Chinese Cemeteries and Environmental Ethics: Some Insights from Malaysia

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Abstract: Chinese cemeteries are often viewed as dark and eerie places and are to be avoided except during the Qing Ming prayers. Chinese immigrants to Malaysia but who did not return to China were buried in cemeteries established by their clansmen. The hundreds of Chinese cemeteries are now part of the Malaysian cultural landscape. Culturally the cemeteries symbolize the core Chinese concept of the “unity of heaven and humans”. This concept is manifested through three key cultural values of filial piety, fengshui (geomancy), and yi (righteousness). On the practical level, the management of Chinese cemeteries is nurturing a “green culture” primarily through efforts to “humanize” the cemetery landscape. This objective is being pursued in three ways, namely, changing the image of cemeteries, developing garden-type memorial parks, and increasing the level of human presence.

Key Terms: Chinese Cemeteries, “Unity of Heaven and Humans”
Introduction

People of all nationalities and ethnicities view life with joy and death with grief. Although death is the end of life, it nevertheless continues to assume a meaning for the living. A common element among all peoples in their attitude towards death is that of respect accorded to the departed. Many believe that the soul lives after death. Among the Chinese the concept of "viewing death as life" is held. Based on the Confucian thinking of "dust to dust, ashes to ashes", the dead are to be buried while the living is beholden to prepare a yin zhai (nether world residence) for the departed to reside in.

From a social perspective, burial in itself is a cultural practice that is steeped in Chinese history and tradition. Although burial cultures differ between the East and West, the cemetery is both a cultural legacy and a piece in the mosaic of land use on the landscape.

Cemeteries are not just a site where the departed are laid to rest. It is a physical environment which embodies the culture and traditions of a people and their history. In Malaysia, the inscriptions on Chinese tombstones are an essential and original source of reference on the history of the Chinese in this country. Information on the surname, jiguan (籍貫 or village of origin and/or dialect), and the years of birth and death are useful clues to the past. Studies based on information culled from tombstones have formed the basis of historical studies. A pioneer study is that of Franke and Chen Tieh Fan (1982). An early study from the perspective of necrogeography was completed by Teng Meng (1979) who searched for the connection between burial and fengshui (风水). More recent studies of cemeteries focus on the social organization and structure of early Chinese communities. Among these studies are those on the cemeteries of the Chinese and Hakka communities in Singapore by 曾玲/Zeng Ling (2000) and 利亮時/Li Liang Shi (2007), and that in Bukit Pasir in the Muar district of Johor by 鄭名烈/Tee Beng Lee (2013). The Johor study is an investigation of a cemetery of the communities which had migrated from the counties of Yong Chun (永春) and De Hua (德化) of Fujian province.

In the discourse on the environment, the relevance of cemeteries has largely been overlooked. Most often mentioned is the practice of Chinese geomancy or fengshui in the
Pik Wah Fan, Phin Keong Voon, Siew Kian Ong, Hong Ching Goh: Chinese Cemeteries and Environmental Ethics: Some Insights from Malaysia

selection of grave sites. However, though not always obvious, there are indeed underlying linkages between the conceptual and operational aspects of Chinese cemeteries and aspects of environmental ethics. Through a proper understanding of the cultural and philosophical bases of Chinese burial, the intimate connection between the Chinese cemetery and the environment may be better appreciated. This study will examine Chinese cemeteries in Malaysia for insights on their relevance to issues of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics are concerned with the role and value of types of environments in the total order of things that are part of the human sphere of influence as well as independent of it. This study attempts to show that the Chinese cemetery is not a wasteland that is irrelevant to the living but has deep-rooted links to life and its cultural dimensions. Dealing with the subject from the conceptual and practical aspects, the narrative will first focus on ground burial in the Chinese cemetery with reference to the concept of “unity of heaven and humans” or tianrenheyi (天人合一) and the environment, followed by an examination of the practical measures to nurture a “green culture” in the management of Chinese cemeteries.

A. Burial and Jiguan Identity

The burial of the dead is an age-old practice of human societies and an integral part of their culture. In ancient China, human burials could have begun merely as an act to dispose of dead bodies. It was not until the age of the sages that burial by coffin and burial rituals came into existence (Yi Jing: Xi Ci or The Great Treatise).

With the passage of time, the burial process grew in complexity. The belief that the human soul continues to exist after death led to a religious need to prepare a proper place to accommodate these souls. From thence emerged the concept of yin zhai or graveyards. These could be simple moulds of the poor or grand mausoleums of kings and emperors. Among the most magnificent royal tombs are the pyramids of the Egyptian pharaohs, the tombs of Shi Huangdi and other emperors in China, the Taj Mahal in India and many more.

The Chinese began to migrate overseas from the 18th century in search of a better living. Many laboured their entire life without success and were unable to return to their ancestral village with a fortune. When they died, the problem of burial became a
Community concern and burial sites had to be found. Prior to the introduction of land administration in Malaysia, the dead were randomly buried in nearby hills and vacant land. When the population was sparse and land abundant, burying the dead was a simple matter and raised few issues on control and management. The simple manner of disposal was done with little regard to cultural considerations, leaving the descendants, if any, a sense of guilt for their failure to fulfil their filial duties. However, the increasing number of graves scattered in great disorder soon became an issue of common concern. It was a matter of time that early Chinese communities in local townships began to establish cemeteries to provide a permanent solution to the burial of the dead.

The oldest Chinese cemetery in Malaysia is San Poh Shan (三寶山) or Bukit Cina in Melaka in which the earliest tombstones were traced to the Ming dynasty. Many others in the former Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Melaka which came under British colonial control in 1786, 1819, and 1824 respectively, also boast a long history of existence. The British extended their control of the Malay States and introduced a land administration system to control the use of land. Parcels of land were set aside for cemeteries. The location, size, and year of approval were announced in government gazettes. Special conditions of use for burial and ancillary facilities were specified, and other uses were strictly forbidden. In the early development of Malaysia, cemeteries were sited away from the emerging townships and often marked the outer limit of human settlement. With the passage of time, urban development has crept towards some of these cemeteries to the extent of encroaching upon their boundaries.

Chinese immigrants to the Malay Peninsula belonged to a diversity of village and dialect groups from south China. Today, the dominant dialect communities are the Hakka (Kejia), Cantonese (Guangfu), Hokkien (Fujian, more popularly known as Minnan), Teochew (Chaozhou), Kwongsai (Guangxi), Hainanese (Hainan), and Foochow (Fuzhou). The Chinese refer to their village and/or dialect origins as jiguan (籍貫) and this soon proved to be a powerful identity marker as a unifying factor in the organization of clan associations. Soon upon settling down in their local townships, the Chinese began to form associations of various kinds to promote their welfare and culture and to safeguard their interests. Bound by the concept of village loyalty or xiangqing (鄉情), they seek solace in the company of their clans and members from their own native villages or other affinities. The earliest clan associations were established by the Hakka, Cantonese and Hokkien in
In the early days of pioneer settlement, burial of the dead, especially among coolies and labourers, was a simple affair and the burial ground was unkempt. The bones were exhumed within three to four years and the ashes transported back to China for permanent burial (吉隆坡廣東義山/Kwong Tong Cemetery Kuala Lumpur, 2001: 65). Among the large dialect groups, *jiguan* identity was extended to cemeteries that were developed under their own initiatives. *Jiguan* communities that are present in substantial numbers established their own cemeteries. In Kuala Lumpur, the Kwong Tong Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur was established in 1895 on 215 acres of land, and extended by an additional 48 acres in 1920 (吉隆坡廣東義山/Kwong Tong Cemetery Kuala Lumpur, 2001: 65). The Hokkien Cemetery was gazetted in 1920 on 60ha of land, but where the earliest tombstones could be traced back to 1891 and 1893 (雪蘭莪吉隆坡福建會館/Selangor-Kuala Lumpur Hokkien Association, 2010: 157). The much smaller community from Guangxi province too has its own cemetery. From these basic facts, it is possible to obtain a glimpse of the local history and distribution of these communities. In Singapore, the early Hakka community founded its own cemeteries (利亮時, 2007). Among smaller Chinese communities, cemeteries are more generally organized according to Fujian or Guangdong provinces. The Guangxi community is accommodated in the *Liang Guang* (Guangdong and Guangxi provinces) cemetery as in Bentong. In some cases, cemeteries have been established to serve smaller *jiguan* groups, such as the Kwong Tong and Ting Zhou Common Cemetery (廣東暨汀州公塚) or the Yong De Common Cemetery (永德公塚) for *Yong Chun* (永春) and *De Hua* (德化) counties of Fujian province. Hence the necrogeography of the Chinese is characterized by distinctive boundary demarcations between those that serve dialect groups from the entire provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian or down to smaller *jiguan* communities.

Unlike the cemeteries in the West that are supervised by the church or local authorities, the Chinese cemeteries in Malaysia are principally planned and funded by the respective clan or *jiguan* associations. These cemeteries now number in their hundreds and many may be picked up on large-scale topographic maps of the country. In each case, gravesite lots and minimal charges are standardized and the needy are provided assistance to entitle them to proper burial rites in reverence for the departed. Had it not been for the
tradition of setting up of cemeteries, burial might resort to the use of mass catacombs as mere burial sites devoid of cultural significance. It is through the leadership and management of cemeteries by clan associations that the Chinese are able to uphold their burial rites and traditions.

The Chinese cemetery in Malaysia has evolved from random burial in vacant lots in the past to the formal organized cemeteries of today. Established by community associations with a clear identification to common affinities based on the village origin, dialect or province, these cemeteries are in effect necro-communities according to jiguàn affiliation. Despite these internal distinctions, these cemeteries serve the common purpose for the performance of traditional burial rites and to fulfil cultural values that are embedded in the act of burial.

B. The Chinese Cemetery: Where Heaven and Humans Meet

In the West, the general perception of death and burial is culturally uncomplicated. The belief in the soul is that it will return to God and live happily in the Garden of Eden. Burial in the churchyard is intended as a blessing to the soul of the departed (Conlin, 2013: 211). The churchyard is a place to commemorate the dead, whereas the Chinese ideology calls the erection of a yin residence for the dead. The early cemeteries in the West were more a part of the city landscape than a cultural site. The Père Lachaise cemetery that was opened in Paris in 1804 soon became “one of the sights of the city” and where visitors could enjoy the view of Paris (Conlin, 2013: 213). London opened its first cemetery in 1832 and others were patterned on the Paris model of suburban burial grounds (Conlin, 2013: 213). Hence besides serving the utilitarian purpose of burial, they were also part of the cityscape that was frequented by local residents and visitors. Considerations of serving religious needs were not obvious.

In sharp contrast, the Chinese cemetery has not been established merely to serve a utilitarian purpose. Instead, it is a platform for the enactment of deep-rooted cultural values. Embedded in the burial culture is the philosophy of the unity of heaven and humans or tianrenheyi (天人合一). According to JiXianlin (季羡林, 1996), tian or heaven may be interpreted as nature or the environment itself. A tenet of Chinese thoughts is the harmony
between humans and nature. As humans depend on nature for their livelihood, co-operation with nature does not mean submitting passively to life. If the environment is to be altered, it is considered as a type of adornment and not as a form of mastery and control (Berger, 1997: 291). The concept of *tianrenheyi* embodies the Chinese world-view that there is harmonious co-operation of all beings because they are parts in a hierarchy that form a cosmic pattern (Ronan, 1978: 306). Central to Confucius’s teaching is the concept of “harmony” as the key to righteousness and welfare. Discord will ensue when the harmony between humans and nature is broken. This doctrine of harmony of human and nature is also promoted by Taoist teachings (Chan 1963: 122). The significance of this idea is its perfect compatibility with the agenda of environmentalism. Buddhism advocates the concept of “Sukhavati” or “Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss”, an idea that is similar to that of the “Garden of Eden” of Christianity. The Buddhist belief in reincarnation through the accumulation of *karma* or good deeds reinforces the concept of life after death and the inter-connectedness of heaven and humans.

### B1. The Manifestations of “Unity of Heaven and Humans”

Three key cultural values underlie the concept of the unity of nature and humans and are pertinent to the narrative of environmental ethics. These values are those of filial piety, *fengshui*, and *yi* or justice and righteousness. Together, they provide the *raison d’être* and the operating mechanism in the sustainability of Chinese cemeteries.

**Filial Piety**

The Chinese family is the nucleus of the kinship system and it is the family and clans that largely regulate social life and inter-personal relations. The kinship ideology is also embedded within the philosophy of burial practice. The building of family cemeteries and ancestral halls bring the clans together and to act as a single ethical entity. Providing the theoretical basis of familial integrity and clan solidarity is the concept of filial piety, considered the most important ideology in Chinese ethical culture. According to the *Book of Rites* (*禮記, Li Ji*) under the section of “Meaning of Sacrifices”:

*Zeng Zi* said, “there are three degrees of filial piety. The highest is to honour our parents; the second is not to disgrace them; and the lowest is to be able to
The key principle of filial piety is respect for parents and kin. Love and respect are shown to parents and elders at all times and long after they have departed. Parents are regarded as *tian di* (天地) or heaven and earth. By logical extension, the love and respect accorded to one’s parents are similarly extended to heaven and earth and hence the respect for nature (冯湛祥/Feng Hu Xiang, 1991: 24). The concept of filial piety by which children love and respect their parents is expressed directly during Qing Ming when the graves are cleaned and offerings made to the ancestors. Qing Ming is for the dead as the Reunion Dinner on New Year’s Eve is for the living. In both cases, family members from far and wide gather to share these occasions. This family togetherness is the essence of the family. The graves of ancestors are treated with love and care by the families, acts that are transferred to the environment of the cemetery. Indeed, the graves are treated as sacred by each family and it is sacrilegious to disfigure the tombstones or the landscape itself. Qing Ming is a cultural sight to behold as the entire cemetery is over-crowded with family members of different generations.

**Fengshui**

Fengshui is “the art of adapting the residence of the living and the dead so as to cooperate and harmonize with the local currents of the cosmic breath”. The earth is a living system with flows of energy or *qi* (氣) consisting of positive energy or *yang qi* (陽氣) and negative energy or *yin qi* (陰氣). Fengshui is an ancient environmental philosophy that accords a high degree of respect to the environment and seeks to adapt the needs of the human world with the forces of nature (Tuan, 1971: 30). Its basic aim is to achieve the unity of heaven and humans in the belief that it will bring prosperity to the living. The practice involves the determination of the most ideal location for both *yang* (陽) and *yin* houses, or respectively the residence of the living and dead, by means of the terrain of the land or compass directions. It has served as an age-old location index for the sitting of houses and graves alike (see Skinner, 1982).

The practice of fengshui is significant with reference to the concept of filial piety. Choosing the most desirable fengshui site for the burial of one’s ancestors is an expression
Pik Wah Fan, Phin Keong Voon, Siew Kian Ong, Hong Ching Goh: Chinese Cemeteries and Environmental Ethics: Some Insights from Malaysia

of filial piety. It is the connection between the soul of the dead and the site of burial that imbues the cemetery with deep cultural and environmental significance.

Whether it is for the sitting of a city, a house, or a grave, the good fengshui site is one that is surrounded by the four symbolic animals with the azure dragon to the east, the white tiger to the west, the red phoenix to the south, and the dark tortoise to the north. The prime objective in the search of the site for burial is to locate the point where the greatest generation of qi occurs. This is of utmost importance as it will ensure the continued prosperity of the descendants.

In Malaysia, the freedom to choose the best fengshui site for burial is limited only to the confines of the cemetery. As burial is forbidden on private land and as cemeteries are clearly set aside in gazetted land with fixed boundaries, the choice of good fengshui location is concerned more with the location of the cemetery rather than individual burial sites. In this regard, the majority of the Chinese cemeteries are located on slopes that are well-rounded and devoid of sharp-pointed outcrops. Curving slopes are conducive to the flow of good qi. Many cemeteries are sited opposite a meandering river of slow-moving water which symbolizes wealth. It is rare that Chinese cemeteries are sited on flat land, not least for its exposure to floods or standing water. That the Kwong Tong Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur is located on flat terrain is more a necessity rather than a choice. Kuala Lumpur is situated at the confluence of two major tributaries of the Klang River and in the midst of a broad valley from which the nearest hills are a good distance away. The adjacent Hokkien and Kwongsai cemeteries are similarly sited. Also, these cemeteries were established when the growth of Kuala Lumpur was in its infancy and were then located at a considerable distance away from the centre of the town.

**Moral Obligation**

The practice of filial piety and fengshui is concerned with the well-being of individual families. Yi (義) or righteousness and sense of justice is concerned with the well-being of the entire community, in the spirit of the “bigger self” and the practice of altruistic love. As a core cultural value, yi is an effective social mechanism to inspire altruistic action.

1 In the privacy of the home, “ancestor worship” is practised as an act of filial duty or genuine affection for the ancestors rather than worshipping them as “gods”. It is also a form of propitiation as the departed are believed to influence the future prospects of living descendants (Skinner, 1982: 13).

-93-
through the performance of a public good to show fair treatment and justice to all.

Early Chinese burial sites were known as public cemeteries or “Gong Zhong” (公塚). Responding to the strong sense of moral obligation to the dead, the Chinese community infuses a new meaning of righteousness and justice to the idea of burial and the function of the cemetery and thereby adds a new dimension to the concept of environmental ethics.

The moral obligation to family members is extended to the community and also from the living to the dead. The common cemeteries were christened yishan (義山) in the direct practice of the cultural concept of yi. The yishan symbolizes an act of community benevolence that represents a cultural innovation among the Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia. Among the first duties of Chinese associations organized according jiguan is the concern with providing a proper burial for their members. The extension of assistance on burial is a highly esteemed act of moral responsibility that also contributes, in Buddhism and Chinese folk religion, to the accumulation of merits in the eyes of the Almighty. The establishment of the cemetery to serve the public good is hence widely accepted wherever the Chinese have settled.

The antithesis of yi is li (利 or private gain). Yi is a cultural value driven by the force of compassion and charitable action towards others, without any thought for personal gain in return, but out of the altruistic passion to serve others in the community (雪蘭莪福建會館/Selangor Hokkien Association, 2001: 63). Through the practice of yi, the community performs a common good (公義) for public benefit (公益) that does justice (正義) to all in the matter of death and burial. Hence conferring on the cemetery the cultural attribute of yi is a direct attempt to “humanize” the burial ground as it fulfills a moral duty to the dead in the same way as the various Chinese communities fulfill theirs to their own members.

Among the hundreds of Yishanin Malaysia, all are united in their purpose of providing a “home” as the final resting place of the departed. The community of the dead, like that of the living, is treated with utmost concern and respect. Members and their families have equal access to burial sites at modest costs. The rich and the poor, and the powerful and the oppressed are treated on equal terms. The rich and powerful may afford larger than average lots, and erect more impressive tombs. But each counts as an equal “occupant” in the sacred resting place. The monies collected through the sale of burial lots and related services are ploughed back for the upkeep of the cemetery and its facilities. The sanctity of the cemetery as a sacred environment is universally accepted. The idea of the non-profit
basis of the *yishan* is sacrosanct and almost taboo. To go against this idea is similar to committing a moral sin and a sign of disrespect to the departed. These considerations summarize the *raison d'être* of the *yishan* that every person is entitled to a burial site and a funeral befitting his/her identity as a Chinese.

In the social context, the *yishan* symbolizes a change of the Chinese from being sojourners to becoming permanent settlers. To be born in this country, and eventually to be buried in an appropriate *yishan* is, to the Chinese, a registration of their identity as citizens of this country rather than those of China.

C. Towards a "Green Culture" of Cemeteries

As a permanent feature of the cultural landscape of Malaysia, the *yishan* is unlikely to vanish from sight as the option for ground burial is a cultural and/or religious choice and a basic human right. The demand for burial land too is unlikely to stop, and the Chinese community is unlikely to adopt *en masse* the practice of cremation. However, to be meaningful, the ethical values that intimately couple the cemetery to the environment as a sacred cultural landscape have to be reinforced by decisions and strategies to nurture a "green culture" of cemeteries.

Nurturing a "green culture" of cemeteries is important for their instrumental and intrinsic values. Their instrumental value lies in serving the ends of the living for the burial of the dead, and their intrinsic value is derived from their existence in their own right and for being a cultural and necropolis landscape as the abode of the dead.

On the other hand, there are certain trends of development that may impinge on the existence of some Chinese cemeteries. Serious neglect or even abandonment of cemeteries is possible with population decline or out-migration to urban centres. An example is that of the century-old cemetery of Sena in the northern state of Perlis. Its more than 300 graves have been deserted for lack of proper management and the land has been invaded by housing development. Other cemeteries face the possibility of re-location to give way to more alternative uses. The Kwong Tong and Hokkien cemeteries in Kuala Lumpur were involved in an official proposal to shift to distant sites away from the city. It was the
vigorousoption of the communities that prevented the implementation of the proposal (see 雪蘭莪暨吉隆坡福建會館/Selangor-Kuala Lumpur Hokkien Association, 2010).

Another trend is the encroachment of commercialization which may undermine the social and cultural basis of the yishan in its present form.

Apart from guarding against these possible events, the moral responsibility of cemetery management is to ensure a future to posterity the same rights of access to burial sites on well-preserved and eco-friendly environments as the present generation. This future is bound up with an environment-oriented “green culture” the objective of which is to promote healthy environmental practices in the management and design of burial spaces and at the same time to safeguard the burial tradition.

Culturally, the cemetery is more than the human concern with departed humans but, in practice, it is also the relationship between humans and the physical environment. This relationship is both moral and spiritual. In the West, human control over the environment “by the people, for the people” (人為，為人) is a dominant theme in Western thinking (see 費孝通/Fei Xiaotong, 2003: 3). This situation is often ascribed to Christianity and has given rise to a moral crisis (see White, 1966). The implication here is that the environment is to be treated as an inter-related system, as has long been understood in Zhong Yong (《中庸》) which states that all living things grow without damage to, and exist without conflict with, one another. This harmony between nature and humans is the key to a healthy environment. Efforts to temper human greed and selfishness and a greater sense of respect for the environment is not just an issue of good economics but, more so, one of deep moral consequences for the human race and nature (see Means, 1971).

The concept of “green culture” of cemeteries incorporates management strategies to improve and protect the environment and the maintenance of the burial culture in the spirit of “the unity of heaven and humans”. Attempts to put this concept into practice are aimed at transforming cemeteries into more “humanized landscapes”. This involves changing the current image of cemeteries, establishing “memorial parks”, and increasing the level of human presence.

C1. Changing the Image of Cemeteries

To many, the cemetery arouses an environmental psychology of to pophobia mixed
Chinese Cemeteries and Environmental Ethics: Some Insights from Malaysia

Pik Wah Fan, Phin Keong Voon, Siew Kian Ong, Hong Ching Goh

with awe and respect. The cemetery has long suffered from an image problem as a *yin* environment that compels avoidance by humans. A major strategy of cemetery management and operation is to change the perception of the cemetery as a landscape of the dead to that of a human space.

Since the 1980s, cemeteries have been designed by setting regulations and operation procedures to standardize the burial sites, greening the environment, and treating all parties without favour. Burial lots are arranged systematically complete with well-planned pathways to facilitate circulation and to enhance aesthetic quality. Some cemeteries integrate foreign graveyard designs to soften their negative image. The outcome is a positive change in the image of the conventional cemeteries as better organized, cleaner and brighter environments.

The town of Sibu in Sarawak is a pioneer in reformatory efforts. The formation of the Sibu Cemetery Federation to take overall charge of the planning of graveyards is the outcome of a bold decision. By January 2014, the Federation has conducted three cemetery beautification competitions to encourage local cemetery organizations to “humanize” the image of burial grounds. With government and public support, the Federation has successfully transformed the images and perceptions of cemeteries where visitors are greeted by clear and bright sceneries during and outside the Qing Ming period. From the air, the forty local cemeteries of varying sizes take on an appearance of “residential gardens”.

The shortage of land has also compelled action to improve the image of cemeteries. A century ago, a 4ha burial ground would be fully occupied in 60 years; today the same area would reach saturation point in seven to eight years. One of the solutions to this problem is the switch to cremation as an alternative to ground burial. Cremation is a Buddhist practice and is thus easily accepted by the Chinese. To cope with demand, the bigger cemeteries have built multi-storey columbaria to store the urns of ashes.

In the search for inspirations to integrate the management of the burial process and enhancement of the environment, an innovative attempt is the experiment of the Miri Charity Association of Sarawak to introduce tree burial, cycle burial and columbarium...
facilities. All three methods require cremation as part of the burial process. In tree burial, ashes of remains will be scattered under a specific tree. The ashes of the entire family may then be scattered under the same tree. The descendants may commemorate the dead ancestors by performing prayers under the tree, as is practised in Korea. Cycle burial is similar to tree burial in terms of the freedom from physical rites. After cremation, the ashes are thrown into pools or directly returned to the earth. This is in keeping with the concept of “the unity of heaven and humans”. Another practice is to place urns in a columbarium for permanent custody. When the wall is fully occupied, the oldest urns may be shifted to a basement to make space for the urns of other family members. These cemeteries have thus set a benchmark on environmental management that may be adopted by cemetery management committees.

Many cemetery management committees are battling to transform fully-occupied cemeteries. An example of this is the attempt of the Krokop Chinese Cemetery Organization of Miri, Sarawak, to transform this century-old cemetery. It has built many columbaria on its empty land, exhumed the graves which have long been neglected and to keep the ashes in columbarium walls. With relocation and exhumation, efforts to re-align and beautify old cemeteries may be carried out to provide a more pleasing ambience for visitors to pay respect to the departed. Exhumation of abandoned graves and relocation to a common site have also made available more open space to facilitate movement especially to ease over-crowding during Qing Ming.

C2. Commercial Cemeteries

Among the cemeteries established in recent years are those marketed as memorial parks. These commercial cemeteries combine the utilitarian and cultural functions in a tastefully landscaped environment. The commercial cemetery is so designed to eliminate the paranoid fear of the average person and instead to induce a sense of topophilia.

The era of the modern landscaped cemeteries begins with the inauguration of Xiao En Yuan (孝恩园 or Nilai Memorial Park) in 1987. This memorial park incorporates the characteristics of Western graveyards and laid out with meticulous designs on beautification by creating a green and tasteful ambience of a landscaped garden. At the same time, it provides a range of services to meet the need for traditional burial practice.
This pioneer effort has inspired others to build similar garden cemeteries. One of these is Nirvana Memorial Park (富貴山莊) established in 1990.

The cemetery parks are not unique to Malaysia but have long been in existence in the West. In China, Kong Lin (孔林 or Confucian Forest and Cemetery) is regarded as the oldest and largest of its kind in the country. It is a world heritage site covering thousands of graves and over 20,000 plants within a land area of two square kilometres.

The trend towards the development of commercial cemeteries introduces an entirely new concept of human burial. Commercialism is driven by the profit motive in a move that will revive the yi versus li debate. It is a trend that not only favours the rich over the poor but also eliminates the traditional relevance of yi. While the commercial cemetery divorces itself from the moral obligation as implied by yi, it concentrates its efforts towards a more scientific and aesthetic management of the environment. It is through this trade-off between tradition and the environment that commercial cemeteries hope to create the demand for their services.

C3. Increasing Human Presence

“Green culture” advocates conservation through the preservation and protection of the environment and its elements. It involves the planned management of a site or natural resource to prevent exploitation or destruction. Hence it implies the recognition of limits and the human awareness of these limits. The organization of cultural activities in cemeteries is a form of conservation as it is intended to educate and to propagate the positive view of the cemetery as a historical and cultural heritage.

Many old cemeteries, once located on outskirts of towns, have become prime land for urban development. Surrounded by the encroaching and congested cities, cemeteries may function as urban green belts. Covered mostly with greenery, cemeteries are the sanctuaries of birds and small wildlife, whose habitats have long been destroyed by the city of concrete jungle. Bukit Brown Chinese cemetery in Singapore is a good example that offers a home to many beautiful birds and a place for leisure activities to the locals (Tan, 2011). The cemetery symbolizes the co-existence of culture and the protected environment.

Western graveyards are usually developed into gardens and tourist sites. Beautification works have rendered these graveyards into areas suitable for leisure and
recreational activities or even as a cultural heritage site. Skogskyrkogården of Stockholm is one of the best examples for such recognition. In America, the cemetery is a cultural landscape that reflects the customs, beliefs and even social structure of the local community. But it is also a place for the living. At certain times of the year called "decoration days," the cemetery provides the setting for important social events. The living come not just to commune with the dead, but to associate with friends or to beautify the graveyards and carry out other activities such as tossing frisbees, jogging, riding bicycles, playing cards and hide and seek, flying model aeroplanes, or even sleeping. In some cemeteries in Texas, there are lawn chairs alongside some graves. (Jordan, 1982: 4). In rural areas, life is seen as intertwined with death. In the folk culture of the burial ground, the ideas of life, death and the afterlife are merged and hence it is natural for the living to be in the cemeteries (Jordan, 1982: 6).

Malaysia is lagging behind efforts to infuse human presence in cemeteries. However, some of the long-established Chinese cemeteries are acquiring the status of historical sites and treasured as the cultural heritage of the Chinese community. They are undergoing a gradual transformation into areas where cultural activities are organized on a periodic basis. The San Poh Shan in Melaka is often the site for the inauguration of cultural events. The Kwong Tong Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur is emerging as a cultural heritage site of the local Chinese community as it reclaims the historical and cultural links with the living and the dead. In recent years, the community has organized charity walks that attract participants among the young and old. The Hokkien Cemetery of Kuala Lumpur features the graves of historical personalities such as well-known educationist Lim LianGeok (林連玉) to whom a public commemorative ceremony is held each year. The annual public ceremony to commemorate victims of the Japanese Occupation also draws hundreds of concerned participants.

Attempts to transform the cemetery into ceremonial spaces on special occasions are meeting with some success. But the day when these cemeteries are accepted as open spaces for recreation, leisure, and other activities has yet to arrive. Nevertheless, cemetery management committees are increasingly aware of the importance of "humanizing" the cemetery to turn it into genuine cultural spaces.
The Chinese cemetery in Malaysia has been in existence since the settlement of Chinese especially during the period of British colonial rule from the late 18th century onwards. Whether they are the traditional or commercial cemeteries, their primary role is to serve as the “abode” of the dead and to facilitate the practice of the burial culture. But the cemeteries have not been established merely to provide a utilitarian service. Not only do they bear historical witness to the role of the Chinese in the development of Malaysia but have also etched deep cultural and historical imprints on the landscape. They are now a permanent component of the built environment and are adapting to new management practices.

This study is an attempt to show the linkages between the Chinese community and the cemeteries from the conceptual and practical perspectives. The former is approached in the context of the core notion of “unity of heaven and humans” and the latter in terms of the management of cemeteries. Conceptually, the linkages are effected through the enactment of key cultural values of filial piety, the practice of fengshui, and the principle of yi that is still featuring in contemporary Chinese life with a great deal of vigour and dynamism.

In practical terms, changes are being made with the aim to influence the general perception of the cemeteries as landscapes of fear to that of a garden of culture and, at the same time, to safeguard the sanctity of the burial culture and tradition. Serious attempts are taken by cemetery management committees to improve the image of the conventional cemetery, to adopt alternative modes of burial, to develop commercialized memorial parks, and to nurture a green culture of cemeteries.

The discourse on cemeteries has yielded insights into environmental ethics especially those derived from the concept of the unity and harmony of nature and humans and the promotion of a green culture. Cemeteries in the contemporary period are acquiring a new meaning that integrate an ancient practice in accordance with the more enlightened view of the environment. Just as the Chinese are able to adapt and be tolerant of other cultures without losing their uniqueness, their cemeteries have similarly demonstrated how Chinese traditional philosophy can survive and adapt to the call for a healthy environment. In short, land that is devoted to the burial of the dead to satisfy the Chinese desire to safeguard their
traditions can at the same time be preserved as a healthy and green environment. Indeed, the needs of burial and environmental protection are not contradictory but are compatible with the principle of unity and harmony between nature and humans.

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內容摘要：華人義山（墓地）向來被視為黑暗與陰森可怕的地方，人們在清明時節去祭拜之外，平時都避之唯恐不及。早期到馬來西亞卻無法返鄉的中國移民，去世之後埋葬在他們的族人建立的義山裡。如今，數以百計的華人義山已經成為馬來西亞的文化景觀之一。華人義山象徵著中華文化的核心概念，也就是「天人合一」的體現。這個概念建立在孝道、風水和義舉三種文化價值上。在實踐的過程中，義山管理層主要以「綠色文化」和「人性化」去規劃義山的景觀，同時以改善義山形象、發展花園式墓園和提升人文特色為目標。

關鍵詞：華人義山、天人合一、綠色文化