

Ghost Month invented by Ming emperor, research shows

研究顯示：「鬼月」之說始於明太祖



The seventh month of the lunar calendar is traditionally known as Ghost Month, but according to a report published by the Taiwan Folklore Museum, it only acquired its **inauspicious** connotations during the reign of the Hongwu Emperor during the Ming Dynasty in the 14th century. Until then, the month was a time for worshipping ancestors and honoring parents.

The museum's research shows that the Hongwu Emperor "blamed the ghosts" as a way of deterring the general public from worshipping on the same auspicious days as the imperial **court**.

Taiwan Folklore Museum director Chu Chieh-yang said that there are a lot of taboos during Ghost Month, and many everyday activities are deemed inappropriate. However, not many people have bothered to find out why, so the museum decided to conduct some research into the matter.

Yen Rong-feng, deputy director of the museum, said ancient poems and texts make no mention of anything inauspicious related to the seventh lunar month. On the contrary, a Buddhist ancestor worshipping ceremony, Ullambana, was introduced by Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty. Ullambana became popular among the general populace, who honored their elders and ancestors on the 15th day of the seventh month. This continued until the Tang Dynasty, and there are no references to ghosts until the Song Dynasty.

The Ghost Festival that falls on the seventh full moon of the lunar year was considered an important day for worshipping ancestors, and a record of this practice is recorded in the General History of Taiwan. Buddhists associate the Ghost Festival with filial piety through the legend of Maudgalyayana, who rescued his mother after she was reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts. Yen says an expression used by the ancient geomancers that, "Since ancient

times, emperors have been buried in the seventh month," is further evidence that the seventh month used to be considered auspicious. An alternative word for the seventh lunar month contained the field radical with a vertical line through it, implying that "The time is right in heaven, the conditions on earth are favorable." Yen says that Ming emperors not only had their burials in this month, but also favored it for **coronations**.

So when did the seventh lunar month become inauspicious? Yen says historical documents show that Liu Bowen, an advisor to the Hongwu Emperor, proposed the idea of sending people disguised as Taoist priests to cities and counties to spread the news that a disaster would happen in the seventh month. From then on, the notion of that month being unlucky began to spread.

Yen speculates that the Hongwu Emperor was an ardent believer in **geomancy** who fooled his subjects into believing that that the seventh month was unlucky so that the imperial court could reap the benefits of the auspicious days without having to share them with the common people. Yen says that the purpose of the museum's research is to prevent people from becoming overly superstitious.

(LIBERTY TIMES, TRANSLATED BY TAIJING WU)

Above: A monk speaks at a press conference in Taichung organized by Asia University to publicize the Taiwan Folklore Museum's report on Ghost Month, on Aug. 9, 2010. PHOTO: SU MENG-CHUAN, LIBERTY TIMES
Right: Worshippers burn incense and ghost money in a traditional Ghost Month ceremony in Taipei on Aug. 15, 2010.

PHOTO: TAIJING WU, TAIPEI TIMES

上圖：八月九日，一名僧侶在台中的亞洲大學台灣民俗館破除台灣鬼文化迷失記者會上發言。

照片：自由時報記者蘇孟娟

右圖：八月十五日，台北幾位民眾在傳統鬼月焚香燒紙錢祭拜好兄弟。

照片：台北時報吳偉攝

農曆七月俗稱鬼月，但台灣民俗文物館考證後發現，這種不吉祥的說法，是從明朝明太祖朱洪武才開始，在這之前的七月多是祭祖、孝義之月。

研究顯示，應該是明太祖「嫁禍於鬼」，不讓民間與皇族共用吉日吉時所致。

台灣民俗文物館館長朱界陽指出，每逢農曆七月，民眾總有諸多忌諱，認為諸事不宜，但實況究竟為何卻少有人探究，因此決定加以考證。

副館長顏榮豐說，考證不少古時經典都未找到有不祥之兆的記載：梁武帝時設盂蘭盆齋，此後民間普遍在七月十五設盂蘭盆齋為孝親之供，到唐代仍沿襲；到宋朝為止，未曾查見到七月是鬼月的記載。

七月十五中元節是舊時祭祖重要日子；台灣通史也記載相同祭祖的活動；佛教在中元祭祖禮俗外，也增「目連救母」的說法，讓中元節又增添孝親意義。顏榮豐說，另查到古代堪輿師的口訣指「古來天子七月葬」，因為七月是申月，取其在田，有「上得天時下得地利」之勢，而且明朝皇帝除沿古來天子七月葬之俗外，也偏好選在七月登基。

那七月究竟從何時開始變成不祥之月呢？顏榮豐說，文獻記載朱洪武軍師劉伯溫獻計，在七月叫許多人扮道士向各州縣散播天將降大災等訊息，應是七月不祥之月的由來。

顏榮豐推測，明太祖朱元璋篤信風水地理之說，把七月視作諸事不宜的鬼月，應是當時刻意施行的愚民政策，目的就是希望民眾不要過度迷信。

(自由時報記者蘇孟娟)



TODAY'S WORDS

今日單字

1. **inauspicious** /,ɪnˈɔːspɪʃəs/ adj.

不祥的 (bu4 xiang2 de5)

例：Today is an inauspicious day to get married.
(今日不宜嫁娶。)

2. **court** /kɔːrt/ n.

宮廷 (gong1 ting2)

例：Court officials attended to the emperor's every need.
(宮內侍者照料皇帝一切所需。)

3. **coronation** /,kɒrəˈneɪʃən/ n.

加冕 (jia1 mian3)

例：Thousands of people turned up to watch the coronation ceremony.
(數千民眾到場觀賞加冕典禮。)

4. **geomancy** /ˈdʒiːmənsti/ n.

風水學 (feng1 shui3 xue2)

例：Geomancy stills plays a part in the design of some modern buildings.
(部分現代建築設計仍受風水學影響。)