

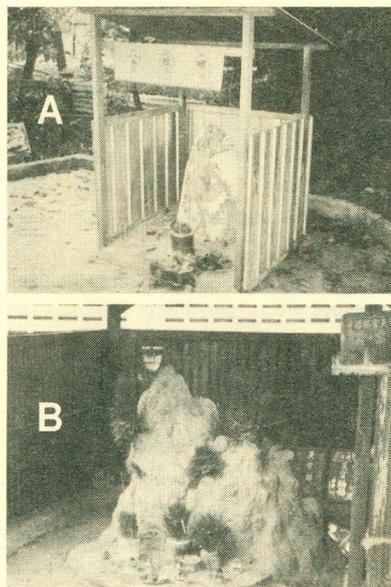
The Worship of Termite Mounds

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The culture of worshipping termite mounds is common throughout Southeast Asia, especially among overseas Chinese and Indians communities. For the past few centuries, termite mounds (mostly *Macrotermes* sp. or *Globitermes sulphureus*) are believed to be the living places of 'Penunggu' or 'Datok' by the native Indo-Malayan community. 'Penunggu' is a Malay term used for local spirit or ghost which may affect the life of the people living around its surrounding area. Very often, 'Penunggu' is associated with big and old figurines in daily life, such as an old tree, big rock resembling a human, termite and ant mounds, etc.

It was believed that the culture of worshipping termite mounds started as early as 1400s, i.e. among the native Malay people and the aborigines. After Islam was introduced, many of the natives forsaken the worship of figurines. Despite this, many Malay and aborigine people still believe in 'Penunggu.' The Chinese and Indian immigrants came into the Indo-Malayan region in 1900s to escape from poverty and war in their native countries. It was believed that the culture of worshipping termite mounds started at this time among the Chinese and Indian communities due to cross-fusion of cultures.

The Chinese Malaysians believe there are three types of 'Penunggu' or 'Datok': the black, red and white ones. According to several old Chinese, the black and red 'Datok' represented bad and evil spirits, while the white ones are mild and helpful. In Malaysia, shelters are built to protect termite mounds for worship. These range from a small



box (resembling a hut) to a real hut (Fig. A). Incenses are usually burned by Chinese worshippers and are planted on an incense urn which is often placed in front of the mound (Fig. B). The requests made by the worshippers to the 'Datok' are endless, ranging from recovery from a major illness, luck in passing a government school examination, or picking winning lottery numbers. A quick survey on southwestern area of Penang Island, Malaysia showed more than 27 termite mounds that are worshipped by the local Chinese communities.

Contrary to the Chinese community, the Indian communities in Malaysia worship termite mounds because they believe each harbors a black snake. The black snake is a sacred figure in the Indian culture. According to a few Indians who lived nearby a termite mound, they have seen black snakes moving in and out of the mound.

It is unknown whether the mounds worshipped are still active with termites. One thing is for sure though, if we check the mound for termite activity, it will provoke the feeling of the local people. □

OPPORTUNITIES

BIO. SCIENCE TECHNICIAN:

A full-time position to assist research of subterranean termites. Prefer M.S. in Entomol./Zool. sciences with field ecology background. Contact: N.-Y. Su, Ft. Lauderdale Res. & Edc. Ctr., Univ. of Florida, 3205 College Ave., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314, USA, Ph. (954) 475-8990, Fax: (954) 475-4125; email: suny@gnv.ifas.ufl.edu.

POSTDOCTORAL:

Two-year position (min.) to conduct research on subterranean termites in Kentucky. Emphasis on applied/basic field studies in urban settings. Highly competitive salary & benefits. Position available immediately. Send letter of application, CV, and names of 3 references to: M. Potter, Dept. of Entomol., Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546-0091, USA; Ph. (606)257-2398, Fax: (606)323-1120; email: mpotter@ca.uky.edu. For more information see <http://www.uky.edu/Agriculture/Entomology/enthp.htm>.

RESEARCH SPECIALIST:

Two-year position (min.) to conduct research on subterranean termites in Kentucky. Emphasis on applied/basic field studies in urban settings. Highly competitive salary & benefits. M.S. degree in entomology with ability to design & conduct field experiments with minimal supervision. Position available immediately. Send letter of application, CV, and names of 3 references to: M. Potter, Dept. of Entomology, Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546-0091 USA, Ph. (606)257-2398, Fax: (606)323-1120; email: mpotter@ca.uky.edu. For more information see <http://www.uky.edu/Agriculture/Entomology/enthp.htm>.