

Examining the Mystical Experiences of Taiwanese People

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After we analyzed the questions relating to mystical experiences with the statistical software, as we constructed the statistical results and transferred the document to another format, we discovered that the negative signs for the regression coefficients had suddenly disappeared. Nonetheless, not all of them disappeared; a few remained. This kind of situation has never happened before, which could mean that there were mistakes in the handling of the data. However, this situation is difficult to explain, and therefore can also be considered a kind of mystical experience in itself.

Since 1994, the Taiwan Social Change Survey has conducted three wave surveys on religions. The survey contained one set of questions regarding mystical experiences of Taiwanese people. Based on these three studies, we could examine the ways in which Taiwanese people changed from 1994 to 2004. We could explore the factors facilitating the presence and frequency of mystical experiences, as well as the kinds of religious attitudes and behaviors relating to such experiences. In addition, we could look into the effects a mystical experience had on an individual.

William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1905) continues to be important in the literature after a century of its publication (Spilka, et al, 2003). In the beginning of the chapter about mystical experience, James emphasized that in previous chapters he had repeatedly said that he would discuss this topic at further. He stressed that the core and basis of personal religious experience is mystical states of consciousness (from Tang Yu's Chinese translation). In his lecture, James analyzed the phenomena of mystical experience in several main religions around world. Some ink was also spilled on the subject of yoga. These showed his

eruditeness as well as his profound scholarly techniques of analysis.

James' discussion concerning religious experience directly influenced many subsequent studies and experiments on religious and mystical experiences conducted by psychologists of religions. From James' *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, Hood selected 15 kinds of religious experiences to construct his 'Religious Experiences Episodes Measure' (REEM). There were also Stace's *Mysticism Scale* (M Scale) and Panke's questionnaire about mystical experience (1966), which explored how an individual's mystical experiences related to religious beliefs, religious behaviors like praying and even other behaviors like the consumption of narcotics. However, most of these scales of measurement focused on Christian beliefs. The scales were rarely used in non-Christian societies. Most studies conducted by these psychologists focused on the relationship between mystical experiences and psychological factors, which included religious attitudes coming from within and from the outside, the sense of isolation, and the ego. These researches rarely look at the social origin of these mystical experiences and their social meanings.

In addition, many studies employed open or close-ended surveys to examine mystical experiences. Since these researches asked individuals if they had particular kinds of mystical experiences and the frequencies of their occurrences, they often focused on particular kinds of experiences. Sometimes, these studies also targeted a certain kind of experience for analysis. Because of the popularity of Christianity, the questions were particularly concerned with whether people had 'communicated' with God or had feelings that they were 'influenced' by God. A great deal of similar research that focused on a particular kind of mystical experience was conducted, this line of research regarding mystical experience dominated the field. While this method of research was generally suitable for Christians, especially American Christians, it may not have been appropriate in other countries, even in a predominately Christian country, like Sweden, due to problems with translation. (Spilka, et al, 2003)

The aforementioned kinds of mystical experiences were mostly related to Christianity. Questions about these experiences would not be problematic in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. From 1962 to 1987, about 35% to 45% of studies on mystical experiences in these three countries were based on

Hay & Morisy's method. For these reasons, although James was widely read and he discussed the variety of religious experiences in different countries, English-speaking scholars limited the scope of their studies to Christianity and rarely examined religions and mystical experiences outside the Christian religion. This was particularly true for American psychologists of religions.

The research on mystical experiences conducted by American psychologists took the occurrences and frequencies of respondents' mystical experiences as variables. That is to say, their questions were concerned with the operation of these experiences. Sometimes, these experiences are also described as anomalous, spiritual, psychic, and numinous. Many researches also directly examined particular kinds of mystical experiences, such as *deja-vu*, clairvoyance, and ESP. In Chinese literature, we generally used the term "shen-bi", which means mystical. Another translation of James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* by Tsai Yi-jia and Liu Hung-Hsin translated the word, "mystical" as the word "mi-qi" or secret understanding.

In Taiwan, except for the Taiwan Social Change Survey, which listed eight phenomena regarding mystical experiences, there was no other research had thoroughly examine these experiences. In the 1980s, there was popular trend in China, which promoted chi-gong as a kind of physiology. Some people collected 1000 examples from the 3000 years between the Shang dynasty and the Xuanton period of the late Qing dynasty, sorting out five main supernatural phenomena. Scholars who opposed chi-gong and other supernatural skills subsequently criticized this study. In his *Analysis of Chigong and Extraordinary power*, Zhong Ke-wen provided excerpts about the five extraordinary powers from Chen Tao-qi's "Overview of the Historical Data on Chinese Extraordinary Powers" and a critical analysis. Chen employed quasi-scientific terms in the naming of the five kinds of extraordinary powers, such as "extraordinary intelligence", "extraordinary perception", "extraordinary functions of thoughts and intentions", "remote sensing" and "precognition". While the items, extraordinary intelligence and remote sensing, were similar to ESP and clairvoyance, they are not completely the same. The traditional legends in the book seem more mysterious and beyond our comprehension. The extraordinary functions of thoughts and extraordinary intelligence, and precognition are also loaded with unique elements from Chinese

culture and traditions. Beliefs about these mystical, supernatural phenomena have always been present and even popular in Taiwan.

In addition to the mystical culture from Chinese traditions, Taiwan has also been influenced by the popularity of the new mystical cultures and experiences that have come from abroad. At present, Indian yoga has had both direct and indirect influences on Taiwan. Many Indian religions arrived in Taiwan through Europe and North America and became new religions in Taiwan, bringing about long-term influence in Taiwan (Chiu and Chang, 2003). For instance, it has a notable influence on mysticism and mystical experience. For instance, the Qinghai Kuan Yin (God of Mercy) that originated in India propagated numerous kinds of mysticism and mystical experiences. New age beliefs, which are popular among the classes of people who have more knowledge, are also loaded with elements of rich mystical ideas and experiences. (Chen, 2000) When the martial law was lifted, the media designed many programs relating to mystical topics in a more open environment. Many programs talked about theories of fate and 'feng shui', which could have accelerated the increase in the belief in and experience of mysticism. There were many best-selling publications relating to mysterious phenomena and mysticism. For example, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, *Bible Codes*, and even books about horoscopes and psychic sold well. In particular, the translation of "*Many Lives, Many Masters*" surprisingly sold about five hundreds editions, or the equivalent of 500 thousand copies. The good sales of these books also promoted mysterious experience. Finally, new religions, which emphasized lots of mysterious ideas, such as ideas about 'splitting oneself into two bodies' and 'glowing bodies', used pseudo scientists who assumed under the name of science to prove the existence of extraordinary powers, more or less also promoted mystical ideas and mysterious experience.

There have been many studies on mystical experience conducted in different countries; however, there has yet been any literature that has gathered research results from around the world and arranged and integrated them together. The present research is directly related to several NORC's nationwide surveys and some national surveys in the United States. Among these, most of the in-depth analyses were based on GSS conducted by the NORC. Based on the four nationwide surveys (1994), MacDonald pointed out that from 1973 to 1984, the

mystical experiences of Americans tended to increase; however, the results showed signs of a decrease in this kind of experience in 1989. Fox (1992) and Brown (2003) organized the results of the GSS conducted by the NORC in 1984, 1988, 1989 shown as below:

Table 1 Survey findings of the mystical experiences of Americans – GSS 1994, 1988, 1989.

	Deja-vu	ESP	Clairvoyance	Communication with the Dead	Moved by Mysterious Powers
1984	68	67	30	42	41
1988	68	64	28	40	32
1989	65	58	23	35	30

These studies on mystical experience generally focused on the percentage of occurrence. Few studies analyzed in depth the relationship between mystical experience and socio-psychological factors. Brown (2003) carried out a comprehensive analysis on the phenomena of deja-vu in relation to age, sex, education, socio-economic status, number of experiences traveling, pressure, dreams, and mental illness. Brown's paper will be discussed further in our analysis of deja-vu.

In France, Boy (2002), after examining five surveys between 1982 and 2000, pointed out that the number of anomalous experiences did not show signs of increase. McClenon (1988) studied mystical experiences in 314 university students in Xi-an, China. In terms of the experience of deja-vu, ESP, communication with the dead, disembodiment, and sixth sense, the Chinese students were not less likely to have these experiences, but, in fact, were even more likely than Western students to have such experiences. McClenon believed that, since the Chinese students had no formal involvement with religion, their mystical experiences were not products of religion, despite the prevalence of such experiences among them. McClenon (1993) studied American scientists, 'white' and 'black' people, and Chinese and Japanese university students to find out whether they had experienced deja-vu, ESP, communication with the dead, disembodiment and sixth sense. The results showed that although different racial and cultural groups had different amounts of these experiences, these experiences were not related to a person's

religious beliefs, religious attitudes, or their scientific training. Walker, Hoekstra, and Vogl (2002) discovered that even a strong background in science could not prevent a person from having beliefs in extraordinary phenomena.

However, in McClenon's surveys, a high percentage of Chinese university students had experienced ESP and communication with the dead. 71% of them had experienced ESP, which was on average 32% higher than countries in Western Europe, and were also on average 27% to 36% higher than for American and Japanese students. A number of the surveys could be problematic, especially regarding the measure of communication with the dead. The figure was as high as 40%, which was 15% to 30% higher than for American and Japanese students. Discrepancies might have arisen when the questionnaire was translated to Chinese, and the meanings might have greatly differed from the original English version. The meaning of communication with the dead was very unclear.

Rice (2003) and Brown (2003) generally discovered that the percentage of young people and people with high education levels who had experienced *deja-vu* tended to be higher. Levine (1993) and Rice (2003) pointed out that other mystical experiences tended to be more common among women, regardless of age and education. Levine (1993) conducted an analysis on GSS data. Levine discovered that, in addition to the age difference in terms of mystical experiences, these experiences positively correlated with personal, non-organized characteristics and subjectivity. On the other hand, it negatively correlated with organized religious sense. Finally, Laubach (2004) also used data from 1988 to explain the cause and effect relationship between religious beliefs and behaviors, on one hand, and mystical experiences, on the other. The results of the analysis showed that mystical experiences had negative effects on religious beliefs as well as participation in public religious activities, while it had positive effects on moral voluntarism and private, personal religious behaviors. It also had complicated effects on people's sense of closeness with a god. Both MacDonald (1995) and Rice (2003) pointed out that the variance explained of social background variables for mystical experience was small. MacDonald found that praying frequently was related to ESP, while Rice's research emphasized that religious beliefs had no significant relationship with mystical experiences.

Regarding mystical experiences, there were anthropological field studies on

practitioners of witchcraft, like shamans, and psychiatrists' research on possessed patients, as well as other sociological scholars who conducted analyses on survey results. Anthropological studies tended to focus on analyzing religious cultures of shamanism, and they recorded experiences of being possessed as a state of trance. They also analyzed the social characters of shamans who had experienced being possessed. (Li, 1978; Chang, 1987; Yu, 2000) Klineman conducted in depth research with large scope on shamans, which looked at the subject from the viewpoint of medical anthropology. The research on the experience of being possessed became important reference for subsequent studies in psychiatry. Psychiatrists in Taiwan had hands-on experience of many cases of illness relating to possession; thus, they conducted case studies as well as comprehensive research, which tended to study people who claimed to be possessed as patients with illness. In a more comprehensive study, these cases were considered as local phenomena in Taiwan, social, cultural factors behind these phenomena were examined (Wen, et al). Regarding sociological studies on mystical experience, until now, researchers generally used related sets of questions in the Taiwan Social Change Survey to construct a variable, which was included as one of the variables in studies related to religions. For instance, Lin (1997) took mystical experience as one of the characteristics behind people who changed their religions. Chiu (2002) examined the differences between members of new religions and traditional religions based on the characteristic of mysticism. These studies have not carried out an in-depth analysis on mystical experience, itself.

Research Method and Data Analysis Strategy

In the Taiwan Social Change Survey of 1994, 1999, and 2004, the questionnaire on mystical experiences contained eight questions. The respondents were asked, "Have you had the following kinds of experiences? How often have you had these experiences?"

- 1) The experience in which one feels that a place seems familiar although one has never been to such a place.
- 2) The feeling that one has received a message from distant relatives in a dream.

- 3) One seems to have seen (or dreamt about) one's past or future lives.
- 4) The experience of being possessed by a god.
- 5) The experience of a god revealing itself to one.
- 6) The experience of seeing a ghost.
- 7) The experience of being possessed by a spirit.
- 8) The experience of seeing someone else being possessed by a spirit.

The choices of responses for the respondents included, “never”, “have experienced it one or twice”, “have experienced it a few times”, “have often experienced it”, “unable to answer”, “do not understand the question”, and “not willing to answer”. During our analysis, we quantified the first four choices with 0, 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Other choices were considered as missing, and were not included in the analysis. These questions were composed of two parts – the first part was concerned with mystical experience of an individual; the second part concerned with whether or not one had experienced communication with gods, ghosts, and spirits, and experienced being possessed. The oblique rotated factor analyses on the respondents' answers to the eight questions, indeed, allowed us to construct the two aforementioned factors. With respect to the first factor, the loadings of the questions concerning the experience of communicating with gods, ghosts, and spirits were high; therefore, the factor was named “meeting gods and ghosts”. With respect to the second factor, the loading of the questions regarding *deja-vu*, receiving messages from distant relatives, and experiences of past and future lives were high; therefore, the factor was named “mystical sense”. Even though we could identify two factors from eight experiences, since each experience has its own characteristics, the present study will analyze each experience of the two factors.

This study principally examined the potential factors that influenced different mystical experiences people had. The potential factors could be classified into the following three main factors – the first one was social background factors of an individual, which included age, sex group, racial, cultural group, and education. The religious factors of an individual included religious affiliation, religious attitudes, belief in mysterious occurrences, and belief in fate. Finally, the physical and psychological factors of an individual included mental health, whether one

had a physical illness which affected one's life, and whether one was happy about living or not. The measures of the following variables are as followed:

Table 2 Results of the factor analysis of mystical experiences

	Meeting gods and ghosts	Mystical sense
1) Deja-vu	-0.051	0.521
2) Received a message from distant relatives in a dream	0.083	0.389
3) Seen (or dreamt about) one's past lives or future events	-0.025	0.525
4) Being possessed by a god	0.628	-0.093
5) God revealing itself to one	0.581	0.051
6) Seeing a ghost	0.361	0.191
7) Being possessed by a spirit	0.463	-0.031
8) Seeing someone else being possessed by a spirit	0.353	0.093
Eigen-value	1.212	0.756
Variance Explained	0.152	0.094

1. Social background factors of an individual

The present study included sex, age group, ethnic group, and education as the basic social background variables. These background factors ordinarily need to be included as basic control variables. On the other hand, these variables also had substantial meanings. The question of whether there was any difference between male and female mystical experiences was difficult to confirm before the analysis. With respect to age, the older one was, the more chances one had to have such experiences. Moreover, age also represented a different historical period of time. People who were born earlier could have retained more traditional ideas, experiences, and behaviors; thus, they were more likely to have mystical experiences. However, the relationship between age and mystical experience was not linear. Therefore, people from the age of 20 to 60 were divided into five age groups based on a unit of 10 years; and the group of respondents in their 20s was included in the analysis as a reference group. The effects of ethnic factors were also difficult to confirm before the analysis. It was difficult to tell which one of

the four ethnic groups – Fukien, Hakka, aboriginals, and Chinese Mainlanders – tended to have more mystical experiences. Finally, education is considered to be a main factor that decreases the chances of having mystical experiences. Since many different kinds of mystical experiences are irrational, the rational elements in modern education can inhibit mystical experiences. Overall, the line of differentiation could be drawn at senior high school. The influence of university education or above should be the greatest. Thus, this study had six dummy variables and it used people with no education as the reference group.

2. Religious factors of an individual

In this study, the variables which were listed under religious factors included an individual's religious affiliation, religious attitudes towards gods, souls, 'chi', 'yuan'¹, and karma, belief in mysterious phenomena, and belief in different ideas about fate. Based on the survey, religious affiliations included eight categories – having no religion, folk religion, Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, new religions, and others. These categories were all based on the self-reports of the respondents. Followers of folk religion are those who claimed that they believe in folk religion or worship many kinds of gods. In this study, not many believers of folk religion said that they follow folk religion. This study also determines whether respondents were Buddhists or not based on respondents' self reports. However, many of these Buddhists had not actually converted to Buddhism. It is an old habit in Chinese society that many people claim to believe in Buddha but have not actually been converted to Buddhism, nor do they follow Buddhist teachings. In a past study, we identified Buddhists by isolating Buddhists who had undergone conversion. However, as we combined the three surveys, we discovered that the data regarding conversion were incomplete. Thus, this paper could only label Buddhists as those who considered themselves as Buddhists. Because Buddhists in this study could be mixed with followers of folk religion, we were less able to examine the attitudes and behaviors of Buddhists who had undergone conversion. Thus, the influence of the variable of Buddhism on other related variables could be limited.

¹ "Yuan" means fate that a person inherited from past life.

In terms of religious attitudes, the questionnaire in the three surveys had 18 questions. After factor analysis, we identify five factors – “yuan”, “chi”, “soul”, “karma”, and “gods”. The total variance explained was 45.5%. Variance explained for the individual factors is shown in the following table. Among these five factors, “souls” is related to various beliefs about souls, which most related to “mystical experiences concerning gods, ghosts, and souls”. Gods are a kind of soul; ghosts are also a kind of soul; the experience of being possessed also directly represents the existence of souls. In terms of attitudes, the belief in the existence of souls and various ideas about souls were the basis of the experience of having seen god revealing itself or ghosts, or being possessed by gods or souls.

Table 3 The distribution of self-claimed religious affiliations of the respondents

	1994	1999	2004	Total
1. No Religion	242	262	390	894
%	13	13.66	20.87	15.83
2. folk religion	577	643	576	1,796
%	31	33.52	30.82	31.8
3. Buddhism	717	506	450	1,673
%	38.53	26.38	24.08	29.62
4. Taoism	169	245	287	701
%	9.08	12.77	15.36	12.41
5. Catholicism	20	47	10	77
%	1.07	2.45	0.54	1.36
6. Protestantism	79	92	61	232
%	4.25	4.8	3.26	4.11
7. New Religions	49	52	38	139
%	2.63	2.71	2.03	2.46
8. Others	8	71	57	136
%	0.43	3.7	3.05	2.41
Total	1,861	1,918	1,869	5,648
%	100	100	100	100

Table 4 Factor Analysis of Questions about Religious Attitudes

	Yuan	Chi	Soul	Karma	Gods
1) Existence of the highest god in this world	0.055	0.010	-0.166	0.070	0.494
2) Existence of heaven and hell	-0.009	0.022	-0.439	0.053	0.454
3) President is determined by heaven's will	0.352	0.053	-0.117	0.041	0.105
4) Existence of soul after death	-0.112	0.016	-0.676	0.014	0.209
5) Reincarnation	0.050	-0.018	-0.724	0.069	-0.001
6) Souls with worshippers would wander	0.112	0.013	-0.743	-0.007	-0.104
7) Believe a body can be possessed by a soul	0.080	0.039	-0.701	-0.123	0.052
8) Yuan is determined by past live	0.600	0.022	-0.150	0.079	-0.010
9) Bad marriage due to debt from past lives	0.903	-0.021	0.015	-0.030	0.015
10) Child rearing due to debt from past lives	0.846	-0.044	0.025	0.000	0.002
11) QiChigong can cure illnesses	-0.102	0.731	-0.013	-0.030	0.076
12) 'QiChi' can be strengthen through practice	-0.098	0.809	-0.025	-0.004	-0.006
13) Strong 'qichi' can protect one from all evils	0.172	0.638	0.050	0.000	-0.040
14) Plants flourish in a place with strong 'qichi'	0.113	0.594	-0.055	0.072	-0.034
15) Not to rely on gods if one works hard	-0.052	0.035	-0.038	0.098	-0.326
16) Having male offspring to worship	0.051	-0.012	-0.099	0.429	-0.072
17) Wrong deeds affect their offspring	0.009	0.038	0.058	0.699	0.032
18) Wrong deeds affect their future lives	0.112	-0.016	-0.079	0.634	0.071
Eigen- vValue	2.131	1.962	2.309	1.127	0.645
Variance Explained	0.118	0.109	0.128	0.063	0.036

In other words, when people believed in the existence of souls or gods, they could then see gods or ghosts, or experience being possessed by gods or souls. Besides, the belief in gods should be one of the factors behind the experience of seeing gods and ghosts or being possessed by gods or souls. According to Chinese traditions, 'yuan', 'chi', karma, and soul have a close connection. In terms of their correlations, except that the three correlations between god, and the three variables 'yuan', 'chi', and karma, were relatively low, the remaining seven correlations between the variables were high. The variable, soul, was highly correlated with 'yuan', 'chi', and 'karma', most were about .7.

With respect to the belief in the power of gods, this study examined the degree

to which respondents believed in magical power and the idea of exorcism. Based on the analysis, the three questions could be combined as a single factor. The eigen value was 1.210 and the variance explained was 40.3%. The belief in divine power and mysterious phenomena should be closely related to various mysterious experiences, especially to the factors of gods, ghosts, and souls. Belief in gods as well as trying to cure disease through exorcism were the necessary conditions for people who claimed to have seen gods and ghosts and witnessed a body possessed by gods or souls. The three questions and the loadings of the factors were as followed:

- 1) Do you believe that through practice people can develop extraordinary power or magical powers (to cure illnesses)? (.673)
- 2) Do you believe gods and Buddha (or God) can protect pious believers so that they can avoid calamity (or disaster)? (.683)
- 3) Do you believe that spiritual medium (i.e., shamans) can cure illness through exorcism? (.596)

With respect to religions and mysticism, this research included donating money to religious organizations, reading religious publications, wearing Buddhist bracelets, visiting altars, and seeking ‘feng shui’ and fortune telling services. These kinds of behaviors generally confirmed that religions had mysterious powers and, thus, could affect whether or not one had mysterious experiences. Based on Levine’s classification (1993), these kinds of behaviors were considered non-organized religious behaviors, which had relatively more of a significant influence on the occurrence of mysterious experiences.

3. Social-psychological Factors of an Individual

Mysterious experiences an individual has can be related to the social psychological factors of the individual. People, who have physical or psychological problems, may seek comfort and resolution from mysterious experiences. People may also tend to explain their physical or psychological problems through mysterious experiences. Perhaps, these people can even be more prone to and aware of mysterious experiences. In the three surveys, two simple and yet meaningful variables, are identified and are related to the mental and

physical states or problems of an individual. The first factor concerned whether or not one was living happily; 8% of respondents indicated that they were unhappy. It seemed difficult to link the question of whether one was happy or not with the question of whether one had a mysterious experience or not. We included this measure in order to compare it with other variables related to psychological and physical conditions. The second variable was concerned with whether people had been injured or ill for over a month, which made it impossible for them to lead their ordinary, routine lives. Based on the study, 21% of the respondents gave affirmative answers. Illnesses and injuries, which make it impossible for people to carry on their ordinary routine, can be exceptionally painful experiences, which may trigger mysterious experiences.

In terms of the method of analysis, this study conducted factor analyses on the variables that could be constructed as a scale. We employed an oblique rotates factor analysis to identify meaningful factors, except those scales which were found to have single factors. After the scores for each variables in the table was calculated, the Stata Impute was used to infer the scores for the factors of the choices that were missing, in order to reduce the loss in the sample.

Table 5 The mysterious experiences of Taiwanese people (1994, 1999, 2004)

	1994	1999	2004
Deja-vu	30	35	40
Received a message from distant relatives in a dream	26	25	29
Have seen one's past or future lives	7	11	13
Have seen a god revealing itself	9	8	11
Have seen a ghost	7	8	8
Have experienced a god possessing a body	4	4	4
Have experienced being possessed a body	2	2	2
Have seen a soul possess another body	13	12	14
Sample Size	1862	1925	1881

This study mainly employed regression analyses to detect the causes of mystical experiences of Taiwanese people. We took different kinds of mysterious experiences as dependent variables, while the aforementioned variables, such as social backgrounds, religions, and physical and psychological well-being, were

independent variables. All the names of the independent variables and meanings were listed in Table 5 and were discussed above. In treating the results of the regression analysis, this study employed standardized regression coefficients as a reference to the effects of the independent variables. This study set the significant value p as smaller than .05.

4. Mystical Experiences of Taiwanese People (I)-- Mystical Sense

1). Deja-vu

This experience is described as the French noun, “*deja-vu*”, which is also used in English. Many psychologists have conducted studies on this phenomenon (Brown, 2003). *Deja-vu* is a kind of unexplainable feeling or illusion one has about having experienced a certain event already even though it is actually the first time one has experienced it. If one, indeed, experiences an event for the first time, and yet one can remember that it has happened before, it is possible that because one does not pay attention to the original experience, or the memory of that experience is not completed. Thus, the person’s present experience triggers an incomplete memory of the past (Sno and Linzen, 1990). Funkhouser (1995) outlined three experiences – *Deja vecu* (the feeling of having already experienced an event), *Deja senti* (the feeling of having already felt something), and *Deja visite* (the feeling of having already visited a place). At present, psychologists have proposed four explanations for these phenomena – problems resulting from the two separate but interactive processes of knowing something, abnormality with the communicative speed of the nerves, special problems with memory, and the results of inattention. A lot of interesting research has been conducted relating to the psychological process of *deja-vu*. However, it is not the focus of the present study and will not be discussed further. On the other hand, psychologists also based on some research data from the analysis of social background factors, which is fits considerably well with the present study, and can be used as an important reference for our discussion.

Brown (2003: 397) sorted out 32 researches on university students and other ordinary people. 30% to 100% of these people had had the experience of *deja-*

vu. The research on university students indicated a high percentage of students had this kind of experience. However, the studies did not fulfill the requirement of random sampling and the sample sizes were small. They generally had only several dozen students. Only four of these research samples had 300 to 500 students. Some of the studies that Brown listed targeted a single city. There was also a Japanese research study that non-randomly selected about 70 people. These studies were not very representative. If we selected nationwide studies that satisfied the requirement of random sampling, there were only about six surveys in the United States. They are:

	Sample size	rate of occurrence
NORC(1973)	1467	59%
Gallup(1978)	1553	31%
NORC(1984)	1439	68%
NORC (1988)	1456	68%
NORC (1989)	990	65%
Gallup and Newport (1991):	1236	57%

From these six surveys, we again examined the percentage of Americans who had experienced *deja-vu*. The figures were between 31% and 68%. Mostly, the data were between 60% and 70%. The median was about 67%. Compared to Americans, the number of Taiwanese who had experienced this was much smaller. Based on the three Social Change Surveys in Taiwan, in 1994, about 30% of respondents, who were above 20 years old, “had experienced visiting a familiar place, which, however, seemingly they had never been to before.” In 1999, the figure rose to 35%. In 2004, the figure continued to increased to 40%. Based on statistic analysis, the difference between the ten years was significant (See Table 6 and 8).

With respect to the frequencies of the various mysterious experiences in this study, the study adopted a factor analysis in order to determine various potential factors. After many adjustments, we finally included variables of social background, such as sex, age group, ethnic group, and education; and religious factors of an individual, such as religious affiliation, religious attitudes, the number of times they have visited an altar, whether or not one wears a Buddhist bracelet,

donated money to religious organizations, reading religious texts, seeking 'feng shui' services, and seeking fortune telling services; socio-psychological factors included a happiness index, illness and injuries which interfered with one's normal routine for over a month, and other factors.

From the results of the regression analysis, sex had significant effects. Males reported experiencing *deja-vu* significantly more than females. These findings concerning the difference between males and females diverged from related findings in many studies in the United States. Some American studies indicated that the number of males who experienced *deja-vu* was higher, while others indicated the number of females was higher. There were no conclusive results. At present, we have no explanation for why males in Taiwan experienced *deja-vu* more than females.

With respect to age, a point worth noting was that the experience of *deja-vu* tended to decrease as age increased. Based on the regression analysis, the four groups of people from the 30 years old age group were significantly less likely to have such an experience compared to the groups of people from the 20 years old age group. We further compared each age group to the age group that preceded it. There was no significant difference between people from ages 40 to 49 and people from ages 50 to 59, while the figures of all the other age groups were significantly smaller than the preceding age group. The non-standardized regression coefficients of each age group compared to its preceding age group were listed in order as follows: -.294, -.245, -.019, and -.082. More than 20 studies in the United States also showed that the experience of *deja-vu* decreased as the age of people increased (Brown, 2003: 398).

From our initial analysis, we found that, as people aged it became less likely for them to experience *deja-vu*. More detailed analysis revealed that events that occurred to a person when he or she was young should also be considered to be part of his or her experience as the person became older. Thus, the occurrence of *deja-vu* could not have decreased as people aged. These results involved two questions. The first one is memory. As people age, their memory become weaker. Earlier incidents may be forgotten. The second problem has to do with how one defines one's own experience. Older people may not consider the events that they have experienced in the past as *deja-vu*. That is to say, as people's experience

and knowledge accumulates, they subsequently reject the idea that their former experience is a kind of déjà-vu.

Even though these cannot fully explain why the number of people who claimed to experienced déjà-vu decreased along with the increase of age, the factor of age, indeed, had significant influence on such experience. A blog on a Taiwanese website, which focused on this kind of experience, had a few messages that particularly stressed that young people were more likely to have this kind of experience. One blogger said, “In the past I also felt very amused, but as I grow older, the number of these kinds of experiences decreased. After I grew up, I didn’t have these kinds of experiences anymore.” Another blogger said, “While this experience did not happen after I grew up, when I was young, this experience was fairly frequent.” (*“The truth behind things that are beyond our comprehension.” Gamebase.com.tw*)

Earlier we mentioned that based on the three Taiwan Social Change Surveys, we discovered that in the ten years between 1994 and 2004, the percentage of experiences of déjà-vu tended to increase. Because age had significant effects on this kind of experience, the change in different age group could also be different. The results of the analysis of variance indicated that the number of people from the three age groups between 20 and 49 years old, who experienced déjà-vu tended to increase significantly and gradually. Although some changes observed in the age group of 50 to 59 year olds, the frequencies of these experiences in 1999 was lower than the figures in 1994, or the differences were simply not significant. Respondents over 60 years of age almost did not change at all during this decade. The regression analysis on the effects of all the independent variables on different age groups indicated that the percentage of people from the three age groups (between 20 and 49 years old), who claimed to have experienced déjà-vu in 2004, was significantly higher than in 1994. The two age groups of people above 50 years of age did not show significant changes. For these reasons, not only did déjà-vu decrease along with the increase of age, but older people’s experiences of déjà-vu also did not change despite the passage of time. In contrast, compared to respondents who were under 49 years of age, the figures, in fact, increased significantly between 1994 and 2004.

An increase was only observed in three out of the eight mystical experiences

in this research, which were the experiences of déjà-vu, dreaming about (or seeing) past and future lives, and seeing ghosts. The change and social meanings of these three experiences could be different. The experience of dreaming about (or seeing) past and future lives and seeing ghosts tended to be related to religious beliefs. On the other hand, the relationship between déjà-vu and religious beliefs is weaker. There is not much, if any, relationship between the increase in déjà-vu experience and religious beliefs. Basically, déjà-vu was not related to religious affiliations or the kind of religions that people believed in. However, many of the people who experienced déjà-vu had religious attitudes that were popular in Taiwan, or even showed popular religious behaviors. We will discuss the two other mystical experiences that tended to be closely connected to religious experience in the later related passage.

What are the reasons behind the significant increase in the percentage of people who have experienced déjà-vu in the past decade? As we discuss this phenomenon in terms of four kinds of potential psychological processes, the main reason could be due to a rapid, substantial increase in the amount of information, especially visual and audio information, that stimulated people's mind and distracted their attention. For these reasons, people were exposed to many places that they had never been to. The memory can store a large amount of images, which may have, subsequently, enhanced their sense of familiarity about some places; hence, déjà-vu. Moreover, the large quantity of information could distract them and decrease their ability to attend to some situations. When people are distracted, they are more likely to experience déjà-vu.

The education levels of an individual had a significant influence on the experience of déjà-vu. People with more education were more likely to experience déjà-vu. These results were similar to many related studies in the United States (Brown, 2003). During our analysis, this research did not set the variable of education as a continuous variable, but we measured it as a nominal variable. The main reason was that the effects of education were not linear. Even though people with more education were more likely to have experienced déjà-vu, it depended on the levels of education. Certain levels of education could have influence, while some levels of education could have no effects. Researchers also conjectured that while the above mentioned certain levels of education could have effects,

Table 6 Results of multiple regression analyses for mystical experience (I)

	Deja-vu	Received message From distant relatives	Past and Future Lives	Mystical Experience
Sex	0.040*	-0.057*	0.039*	0.049*
30-39	-0.167*	0.032	-0.022	-0.070*
40-49	-0.300*	0.032	-0.080*	-0.151*
50-59	-0.249*	0.008	-0.053*	-0.125*
60 or over	-0.253*	0.045*	-0.036	-0.118*
Hakka	0.001	0.008	0.010	0.004
Aboriginals	-0.018	0.029	0.017	0.009
Chinese mainlanders	0.054*	0.015	0.026	0.045*
Elementary school	0.002	-0.007	-0.019	-0.009
High school	-0.011	-0.027	-0.000	-0.018
Senior high school	0.036	-0.105*	-0.004	-0.054*
College	0.052*	-0.080*	0.031	-0.035
University	0.065*	-0.078*	0.003	-0.037*
Graduate school	0.041*	-0.022	-0.001	-0.012
Folk religion	-0.017	-0.003	-0.011	-0.024
Buddhism	-0.026	-0.008	-0.032	-0.044*
Taoism	0.017	0.001	0.039*	0.049*
Catholicism	-0.017	-0.014	-0.031	-0.034*
Christianity	0.007	-0.019	-0.009	-0.009
New religions	-0.021	-0.023	-0.011	-0.014
Other religions	0.030*	0.001	-0.023	0.014
‘Yuan’	0.056*	0.020	0.029	0.068*
Chi	-0.042*	-0.022	-0.007	-0.025
Soul	0.150*	0.124*	0.141*	0.232*
Karma	0.055*	0.037	0.037	0.074*
Belief in gods	0.036*	0.011	0.035	0.030
Belief in supernatural powers	-0.042*	-0.070*	-0.036*	-0.124*
Visit an altar	0.037*	0.044*	0.035*	0.078*
Wear a Buddhist bracelet	0.030*	0.038*	0.038*	0.064*
Donation to religious organization	0.024	0.030*	-0.000	0.019
Read religious texts	0.059*	0.045*	0.054*	0.073*
Seeking feng shui services	0.063*	0.065*	0.056*	0.080*
Fortune telling	0.048*	0.035*	0.023	0.063*
Happiness	0.011	-0.007	0.024	-0.000
Illnesses or Injuries	0.059*	0.063*	0.035*	0.092*
1999	0.029	0.018	0.058*	0.041*
2004	0.102*	0.031	0.085*	0.092*
RSQ	0.174*	0.071*	0.047*	0.159*
N	5300	5300	5300	5300

* p<.05

different levels of education could have different a degree of influence. The results showed education produced no significant effects on people with senior high school education or below. In other words, people with senior high school education, elementary school, or no education did not differ significantly in terms of their experience of *deja-vu*. However, respondents who had gone to colleges, universities, and graduate schools experienced significant more *deja-vu* than people with no education. We further examined if there were any differences among different levels of education. According to our findings, the difference between each education level and its preceding level was not significant. That is to say that people with each of the levels of education above the college level were different from people with no education to a similar degree. The effects of graduate school, university and college levels on respondents were similar. In conclusion, people with college education or above were more likely to experience *deja-vu*. Compared to other mystical experiences, this phenomenon was very special, since education tended to have negative effects on the other experiences. While a high levels of education encouraged *deja-vu*, it inhibited other kinds of mystical experiences. With respect to the inhibition of mystical experience, it is easy to understand how the rationality cultivated by the secular humanistic elements in modern education can inhibit holding beliefs in gods, ghosts, and a body being possessed, which will be discussed in further detail in a later passage. In contrast, it is difficult to use this reason to explain why people with more education experienced more *deja-vu*. If we use the four explanations proposed by psychologists, the main reasons are related to memory and attention. Learning and dysfunction are basic mental and physical functions that are not be affected by education. People with a college education or above may have developed the components of attention and memory to a certain level due to the effects of long-term training. As to how education can produce effects on memory and attention, leading to the findings that people with more education experience more *deja-vu*, more psychological studies are warranted.

With respect to the variable of race, this study showed that mainlanders, who immigrated to Taiwan at various periods of time after 1947, experienced significantly more *deja-vu*. As to other mysterious experiences, there was no significant difference between race, except mainlanders were slightly more

likely to have had these experiences. Mainlanders experienced more *deja-vu* and were more likely to see ghosts, but at this point it was difficult to understand the particular meanings behind this findings. The data warrant further discussion.

With respect to the religious affiliations of an individual, people believe in 'other' religions, experienced more *deja-vu* than people with no religion. On the other hand, there was no difference between non-religious people and followers of folk religion, Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Taoism, and new religions. Since the 'other religions' included many religions, and its sample was small, it was difficult to say why members of this type of religions experienced more *deja-vu*. Overall, the experience of *deja-vu* had no relationship with religious affiliations. Believers of each religion were as likely to experience *deja-vu*. An interesting point was that, in contrast to religious affiliations, religious attitudes had significant effects, especially the five religious attitudes – 'yuan', 'chi', soul, karma, and gods. Each factor tended to increase the instances of *deja-vu*. The influence of the belief in soul was the greatest. While such a belief also had the greatest effects on the other seven kinds of mystical experience and was the most influential factor among the five religious attitudes, the fact that such a belief had a significant and the greatest influence on *deja-vu* was particularly worth pondering. The reason is that the relationship between the belief in soul, on one hand, and, the belief in being possessed as well as having seen a soul possess another body, on the other hand, seem clear and direct enough. The belief in soul is also related to seeing ghost and being possessed by a god, given that gods and ghosts are related to souls. In contrast, the relationship between *deja-vu* and the belief in soul is not so direct and clear. Looking at this from another angle, people who experience *deja-vu* have a stronger belief in soul. The experience of *deja-vu* seemed to presuppose on the existence of souls as well as various traditional ideas about souls. *Deja-vu* also seems to be resulted in the working of the soul.

In terms of religious attitudes, people who hold stronger beliefs in mysterious phenomena are more likely to have experienced *deja-vu*, which shows that even though such experience is not related to the religious affiliations of individuals, it is related to religious attitudes. This mystical experience is basically correlated with the belief in soul and extraordinary powers. Based on the findings of the GSS conducted by NORC in 1988, Levin (1993) pointed out that organized,

religious behavior has negative effects on mystical experience. In contrast, non-organized religious behavior encourages mystical experience. In Taiwan, because most people were followers of folk religion, who were fundamentally different from members of organized religions in the United States, such as Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism, the Taiwan Social Change Survey did not contain any data concerning organized religious behavior. If we took religious affiliations to represent organized religious behaviors, then organized religions had no influence on *deja-vu*. These results were different from the organized religions in American society which was shown to have inhibitory effects.

In terms of non-organized religions, this study had multiple regression analyses, which included variables, such as the frequencies of visiting an altar and whether or not one wore Buddhist bracelets, made donations to religious organizations, read religious publications, and sought 'feng shui' or fortune telling services. The results showed that in addition to making donations to religious organizations, all other religious behaviors tended to have a significantly positive influence on experiencing *deja-vu*. If we included making donation as an organized, religious behavior, we could say that this kind of religious behavior did not have obvious effects on *deja-vu*. Other various non-organized religious behaviors had clear and significant effects. Looking closer at these results, there seem to be two meanings. First, religious behaviors are correlated with mystical powers. People visited altars since they believed in different kinds of mystical powers. People believed wearing a Buddhist bracelet could help ward off evils. On the other hand, the two mystical behaviors, seeking 'feng shui' and fortune telling services, were related to the belief that there are some secret powers controlling human fate in the unseen world. Only reading religious publications had a comparably less direct relationship with secret powers. The second important idea is that each non-organized religious behavior had pure, independent influence, as the regression coefficients indicated the influence of each variable after controlling other variables. For these reasons, the influence of each of the non-organized religious behaviors had an independent influence, and the influences of these variables could accumulate and add up to the overall effects.

With respect to the socio-psychological factors of an individual, this study only included two variables – the self-evaluated measure of happiness and whether

one's life has been affected by illnesses and injuries. The results indicated that whether one was happy or not was not related to *deja-vu*. An interesting point is that people whose lives had been affected by illness or injury for over one month were more likely to experience *deja-vu*. The influences of these two variables on other mystical experiences, both the presence of and the degree of the influence, were almost similar. This can show that whether one was happy or not was purely secular, not religious. On the other hand, severe injuries or illnesses represented a kind of suffering for an individual, which could lead to personal needs for religion. Thus, injuries and illnesses are related to mystical experience. These results relating to the influence of severe injuries and illnesses on mystical experiences were interesting findings. However, further explanations and clarifications are warranted.

In conclusion, among the eight kinds of mystical experiences, *deja-vu* was the most frequent experience. In 2004, 40% of the people studied had such an experience. The percentage of people who experienced *deja-vu* in Taiwan was about 20% to 30% lower than the figure in the United States. In terms of the factors affecting mystical experiences, having more education, being male, being a Chinese mainlander, and the exhibiting non-organizational religious behaviors tended to increase the likelihood one would experience *deja-vu*. Younger people or people who held stronger beliefs in souls, 'chi', 'yuan', karma, and gods were also more likely to experience *deja-vu*.

2) Receiving messages from distant relatives in dreams

The past Social Surveys showed that 25% to 29% of the respondents indicated that they "seemed to have received messages from distant relatives in dreams." Based on the statistical results, the change between 1994 and 2004 was not significant.

Among the five age groups, only people who were over 60 years of age and those who were in their 20s had this experience significantly more than the other age groups. There was no significant difference among the other age groups. As we analyzed this further, we found that this experience may have originated in ancient beliefs and traditions. According to which, the soul of a deceased person can send messages to people in dreams as well as thorough ESP. Many older people tended to have these kinds of beliefs and experiences, especially after major events

happened, such as the death of a distant relative or an accident. Young people were less and less likely to have such experiences.

Modern education had inhibitory effects on these kinds of experiences. However, only senior high school education or above had significant effects. In other words, the difference between people with junior high school or elementary school education and people who have no formal education was small. The effects of education were seen in people with senior high school education or above. As we further examined the differences among the groups of education levels above senior high school, we discovered that education did not show further inhibition beyond senior high school. In fact, the inhibitory effects that senior high school education produced did not increase with further levels of education. The effects of education on other mystical experiences were generally similar to the effects of education on the present variable regarding receiving messages in dreams. Senior high school education consists of rational elements, which offer the main inhibitory forces against mystical experiences. A point worth considering is why higher levels of education did not have greater effects. In other words, why college and university education seemed not to further inhibit mystical experiences.

Looking at whether religious affiliations had a significant influence on whether people had received messages from distant relatives in dreams, we found that both the religious believers and people with no religion had this kind of mystical experience. The origin of this kind of experience could have come from the Chinese belief in soul. Among the five religious attitudes, 'yuan', 'chi', soul, karma, and gods, the belief in soul had the most significant influence on the mystical experience in question. People, who claimed to have received messages from distant relatives, generally also believed that the soul of a distant relative and their own soul could communicate with each other. People clearly believed that physical, material space could not block ESP used by souls. The delivery of a message from a distant relative was not related to gods, since ESP does not operate through gods. However, the belief in divine power could facilitate this kind of mystical experience. The belief in divine power and the belief in the existence of gods are fundamentally different. People who were apt to believe in divine power were more likely to claim to have received messages from distant relatives.

Non-organized religious behaviors significantly encouraged the mystical

experience in question. Except making donations to religious organizations, the effects of all the variables of religious behaviors on people receiving messages from distant relatives were similar to the effects of non-organized religious behavior on *deja-vu*, both in terms of the magnitude and the directions of the effects. These influences were also similar to the mystical experience in the next section, which concerns seeing one's future and past lives. Non-organized or personal religious behaviors had similar effects on different kinds of mystical senses. This indicates that whether or not there was a relationship between mystical experiences and religion or how deep such a relationship was, the mystical experiences of people were affected by ordinary religious behaviors as well as occultism. Perhaps, the underlying psychological basis for these experiences was religious. This religious sense is non-organized. For these reasons, seeking 'feng shui' and fortune telling services could be seen as a kind of non-organized religious behavior, since the effects of these behaviors and other non-organized, personal behaviors were similar.

People whose normal lives were affected by severe illness or injury had significantly more experiences of receiving messages from distant relatives compared to people who had no such illness or injury. These results were similar to those of *deja-vu* as well as other mystical experiences. As mentioned above, the reason behind this warranted further analysis.

3) Dreaming (or Seeing) Past and Future Lives

Beliefs about past and future lives are old and are deeply rooted in the traditions of Taiwanese people. Although the questions in the Taiwan Social Change Survey did not directly inquire whether respondents believed in past and future lives, the response from people about 'yuan' indicated that they believed in past lives. The number of people who believed that 'yuan' or fate in the present life was conditioned by a past life or even a few past lives was as high as 73%; 57% believed that marriage to the wrong person also involved debt from a past life; and 52% of the people believed their duty to nurture their sons and daughters are due to their debt in the past life). This revealed that the belief in past lives was considerably widespread. When people believe in past lives, they also believe in future lives. In other words, if there is a past life, there will be a future life; when the future life has gone by, it becomes a past life.

Regression analysis indicated that the percentage that males that saw their past lives was significant higher than females.

With respect to age, the results generally indicated that people from the two age groups covering the ages 40 to 59 were significantly more likely to have seen their past lives, which was represented by an inverted U-shaped curve. Further examination showed that the difference between the two age groups, 40 to 49 and 50 to 59, was not significant.

With respect to education, there was no difference among different educational levels in terms of whether a person had seen their past or future lives. There was also no significant difference between different ethnic groups. Overall, the belief in past and future lives was prevalent.

In terms of religious affiliations, an interesting point is that followers of Taoism were more likely to have experienced seeing their past and future lives. We originally thought that Buddhism would have had a stronger influence because its core beliefs involved past and future lives. Surprisingly, Buddhists were less likely that people who had no religious affiliation to have such an experience, although this difference was not significant. (See Table 6). The research results also indicated that, followers of Taoism were not significantly more likely to experience the last two mystical experiences discussed above, while Taoism has significant effects on the other six mystical experiences.

In terms of religious attitudes, only the factor of soul had a significant effect, and, that is, people, who held stronger beliefs in the existence of souls and related traditional beliefs, were more likely to have experienced seeing one's past and future lives. The other four factors had no significant effects. The questions regarding the factor of 'yuan' inquired about whether people believed that different kinds of 'yuan' were determined by past lives. These questions were concerned with the concept of past and future lives but were not related to the experience of past and future lives. After examination, if we only included 5 factors concerning religious attitudes as regression variables, we found that three factors – 'yuan', soul, and karma, were significantly correlated to the experience of past and future lives. When we included other different variables, we found that there was no direct correlation between 'yuan' or karma and the experience of past and future lives. Therefore, the experience of past and future lives was not

completely unrelated to 'yuan'. If we directly asked respondents' beliefs about past and future lives, it should verify that there was a relationship between the belief in past and future lives and the experience of seeing them. However, regardless of the outcome, the present research mainly indicated a clear, significant relationship between the belief in souls and the experience of seeing one's past and future lives. This implied that past and future lives must be correlated with soul. We could even say that only if there were souls and these souls could reincarnate, could we say that there were past and future lives.

The belief in supernatural powers also had a significant effect on the experience of seeing past and future lives. Non-organizational religious and mystical behaviors, except making donation to religious organizations and seeking fortune telling services, had a significant influence on seeing past and present lives. We again discovered that the experience of having a serious injury or illness was significantly related to mystical experiences.

The 1999 study asked respondents whether or not they had read the Chinese translation of the book, "*Many Lives Many Masters*" written by American Psychiatrist, Brian Weiss, and whether they agreed with the views in the book. The results showed that 18% of the respondents agreed with the views. We included this figure in our regression analysis and we found that people's acceptance of those views significantly affected whether or not they had experienced seeing past and future lives. Up until 2006, 501 editions, or 510 000 books, have been published. Its significant influence on Taiwanese people's views about past and present lives and extrasensory perception are worth considering. Even though Weiss's theory was problematic in psychiatric circles, it had a strong response from the other side of the Pacific. Taiwanese people's beliefs in past and present lives, which were originally strong, were further intensified by this kind of pseudo-science.

Finally and most importantly, the number of Taiwanese people who experienced dreaming or seeing past and future lives in 1999 and 2004 was significantly greater than in 1994. On the other hand, the differences between 2004 and 1999 were not significant, as further examination indicated. We can say that the prevalence of this type of experience significantly increased from 1994 to 1999. While it continued to increase in the next five years, the increase was small and statistically insignificant.

5. Mystical Experiences of Taiwanese People (II) – Encountering Gods, Ghosts, and Souls

Based on factor analyses, the second factor of the mystical experience is experience with gods, ghosts, and souls and, encountering these beings. If we discuss this based on the nature of the experience, these kinds of experiences can be divided into two types – first, having seen gods or ghosts, that is having experienced that a god revealed itself or seeing a ghost; second, the experience of being possessed by a god or soul, including people have been possessed themselves as well as people who have seen others being possessed. The following analysis will distinguish between the two kinds of experiences.

1) Mystical Experience of Seeing Gods and Ghosts

The experience of a god revealing itself in front of people is an important phenomenon in Taiwanese religious beliefs. There are a lot of legends relating to a god revealing itself. In particular, these kind of important incidents are believed to have occurred in many large-scale temples. However, while most believers have heard about these incidents, very few people have actually had these experiences. Nonetheless, there were still a very small percentage of people who had seen a god revealing itself to them. The Social Change Survey in 1994, 1999, and 2004 indicated that there were 9%, 8%, and 11% respectively of respondents who had experienced incidents relating to a god revealing itself. On average, close to 10% of adults had had this type of experience, which was a minority. Conversely, 90% of the people had never had such an experience. The small number of people who claimed that they had seen gods provided an important basis for Taiwanese folk religion. Looking at the real numbers, over 1.6 million people had had this kind of experience. Therefore, the influence of the people who had had such a mystical experience should not be overlooked.

Like the belief in gods, the belief in ghosts also has had a long tradition in Taiwan. Such a belief was also commonly influential. When Han people started to immigrate to Taiwan 400 years ago, they faced wars and epidemics. Many of these people were single and for this reason the belief in ‘yin’ gods, like “You Yin Gong”, or the god who never refuses a request, became very common. In fact, ‘yin’ gods, like “You Yin Gong” are ghosts. These ‘yin’ gods are called “good brothers”

who are worshipped and offered sacrifices to by people; unlike other wandering souls, who have no relatives or friends to pay respects to them and, thus, often harm people. Speaking of “good brothers” actually there is a delicate relationship between Taiwanese people and ghosts. On the one hand, people believe that ghosts are not clean and good and can harm people. On the other hand, they want to receive protection from the “good brothers” through the method of bribing them by means of worship. They even hope that they will receive good fortune with the help of “good brothers”, such as winning the Happy Lottery, Mark Six Lotto, and Lucky Dip Lotto. Since people habitually have formed and maintained rich, social relationship with ghosts, some of them would see ghosts. The three Social Change Surveys generally found that 7% to 8% of the people had reported seeing ghosts, about 1.3 million people. Since over 1 million people claimed to have seen ghosts, the influence of these people in terms of spreading their beliefs in Taiwan should not be neglected.

Although the percentage of people who have seen a god revealing itself tended to increase over time, this tendency was not significant after other variables were controlled. Actually, the increase in the percentage of seeing ghosts was limited. It apparently only increased 1% over the years. However, the regression coefficient indicated that the figure in 2004 was significantly higher than that of 1994. While the percentage of people who reported having seen a god remained the same, the percentage of people who saw ghosts had increased. However, although there was a significant increase, the actual increase during the decade was only 1%, which was limited. In other words, the instances of people seeing gods and ghosts were stable and did not change substantially. About 10% of people had seen a god revealing itself; about 8% of the people had seen ghosts; 3% had seen both gods and ghosts; and 5% had only seen ghosts. In total, 15% of the people had seen either a god or a ghost. It was estimated that the actual number was as high as 2.5 million people. This showed that the influence of gods and ghosts together is not a trivial matter.

The number of men who had seen a god or a ghost was significantly higher than for women. Seven out of the eight kinds of mystical experiences were more common among men, while the experience of receiving messages from distant relatives was more common among woman. With respect to age, there was no

significant difference among different age groups in terms of their experience of a god revealing itself. However, the number of people over the age of 40 who had seen ghosts was less than people under the age of 40. On the other hand, there was no significant difference among the three age groups of people over 40.

People, who received a senior high school education or above, were significantly less likely to see a god or a ghost than people with less education. There was no significant difference among people with different levels of education that were lower than senior high school. People who received a college education were significantly less likely to see ghosts compared with people with a senior high school education. On the other hand, there was no significant difference among different levels of education above senior high school in terms of their experiences of seeing gods. Overall, a senior high school education provided the key in the difference of this measure. College education only maintained the existing influence and did not further increase the influence.

Buddhist believers were significantly less likely to experience seeing gods than people with no religion. On the other hand, followers of Taoism were more likely to have such an experience compared with Buddhists, Catholics, and Christians, and people with no religion, and they were similar to new religions and other religions on this measure. In terms of seeing ghosts, there was no significant difference among different religions. Taoists were not more likely than other religious members to have had this experience. The question of why affiliation with Taoism had a significant influence on mystical experiences of gods, ghosts, and souls, but not on seeing ghosts, is worth examining. Taoism is considered to have an emphasis on gods; however, their followers were not more likely to see ghosts. Legends about seeing ghosts are very widespread in Taiwan, which is common across religions and among different religious members as well as people with no religion. Thus, on this measure, there is no major difference among people with different religious beliefs.

The beliefs in souls and karma had a significant influence on seeing gods and ghosts. The belief in souls had a particularly significant influence on the experience of seeing ghosts. The standardized regression coefficient was as high as .187. A soul is a part of a person, which separates from the body after death, and subsequently turns into a ghost. Thus, souls are at the core of the belief in

ghosts. Seeing ghosts means seeing the soul of the dead person, which is called a wandering soul. Most Taiwanese also believe that many gods were once people who have been improved or advanced after their death. Thus, human souls exist after death through the existence of gods and the status of these human souls becomes higher. Most people turn into ghosts after death, only a very few people can turn into a god. Becoming a ghost or a god results from a kind of change in the soul, in spite of the huge difference between gods and ghosts. For these reasons, although the belief in souls was related to the belief in both gods and ghosts, how well it correlated with each was very different. On the other hand, not only did the belief in karma have a significant influence on gods and ghosts, but also the degree of its influence on both variables was similar. People who believed in karma were more likely to have had experiences with gods and ghosts. The idea of karma or retribution involves the idea of existence in different lifetimes and the idea that, through reincarnation, people can turn into ghosts, gods, or animals, which are all manifestations of karma. Since the idea of karma already contains the belief of becoming gods and ghosts; therefore, it is a necessary belief behind experiences of encountering gods and ghosts.

The belief in extraordinary powers had significant effects on all the mystical experiences, including having experiences with gods and ghosts. Most people who believed in supernatural powers also believed in the existence of gods and ghosts. The experience with gods or ghosts further strengthened the belief in the existence of such beings. However, the belief in their existence does not necessarily entail that people will have met gods or ghosts. In fact, most people who believe in the existence of ghosts and gods have not encountered these beings. There is a difference between belief and experience. The belief in the supernatural also has different degrees of effects on experiences with gods and ghosts. The standardized regression coefficient indicated that the belief in supernatural powers had much greater effects on the experience of seeing gods than on seeing ghosts. The former value was $-.170$; the latter was $-.053$. Perhaps, this is because the belief in supernatural powers was caused by an experience with gods and belief in the power of witchcraft. This influence of the belief in extraordinary powers on gods and ghosts was just the opposite of the belief in souls.

Different kinds of non-organized religious and mystical behaviors have

significantly facilitated the experience of seeing gods. Conversely, the experience of seeing ghosts could be affected by an visiting altar, wearing a Buddhist bracelet, and seeking fortune telling services; and yet, unlike the experience with gods, it was not affected by reading religious publications and seeking ‘feng shui’ services. Despite some differences, non-organized religious behaviors had similar influences on seeing ghosts and gods. On the other hand, the effects of non-organized religious behaviors on seeing gods or ghosts were greater than their effects on the experience of a body being possessed. Thus, the relationship between seeing ghosts and religious beliefs seems relatively greater.

Serious illnesses and injuries also have a significant influence on seeing gods and ghosts. People who are seriously ill or injured are often seen as having a weaker body as well as soul. They are even more vulnerable to ‘unclean things’, like ghosts. Thus, they are more likely to see gods and ghosts.

2) Mystical Experience of Being Possessed

In Taiwan, most people believe that the soul continues to exist after death. Many also believe that a body can be possessed by a soul. All the Taiwan Social Change Surveys indicated that more than 70% of respondents believed that the soul continues to exist after death. The research on epidemics in community conducted by Wen also discovered that more than 72% of the respondents believed that the soul continues to exist after death. The series of Social Change Surveys in Taiwan indicated that 46% to 55% of people believed in ideas about a body being possessed. The community research conducted by Wen indicated that 63% of the residents believed in this idea.

According to clinical experience of psychiatrists, quite a number of cases of mental illnesses involved the idea of a body being possessed. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-III-R) of 1987 and the 10th edition of the International Classification of Diseases of 1992 (ICD-10), possession is defined as an episodic state that happened outside a religious or other normalized settings; in possession, the patient temporarily loses a sense of identity and completely loses awareness of their surroundings due to the influence of another personality, god, ghost, deity, or power.

The research conducted by Wen, Lin, and Chen showed that people, who

had strong social support and were under a lot of pressure, and that people who develop mental illness due to their tendency to seek a supernatural explanation for their illnesses, are more likely to have an experience of being possessed. Looking at the social background variables, the possession cases involved individuals whose educational levels were below senior high school or people with lower socio-economic status. Many of them are marginal people. This study also pointed out that people who had such experiences were significantly more likely to participate in religious activities compared to ordinary individuals. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between ordinary individuals and the control group consisting of people who had been ill but whose illnesses were not related to possession. In addition, some clinical studies focused on the symptoms of possession to conduct medical analyses.

Although some anthropological records analyzed the phenomena of possession, most of them focused on the rituals of the incidents. Thus, psychiatric and anthropological studies of cases generally focused on practitioners of witchcraft, like shamans, or cases of patients with mental illness. Not many of these included cases of ordinary people. Instances of possession by gods or souls are all seen as abnormal phenomena. For these reasons, the question of whether people in the study who had experienced being possessed were practitioners of witchcraft or people with mental illnesses needed to be clarified. The three Social Change Surveys indicated that 4% of the respondents had experiences of being possessed by gods. All three studies also showed that 2% of the respondents had experiences of being possessed by souls. Further statistical analysis indicated that 0.78% of people had both kinds of experiences, that is to say close to 40% of those who had experienced possession by souls also had experienced possession by gods. About 1.32% of the people only had the experience of being possessed by souls. 3.07% of the people only had the experience of being possessed by gods, not by souls. Further studies are warranted to examine whether the figures in our studies are greater than the percentage of people who are considered to be mentally ill due to possession, or the percentage of practitioners of witchcraft, or the total of these two groups. However, based on my estimation, the sample in the study should be greater than people with related mental illnesses and witchcraft practitioners.

Based on a regression analysis, males had significantly more experiences of

possession, including being possessed by a god or a soul as well as seeing a soul possessing another body, compared to their female counterparts. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the percentage of people from different age and ethnic groups who had such experiences.

Education had significantly different effects on the experience of possession by a god and possession by a soul. It significantly inhibited the former experience. However, there was generally no significant difference among respondents with various levels of education in terms of their experience of possession by a soul, whether the respondents experienced possession themselves or observed others undergoing the experience. As for the possession by a god, the main inhibitory effects came from senior high school education and above, which were similar to the findings for other mystical experiences. That is, the inhibitory effects did not increase further in education levels above senior high school.

In terms of the effects of religious affiliations, only followers of Taoism had more experiences of being possessed by a god than people with no religion. As we further examined the differences among Taoists and members of other religions in terms of their experiences of being possessed, we discovered that Taoists experienced being possessed by gods significantly more than followers of folk religion, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. In contrast, it did not significantly differ from followers of new religions and 'other' religions. In terms of being possessed by a soul, followers of Taoism were significantly different from people with no religion, followers of folk religion, Buddhists, and members of 'other' religions. Taoists were more likely to experience being possessed by a soul, while they did not experience it significantly more than Catholics, Protestants, and members of new religions. These findings are worthy of consideration. Perhaps, Christians also hold beliefs and exhibit behaviors relating to possession of a soul. (Yu, 1997). On the other hand, Taoists were significantly more likely to see a body possessed by a god than followers of folk religion, Buddhists, and Catholics; however, there was no difference between Taoist and Protestants, or members of new religions or 'other' religions. We further discovered that there was no difference between Christians and Taoist in terms of their experiences of being possessed by a soul. Thus, the percentages of followers of Taoism and Christians who experienced this experience were relatively high.

The belief in souls remained a factor of religious attitudes, which had significant effects on possession. It had significant effects on the three kinds of possessions. The belief in karma significantly affected the experience of being possessed by a god, but not by a soul. The belief in souls is a precondition for possession, without which one cannot experience possession. Possessing a body is a mystical function of a soul; possessing by a god is another function of the soul. Not only can a god possess a body since the former has a soul, it, but also the possessed person also has a soul. Thus, it can be replaced by another soul. Moreover, possession by a god is followed by a retreat, during which the soul of the god leaves a person's body and the soul of the person recovers its position. With respect to the relationship between the belief in karma and the belief in possession by a god, it warrants further examination. The belief in karma is also related to *deja-vu*, the experience of a god revealing itself, seeing ghosts, and being possessed by a god. It is not related to other mystical experiences.

The belief in extraordinary powers has effects on the eight kinds of mystical experiences; the experience of possession is no exception. Furthermore, this belief has relatively stronger effects on the three kinds of possessions. The three standardized regression coefficients were very high, almost as high as the effects of this belief on the experience of a god revealing itself. People who believed in the power of gods and Buddha, and practitioners of witchcraft were more likely to experience possessions by a god or a soul. In many religious settings, the idea of possession by a god or a soul is used to verify the existence of an extraordinary power.

Ordinary speaking, the effects of non-organized, religious behaviors on possession are limited, except regarding visiting an altar. The setting in which most people experienced being possessed by a god or soul was at an altar. We can say that most experiences of possession occurred in front of an altar. This is directly related to the religious characteristics of altars. The service provided by an altar basically relies on possession by a god or soul. Other non-organized religious behaviors only have limited effects and a small influence on possession. These behaviors have completely no effects with respect to possession by a god, while the behavior of seeking fortune telling service has some significant effects on possession by a soul. On the contrary, the behavior of making donations to a

Table 7 Results for multiple regression analyses for mystical experiences (II)

	A god revealed himself	Saw a ghost	Being possessed by a god	Being possessed by a soul	Saw a soul possess another body	God, soul, ghost
Sex	0.037*	0.050*	0.070*	0.041*	0.094*	0.078*
30-39	-0.016	-0.017	0.021	-0.008	-0.014	-0.015
40-49	-0.013	-0.051*	0.022	0.013	-0.023	-0.031
50-59	-0.003	-0.054*	0.029	0.023	-0.024	-0.021
60 or above	-0.023	-0.055*	-0.000	0.000	-0.036	-0.042*
Hakka	-0.018	0.007	0.005	-0.002	-0.010	-0.004
Aboriginal	-0.006	0.016	-0.001	-0.009	-0.012	-0.001
Chinese Mainlanders	0.009	0.034*	0.006	0.028	-0.008	0.026
Elementary school	-0.022	0.010	0.031*	0.006	-0.000	0.005
High school	-0.014	-0.014	-0.018	0.003	0.006	-0.017
Senior high school	-0.085*	-0.068*	-0.067*	-0.021	-0.003	-0.086*
College	-0.092*	-0.083*	-0.055*	-0.023	-0.034	-0.089*
University	-0.082*	-0.071*	-0.062*	--0.028	-0.038*	-0.088*
Graduate school	-0.049*	-0.032*	-0.039*	-0.014	-0.017	-0.046*
Folk religions	-0.032	-0.031	-0.014	-0.007	0.009	-0.026
Buddhism	-0.046*	-0.037	-0.024	-0.001	-0.015	--0.042*
Taoism	0.051*	0.035	0.070*	0.037*	0.037*	0.072*
Catholicism	-0.014	-0.019	-0.023	0.005	-0.026	-0.029*
Christianity	-0.022	-0.006	-0.006	-0.001	0.019	-0.010
New religions	0.022	-0.017	0.011	0.042*	0.011	0.016
Others	0.047*	-0.008	0.015	-0.016	0.040*	0.025
Yuan	-0.032	0.059*	-0.003	0.042	0.065*	0.055*
Chi	0.010	0.007	0.002	0.022	-0.011	-0.004
Soul	0.081*	0.187*	0.062*	0.112*	0.133*	0.182*
Karma	0.047*	0.050*	0.055*	0.032	0.028	0.072*
Gods	-0.027	0.011	0.001	0.019	0.002	0.004
Belief in extraordinary powers	-0.170*	-0.053*	-0.144*	-0.112*	-0.135*	-0.194*
Visit an altar	0.066*	0.046*	0.042*	0.029*	0.086*	0.084*
Wear a Buddhist bracelet	0.048*	0.059*	-0.027	0.007	0.024	0.057*
Make donation to religious organizations	0.008	-0.004	-0.001	-0.042*	0.021	0.000

to be continued

Table 7 (Continued)

	A god revealed himself	Saw a ghost	Being possessed by a god	Being possessed by a soul	Saw a soul possess another body	God, soul, ghost
Read religious texts	0.048*	0.012	0.003	0.012	0.033*	0.042*
Seek 'feng shui' services	0.041*	0.005	0.001	0.010	0.047*	0.044*
Seek fortune telling services	0.044*	0.053*	-0.018	0.039*	0.022	0.057*
Happiness	-0.015	-0.016	-0.023	-0.014	-0.028	-0.025
Illness and injuries	0.036*	0.088*	0.065*	0.053*	0.037*	0.090*
1999	0.003	0.020	-0.015	0.018	-0.028	0.007
2004	0.016	0.033*	0.003	-0.001	0.004	0.031
RSQ	0.099*	0.057*	0.059*	0.031*	0.083*	0.153*
N	5300	5300	5300	5300	5300	5300

*p<.05

religious organization has a negative influence. Reading religious publications and seeking 'feng shui' services result in people being more likely to have seen a soul possessing the body of another person.

People who experienced severe illnesses and injuries also have more experiences with possession. In fact, the services provided by altars also include healing long-term or chronic illnesses. Being possessed by a god is an important medical method employed by folk religion. On the other hand, being possessed by a ghost can also be a main cause behind an illness.

6. Discussion and Conclusion – Re-examination of Mystical Experiences

In the process of examining of whether social factors had any effect on the mystical experiences of an individual and the degree of such effects, in terms of our strategy, this paper originally planned to focus on different mystical experiences under the two categories – “experiences with gods and ghosts” and “mystical sense”. However, during the process of writing, I discovered that this way of analyzing would result in the repetitions of our description and discussion, which would be mechanical and dull. Thus, I reorganized the structure of the paper

and took “mystical sense” and “encountering gods and ghosts” as the main body of our discussion. In the part regarding “mystical sense”, because the three mystical experiences all have their own characteristics, the discussions are more detailed. In particular, déjà-vu a well-studied topic by American researchers, was helpful to the examination of the similar situation in Taiwan. Thus, the related discussion is considerably long. During our discussion of the five mystical experience relating to “experiences with gods and ghosts”, we discuss two parts, “seeing gods and ghosts” and “possession”, in order to avoid repetition and dullness.

After discussing various kinds of mystical experiences, we will further discuss the effects of the independent variables on various mystical experiences. The previous two main sections focused on the effects of different independent variables on mystical experiences. In the following, we organize and compare these effects. This comparative analysis will help to discover the similarities among various mystical experiences and we can further grasp the unique characteristics of each mystical experience.

A summary of the effects of each independent variable on various mystical experiences is as follows:

- (1) With respect to sex group, females tend to have more experiences of receiving messages from distant relatives. On the other hand, males are more likely to experience the other mystical experiences than females.
- (2) The effects of age are present in three mystical experiences – déjà-vu, seeing past and future lives, and seeing ghosts. Age has no significant effects on the other mystical experiences.
- (3) In terms of ethnic groups, Chinese mainlanders are more likely to have these two experiences – déjà-vu and seeing ghosts.
- (4) Education has three different kinds of effects. People with a college education or above are more likely to experience déjà-vu. People with a high school education or above are significantly less likely to have the following four experiences – receiving messages from distant relatives, possession by a god, experience of a god revealing itself and seeing ghosts. Education has no significant effects on seeing past and future lives and possession by a soul.

- (5) Taoists have more mystical experiences of seeing past and future lives and are more likely to have the various experiences relating to encountering gods, ghosts, and souls. With the exception of seeing ghosts, Taoists are significantly more likely than members of other religions or people with no religions to have these experiences. Only with respect to the possession by a soul, is there no difference between Taoists and Christians.
- (6) With respect to religious attitudes, the belief in souls has significant effects on both the presence of and the frequencies of mystical experiences. The belief in karma has effects on seeing gods and ghosts as well as the possession by a god. 'Yuan', 'chi', soul, karma, and god facilitate *deja-vu*.
- (7) The belief in extraordinary powers has a significant influence on all mystical experiences.
- (8) Non-organized religious and mystical behaviors of an individual have a significant influence on the three mystical experiences relating to mystical sense. These behaviors have relatively greater effects on the experience of a god revealing itself, while they only have a limited effect on possession by a soul.
- (9) The religious behavior, visiting an altar, significantly increases the likelihood of different kinds of mystical experience.
- (10) Whether people are living happily or not has no actual effects on mystical experiences.
- (11) Severe illnesses and injuries resulting in a person not being able to carry out their a normal routine have significant positive effects on all kinds of mystical experiences.
- (12) Between the year of 1994 and 2004, the three kinds of mystical experiences were on the rise – *deja-vu*, seeing past and future lives, and seeing ghosts. The percentages of other mystical experience remained the same.

This study attempted to examine the social factors that facilitate or inhibit mystical experiences. The variance explained of different variables is not great.

The main reason can be that many mystical experiences are only experienced by a very small number of people, leading to a small variance. Therefore, the variance explained of the regression analysis and the variance explained of different independent variables tends to be low. For example, only 2% of the people had experienced being possessed by a soul and 4% of the people had experienced being possessed by gods. Moreover, the measure of mystical experiences in this study is based on self-report of the respondents. There is no way to verify whether these experiences actually occurred. It is very possible that the subjective affirmations of people indeed have no factual basis. In other words, the reliability and validity of self-reports of mystical experiences needed further verification. Finally, the nature of mystical experiences is mysterious and difficult to grasp and understand.

In terms of cause and effect, the above discussion set mystical experiences as a result affecting various social backgrounds, religious, physical, and psychological factors. In fact, the relationship of cause and effect can be reversed, especially with respect to religious, physical, and psychological variables. Generally speaking, age, sex, education, and ethnic groups cannot be altered by mystical experiences. Thus, we can say that these are not causes, but effects. Religious affiliations should generally be considered as the causes facilitating or inhibiting mystical experience; however, whether or not one has a mystical experience and the strength of such experience can have influence on religious conversion. Nonetheless, The likelihood of the latter situation is lower. The religious beliefs of adults are considerably stable. These stable religious beliefs form the key factors of the mystical experiences of an individual. A small number of people who change their religion can be due to some miracles of their new religion, which facilitate new kinds of mystical experiences. The results of the regression analysis targeting whether people have changed their religions indicated that all mystical experiences have no significant relationship with whether people change their religions or not. Therefore, religious affiliations can still be the cause behind facilitating and inhibiting mystical experiences. The cause of and relationship between religious attitudes and mystical experiences is very complicated and difficult to clarify. It could be that people who hold strong attitudes regarding soul, karma, 'yuan' and 'chi' are therefore more likely to have mystical experiences. However, it could also be that the mystical experiences people have strengthen their religious attitudes. In other words, the problem is about whether mystical experiences occur first or

whether the religious attitudes develop first. The method employed by the present study probably cannot solve this problem. Laubach (2004) used the data from GSS to examine the cause and effect relationship between religious variables and the variables of mystical experiences. It verified that mystical experience is the cause, not the effect. This point is worth examining further. Finally, with respect to the cause and effect relationship between physical, psychological factors and mystical experiences, there is a significant, positive correlation between people who have severe illnesses or injuries which impair the normal routines of their lives for over a month and their chances of having a mystical experience. In terms of cause and effect, severe illnesses and injuries affecting normal lives should be the cause, not the effect, because mystical experience cannot cause people to become seriously ill or injured. There can be cases in which mystical experience seriously burdens and perplexes the life of a person, which leads to illnesses like being possessed by a soul (Wen, et al, 1993). Nonetheless, the possibility of this kind of situation should be very low.

This study is probably the first sociological paper that examines mystical experiences in Taiwan. It can only take the first step in the analysis of mystical experiences, since there is earlier research to provide the basis for the present study. Sociologists and other scholars have examined mystical experiences but did not focus on verifying the presence of a mystical experience, but rather on whether people have had this kind of experience; just as James' discussion of mystical experience, which included in the analysis of religious experience. He does not focus on whether or not mystical experiences actually exist, but on the psychological function and meaning of mystical experiences. Researchers need not contend whether such mystical experiences exist or not. They also need not attempt to verify the presence of these experiences. Nevertheless, many mystical experiences or phenomena can actually be resolved. For example, after psychiatrists analyzed possession, they discovered that it is often caused by the workings of the brain. Some are also symptoms of other illnesses, which are curable by medical treatments, which indicate that the phenomenon of possession is not an unexplainable, mystical event.

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