

Hsun Chang and Benjamin Penny, eds., *Religion in Taiwan and China: Locality and Transmission*

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Based on a workshop held at the Australian National University in 2013, this book covers a broad range of times, places, and religious actors and institutions. Of the twelve chapters, six focus on Chinese contexts, five on Taiwan, and one on Sino-Japanese religious exchange. Five contributions take a historical and/or text-based approach, while the other seven rely on ethnographic data and interviews. Two of the chapters are dedicated to Protestants in China; one each to Islam, Buddhism, New Age spirituality, and Yiguandao; another two take Taiwan's Indigenous peoples as their subject matter; but the majority of chapters (four) focus on popular religious practices—or local religion, as the editors prefer calling it (vii). However, since an emphasis on locality connects all religions discussed in this volume, this fine point does not add conceptual clarity. In the introduction, the editors lay out the reasons for the focus on local practice and the transmission of religion in concrete contexts. Religious practices are compared to dialects, which seem unintelligible from afar but merge into each other at points of cultural contact (xi). Unfortunately, the following chapters are not engaged in-depth, nor are the twin themes of locality and transmission really developed.

The individual chapters, while differing in length, conceptual language, and disciplinary approach, contain valuable contributions to their respective fields. Leading a series of historical papers, Chen Jidong shows through an analysis of letters the interconnections between persons and places in the transfer of “modern” Buddhist ideas between Japan, China, and London, where the monk Nanjō Bunyū went to study ancient Buddhist texts with Max Müller. While the Western study of Buddhism followed the structures of (British) colonialism and emphasized the importance of (Sanskrit) philology, Nanjō used his translations of early sutras for his own ends, namely to increase the legitimacy of his own school. Next, Luo Weiwei shows the many ways in which “local” temple cults in Qing-dynasty China were connected beyond the locality along economic and political networks of their patrons. Indeed, outside connections were crucial to the success of temple renovations, as “[t]he social connections of the residents of a location often determined its financial well-being, which was often in turn reflected in its patterns of temple renovations” (47).

Vincent Goossaert's chapter, a translation of a previously published article, examines the extent to which the well-known literati of the late Qing, Yu Yue (1821–1906), shared the religious cosmology of his family members. In the context of the author's previous work, this produces some evidence for the hypothesis that the generation of literati after

Yu drastically and negatively changed their stance toward popular practices. There are fine discussions of gender, the problem of “belief,” and the importance of family networks in determining the ideological views of the elite, but the chapter does not engage the book’s main subjects and the reader is left to interpret whether this generational change in late Qing China is due to a *lack* of cultural transmission. Jumping back in time a bit, Benjamin Penny’s chapter analyzes the writings of a British missionary’s wife in Britain’s settlement in Shanghai. The chapter features a short, interesting discussion of the illusion of bounded space created through (Western) maps of the concessions. However, the missionaries routinely transcended the locality of the British settlement and its rules via “itinerations”—trips for the purpose of proselytization. Unfortunately, the short chapter’s discussion of the notions of “inside” and “outside” feels unfinished.

Ting Jen-chieh’s chapter on fundamentalism in Yiguandao then makes a huge temporal-spatial leap to contemporary Taiwan. A thought-provoking challenge to Western-based theories of fundamentalism in monotheist religions, it observes that fundamentalism in Yiguandao is created through the sponsoring of new scriptures (attained via spirit-writing), rather than the continuous interpretation of old ones. Ting rests his claim to Yiguandao’s “quasi-fundamentalism” (160) on it being a case of Confucian cultural fundamentalism. But the question remains whether the fraught concept of fundamentalism is helpful for framing Yiguandao when the group has progressively and significantly relaxed its politico-religious chiliasm.

Chapter 6, by Kao Chen-yang, shows in a sensitive and intimate way how elders of the (Protestant) Little Flock in Fuzhou dealt with the question of whether they should work with the authorities of the Chinese Communist Party or resist them based on their faith. The principle of local independence looms large in the ideology of the Little Flock church and, under pressure from the state-administered, supra-local Three-Self Patriotic Movement, led to splits and two opposing approaches to dealing with secular state power. In the next chapter, Paul J. Farrelly outlines the importance of two music cafes for the Taiwanese New Age movement of the 1980s and 1990s as *genius loci*, that is, unique and important “cultural spaces.” Using the writings of Terry Hu, he shows how the famous writer “create[d] a retrospective origin that placed her at the centre” of Taipei’s folk music scene (221) and reinterpreted Chinese values through the medium of culture and music derived from the West.

Chapters 8 and 10, by Benoît Vermander and Hu Tai-li respectively, take Taiwan’s aboriginal culture as subject matter. Vermander shows how millet, though replaced in its economic role by rice, has retained symbolic value as a marker of indigenous identity in contemporary Taiwan. Myths and rituals surrounding millet “transmute” local-communal knowledge into a worldview but simultaneously connect this worldview to its natural and social environment (280–81). Hu asks why an ancestral festival held every five years has revitalized in one specific Paiwan settlement but not in others. She shows that the preservation of the ritual depends on the transmission of shamanic practices, which is correlated with the degree of Christianization as well as other factors such as elite and state support for shamans. In between these two chapters, Chang Hsun traces the connection between a highly successful, entrepreneurial Mazu temple and community development in rural Taiwan through NGOs. The chapter highlights the importance of the temple for local public affairs and development, while also discussing how this role has changed and how the temple was monopolized by local elites. All three

chapters contribute substantially to recent research on local community development in Taiwanese society.

Tiffany Cone's chapter on the significance of the Northwestern Chinese city of Linxia as the "Little Mecca" of Chinese Sufism sets out to trace the making of spiritual power through holy sites. Her ethnography of everyday life in one Sufi shrine then focuses more on the issue of attaining and transmitting spiritual power (*baraka*). The author touches briefly on the highly suggestive concept of charisma, which could use some unfolding. Individual charisma also reverberates in the last chapter, by Li Geng, who analyzes the life stories of three "diviners" in China who differ in terms of their success, status, and self-image. This very well-written and argued paper casts those diviners as *jianghu*, a category on the margins of organized, official society that builds on a range of ambiguous values and characteristics. Being on the margins of the capitalist system opens up spaces for alternative practices and thoughts but also leaves them vulnerable to downward social mobility. While fascinating in its own right, the link with locality or transmission could have been made more explicit.

The diversity of contributions is the source of both the book's strengths and weaknesses. The chapters, which seem to follow no particular order, would have benefitted from more explicit connections and additional copyediting. Notwithstanding this overall incoherence, the consistently high quality of the individual chapters should make them valuable reading for interested specialists.

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