A Sociological Analysis of the Collective Movement "Converging with the Spirit Mountain": The Transformation and Re-embedding of Folk Religion under the Situation of De-territorialization

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1. Introduction

An ethnography of a South Taiwan village by David Jordan (1972) is a pioneering study of the beliefs and practices of Chinese folk religions. The work stimulated many later researchers' interest in both the structure of and the changes within Chinese folk religion.

Jordan (1972), in his conclusion, sums up that Chinese folk religion can be counted as an equilibrium model but one with strong potential for adapting itself to change. He writes:

> It seems to me that this model [Chinese folk religion] is logically independent of the social practices to which it is attached and is therefore able to accommodate social change without suffering displacement. (172)

> Such a system is also able to accommodate change, if slowly. We must not overlook the fact that exactly the same personnel could manipulate exactly the same supernaturals to explain exactly the same disasters with a very different set of reasons, and they could propose a different set of solutions. Decisions about ghosts as the cause of disaster, about whether the ghosts should be exorcised (formally dismissed) or accommodated (caused by ritual manipulations to conform to the structural norms), provide opportunity for a variety of ways of manipulating and operating the system so that it remains in concord with contemporary expectations, norms, morality, and, in general, the world as it actually is. (p.173)

That is to say, although this folk religious system plays an important social function by producing, backing up, reinforcing, and sanctifying the patrilineal mode of social

reproduction (see, e.g., Sangren 2000), this religious system itself is relatively independent of social change, in the sense that it allows a lot of space for manipulating and adjusting by religious specialists and the community.

Furthermore, according to Jordan, even though the traditional principles of social structure, such as the patrilineal and virilocal systems, may change, we still may expect that the Taiwanese folk religion can possibly sustain itself and adjust. In Jordan's (1972) own words:

> The scheme of ghostly explanations of disaster and divine correctives behaves as a good equilibrium model should in adjusting things to a tightly defined, socially sanctioned norm, and it is clearly a major force in the maintenance of descent-line and other traditional principles. But it can also easily accommodate changes in the norms (or differences in the acceptable deviation from them: another kind of norm), in response to any number of impinging social realities (including those associated with modernization). And that is the essence of a dynamic mode. (p.175)

In other words, it seems that as the religious system can always accommodate change in response to the evolving social reality, it thus can refrain from being displaced.

However, Jordan (1972) did predict a possible change for Taiwanese folk religion; he wrote:

> Ultimately this belief system will probably be undermined. It will be undermined by essentially external forces—westernization, science, political paranoia—which maintain that there are no ghosts, that there are no gods (or that God is a Christian), and that divination is a rather perverse kind of induced autosuggestion. But it will not be undermined by its own inconsistencies or by its inability to cope with problems intrinsic of Chinese social life. (p.177)

Here, I totally agree with Jordan's notion on Chinese or, say, Taiwanese folk religion. However, the following questions remain unclear or unanswered:

1.This system indeed has a high capacity for adaptation; however, does the adaptation involve only the adjusting of explanation within a same logic? Or, might even the internal logic of the system sometimes change? Furthermore, inasmuch as this "ghostly explanation of disaster" (Jordan 1972:134) still holds in the system, yet considering that the image of relations between ghosts and humans is beginning to change, can we still say that this is a system remaining unchanged?

2. For sure, modernity, especially "science," may dilute the plausibility of this folk belief system, since as soon as people lose their belief in its intangible spirits, the system breaks down immediately. Yet within the line of still giving credits to those intangible spirits, how far can this system adapt itself into modernity? And, how will it looks after it is intertwined with so many components of modernity? Is it still possible that the religious system's appearance will barely change? Only circumlocution or updating in the connotation of traditional phrases would make the religion strong enough to resist social change.

3. Modernity includes many mutually related yet sometimes hierarchically associated components, such as the process of rationalization, a way of empirical-based thinking, and universalistic orientation, and so on. When Chinese folk religion encounters the modernity, in order to survive the external striking force, which components of the modernity will be easier for it to absorb or adapt into, and which components of modernity may cause a real difficulty for Chinese folk religion to remain in its plausibility?

Since Jordan's ethnography on the structure and transformation of Taiwanese folk religion, thirty years have passed. The penetration of modernity into Taiwan's villages has become deeper. Confronting various kinds of external forces, does the plausibility of folk religion still hold? Might the adaptiveness of this system manifest only in its capacity to remain equilibrous, might it involve other dimensions?

Continuing Jordan's theoretical concern, this study explores the issues around the patterns of structure and change in Chinese folk religion, especially within the contexts of the contemporary global and modern world arenas. Now, the so-called situation of de-territorialization (to be described later; see Garcia Canclini 1995) will be delineated as the backdrop of the current study. I will use the case of "Converging with the Spirit Mountain," (*Hui ling shan* 會靈山), currently a thriving collective trance movement in Taiwan, to help us to shed light on the relevant issues.

The rationale for this study is that, through examining the most recent folk religious development within the locally embedded Chinese religious tradition, we may get a glimpse of the trajectories of Chinese folk religion in this global and modern milieu. Of course, the phenomenon under consideration may not be the only possibly trajectory of Chinese folk religion, yet as a bottom-up collective religious movement, it can teach us some heuristic lessons on the issues concerned.

In the succeeding sections, I will give an account of this collective trance movement, delineating this trajectory under the Chinese folk religious tradition and

Taiwanese historical context and explaining how and why "Converging with the Spirit Mountain" can help Chinese folk religion fit itself successfully into a de-territorial social climate. The empirical and theoretical implications of this phenomenon will be discussed intensively thereafter.

2. Description of the collective trance movement: "Converging with the Spirit Mountain"

A. Definition and Manifestations

For the convenience of later discussion, I would like to first offer a temporary, descriptive definition of "Converging with the Spirit Mountain" (*Hiui ling shan* 會靈 山, hereafter HLS). HLS is a collective trance movement that started out in Taiwan around the late 1980s. The constituency of the movement mainly comes from the followers of "private temples" (*shen tan* 神壇; to be discussed later). Underlying this movement, there is a loose yet reticulated network of religious practices. This network is beyond any specific religious organizations and sectarian groups.

The purpose for the collective trance, according to the majority of the practitioners, is to find out one's original purified soul and to meet the so-called Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother (to be discussed later), in order to receive personal or family benefits and attain the ultimate personal salvation. Participants in this movement in practice organize into small groups, of usually between five and forty people, and go to specific temples around Taiwan Island, mainly the so-called Mother Goddess Temple (to be discussed later). Participants conduct a pilgrimage-like religious activity (even though it is actually not a pilgrimage). Once participants arrive at the specific religious site, they engage in a kind of collective trance and special performance inside or outside that temple. Around the temple, people then cry, scream, dance, laugh, and write and speak in some kind of celestial language.

The activity is based upon a cosmic theory about the distinction between "Precedent Heaven" and "After Heaven" (to be discussed later). There are a varieties of deities belonging to Precedent Heaven. It is assumed that these deities are crucial for us to enhance our spirituality and gain our ultimate salvation.

The definition above is general; the actual manifestations of HLS in different assemblies show divergence in the following dimensions: (1) The degree of the mobility: whether followers engage in frequent visits to those presumed sacred sites or remain limited to a specific site instead. Sometimes followers choose to be inside only one specific private temple to engage in this activity, rather than to go to many other sites; (2) The fanaticism of the performance: whether appearing in a great dramatizing way or not; (3) The scale: followers associate with one another to engage

in this activity. The assembly could fall anywhere in the range of two to one hundred people.

B. Doctrines, Cosmology, Soteriology, and Practices
The connotation and implication for the phrase *Hui ling shan*

HLS is a vibrant and multifarious movement, yet not amorphous. For a better understanding of HLS, based upon both written and oral sources, as well as observations of the actual practices of it, here I try to codify and delineate the basic doctrines, cosmology, and soteriology of HLS on the following points.

First of all, *hui ling shan* literally means "converging or meeting with the Spirit Mountain." It is hard to trace who began to use this label to designate the movement. However, we know clearly that the words *ling shan* (靈山), "Spirit Mountain," are the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term "Gradrakuta" (vulture peak, Gradra literally means "vulture," kuta means "peak"). Yet, as it was translated into Chinese, the adjective *ling* 靈 "clever" or "fairy," was added. Then, the phrase "Gradrakuta" was mystified as "Clever Vulture Mountain" or "Fairy Vulture Mountain" (*Ling jiu shan* 靈鷲山).

The phrase "Gradrakuta" appears in many Buddhist sutras. For example, in the Lotus Sutra, "Gradrakuta Mountain" is the place where Buddha gave the Gospels to audiences. Since Gradrakuta Mountain is the name of a place associated with Buddha's enlightening lessons, "departing for Gradrakuta" thus may refer to a process similar to the "pilgrim's progress," in the terms of John Bunyan's book title. Indeed, this phrase *ling shan* (Spirit Mountain 靈山) did become popular in the Chinese cultural context (with the connotation described above). Thus, anyone who seriously engages in any kind of religious self-cultivation will be doing what is called *xiu ling shan* 修靈山, "cultivating the Sprit Mountain." Here, this spirit mountain can refer either to physical sacred religious landmarks or to one's true inner self needing to be cultivated and explored.

The famous popular saying below illustrates these connotations very clearly:

The Buddha is on the Spirit Mountain, so don't seek afar;
The Spirit Mountain is right within your heart.
Everyone possesses a pagoda on his Spirit Mountain;
So cultivate at the base of the pagoda on your Spirit Mountain.
(佛在靈山莫遠求;靈山就在汝心頭。人人有個靈山塔;只向靈山塔下修。)

Now, with regard to the collective trance movement we are addressing, to the above connotation for *ling shan* has been added one more meaning: "to meet the

important deities associated with you, and then you cultivate yourself thoroughly, in order to attain salvation."

C. Cosmology and Salvational Schema

With regard to doctrines and cosmology, I will emphasize several main themes underlying HLS. All of them interrelate and reinforce one another Moreover, almost all of them already exist elsewhere, in Buddhism, Taoism, other Chinese sectarian groups, or folk religious belief. Now, HLS bundles and syncretizes different materials, and makes them into, or at least to look like, a brand-new system of religious practices. Several theses with this cosmological and salvational schema are the following:

1. Thesis on spiritual transmigration and ways to restore our spiritual purities: It is presumed that the human being is situated in a ceaseless process of transmigration. In the process of transmigration, our souls have been degraded and polluted. After these transmigrations, that is, pollutions, humans are too contaminated to be liberated in the short term. However, there still is one alternative way of being left for us to exempt ourselves from this long passage of self-contamination. And fortunately, this short-cut alternative is a holistic kind of treatment and at the same time the most efficient way for self-redemption. The essence of this method is to access and associate with our Precedent Heaven nature through some specific Precedent Heaven paths. The paths are mediated by the Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother. These specific paths were previously unavailable in this world, yet now they have been transmitted to our human realm.

2. Thesis on the "Precedent Heaven *ling*"(*Xian tian ling* 先天靈) and the "After Heaven *ling*" (*Hou tian ling* 後天靈): It is assumed that we have at least two souls. One soul comes from the Precedent Heaven, and it is sited deep in us. The *ling* here refers to one's spirit or soul. This Precedent Heaven *ling* is the one that has never been polluted before. This soul exists before the beginning of human written history. The other soul, called the After Heaven *ling*, has been polluted during the process of transmigration. Now is the time for us to liberate ourselves from the cycle of rebirth, and the most direct and the fastest path is through converging our Precedent Heaven *ling* with the Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother.

3. Thesis on "Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother"(*Xian tian mu* 先天母):
Before the start of human history, all souls stayed in heaven. These souls were begot by the Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother. Later, the Precedent Heaven Cosmic

Mother was differentiated into at least five cosmic mothers (*wumu* 五母, "five mothers"). Now these mothers descend to this world to save their beloved children.

4. Thesis on the "Third Eschatological Period" (*san ci mo jie* 三期末劫): In the theory of the "Three Eschatological Periods," it is presumed the Third Eschatological Period, the "White Sun Period" (*bai yang ci* 白陽期), is coming. This idea of the Three Eschatological Periods, of course, was already a long tradition in the Chinese sectarian movement. It first was borrowed from the Buddhist concept of *kalpas* (in Chinese, *jie* 劫) and later was appropriated by the White Lotus Society (*Bai lian jiao* 白蓮教) in the Song dynasty (960-1279). The White Lotus Society postulated that, to save humanity, the great goddess sent Buddha down to earth to teach a salvific morality to her wayward children. Human beings, being "steeped in wickedness," required repeated efforts for their salvation, however. She sent down, in succession, the "Lamp-Lighting Buddha" (Randengfo 燃燈佛) and "Sakyamuni Buddha" (Shijiamonifo 釋迦牟尼佛). Yet each could save only some of her children, leaving most of humanity still benighted. The salvation of the remainder would be undertaken by a third and final god, "Buddha Maitreya" (Milefo 彌勒佛)(Chang 2004:52). Inheriting the above popular ideas, but giving the last savior different names—the Cosmic Mother in her five differentiated forms—in HLS the ideas of the Third Eschatological Period are now represented as follows: In the last period, people are so polluted and find it hard to get the salvation by themselves. Now, our cosmic mothers are very anxious about human beings. So, they descend to this world to help us to get salvation. And the cosmic mothers will make this path of salvation easier at this last eschatological period. Then, according to HLS, by the grace of the cosmic mothers or, say, converging with the spirits of the cosmic mothers, we can enhance our spirituality and then possibly attain the ultimate salvation.

D. A glimpse of the practices

Using practitioners' accounts, and the written representation in the relevant "morality books" (*shan shu* 善書; to be discussed later), HLS's pilgrimage sites can be easily identified. Some morality books even document over two hundred pilgrimage sites for HLS, nationwide. However, a core listing does appear repetitively across different sources. Among the core sites, five temples associated with the differentiated forms of the cosmic mothers are the most important ones.

Originally, these five temples were not interlinked, either geographically or ritually. But since the arising of HLS, these five temples are gradually being integrated into an imaginary cosmic spiritual network. Therefore, now, in HLS's

cosmic framework, among these five mother temples, each mother temple embodies a primary abode of a specific Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother.

In Taiwan, the five cosmic mothers and corresponding five mother temples are located in the following sites:

1. The "Mother Queen of the Heaven" (*Wangmu* 王母) resides in the Temple of Supreme Peace (*Shan'an gong* 勝安宮), Hualian County (on the east coast of Taiwan).
2. The "Golden Mother" (*Jinmu* 金母) resides in the Temple of the Compassion Society (*Cihui tang* 慈惠堂), Hualian County.
3. The "Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens" (*Jiutian xuannu* 九天玄女) resides in the temple of the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens, Miaoli County (on the west cost of Taiwan, midpoint north to south).
4. The "Earth Mother"(*Dimu* 地母) resides in the Earth Mother Temple, Nanto County (centrally located on Taiwan Island).
5. The "Goddess of Mercy" (*Guanyin* 觀音) resides in the Guanyin Temple (on the southwest coast of Taiwan).

Cosmologically, it is believed that these five mothers embody the basic "three powers," or "three elements" (*sancai* 三才) —Heaven, Earth and Human—that constitute the cosmos. Originally, this idea of three elements appeared in the *Book of Change* (*Yi jing* 易經). With regard to each element, Heaven is embodied by both the Mother Queen of the Heaven and the Golden Mother; Earth is embodied by the Earth Mother; and Human is embodied by the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens.

It is believed that the path of HLS, in its very nature, is a path of repentance and submission. And through repentance and submission, one can really converge with the holy spirits and then can attain further spiritual enhancement and even the last, ultimate salvation. The Goddess of Mercy, although she embodies none of the three elements, has the capability of forgiveness and compassion, thereby giving her an intrinsic role in this schema of salvation.

Geographically, these five temples are evenly distributed on Taiwan Island. It is believed that in each year, a serious practitioner should go to all of these five temples at least once.

F. Books

The HLS movement has been popular since the early 1990s. However, its morality books have only been published intensively since early 2000. They have titles such as "the Manual of *Ling* Practice," "Discussing the Truth on the Spirit Mountain,"

"Outlines for HLS," and so on. The contents of the books or booklets usually include explanations of why we should choose the HLS path, the specific procedures that should be followed for this religious practice, where to meet the Precedent Heaven Mother, and the like.

G. New Temples

Corresponding to the popularity of HLS, new temples have been born. Mainly focusing on Precedent Heaven deities and the Precedent Heaven *ling*, some temples claim to serve Precedent Heaven. These new temples attract followers from all directions. The temples vary in scale and we may classify them into the following three categories:

1. Newly established large temples that claim to embody the new mandate of heaven. A most renowned one is called "Temple of the Apex of Nothingness and Original Heaven" (*Wujitianyun gong* 無極天元宮). This temple was established in 1971, by a group of low-rank civil service workers. These founders chose a remote area in North Taiwan to proclaim the new mandate of heaven coming from the Precedent Heaven. Once established, this temple soon became a famous temple associated with the Precedent Heaven theology.

5. "Private temples" that have transformed themselves to adapt into the new salvational schema. Many private temples, although begun as healing services suppliers, welcomed the HLS salvational schema very much. The reason may due to this schema's advantage in promoting private temples' legitimacy and religious resonance, at the same time without deteriorating each private temple's autonomy. Very often, those private temples already having a title embedded with the Chinese characters *wuji* 無極 ("apex of nothingness," a common phrase in Taoist philosophy) have a higher tendency to adapt themselves into the new schema since the phrase *wuji* has been deliberately taken to represent the realm of Precedent Heaven by the relevant morality book writers or HLS's "theologians." Retrospectively, after HLS became popular, many private temples already having *wuij* in their title then began to differentiate themselves from other temples, in the sense that they received the mandate of heaven directly from the Precedent Heaven.

3. Small temples, in the name of the five mother temples, that arose after HLS became popular. Since the island-wide pilgrimage to five different mother temples is costly and toilsome, some religious entrepreneurs build new small temples, putting five of

these mother deity statues together in one location. Followers thus can easily access the five differentiated forms of the Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother at the same time.

3. A Comparison between traditional pilgrimage and HLS

A pilgrimage is a type of religious journey. "The destination of a pilgrimage is a place that is believed by the pilgrim and other adherents of a religion to have a special, sacred quality. Often the place is associated with a particular supernatural being, a supernatural event such as a miracle, or a sacred personage such as a saint. The reason an individual makes a pilgrimage is to become physically, emotionally, and spiritually closer to the supernatural world. There may be other purposes as well, such as asking for forgiveness or assistance, seeking a cure for an illness, meeting a religious obligation, enhancing one's reputation as a devout adherent in one's home community, and the more worldly purpose of participating in a journey to a distant and exciting place" (Levinson 1996:154).

The activities of HLS could be categorized as one type of pilgrimage. However, in a parallel comparison of HLS and the pilgrimage in traditional Chinese folk religion or territorial cults, we find differences between them.

As Sangren (1987:87) has mentioned, largely due to Victor and Edith Turner's work (Turner 1974, Turner and Turner 1978), scholars began to notice the role of pilgrimage as the concrete medium of nonlocal cultural performance. However, in Chinese folk religion, it is Sangren who began to explore systematically the processes and mechanisms of pilgrimage in linking local territorial cult communities to a much larger ritual context.

C.K. Yang (1961:87; see also Sangren 1987:88-89) has already documented that in traditional China, at group expense, pilgrim groups were generally sent by villages or special pilgrimage organizations within a village. Pilgrimage was rarely an individual thing. For example, the pilgrimage activities occurring in the center of Taiwan's Matzu 媽祖 (the goddess of the ocean) cult, Chiaotian kung (朝天宮) in Peikung, are depicted vividly by Sangren (1987) as follows:

> The great majority of pilgrims arrive in group (chin-hsiang-tuan, incense offering societies) by chartered bus. Organized by local-temple and religious associations in rural villages, country towns, and urban neighborhoods, these pilgrimage groups continue the tradition of ritual rejuvenation by passing branch images through the smoke of Chiao-tien kung's incense burner. (88)

Here, under the Chinese or say, the Taiwanese context, local identities play a crucial and necessary role among various pilgrimage performances (Sangren 2000:99), unlike in Turner's characterization of pilgrimage as a typical occasion of "communitas" and "anti-structure."

In Sangren's sketch of the Mazu pilgrimage in Peikung, Taiwan, he mentions at least three dimensions that are part of pilgrimage process and sacred sites. (1) Representations of "power" (i.e. *ling*) are produced during the pilgrimage process. This power is a state of transcendence for both the local society's and individuals' sense of themselves (1997:97). (2) The pilgrimage is about spatial integration. As pilgrimages are usually organized at the village level, the processes thus embody, react, and reinforce the mutual relationships of villages. (3) During pilgrimage, the branch temples rejuvenate the spiritual power of their branch images by passing them through the smoke of the home temple's incense fire (1987:88).

However, even the Matzu pilgrimage is always organized on a village's territorial-cult basis (Sangren 1987:91). As the ideology of Matsu pilgrimages stresses an unmediated and direct relationship between each individual household and the deity (Sangren 1987:91), we may assume that each humble pilgrim still approaches and experiences the worshipped deity directly.

Sangren (2000:105) argues that the power of pilgrimage is based upon a "transcendence" quality, and he indicates that locating the source of power outside the community defines this power as transcendent in that its origin is external to the community itself. However, Sangren (2000:97) also argues that the representations of transcendence misrecognize the sociogenic nature of productive power, alienating this power by attributing it to supernatural entities.

To put pilgrimage in the Chinese context of social and cultural production, Sangren (1987:191-200) delineates three main themes underlying the pilgrimage of Chinese folk religion. (1) Chinese pilgrimages explicitly articulate and often baroquely elaborate cultural categories. Correspondences between sacred geography and temple architecture on the one hand, and the cardinal directions, the four elements, cosmological hierarchies, and even aspects of human character on the other, are important in pilgrimage iconography. That is, pilgrimage plays a pedagogical function in assimilating cultural categories and knowledge. (2) Pilgrimage is one of the ritual processes through which the construction of a dialectics between local and national identities occurs. (3) Pilgrimage plays an important role in integrating the so-called great tradition and little traditions in agrarian civilization, or to put it more accurately, pilgrimage plays an important role in reproducing basic and widespread collective representations through ritual action. These reproductive processes occur at many levels of cultural sophistication.

Based upon the above understanding, we may go further to clarify and account the similarities and differences between HLS and pilgrimages in traditional Chinese society. Looking at the very surface, there are many similarities between these two. For example, they take place in similar religious sites. Mechanisms of rejuvenating and recharging are involved in both processes. Both are carried out with some degree of lively and vigorous performance. The two processes entail the intercommunication between two or more spiritual beings. Both of them involve a dialectics between different levels' identity. In addition, both are articulated through similar baroquely elaborated cultural categories, such as the five agents (*wu xing* 五行), five directions (*wu fang* 五方) , three elements (*Sancai* 三才), and so on.

To sum up, we may say that both arenas constitute a cultural model of social space-time locating individuals or local communities within wider historical and spatial horizons. Also, both promote a construction of transcendence in which attributes to the supernatural entity, and in which is alienated from each individual or community constituent.

However, there are more differences than similarities between HLS and pilgrimages in traditional Chinese folk religion, which are called *jinxiang* 進香 (hereafter JX). In general, the process of de-territoritalization already disrupts the plausibility of the village-based or group-based activities; under this influence, the pilgrimage involving the intercommunication between the territorially defined cults may either experience a kind of transformation in meaning or gradually lose its original participants. Nevertheless, we may also assume that the process of de-territorialization can release a new possibility for people to cluster and to worship deities.

Before conducting further sociological analyses, first I would like to identify some of the differences between JX and HLS. They are listed in the following parallel comparisons:

JX: Pilgrims hold the josses (idols) from their own local temple and then bring them into the host temple. As the pilgrim group enters into the host temple, the host temple ignites firecrackers to welcome the pilgrims.
HLS: Participants organize in small groups. When they enter a temple, they usually do not bring joss. As the group enters into the temple the host temple does nothing.

JX: During the pilgrimage, pilgrims burn "paper money," either individually or collectively. The paper money is a kind of offerings for the deities in the host temple.
HLS: During the process, paper money burning is not necessary. If a participant wants to do this, the paper money will not be burnt in the form of bundles; rather, a

participant usually folds the paper money into a shape like a lotus flower (each flower consumes 108 pieces of thin paper money) and then burns only one flower per temple. Before a participant burns the paper flower, he/she will sign his/her name on the flower.

JX: Burning incense is necessary, either as a ritual offering or as a means to communicate with the deities.
HLS: There is no such necessity.

JX: Each group of pilgrims has only one or several shamans to embody their local deities. When pilgrims arrive at the host temple, these shamans will become possessed. Sometime the shamans mortify themselves in the sense that they may reveal the efficacy of the possessing deities (if there is no injury, then the deities' efficacy has been proved) or exhibit the vigorous and unyielding nature of the possessing deities.
HLS: When participants enter into or draw nearby the host temple, each willing participant tries to get into a state of trance. The trance has a loose yet discernible format, usually including dancing, crying, exclaiming, speaking in tongues, and so forth. Participants almost never engage in any kind of self-mortification.

In summary, the above parallel comparisons show us that even though these two activites often occur at the same sites, the differences between JX and HLS exist in at least three crucial dimensions.

1. The underlying nature of the deities. HLS differentiates the deities into After Heaven or Precedent Heaven. The former refers to the deities coming from true or fictive historical figures; the latter refers to the deities who presumably already existed before homo sapiens came into existence. The Precedent Heaven deities include the Earth Mother, the Golden Mother, the Three Pure Ones (*San gian dao zu* 三清道祖) , and others. The After Heaven deities include Guan Gong 關公, the god of the military; Xuan Tian Shang Di 玄天上帝, the Supreme Ruler of Obscure Heaven; and so on. However, some historical-figure deities could be counted as either type, depending on the informant's point of view. Mazu is an example. When Mazu is classified as Precedent Heaven in HLS, it implies that she already was a Precedent Heaven deity before human history. During her lifetime, Mazu ascended from Precedent Heaven purposefully in order to save people. So here the historical figure Mazu is only one incarnation of the eternal Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother's spirit.

2. The organizational base. In HLS, participants organize in small groups

rather than as a whole village. Therefore, the patron god associated with the participants is no more embodying the whole village. During the process of converging with the Spirit Mountain, participants gather into small groups associated with specific teachers or private temple, and each participant can affiliate with one or several Precedent Heaven deities.

3. The geographical space or the extended network. JX mainly encompasses the nested hierarchy of territory within the same marketing network; whereas, for HLS, the territory is no more bounded by the nested hierarchy of a regional system. The activities sphere now may include and extend to any geographic space corresponding to an imagined yet culturally defined space (such as the boundary within the five directions).

Let me pause momentarily for comment. We notice that, as Jordan (1972: 137) has emphasized, for Chinese folk religion, there is a homology between village and family. Specifically, Jordan (1972:134-135) writes, "the relation between the village and its protecting gods and threatening ghosts is the same as the relation between the family and its patron gods and threatening ghosts." He continues:

> We are provided with a kind of least-common-denominator formation of Chinese religious conceptions whereby contingencies in the human world are guarded against by organizations of people forming alliances with gods and exchanging worship for divine protection. The size and nature of the human unit involved seems to be related to the nature of the disaster guarded against, but the approach is consistent even to the rites involved.(Jordan 1972:135)

Jordan never made further attempts to investigate how this homology may apply to the individual level, thus a theoretical and empirical gap remained unfilled. We may presume that this homology holds at the individual level. Yet, the following questions would be hard to answer: Once the process of de-teritorralization penetrates, is the need for boundary protection still the necessary function of folk religion? Or, might a new transformation under a similar appearance to the folk religion be involved? Here, in the case of HLS, we find that whether in regard to the underlying nature of the deities, the organization of the ritual, or the geographical spaces being encompassed, all are in sharp contrast with the traditional folk religion. How can we understand these collective gatherings motivated by rather individualized concern? Could we apply the idea of homology between village and family level down to the individual level? I will explore these issues both historically and sociologically below.

4. Some Historical Antecedents of HLS

Due to the limitations of my current information, that is, without accumulated longitudinal data, it is hard for me to clarify the historical progression of HLS. Nevertheless, based upon a primary observation of the configurations of various religious movements and organizations in modern Taiwan, I can discern that at least three earlier religious developments in Taiwan may have contributed much to HLS's formation. Here, it is worthwhile for us to have a very brief overview of these earlier historical antecedents. Our discussion starts from a broader historical background, then moves to a rather narrow yet influential sectarian movement. However, the three developments we will discuss actually become compelling in Taiwan society almost at the same time.

A. Private Temples

First, we should put HLS in the context of a more broad social development: the emergence of the "private temple" (*shen tan* 神壇) as the main carrier of Taiwanese folk religion. This new development reorients folk religion from communal, village-based public ritual activities to personal healing services surrounding clinic-like semiprivate settings.

Due to de-territoritalization, that is, "the loss of the natural relation of culture to geographical and social territories" (Garcia Canclini 1995:229), the territorially defined cults may have gradually lost their general plausibility. Specifically, the force of modernization may have disrupted the locally everlasting and recurrent social relations and time-space experience; thus, even though the customary territorial cults endure, the scope and degree of the plausibility behind these territorial cults are reduced.

Another possible development is that, if the plausibility of the territorial cults is reduced, under the circumstances of folk religion's tenacity continuing and commoners' religious needs being sustained, other forms of nonterritorially defined religious practices may evolve or emerge. Here, the so-called private temple is one of these alternatives.

Specifically, since the 1960s, during the process of urbanization, villagers immigrated to the newly developed urban areas yet without much interconnection with surrounding neighborhoods. New forms of faith then arose. Still residing in their previous living "habitus," but in a way corresponding to the fragmentary urban settings, many new immigrants engraved josses resembling and deriving from

(through the process of *fen xiang* 分香, "dividing incense," or *fen ling* 分靈, "reproducing the joss image") their hometown's patron deities.

At the beginning, these newly established josses may only have been worshiped in the new immigrants' personal houses. This form of religious setting suits urban milieu perfectly, in the sense that people's interactions become more fluid and segmentary and people's local connection becomes much weaker, a small-scale client-oriented institution would serve much better people's immediate physical and spiritual needs.

Soon, the religious petty entrepreneurs get involved. With the dual purposes of occupying the new marketing niche and enhancing a specific religious path, these semispecialists begin to open commercialized private temples. These private temples are private, in the sense they that they are located in people's own houses; but, they are also public, in the sense that they are open to outside clients and enshrine the deities clearly with some public orientation.

To sum up, these private temples have the following characteristics: (1) the public-oriented deities reside in semiprivate settings; (2) the curators of the private temples usually are nonordained self-cultivated religious specialists; and (3) the private temples offer various services to clients, in terms of a loosely defined form of commercial transaction.

Generally speaking, the main institutional form of Taiwanese folk religion now has gradually transformed from a territorially defined, public-oriented, and communal/closed system (Chun 2003:66) to a public-oriented yet small-group and clinic-like religious fabric.

B. Temple of the Compassion Society (*Cihui tang* 慈惠堂)

It has been reported elsewhere (Jordan and Overmyer 1986:129-140) that the modern "Venerable Mother belief complex"（*M niang xin yang* 母娘信仰）started in east-central Taiwan in the early 1950s. A young man was possessed by the deity Venerable Mother and the Venerable Mother's revelations through this young man were the beginning of the faith. Since then, the contemporary manifestation of the Mother Queen of the West (*Xi wang-mu* 西王母), in the name of the Venerable Mother, has had a great impact on the doctrines and practices of folk religion in Taiwan.

The split among adherents in the formative period has made the first Venerable Mother's belief group into two organizations, the "Palace of Sacred Peace" (*Sheng'an gong* 勝安宮) and the "Compassion Society" (*Cihui tang* 慈惠堂). Each of these organizations has a specific name to refer to its own mother deity: the former labels the deity Wangmu niangniang 王母娘娘 (Mother Queen), and the latter Jinmu 金母

(Golden Mother). Adherents believe that these two different names may just represent the different radiant forms of the same deity, or maybe these two mother deities are actually sisters.

A private temple can affiliate with Compassion Society voluntary, thereby becoming a branch of the Compassion Society. One benefit of joining this temple network is that a private temple can be recognized and accepted by the public immediately. Besides, the interconnection with the Compassion Society's broad network also makes external resources more accessible.

Now, maybe partly due to the Compassion Society's strategy for extending and thus purposefully making alliances with many private temples, and partly due to the Venerable Mother's presumed position of transcendence within the hierarchical pantheon corresponding very well to the urban middle classes' new psychological needs and mental imagination, soon the whole Compassion society system (with its headquarters in Hualian County and at least one thousand branches nationwide) or, say, the modern complex of the Heaven Mother belief complex, developed into the most prosperous religious practice in Taiwan (see Lai 1999:50).

Here is not the place for me to review the historical trajectory and overall religious practices of the Compassion Society. However, one thing we need to keep in mind is that the Compassion Society's religious practices do stimulate and have a great impact on HLS's later development.

One example of this is that the Compassion Society enhances and legitimizes the trance as the right path for spiritual practice, not only for shamans, but for all commoners. This reorientation of shamanism has had a great impact on commoners' religious practices.

Jordan and Overmeyer (1986:139) gives the following vivid description of trances activities in the Compassion Society:

> Some Compassion Society rituals are described in more detail below. They include congregational chanting of scriptures, spirit-writing séances, processions in honor of the goddess, and, most distinctively, individual "dancing" while under the influence of a deity, more politely known as "training" (hsun) Training, here, is a state of ecstatic excitement usually associated with makeshift shadow-boxing or with slapping one's body in a pattern of quick, repetitive motions with the flat of each hand alternately. It is thought especially to promote health and healing. The fact that all can become possessed and "dance" while in a state of trance is seen by Compassion Society leaders to be one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of their religion, particularly in contrast with the Palace of Sacred Peace, in which only the tank-ki dance. From this

perspective the sect appears as a popularization of spirit medium ship, making available to all the certainty of individual election hitherto limited to folk elite in Taiwan and southeast coastal China. For the Compassion Society the only difference between a member in a state of trance and a tank-ki is that the tank-ki speaks words of a deity or spirit. Thus it is not supporting that for them such articulate possession expresses temporary heightening of awareness rather than a long-term vocation.

To make the foregoing shamanic kind of practice plausible and legitimate for not only specialists but also for commoners, within the Chinese folk religious context, there actually needs to be some dramatic transformation and reorientation of the religion, including in dimensions such as doctrines, position of deities within the pantheon, and the schema for salvation. And it is exactly here in the Compassion Society that the barrier for direct mediation has been released and a more democratic form of spiritual mediation has emerged, even though it happened just as an unintended result. Soon, the Compassion Society's new type of spiritual practice—a democratic form of possession—was appropriated by many private temples and small religious groups then.

This new form of unmediated salvation (no need for any mediation between deities and followers) could go along with different organizational forms. However, HLS's diffused and loosely integrated spiritual network has made best use of this. The result is that after HLS practitioners' rebundling and reassembling of contemporary popular religious practices and ideas, an efficacy-oriented, minimally restricted in regards to membership and spiritual mediation, yet still plausible and self-contained belief system arises and begins to gain popularity.

C. The "Way of Penetrating Unity" (*I-kuan tao* 一貫道)

It is well known that in China diffused religion has relied upon institutional religion for the development of mythical or theological concepts (Yang 1961:295). Here, a prosperous sectarian movement in modern Taiwan, the I-kuan tao 一貫道 (Way of Penetrating Unity), does play the role of offering HLS ready-made mythical and theological concepts.

I-kuan tao is currently the largest sectarian group in Taiwan (an underestimated official figure shows that in 1995, the I-kuan tao in Taiwan had approximately 942,000 members; see *Statistical Abstract of the Interior of the Republic of China* 1996:117).The I-kuan tao believes in a God beyond all other gods, called Mingming shangdi 明明上帝 (Most Bright Emperor) or Wusheng laomu 無生老母 (Eternal Primordial Mother). It is a syncretic faith that draws upon Confucian, Buddhist,

Daoist, and folk religious terminology. According to I-kuan tao adherents, this religion attempts to identify common principles underlying Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. The I-kuan tao faithful believe that by uncovering a single set of universal truths, the "increasing chaos" of modern times can be defeated and the world's people can live peacefully in harmony (Tsai 2003:34).

The I-kuan tao once prohibited but now has widespread influence on popular religions in Taiwan. Although it is hard to trace how the I-kuan tao's ideas are appropriated by other religious groups, we can indeed see that the I-kuan tao's cosmology and schema of salvation, in one way or another, already constitutes a very hard core of HLS's teachings. Besides, HLS's exalting of the Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother can be easily recognized as the parallel or derivative development of the I-kuan tao's exalting of Eternal Primordial Mother as the target of worship.

Many ideas in HLS, such as the Precedent Heaven, Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother, the incoming of the Third Eschatological Era, and so on, apparently come from the I-kuan tao. At least originally these ideas' popularity in Taiwan was due to the I-kuan tao's re-affirming and spreading them. For sure, under the diffused form of spiritual practice, HLS itself has not invented directly but has only borrowed things from I-kuan tao's cosmological blueprint and salvational schema to constitute its own coherent theological premises. Furthermore, even though those ideas in the I-kuan tao are not novel, in Taiwan it was only due to the adherents of the I-kuan tao that these ideas were popularized into a much broader social circle.

The differences between the I-kuan tao and HLS are not in their general cosmological blueprint and salvational schema, since those are similar. Rather, they lodge in the more specific and technical dimension regarding how to acquire salvation. In the I-kuan tao, followers gain salvation through the esoteric rite of conversion, as well as through their continuing endeavors in moral self-cultivation and proselytizing. In HLS, salvation is gained through a process of self-cultivation defined by spirit possession and spiritual enhancement.

To sum up, we can say that HLS is a collective creation. Whether intended or unintended, from various sources, aggregately, HLS has developed into a loosely spiritual, networked, collective trance movement. However, even with the new label of *hui ling shan* it has not yet differentiated itself from folk religion, since the Precedent Heaven deities and After Heaven deities can coexist within the traditional polytheist pantheon. HLS is not a sectarian group nor a territorially defined ritual practice, yet it does have many small group leaders among this diffused spiritual network. Historically, three earlier religious developments in Taiwan—that is, the proliferation of private temples in urban settings, the fast growth of the Compassion Society and the related Venerable Mother belief complex, as well as the sectarian

movement I-kuan tao and its theology's popularity—already contained enough symbolic and organizational resources to integrate themselves into a new faith system. As soon as these religious ferments intertwined, they then wove together to form a new base for religious development.Without much time lag, HLS began to mushroom all over Taiwan from the late 1990s.

5. A Sociological Commentary on the HLS movement in Taiwan

According to Giddens (1991:16), the process and effects of modernization can be discerned through three main elements or sets of elements: (1) separation of time and space—the condition for the articulation of social relations across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems; (2) a disembedding mechanism—which consists of symbolic tokens and expert systems, and separates interaction for the particularities of locals; and (3) institutional reflexivity—the regulated use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as a constituent element in the institution's organization and transformation.

To Giddens, the path of modernity, to some extent, equals the process of de-territoralization, in which place and culture are differentiated from each other and a stable local personal network has been disrupted. However, modernity may create a new social system bounded and linked by new principles (Giddens 1990:14). Giddens (1990:14) calls this new order one of "time-space distanciation," the conditions under which time and space are organized so as to connect presence and absence.

In order to maintain this time-space distanciation of modern society, according to Giddens (1990:22), there are two other types of disembedding mechanisms intrinsically involved in the development of modern social intuitions. One is "symbolic tokens"; the second is "expert systems." By symbolic tokens, Giddens means the media for interchange that can be "passed around" without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them at any particular juncture. Various kinds of symbolic tokens can be distinguished, such as media of political legitimacy and tokens of money in the economic sphere (1990:22). With regard to the expert systems, Giddens (1990:27-28) refers to the systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organize large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today. By providing "guarantees" of expectations across "distanciated time-space," this "stretching" of the social system is achieved via the impersonal nature of tests applied to evaluate technical knowledge and by public critique (Giddens 1990:28).

As for religion, Giddens has not written much about how it may adapt itself into

this system of time-space distanciation. He does acknowledge that religion will never disappear, and that it certainly resurges. However, for Giddens, with regard to modernity, religion only plays a role of counteracting and reacting. Giddens (1991:207) writes:

> Not only has religion failed to disappear. We see all around us the creation of new forms of religious sensibility and spiritual endeavour. The reasons for this concern quite fundamental features of late modernity. What was due to become a social and physical universe subject to increasingly certain knowledge and control instead creates a system in which areas of relative security interlace with radical doubt and with disquieting scenarios of risk. Religion in some part generates the conviction which adherence to the tenets of modernity must necessarily suspend: in this regard it is easy to see why religious fundamentalism has a special appeal. But this is not all. New forms of religion and spirituality represent in a most basic sense a return of the repressed, since they directly address issues of the moral meaning of existence which modern institutions so thoroughly tend to dissolve.

Here, I acknowledge Giddens's characterization of modernity or even late modernity, yet the point I still do not agree with Giddens in that he assigns only a counteracting or reacting role for religion within this fabric of time-space distanciation. Rather, I would like to argue that, for religion, especially for the diffused kind of folk religion, as it is a specific form integrating with and being associated with the general masses' economic production and cultural reproduction, its capacity to adapt itself to external social forces and its flexibility in absorbing other elements into the system may go way beyond many scholars' expectations.

For example, in contrast to Giddens, Jordan (1972) takes folk religion in Taiwan as an equilibrium model with the potential of adapting itself to external dynamic change. According to Jordan (1972:175), in this model, elements in the system are well integrated and thus can always be self-correcting; yet, at the same time the system can also easily accommodate changes in the norms and can transform itself in response to any number of impinging social realities. Indeed, Jordan's idea of the "equilibrium and dynamic" nature underlying Taiwanese folk religion, if we elaborate and refine it, can be a powerful countering argument to Giddens's view of religion in general. Nevertheless, many questions remain unresolved. How flexible can this Chinese folk religious system be? How durable can it be? To what extent can we say that after its adjusting itself to social change, it is still the same system? Under this "equilibrium and dynamic" nature of Taiwanese folk religion, can we find an

appropriate definition to describe this system? All these issues need some further elaboration. And, I think an analysis of the current case of HLS may promise us a lot in this regard.

However, it may sound ironic that in my following analysis I would like to go directly to using Giddens's framework as a reference point to analyze the dynamics of the HLS. Actually, borrowing Giddens's insights into how modernity works within its time-space distanciation system, yet in a sense reversing his direction of thinking, we may see some parallels between Giddens's depictions of a modern system and HLS's actual manifestations.

We notice that, within Giddens's framework, two mechanisms hold and are intrinsically involved in the modern disembedding social situation: these are "symbolic tokens" and "expert systems." Following this, here, I would like to argue that even if we define HLS as a counteracting exercise toward modernity, for whatever reasons, in the HLS system we can find functional equivalents to the "symbolic tokens" and "expert systems" within the capitalist system. In HLS, in regard to symbolic tokens, it is the concept of the Precedent Heaven *ling* that is equivalent; both the private temple and morality books could function as the expert systems within the stretched folk religious practices.

Indeed, Giddens postulates that during de-territorialization, religion is what being disrupted and being compelled to counteract the social change. Now, how is it that the two modernities' mechanisms of linkages such as symbolic tokens and expert systems can be reproduced, or at least be resembled, in the folk religious system?

Before we examine these issues, I would like to go directly to investigating how and in what way three components of HLS—the Precedent Heaven *ling*, the private temple and morality books—might play a role equivalent to that of the symbolic tokens and expert systems in the capitalist system.

Suppose we characterize HLS as a previously territorially defined folk religion, which after the process of de-territoralization, mainly in its disruption of both particularized social interaction and homogenous local experience, then through some new symbols or mechanisms or through some traditional symbols being newly transformed, begins to re-link and re-embed in a rather extended space. Then, we may see that the internal function of HLS actually looks quite a bit like Gidden's characterization of a modern social system. Actually it is very much the opposite, in the sense that the newly "distanciated system" is not the modern society. Rather, it is the religious system or local experience that we previously believed would be disrupted by modernity.

To see these issues more clearly, I would like to discuss the following components within HLS that may help to sustain folk religion in an extended spiritual

network: the concept of the Precedent Heaven *ling*, private temples, and morality books.

A. The Precedent Heaven *Ling*: The "Symbolic Token" in HLS

Sangren (2000:4) argues that the "notions of supernatural power (*ling*) attributed to gods" can be best understood as "at once manifestations of a cultural logic of symbolic relations and as a material logic of social relations." In accepting *ling* as the key notion underscoring both Chinese symbolic reasoning and social relations, however, here I would characterize it from a rather different perspective.

I would like to argue that, *ling*, according to Sangren, as a mediator between both yang and yin, and order and disorder, this association of spiritual and social, may easily become a means to justify the established power structure. Therefore, those who have social power may be considered to have some internal "*ling* power" accordingly. In short, under this "*ling* logic," spiritual and social dimensions are mutually reinforced and mutually justified. So, *ling* is a concept embedded with the hierarchical implication and can be readily taken for conservative use.

In contrast, here, the concept of the Precedent Heaven *ling* , although it is a derivative phrase of *ling* , may entail a very different connotation. The Precedent Heaven *ling* is the soul that one has begotten before one's his/her historical transmigration. Passing through history, the Precedent Heaven *ling* is in our innermost self and has not been contaminated by the process of transmigration. Because this *ling*, or spirit, is "precedent," it may distance itself from social hierarchy and unequal resource distribution within human history. Yet, still, this notion is neither abstract nor deviates from tradition and history, since the Precedent Heaven *ling* is referred as an individualized entity with the quality associated with the preexisting key symbol *ling*.

The Precedent Heaven *ling* is an individualized entity. Without regard to one's occupation, social status, gender, or ethnicity, through the process of identifying one's eternal Precedent Heaven *ling* and converging one's Precedent Heaven *ling* with a specific Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother, one is allowed to develop a unique personal attachment and identity.

The Precedent Heaven *ling* is associated with the preexisting key symbol *ling*, and so the Precedent Heaven *ling* shares and receives many conventional ideas attached to the word *ling*, such as the connotations of spiritual power, efficacy, responsiveness, and so on. In admitting this functional connotation of *ling*, however, HLS puts the Precedent Heaven *ling* in an imperative and prior position compared to the traditional *ling*. Now, only through one's returning to one's true inner self, rather than through external manifestations of power or efficacy, can one enhance oneself into a level of noncontamination and eternality. Through this idea of *ling*, both the

Precedent Heaven belief system of HLS and the traditional Chinese folk religius faith in *ling's* mediating function between yin and yang can coexist or even mutually translate in the same symbolic and ritual sphere.

Ling manifests in history, community, and personal life history; thus, it is associated with the actual power structure and social arrangements. However, in postulating the existence of the Precedent Heaven *ling* (a utopian definition for a presumed eternal and pure form of people's inner spirits), HLS also begins to set up a transcendent domain that can go beyond any specific historical incidents, territorial boundedness, and social hierarchies. Therefore, HLS also creates a new base for people to interact equally and make connections.

We recall that, by "symbolic tokens," Giddens means the media for interchange that can be "passed around" without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them at any particular juncture. Now, in the case of HLS, although the concept of the Precedent Heaven *ling* is not a "thing" to be used as a media for interchanging, its capacity and function look very similar to that of a kind of symbolic token that can go beyond the specific characteristics of different individuals and can handle people together at any particular juncture. Based upon this idea of Precedent Heaven *ling*, people can associate with each other more easily, and this association can also be extended more easily, in the sense that our mutual interaction lodges on a transcendental yet very equal ground.

To sum up, under the impacts of de-territorialization from the outside, within the Chinese folk religion itself, Chinese folk religion begins to entail a dynamic process of self-transformation. This self-transformation results in and is epitomized by a symbolic token equivalent—the Precedent Heaven *ling*. Nonetheless, with regard to this internal dynamics, we also can see some parallel development to that from territorialization to de-territorialization to re-embedding, such as from a communal/closed consensus to a lack of consensus to the idea of the Precedent Heaven *ling* that can link people in a broader base. And, the genesis and the popularity of the concept of the Precedent Heaven *ling* in Chinese folk religion may manifest such that the Chinese folk religious system could be re-embedded into the current global world without too much difficulty.

B. The Private Temple: One of the "Expert Systems" within HLS

As we discussed above, one change in the folk religion in contemporary Taiwan is that the private temple has gradually become the main carrier of Chinese folk religion in urban settings. Many people, especially urbanites, now attend services more often in private temples than in territorially based community temples.

A private temple may occupy only a fraction of urban space (without integrating

with surrounding neighborhoods and locating in a very limited space); nevertheless, the intimacy of interaction within it often can foster clients' feeling of belonging. Although the urban lifestyle might distance city residents from traditional religion, urbanites' entering into private temples for help may re-link people into the folk religious system. At the beginning, this relinkage usually is intricate with pragmatic ends, such as asking for blessing, healing, exorcism, and the like. Yet later on, the cosmological and salvational dimensions of the religious system may begin to penetrate into followers' cognition and daily life practices.

After all, even though the mainstream culture is getting secularized, people's daily lives and practices are not necessary so. If people have chances to connect to specific spiritual networks, the results will be different. In the case of HLS, we see that through a dispersed yet dense spiritual network reticulated by private temples, individuals still might be integrated into the folk religious system interlaced by these private temples. Now, private temples gradually become the new reservoir and inheritor of folk religion, both ritually and cosmologically.

Folk religion, is no longer a communal/closed system; rather, its format becomes the voluntary assembly of a small group or some loosely extended networks. Among these voluntary assemblies, many possibilities arise: whereas HLS is one of them, it may also be the most extended and stretched of them.

As private temples are the basic institutional nodes of this HLS system, each private temple then continually engages in the circulation and re-interpretation of folk religion. As mentioned earlier, in terms of "expert systems," Giddens (1990:27-28) refers to the systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organize large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today. By providing guarantees of expectations across distanciated time-space, this "stretching" of the social system is achieved. Here, although the folk religion is not strictly of a technical and impersonal nature, functionally, the private temple does play the role of "expert system" within this newly distanciated folk religious system—HLS. Through private temples, commoners' everyday lives comes to remerge with a religious system that derives from and transforms folk tradition. And now, through these private temples, even though there might be much risk of being mislead and fraud, followers of HLS can get guarantees of expectations (of being healed and being saved) within this distanciated time-space sphere.

C. Morality Books: Another "Expert System" within HLS

In addition to private temples, another constituting component of HLS, the morality books, also plays the functional equivalent of an expert system within the entire system.

Indeed, morality books, together with the so-called Phenonix Halls (*Luan tang* 鸞堂, "spirit-writing temples") that boomed in Taiwan after around the 1920s (see Seaman 1978: 20-29, Wang 1997), have become important sources for the spreading of moral teachings of folk Confucianism, folk Buddhism, and folk religion to common people. Nevertheless, with regard to folk religion in the traditional community, oral communication still was the dominant form. In that traditional setting, the publishing of morality books thus played more of a role in establishing a publisher's (a Phenonix Hall's) spiritual authority and in accumulating sponsors' merits than in a systemically spreading the teachings. Besides, in the traditional context, quite often some influential and classical texts, such as the *Liaofan sixun* 了凡四訓 (The Four Lessons by Liaofan), *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Book of Rewards and Punishments), and *Yinzhi wen* 陰騭文 (Track on Hidden Judgement) (see Brokaw 1987, 1991, and Chu 1992, 1993) , have already been published repetitively and redundantly. Thus, even as the teachings were being spread out, it was usually only a revitalization and respreading of the old teachings rather than a dissemination of some new teachings.

However, in the case of HLS, morality books began to play a heavier and more substantial role in guiding and uniting people's religious practices. Recently, the contents of the morality books have become much more currently relevant and issue- and advice-oriented. These published materials, if we do not restrict them to the format of the book, now may range from flyers, audio and video tapes, and DVDs to Web sites and the like. These accessible formats have already made the morality books more penetrable to people's daily life. The change and transformation of morality books in modern Chinese society itself is a big issue needing to be explored further. There is not space enough here; nevertheless, it is enough to say that, after a very brief survey, with regard to the role morality books play within HLS, we have already found out many new patterns emerging.

Within the movement of HLS, I have collected more than 20 different morality books. The contents usually include definitions of and instructions for the presumed standardized procedures of HLS. Each one emphasizes slightly different dimensions, such as repentance, redemption, thaumaturgy, tour guiding, and so on. As HLS is a vibrant, ongoing movement, these newly published books give instructions and directions on how and where to conduct the "converging with the Spirit Mountain." Therefore, the publishing of these books not only performs some religious function of reinforcing sects' legitimacy and donors' merit accumulation, but also substantially contributes to the forming of the knowledge and practices of the movement.

In contents and styles, these newly published morality books are idiosyncratic. Even though the spirit-writing moral lessons in them are similar to those of the

traditional morality books, the moral teachings now are intertwined with a much heavier concern about how to enhance one's personal spirituality in this secularized, chaotic world. A cosmological picture with a specific teleological direction has been elaborated. The association of the publisher's organization and the right path documented in the morality books has been emphasized. It is very often that the books are published in a series (of sometimes more than 10) rather than in a sole volume. Overall, these morality books are highly sophisticated and elaborated. They give very specific instructions on how to engage in an effective path of spiritual enhancement. The texts are presented in systematic discourse and discussion rather than conventional parable or documented stories about moral retribution.

With regard to circulation and distribution, these morality books also set a new pattern. The approach for distributing the morality books looks similar to the traditional way, that is, piling them up in some public spaces (temples, parks, stations, etc.) for free giving. However, now, the books are not only for openly disseminating but also for advocating a new spiritual path and for maintaining the loosely spiritual network, in the sense that the books usually clearly list the publisher itself and some other religious organizations as the accessible resources for further help. Based on my field observation, most often these morality books are distributed not only to dispersed individuals, but also to and through many spiritual circles both within and outside. That is, if we look at the distribution from the demand side, the demanding subjects are now individuals mediated through various voluntary assemblies rather than only dispersed individuals. For each voluntary assembly or spiritual circle, usually of about five to one hundred people, circumscribed by the size of the specific private temple, the leader collects many morality books from different sources, then often sorts out the most relevant for followers to discuss and read, or sometimes the leader syncritizes and updates them into study notes or even a published book for further circulation within or outside of the specific private temple. Morality books now contribute much to producing specific guidelines for religious practices and then giving the diffused religious practices a rather coherent and systematic appearance.

In summary, in HLS, morality books have begun to play a crucial and indispensable role in guiding, uniting, and vitalizing participants' religious practices. Morality books, together with private temples, now constitute a functional equivalent to the expert system within HLS. These two mechanisms provide guarantees and support for participants in this new faith system. Even under the circumstances that participants do not have clear and sufficient knowledge to engage in the relevant practices, private temples' active counseling and family-like networking, as well as the ongoing publishing of new morality books (manifesting the newly revealed mandate of heaven, updating all traditional religion into a currently relevant form,

demonstrating a penetrable existence to enhance the movement's legitimacy, and offering a much more systematic presence that can guide and unify participants), can give this "stretching" religious system a much more trustworthy and promising face.

6. Discussion, and Conclusion

The thesis of the current study is that, through studying the most recent folk religious development within the locally embedded Chinese religious tradition, we may get a glimpse of the trajectories of Chinese folk religion in this global and modern milieu. Through this study, I can also explore the essences and dynamics of Chinese folk religion in a more sophisticated way.

The process of modernization produces a standardized time-space experience. It disrupts the social activities and relations particularized to territorial contexts. As a result, de-territorialization may appear, and the plausibility of traditional Chinese territorial folk religion may be weakened. Nevertheless, as religious practices of local communities face the challenge of de-territorialization coming from the mechanisms of modernity, it is possible that through some analogous mechanisms, folk religion can be transformed into a format in which it can adapt itself to modern situations. In the present paper, the case of HLS, a collective trance movement becoming popular in Taiwan since the mid-1980s, has helped us to shed light on these issues.

The case of HLS gives us a lot of clues for rethinking the essences and dynamics of Chinese folk religion. Within our discussion, two interrelated issues are highly relevant: one is the issue of authenticity and aura (Sangren 1987:199-206); the other is the issue of the equilibrium model (Jordan 1972:172-177).

For our purpose, we may temporarily take "authenticity" as the thing defined by cultures as the very essence of the core value. Of course, it is hard to judge which parts of the world—tangible or intangible things—are more authentic. For sure, the authenticity must be articulated through specific language and cultural contexts. Whereas the power forms could be differentiated into subcategories, such as political, economic, or ideological/normative power (Poggi 2001), there certainly might be competitive discourses on which parts of the world are more authentic. Besides, especially for the ideological/normative power (religious institutes usually are the main carriers of this power), due to its very normative orientation, for maintaining its own authenticity or purity, it often has a need to keep some distance from other forms of power.

In terms of the context of pilgrimage, Sangren (1987:199) uses MacCannell's (1976:48) discussion of tourism to bring out the issue of "aura and authenticity" under Chinese contexts. According to MacCannell (1976:48, citation in Sangren 1987:199):

"The work of art [or tourist attraction] becomes 'authentic' only after the first copy of its produced.的 The reproduction is the aura, and the associated ritual, far from being the point of origin, derives from the relationship between the original object and its socially constructed importance."

Here, I will not fall into Sangren's discussion of "aura and authenticity" through the Chinese concept of *ling* 靈 (efficacy). Yet, I want to emphasize that within the subdomain of a culture, there is always a baseline for defining aura and authenticity. In so doing, a sense of transcendence in the specific culture's subdomain can also be enhanced.

With regard to another issue mentioned earlier, the "equilibrium model of Chinese religion," I want to rephrase it in philosophical and epistemological terms. Without involving too much detail, here it is sufficient to point out that the equilibrium model of Chinese religion could be counted as one kind of "coherence theory of truth." Epistemologically, the coherence theory of truth states that the truth of any (true) proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions (Joachim 1906). The coherence theory differs from its principal competitor, the "correspondence theory of truth" (Russell 1906). These two competing theories give conflicting accounts of the relation between propositions and their truth conditions. According to the former, the relation is coherence; according to the latter, it is correspondence. The two theories also give conflicting accounts of truth conditions. According to the coherence theory, the truth conditions of a proposition are to be found in other propositions. The correspondence theory, in contrast, states that the truth conditions of propositions are not propositions, but rather objective features of the world. (see "The Coherence Theory of Truth," in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at http://plato.standord.edu/entiries/truth-coherence/).

By criticizing different versions of the coherence theory truth, the "correspondence theory of truth" was developed and advocated by Russell (1906) and Moore (1910-11) in the early twentieth century. These labels could be applied much more broadly to refer to whether the truth is based upon internal coherence or its relation to external reality.

Then, in terms of coherence theory or correspondence theory, we may say that Chinese folk religion could be characterized as one kind of coherence theory. For example, even though phrased in different terms and different logic, Jordan's idea of the equilibrium model can be roughly corresponded to, or at least commensurate with, the coherence theory. Jordan (1972:172) writes that Chinese folk religion "is logically independent of the social practices to which it is attached and is therefore able to accommodate social change without suffering displacement."

Nevertheless, this coherence theory of Chinese folk religion still needs to face

the challenge of plausibility or say, the "correspondence of empirical facts." Again, according to Jordan's (1972:177) speculation: "Ultimately this belief system [Chinese folk religion] will probably be undermined. It will be undermined by essentially external forces—westernization, science, political paranoia—which maintain that there are no ghosts, that there are no gods......But it will not be undermined by its own inconsistencies."

Linking the above two interrelated issues (the issue of authenticity and aura as well as the issue of the equilibrium model), for our special purpose, we may say the following: (1) in its epistemological base, Chinese folk religion is a type of coherence theory; and (2) indeed, there might be, and must have been, some very authentic core in the Chinese folk religious system. Within this "coherence model," this authentic thing, by its "elements mutual interrelated" nature, logically thus, might not manifest in any specific elements; rather, it might manifest behind, and penetrate into, the interrelating elements of the system. In other words, this authenticity has a nature with both transcendent and imminent attributes.

Now, in facing social change, how might the Chinese folk religious system adapt itself? And, how might the previous claims of authenticity (e.g., the *ling*) be sustained? Or, might some new criterion of authenticity emerge?

From the case of HLS, it is interesting to notice that, in meeting external challenges of empirical accountability and plausibility (mainly from the sources of modernity), the adaptation of Chinese folk religion is not to enhance its empirical accountability; rather, it is to put its claims of "authenticity" in a more transcendental and more immanent way. It is more transcendental in the sense that its crucial new idea, the Precedent Heaven *ling* is way beyond any historical specification; more imminent, in the sense that now everyone share the same quality of transcendence in its more immediate level (without too much endeavor, even only by trance can authenticity be revealed). Besides, the representation of authenticity is not made more authentic through adding new information, but only through enhancing a previously rather implicit systematic discourse of religious teachings into an explicitly more systematic form of representation; that is, by following the criteria of authenticity within the coherent theory of truth and even sticking to these criteria more intensively.

The above thesis needs some further elaboration, yet here it is already sufficient to say that the Chinese folk religious system, by its very nature (with the quality of coherence truth), when it faces the challenge of "empirical correspondence," within its "coherence framework," its adjustment would not be to derive more empirical facts to prove its accountability. Rather, it would adjust by rebuilding or transforming its authenticity into a more transcendental, more internally penetrating, and more equally distributed base.

Of course, these adjustments may not assure this religious system's empirical correspondence; even worse, they may distance it further from the empirical reality. However, in regard to the system's internal logic and theoretical coherence, the authenticity of the truth would not be deteriorated even a bit.

For sure, inconsistency between the religious system and external reality may lessen the system's plausibility, yet it will not necessary weaken (actually most times it will strengthen) followers' faith in the system. Since once one has a deep conviction in a current belief, although the belief system has been challenged by disconfirming facts, strong group support and, most of the time, the enthusiastic act of proselyting can further strengthen and rationalize one's belief system (see the case in Festinger, Riechen, and Schachter 1956).

Nevertheless, given the drastic inconsistency, it is not to say that followers of the system remain quiet and peaceful within the system. In terms of "tribulations of the self," Giddens (1991:201) shows us that, against the complicated modern backdrop, in steering between the conflicting claims of rival types of abstract system, the self may face at least four kinds of dilemma or tension. In short, there are, unification versus fragmentation, powerlessness versus appropriation, authority versus uncertainty, and personalized versus commodified experience.

In other words, within the current world arena, no matter what the religion, the inconsistency between the religious worldview and the mechanical paradigm of the empirical explanation of the world already has become intense. Nevertheless, very often, this inconsistency will not deteriorate people's faith in the religious system, but instead it will only transform people's religiosity—including the nature, contents, and practices of the religion—into a new form. In HLS, we thus see a possible tranformation—into an almost entirely distanciated form—of Chinese folk religion in the modern world arena. Through this case study, we also get a chance to learn about the essences, dynamics, and patterned form of change of Chinese folk religion.

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Glossary

Bai Lian Jiao 白蓮教 ("White Lotus Society")

bai yang ci 白陽期 ("White Sun Period")

Chiaotian kung 朝天宮 (a Mazu temple in Peikung, Taiwan)

Cihui tang 慈惠堂 ("Temple of the Compassion Society")

Dimu 地母 ("Earth Mother")

fen ling 分靈 ("reproducing the joss image")

fen xiang 分香 ("dividing incense")

Guan Gong 關公 (the god of the military)

hou tian ling 後天靈 ("After Heaven *ling*")

hui ling shan, HLS 會靈山 ("Converging with the Spirit Mountain")

I-kuan Tao 一貫道 ("Way of Penetrating Unity")

Jinmu 金母 ("Golden mother"）

Jinxiang 進香 (pilgrimage).

Jiutian xuannu 九天玄女 (the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heaven)

Liaofan sixun 了凡四訓 ("The four lessons by Liaofan")

ling jiu shan 靈鷲山 (Gradrakuta Mountain or Vulture Mountain)

ling shan 靈山 ("Vulture Mountain": can refer to a "sacred place," "self-cultivation," or
    "one's true self")

Luan tang 鸞堂 ("Phenonix Hall" or "spirit-writing temple")

Matzu 媽祖 ("Goddess of Ocean")

Mingming Shangdi 明明上帝 ("the Most Bright Emperor")

Muniang xinyang 母娘信仰 ("Venerable Mother belief complex"）

Quan-yin 觀音 ("Goddess of Mercy")

Sancai 三才 ("three elements—heaven, earth, human—of cosmos")

san ci mo jie 三期末劫 ("The Third Eschatological Period")

San ging dao zu 三清道祖 (" The Three Pure Ones)

shan shu 善書 ("morality books")

Shanan gong 勝安宮 ("Temple of Supreme Peace")

Shen tan 神壇 ("private temple")

Taishang ganying pian 太上感應篇 ("Book of rewards and punishments")

Wangmu niangniang 王母娘娘 ("Mother Queen")

wu fang 五方 (five directions)

Wujitianyun gong 無極天元宮 ("Temple of the Apex of Nothingness and Original Heaven")

wumu 五母 ("five cosmic mothers")

Wusheng laomu 無生老母 ("Eternal Primordial Mother")

wu xing 五行 (five agents)

xian tian ling 先天靈 ("Precedent Heaven *ling*")

xian tian mu 先天母 ("Precedent Heaven Cosmic Mother")

xiu ling shan 修靈山 ("cultivating the sprit Mountain"; refers to "spiritual cultivation")

xi wangmu 西王母 ("Mother Queen of the West")

Xuan tian shang di 玄天上帝 ("the Supreme ruler of Obscure Heaven")

Yi jing 易經 (the "Book of Change")

Yinzhi wen 陰騭文 ("Track on Hidden Judgement")