

provides some reassurance: "Not all the books on Feng Shui that mention the *I Ching* are listed in this bibliography," it says, and the reader heaves a sigh of relief.

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MOSKOWITZ, MARC L. *The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001. viii + 206 pages. Plates, appendix, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper US\$24.95; ISBN 0-8248-2428-8.

The Haunting Fetus is a study about a ritual phenomenon, called Fetus-Ghost Appeasement, that appeared in recent years in Taiwan. The author believes that it is a new cult.

A fetus ghost is the spirit of an aborted infant who is believed to bring serious troubles, such as illness, misfortune, accidents, etc., to its parents, especially its mother. According to the author, rites for fetus ghosts and religious institutions that cater to them have dramatically increased since the 1980s, in particular for the following two reasons: the introduction of a similar belief in spirits in the middle of the 1970s from Japan, and the legalization of abortion in 1984. Further related to these reasons were a change in the thinking of young people about sex, the influence of government policies in family planning, and the commercialization of religion.

Over a period of two years, beginning in 1996, the author interviewed more than 150 people, and collected rich primary material about the image the Taiwanese hold about these fetus ghosts, about what misfortunes they believe the spirits cause, and about their ethical views. He gathered further material not only from religious practitioners who deal with these spirits, but also from the mass media, including movies, books, and newspapers. Thus he analyzes the fetus-ghost belief from various angles. The variety of materials gathered and their comparison is an interesting feature of this book, and it provides a good empirical base for analysis.

Although the author makes it a point to stress the relationship of fetus-ghost beliefs with traditional popular beliefs, he argues that it is a new form of religion, a consequence of the rapid modernization and industrialization of Taiwan's contemporary society. It seems to me that the concept of the "commodification of sin," which the author introduces in the later chapters of the book, is particularly important and helpful for a better understanding of religion in modern Taiwan.

This concept refers, first of all, to the commercialization of rituals. Moskowitz describes how some of the religious practitioners he studied requested their clients to pay large sums of money but used it to build up their own fortune. In some cases this became the source of serious trouble between religious practitioner and believers. The key question, however, is this: Why were the believers so eager to have the rituals performed when they were so expensive? The answer is that they assumed that the fetus ghost was causing their misfortune and, therefore, needed to be appeased. In paying for the rituals they intended to atone for their sin, abortion, and so expected to change their fortune for the better. The phenomenon can, therefore, rightly be called "commodification of sin."

Moskowitz interprets this as a modern strategy of religion. As a consequence of an all-pervasive consumer economy, financial dealings also quite naturally invaded religious life causing rituals to be consumed as "commodities." According to his analysis the religious practitioners invented rituals and magic dealing with causes of misfortune as a new "commodity" in order to respond to the needs of their clients.

Yet, there remains the important question: Why did people come to fear the fetus ghosts? Moskowitz considers Chinese traditional thinking about sexuality to be the reason for such a fear. In chapter 9 he discusses classic texts to back up his interpretation, and as a result he appears to be less empirical in this section than in the earlier chapters. It seems to me that it would have been more fruitful to pay attention to the change that occurred in the image people harbor about the spirits of the dead.

In traditional Taiwanese society people arrange for a special kind of marriage ritual, a so-called "ghost marriage," to be performed for a child, particularly for a girl, who died before having reached adulthood. Premature death was believed to cause an ambiguous and dangerous situation for these girls, because according to the society's patrilineal ideology all women are obliged to marry a man of another descent group and give birth to descendants of their husband's descent group. After her death, a woman's descendants will worship her as their ancestor. If she dies unmarried, she has no status in genealogy and nobody will worship her, causing her to remain in an ambiguous state. In order to remedy this situation, a "ghost marriage" is performed for her. It would appear, therefore, that the intention to guarantee the woman a well defined place according to patrilineal ideology is more important than the fear of spirits.

The Fetus-Ghost Appeasement discussed in this book shows a quite different kind of approach to spirits. The fetus ghosts, it seems to me, are closer to the ghosts that appear in Western and Japanese horror movies. In recent years there has been a tendency in Taiwanese TV programs to take up mysterious phenomena allegedly caused by spirits of the dead. This tendency is quite new. Under the strong influence of such programs, it is not surprising that a traditional society like Taiwan's came to adhere to hitherto unknown images of the spirits of the dead. This demonstrates how important it is to consider the influence exerted by the mass media when analyzing contemporary culture.

The author's discussion of the Fetus-Ghost Appeasement brings to light two important aspects of modern Taiwanese culture: commercialization and the influence of the mass media. *The Haunting Fetus* is, therefore, a study rich in suggestions for the analysis of modern Taiwanese society.

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SCHNELL, RENÉ. *Briefe aus Shanghai 1946–1952. Dokumente eines Kulturschocks*. Das volkscundliche Taschenbuch 23. Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 2000. 268 pages. Maps, photos, index. Paper n. p.; ISBN 3-85791-310-X. (In German)

Life histories and their study have become an important branch of folklore and anthropological research, and a precious source of insider information about a particular culture. Often, however, these histories are reported by the researcher and are, therefore, presented in a somewhat "purified" or edited "presentable" form, so to speak. The series *Das volkscundliche Taschenbuch*, published by the Swiss Society of Folklore (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde), that includes *Briefe aus Shanghai* makes it a point to retain as much as possible an author's idiosyncrasies. Due to this procedure the reader can savor the world and the thinking of the author. At times it may even happen to an almost embarrassing degree; in some cases the reader may be inclined to think that certain expressions should not have passed the copy editor's desk without being reshaped. However, it is just this kind of imme-