

THE ETERNAL YOUTH OF THE *TANG-KI*

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No matter the medium's age, even if he is a grandfather, as *tang-ki* he is a 'child'. The *tang-ki's* youth is not symbolic but a 'real' spiritual condition.

The religious belief behind the *tang-ki's* eternal youth:

Religious beliefs support the philosophical and mythological notion of the spiritual youth of the *tang-ki*. A person's horoscope is calculated by adding together eight figures drawn from the year, month, day and hour of her/his birth. People with 'light' horoscopes are fated, through no fault of their own, to have short lives. This life span will be increased if they are selected by the gods, and agree to be mediums. The transient mortal lives of potential mediums are on account of the incomplete nature of their souls.

The Chinese believe in the duality of the *linghun* (灵魂) or soul. The soul is made up of two elements. The *po* (魄) represents the *yin* and base nature of a person. This is imbued in the flesh, which in death putrefies but then gets reincarnated again also as flesh. The *hun* (魂), on the other hand is the *yang* and spiritual essence that in death continues its existence either as a *shen* (神 bright spirit) or a ghost *gui* (鬼), depending on whether or not the *hun* has been sacrificed to in ancestor worship.

When a child is born, his *po* element is complete but not his *hun*. This spiritual essence of the soul will gradually accrue in life until it is complete in adulthood, which for a male, according to the *Liji*, is twenty years of age and for a female when she is married. Because the *linghun* of a child is not

complete, Confucian traditions do not accord a dead child a full and proper funeral ceremony. However because the soul of a child is incomplete, the child possesses capacity, like a half empty glass, to take in more spirit and therefore makes a suitable vessel for possession by an alien spirit. This is the reason for the eternal youth of *tang-kis*. No matter the real age of the medium, as a *tang-ki* (童乩) he is always a child diviner (plate 1).



Plate 1: The medium may be an old man, but as a *tang-ki* he is eternally a child-diviner as signalled by the stomacher (a baby's undergarment) that he wears. Photo: Author.