

highly visible memorial arches and shrines, played a crucial role in the affirmation and dissemination of the cult in the final centuries of the imperial era. Lu also highlights the importance of childhood betrothal in creating a sense in the young girl that she already belonged to another family and the overwhelming importance of marriage in the female life-cycle: “without marriage, a woman’s life was incomplete” (p. 113). Should she live on in her natal home to be a burden to her brothers after the death of her parents? Would she lose a sense of moral integrity if she accepted another suitor? Should she force herself on the home of her deceased betrothed to face an uncertain welcome? The sexual repression required in the lifelong faithful maiden and faithful widow cult could also give rise to the kind of despair that led to suicide as the only choice. As Lu explains, “suicide came only after they saw overwhelming odds against the possibility of living on with the dignity to which they aspired” (p. 133).

The cult of the faithful maiden is another example, together with the egregious case of foot-binding, where Chinese women in imperial times persisted with what from a modern perspective would be called oppressive practices that led to their victimization and marginalization. In both cases, women responded to and helped to create elaborate ritual practices and discourses that validated and celebrated their fierce upholding of notions of female heroism. Readers of *True to Her Word* will no doubt continue to debate the extent to which the cult of the faithful maidens should be judged as a form of female agency or simply the result of restricted life choices and an intoxicating ideology of female virtue. Weijing Lu has made a path-breaking and illuminating contribution to our knowledge of one of the most intriguing phenomena in the history of Chinese women. *True to Her Word* will be indispensable reading for those with an interest in the cultural, social, and intellectual history of late imperial China.

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### *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan: Adapting to a Changing Religious Economy*

YUNFENG LU. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008. xi, 201 pages. ISBN 978-0-7391-1719-4. US\$65.00 hardcover.

As Daniel Overmyer has pointed out: “the great difference between China and both Europe and Japan is that in the Chinese situation, incipient ‘denominational’ or ‘church’ structures were never allowed to develop to their full potential because of official hostility, an

opposition present even during periods of political disunion."<sup>1</sup> For this reason, in Taiwan, after the lifting of martial law in 1987, it is a perfect time to observe this "full potential" of Chinese popular religion. However, the lifting of martial law also brought a newly open and free religious market to Taiwan. Under these circumstances, how can the religious economy model deriving from the observation of the United States be applied to Chinese religions?

When these two things—a full potential of Chinese popular religion and a newly open, free religious market—happen at the same historical moment, it does indeed give us a good chance to resolve these puzzles simultaneously. Yet it is also unfortunate that when these two lines intersect, a most confusing moment is produced. The phenomena we are observing could be due to the stimulation from the newly open free religious market, yet it is also very possible that we are just witnessing a full display of Chinese religious logic.

The book under review, *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan* by Lu Yunfeng, is based on his fieldwork conducted in 2002 in Taiwan, and it faces the two issues together. Lu's main focus is the applicability of the religious economy model to Chinese religions, yet he also has to deal with the problem of the potentiality of Chinese religions. Furthermore, as the author proposes to put these questions within the local context, an entire reflection on contextual and categorical differences between Chinese religions and Western religions is necessary. How much has Lu accomplished toward his ambitious goal?

The purpose of this book certainly is both empirical and theoretical; Lu summarizes: "it analyzes competition within the Yiguan Dao [一貫道] divisions and that between Yiguan Dao and its rivals. It also probes the impact of state regulation on the evolution of Yiguan Dao. As a theory-driven study, this book not only provides a detailed and complete picture of Yiguan Dao over the past twenty years, but also tries to develop the religious economy model by extending it to Chinese society" (p.16). The book covers several different levels and dimensions, including the interaction between macro-political factors and religious ecology (chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5); how the religious organization can adapt itself to different ecologies over time (chapters 5 and 6); how personal religious experiences may covariate with the external ecology (chapter 4); and how religious commitment develops along an additive path within Yiguan Dao (chapter 3).

With regard to the religious economy model, the author packages it into three levels: "[A]t the individual level . . . [the model] hypothesizes that people seek to gain rewards and otherworldly rewards from the deities . . . [and] the exchange relationship between gods and humankind evolves toward an exclusive one....At the group level, the new paradigm expands the sect-to-church theory and explains the long-term evolutions of religious institutions, arguing that religious organizations tend to choose an optimal degree of tension with the surrounding society and thus move along the continuum from rejection to acceptance of the environment. And finally, at the macro level, the new paradigm views religion as an economy with the same phenomena found in other economies: a 'market' of consumers, a number of products and services provided by religious 'firms,' a set of one or more religious firms

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<sup>1</sup> Overmyer, Daniel L. *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 63.

seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and a certain degree of competition and state regulation" (p.7).

When discussing the applicability of the religious economy model to Chinese society, the author reminds us of the danger of using concepts such as sects, state regulation, religious markets, etc., in Chinese institutional settings. He examines characteristics of Chinese religions such as non-exclusiveness, a policy of balanced religious oligopoly, Confucian ideas of heterodoxies, the competition for efficacy between and among different levels of temples, and boundaries blurring between different religions; however, in the end, the author never tries to refine or revise the religious economy model, but only, after very minor modification, to reaffirm the religious economy model's validity within Chinese religious contexts (p. 12).

"Tension," certainly, is one crucial part of the religious economy model reminding us to rethink the model (the other is "competition"). The model proposes that tension is not necessary for reducing the plausibility and viability of religion, just the opposite—an optimal degree of tension increases religions' vitality and robustness. If this is to hold true, then for Yiguan Dao the first question we may ask is that even though there is always a tension between Yiguan Dao and the government, mass media, and other established religions, what is the relation of Yiguan Dao with its very immediate and local surroundings? What kind of tension is it? Yet this question is never raised in this book. From the very start, as the author begins with the question of how a persecuted and stigmatized sect changes into an increasingly respected religion, the book already falls into a trap of dichotomy between orthodox and heterodox. This dichotomy, in China, is mainly initiated by official authority, established religions, and the mass media. Yet actually, rooted in the local context, Yiguan Dao's syncretic orientation could be seen as the representation of a long-term lasting Chinese orthodoxy. Furthermore, currently, the change in Yiguan Dao's image in the mass media and in the minds of official agents may be just a reflection of a religious populist perspective put forth by the newly developing democratic regime. Generally speaking, there is a change in the public image of Yiguan Dao, yet it is still needs to be clarified how much the relationship between Yiguan Dao and its local settings has changed.

At some points, the author makes too many concessions to the Western conceptual framework. In chapter 1, when discussing how Yiguan Dao could achieve its success in mainland China from 1930 to 1953, without hesitation, the author borrows Rodney Stark's eight criteria to examine Yiguan Dao's evolution.<sup>2</sup> He concludes that Yiguan Dao fulfilled all of these criteria, except for resisting the secularization of the socialization of the young. Here, indeed, Stark's criteria afford an easy cross-cultural comparison. Yet, as cultural implications within these criteria have not yet been explored, the comparison raises more questions than it answers. For example, within Chinese religious contexts, what are cultural continuity, social tension, dense networking, a favorable ecology, and resisting secularization? Without discussing the real meaning of these concepts in Chinese contexts, a cross-cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Stark, Rodney, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley and Philip E. Hammond (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 11-29.

comparison is not only premature but also compromises too much with the existing theoretical model.

Several treatments in this book exhibit very creative and admirable uses of sociological vision, such as in chapter 2, where the author shows how religious suppression may cause the following unintended consequences: doctrinal innovation, organizational adaptation, and an automatic barrier to mitigate the free-rider problem. In chapter 4, the author links market forces to an individual's religious experiences and shows that "religious suppliers appear to compete to provide religious experiences, which maximize their appeal to members and potential adherents. At the same time, they try to control these experiences so that they can only be properly pursued and understood within the group. They try to control these experiences to prevent innovations that could threaten the group's leadership and structure. It seems that competition forces religious firms to encourage or forbid some categories of religious experience" (p. 108).

From chapter 4 through chapter 6, the author attempts to link macro-ecological change with a meso-, even a micro-level of religious factors, including organizational structure, doctrinal transformation, and religious experience. However, one factor the author never clarifies is that, as mentioned already, the potentiality of Chinese religion and the influence of free-marketing on Chinese religion, even as they intertwine at the current historical moment, are actually two different things. Before we really know enough details about the full-fledged Chinese religion, especially the sectarian movement's doctrine and organizational lineal or cyclical path, it is difficult to accurately test the religious economy model's applicability to the Chinese religious context.

As a matter of fact, in Yiguan Dao's modern development we can see both continuity and discontinuity in the evolution of a Chinese sectarian movement. The continuity is its syncretism and self-assertion of the status of orthodoxy; the discontinuity is its social position change and further transformation. For official agencies, Yiguan Dao indeed did become an approvable democratic token, and its members could be mobilized to vote as a block to support a particular party or candidate during elections. Now, some of these continuities and discontinuities do come from ecological change, but others are just the full display of the potentiality of the Chinese sectarian movement. Are the various new religious phenomena in Taiwan, not only Yiguan Dao, simply a short part of a long historical wave? Or do they represent a great rupture from the already existing popular religious practices? Are they the result of the religious free market or are they just surfing on the hidden popular religiosity? The materials in this book do not offer us enough clues to answer these questions.

However, this book does have valuable contributions to both Yiguan Dao studies and general sociological studies on Chinese religion. The author does try very carefully to bring sociological concepts into the institutional settings of Chinese religions, and even though in the end he does not challenge the totalistic picture of the religious economy model, the book is already a good beginning. It seems that if we cannot clarify the real meaning of popular religious practices under the Chinese cultural and social complex, any piecemeal amelioration of the religious economy model may remind us that a new marketing ecology has come to China, but it still cannot really explain the internal dynamics, including the salvational goals,

dynamics of schism, tensions among different hegemonies, recurrent paths of cyclical transformation, and the relation between sacred books and their followers, of the Chinese sectarian movement through time.

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*Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*

RICHARD MADSEN. Berkeley: University of California, Press, 2007. xxvi, 191 pages. ISBN 978-0-520-25228-8. US\$21.95, £12.95, paperback.

This book written by a political scientist looks at the religious life of Taiwan from an unusual angle. Political scientists have usually looked at religion as a marginal phenomenon, and have subscribed to some versions of secularization theory that predicted its disappearance from the public sphere. Area study experts looking into South Asia or the Middle East have resisted this approach because of the political realities in these parts of the world and scholars on US politics have also rejected the view that religion would vanish from the political arena. Yet, despite these exceptions, most specialists working on the politics of East Asia have cast this part of the world as similar to Western Europe, immune from the passions of religious values and controversies. Research traditions in historiography, anthropology, and sociology have long ago questioned this vision of secularized Asian society, but for the most part, political scientists have ignored this dimension of public life. Richard Madsen's book provides a welcome exception to that trend. It looks at three Buddhist organizations: Tzu-chi 慈濟, Buddha's Light Mountain (Fo-kuang shan 佛光山), and Dharma Drum Mountain (Fa-ku shan 法鼓山), as well as a Taoist association, the Enacting Heaven Temple (Hsing-t'ien kung 行天宮), to explore the contribution of religious organizations to democracy. The central point of this book is that religious organizations in Taiwan often contain important seeds of autonomy, but of a kind that is not opposed to the government. By fostering moderation and in cooperating with the government in charity works, he argues, these organizations have played a conservative, stabilizing role in a society going through a rapidly changing political situation (p. 136).

After a discussion of Taiwan's religious context that emphasizes the importance of Confucianism and that pays due respect to the sociopolitical background, Richard Madsen provides a description of his case studies. He first discusses Tzu-chi, also known as the Buddhist Compassion Relief Association, which stands as Taiwan's major charity organization. Led by a charismatic figure of unquestioned authority, it may not seem a solid