

Realignments in religion and tensions over identity: Yiguan dao, an example of a “New Religion”

Evelyne Micollier

► **To cite this version:**

Evelyne Micollier. Realignments in religion and tensions over identity: Yiguan dao, an example of a “New Religion”. China perspectives, Hong Kong: French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, 1998, pp.37-43. <ird-00449887>

HAL Id: ird-00449887

<http://hal.ird.fr/ird-00449887>

Submitted on 23 Jan 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Realignments in Religion and Tensions over Identity

Yiguan Dao: An Example of a “New Religion”

EVELYNE MICOLLIER

The political, economic and social changes, which have had an increasing effect upon Taiwanese society over the last two decades, have been accompanied by a reformulation of religious beliefs and practices. Among these reformulated religions, some of the groups currently known as the “new religions” or *xinxing zongjiao* (literally “emergent religious movements”) arose during the modernisation period from around 1900 until the 1930s in China, and some appeared during the 1980s in Taiwan. They are directly descended from the traditional Chinese sects of the 19th and 20th centuries. These religions, which are also known as “syncretic religions”, should be clearly distinguished from the secret societies. J. Chesneau (1960-1970)⁽¹⁾ deliberately linked the two together, but this view has been challenged since the 1980s by experts in this field⁽²⁾. According to S. Harrell and E. Perry⁽³⁾, there is a basic difference between the religious sects described by D. L. Overmyer⁽⁴⁾ as “popular Buddhism” and secret societies like the triads. The secret societies were originally organised for political reasons and used religion and ritual for political ends, whereas the sectarian movements did more or less the opposite: whenever they organised collective political action, it was mostly for religious ends. Moreover, except during times of persecution, these religious movements were not secret, even though some of their texts and mantras were, and they led an open existence, openly seeking converts.

Methodologically, in this article, these “emergent religious movements” have been the subject of ethnological research⁽⁵⁾. So my contribution will be from the standpoint of social anthropology, rather than of history or politics. The *Yiguan dao* (Path of Unity) movement, whose origins lie in the crisis of the 1930s in Shandong

Province⁽⁶⁾, is the most numerous and best organised “new religion”, and it draws on the polarised tensions around the problem of identity in Taiwanese society. Four million Taiwanese—that is about 20% of the overall population of the island—are reckoned to have been members of the *Yiguan dao* or its dependent organisations at some time in their lives. The movement includes several branches that are frequently in competition with each other. The factional struggles of a movements divided in approximately 15 groups and 70 sub-groups comprising this movement have been well documented⁽⁷⁾. Each branch is organised according to locality and is controlled by a central authority. The level of centralisation helps to maintain the unity of the *Yiguan dao* against the threat of local divisiveness and personal ambitions⁽⁸⁾. Current membership for Taiwan is estimated at 500,000, in addition to a million sympathisers, making a total of 1,500,000, as compared with 50,000 members in the 1960s rising to 500,000 from the 1980s onwards⁽⁹⁾. Overseas membership is estimated at two million. The beliefs, changes in ritual practices and tensions over identity, show the flexibility of the *Yiguan dao* movement, and partly explain its history and development.

In this article, religious affiliation will be considered as indicative of identity; the different sectors of the population and their political allegiances will be analysed by taking the *Yiguan dao* movement as an example. The politico-religious stakes of the “new religions” in Taiwan and the issues surrounding the construction of a pluralist national identity will be examined, precisely because this cultural pluralism represents a break with the nationalist project of the Kuomintang. This party has held power in Taiwan for the last 50 years, and its main project has been an attempt to form a homogenous

The fieldwork for this article was conducted between August and December 1997, with the support of the Centre for Chinese Studies (*Hanxue zhongxin*), the National Library, Taipei. I would like to thank Benoît Vermander for reading the final draft.

national identity, taking no account of internal sub-ethnic divisions.

Lastly, the broader Chinese and international stakes will be considered in the light of the *Yiguan dao*'s ambitious proselytising, which expresses a "globalising" thrust quite in accordance with the way the Chinese "diasporas" operate.

Religious beliefs and changing practices: the *Yiguan dao* shows flexibility

One of the main characteristics of the movement is its adaptability, which can be seen even in the spatial layout of *Yiguan dao* temples. At first sight, these can scarcely be distinguished from places of popular religious worship. They have three levels: the divine figures to be worshipped are the *Milefo* incarnation of the Buddha⁽¹⁰⁾, the bodhisattva representations of *Guanyin* (a leading goddess in popular Buddhism, frequently associated in Taiwan with *Mazu*, a local protectress of sailors and goddess of the sea), and *Wusheng lao mu*, "the as yet unborn mother". The latter holds a central place in the *xinxing zongjiao* cults. The form of worship laid down by the religious doctrine of the "as yet unborn mother" is labelled "the fourth Chinese religion" along with the *san jiao*, the "three Chinese religions", Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism⁽¹¹⁾. Belief in this female divinity may have developed out of popular religion, but it is shared by most of the syncretic sects⁽¹²⁾. The bulk of the beliefs in the *Wusheng laomu* (or *Shengmu*) and their important roles are, by contrast, specific to the syncretic religions. This goddess controls the cycle of kalpas, sends buddhas down to earth to guide the faithful and takes them to her breast and even into her womb to save them (in an act of salvation). Whether it was invented independently or grew out of ancient popular beliefs, the place reserved for this goddess is the most outstanding feature of the Chinese millenarian sects⁽¹³⁾. The cult of *Shengmu* draws large numbers of followers.

The three female divinities, *Guanyin*, *Mazu* and *Wusheng laomu* are protective and compassionate feminine figures. In this respect, there is no visible difference between the practices of a *Yiguan dao* temple and a popular local one. The distinctive features emerge as one goes up through the levels, whose vertical arrangement reflects different degrees of religious understanding. The last two are reserved for the initiated: they are dedicated to Confucius, Lao Tse or Mencius and the *Milefo* incarnation of the Buddha. The spatial layout reflects the way the movement mentally represents to itself its hierarchy of divinities and philosophical doctrines. But this mental representation enjoys widespread endorsement, far beyond the circle of cult members. It is rooted in a vision of the world arising from Chinese tradition.



Thai devotees visit temple
Level one: Milefo (centre)

However, it is worth noting, with regard to the movement's adaptability, that some people take part in temple life without knowing that their place of worship belongs to the *Yiguan dao* religious group. From their point of view, they just come to acquire knowledge through studying the texts or learning relaxation and meditation techniques for a better quality of life. These participants often use the expression *shenghuo kuaile* ("it is for being happy in life") to justify their activities. It is not at all a matter of religious belief but a way of living.

Behaviour in the sphere of sexuality and relations between men and women is highly regulated in these groups. Sobriety in dress (suits for men, classical navy blue jacket and dress for women, sports clothes for children and adolescents) is a feature in sharp contrast with the dress worn at popular local religious celebrations. During the practical exercises, the men are separated from the women. This is because, for these movements, which all at some time or other in their development seek legitimate status, it is of prime importance to avoid provoking rumours about their sexual behaviour or loose morals. Such rumours are easily fed by prejudices in support of established tradition, for members of new religious movements, whether sectarian or alternative, behave in ways that are normally forbidden, owing to the clandestine, secret and, therefore, necessarily immoral character of their practices.

Between the 1970s and the 1980s the practices underwent a change. The cults using spiritual mediums tended to disappear in favour of a return to the writings of the "three religions". The cults sprang from a tradition of divination and revelation for which there is corroboration going back to the Sung dynasty (960-1279 A.D), but it took its modern form in the nineteenth century. This method of divination through writing is known as *Fuji*, and its texts are messages from the gods transcribed by

a medium. Nowadays they are collected and published as books or magazines in Taiwan. There is also a ritual of automatic writing known as *Bailuan* (cult of the phoenix). Its practitioners use this term more generally to refer to their group, the practice of *fujii*, and the ceremony surrounding the practice. The type of revelation varies from moral injunctions to teachings and liturgical instruction (invocations, charms, chants, the proper use of incense etc.) and mythological elaborations⁽¹⁴⁾.

The writings of the “three religions” are popularising works, inspired by the classics and set down by masters to initiate new members⁽¹⁵⁾. The explanation advanced by the practitioners is as follows: communication with the gods through a medium is no longer necessary because the majority are more educated nowadays and can therefore read and study the texts without having need for the presence of a medium in their relations with the beings from another world. Groups which still make use of mediums are increasingly considered backward and insufficiently educated to study the written texts. In this way a quiet revolution in practices has taken place through one sub-group imitating another and through an ongoing devaluation of former practices in favour of newer ones. This example illustrates a constant factor in social change: the increasing value attached to education, which accompanies the transition from a rural to an urban society. It is a development that can be explained by the involvement of younger members bringing in new ideas, and it reflects a trend towards the questioning of the ideas of older adherents. It also testifies to the liveliness of a movement capable of self-renewal through listening to its younger, “junior” members. But we should be clear that it is the practices, rather than the ideas, which are transformed. Religious pragmatism in the Chinese cultural context can also be applied to other areas of social life.

The goal of the believers is theoretically to reach salvation through “the Way” (*Dao*), and certain traditional expressions serve to indicate the position of the adherent on the way of initiation: *qiudao* means to “seek initiation”; *xiudao*, “to cultivate the Way”, refers to various religious practices (meditation, martial arts, invocations, textual readings); the two final stages consist of *chengdao*, “to achieve the Way” and *dedao*, “to obtain the Way”⁽¹⁶⁾. To “cultivate the Way” is a generic term covering the whole range of religious practices, but referring particularly to the various forms of meditation: *neixiu*, “inward cultivation”; *qigong*, *neigong* (inward corporeal health practice), the techniques for preserving health (*yangsheng*) and development of the self. They reveal a process of privatisation, individualisation, and the emergence of a private sphere in daily social life, which is another feature of the social changes brought about by the urbanisation

and modernisation of Taiwanese society.

Identity, religion and politics: the *Yiguan dao* as indicative of a pluralist cultural identity

As far as questions of cultural identity in Taiwan are concerned, the *Yiguan dao* is the most flexible of all the movements, and is consequently the most adaptive to social change, and the most widely accepted. It draws in people whose cultural identities are very diverse.

It is the issue of cultural identity that explains why an illegal religious group could influence a political party, which had to turn to it to win in the elections. The religious movement developed along with the political change, which was the Taiwanisation of the Kuomintang at the end of the 1980s.

The shifting position over the legal recognition of the *Yiguan dao* is an accurate reflection of an aspect of a social change as well, namely the emergence of a civil society and permission to discuss long tabooed subjects.

The meaning of the term “identity” needs to be defined in the context of Taiwan, with its internal sub-ethnic divisions. This situation means that the building of a national identity⁽¹⁷⁾ has to be pluralist, even though this actually conflicts with the KMT’s nationalist project, which tended to deny the very existence of multiple identities. In Taiwan, the question of so-called “provincial nationalities” (*shengji wenti*) alludes to tensions between people originating from provinces outside Taiwan (*waisheng ren*) and the population whose origin is Taiwan (*bensheng ren*). *Waisheng* is used to refer to the Chinese who arrived after 1945 with the nationalist government⁽¹⁸⁾. And their children, wherever they were actually born, are also considered to be *waisheng ren*. The immigration of the *bensheng ren* began at the end of the seventeenth century, under the Qing dynasty. Originating



Alter of Maitraya (Milefo), the Buddha of the future, who *Yiguan dao* followers believe has already been on earth and left

from the Fujianese *minnan* region, they arrived in Taiwan with a considerable number of Hakkas from Guangdong Province. After 1945, the *bensheng ren* generally came to be called *Taiwan ren* (Taiwanese), whereas the *waisheng ren* became *dalu ren* (mainlanders). Recently the number of *bensheng ren* has settled at around 86% of the population in relation to the 14% of *waisheng ren*. Zhang Maogui has concluded from this that the problem of the “provincial nationalities” arises from the principle of social organisation based on collective identity, which is one of the structures of social power underlying Taiwanese society⁽¹⁹⁾. In addition, the ethnic or sub-ethnic pluralism in Taiwan is overlaid by a linguistic pluralism. Mandarin Chinese (*guo yu*) is spoken by the *waisheng ren* (outsiders to the province); the *bensheng ren* (native to the province), being born in Taiwan into the *minnan* culture originating in Fujian or among the Hakkas of Guangdong, speak either the Taiwanese *minnan hua* or Hakka respectively; and austronesian languages are spoken by the aborigines, known as *yuanzhu min* (or “first inhabitants” of Taiwan).

The *Yiguan dao* sect was born out of the crisis of the 1930s in Shandong, and its leaders fled to Taiwan in the 1950s. The movement was persecuted in the People’s Republic on the grounds of its collaboration with the Japanese, of which there was no doubt in the authorities’ view, since it had been granted legal status in the occupied territories. From the 1920s to the 1940s the *Yiguan dao* underwent continuous development, eventually reaching a membership of 10 million. In spite of political repression, it seems to have continued to exist underground, and to have been particularly active from 1959 to 1962, with a further resurgence during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969). At present, the situation of these syncretic “new religions”⁽²⁰⁾ in the PRC is not clear: they lead a clandestine existence but are seeking a legally recognised status. During the 1980s, the government frequently opted for repression, and some leaders of the heterodox religions were executed for “counter-revolutionary activities”. They received severer punishments than the founders of other social groups likewise seeking legal recognition, such as the Chinese “non-governmental organisations” (NGOs)⁽²¹⁾. In recent years the authorities have become very concerned at the growing success of these religions. According to K. Tertitski, greater political liberalisation in China would lead to a revival of the influence of the syncretic religions, making them a major religious force in the country⁽²²⁾.

The *Yiguan dao* is presently the most powerful of the “new religions” in Taiwan. Its electoral influence gives it political clout, and it was belatedly legalised in 1987⁽²³⁾ after years of clandestine existence and heavy repression. This lasted even into the 1970s, primarily because of more or less documented evidence of its collaboration with the Japanese⁽²⁴⁾. It became more politicised in the 1980s, being both a symptom of, and an

active participant in, the tensions surrounding the issue of identity in contemporary Taiwanese society. The links between identity, politics and religion cast a useful light not only on social and cultural transformations but also on their limits, and on the resistances that prevent deep structural change, particularly in the political sphere. According to B. Vermander⁽²⁵⁾, the *Yiguan dao* offers a significant example of the relations between religion and politics in the Taiwanese context. It is also a good example of the instrumental use of religion both by the state and by the population, in perfect accordance with the Chinese tradition in such matters.

The official pronouncements by the KMT in Taiwan up until the 1970s, and by the Communist Party on the mainland at the present moment, can be explained by their common historical heritage concerning the traditional relationship between the central state and the regions, and between the state and heterodox religions. The latter have always been perceived by the authorities as being beyond control because they are not organised along traditional social lines, since their networks conform to neither clan, nor professional body nor locality. Heterodox religions were known to the imperial authorities as *lijiao*, and were periodically persecuted. As they organised and became institutionalised, gaining strength through their economic power and growing numbers, they became intrusive and were then considered to be a potential threat to central power. There was another threat too, of a symbolic nature with ideological implications: their beliefs were seen as questioning the symbolic power of the Emperor⁽²⁶⁾. In the modern world, this is repeated in the restoration of “religious order” by the State.

In 1987, the *Yiguan dao* gained legal recognition through the support of the Taiwanese faction of the KMT. From the 1983 legislative elections onwards, when this faction’s candidates turned to the *Yiguan dao* associations to retain their seats, the associations have been linked to the Taiwanese faction of the KMT, consisting of *bensheng ren*, as opposed to the traditional faction made up of *waisheng ren*. For several years the *Yiguan dao* was neither forbidden nor legally recognised. It played an effective role as mediator during the period of the Taiwanisation of the nationalist party. Its adherents called themselves both Chinese and Taiwanese at the same time. This reflected the division in Taiwanese society, between those who called themselves either Chinese or Taiwanese, and those who called themselves both Chinese and Taiwanese. Here too, the *Yiguan dao* followed the consensus by encouraging the tolerant attitude of considering oneself as both Chinese and Taiwanese. It was above all a question of avoiding social division and conflicts between excessively demarcated cultural identities separating social groups. A very Confucian tendency, in continuity with Chinese tradition, dominates the thinking and behaviour of the members of the *Yiguan dao*.



Gathering of *Yiguan dao* followers at the “Tianyuan Fo Yuan” Temple, Nantou District, to celebrate *Wusheng Laomu*

The development of trends concerning identity and political affiliation among the members of the *Tiandi jiao* and the *Xuanyuan jiao* provide a pertinent comparison with the *Yiguan dao* organisations⁽²⁷⁾:

The *Xuanyuan jiao* was founded in 1957 by a deputy, Wang Han-sheng. Originally its aim was cultural renewal, but it changed its legal status and became a religion. The form and the content of Wang’s lectures on culture were changed and also attracted a new audience. Many supporters, mostly *waisheng ren*, turned away from his doctrines, to be replaced by growing numbers of *bensheng ren*⁽²⁸⁾. The first of his followers in 1957 included high government functionaries and *waisheng ren* from the upper ranks in education and the army. A little later the adherence of the Taiwan prime minister, Lee Chee-fu, was reported in detail in the provincial gazette. In 1970 it had 15,000 followers, of whom 70% were Taiwanese⁽²⁹⁾. Throughout that decade an average of 10,000 people per year joined it, reaching more than 100,000 in 1981⁽³⁰⁾.

The “new religion” known as the *Tiandi jiao* (Teachings of the Celestial Emperor) was founded in 1980 by Lee Yu-chieh, who was a charismatic figure and an active member of the KMT. As a schismatic branch of the *Tiande jiao* (Teachings of Celestial Virtue), which was founded on the mainland in 1923 and legally recognised as a religion in Taiwan in 1989, it shares numerous features with the latter. Chiang Wei-kuo, who was the last son of Chiang Kai-shek and died in 1997, often took part in activities organised by the *Tiande jiao* and the *Tiandi jiao*⁽³¹⁾. The present prime minister, Vincent Siew, is a former member of the *Tiandi jiao*⁽³²⁾, which is sometimes called “the religion of the Kuomintang”⁽³³⁾.

The ideology proclaimed by these religious groups is based on the underlying unity of the “three religions” (*sanjiao heyi*), namely Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which is an ideological component of the nationalist programme as well as the belief in the millenium idea.

Having sketched out the points in common between the *Xuanyuan jiao* and the *Tiandi jiao* movements, it is worth stressing a fundamental difference. Whereas the former movement remains relatively modest in size, the latter has undergone a continual expansion, which is perhaps not over yet. So their places within the religious changes in Taiwanese society are not comparable. The *Tiandi jiao* is an “up to date” movement, contributing to social change as well as reflecting it. In the political domain, its leaders organise numerous activities on the mainland and are still fervently committed to the reunification of Taiwan with the PRC. But its members, mostly of Taiwanese origin, are attracted above all by its corporeal practices, for prevention and/or cure of ailments, which are incorporated into rituals⁽³⁴⁾. They are less concerned with its political ideas, which, by and large, they do not share. This represents a palpable ideological rift between the charismatic leaders of the movement and its increasingly diversified membership.

National issues, international issues and the “reconquest of the mainland”

As a proselytising movement, like the other *xinxing zongjiao*, the *Yiguan dao* is regaining ground in the PRC and overseas, particularly in the Chinese communities: the overseas membership (excluding Taiwan) is estimated at two million⁽³⁵⁾. It conforms to the expectations of people from Chinese culture, being adaptable, conservative and attached to tradition in the same way as the movements of revitalisation⁽³⁶⁾. The changes always happen slowly and in a consensual fashion, according to the respect for the “Middle Way”, which is a fundamental tenet of Confucian social ethics. H. Seiwert⁽³⁷⁾ explains the success of the groups within the *Yiguan dao* by their tendency to consider traditionalism as a superior alternative to modernity.

The proselytising takes the communities of the Chinese diaspora as its first goal and then foreigners out-

side the Chinese communities as its second one. At the same time, the wish to “reconquer the mainland” is quite openly expressed in its speeches and activities in the PRC.

Among the “new religions”, the *Yiguan dao* “Way of Unity” offers a threefold interest: firstly, its success (the number of members and sympathisers in Taiwan and overseas); secondly, in its role as an index of the problems of identity in Taiwanese society; and thirdly, in its relation to the political stakes, which show how the movement both reveals and actively contributes to the changing political stakes.

Recent changes in these political stakes can be observed; the clearly defined objective is now to set up international networks through aggressive proselytising and the deployment of ideologies tending to extend the syncretic aspect of the movement. The positive emphasis placed on Chinese tradition and the Confucian nationalist project, through the ideal of the “unity of the three religions” (Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism) is being extended in a universalising direction to include Christianity (essentially Protestantism) and Islam, even going so far as to eulogise a *wujiao heyi* (unity of the five religions). Within this ideological schema, the Chinese tradition remains the significant “engulfing matrix”, not closed in on itself but, on the contrary, open to incorporate foreign religious traditions.

The problems of language as an obstacle to proselytism aimed at non-Chinese, noted by H. Seiwert (1981), have been partially resolved by the increasing command of English by certain masters. Writings have been translated into English; and some well-known masters go abroad to preach or receive foreigners at home. In this respect, the example of a ceremony attended by myself and three young American Protestants is significant: the “Master” conducting the ceremony (*Dashi*) explained in English what had happened during the initiation ritual and handed out documents translated into English for education purposes, devoting a moment after the ceremony to the four of us.

The “new religions”, which mostly arose in China at the turn of the century and were exported to Taiwan in the 1950s, are being reintroduced into the Chinese mainland.

In respect of the social and political issues at stake, the “new religions” present certain points in common with the traditional Chinese religious sects that were active in the 19th and early 20th centuries:

- at the formal level of ritual practice, there is an intentional self-distancing from popular religion (through the adoption of deliberately contrasting features);

- at the ideological level, there are the proselytising and universalist trends, the nationalist trends and the positive emphasis placed upon the Chinese tradition in its grandeur and wisdom, as in the utopian version of the *sanjiao*. This is a recurrent ideological obsession among the intellectual elite (educated Confucians) in

the history of Chinese civilisation and is the equivalent of the myth of the Golden Age transplanted into Chinese culture.

The attitude to science is not the same. In the “new religions” science is not accorded special value, but it is not rejected. They are conservative religions, but they are not opposed to the modernisation of society, since it is considered necessary to rival the West and raise the Chinese world to the level of a great power. The universalising proselytism reveals the wish to raise Chinese tradition in a modernising direction and to gain world recognition of its supremacy. In this it is possible to compare it with that other ideological current, concerned with political philosophy rather than religion, whose ideas are nonetheless very close. Some intellectuals from the Chinese world share these ideas, and are trying to systematise them by becoming the philosophers of a “new Confucianism” or “contemporary Confucianism” (*dangdai rujiao*). This group of researchers, Taiwanese, American Chinese and Singaporeans linked to the University of Hawaii, eulogise Confucianism in a modern form and urge its diffusion, maintaining that it will become the world ideology of the 21st century, and so expressing again another utopian and hegemonic aspiration.

I have analysed the restructuring of religious beliefs and practices, especially those of the “new religions”, in terms of tensions over identity in the Taiwanese context. This has been mainly on the basis of the example of the *Yiguan dao* movement in a comparative perspective, utilising the examples of the *Tiandi jiao* and the *Xuanyuan jiao*. I brought in the provenance of the “new religions” from some aspects of the religious sects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for heuristic reasons.

The success of the *Yiguan dao* is partly explained by its adaptability, which is evident in both religious beliefs and recent developments in its practices. Behind the practices and beliefs, the outlines of the political and religious issues concerning collective identity can be perceived.

These religious facts throw light on aspects of social change: the new religious schemas, resulting from the transformations in practices and representations, are an expression of modernity in Taiwanese society. The proselytising activities and the ambitions of the *Yiguan dao* are contributing to the formation of international networks that can be compared to the economic and social relations of the Chinese “diasporas” with regard to their coherence and mode of operation. In Taiwan, the “new religions”, which were originally traditionalist forces persecuted by the State, have become conservative Confucian religions based on the development of the middle classes. ■

1. J. Chesneaux, *Les sociétés secrètes en Chine (XIXe et XXe siècles)*, Paris, Archives Julliard, 1965.
2. The constant features in the operations of the traditional secret societies are summarised in C. Mollier: "Les sectes religieuses chinoises", in P. Gentelle, *L'état de la Chine*, Paris, La Découverte, 1989, pp. 94-96.
3. "Syncretic Sects in Chinese Society", *Modern China*, vol. 8, 1982, pp. 283-303 (a special issue dealing with the syncretic religions in a diachronic perspective).
4. *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1976.
5. In an urban area of Taipei in 1995-1996, and in 1997.
6. There is evidence of direct descent from the traditional *bailian jiao* (White Lotus Teachings). There are traces of the *Yiguan dao* in the nineteenth century through its connection with this tradition. For the latter, see: Haar, Ter. B.J., *The White Lotus Society and the White Lotus Teachings: Reality and Label*, doctoral thesis, Rijk Universiteit te Leiden, The Netherlands, 1990.
7. See D. K. Jordan, "The Recent History of the Celestial Way: A Chinese Pietistic Association", *Modern China* vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 435-462; Lin Rongzi, "Fayiling yin yige taiwan yiguan dao zuzhi de fazhan shi" (The *Fa Yi Ling Yin*: a History of the Development of a Branch of the *Yiguan dao* in Taiwan), *Dongfang zongjiao* (Research on Eastern Religions), October 1993, pp. 267-296.
8. See J. Bosco, "Yiguandao: 'Heterodoxy' and Popular Religion in Taiwan" in M. A. Rubinstein (ed.) *The Other Taiwan: 1945 to the Present*, M. E. Sharpe, NY and London, 1994, pp. 423-444; p. 431.
9. According to reports from the experts, Cheng Zhiming and Song Guangyu, and from oral informants, B. Vermander (*op. cit.* 1995, p. 50) mentions a levelling-off of membership in the 1980s, based on informants' reports. He puts the movement's following at one million. I have made a distinction between members and supporters by conflating information from different sources.
10. Maitreya, the incarnation of universal love; in orthodox Buddhism, this deity is to become manifest in the future as the fifth and last earthly Buddha. See M. S. Diener, F. K. Ehrhard, I. Fischer-Schreiber, *The Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, Boston Shambala, 1991. According to the teachings of the *Yiguan dao*, salvation is bestowed on humanity by a series of Buddhas, of whom the last to visit the earth was Maitreya.
11. See D. K. Jordan, *op. cit.* 1982, p. 439. On the history of this cult and its teachings, see S. Naquin, *The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976; D. L. Overmyer, *op. cit.*
12. See S. Harrell, and E. Perry, *op. cit.* 1982, p. 287.
13. *ibid.*, pp. 290-291.
14. On these religious practices see D. K. Jordan and D. L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Sectarianism in Taiwan*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986, pp. 36-88; L. Thompson, "The Moving Finger Writes: A Note on Revelation and Renewal in Chinese Religion", *Journal of Chinese Religions* no. 10 1992, pp. 92-147; H. Seiwert, "Religious Response to Modernisation in Taiwan: The Case of I-Kuan Tao", *Journal of the Hongkong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* no. 2, pp. 43-70, esp. pp. 51-52.
15. See *Guangming jikan* (Light) the quarterly published by *Yiguan dao* since 1995; the collection of didactic writings by Zheng Wuhou, *Zhengde congshu: Ruhe chuanguzao xingfu rensheng* (How to Be Happy in Life); Jin Houshun, *Liaofan sixun* (The Four Lessons of Liaofan); this work, originally written in the fifteenth century, during the Ming dynasty, by Yuan Liaofan for his son, has become a classic of popular didactic literature; the little bi-lingual handbook in Chinese and English, *Xiantian dadao jianjie* (Introduction to the Tao); the magazine issued by the temple where I attended the "request initiation" (*qiudao*) ceremony; the initiate must study these texts after the request for initiation in order to "cultivate the Way" (*xiudao*).
16. D. K. Jordan, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 439.
17. The problem of national identity was first openly discussed by intellectuals in 1983-1984. The debate over the *Taiwan jie* (Taiwan complex) as opposed to the *Zhongguo jie* (China complex) was started by the *Dangwai* (outside the Party) movement which led to the founding of the *Minjin dang* (Democratic Progressive Party) in 1986. See Zhang Wenzhi "Taiwanese Identity in Contemporary Literature" in Cheng Chunmin, Chuang Yingchang, and Huang Shumin (eds.), *Ethnicity in Taiwan: Social, Historical, and Cultural Perspectives*, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 1994, pp. 169-187.
18. Zhang Maogui, "Toward an Understanding of the *Sheng-chi Wen-ti* in Taiwan: Focusing on Changes After Political Liberalization", *ibid.* pp. 93-150, 93-94.
19. *ibid.* p. 135
20. For "ideological syncretism" in relation to "historical syncretism" in popular religion, see D. K. Overmyer, *op. cit.* 1986.
21. See "China: Social Groups Seek Independence in Regulatory Cage", a Human Rights in China report, September 1997, p. 10
22. *Chinese Syncretic Religions in the 20th Century*, Vostochnaja Litereatura, Moscow, 1998 (Russian language). In the light of a diachronic analysis and survey covering the twentieth century, the author establishes that the members of these religions represent about 3% of the total Chinese population.
23. It should be remembered that this was the year of the lifting of martial law and the legalisation of the DPP opposition party in Taiwan.
24. See Song Guangyu, *Tiandao gouchen: Yiguan dao diaocha baogao* (Enquiry into the *Yiguan dao*), Taipei 1983. The author does not support the thesis of their collaboration. D. K. Jordan and D. L. Overmyer (1986, pp. 216-217) review these assumptions.
25. See B. Vermander, "Le paysage religieux de Taiwan et ses évolutions récentes", *L'Ethnographie* 91 (2) 1995, p. 48.
26. See S. Harrell and E. Perry, *op. cit.* 1982, p. 293.
27. The following two paragraphs were adapted from my article, "An Approach to the 'New Religions' in Taiwanese Society", *China Perspectives* no. 16, March/April 1998, pp. 34-40. The latter is principally concerned with the *Tiandi jiao* movement and the incorporation of health practices into religious ones.
28. See C. Jochim, "Flowers, Fruit, and Incense Only: Elite versus Popular in Taiwan's Religion of the Yellow Emperor", *Modern China* vol. 16, no. 1, 1990, pp. 3-38; p. 7.
29. "Taiwan sheng wenxian weiyuanhui (Provincial Committee on Documents), *Taiwan sheng tongzhi* (Provincial Gazette), Taichung, 1971, pp. 271a-271b-272b.
30. See C. Jochim, *op. cit.* 1990, p.8.
31. B. Vermander, "Religions in Taiwan Today", *China News Analysis* no. 1538-1539, July 1st 1995, pp. 1-15; p. 9. Chiang Wei-kuo died on September 23rd 1997, aged 81.
32. To my knowledge no source states clearly whether he is still a member.
33. *Zhongguo shibao*, January 26th 1995.
34. On these health practices see E. Micollier, *op. cit.*
35. According to our informants, the sect has developed strong roots in Japan, Korea and the United States. The information on the PRC comes from personal communications from Professor K. Tertitski of Moscow State University, who is a historian specialising in the "new religions" and has recently carried out research on the renewal of the *Yiguan dao* movement in Shandong province, where the group originated.
36. D. K. Jordan and D. L. Overmyer (1986, p. 13) draw a parallel with the revival movements of the "new religions" in Japan. They find points in common in the *fuji* and *bailian* religious practices in particular, arising from a divinatory and revelatory tradition, and in the psychological motivations of the adherents in the face of rapid social modernisation.
37. H. Seiwert, *op. cit.*, 1981, pp. 57 ff