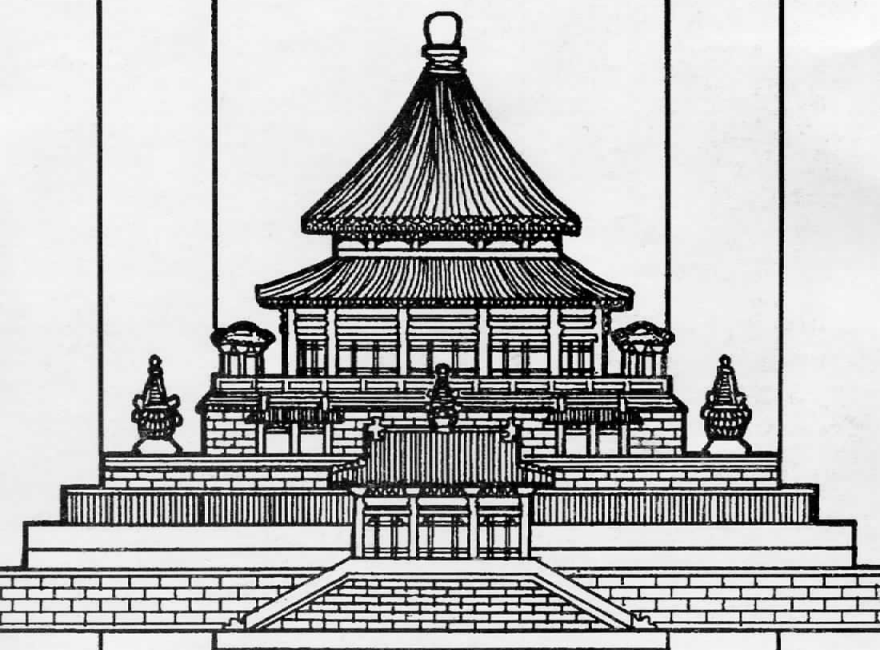


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Philip Clart

SECTS, CULTS, AND POPULAR RELIGION: ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN POST-WAR TAIWAN

I. Introduction

This paper attempts to analyze and discuss the nature of religious change in Taiwan since 1945, focussing in particular on the development of popular and sectarian religion.¹ Local observers describe religious change on the island mostly in terms of concepts derived from Western modernization theory: modernization, secularization, commercialization, rationalization etc. Orthodox modernization theory, however, does not easily explain the religious scenario in Taiwan, where profound economic rationalization and the typical social changes associated with modernization seem to have been accompanied, not by a significant decline of religious institutions, but rather by an unprecedented burgeoning of the same. The author of a Taiwanese university textbook on social change writes somewhat perplexedly:

¹ Earlier versions of this article have been presented at the 10th Conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies (Prague, August 29 - September 1, 1994), and at a "Graduate Student Colloquium" in the Dept. of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, on October 24, 1994. I would like to thank Mrs. Linda Christensen, Mr. André Laliberté, Prof. Daniel L. Overmyer and Prof. Julian Pas for their helpful comments and criticism. In transliterating Chinese terms, as a rule, I follow the Hanyu Pinyin system. Exceptions are certain place-names (such as Taipei and Kaohsiung), for which other spellings have become customary, and personal names, if the individual in question has established his or her own preferred romanization for the name.

.... as a result of Taiwan's successful industrialization and economic development, irrational customs and behaviours ought to recede. Since religious belief leans toward a mystical and irrational culture, it "ought" to decrease gradually and be substituted by rational culture.

In fact, however, this is not happening. Religious belief in Taiwan is not only not on the retreat, but quite to the contrary shows a tendency to increase.²

Put thus, Taiwanese empirical data appear to contradict the predictions of modernization theory, putting a question mark behind its validity. Before examining these empirical data, a cursory look at historical and contemporary Western interpretations of that concept within modernization theory most relevant for the interpretation of religious change, namely "secularization", is called for. From this discussion I hope to derive a theoretical framework that will help in making sense of contemporary religious change in Taiwan. I also think it useful to have an understanding of the Western traditions of thought and social realities that produced the concept of secularization, before applying it to non-Western societies. The universal and the particular elements in the process of religious change in Taiwan will stand out the more clearly when viewed against the background of the interpretation of religious change in Western societies.

II. Western Views of Secularization

The fate of religion in modern society has been a subject of intense debate among Western intellectuals since the Age of Enlightenment. At that time secular

² Cai 1990:226.

philosophies started to challenge successfully the dominance of religious thought; these philosophies accompanied the rise of modern science, following up the latter's debunking of the established churches' dogmas on the character of physical nature with an attack on their conceptions of spiritual reality. Nineteenth century philosophers like Auguste Comte posited the notion of humanity's spiritual evolution towards rationality to proclaim the coming of a modern, rational society that would have no need for religion, except in secularized forms such as Comte's sociocentred "religion de l'humanité" or Guyau's metaphysical philosophy. While it never went completely unchallenged, this belief in the inevitability of secularization continued to play an important role in many branches of Western thinking, including those that are of most interest to us here--the social sciences.³ As late as 1966 anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace maintained that

... as a cultural trait, belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as a result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge and of the realization by secular faiths that supernatural belief is not necessary to the effective use of ritual. The question of whether such a denouement will be good or bad for humanity is irrelevant to the prediction; the process is inevitable.⁴

Since the 1960s, social scientists have, however, become less sanguine about the death of religion and have turned to studying the actual changes of religion in modern Western societies. Sociologist Jeffrey K. Hadden has even denounced "secularization theory" as a largely

³ For a summary and discussion of "traditional" social science approaches to modernization and secularization see Lien-chin Wu 1984:chapter 1.

⁴ Wallace 1966:265.

unfounded ideology, distorting our view of social realities that in actuality do not show much sign of secularization.⁵ However, before assessing the degree of empirically detectable secularization, one needs to clarify the concept itself. Here we find that the process of secularization is postulated by its proponents as two-pronged: there is an “objective secularization”, affecting institutions, and a “subjective secularization” affecting individual consciousness.⁶ The first refers to the substitution of rational modes of thinking and behaviour for religious ones in important sectors of a modern society, such as the economy and administration. The latter describes the diminishment of religious motifs in the individual consciousness of that society’s members. The process of objective secularization has been studied by many sociologists and can be accepted as sufficiently verified. Hadden’s critique, however, though he speaks of secularization in general, is directed exclusively against its subjective variety, and he adduces statistical and impressionistic data to show that personal religiosity is not on the wane in the United States, concluding that these “data suggest that secularization is not happening.”⁷ However, if the death of religion postulated by a secularization ideology is not in evidence, this does not necessarily mean that no secularization is going on. Rather, this should direct our attention to an inquiry into the social forms secularization actually takes in modern societies, and in particular to the study of the empirical relationship between “objective” and “subjective” secularization.

One sociologist who has continuously employed the concept of secularization, while trying to document the actual religious changes happening in modern

⁵ Hadden 1989.

⁶ These terms are borrowed from Sironneau 1982. Cf. Peter L. Berger’s usage of “secularization of society and culture” and “secularization of consciousness” [1969:107].

⁷ Hadden 1989:22.

societies, is Peter L. Berger. He does not posit the eventual death of religion. His anthropology sees humans as meaning-producing beings; deprived by nature of a ready-made instinctual life-world, humans have to construct for themselves a meaningful world to live in. Human society is an "edifice of externalized and objectivated meanings, always intending a meaningful totality. Every society is engaged in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world."⁸ Religion is meaning-building on a cosmic scale: the attempt to conceive of the whole cosmos as humanly meaningful.⁹ While the thoroughly sacred cosmoi of traditional societies are progressively secularized by science in modern societies, there remain sectors of ultimate meaning that science or secular philosophy so far have not been able to conquer. An important one is the problem of theodicy which occupies a central position "for any religious effort at world-maintenance, and indeed also for any effort at the latter on the basis of a non-religious *Weltanschauung*".¹⁰ Up to now, such non-religious world-views have not been very successful in constructing theodicies that remain persuasive in the long run. More explicitly, Jean-Pierre Sironneau emphasizes that "man cannot live without the sacred,"¹¹ because only the sacred provides a transcendent point of reference which allows us to break through the closed unidimensionality of modern existence. "Political religions," such as fascism, are in the final analysis only pseudo-religions, subject to rapid demystification exactly because they lack this external reference point of the sacred. Philosophies that choose to eschew the problem of theodicy altogether have not been very successful either: the anomic liberty of the existentialist "homme absurde" has not proved to possess any mass appeal.

⁸ Berger 1969:28.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Berger 1969:80.

¹¹ Sironneau 1982:562,565.

Thus we are left with the conclusion that religion still has a role to fulfill in modern society, namely that of providing the individual with ultimate meanings. What has greatly changed, however, is the social context in which religion continues to fulfill this core function. While traditionally religion constituted a unitary "sacred canopy" spanning the whole of society and endowing it with religious meaning, in modern society it has become a pluralistic social subsystem of relevance mainly to the private sphere of the individual with little influence on other differentiated subsystems such as economy or politics. For Berger, the central characteristic of modern society is the plurality of life-worlds which the individual maintains synchronically and diachronically. These life-worlds fall respectively into the two spheres of public and private life, with religion being relegated to the latter. While in traditional society the whole of society served as plausibility structure for the religious system, religion in modern society has to build and maintain its own supporting structures in the form of voluntary associations. The meanings offered by them are not taken-for-granted truths, but beliefs that constantly have to withstand the relativizing impact of the secular meanings governing the public sphere or competing interpretations of other religious groups. "Faith is no longer socially given, but must be individually achieved."¹² And achieving faith is not enough: it also has to be maintained. Social meanings are maintained by and within social structures, but, as we have seen, the fact that religion has to rely on voluntary associations in a pluralistic environment means that the meanings supported by religious institutions are constantly in danger of relativization, thereby losing their ability to provide ultimate, i.e., absolute,

¹² Berger, Berger & Kellner 1973:81.

interpretations of the human condition. In Berger's words:

In their private lives individuals keep on constructing and reconstructing refuges that they experience as 'home.' But, over and over again, the cold winds of 'homelessness' threaten these fragile constructions. It would be an overstatement to say that the "solution" of the private sphere is a failure; there are too many individual successes. But it is always very precarious.¹³

To sum up: religion in general continues to provide ultimate meanings to individuals, but the hold of any one specific religion on the consciousness of the individual members of a society has been much attenuated.

The plurality of religious groups in any modern Western society competing for adherents has led to the conceptualization of a "religious economy." Berger develops some aspects of this religious marketplace, where believers are consumers, religious meanings and services commodities, religious institutions marketing agencies.¹⁴ Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, working mainly from American data, have proposed an economic model of religion, based on a rather straightforward anthropology which they sum up in one sentence: "Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and try to avoid what they perceive to be costs."¹⁵ Some rewards are difficult or impossible to attain; for these, "compensators" function as substitutes. A compensator is basically an IOU, a promise that the reward sought after will be attained at a later point in

¹³ Berger, Berger & Kellner 1973:188.

¹⁴ Berger 1969:137ff.

¹⁵ Stark & Bainbridge 1985:5.

time. According to the nature of the reward promised, compensators can be specific or general, short or long term. Some rewards (such as eternal life) are so far-reaching that credible compensators can only be created by postulating a supernatural agency able to redeem them. The production, maintenance, and exchange of such supernaturally based general compensators is the primary purpose of religion.¹⁶ The demand for such unattainable rewards as “eternal life” and “ultimate meaning” is an anthropological constant and reserves for religion in any society a position ultimately unassailable by secular ideologies which, due to their lack of a supernatural agency, cannot produce the general compensators needed to meet this human demand. From this follows that secularization is a self-limiting process: when it comes to affect a religious institution to the extent that it cannot produce and sell credible general compensators anymore, the consequence may be the death of this particular religious institution, but not the death of religion. The demand for supernaturally based general compensators continues to exist and new suppliers will appear to satisfy it. Thus secularization produces its own opposite, a tendency of resacralization that takes two different forms: sects and cult movements. The former are dissenters split off from an established church in the grips of secularization, aiming to revive the original spirituality of its parent tradition. The latter are innovative religious groups that either invent novel forms of religious compensators or import them from another culture. Of the two, cults are the more interesting form. While sects try to revive an already much eroded tradition, cults have the competitive advantage of entering the market with new products unburdened by the failure of earlier versions. In the long run, their chances of becoming major religious institutions are better than those of sects, and serious

¹⁶ Stark & Bainbridge 1985:6-7,172.

future contenders for churchhood may presently still be hovering along the fringes of religious economies. These fringes therefore warrant particular attention.¹⁷ Stark and Bainbridge differentiate three types of cults: 1. audience cults, 2. client cults, 3. cult movements. Audience cults are systems of thought that exist mainly in print and lecture form, addressing themselves to an unorganized, anonymous audience and readership. The difference between client cults and cult movements is basically that between magic and religion. Client cults sell specific, short term compensators (such as love potions, horoscopes etc.) that are falsifiable and unable to bind their clients together into a community of believers. This is what cult movements achieve with their general, truly religious compensators. Thus, of the three types, only cult movements count as genuinely religious movements.¹⁸ Stark and Bainbridge make a very sharp distinction between magic and religion: because the short term, specific compensators of magic are falsifiable and unable to sustain organizations,¹⁹ religious movements in the long run have to rid themselves of these instability-inducing magical elements.²⁰ These are the basic outlines of Stark and Bainbridge's model of the religious economy, developed from and for American data. It is not incompatible with Berger's sociology of knowledge; in fact, it seems to restate it in economic terms. And although I find its equation of *homo religiosus* with *homo oeconomicus* rather too simplistic, the model as a whole is able to make sense of some important phenomena of religious change in the United States.

17 Stark & Bainbridge 1985:2.

18 Stark & Bainbridge 1985:26ff.

19 Here the authors quote approvingly Durkheim's dictum that there can be no church of magic [Stark & Bainbridge 1985:33].

20 Stark & Bainbridge 1985:116ff.,456.

Let us now see whether the theoretical insights we have gained from this selection of Western sociological treatments of the problems of secularization and religious change can help us understand the religious dynamics of contemporary Taiwan.

III. Religious Change In Taiwan

Let us return to the baffled sociologist's wonderment, cited above, at the stubborn survival of religion in modern Taiwan. What are the social changes that made him expect adverse effects on religion? First, there is the massive restructuring of the economy from an agricultural to an industrial base: The proportion of people employed in agriculture dropped from 57% in 1952 to 11.49% in 1993.²¹ This shift in labour patterns was accompanied by urbanization: by 1993 57.3% of Taiwan's population lived in localities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, a further 37.1% in places with 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants. The respective figures for 1962 are 29.6% and 36.4%.²² In the field of education we are witnessing the proportion of illiterates falling from 34.6% in 1951 to 8.62% in 1993.²³ In 1993, 14.23% of the Taiwanese population of 25 and over had attained a post-secondary and 44.51% a secondary level of education.²⁴ These statistics show the massive restructuring Taiwanese society has undergone since the 1950s. These developments accelerated from about the second half of the 1960s, turning Taiwan into a thoroughly modern society in many respects. We are thus faced with social conditions such as high levels of industrialization, urbanization, income, and education, that are indicative of modernization and therefore presumably conducive to secularization. The question to be examined in the

²¹ Chang 1984:140; Statistical Yearbook 1993:54.

²² Statistical Yearbook 1992:25; 1993:25.

²³ Cai 1990:229; Statistical Yearbook 1993:94.

²⁴ Statistical Yearbook 1993:95.

following sections is, if, to what extent, and in what manner this secularization is taking place in Taiwan. We will take a look first at the micro-level of changes in individual religiosity, and then at the macro-level of structural religious change.

1 Changes in Individual Religiosity

Several large-scale studies have been undertaken to measure changes in social consciousness among the Taiwanese population, some directed very generally towards an assessment of the relative modernity and traditionality of different sectors of the population, some more specifically towards changes in the religious beliefs and behaviour of the individual. For reasons of space, I will here focus on the latter. One of the earliest such studies is that by Lien-chin Wu, working from a set of data gathered between 1972 and 1975 among seven communities in northern and eastern Taiwan.²⁵ His study addresses the question of how far three key components of modernization, viz. secularization, industrialization, and urbanization, affect popular religious belief and practice. His conclusion is that these three determinants account for only about 35% of variation in popular religiosity. Of this the greater part is related to secularization (defined mainly through level of education), with urbanization and industrialization playing only a minor role. On the level of community popular religious practice the explanatory power of the modernization model dropped to 5% of variance. He concludes that the Taiwanese data do not go very far in supporting the predictions of conventional modernization theory concerning the inevitable decline of popular religions.²⁶ Working from data from a 1985 island-wide survey, Zhou Xuehui paints

²⁵ Lien-chin Wu 1984.

²⁶ Lien-chin Wu 1984:272f.

a somewhat more optimistic picture, detecting significant variation in popular religious practices in relation to modernizing factors, with education again playing the most prominent role.²⁷ However, Zhou also discovered that for some divinatory practices such as drawing oracle sticks and fate calculation there was either no significant variation according to level of education, or highly educated individuals were even more likely to perform these acts than individuals of low education. Zhou interprets this as a reflection of the utilitarian function of popular religion which remains attractive to intellectuals having to survive in a highly competitive urban environment.²⁸ These variations have to be seen in the overall context of the 1985 survey which shows that two-thirds of the respondents can be classified as popular religionists, 3.1% as genuine Buddhists, 5.5% as followers of Western religions, and 11.7% as being without religion.²⁹ The thoroughly secularized sector of society, according to these data, is represented by the latter category of "non-religionists". However, as the above classification used criteria of objects of worship and devotional practices, these non-worshipping 11.7% may still hold some beliefs and perform some practices that do not involve formal worship of deities. In a study conducted in 1986 in Hsinchu City, Song Wenli and Li Yih-yuan found that most self-declared non-religionists (9.8% of the sample) still held a number of beliefs and performed a number of practices which can be viewed as part of "traditional Chinese religion".³⁰ These results taken together reveal that the individual secularization brought about by the

27 Zhou 1989:106.

28 Zhou 1989:67,70.

29 Zhou 1989:101. These figures do not reflect the respondents' self-declarations, but are based on behavioral indicators.

30 Song Wenli & Li Yih-yuan 1988. It must be pointed out, however, that these authors use an extremely broad definition of "traditional Chinese religion", practically equating it with "traditional world-view."

modernization of Taiwanese society is a matter of degree, varying with the parameters used to delimit it, but is in any case not a majority phenomenon. The vast majority of the Taiwanese population still holds religious beliefs and engages in some form of religious practice. If, then, individual religiosity continues to survive and thrive in Taiwan, the question arises as to what social forms religion is taking nowadays. This will be addressed in the next section.

2 Social-Structural Changes

In a recent article on religious change in post-war Taiwan, David K. Jordan claims that up to now very little research has focussed on the transformation of traditional religion in Taiwan.³¹ This, however, is true only to the extent that one ignores the copious Chinese-language research in this field. Much of it is quantitative in nature and shall here serve as a basis for the later discussion of qualitative perceptions of religious change.

According to C.K. Yang, traditional Chinese religion takes on the two structural forms of diffused and institutional religion.³² If we look at the religious situation in Taiwan around the year 1945, we notice the existence of a widespread diffused system of religion, called popular religion, and of several forms of institutional religion, among them indigenous ones (like monastic Buddhism, sects such as the Longhua Pai, Jintong Pai, and Xiantian Dao, and spirit-writing societies), as well as imported ones (such as Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, and Tenrikyô).

³¹ Jordan 1994:137.

³² Yang 1961:20.

The scales, however, were tipped heavily in favour of popular religion, with an estimated 95% of the population adhering to it.³³ It is this popular religion that practically all the early ethnographic field studies have focussed upon and that the Western student therefore tends to identify with Taiwanese religion *per se*.

One of the most easily quantifiable indicators of institutional religious change is the number of registered places of worship, which in Taiwan means mainly temples and churches. Examining only the figures for non-Christian worship places, we find their total number according to official statistics rising from 3,840 in 1960 to 5,539 in 1981.³⁴ This impressive increase is relativized by the concomitant increase in population: the numbers of "Buddhist" and "Daoist" temples per 10,000 inhabitants increased from 3.12 in 1956 to 3.51 in 1980.³⁵ These figures are not to be taken at their face value, but simply as an indicator of the changes going on. The official statistics on which they are based are often quite inaccurate and incomplete.³⁶ Apart from the problem of official temple affiliation ("Buddhist" and "Daoist" as catch-all terms), these figures also do not take into account the many unregistered temples.³⁷ Furthermore, the rates of increase do not reflect the widespread rebuilding on a grander scale of old

33 Chu 1993:393.

34 Yu 1982:77.

35 Yu 1982:72.

36 Informal estimates put the actual number of temples in 1980 at about 12,000 [Sung 1985:208].

37 In a new study Sung Kwang-yu shows that of the 72 temples and "spirit shrines" (*shentan*) founded in Kaohsiung City between 1986 and 1991, 69 (or 95.9% of the total) did not register with the city government [1994a:2f.]. In another article, Sung quotes an official statistic according to which there exist two and a half times as many unregistered as registered temples in Taipei City [1994b:176].

temples.³⁸ These figures do demonstrate, however, that traditional religions, at least as far as they are related to temples, are not in decline, but rather display a trend of growth.

Having established that, we can now turn to a more qualitative evaluation of the characteristics of religious change in post-war Taiwan. One aspect noted by several authors is a change in the relative popularity of different deities. Some deities whose cult served as subethnic marker during the period of communal strife under the Qing dynasty (such as the Sanshan Guowang) have stagnated or decreased, while "pan-Chinese" deities such as Guan Sheng Dijun, Xuantian Shangdi, Fuyou Dijun, and Sakyamuni Buddha are on the rise.³⁹ This points to the diminishing importance of subethnic identities and the formation of a pan-Taiwanese identity under the political pressure of mainlander domination.

The significant increase in numbers of temples evidenced by the statistics quoted above has its roots in the strong growth of their financial resources. Average per-capita income in Taiwan has grown tremendously over the last thirty years and so even without an increase in the proportion of household income devoted to religious purposes, the absolute amount of money flowing into temples has grown significantly.⁴⁰ This resulted in great rebuilding projects for many temples, sometimes spurred on by competition with rival

³⁸ For discussions of the problems involved in using official temple statistics see Yu 1982, Chu 1992:1044-1059, and Sung 1994b:175-176.

³⁹ Yu 1982:79ff. Cf. Thompson 1964:335.

⁴⁰ Jordan 1994:142. Working from official statistics, Sung Kwang-yu [1994b:189-190] notes that in the 1980s periods of faster and slower increases in the number of registered temples correlate with a time lag of three to four years to corresponding changes in the average family income.

temples.⁴¹ The increasing amounts of money available for religious purposes have prompted new suppliers of religious services (or “compensators” in Stark and Bainbridge’s terminology) to enter the market. And a market it is: one of the most common diagnoses of the situation of religion in modern Taiwan is that of its increasing commercialization. With growing mobility and therefore decreasing allegiance to specific community temples, there has developed a market for non-community based temples and “spirit shrines” (*shentan*) catering to individuals who place their money where they expect the best results. Li Yih-yuan has interpreted this phenomenon as a manifestation of the ingrained “utilitarianism” of popular religion, a feature that makes popular religion well adapted to modern Taiwanese society, where economic insecurity and competitiveness create anxieties and tensions that can be lessened by the harnessing of additional, supernatural sources of support.⁴² This “utilitarianism” is certainly a relevant factor, but in my view demographic mobility is probably at the root of the phenomenon; it cuts individuals loose from the rural community temple networks which have dominated traditional popular religion and makes them into largely unattached religious consumers, thus creating the conditions under which any “utilitarianism” can come into full play. For the origin of many of these private run temples and spirit shrines Stark and Bainbridge’s “entrepreneur model” of cult formation seems applicable.⁴³ They often are started by enterprising individuals as businesses specializing in the sale of specific compensators (such as healing, personal advice, divine protection etc.) to a paying, unorganized clientele. Thus, in many respects they are similar to Stark and Bainbridge’s “client cults”.⁴⁴ In the

41 Yu 1982:97.

42 Li Yih-yuan 1982:426. Sung 1985:219.

43 Cf. Stark & Bainbridge 1985:178.

44 On some aspects of the formation of *shentan* see Sung 1994a.

1980s *shentan* seem to have received a particular boost from the great market demand for number predictions in the illegal *dajiale* lottery craze.⁴⁵ This religious market embraces not only private temples, but increasingly traditional community temples have also entered the competition. One of the best known phenomena in this respect is the rapid expansion of the pilgrimage business and the concomitant competition for visitors between pilgrimage centres.⁴⁶ While pilgrimages may fulfill important cognitive functions as fields "for communicating, validating, and reproducing important cultural categories,"⁴⁷ for the temples involved they are also significant economic factors. With the land reform of the 1950s, some community temples lost a significant portion of their income from land held by themselves or by religious associations⁴⁸ and consequently became more dependent on voluntary contributions. The ensuing economic uncertainty probably encouraged them to try to attract worshippers from outside the immediate local community more actively. There is little statistical material to demonstrate this point; therefore, we will

⁴⁵ Xie Gaoqiao 1989:280; Li Yih-yuan 1991:121-123.

⁴⁶ For a description of the disputes over historical primacy between Mazu pilgrimage centres see Sangren 1988.

⁴⁷ Sangren 1987:193.

⁴⁸ It seems, however, that before the land reform the amount of religiously devoted land had varied significantly between individual villages. Between 1900 and 1910 only about 1% of cultivated land in the northern Taiwanese village of P'eng-fu belonged to temples and religious organizations [Wickberg 1981:223]. In the southern village of Tatieh, studied by Burton Pasternak, in 1935 some 97 hectares or 17% of all cultivated land was owned by 31 non-kin based association, many of them religious in nature. Most of these landholdings, however, were dissolved already unter Japanese pressure, i.e. long before the land reform of the 1950s. In Chungshe, the second village studied by Pasternak, about 50 km north of Tatieh, there existed in 1935 merely 4 non-kin corporate associations with only negligible land holdings. [Pasternak 1972:108,125].

here by way of illustration summarize shortly one case-study, conducted by Johanna Pennarz, on a community temple's changes in the village of Shekou in Yunlin County.⁴⁹

The eight hectares of land owned by the local Mazu temple were expropriated in 1954. For much of the following twenty-five years the temple sank into dusty sleepiness, and the same applied to social life in the village which was strongly affected by the migration of its young people into the cities. By 1980, however, the situation had changed: the local peasants had turned from rice farming to the more profitable vegetable gardening, attracting many migrants back into their home village. Many of these returnees were disillusioned with the anonymity of city life and they were among the driving forces in the revival of local religious activities. In this year, a Mazu *shenminghui* was founded with the express aim of rebuilding the village temple. Donations were solicited and the new building was begun in 1984. Unexpectedly, however, the new temple that was intended to symbolize the village's prosperity and unity, soon became a bone of contention between several interest groups. Under the leadership of a strong-willed chairman the temple that before had been managed informally and through consensus by the older men of the village became a centralized organizational entity, set apart from village society. Decisions were now made by the chairman (and the committee loyal to him) without much consultation of village opinion, while at the same time the temple, through developing itself as a pilgrimage centre, became increasingly independent of local resources. To be attractive to pilgrims from outside, local contents (such as the cult of a stone spirit) were deemphasized and standard Mazu lore put in the forefront. The spirit-mediums, as voices of local discontent, "superstitious"

⁴⁹ The following according to Pennarz 1992.

elements, and competing sources of religious authority, were turned out of the temple. As a result a spirit-writing group formed in a private residence behind the village temple to satisfy those religious needs that the village temple no longer addressed. This group took over some of the functions as a social centre that the village temple had lost in the course of its increasing institutional differentiation and commercialization.

The Mazu temple of Shekou is probably not typical of the majority of village temples, yet it shows the new lines of development potentially open to them, among which perhaps the most significant is their institutional differentiation.⁵⁰ It also nicely demonstrates the importance of the entrepreneur in the modern Taiwanese religious economy,⁵¹ in this case embodied by the temple chairman, a politically ambitious district administration bureaucrat. It has

⁵⁰ It should be added that by means of various legal instruments the government encourages community temples to develop more formalized structures of management. As we saw in the example of the Mazu temple of Shekou, these structures (such as temple committees) may then serve as levers to set up the temple as an institutional entity distinct from its village. For the government, such an arrangement has the advantage of higher accountability and better controls of temple activities [cf. also Pennarz 1992:97]. This legal framework within which local temples have to operate is rarely taken into account by students of Taiwanese folk religion. For an overview of the relevant regulations in force at various times see Chen 1974, Fan 1978, Fan 1985, Wu Yaofeng 1992, and Chu 1990 (for this last reference I am indebted to Charles B. Jones).

A useful complement to Pennarz's study of a rural temple is provided by Paul Katz's two short case-studies on the effects of modernization on a public Wangye temple in Donggang township (Pingdong County) and a private Wangye temple in Taipei City [Katz 1994].

⁵¹ This seems to apply to other Chinese religious economies as well. Cf. Lang and Ragvald's study of the Wong Tai Sin temple in Hong Kong [1993] and Elliott on the situation in Singapore in the 1950s [1955:41 seq.].

relevance not only for the popular religious sector of this economy, but also in other areas. One of the prime examples for commercialization, consumer orientation, and "touristification", often quoted in the literature, is the Buddhist-monastery-cum-pilgrimage-centre-cum-theme-park Foguangshan in Kaohsiung County, which owes its immense popularity mainly to the entrepreneurial skills of its abbot, Xingyun Fashi.⁵²

This "utilitarian" tendency, where temples, monasteries, and spirit shrines derive a significant part of their income from the sale of religious and magical services to a clientele of largely unorganized individual religious consumers (functioning much like the "client cults" of Stark and Bainbridge's model) is balanced by the simultaneous growth of another form of institutional religion--voluntary religious associations which possess a formal membership structure, communal rituals, and religious doctrines, designed to give ultimate meaning to their members' lives and to pattern them in accordance with that meaning. These are genuinely religious movements, and they seem to be on the rise in Taiwan. We may be seeing the beginnings of such a religious group in the small spirit-writing circle in Shekou which, although its main function is still the supply of oracular services to the village people, seems to possess some form of formal membership and to be in the process of developing a body of religious doctrines.⁵³ If we look at the larger society, we see a multitude of such voluntary religious associations competing for believers in the religious marketplace. Listing just a few, I would name the Cihui Tang network of temples, the Yiguan Dao, Tiandi Jiao, Xuanyuan Jiao, the loose assortment of spirit-writing temples usually referred to in the literature as "Ruzong Shenjiao", Zhaijiao, sutra-recitation and other lay

⁵² Sung 1985:209ff.

⁵³ Cf. Pennarz 1992:107f.

groups associated with Buddhist organizations, the Catholic Church, the various Protestant denominations, etc.⁵⁴ In the present paper I will focus on those groups traditionally subsumed under the term "sectarianism". These groups are not in themselves new phenomena: China has a long and rich tradition of lay-based voluntary religious associations, organizationally independent of and doctrinally distinct from the three

⁵⁴ All of these groups can be and have been referred by a plethora of terms, such as "church", "religion", "sect", "cult" etc. So as not to add to the confusion, I would at this point like to define my own terminology: I use the term "religious movement" for any institutionalized form of religion. The term sect shall refer to those organizations that synthesize various religious traditions into a coherent whole and possess a well-developed, non-localized membership structure. The term "cult" refers to any form of small-scale religious institution, usually centred upon one temple or spirit-altar. If this institution possesses a well-developed system of doctrine (i.e. an integrated array of "general compensators") and an organized membership, we should call it a "sectarian cult"; many spirit-writing cults, including the one I studied, fall into this category. For cults that provide mainly "specific compensators" (such as various divinatory and healing services) without organizing a membership, we can use Stark's and Bainbridge's concept of "client cult". Non-syncretic religious institutions, like Buddhist associations and Christian churches, I would propose to simply call by their autonyms. It should be mentioned that the various forms of sects and cults are not mutually exclusive. A client cult can develop into a sectarian cult which in turn can become a sect. Also, the same religious institution can simultaneously fulfill functions of several conceptual types. Thus the spirit-writing cult I studied is a sectarian cult for its core membership, a client cult for the occasional, unattached visitor, and an "audience cult" for the anonymous readers of its many publications.

The reader should be aware that although I make use of Stark's and Bainbridge's terminology, I endow terms such as "sect" and "cult" with quite different meanings. For an attempt to describe the Taiwanese situation using Stark's and Bainbridge's original concepts, see my conclusion, below p. 155.

Great Traditions of China, Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. What is new is their higher profile and increase in membership. The absolute figures are not easy to ascertain. In the present paper, I would like to focus on the Yiguan Dao (the "All-Pervading Way", in the literature often called "Unity Sect") as an example. For this sect various figures have been quoted, which range from as low as 200,000 members⁵⁵ to as high as over one million.⁵⁶ Let us take a closer look at the development of the Yiguan Dao in Taiwan to get a clearer idea of its nature and social position.⁵⁷

3 The Development of the Yiguan Dao

The Yiguan Dao entered Taiwan in 1946 in the shape of individual emissaries from mainland groups. With the collapse of Nationalist rule on the mainland, many more Yiguan Dao members followed the Kuomintang government to Taiwan, whereupon the sect spread rapidly over the island, mostly in the form of private worship groups. Most of its leading personnel were Mainland Chinese, but this did not limit its appeal to the Taiwanese, especially as some of its leaders took the pains to learn the Taiwanese dialect. At first it recruited predominantly among peasants, workers, and small merchants. Some villages in impoverished Yunlin County were converted almost *in toto* to the Yiguan Dao.⁵⁸ The sect was officially prohibited in 1951 by a government uneasy about secretive private

⁵⁵ Republic of China Yearbook 1990-91:581.

⁵⁶ Sung 1987:59; 1994b:205,209.

⁵⁷ I will not go into the whole history of this sect, but focus on its status in Taiwan. For the history of the Yiguan Dao see Li Shiyu 1948, Jordan 1982, Sung 1983, Ma & Han 1992: chapter 18, Wang Chien Chuan 1994.

⁵⁸ Sung 1983:144. It is possible that here factors were at work similar to those that produced whole villages of Roman Catholic "Rice Christians" in the 1950s. A study of these Yiguan Dao villages would be a very worthwhile undertaking.

organizations in a time of high tension with the mainland, but enforcement was lax until 1963 when the prohibition was restated and stricter enforcement measures were taken.⁵⁹ Even after 1963, however, enforcement did not seriously threaten the survival of the sect, many of whose branches had taken refuge in recognized religious bodies such as the Daoist and Buddhist associations and the Xuanyuan Jiao. Especially the Daoist Association played an important role as a safe haven for Yiguan Dao groups. One Yiguan Dao leader was involved in its founding in 1963 (the year of the reiterated prohibition) and in 1964 the Daoist Association ran a newspaper advertisement openly calling upon Yiguan Dao groups to join the Association.⁶⁰ Under the protective wings of these recognized religious associations, the Yiguan Dao continued to expand. In the 1970s some of the larger branches experienced a change in their social structure. While until then the majority of their membership had possessed a relatively low level of education, now more and more university students were joining. With the economic success of Taiwan in the 1970s, interest in their own cultural tradition was rekindled among young people. "National Studies" (*Guoxue*) became a fashion and Yiguan Dao groups were among the few organizations providing study and discussion classes on the Confucian and Daoist classics. The Fayi branch was particularly active on campuses, organizing cooperative dormitories-cum-canteens as well as study camps.⁶¹ Thus throughout the 1970s, the Yiguan Dao underwent a process of gradual "intellectualization" which led to a greater emphasis on Confucian teachings, the removal in some branches of the "superstitious" (and, incidentally, not easily controllable) spirit-writing, and a coordinated push for

⁵⁹ For the details of this process, see Lin Benxuan 1989:8-14.

⁶⁰ Lin Benxuan 1989:32. The advertisement is reprinted in Sung 1983:10.

⁶¹ Cf. Lin Rongze 1994.

legalization.⁶² In hindsight, one of the most important aspects of the latter campaign was Yiguan Dao electoral support for KMT candidates.⁶³ The conservative, pan-Chinese ideology maintained by its mainlander dominated leadership made the Yiguan Dao a natural bedfellow of the KMT in the period of “soft authoritarianism” under Jiang Jinguo, when the opposition movement began to gain momentum. These ever closer relations with the ruling party eventually paid off and the Yiguan Dao prohibition was formally lifted in 1987. On 5 March 1988 the Yiguan Dao Association of the Republic of China was registered with the authorities.⁶⁴

Due to its troubled political history and the aura of mystery surrounding it, the Yiguan Dao has received a lot of attention from scholars and has become a household name among ordinary citizens as well. While many sects are rather obscure, even though they may possess a significant membership, the one everyone knows at least by name is the Yiguan Dao. Before delving into an interpretation of the success of this particular religious movement, let us remind the reader that it is only one, though perhaps the largest, among a number of functionally comparable organizations.

Li Yih-yuan has interpreted sectarian societies as “moral revivalistic sects” (*daode fuzhen jiaopai*) which he subdivides into two types: large-scale, tightly structured sects like the Yiguan Dao and small, loosely structured temple cults like those of the “Enzhugong

⁶² This campaign was made possibly financially by the increasing participation of wealthy entrepreneurs in the sect, which accompanied its gradual intellectualization during the 1970s. Sung Kwang-yu argues that in this phase of its development, the Yiguan Dao changed from a religion of the rural lower classes (*xiangxiaren de zongjiao*) into a “religion of the gentry and merchants” (*shen-shang zongjiao*) [1994b:210].

⁶³ Cf. Lin Benxuan 1989:38ff.

⁶⁴ Lin Benxuan 1989:35.

Worship Cluster" (*Enzhugong chongbaicong*), with the Xingtian Gong in Taipei City as an example. In his view, the former are focussing on doctrinal renewal, the latter on ritual reform.⁶⁵ A view of modern society as erosive of traditional values is common to all such revivalistic sects and cults, but they do not reject modernity per se, but only its "harmful" aspects. Indeed, one of their principal functions seems to be to make traditional morality relevant in a modern context. As the Yiguan Dao, like all of these groups, is lay-based, its ethical doctrines and salvationist perspectives have the lay individual as their focus point. While its world-transcending soteriology promises the believer deliverance from worldly suffering and a return to the Eternal Mother,⁶⁶ its moral teachings are decidedly innerworldly, instructing the believer how to live the right life in society, how to *chushi*--to find one's place in the world. In a world marked by the rapid development of industry and trade, the Yiguan Dao seems to have succeeded in integrating the religious and economic lives of its adherents. While I would stop short of claiming a sort of "Protestant work ethic" for the Yiguan Dao, it is clear that economic and religious activities are closely intertwined in Yiguan Dao doctrine and practice⁶⁷--a trait that perhaps accounts for the

⁶⁵ Li Yih-yuan 1982:427; 1991:123. In speaking of "revivalistic sects", Li may have had the anthropological literature on revitalization movements in mind (cf. e.g. Wallace 1966:157ff., especially p.165, where he differentiates revivalism as one possible attitude a revitalization movement may take). The problem of terminology is compounded by Li's own translation in an English-language publication of *fuzhen jiaopai* as "nativistic cults" [Li 1985:63]. "Nativism" is more or less synonymous with "revitalism" (cf. the definition in Panoff & Perrin 1982:219f.).

⁶⁶ For a discussion of this soteriology from a Christian perspective see Wang Guangci 1991.

⁶⁷ In his first full study of the Yiguan Dao, Sung Kwang-yu compares its work ethic to that Max Weber's Protestantism [1983: 212f.]. In later articles, he no longer uses this

interest of parts of the business community in the sect.⁶⁸ It seems that the Yiguan Dao has succeeded in putting together a plausible package of compensators that are traditional enough to satisfy the need for a reinvigorated Chinese cultural identity, yet at the same time give the individual practical guidance in his or her everyday life in modern Taiwanese society.

Who is attracted to the Yiguan Dao? Sung Kwang-yu has put forth the hypothesis that the typical Yiguan Dao believer is the migrant--a person coming from a traditional, rural background for whom in the midst of anonymous and anomic city life Yiguan Dao worship groups provide a social network governed by the traditional values he or she has grown up with.⁶⁹ There exist no statistical data on the social backgrounds of the Yiguan Dao membership to support or disprove this hypothesis, which deductively makes a lot of sense. However, put in this way, I believe its implications are somewhat misleading. It seems to say that the Yiguan Dao is basically an urban support network for disoriented migrants who presumably at some point--if not in this, then in the next generation--will outgrow this need, having become thoroughly urbanized and secularized. Such a view, which incidentally I do not think is the one Sung Kwang-yu really holds, puts too

analogy, but he continues to point out the strong interconnectedness of religion and economic activity in the Yiguan Dao (cf. Sung 1987).

⁶⁸ During my recent stay in Taiwan I visited two Yiguan Dao worship halls in Taichung County, both of them set up in the precincts of factories (one of them the headquarters of the well known sports equipment producer Kennex) for the benefit of employees by the owners who themselves were Yiguan Dao members. Sung Kwang-yu points to the economic success of some Yiguan Dao related companies (such as the Evergreen conglomerate) and the for Taiwanese standards high degree of employee loyalty these companies can command [1987:65f.;1993:95].

⁶⁹ 1983:217;1985:220f.

much emphasis on the traditionalist elements of Yiguan Dao doctrine at the expense of those aspects which make it very well adapted to modern Taiwanese society. I would like to reformulate the hypothesis to suggest that it is mainly people to whom traditional values and religious ideas make sense or people who want them to make sense that are attracted to the Yiguan Dao. Whether such a mental attitude correlates with the social background of the individual is something for future studies to find out. From my own experiences with the Yiguan Dao and similar sectarian groups, I did not get a strong impression of their members being drawn from any one particular social background. Rather, what struck me was the fact that they seemed to be recruited from all walks of life, virtually representing a cross-section of Taiwanese society.

To assert that people with a traditional outlook are attracted to a traditionalist sect seems to be stating the self-evident, but it is only meant as a baseline from which to gain a fresh perspective on the question of traditionality, modernity, and secularization. Song Wenli and Li Yih-yuan assert in a study of individual religiosity conducted in Hsinchu city that if one takes a very broad view of Chinese religion, not even the self-declared non-religionists are completely secularized. They still share, qua socialization in a Chinese cultural context, basic elements of a traditional Chinese world-view. This alerts us to one important point: secularization in Taiwan means essentially Westernization, which is a crucial difference from the secularization process as it took place in the West.⁷⁰ There secularization was an endogenous, incremental process which took several centuries, slowly eroding both the worldly and the spiritual influence of those religious mass organizations, the churches. In Taiwan, secularization is an imported product, introduced into a society whose

⁷⁰ This point has been developed by Seiwert 1981.

traditional world-view was largely intact and had not suffered the century-long attrition process of its counterpart in the West. The very rapidity of the social transformation of Taiwan guaranteed that this traditional world-view would be preserved: only the most dogmatic materialist would expect the superstructure to change simultaneously with its substructure. In reality, changes in social consciousness always proceed slower than changes in social structure. What happened in Taiwan was that a social-structural transformation took place that left the traditional world-view largely intact. There simply developed new social forms⁷¹ to act as plausibility structures for this world-view. Examples are the syncretic cults and sects discussed so far. As we have seen, the institution of the religious sect itself is not new in Chinese culture; it is a traditional form that proved suitable for the continuation of traditional religiosity in a modernizing society. It is suitable because it focuses on the needs of the individual member. As Peter Berger has pointed out for modern Western societies, religion has become privatized; world-building and maintaining is now a cognitive task relegated to the private sphere. Religious groups, the suppliers of ultimate meanings, are made up of voluntary individual members. One of the reasons for the success of the Yiguan Dao is its private nature, focusing totally on the individual. In the early phase of its mission work in Taiwan, the Yiguan Dao operated mostly in the form of informal private worship groups. Its later history is one of progressive institutionalization. Lin Benxuan sees in the Yiguan Dao's increasing emphasis on public temples and deemphasis of private worship groups a strategy to gain political acceptance by making its operations more transparent and controllable for the government.⁷² While this

⁷¹ Berger, following Gehlen, would call them "secondary institutions" [1973:187].

⁷² 1989:36.

motive may have played a role, this process also reminds us of Berger's interpretation of religious dynamics in modern Western societies: in a pluralistic situation, the meanings provided by religious bodies, which are intended as ultimate, are in constant danger of relativization. In response, religious groups try to shore them up through an increasingly elaborate institutional structure, which, however, tends to make them become more and more like secular institutions and less able to fulfill individual religious needs.⁷³ Whatever the reason, a process of institutionalization and formalization indeed seems to be happening within Yiguan Dao branches. How this going to affect the sect remains to be seen.

4 The Traditional World-View and Cultural Identity

Above I have explained the persistence of the traditional Chinese world-view by the time lag between superstructural and substructural change. If I left it at that, I would still be implying that sooner or later this world-view will vanish completely, that the Chinese of Taiwan will become Westernized and stop being Chinese. I do not believe that this will come about. First, there is the factor of cultural identity. Key parts of the traditional world-view will be maintained simply because they constitute Chinese identity and giving them up would mean deculturation. And if secularization truly is a self-limiting process, as Stark and Bainbridge assert, religious elements will definitely be among those key parts. Attempts by modern Confucian philosophers to construct a secular Chinese identity have so far not found any resonance outside of their academic circles.

⁷³ Berger, Berger & Kellner 1973:187.

Second, the traditional world view has shown itself to be internally quite resistant to rationalizing influences. The reason for this is its great flexibility and consistency. As long as one accepts its basic cosmological premises, such as *samsara*, *karma*, *yin/yang*, and the five phases, it makes up a coherent, largely contradiction-free system, unburdened by the characteristic Christian problem of theodicy. These premises are usually incorporated into the individual consciousness through socialization and authenticate each other across different cultural fields. E.g., if *yin/yang* explanatory models are accepted for acupuncture, it is only a short cognitive step to accept their validity in geomancy, fortune-telling, or the circular progression of the universe in stages of kalpas.

Third, in a very general sense, the traditional Chinese world view is supported by the economic success of Taiwan. It is significant that Christianity was able to make a strong missionary impact mainly in the 1950s and early 1960s during which time both the Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations showed strong growth. These were difficult economic times for Taiwan and cultural self-confidence reached a low point. With the appearance of Taiwan's economic miracle, Christian church growth slowed and finally stagnated.⁷⁴ During the same time, as we have seen, the "National Studies" fashion appeared, signalling a renewed interest and pride in the Chinese cultural tradition which worked in favour of sects like the Yiguan Dao.

The "traditional Chinese world-view", vague though the term is, thus seems to have survived the modernization of Taiwan quite well. To be sure, individuals will share in this world-view in unequal measure, some retaining more, some less elements of it.

⁷⁴ Cf. Chu 1992:407ff., 630ff.

But as the above quoted study by Song Wenli and Li Yih-yuan has shown, even the most secularized individuals still share some basic premises of this world-view, even if these may only pertain to the classification of foodstuffs into “hot” and “cold”, or to the acceptance of the validity of traditional Chinese medicine. A serious flaw of social-psychological studies on individual modernity and traditionality throughout the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s had been their conceptualization of these two attitudes as mutually exclusive: an individual had to be either modern or traditional in outlook. Currently this whole approach is being revised and a conceptual apparatus is being developed which will be able to take into account the intermixture of traditionality and modernity in individuals.⁷⁵

If we accept Berger's view of the interrelatedness of individual consciousness and social structure, we would have to expect some correlation between the degree of modernity and social position. However, until we understand this correlation better, we ought to tread carefully. As far as sectarians are concerned, we should not out of hand pigeonhole them as the uprooted, the disinherited, or the relatively deprived. It is safer for the time being to stick to the obvious and posit as the main common characteristic of the Yiguan Dao (and probably other) sectarians a relatively strong adherence to the traditional Chinese world-view.⁷⁶ Since, as we have seen, this world-view is still very pervasive in Taiwanese society, sectarians in fact seem to be drawn from all classes and educational levels.

Having stated my reservations, I still cannot resist a bit of speculation on one social characteristic of

⁷⁵ Cf. Yang, Yu & Ye 1991.

⁷⁶ Cf. the statement in Jordan & Overmyer 1986:275, who, however, afterwards put forth a relative deprivation profile of spirit-writing cult members, which from my own research I find difficult to accept.

the Yiguan Dao which is fairly well documented: its attraction to highly educated persons such as university students, professionals etc. My personal impression from contacts with Yiguan Dao branches is that a significant part of its membership possesses a tertiary level of education. As noted above, the increasing incorporation of intellectuals into its ranks became one the most notable trends in the development of the Yiguan Dao since the late 1960s. My own field research with a spirit-writing cult in Taichung City shows that 30.4% of the core membership possessed a post-secondary level of education, 55.5% a secondary level, and 10.7% a primary level.⁷⁷ Compared with the educational level of the total population of Taiwan, we find in this small-scale cult, whose founder is a lawyer and whose medium is a high-school teacher, a strong overrepresentation of persons with secondary and tertiary education.

If we put these impressions and data together with the statistical findings that show educational attainment to be the single most important factor in the variation of popular religiosity, we can speculate that a lessening of popular religiosity among highly educated

⁷⁷ "Core membership" means the regular attendants of spirit-writing seances. The percentage figures are derived from a sample of 56 returned questionnaires. Two questionnaires did not indicate the respondent's educational attainment which explains the 3.4% missing for the total.

Field research was carried out from November 1993 to June 1994. I would like to express my gratitude to the institutions which directly or indirectly assisted in funding this research project: the Center for Chinese Studies (Taipei), the Lin Pen-yüan Foundation (Taipei), the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of British Columbia. I also acknowledge warmly the institutional support rendered to me as a visiting scholar by the Institute of Ethnology at the Academia Sinica, and the valuable advice I received from Profs. Chu Hai-yuan, Sung Kwang-yu, Lin Mei-rong, Zheng Zhiming, as well as Mr. Wang Chien Chuan.

persons does not necessarily mean a lessening of their religiosity as such but simply a shifting to other forms of religion, among them sectarianism. As I have argued above, the traditional world-view still holds a large degree of plausibility for the vast majority of the population, including "intellectuals" (defined as those possessing a tertiary level of education). However, intellectuals have higher expectations of the internal consistency of this world-view--and this is exactly what sects like the Yiguan Dao or spirit-writing cults like the one I studied are offering: a highly synthetic reworking and systematization of the traditional Chinese world-view, fitting elements from China's great and small traditions together into a coherent and largely contradiction-free whole. This is where the attraction of sectarian religion lies for intellectuals: it offers a system of meanings that is intellectually respectable, while not demanding a great leap of faith on the part of the individual, since it merely brings order into a pre-existing and widely accepted assortment of beliefs and practices.⁷⁸

What does this imply for traditional popular religion? It would be tempting to predict that with rising levels of education, sectarianism will eventually take the place of the popular religion that we know from the classical field studies. However, such predictions are rather irresponsible, since any objective or subjective social phenomenon is conditioned by a multitude of factors, among which average education is just one. And, as we have seen in the studies of Wu and Zhou, while the influence of

⁷⁸ This continuity between Yiguan Dao and popular religion has been emphasized by Joseph Bosco, who cautions against an interpretation of Chinese sectarian religion as "a totally different tradition that offers a radical critique of society and a rejection of the wordly order." Rather, he tries to demonstrate that Yiguan Dao beliefs and practices are rooted in and interpreted in terms of popular religion [1994:424].

education on popular religiosity is noticeable, it is by no means absolute. Let us therefore take the safer course and focus on some obvious consequences.

First, participation in sects takes potential participants away from popular religion. The degree of exclusivity probably differs from group to group. The spirit-writing cult studied by me maintains a fairly tolerant stance towards popular religious practices, but still its core membership's involvement with popular religion is low. Reasons for this are the great amount of time spent at spirit-writing seances (up to ten days every month) and the competitive provision by the cult of many services which are also offered in the popular religious sector (such as divination and healing).

Secondly, sectarian symbols and doctrines influence and become part of popular religion. I think Sung Kwang-yu's assertion that the belief in the Eternal Mother has already become a centrepiece of Taiwanese popular religion goes too far,⁷⁹ but sectarian deities such as the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool (Yaochi Jinmu) definitely are spreading in non-sectarian temples. That does not mean, however, that they retain the meanings given to them in their sectarian origin groups. In an old, recently rebuilt and enlarged Mazu temple in a suburb of Taichung I noticed a wall painting depicting Yaochi Jinmu. When I asked the temple committee chairman about it, he was aware that this deity was worshipped by the Cihui Tang, but did not agree with her elevated status in that sect. He gave me an alternative interpretation in the form of a story about Yaochi Jinmu that seemed to follow the Mulian legend pattern. Some sectarian doctrines, however, have succeeded in crossing the line into popular religion. The belief that Guan Sheng Dijun has succeeded to the office of Jade Emperor (Yuhuang Dadi),

⁷⁹ Sung 1985:206.

produced and widely maintained in spirit-writing circles, has gained a certain currency and can be encountered among non-sectarians as well. Both sectarian symbols and doctrines are spread through magazines and books published and distributed for free by these groups which are available from book racks in bus and train stations, hospitals, and temples. These ubiquitous religious reading materials play an important role in standardizing religious belief among a largely literate population.⁸⁰ A similar role is played by religious information available through other media, such as TV and the movies. During my recent stay in Taiwan, various religiously coloured productions were on show, among them a big-screen movie version of the *Jigong zhuan*, and TV soap-operas with Yaochi Jinmu and Jigong Huofo as protagonists.⁸¹

IV. Conclusion

Secularization in Taiwan, as one aspect of the larger process of modernization, has not led to the death of religion, but it has produced significant changes. The most significant aspects of this change are the increasing institutionalization and commercialization of the popular religious sector, and the growing importance of voluntary religious associations. Religion has become a matter of private choice to the individual and a pluralistic religious marketplace has formed where a broad spectrum of religious institutions are competing for clients and adherents. Some of them cater to the short term needs of their customers, some offer sophisticated cosmological and ethical systems and can command the loyalty of an organized membership. The various indigenous forms of organized religion are

⁸⁰ Cf. Sangren 1987:199; Jordan 1994:150f. For a study of sectarian media utilization and reception see He 1983.

⁸¹ Cf. Jordan 1994:151.

growing rapidly at the expense of community-based, diffused popular religion. Yet many of the beliefs and practices of popular religion are incorporated into these new religious institutions, and are thus continued in a modified, better-adapted form within modern Taiwanese society.

Finally, how well does Stark's and Bainbridge's model work in the Taiwanese context? These authors subdivide "religious movements" into churches, sects, and cults. This conceptualization, derived from American data, runs into problems in Taiwan where no religious mass organizations like the Christian churches, against which sects and cults could be defined, ever existed. Their functional equivalent in traditional Taiwan was diffused popular religion. As we have seen, organizations like the Yiguan Dao syncretically rework this popular religion and tend to replace it for their members. Thus we could see the Yiguan Dao as a "sect" (in the meaning given to this term by Stark and Bainbridge) without an organized "church". If the Yiguan Dao is a sect in relation to popular religion, the "cults" (again in Stark's and Bainbridge's usage of the term) in Taiwan would be imported forms of religion like Christianity, Tenrikyô, Baha'i etc., because they represent innovation and cultural import. Interestingly enough and different from the American religious economy as understood by Stark and Bainbridge, the "sect" seems to be the more promising form in Taiwan, while imported "cults" like Christianity are more or less stagnating.

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GLOSSARY

chushi	處世
Cihui Tang	慈惠堂
daode fuzhen jiaopai	道德復興教派
Enzhugong chongbaicong	恩主公崇拜叢
Fayi	發一
Foguangshan	佛光山
Fuyou Dijun	孚佑帝君
Guan Sheng Dijun	關聖帝君
Guoxue	國學
Jiang Jingguo	蔣經國
Jigong Huofo	濟公活佛
Jigong zhuan	濟公傳
Jintong Pai	金幢派
Longhua Pai	龍華派
Mazu	媽祖
Ruzong Shenjiao	儒宗神教
shenminghui	神明會
shen-shang zongjiao	紳商宗教
shentan	神壇
Sanshan Guowang	三山國王
Tenrikyô	天理教
Tiandi Jiao	天帝教
Wangye	王爺
xiangxiaren de zongjiao	鄉下人的宗教
Xiantian Dao	先天道
Xingtian Gong	行天宮
Xingyun Fashi	星雲法師
Xuantian Shangdi	玄天上帝
Xuanyuan Jiao	軒轅教
Yaochi Jinmu	瑤池金母
Yiguan Dao	一貫道
Yuhuang Dadi	玉皇大帝
Zhaijiao	齋教

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