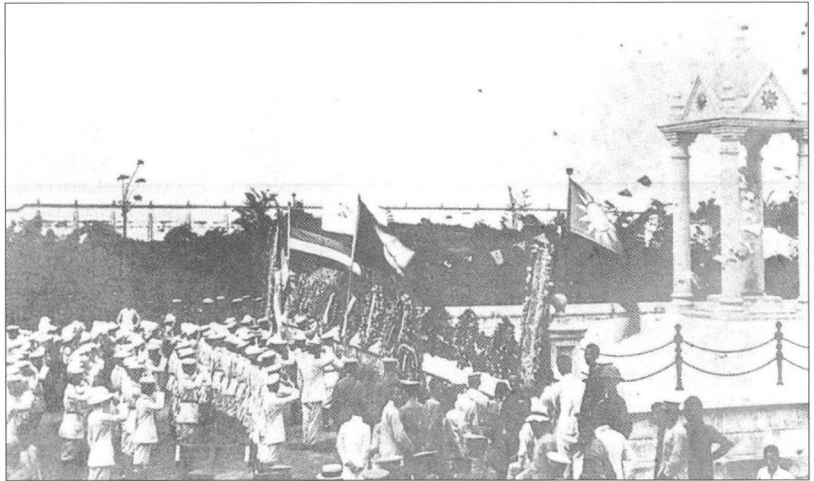
(3) Li Liejun 李烈鈞, Chief of Staff of the Republican Army in Canton, mentioned in his eulogy that plain rice wine and simple food offerings were sacrificed at the tomb. The fact that the young Republic was able to survive against all odds was, in his view, "attributable to the efficacious spirits of you martyrs." He wrote optimistically that "[A]lthough our martyrs passed away long ago, their spirits live on in the human realm and their power remains efficacious. By relying on [these spirits] to wage war against the evil [enemies of ours], we will have the good fortune to win battles ..."<sup>81</sup>

(4) Li Genyuan 李根源, a senior military officer and statesman from Yunnan,<sup>82</sup> ended his eulogy with a call for the return of the efficacious spirits of the seventy-two martyrs so they could help bring everlasting prosperity to China.<sup>83</sup>

(5) The staff of a local school submitted a collective eulogy glorifying the merits of the martyrs—their efficacious spirits were commended for helping the young Republic dispel all political misfortunes and overthrow the tyrannical Manchu regime. To express their gratitude and to reciprocate, the living "descendants" were urged to make offerings regularly to the tomb and to revere these "loyal and righteous spirits."<sup>84</sup>

**Figure 12**

*An official commemorative event at Huanghua gang in 1919 (source: Xiu Jinbua, Huanghua gang gongyuan, p.43)*



<sup>79</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, Section on *jiwen*, p.5f.

<sup>80</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, *jiwen*, p.6.

<sup>81</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, *jiwen*, pp.9b–10f.

<sup>82</sup> See Li Genyuan, *Xuesheng nianpu* [A chronological autobiography of Xue-sheng] (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1969).

<sup>83</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, *jiwen*, p.10b.

<sup>84</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, *jiwen*, p.15.

<sup>85</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua, jiwen*, pp.15b–16f.

<sup>86</sup> The “*Jiwei*” (literally meaning “tail of a rattan basket”) Constellation is one of the twenty-eight heavenly constellations. It is located in the southern part of the heavens and was believed to be one of the sources of strong wind on earth. It was also thought of as being the tail of a legendary dragon. *Hanyu Dacidian* [A complete dictionary of the Chinese language] (Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Chubanshe, 1991), vol.8, p.1187.

<sup>87</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, Section on *shi*, pp.10–11f.

(6) In a eulogy prepared by an Association of Comrades (to relieve China’s National Crisis (*Zhonghua guonan tongzhi hui* 中華國難同志會), and a Drama Society of Patriotic Ghost Shadows (*Guohunying jushe* 國魂影新劇社), the spirits of the martyrs were said to be so alive and efficaciously powerful that they had assisted their living “brothers” in overthrowing the tyrannical rule of the Manchu and in the founding of the Republic. In spite of the early setbacks suffered by the revolutionary government, these eulogists stated that “luckily the spirits of these [seventy-two] gentlemen helped us redress this unjust [situation] by ... [aiding] our anti-traitor army in defeating its enemies, so as to bring light back [to our country]. [With their help, we] have crushed our bandit[-like enemies], resolved internal dissension [among ourselves], and bonded together to withstand foreign [aggression] ... . Efficacious spirits of our [seventy-two] martyrs, please accept our libation of wine. May this offering be acceptable to thee!”<sup>85</sup>

(7) A poem composed by Liu Datong 劉大同 for the occasion reads: “Yellow flowers blossom at the Yellow Flower Mound. Underneath it are the piles of bones of seventy-two loyal men. I call for the return of their spirits. Their spirits travel back to the altar of the ancient King of Yue [粵 that is, Guangdong] on a sorrowful breeze ... . Up above are dark clouds on which the spirits are riding in their journey [to earth]. The seventy-two spirits riding on the Jiwei 箕尾 Constellation come,<sup>86</sup> bringing with them the protective blessing of the mountain spirits of the South.”<sup>87</sup>

(8) A long poem by Yan Bingyuan 顏鬲元 contains colorful references to the martyrs as powerful supernatural beings. In this poem, these martyrs were described, or mythologized, as descendants of the God of Flowers and Wood (*Huamu shen* 花木神), said to be created by *Danao Shi* 大撓氏, an assistant to the legendary Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi* 黃帝) and the inventor of the Ten Celestial Stems. Yan also praised the mythological sage kings Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, whose blessings were believed to have contributed to the “budding of republicanism in East Asia.” This sacred order of Heaven, however, was disrupted by the Manchu’s invasion of China, and the subsequent disorder lasted for over two hundred years. To restore light and order to the universe, the God of Flowers and Woods, angry at the disturbance of the natural order of things on earth, had to “descend from his palace [in Heaven] to the city of Canton and make an appearance through the bodies of the seventy-two [heroes who later became] martyrs ... .” After martyrdom, the spirits [of these seventy-two heroes] ascended back to Heaven to submit a memorial to the God of Heaven saying that they wanted to see the end of the monarchical system of government in China and to have it replaced with a democratic republic. The God of Heaven was impressed by this memorial and, as a result, promised to send “a note written on a scroll made of gold and jade announcing that the seventy-two martyrs were entrusted to assist the revolutionary camp in the Wuchang

**Figure 13**

A painting commemorating the Huanghua gang martyrs by the famous Lingnan School painter He Jianshi 何劍士. The first two lines of the inscription on the top left-hand corner of the painting read: "In the past I was a martyr who killed the thieves [who stole the country]. Now a heroic ghost who should I slaughter?" (source: *Xiu jinbua*, Huanghua gang gongyuan, p.53). In this artist's eyes, the spirits of martyrs were vengeful and determined to continue to serve their country



<sup>88</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, Section on *shi*, pp.6b–8f.

<sup>89</sup> Lin Sen, ed., *Bixue Huanghua*, Section on *shi*, pp.2, 3f, 9b, 13b, 15b; and "miscellany", p.11f.

Uprising (*Wuchang qi yi* 武昌起義)" (which led to the ultimate collapse of the Manchu dynasty). After the success of the 1911 Revolution, our poet continued, the country was troubled by a long list of political problems. By the time this poem was composed, negotiations between the two major rival camps in the national politic were under way. Yan, however, still wrote that "[we had] better rely on [the blessing of these] martyrs than [on] peace talks; these martyrs, though already dead, are still [committed to] their oath of fulfilling the [heavenly] duty [of coming to our help] ...".<sup>88</sup> Many other poems in this collection also made similar appeals to the supernatural aid of the martyrs' spirits in helping suppress the political enemies of the supplicants and for putting an end to political chaos in China.<sup>89</sup>

All the above-cited works have something in common. First, the élitist background of these mourners did not prevent them from thinking of the seventy-two martyrs in a way that was common to worshippers in popular religions. In fact, as we have seen earlier, many of these modern politicians did not conceal their appeals for supernatural aid from the dead heroes for the cause of the revolution. It is interesting to note in passing that such practices were not limited to militarists or politicians in Canton. The Sichuan 四川 warlord Liu Xiang 劉湘, for example, was known for his indulgence in practising Daoist magical rituals to aid his military operations. In preparing for one of his military campaigns, Liu Xiang reportedly fasted for seven days and nights, ascended to an altar to perform various magical rites, and appointed the deified Song 宋-dynasty general Yue Fei 岳飛 as commander-in-chief of

<sup>90</sup> *Yuehua bao* (Canton daily), 14 November 1932.

<sup>91</sup> Jerome Ch'en (Chen Zhirang), *Jun shen zhengquan* [The military-gentry coalition] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1979), p.148.

<sup>92</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 7 May 1921.

<sup>93</sup> Stephan Feuchtwang, "The emperor's power: history as religion in China," in *A conciliation of power: the force of religion in society*, ed. Göran Aijmer (Gothenburg: Institute for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology, 1992), pp.69–72.

<sup>94</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 16 May 1927.

<sup>95</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 15 May 1920.

his forces and Pang Tong 龐統, presumably another deity, as his chief of staff. An auspicious date would be chosen, after making careful astrological calculations, for the launching of his military attacks.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Chang Jingyao 張敬堯, an infamous warlord from Anhui 安徽, was reportedly a faithful worshipper of a genie called Xuannü in the Highest Heavens (*Jiutian xuannü* 九天玄女), a legendary female who is said to have instructed the Yellow Emperor in the military arts, whom he believed bestowed blessings on his soldiers on the battlefields.<sup>91</sup> Although the cult of *HHG* was expressed in a more subtle manner than this, its ultimate objective was similar.

Second, despite the officials' intention to secularise the ceremonies surrounding grave visits, it is clear that traditional religious paraphernalia and offerings did not completely disappear from *HHG*, as it was mentioned in many eulogies and reports. Rice wine, food and fruit, in addition to fresh flowers, were presented as sacrificial offerings to the martyrs. This is significant because the symbolic meanings of these offerings suggests that the martyrs were actually treated, or worshipped, as ghosts, spirits, or even pseudo-ancestors or demigods. Despite official stipulations against the uses of incense and paper-made religious offerings, such items were still burnt at the site. A newspaper report in 1921 mentioned the installation of two large censers by the tomb that were used for burning sandalwood, which was a substitute for incense sticks and other paper offerings.<sup>92</sup> Incense, however, is incense, be it made of sandalwood or in the more conventional form of sticks, and it is a medium used in communications with the spiritual world.<sup>93</sup> It was also believed that "a [tangible] object can be transformed into a supernatural being after having been bestowed [for a length of time] with the energy of the sun and of the moon; and this being will become supernaturally efficacious (*ling* 靈) after [a long period of] exposure to the [smoke of] incense which have been offered."<sup>94</sup> Incense, in addition to other sacrificial offerings, helped keep the spirits of the seventy-two martyrs content, as much as keeping their supernatural power alive so that the prayers of the mourners could be heard and, presumably, answered.

Third, many of the mourners used the term "*zhaobun*" 招魂, meaning "to recall the spirit," in their writings to describe their eagerness to communicate with the deceased martyrs. They apparently did not come to *HHG* just to commemorate the revolution, but also for telepathic or religious unison with the souls of the deceased heroes. It was perhaps inspired by the commonly-held belief in the supernatural dimension of the *HHG* cult that a contemporary Cantonese opera troupe performed a piece entitled "The Appearance of Apparitions when Making Sacrifice at the Tomb" (*Jimu xian lingbun* 祭奠顯靈魂).<sup>95</sup> Although the script is not extant, the title shows, at least, that in the popular mind tomb worship, be it at *HHG* or elsewhere, was unmistakably associated with the cult of the dead and ghosts.

Following this line of thinking, the government's decision to reserve *HHG* as an exclusive cemetery for a select few officially-recognized "prominent people" might be, therefore, the result of both political and religious considerations. Politically, the cemetery was about legitimacy, dignifying martyrdom, the creation of an official cult of nationalism, and so on. In religious terms, the eagerness of the government to prohibit unauthorized burials at the site was seemingly intended to conserve the supernatural power of these "extraordinary" dead bodies from being misappropriated by undesirable elements. As mentioned earlier, according to popular views, to have one's deceased relative buried near a prominent grave of good *feng shui* such as the *HHG* would enable the living to benefit from the power of the tomb. Hence, by cleansing the area of "unrelated" or "uninvited" tombs, old and new, it was possible to prevent the martyrs' spiritual power from being dissipated and their blessings drained dry or stolen or, even worse, the auspicious geomancy of the tomb destroyed. Moreover, by keeping *HHG* as an exclusive graveyard for the prominent few, the supernatural vigour of the honoured dead could be concentrated, so to speak, in that particular location and its blessing power, thereby, be utilised solely by, and for, the Nationalist Party. However, the ban on unauthorized burial at the site was not completely successful. Today, a few tiny obscure graves can still be seen lying scattered in its vicinity.<sup>96</sup> The official intent to secularise the tomb and to reconfigure the popular attitude towards it seems to have succeed only to a certain extent.

The ambivalent attitude towards the dead reminds us of the imperial cults of local leaders or officials, who during their lifetime had performed noteworthy service to the state or the public interest. These personalities, as C.K. Yang points out, were usually worshipped by officials and commoners alike in a sanctuary (*ci* 祠), a temple-like building that houses gods or spirits for periodic sacrifice. In official discourse, these cults were always portrayed as nothing but a government's attempt to exemplify the virtuous example and good deeds of these men.<sup>97</sup> Despite the intention of the imperial state to emphasise the ethico-political side of these cults, it never succeeded in preventing the people from worshipping these personalities for their presumably magical powers. Some of these local sanctuaries were said to be "answering prayers of all sorts offered, and their *t'zu* [*ci*] were not limited to periodic sacrifice, but were open to daily public worship as well."<sup>98</sup> Childless couples were sometimes found praying at the Temple of Confucius for pregnancy, though Confucius was not conventionally known for this kind of "superstitious" efficacy.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, it is not clear if local officials and the educated élite necessarily had to hold a profoundly different and secular view on the nature and the functions of these cults. It is hard to imagine that these officials and gentry, who had a strong faith in such efficacious deities as the Dragon

<sup>96</sup> A similar situation was noted at another martyrs' tomb in the Red Flower Mound as late as 1948. The Lands Affairs Department of Canton had to issue an order to contain the problems of "uncontrolled burial" and *fuzang* in that area. See Guangzhou dizhen ju, "Baogao Honghua gang shandi xianling tingzhi maizang bing jiang luanfen qianchu an" [Record of notice of prevention of burial and removal of uncontrolled graves from the area of Red Flower Mound], Canton Municipal Archive, 13/1/533.

<sup>97</sup> Local gazetteers and compendia of official memorials contain numerous descriptions of these men and their stories. Examples abound, and *Zhang Zhidong quanji*, pp.911–4, *Qing shigao*, pp.2595–608, *Longmen xianzhi* (Gazetteer of Longmen County) (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1968), pp.359–62, are only a randomly chosen few.

<sup>98</sup> C. K. Yang, *Religion*, pp.161–2.

<sup>99</sup> *Shen bao*, 27 November 1874.

<sup>100</sup> One conventional assumption about the relations between the state and unorthodox popular religions is that Chinese imperial officials and the local educated élite, given their Confucianist background, were all humanist and henceforth anti-superstitious in outlook. Such a view, however, fails to take into account the complexity of the real situation. All evidence points to the fact that many of these Confucian scholar-officials held an ambiguous, rather than hostile, attitude towards popular religions. True atheists were few and their influence weak. See C. K. Yang, *Religion*, chs.7 and 10; Donald Sutton, "Confucians confront the spirit mediums in late imperial China," *Late imperial China* 21.2 (Dec. 2000); and *Shen bao*, 24 November 1881, 27 November 1881, 28 November 1881, 14 October 1882. The memoirs of Guo Songtao, a prominent late-Qing official, provide us with a rare but sincere glimpse into this. In an ordinary month during his tenure as a senior provincial office, paying regular homage to a list of temples in a locality under his jurisdiction was part of his administrative routines. On many occasions during his tenure as Guangdong Governor-General, he prayed in a local Dragon King Temple for rain and he was at times relieved by the efficacy of his acts of faith. For example, see *Guo Songtao rizhi* [Diary of Guo Songtao] (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), vol.2, pp.142, 213, and 231. A contemporary cartoon depicts the scene of a ceremony at which a party of imperial officials is making public offerings to the Sea God. Interestingly, the cartoon shows that while the supplicants are performing the sacrificial rituals, an entourage of gods and heavenly soldiers is ascending from the sea to the sky, apparently to receive the offerings and to answer the prayers of those officials. Religious ritual had certainly more practical functions than just ceremonial; it was construed as a means of communication between its performers and the heavenly spirits. See Wu Youyu, ed., *Dianshizai huabao* [Pictures from the Touchstone Studio] (1884–98; reprint

King (*Longwang* 龍王) and the God of War (*Guandi* 關帝), and had organised and participated in rain-inducing rituals at times of severe drought, and who had made public offerings regularly to both officially-endorsed and "minor" deities, could treat this particular form of cult in a significantly dissimilar manner.<sup>100</sup> Quite often officials and local élites were willing "accomplices" in transforming these supposedly ethico-political cults into popular religious cults. Memorials seeking the Imperial Court's recognition of these sanctuaries revealed that most of these subsequently deified personalities had been "fearless" military men or officials who suppressed banditry or crushed rebellions and restored peace and order to an area. These personalities were always described as possessing extraordinary power that helped destroy enemies.<sup>101</sup> Extant documentary materials show that senior officials sometimes memorialised the throne describing how they witnessed the supernatural efficacy of some of the shrines which bestowed paranormal protection over localities within their jurisdiction. For instance, the two highest officials of Guangdong had memorialised the emperor about how the God of War had revealed his power when the city of Canton was under siege by a massive force of rebels associated with the Taiping Rebellion; only with His help could the city stand fast, and the rebels eventually be exterminated.<sup>102</sup> On another occasion, the Governor of Guangxi memorialised the throne to report that the shrines dedicated to a Han-dynasty official Ma Huan 馬援 and to a Ming-dynasty official Wang Shouren 王守仁 in many areas in his jurisdiction were popularly worshipped for their efficacy in helping local residents withstand natural calamities. He requested the endorsement of the emperor to incorporate these two personalities into the official Temples of Literature in the province, an act that represented an effort to "standardise gods," as much as it was one of extending official recognition to the power of these benevolent spirits, or demigods.<sup>103</sup> It is, therefore, not difficult to imagine that in death, and sometimes even when they were still alive, these men of "extraordinary power" were revered for

/ed., Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guji Keyinshe, 1990), vol.1, p.86. A newspaper report noted that during a drought in Canton, the city administration ordered the cessation of butchering livestock as a contingency measure for the sake of accrediting religious merit in order to impress Heaven. Moreover, officials of all ranks also marched to a temple sixty Chinese miles from Canton, all holding incense sticks in their hands, to pray for rain. *Shen bao*, 20 October 1884.

<sup>101</sup> For example, see *Longmen xianzhi*, pp.359–62.

<sup>102</sup> *Qing shilu Guangdong shiliao* [Historical sources relating to Guangdong in *Veritable Records of the Qing*], edited by Guangdong Sheng Difang Shizhi Bianweihui Bangongshi, Guangzhou Shi Difangzhi Bianweihui Bangongshi (Guangzhou: Guangdong Sheng Ditu Chubanshe, 1995) (6 vols.), vol.5, pp. 57–8.

<sup>103</sup> Ma Piya, *Ma Zhongcheng (Piya) yizhi* [Collected works of the late governor Ma Piya] (1898–9; reprint ed., Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1970), pp.191–5. A similar case was recorded in *Qing shilu Guangdong shiliao*, vol.5, pp.91–2.



their supposedly supernatural prowess. Shrines dedicated to such powerful spiritual beings could only benefit a locality. This was an attitude that was commonly shared by commoners, local élites and officials.

Similar to their counterparts in imperial times, the seventy-two martyrs of the Republican revolution were not only remembered as heroes but also worshipped as spirits whose supernatural power could be invoked to the assistance of their worshippers. Even Sun Yat-sen, who was portrayed as a hero of anti-superstition in modern China, was, most ironically, worshipped by some as a demigod after his death. In a memorial service organised by the GMD and held in the county city of Bao'an 寶安, an altar was set up at the venue in the middle of which a photograph of Sun was placed. A couplet was hung up on either side of the altar which read: "Our admirable heaven and our admirable emperor, he was a holy being and a god" (*butian budi, naisheng naishen* 胡天胡帝，乃聖乃神). It was also known that inside the venue censers were installed for the worshippers' use, especially for those who came to experience religious communion with the "Father of the Nation."<sup>104</sup> Even more alarming was that shortly after the news of Sun's death reached Canton, a leader in a local daily run by the GMD urged the people to build assembly halls in memory of Sun as the "Father of the Nation" with the same degree of zeal as they built ancestral halls for deceased kin. Furthermore, Sun was described as the "god of the revolution" and was compared to "gods that people worshipped at temples in the past."<sup>105</sup> In death martyrs and heroes continued to be enlisted to play a role as spirit soldiers for the cause, as well as being a source of blessing for the citizenry. Magic and politics were interwoven and perpetuated, surviving the challenge of secularisation unleashed by the inauguration of the modern era.

### *Resilience of Ambivalence: the Nationalist Era*

In July 1929, a small group of GMD activists under the leadership of an Executive Committee member Pu Zhuliang 蒲柱良 founded a Customs Reform Committee (*Fengsu gaige weiyuanhui* 風俗改革委員會) in Canton with an ambitious platform aimed at wiping out all kinds of "bad customs" from the city in the shortest possible time. Handicapped by a shortage of funds, however, this committee lasted only seven months with a mere two full-time staff. The organisation, however modest, was under the "direct guidance and supervision" of the Canton Branch of the GMD, which appointed its chairman and was able to enlist the participation of fifteen official or semi-official "popular associations." The committee met several times and a number of resolutions were passed including an appeal to the government to destroy all idols in local temples, to ban the sale of religious items in Canton, and to demand the

<sup>104</sup> Bao'an County is present-day Shenzhen, the largest city in Guangdong. Sun Zhongsan Xiansheng Guozang Jinian Weiyuanhui, ed., *Aisi lu* [A record of melancholic remembrances] (N.p., n.d.) (Reprinted in the series *Jindai Zhongguo shiliaocongkan*, Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe [1970], vol.569), p.233. For an analysis on the various political symbols insinuated by the GMD and the State in the official burial of Sun Yat-sen, see Henrietta Harrison, *The making of the republican citizens: political ceremonies and symbols in China, 1911–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially ch.6.

<sup>105</sup> *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 31 March 1925.

<sup>106</sup> Fengsu Gaige Weiyuanhui, ed., *Fengsu gaige congtan*, pp.3–4, 15–7, 257–70.

<sup>107</sup> The trend began in the part of Guangdong under GMD rule from the early 1920s. For a more informative analysis on this point, see John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: politics, culture, and class in the nationalist revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp.116–46 and Ch.7.

<sup>108</sup> Most of the contributions did not exceed 100 *yuan*. By September 1929, it would appear that there was only 1,400 *yuan* in its coffers. See *Huazi ribao*, 23 August 1929.

<sup>109</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 12 December 1929; Fengsu Gaige Weiyuanhui, ed., *Fengsu gaige congtan*, pp.15–8, 257–8.

<sup>110</sup> Fengsu Gaige Weiyuanhui, ed., *Fengsu gaige congtan*, pp.257–8.

<sup>111</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 19 September 1929.

<sup>112</sup> Fengsu Gaige Weiyuanhui, *Fengsu gaige congtan*, p.18.

<sup>113</sup> Officially, this was ascribed to a request by the local party headquarters to assume total stewardship over such an “important matter.” *Ibid.*, p.262. In Jiangsu, similarly unpopular anti-superstition campaigns had led to violent resistance of the people in the countryside. See Mitani Takashi, “Nankin seiken to ‘meishin daha undō’”, pp.11–12.

<sup>114</sup> Zhongguo Di'er Dang'anguan, ed., *Zhonghuaminguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian*, series 5, no.1 (*wenhua*), pp.495–506, 515–46; and C. K. Yang, *Religion*, pp.367–77.

confiscation of properties owned by local temples. By the time this committee was dissolved, its chairman claimed that it had professedly succeeded in pushing the Social Bureau of the municipal government to have idols in the city's temples dismantled, and in registering all shops that sold religious paraphernalia in Canton, as the first step to the eventual complete suppression of superstition. During its seven months of existence, this organisation, under the zealous leadership of young party radicals, launched a series of publicity campaigns, which were said to have had a consciousness-raising impact on the citizens of Canton.<sup>106</sup>

This represented, without doubt, a radical attempt to “revolutionise” local society and culture.<sup>107</sup> However, traditional customs, including systems of popular religious belief, were not so easily discarded. First, the committee itself, despite its close links to the GMD, was not omnipotent. Financially, its operation depended solely on irregular donations from associated members and a handful of government bodies. Since contributions were less than substantial, it survived on a very tight budget.<sup>108</sup> More importantly, it failed to win the earnest support of the government, especially the Public Security Bureau, which had openly criticised the committee's ambitious action plans for being too radical and for having ignored the legitimate business interests of those in the religious paraphernalia trade.<sup>109</sup> The government apparently did not share the enthusiasm of the party in regard to this “cultural revolution,” and its attitude towards the movement remained largely indifferent.<sup>110</sup> Some civil servants were ill-disposed to the campaign because the proposed abolition of certain traditional festivals such as the Mid-Autumn Festival (*Zhongqiu jie* 中秋節) would deprive them of a few days of public holiday; they complained that even the Meiji 明治 reformers in Japan did not go that far.<sup>111</sup> Second, the masses were also said to be too conservative and complacent to embrace the kind of radical change advocated by this Committee. As a result, despite waves of publicity campaigns and the implementation of some counter-superstitious measures, worshippers still flocked to local temples on the occasion of religious festivals, and all sorts of “superstitious” folk beliefs and practices survived almost as freely as before.<sup>112</sup>

This small but active anti-superstition body was ordered by the local GMD headquarters to close down in February 1930. The real reasons are not known, but it was probably because of its unpopularity and its radicalism.<sup>113</sup> Throughout the 1930s, the GMD in Canton continued to promote agnostic thinking and scientific education in schools, and occasional campaigns against “superstitions” were also launched. However, in the same period the city also witnessed the promotion by the state and the Party of ethico-political cults of the God of War, Confucius, and revolutionary martyrs.<sup>114</sup> The coexistence of these two conflicting socio-cultural forces reflects both the tensions between, as much as the strength

of, these two trends. There was no winner in this socio-cultural tug of war, and it was in an unsettled and ambivalent situation like this that traditional systems of spiritual belief were given the chance to perpetuate.

Since the early 1920s, public mourning at the *HHG* had become an annual political event, which was orchestrated by the Party and was well attended by school students, bureaucrats, and military personnel. The compilation of mourning texts for these occasions, like the one that was published in 1919 and mentioned earlier, appears to have been discontinued. Fragmentary accounts written by participants, however, can be found in highbrow literary journals. A cursory comparison of those commemorative writings of 1919 and the 1930s reveals a remarkable reduction of references to the martyrs as spirits. Instead, the language of patriotism and revolutionary ideals quoting Sun's Three Principles of the People became more common.<sup>115</sup> It remains unclear, however, if this trend of secularisation had successfully replaced the religio-spiritual perceptions of the tomb.

A commemorative volume dedicated to an official memorial event held at *HHG* in 1929 contains a report on the political rituals that had been performed at the tomb on that day. Of all the memorial writings composed and presented by the various government departments that had participated in this event, the eulogy delivered by the Municipal Inspection (*Shi jiancha hui* 市監察會) of the Canton Branch of the GDM contained a familiar appeal to the supernatural realm of the grave. This eulogy began with the usual denunciation of the Manchu regime and the glorification of the seventy-two martyrs' heroic deeds. Regarding the abortive revolution in Canton in April 1911, the eulogy blames the failure on the "High Sovereign of the vast heavens who did not show pity [on these men]" (*be baotian qibudiao xi, jingsang wo zhi yuanliang* 何昊天其不吊兮，竟喪我之元良). However, even that short-lived failure was believed to be a part of Heaven's design, because the bravery of these martyrs helped shatter the confidence of the "slavish [imperial] officials" so badly that it eventually led to the success of the Wuchang Uprising. The eulogy then proceeds to describe the chaotic situation during the early Republic and the subsequent breaking up of the country. It added, however, that

[t]he efficacious spirits of our martyrs came forward for our protection. By hovering above [us] and standing by our sides their presence [aided our army to] crush the warlords so as to maintain the legitimacy [of the revolution]. As a result, our nation prospers. Looking at the [*HHG*] memorial in front of us, we worship it... With our heads raised, we look solemnly towards the spirit road [of the tomb and] with heartfelt emotion we offer symbolic incense [to you];<sup>116</sup> [we] trust [that your spirits will] silently bless our Party as it develops [its great enterprise]...<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> One such example is a collection of commemorative essays entitled *Geming xianlie jinian zhuankan* [A special commemorative volume dedicated to the revolutionary martyrs] (Guangzhou: Zhongguo Guomindang Zhongyang Jixin Weiyuanhui Xuanchuanbu, 1932), which was compiled and published by the separatist GMD regime in 1932. Most contributors were senior officials, military officers and intellectuals, with the famous Lu Xun being one of them.

<sup>116</sup> The Buddhist term *xinxiang*, literally meaning "incense in the heart," was used in the original text. According to *Cibai* [The sea of words] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1948), p.521, *xinxiang* refers to a Buddhist's state of mind in which a practitioner feels the presence of the Buddha, just like the act of "burning incense and making offering to the Buddha."

<sup>117</sup> *Huanghua tekan* [Special volume on the Yellow Flower] (Guangzhou: Nanhua tushuguan, 1929), p.2.

<sup>118</sup> *Geming xianlie jinian*, pp.219–20.

<sup>119</sup> *Yuehua bao*, 5 April 1934.

<sup>120</sup> *Gongping bao* [Canton daily], 4 April 1934.

<sup>121</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 7 May 1921.

<sup>122</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 30 April 1921, 2 May 1921, 7 May 1921; *Gongping bao*, 19 May 1928.

<sup>123</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 1 June 1920.

<sup>124</sup> My speculation is based on the fact that such traditional sacrificial meats were commonly displayed at many officially organised “mourning meetings” (*zhuidao dabui*) for revolutionary martyrs, which were supposedly a “modern” form of mortuary practice and remembrance. For instance, see *Shenbao*, 30 November 1916, 10 July 1919, 7 September 1919; also *Yuehua bao*, 18 September 1934.

<sup>125</sup> Michael Tsin, “Canton remapped,” in *Remaking the Chinese city: modernity and national identity, 1900–1950*, ed. Joseph Esherick (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), pp.23–4, 29.

In another commemorative volume published in 1932, one essayist recounted that, when he was facing the tomb, he actually felt the presence of the martyrs' spirits hovering above him. On that sorrowful day, he continued, he sincerely wished that the martyrs' spirits would return to earth to help his ailing country. He pledged his loyalty to the revolutionary cause in front of the tomb as a way of serving the spirits.<sup>118</sup>

A newspaper article about a similar commemorative event held at *HHG* in 1934 stated that on the day of the Yellow Flower Festival (the anniversary of the abortive Canton Uprising in April 1911) in the past twenty years, local weather had always been predictably bad: cloudy, windy, chilly and rainy. He attributed this climatic pattern to the supernatural interference of the seventy-two spirits, which were believed to be upset and angry at China's inability to resolve its national crises and problems. The rains that fell on the anniversaries were, we are told, teardrops of these spirits to “awaken our people.”<sup>119</sup> Another writer also opined that the drizzle that unfailingly fell on that day was the tears of Heaven, ones that represented the Jade Emperor's mourning as well as being his sacrificial offering to the seventy-two martyrs. Despite his appreciation of this graceful act of Heaven, this writer complained about an unusually strong northerly gust on that day in 1934 which he took to be a sign of the Jade Emperor's frustration at the ferocity of the national crises facing China.<sup>120</sup> This matches, in an inverse way, the view of another journalist who attributed the fine weather on one anniversary to the supernatural blessing of the martyrs' spirits.<sup>121</sup> In both ways, the martyrs were still being construed and revered in the 1930s as spirits which were “alive,” real and powerful; the cult persisted as an integral part of the system of popular religious belief.

During the 1920s and the 1930s a new element was introduced to the public worship of the *HHG* martyrs. To allow more citizens to participate in a commemorative event without having to travel all the way to the cemetery, the GMD erected in a public park and a bustling pier in downtown Canton, two mat sheds that housed a collective spiritual tablet (*lingwei* 靈位) of the martyrs for public veneration and, no doubt, religious worship. Another spirit tablet representing the martyrs was installed in a prestigious local school where photographic portraits of some of the dead heroes were also displayed for veneration.<sup>122</sup> In a commemorating event organized by a journalists' association in Canton, a similar spirit tablet was placed on an altar built for the occasion.<sup>123</sup> To represent the martyrs in the form of spiritual tablet was an acknowledgement of the supernatural existence of these dead. Although the sources did not mention the sacrificial foods used on these occasions, traditional offerings for ancestor or demigod such as hog and lamb might have been used.<sup>124</sup>

It must be added that despite the attempts of the state to bring modernity to the city and its citizens,<sup>125</sup> popular belief in the existence of

a supernatural realm never disappeared. Ghost stories continued to enjoy wide popularity, and many were serialized in local dailies or published in book form.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, reports of haunts or of spirits that terrorised people continued to appear in local papers.<sup>127</sup> In a ghost story about the vengeful spirit of a murdered man, the view of its editor perhaps reflects those of his contemporaries. He wrote that if a person died before he or she could accomplish their life's work or fulfil their purpose, they would become a ghost. These spirits, because of their strong desire to accomplish their unfulfilled promise, or to take vengeance on their murderers, did not realize they were already dead and, therefore, they refused to leave this world. This author also stressed that "the more intelligent a person, the deeper his belief in the existence of ghosts" and, speaking for the pragmatic attitude of the majority, he says "it is better to believe in the existence [of ghosts] than otherwise."<sup>128</sup> Following this line of reasoning, it is not hard to understand why the seventy-two martyrs, in the eyes of contemporaries at least, were effectively seventy-two spirits. One can argue, therefore, that all the references to the seventy-two martyrs as ghosts or spirit soldiers made by numerous eulogists and mourners on commemorative occasions during the early decades of the Republic were not necessarily simply rhetorical metaphors, but rather the true reflection of their religious sentiment.

More detailed reports on the commemorative events held at *HHG* during this later period are hard to come by. Other events in Canton, however, point to the persistence of the cult of martyrs, as dead soldiers were still worshipped as spirits. The overt worship of the spirits of the dead soldiers of the Nineteenth Route Army (a military force composed of men from Guangdong) who were killed in their famous heroic engagement with the Japanese army in Shanghai in 1932, was a case in point. For at least three consecutive years from 1932, week-long "soul pacification" rituals (*wanren yuan* 萬人緣) were organised by a local charitable hospital in commemoration, at least on the surface, of these dead soldiers. On these days, altars were set up for Buddhist monks and nuns, and also for Daoist priests, who had been invited to chant scriptures to relieve "spirits large and small" from suffering in purgatory and to pacify the malicious ghosts that roamed abroad, in the hope that they could be drawn back to their "land of happiness."<sup>129</sup> In 1934, an official commemorative event for these martyred soldiers took place at a newly-built monumental tomb dedicated to them which was called *Shijiulujun kang Ri zhenwang jiangshi gongmu* 十九路軍抗日陣亡將士公墓. In front of the monument, a sacrificial altar was erected on which were displayed a selection of foods—raw mutton, roast pork, dumplings, fresh fruit—and other offerings intended, as in popular religious rituals, for the propitiation of ghosts.<sup>130</sup> These occasions were well attended by senior officials of the regime.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>126</sup> For examples, see *Gongping bao*, 28 November 1927, and *Guaisi congshu*.

<sup>127</sup> *Yuehua bao*, 18 November 1932, 20 November 1932, 26 November 1932; *Gongping bao*, 26 August 1927, 1 December 1927, 19 March 1928, 4 April 1934; *Huazi ribao*, 2–3 May 1919, 29 April 1921.

<sup>128</sup> *Guaisi congshu*, pp.7–10.

<sup>129</sup> *Yuehua bao*, 14 November 1932, 20 November 1932; *Gongping bao*, 4 April 1934; *Fanbian yiyuan zhuidao dabui zonghaogao* [Report on the soul relieving ritual organised by Fanbian Hospital] (Guangzhou: N.p., 1933).

<sup>130</sup> *Yuehua bao*, 18 September 1934. In spite of its largely Western appearance, this monument-cum-tomb still follows certain traditional Chinese principles of afterlife architecture. For instance, the major structures of this complex, including one of the two mass tombs, are all southward facing. *Dizhengju xiujian Shijiulujun kangri zhenwang jiangshi gongwu an* [A proposal by the Lands Affairs Department to renovate the public cemetery of the Nineteenth-Route-Army martyrs who were killed in the war of resistance against Japan], Canton Municipal Archive 13/3/148, dated 17 March 1947.

<sup>131</sup> This was not exclusive to Canton. During the Ghost Festival (on the Seventh Moon of the Lunar calendar) in 1936, a large-scale "soul relieving" ritual was organised by the "highest military authorities" in Beijing for pacifying the spirits of the countless Chinese soldiers who had lost their lives in battles in North China over the previous years. This occasion was celebrated as a religious event with no less than 50,000 people participating. See *Huazi ribao*, 9 September 1936.

<sup>132</sup> *Yuehua bao*, 14 November 1932.

<sup>133</sup> *Yuehua bao*, 20 November 1932.

<sup>134</sup> *Gongping bao*, 3 May 1928.

<sup>135</sup> *Gongping bao*, 22 June 1933.

It was in the public responses towards these secular yet religious events that the ambiguous relationship between the worldly and the spiritual, martyrs and ghosts, is most vividly manifest. In one of these soul-pacifying rituals, large crowds of spectators and participants were attracted to the venue. These people came not only from the city, but also from villages in the Pearl River Delta area. A reporter recorded that among the curious crowds were countless men and women who flocked to one particular side of the main altar, where they made offerings to a large paper effigy of a hungry ghost (commonly regarded as a spirit that bestows wealth on its worshippers), hoping that they would be rewarded with its blessing so that they could win in gambling and, especially, lotteries. Many worshippers brought with them dice or characters for lotteries written on pieces of paper. They performed divinations before the altar, in the hope that the “king of ghosts” would pick the lucky numbers or characters for them.<sup>132</sup> During this seven-day-long event, malevolent spirits at the venue reportedly possessed at least one spectator who subsequently went mad.<sup>133</sup> In another context, an opium-den owner was found possessed by the spirit of a dead revolutionary soldier. This malevolent ghost demanded from the victim’s family two horses and fourteen revolvers so that it could set off immediately to join the Northern Expedition 北伐 led by the GMD. The victim recovered only after paper effigies of these requested items had been incinerated under the supervision of a Daoist priest.<sup>134</sup> In the popular mind, there was no conflict between being a revolutionary while alive, and a roaming ghost in the afterlife. The distinction between the two realms was vague and ambiguous. In a newspaper article on the subject of ghosts, one author articulated perhaps what was the view of many of his contemporaries including those pilgrims to the monumental tombs in Canton. There existed indeed a realm of ghosts, he wrote, which had been proved scientifically by modern spiritualists; it was not, therefore, absurd to talk about apparitions. Since spirits existed, the stories about vengeful ghosts were true. He then lamented the escalating aggression of the Japanese, which took its toll on the lives of countless Chinese soldiers. He believed that one day “the angry spirits of these martyrs will all fly to Japan, with swords of vengeance in hand, to fulfil their unfinished mission [to kill the enemy].”<sup>135</sup>

### *Resilience of Ambivalence: the Socialist Era*

From the founding of the People’s Republic (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo* 中華人民共和國) until it was thoroughly renovated in 1981, *HHG* remained in a state of neglect. A cadre at the management office of the present-day *HHG* Park offers two reasons for this. First, the strong association of *HHG* with the “counter-revolutionary” GMD regime had

deterred people from visiting the tomb lest they might be labelled as sympathizers of the Republic. For the same reason, the new socialist government did not care to maintain this once sacred site of the Republican revolution. Second, as *HHG* had been in a state of poor maintenance since the late 1930s, a problem further aggravated by the Japanese occupation and the Civil War, trees and lawns were left to grow wild. As a result, the area was said to have been overwhelmed by the *yin* element and, thus, haunted. Under these circumstances, visitors to the site then were rare and few.

What happened to *HHG* as a source of supernatural blessing then? The socialist regime possesses a much more modernistic outlook, at least superficially, than its Nationalist predecessors. Although the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhongguo gongchandang* 中國共產黨 CCP) did not try to sustain the cult of *HHG* with the same vigour as the GMD, and although Red Guards (*Hong weibing* 紅衛兵) had vandalized some parts of the tomb during the 1960s, the party-state did not orchestrate any systematic or intentional damage to the tomb complex, which was even declared to be a “first-class monument under the state’s protection” in 1961.<sup>136</sup> *HHG* continued to be protected and utilised as a source of blessing, though secular in form and content, during the People’s Republic: martyrdom is still an important ideal in the political education of youngsters of “New China,” and this tomb, as discussed earlier, has been reconfigured to become a political monument that nurtures collective memories of nationalism and modernity among China’s citizens.

In spite of this, the present regime has its own new breed of martyrs who bestow blessings on its citizens. The monumental complex at Honghua gang (Red Flower Mound, completed in 1957), among many other socialist monuments built in the city, houses the collective grave of the “proletarian martyrs” of the abortive 1927 Canton Uprising, a commemorative tombstone for Marshal Ye Jianying 葉劍英 (1897–1986), and a forty-five-metre-tall stone statue of a rifle grasped in a man’s arm. This collective tomb, built on top of a mound, faces west and is flanked by forty small stone lions. The west-facing direction is apparently a deviation from traditional geomantic principles for gravesites. Even this, however, may not be a totally non-religious calculation. Like Mao’s north-facing embalmed body in the Mao Zedong Mausoleum in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square (*Tiananmen guangchang* 天安門廣場), which was positioned as a mystical means to scare away the demonic force of China’s potential enemy in the North (that is, the former Soviet Union),<sup>137</sup> the westerly direction of the Red Flower Mound tomb perhaps embodies a similar symbolic meaning of manipulating the supernatural power of these spirits to drive away another major threat to China from the West—the United States and her NATO allies.

Reminiscences of contemporary residents of Canton reveal further evidence of the survival of the popular image of *HHG* martyrs as spirits. Elderly informants emphasize that *HHG* was far away from the city then.<sup>138</sup>

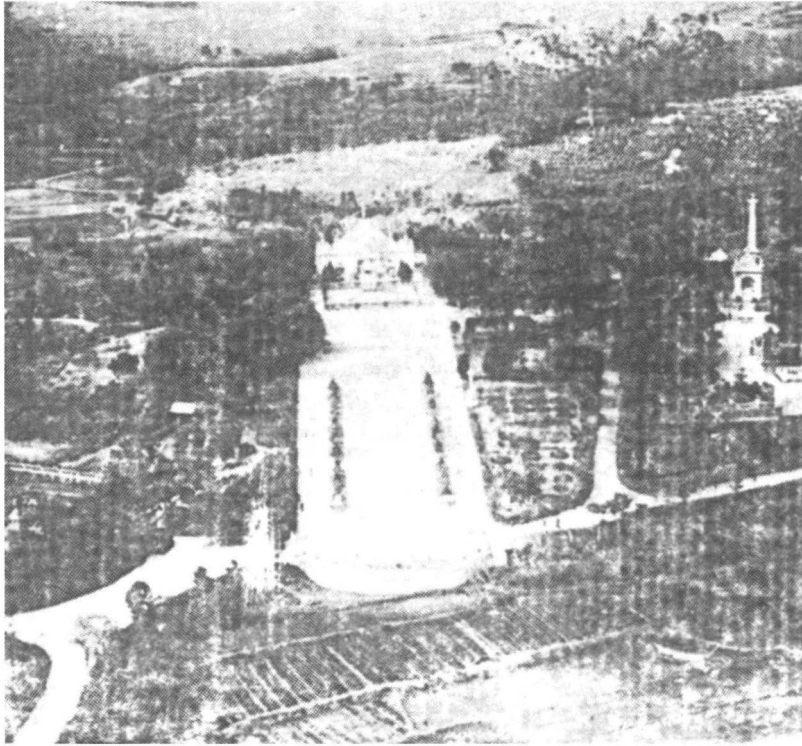
<sup>136</sup> Zhang Yili, *Huanghua gang*, p.25.

<sup>137</sup> A. P. Cheater, “Death ritual as political trickster in the People’s Republic of China”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 26 (July 1991): 91–4. It is also interesting to note that at the memorial meeting for Sun Yat-sen held in Canton after his death in 1925, a huge complex of structures, including sacrificial altars and other funerary decorations, was built at the centre of a large open field. The structures in this complex, including at least one photographic portrait of Sun that was framed on both sides with national and party flags, all faced north. Sun Zhongsan Xiansheng Guozang Jinian Weiyuanhui, *Aisi lu*, pp.224–5. This tallied with the positioning of a deceased body in most mourning households in south China. See De Groot, *Religious system of China*, vol.1, p.5. But if we follow Cheater’s line of thinking, this positioning of Sun’s portrait might well be another symbolic device employed by the living comrades of Sun to utilise the supernatural power in his dead body to, it was hoped, help crush the Beijing “warlord” regime in the north.

<sup>138</sup> Public transport to this area, though available by the mid-1930s, was expensive and infrequent. Guangzhou Shizhengfu, *Guangzhou nianjian* [Canton Yearbook] (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Shizhengfu, 1935), p.168.

**Figure 14**

A 1936 aerial photo of the seventy-two martyrs' gravesite and its surroundings. The area was sparsely populated (source: Huashang yuekan, [Hong Kong] 1.11 [February 1936] frontispiece)



<sup>139</sup> *Huazi ribao*, 28 April 1920; *Panyu xianzhi* [The Gazetteer of Panyu County] (Originally published in 1871. Reprinted by Taipei: Chengwen Chubanshe, 1967), ch.15; Liao Shulun, ed., *Guangzhou daguan* [A grand overview of Canton] (Guangzhou: Tiannan Chubanshe, 1948), p.25. An aerial photograph of this area can be seen in *Huashang yuekan* [Chinese business monthly], 1.10 (February 1936): 2.

<sup>140</sup> This may explain why so many writers of those mourning texts during the early Republic used the term “breeze from purgatory” (*yinfeng*) when referring to the ambience of the area.

<sup>141</sup> Since, probably, the early 1960s. Guangdong Sheng Difang Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, ed., *Guangdong sheng zhi. Min zheng zhi* [Guangdong Province gazetteer. Volume on civil affairs] (Guangzhou: Guang-

Since 1981, the fate of *HHG* turned once again with the tide of political change in China. With the call for re-unification with Taiwan now occupying a high priority on the political agenda, *HHG*, being an important symbolic asset in this political goal, has benefited once more: the tomb and the park were given a thorough face-lift, and are now scrupulously maintained.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, this once-deserted part of Canton has become an integral part of the expanding metropolis. Old graveyards have given way to modern high-rise buildings and broad avenues. It is perhaps because of

/dong Renmin Chubanshe, 1993), pp.193–5.

<sup>142</sup> A recent newspaper carried a front page news item that reported that more than 100,000 Taiwanese have paid homage to the tomb in recent years. The report claims that many Taiwanese pilgrims were touched by the excellent condition of the tombs, and they allegedly praised the

The entire area adjacent to *HHG* was by and large graveyards since at least the 1860s, and by 1950, it was still a sparsely-populated area dotted with only a few small rural communities.<sup>139</sup> In the popular perception, they maintained, this was very much an abode of spirits, not human beings.<sup>140</sup> As a result, they recall, this was an area, among others in the city's suburbs, which ordinary people avoided lest they encounter marauding malevolent ghosts. Even by the early 1970s, this area was still largely rural and graves new and old were scattered over a wide area. People rarely went there unless absolutely necessary. This popular ghostly image of the place was reinforced by the fact that the city's major funeral parlour and crematoria were located just behind the hill of *HHG*.<sup>141</sup> Citizens visited *HHG* to pay homage to the martyrs, as instructed by schools or out of spontaneous patriotic feeling, but they came only around the anniversary and rarely stayed for long.

/CCP for doing a much better job than the GMD in maintaining the place. Many of the visitors reportedly felt a kind of intimacy whenever they came to see the tomb. *HHG* apparently serves as a beacon for the “sojourning” Taiwanese to return “home.” *Guangzhou ribao* [Canton daily], 5 July 1999.

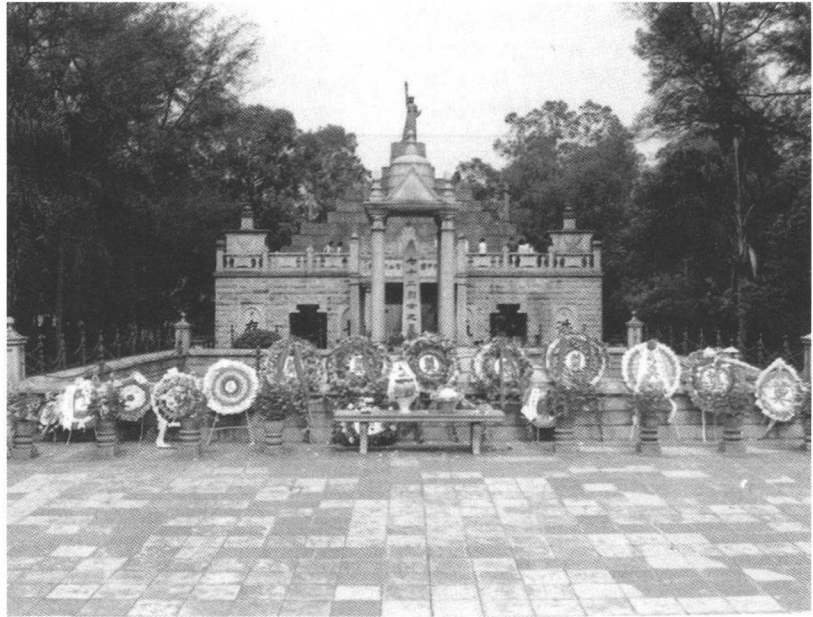


this intense urbanization that this area is gradually losing its old ghostly image in the public mind. Many young students who come here every year to pay homage to the monument deny any belief in the spectral existence of the martyrs, or any religious interpretation of the tomb.<sup>143</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that about one-fifth of my young informants still acknowledge the possibility of apparitions at *HHG*, which is also conceived of as an abode of spirits despite their unfailing acceptance of the official line that the tomb is only a monument. Popular films and television programmes from Hong Kong are held to be responsible for “polluting” these young minds with a “superstitious” belief in the existence of the spirit realm. In the eyes of these young informants, the martyrs are remembered both as historical heroes and benevolent spirits. Even more surprisingly, some of my academic acquaintances in Canton, who received a rigorous and dogmatic education in the 1950s to the 1970s, share this ambiguous attitude towards the tomb. Some of them, even nowadays, refuse to linger at *HHG* for long lest they encounter apparitions.<sup>144</sup> In response to my question why the *HHG Park* has so few visitors on an ordinary day, one of them replied that it is because *HHG* is a *grave*. By implication, it is a place to be avoided, ordinarily.

The structural reforms initiated by the state's policy of “modernisation” since the late 1970s have, ironically, brought about a fevered revival of popular religious beliefs in China. Common people and local officials alike continue to defy the party-state's much-publicised anti-superstition policy by actively participating in, as well as promoting, local cults and “superstitious” practices.<sup>145</sup> Some of this officially denounced public worship reminds us of the cult of *HHG*. In Henan 河南 Province, for example, a rural lineage has converted one of its temples into a Sanctuary for Deceased Virtuous Persons

**Figure 15**

*The scene at the seventy-two martyrs' grave following an official commemoration. The paper-flower wreaths at the grave are the same as those used in present-day mortuary rites in China (source: Huanghua gang Mausoleum of Seventy-Two Martyrs [Guangzhou: Guangdong Huabao She and Huanghua gang gongyuan, n.d.])*



/lectuals. For example, the death of Zhou Enlai, the Premier, sparked off a series of spontaneous protests by students and intellectuals in Tiananmen Square in 1976. Many protestors at the Square composed commemorative writings and eulogies dedicated to Zhou. Many of these writers, surprisingly, referred to the dead premier as a spirit and wished him to return to China to help kill all the enemies of the Party and the nation, including, of course, the infamous Gang of Four. One eulogist even wished that Zhou's ashes could be transformed into an effective pesticide so that all sorts of bugs in China could be exterminated by it. See Tong Huaizhou, ed., *Tiananmen shichao* [Copy of poems from Tiananmen Square] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1978), p.19.

<sup>145</sup> For detailed cases on the Canton Delta area, see Aijmer and Ho, *Cantonese society*, chs.8 to 12; on Fujian, see Kenneth Dean, *Taoist ritual and popular cults in southeast China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>143</sup> In the form of a questionnaire, I have surveyed the opinion of eighty high-school students in Canton who had taken part in political rituals conducted at *HHG* between 1997 and 1998.

<sup>144</sup> During the radical decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the concept of ghosts never entirely disappeared from China, but retreated to the deep recesses of people's minds, including those supposedly politically indoctrinated intel-

<sup>146</sup> *Ming bao*, 29 June 1998.

<sup>147</sup> *Ming bao*, 8 July 1996. Li Wanbing describes the popular cult in detail, in the supernatural sense, of Mao Zedong in recent China in her work *Zai shang shentan de Mao Zedong* [Mao Zedong takes to the altar once again] (Beijing: Ha'erbin Chubanshe, 1993).

<sup>148</sup> See Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), pp.22–3, 26, 211–14.

(*Xianxian ci* 先賢祠), in which tablets of the “ten great commanders of the CCP” (*shida yuanshuai* 十大元帥), in addition to other deities already installed there, are worshipped. The statues of Mao Zedong, Peng Dehuai 彭德懷, Zhu De 朱德 and seven others are placed on altars in the grandest hall of this large temple compound; even a statue of Lin Biao 林彪, the ill-fated No. 2 man of the Party and allegedly would-be assassin of Mao, is ready for installation. The shrine is said to have attracted countless numbers of faithful worshippers and, as a result, “smoke emits from burning incense and other religious paraphernalia without ceasing.”<sup>146</sup> A report from Mao’s native village in Hunan province states that each year numerous visitors to this “holy city of Chinese Communism” climb the 1,800-metre mountain to a spot where Mao’s ancestral grave lies. Many offer incense and bow to the grave which is acclaimed for its strong efficacy in channelling the good geomantic force to its direct descendants and, it is hoped, also to these strangers.<sup>147</sup> Similar phenomena, as Geremie Barmé points out in his highly informative work on the cult of Mao, can be found all over the country.<sup>148</sup> These dead revolutionaries go one step further than their *HHG* counterparts: they have been deified to become gods, and are not just petty spirits.

Urbanization and modernisation have not been able to purge the popular mind of the religious significance of *HHG* and other monumental tombs nearby. Today, *HHG* continues to carry ambiguous meanings, both secular and spiritual, among the local populace. Although “feudalistic superstitious” rituals are no longer seen practised there, the “old” belief in this place as an abode of ghosts, rather than just a political monument, will persist for a long time to come.

## Conclusion

This paper has, I hope, revealed that behind the official narratives of history and the political rhetorical constructions of reality lies a hidden alternative socio-cultural dimension which allows us a glimpse into the world of popular culture and the mentalities of common social actors in history.

Both the GMD and the CCP governments claim to have led China on the historic path of building itself into a modern nation. To facilitate that, both regimes have actively promoted social and political campaigns against “feudalistic” customs and beliefs, including popular religions and “superstitious beliefs.” Decades of revolution, however, have failed to deliver to China the desired modernity. Secularisation as a socio-cultural force is by no means dominant or unchallenged. The example of *HHG* reveals that the process of cultural transition in China from “antiquity” to modernity has never been smooth nor indeed completed. Although

the appeal of modernity is great, the force of cultural continuity is also strong. Throughout the Republican period, despite the ruling élites' faith in the political relevance of a secularised society and culture, members of the same leadership continued to visit traditional temples and modern tombs, with *HHG* being one example, at which they prayed for supernatural blessings for their regimes and the nation. This casts serious doubt on the sincerity of the ruling élites in regard to their much-publicised "determination" to wipe out "counter-modern" practices and beliefs in China. The *HHG* story reveals a pragmatic attitude that local people, both the élites and commoners alike, generally adopted when making sense of the world—a pragmatism that allowed them great flexibility in construing and tackling reality in ways that would bring them maximum advantage. "Superstitious beliefs," as a result, were too emotionally powerful and practically useful to be discarded *in toto*. Those supplicants who made offerings at the martyrs' tomb in *HHG* probably never expected the seventy-two martyrs actually to rise from their graves and help them destroy their enemies. That very thought, however, sufficed to keep their minds connected to a supernatural symbolic universe and popular spiritual tradition which they, at the same time, professedly denounced and renounced. By appealing to the heavenly forces for active interference in terrestrial political affairs, these pilgrims were seemingly begging for miracles, which, according to their mindset, were not necessarily delusional. Citizens and politicians in this new era were living in at least two possible worlds: one secular, one supernatural.<sup>149</sup> Their relations with the sacred were not only maintained, but also reanimated through group unity and practice.<sup>150</sup>

Even the authoritarian socialist regime, despite its enormous power for social control, was not capable of cleansing from its subjects' minds the cognisance of a spirit realm. Despite decades of official efforts in presenting the *HHG* tomb as a revolutionary memorial and the complex as a people's park, the grave and surrounding area is still rarely visited, except occasionally by isolated groups of students and cadres during the Qingming Festival 清明節, and regularly by a small congregation of elderly residents from a housing estate nearby. Compared to most other public parks in this crowded city, this place is unusually little visited. A plausible reason is that its location continues to be construed in its old "original" meaning—graveyard, spirits, pollution associated with death—and is to be avoided. The resilience of "superstitious" thought and its common acceptance indicates the limited reach of the state over its subjects.

Since 1912, the notions and the project of modernity that modern élites in China had been eagerly promoting were clear. Individual experiences of modernity in China, however, had never been that clear. Throughout the Republican period, official anti-superstition campaigns, cast in the rhetoric of modernity, existed paradoxically alongside the official

<sup>149</sup> Aijmer notes, rather perceptively, that "a cultural tradition embraces a number of 'modalities', culturally constructed universes, each with its own given pre-suppositions. Men do not live in one society only, but simultaneously in several societies, which in terms of culture exist in parallel and apart." "Religion in social continuance," in Göran Aijmer, *A conciliation of power*, pp.11–14.

<sup>150</sup> To borrow from Durkheim's concept of the sacred, see Peter E. Glasner, *The sociology of secularisation: a critique of a concept* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp.102–3.

<sup>151</sup> *Guomindang zhongyang zhixing-weiyuanhui mishuchu fengfa* “Shenci cunfei biao zhun” zhi geji danghu ban [A memorandum entitled “The criteria governing the keeping or the abolition of a temple” issued by the Secretariat of GMD Central Executive Committee to all local branches of the Party] (1930) in *Zhonghuaminguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian* [Selected compilation of archival sources of the history of Republic of China], ed. Zhongguo di'er dang'anguan (Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1994), series 5, no.1 (*wenbua*), pp.495–506.

<sup>152</sup> A brief but lucid discussion of these Weberian and Durkheimian concepts of the religious can be found in Peter Glasner, *The sociology of secularisation*, pp.101–9.

<sup>153</sup> For discussion of the problematic Western notion of modernity, see John Jervis, *Exploring the modern* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

<sup>154</sup> In 1925, in the midst of the so-called “high tide of the Chinese revolution,” an ardent Communist wrote about his strong dissatisfaction with some students who were ordered by their schools to take part in a commemorative event at HHG—they dashed off instantly after bowing perfunctorily to the tomb. Workers did not show greater enthusiasm either. Many of them rushed back to their workplace once they had bowed to the tomb. See *Guangzhou dihui Shouzheng baogao dijiubao—Huanghua Gang jinianjie qingxing* [Report no.9 of Shou Zhen, committee member of CCP Canton District Office—situation of HHG commemoration festival], Canton Municipal archive 200/1/42, dated 30 March 1925.

<sup>155</sup> Peter Glasner, *The sociology of secularisation*, p.97.

patronage of select popular cults.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, since the symbolic asset of the martyrs of the Nationalist revolution was too great to be ignored, the GMD never banned this specific cult of the dead but, rather, was determined to utilize it for the benefit of the state and the nation—the sacred, in this respect, was the basis of legitimacy and moral authority.<sup>152</sup> Some historians take the project of modernity as a calculated move of the state for materialistic gain. It is not clear, however, if such “tolerance” and ambivalence truly had anything to do with the spiritual proclivities of these statesmen. The project of modernity that these officials have been actively promoting was not a perfect copy of the Western notion of modernity; few ever envisioned an unqualified reformation of Chinese society based on “the Western model” of modernity. In other words, they held to their own version of modernity allowing space for indigenous elements that contradicted the tenets of modernity as the term was ideally defined in the West.<sup>153</sup> In spite of the Party’s efforts to present this cult of the dead in secular “non-superstitious” language, it was powerless, or even perhaps unwilling, to stop patricians and plebeians from construing it in their own familiar idioms.<sup>154</sup> Many of the central tenets of Republican and Nationalist thought—such as the veneration of martyrs and the building of revolutionary monuments dedicated to them—were not simply “modern” in origin, but can also be traced back to traditional practices in Canton and, in all likelihood, other parts of China. The HHG tomb remained a site of ambivalence; it was a strange hybrid of secularity and religiosity, cultural change and continuity. It was also a mixture of two analytically distinct concepts of cult—the mystic-religious and the quasi-religious: the former conceives of the wider society as irrelevant, while the latter is world-affirming and instrumentalist.<sup>155</sup> The shadow of tradition, like an apparition, refused to leave its old abode and continues to haunt the people in this part of modern China.

Virgil Kit-yiu Ho

Department of Humanities  
Hong Kong University  
of Science and Technology  
Clear Water Bay, Kowloon  
Hong Kong  
hmviho@ust.hk

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