

SEIWERT, HUBERT. *Volksreligion und nationale Tradition in Taiwan: Studien zur regionalen Religionsgeschichte einer chinesischen Provinz* [Folk religion and national tradition in Taiwan: studies on the regional religious history of a Chinese province]. Münchener ostasiatische Studien, Band 38. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985. 284 pages. Glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, index and glossary. Paper, DM 58,—; ISBN 3-515-04247-4. ISSN 0170-3668. (In German)

This book delivers what the title promises. It is a concise overview of religious organization and institutional traditions in Taiwan that is well-grounded in the literature, particularly Chinese and Western sources taking an anthropological perspective. The author's intent in this work is

to make an attempt to bring questions to bear upon research into the religions of China that in general are questions having sociological or ethnological import. The purpose is not to undertake an analysis that is oriented to the history of ideas in textually canonized religious traditions. The main thrust is rather to ask questions about the meaning that religious ideas, practices and institutions take on within a specific social context. In other words: religious history in the present work should not be understood only as a history of the mind, but also as social history [reviewer's translation].

The book proceeds from a now familiar point of view in sociologically and anthropologically oriented studies of Asian societies: the contrast of the great (elite, in this case "canonical") and little (peasant, in this case "local") traditions. Seiwert does not cite the intellectual origins of the sociological tradition (classically Toennies, Durkheim, Redfield, and a host of others), but he gives a definition of "folk religion" that creates implicitly a "folk-urban continuum," because folk religion for Seiwert is what is left when the scripturally based traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (i.e. the learned elite) are set aside.

In the first section of his book, Seiwert begins with a survey of the histories of temples and gods on Taiwan, for it is in this material that he finds sources that can be counterposed to the scriptural traditions. Seiwert then places these materials within the social context of the organizational forms of family and community, in order to discuss their social functions and questions of social change. He next describes concrete religious practices, such as community festivals, calendrical festivals, gods' birthdays, and rites of cosmic renewal (*jiao* 醮), as well as family oriented and individual religious rituals (domestic cults, mourning and ancestral cults, etc.) as a further aid to contextualization. Seiwert closes this section of the book by analyzing the roles of religious specialists and folk concepts of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" categories of the soul (*shen* 神 and *gui* 鬼) (139-141). He concludes that folk religion is an independent religious tradition having a "pragmatic" dimension. This "utilitarian motivation" of popular cults enabled them to outlast the official state cult that was extinguished with the fall of the dynastic system and to endure oppression under the Japanese regime (144).

The second major section of the book deals with Buddhist traditions on Taiwan. The social marginality of spatially segregated communities of monks is contrasted with the flourishing and socially important lay "vegetarian" sectarians. The third major section of the book then uses sources from local history to outline the introduction and institutional forms of official cults and rituals in Taiwan. The historically evolv-

ing relationship between official cult and folk religion is seen as demonstrating the greater vitality of the folk tradition. At the end of this section, the role of the gentry in Taiwan is seen as primarily one of accommodation to popular customs. Yet there were also some features of folk religion on Taiwan that were in some sense gentrified, since Seiwert notes that spirit writing cults (*fuluan* 扶鸞) were probably more attractive to the gentry because of their literary activities (238–239).

The book concludes with a consideration of how the religious history of Taiwan can be seen as the interaction of local and national traditions. Seiwert's conclusion is that folk religion in Taiwan does not represent a popular form of any of the literary traditions, but a regionally based, independent religious tradition (244). It remains to be seen, Seiwert says, how successful the present government will be in encouraging "orthodox" forms of Buddhist and Taoist organizations to replace the religious institutions of folk religion.

In general this reviewer is very content with Seiwert's work. It is short enough so that it does not exhaust one's concentration, yet it covers the most important literature on the topic very comprehensively. Furthermore, it integrates the source materials in a very readable way, organized by a clear conceptualization of local versus elite institutions. The glossary, references and index are clear and accessible. This reviewer regards the book as weak in its use of Japanese sources; it does not cite or use the important periodicals *Minzoku Taiwan* 民俗台灣 or *Taiwan Kanshū Kiji* 台灣慣習記事. Seiwert cites only five Japanese works, but he does acknowledge the importance of Japanese research on Taiwan. Although the Qing period and postwar period are intensively described, the Japanese period is not given comparable coverage. The religious practices surrounding geomancy are only mentioned in passing, even though these practices are very relevant to any discussion of conceptions of the soul or the relation of temples to the communities they service. In the concluding section of the book, Seiwert does not cite the important articles by Ahern (1981a) or Gates (1981), both of which are very relevant to pluralism and folk religion. I also think that Ahern's book (1981b) would have contributed much to Seiwert's discussion of the social functions of cult organization and religious ritual on Taiwan.

This is an important book. It is also a good book that reflects a powerful ability to integrate numerous primary and secondary sources into a cogent narrative.

REFERENCES CITED:

AHERN, Emily Martin

1981a The Thai Ti Kong festival. Ahern, Emily M. and Hill Gates eds. *The anthropology of Taiwanese society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pp. 397–426.

1981b *Chinese ritual and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

GATES, Hill

1981 Ethnicity and social class. Ahern, Emily M. and Hill Gates, eds. *The anthropology of Taiwanese society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pp. 241–281.

Gary Seaman
University of Southern California
Los Angeles