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Evelyne Micollier

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Realignments in religion and health practices

An Approach to the “New Religions” in Taiwanese Society

EVELYNE MICOLLIER

THE ways in which religious beliefs are being revised show the assimilation of health practices into religion. An ethnological approach to the “new religions” (*xinxing zongjiao*—literally, “emerging religious movements”) provides a contribution to the study of how these religious forms are being restructured. My choice of the “new religions”, rather than any other religious formations, is because for the last twenty years they have been developing continuously, both in terms of the number of their members and sympathisers and in terms of the socio-political challenge which they pose. Among these “new religions”, the Teaching of the Heavenly Emperor (*Tiandi jiao*) throws light onto the incorporation of health practices into the very heart of religious practice.

This article is concerned with three main themes. Firstly, the characteristic health practices of *qigong* are briefly set out; secondly, the “new religions” are defined in contrast with popular religion, and in their relationship to the ongoing changes in Taiwanese society; thirdly, I examine the incorporation of health practices into religion, and the practice of *qigong* in the context of the new religions, by taking the example of the *Tianren qigong*—health practices of the *Tiandi jiao* group.

Methodologically, the new cults were approached through fieldwork (1) focusing on their therapeutic capacity particularly with regard to their links with *qigong* practices. These health practices, characterised by the use of *qi* exercises, gave me entry to groups that are not part of the “new religions”, like non-religious associations, Buddhist and ecological groups. For the preparation of this article only the *xinxing zongjiao* groups were analysed.

Qigong health practices

Contemporary *qigong* is a collection of techniques, inherited from Chinese tradition, aimed at preserving

bodily health, the prolongation of life and the reversal of specific pathological states. *Qi* can be translated as “pneuma, or vital energy circulating in the body in harmony with cosmic energies, substance, or breath”; *gong* means “exercise, practice, work, artistic talent, merit, quality, technique, art, tempo”. Taken together, these two semantic fields provide the content for the disyllabic expression *qigong*. The techniques cover a specific field of applications with a double objective. Firstly, the achievement of longevity; in this case the bodily techniques are combined to preserve physical health. Secondly, the reversal of pathological states; in this case the techniques are a form of health care. *Qigong* puts its practitioners into a trance, to enter into “*qigong* state”.

Health practices like *qigong* offer a way to grasp the processes currently operating in Taiwanese society, like the revisions in religion or the changes to traditional roles or representations in a period of social transition. My inquiries were conducted in the medical establishment in Taipei but outside its official institutions. Several hospitals and dispensaries confirmed that neither *qigong* practices nor traditional Chinese medicine, which are officially recognised and used for care and prevention in the PRC, are accepted by the official medical establishment in Taiwan. The public health policy of the Kuomintang (KMT) clearly shows that the traditions of Chinese medical learning are not considered sufficiently trustworthy or effective to be included in the public health system. Only the biomedical approach (2) is encouraged, and it is the only approach practiced in the official state institutions. All the other medical disciplines and methods of treatment are classified as *minjian yiliao* (popular remedies) and are practiced outside the official state institutions. The learned tradition in Chinese medicine is included in this category, alongside treatments linked to religious cults. There are two historical explanations for this. Firstly, it was already the

attitude of the ruling Nationalists in China before 1949. Following their exile to Taiwan, they never encouraged the development of traditional Chinese medicine, contrary to the health policies adopted by the Communist Party (3). Secondly, the influence of the Japanese health policy that was established over the 50 years of their occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945) is still palpable in the present model. The structure of the system, the health and medical educational system, were retained after the change of government (4).

Outside the official medical institutions, *qigong* sessions are organised into evening or weekend programmes, conducted either by informal associations or by religious groups.

So I organised the project into several stages. The sessions allowed me to gather some pertinent ethnographic data, such as the observation of the participants' practices and behaviour, and to record their statements. I then established connections between practitioners selected according to standard social science research criteria (age/sex/level of education/social category). Once a medium-term relationship was established, it gave an insight into the conditions of life and the behaviour in different contexts, as well as the aspirations and values, of the practitioners. By collating the diverse categories of data, it has been possible to establish the common features shared by the practitioners as a group, and to extract the system of representations underlying the exercise of their corporal practices. My inquiry into the practices concerned with the care and maintenance of health (*qigong* practices) gained me admission into those religious groups where these practices are an integral part of religious observance. Most of these groups belong to the "new religions" (*xinxing zongjiao*) which are currently undergoing rapid expansion in Taiwanese society.

The research project leading me towards the "new religions" was aimed at investigating the therapeutic and social aspects of *qigong* practices in Taipei, within an overall comparison between the PRC and Taiwan (5). The initial approach to the field showed that the social impact exercised by *qigong* is specific to the PRC. At present in Taiwan it is not possible to speak of *qigong* as a broad social phenomenon; it has a lower profile, it attracts people from a definite social category (the comfortably off and/or the well educated, with a research or university background), and it is not practiced in the medical establishment. Consequently my comparison brings out the differences rather than the similarities, and my research into the social aspect is in marked contrast *a priori* with the research carried out in the PRC. The position of *qigong* in the Taiwanese medical system throws light on this last point. In the PRC, *qigong* is a therapeutic resource situated at the convergence of three social sectors (popular, professional, and traditional). The internal structure of all medical systems has been

brought to light by A. Kleinman (6) in the context of Taiwan: popular medicine (family based, and linked to popular religion, fortune telling etc.), traditional medicine (specialised medical knowledge like traditional Chinese medicine, or *zhongyi*), professional medicine (practiced within the medical establishment, modern medicine or *xiyi*). In Taiwan, *qigong* belongs almost exclusively to the popular sector (7) where it occupies a marginal position because the central position is taken by the temple and the family; those temple activities linked to health preservation and therapy are included within the overall sphere of religious activities.

The main aim of the practitioners is the conservation of health (*yangsheng*). When the practices are conducted within the religious groupings, the development of the individual is their explicitly stated goal. The therapeutic *qigong* known as *zhibing qigong* (for curing sicknesses) is employed in the case of chronic illnesses. This is the same as in the PRC.

The personal charisma of the *qigong* master, typical of the PRC, is much less manifest in Taiwan. For example, a master talking about *qigong* on the radio in Taiwan did not reveal his own identity or his address, and replied to listeners' questions as follows: "Find a *qigong* master and programme near your home. It is not worth coming to consult me personally. I can offer nothing more than others can".

The fascination with *qigong* is quite recent in Taiwan, and affects mostly the intellectuals and the well-educated, who are more open to change. The formation of a social network around *qigong* practices is less systematic than in the PRC. Might there be a connection between the absence of a close social network and the motives of the practitioners? These motives are personal and subjective, and are not dependent upon a desire or need for social encounters, or for a particular place to enable such encounters. The practitioners perceive regular participation in group activities as a waste of time:

"It is only necessary to practice for a while to assimilate the programme and to make progress. After that, you have to go back to see the master to learn new exercises, but you always have to deepen them by yourself and for your own benefit".

The schedule for the group activities varies according to the participants. They may take place several times a week, every two weeks, or once a month. Within the new religious cults, the practitioners may meet up to three evenings a week and then again at the weekend.

The "new religions" and social change in Taiwan

In the context of contemporary Taiwan, the "new religions" can be characterised by their institutionalised organisation into social networks, their legalisation and eventual recognition by the state, their highly codified master-disciple relationships, their personal motivation and their individual rather than family practices, their

absence of fixed places for the cults and cult activities, their high valuation of the study of texts and educational achievement in the context of religious practice and their proselytism and ideological syncretism. All these traits are in marked contrast with popular religion (*minjian zongjiao*). But still, they have to be understood as tendencies whose particular significance varies according to the religious group in question and its modes of operation.

Proselytism should not be understood in the same way as in the Christian or Islamic traditions. It is aimed at particular individuals rather than at general recruitment. It is motivated in the Chinese context by the wish for networks of social relations on a global scale. As for the ideological aspect of proselytism, it is in fact limited by pragmatic concerns which remain the overriding factor.

The syncretism is conscious and intentional, operating within the present time-frame, as distinct from the syncretism of popular religion, which is historical in the sense that it is produced through a gradual accumulation of diverse practices and beliefs without the adherents being aware of it.

Membership is individual, whereas participation in popular religion is based on family, clan, or group affiliation, with territorial roots.

The compatibility of traditional practices and doctrines with modern science is often deployed as an argument by the charismatic leaders, to justify their religious practices. An example of this is the deputy, Wang Han-sheng, who founded the *Xuanyuan jiao* in 1957 (8).

Changes in religion are a dynamic component in social change. An analysis of religious changes allows us to put the pertinent question as to whether the process of transformation is innovative or simply limited to reproducing traditional practices. Are the restructured forms new or traditional?

Taiwan is a territory that has recently undergone a wave of immigration from China, and its identity has had to be continually remoulded along lines imposed by successive settlement populations and governments. Some decisive events inscribed in the collective memory have influenced the changes in religion, the principal ones being:

- the struggles between settlers and indigenous peoples, and between factions faithful to the Ming dynasty and supporters of the new Qing dynasty;
- the introduction of messianic elements and vegetarianism in the nineteenth century (9), partly coinciding with the arrival of refugees after the Taiping Rebellion, and with social reactions against the opium scourge;
- the religious policies of the Japanese, who tried to inculcate new practices and beliefs, particularly after 1930;
- the installation of the post-war Nationalist government;
- the immigration of religious leaders from all over China, causing a sudden flood in the market, so to

speak, which had a deep social impact for the following decades (10).

In this article, the terms "cult" and "sect" are used in the sense established by D. K. Jordan and D. L. Overmeyer (11) in their seminal study on sectarian movements. A cult is a body of ideological beliefs and religious practices; a sect is a group of believers and their organisational structure.

The integration of health practices like *qigong* into the body of practices and ideological referents of the "new religions" shows their flexibility and ability to integrate "new ingredients" successfully, as in the case of the *qi* practices. These practices are handed down in Chinese tradition, but they also constitute "new ingredients" because there is no precedent for the resituation of such practices within religious configurations. *Qigong* is one example of such "new ingredients". The process of integrating these elements provides an understanding of an important aspect of the way the "new religions" function, namely their flexibility and adaptability to new conditions. The ability to incorporate other elements to a central core of beliefs and practices provides one explanation of their success. Here the difference with popular religion should be stressed. The latter has very vague and imprecise outlines, making it impossible to isolate any core set of beliefs and practices, which might then be called an engendering matrix providing a structure for the whole religious configuration.

Despite the rural environment, the "new religions" are transplanted religions without firm territorial ties, and they do not inspire family, clan, or community loyalty. This feature is in marked contrast with popular religion, which is organised around communities and their local cults. The places chosen for the location of the new cults is significant. The temples of the "new religions" are often built in the countryside outside the villages, which means outside the communal space taken by the popular religious cults. It is striking that the temples of the "new religions" have large parking areas in front, showing that the new followers come by car, sometimes from far away. The form of social organisation into networks, stretching over large distances rather than in a territorially based religious community with local beliefs and powers (12), is a sign of their modernity.

To characterise the "new religions", D.K. Jordan and D.L. Overmeyer (13) write of an "ideological syncretism", meaning that the religious followers and leaders intentionally manipulate ideological material, techniques and rituals borrowed from several traditions, in contrast to "historical syncretism", which is the outcome of events beyond the believer's control and, in most cases, their comprehension. The latter is the case with popular religion.

Nowadays the new religious movements operate in a much more flexible and dynamic context than ever before. Do they reflect a new vision of traditional beliefs

and practices, or do they just repeat an older model in a new form? These alternatives are not mutually exclusive. According to Chang Hsin-ying (14), the “new religions” are a continuation of traditional religions transposed into a new context.

According to the practitioners in the PRC and Taiwan, *qigong* is integral to religious practices, and is primarily religious before being therapeutic. The interactions between religion and *qigong* are a common feature of mainland and Taiwanese society. But the meaning of these interactions, and the way they operate, are not the same. An analysis of these differences, which would involve a consideration of the social structures and socio-political systems of both societies, is beyond the scope of this article. When the practices are conducted within religious groups, particularly the neo-Buddhist groups and the “new religions”, their stated aim is the development of the individual leading to personal salvation.

The success of *qigong* practices, like that of the “new religions”, is linked to the increasing individualist trend in Taiwan society. According to the practitioners’ own accounts, the development of a personal set of practices is a road to individual self-discovery and development. In this context, the Buddhist revival is worth noting. Mostly well-educated young people pore over the sutras (the canonical Buddhist texts) and give them a new interpretation. Traditional texts become the objects of reinterpretation, and provide a conduit for new ideas. History shows this to be a recurrent move on the part of Chinese intellectuals. In his analysis of the religious mutations in contemporary Taiwan, B. Vermander notes a similar privatisation of practices and beliefs (15).

The “labour of *qi*” is an aspect of this individual quest, and is frequently carried out in the setting of a religious group. Bodily practices like meditation techniques or *qigong*, form an integral part of the religious practice. Some practices and beliefs pertaining to popular religion can be identified in groups practicing *qigong*. B. Vermander writes:

“An almost medium-like channelling is set up with whichever ancestor is considered to be the inventor of the specific technique for maintaining vital energy to which the group is dedicated; the maintenance of individual balance is not separated from environmental harmony... these groups are representative of the changes undergone by popular religion in the contemporary situation: the group is not imposed by birth but freely chosen; the functionalisation of the practice (the stress being placed on individual health) goes together with scientific claims, which allows a certain reserve with regard to excessively literal belief or, worse still, superstition; consequently, the extent of the adherent’s own commitment, in terms of both belief and practice, is in his own hands” (16).

The inclusion of the beliefs and practices of popular religion into *qigong* is more specific to the PRC, where religious expression is restricted and concealed behind other sociocultural practices.

Qigong is, therefore, a component of most of the reformulated religions that have been identified, like the popular religions transformed by the addition or the dissociation of certain aspects, the “neo-Buddhist” groups (especially those concerned with protecting the environment) and the “new religions”. The process of this reformulation involves the inclusion of *qigong* into previously existing religious forms, rather than the inclusion of religious elements into the health practices. At all events, *qigong*, in both its social and therapeutic dimensions, is deeply rooted in the domain of religion, in both the PRC and Taiwan, despite the fact that in these two contemporary Chinese societies, religious phenomena take different forms and play different roles, occupying quite distinct positions.

In the nineteenth century different therapeutic techniques were adopted by the adherents of religious sects, and health practices were integrated into religious practices. Traditionally, the members of sects provided effective care to ordinary people, since they mastered the necessary techniques. Chuang Chi-Fa has provided us with details on the therapeutic practices of the Qing period. Among these are his descriptions of traditional medical techniques: acupuncture with cauterisation (*zhenjiu*) and massages (*anmo*), health conservation measures (*yangsheng*), religious practices like invocations (*zhou*) or prayers, and meditation techniques (*zuogong*) (17). The use of invocations and meditation is commonly found in various forms of *qigong*.

D.K. Jordan and D.L. Overmeyer (18) demonstrate very pertinently that there are three tendencies in contemporary Taiwanese sects:

- individual religiosity, expressed in the formation of sects, as opposed to the collective religiosity of popular religion, focused on a defined social group;
- the members’ awareness of their religious syncretism, which actually provides a motive for joining;
- the believers’ behaviour, which irrespective of proclaimed beliefs, suggests an underlying pragmatic attitude.

But it is necessary to treat this analysis with some caution, and to keep the notion of “tendency” in mind, rather than seeking a “defining trait” of sectarian practices. Individual religiosity and pragmatism can also be found in the context of popular religion (19). By way of comparison with a society in the same region of the world, the above authors stress the points in common with the “new religions” in Japan: “In their doctrines and their language, the Taiwanese groups share to a certain extent the same characteristics as the movements for renewal in Japan. Charismatic leaders have reinvigorated ancient traditions of revelation and prophecy, and have joined to

form groups with those who are intent upon keeping a foot in the past while living in an uncertain present" (20).

Another dominant ideological tendency in the *xinxing zongjiao* groups is their traditionalist conservatism. The data which I gathered in situ in 1995-1996 supports the thesis advanced by Jordan and Overmeyer: "...A disproportionate number of members... were excluded in one way or another from the officially encouraged paths to success within the modernising movement, including proficiency in Mandarin. Traditionalism in general... is open to all because it is outside the official school examination system, professional qualification requirements, and, consequently, social norms in general" (21).

The development of consciously traditionalist sects in Taiwanese society as it undergoes modernisation can be analysed as follows: they allow their adherents to recover sufficient self-esteem to put up with the changes while still refusing to live according to them. As Jordan and Overmeyer (22) rightly stress, in general, traditionalists in Taiwan are not opposed to modernity, but they also claim a right to retain their membership of a tradition. In the nineteenth century, the secret societies and traditional sects offered a place to individuals who were more or less marginalised, with no fixed or stable position in society (23). That is why their members were always the objects of disparaging rumours and prejudices. But this view of sect membership is being questioned nowadays; it seems that such groups always drew their members from every social stratum, just as they continue to do today, even though one particular stratum may well provide the basic membership at any given period. Today, it is the middle classes who are well represented in the *xinxing zongjiao* movements.

The *Tianren qigong*: a component of the *Tiandi jiao* religious practices

The "new religion" known as the *Tiandi jiao* (Teaching of Heavenly Emperor) was founded in 1980 by Li Yuchieh, an active member of the KMT. It is the outcome of a split from the *Tiande jiao* (Teaching of Heavenly Virtue) founded on the mainland in 1923. These religious organisations spreaded a defined and claimed ideology of the Chinese tradition: the matrix of this ideology is the unity of the "three religions" *sanjiao heyi* (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) and a doctrine of salvation characterised by the belief in the millenium idea. The *Tiande jiao* was founded during the 1920s, a period of intense political troubles in China: "new religions" blossomed during the 1920s and the 1930s and, considering their scope, became a real social phenomenon, which appeared as a means to bring Chinese society together. Two forces, one coming from the elites and the other from the grass-roots, contributed to the development of these religious groups. On one hand, the state trying to unify the society by using Confucian ideas that

could work as a state religion, encouraged them; on the other hand, these religions met popular demands because they could help marginal groups excluded from society through their mutual aid system and their social organisation. The *Tiandi jiao*, with 100,000 members, is now experiencing a growing success.

The *Tianren qigong* is taught by the *Tiandi jiao* group in Hsintien (Xindian), a town to the south of the Taipei conurbation. Several types of *qigong* are practised there, among which is the *Xianggong* (Perfumed *qigong*), which is generally favoured by Buddhist groups. Local investigations have established that keeping healthy and preventing illness are the main motives of the *Tiandi jiao* groups. Some practitioners are unaware that they are training within the framework of a legally recognised "new religion" linked to the Kuomintang.

Here it is worth recalling the prudence shown by Jordan and Overmeyer (24) in their analysis of the distinguishing traits of Chinese sects, both present and past.

- There is no way of characterising all, or even most of the members in the majority of groups visited. The temptation to think of the members of sects as different from non-members must be resisted.
- Detailed examination of individual group members showed that the followers attend for various reasons. Divergent interests are met by different religious activities. Groups that focus their attention on one activity rather than another, attract members accordingly.
- The activities that correspond most closely to the followers' interests are rarely linked to the explicit belief system as it appears in the charismatic leaders' pronouncements or in the publications containing the group's basic beliefs.
- It is helpful to distinguish between an instrumental or "logistical" kind of knowledge from an ideological one, among nearly all the followers who were questioned. Pragmatic motives predominated over ideology.

These generalisations provide the key for understanding the Hsintien group's practices and ideas as set out in their three-sheet publicity folder. *Qigong* is not used as a term, but that is quite commonly the case in Taiwan, even though the contents in terms of techniques and ideology corresponds to the usage of *qigong* in the PRC. The term *Tianren* is used, as well as the name of the *Tiandi jiao* religious group. The first page of the folder contains the keywords of the practice: *jingxin jingzuo* (for a serene heart—the heart being the centre of mind and feelings—sit in tranquility), the position and technique for meditation. One page covers the benefits of the *jingzuo* method of meditation, and another the value and the life aspirations of one individual practitioner of *jingzuo*, with a photograph. Group practice takes place on three evenings a week, in premises in Hsintien. On another page, a photograph shows a whole family meditating, followed by the commentary: "The whole family

meditates together, the whole family is healthy" (see picture) (25).

Tradition serves as legitimation: according to the front cover, the purpose of the teaching is to transmit "the basic Principles of the oldest school of meditation in China" (26).

Although therapy by *qigong* is not sanctioned by the Taiwan medical establishment, an informant working as a nurse (27) assured me that her direct experience of the therapeutic effectiveness of *qigong* had led her to integrate treatment by the *Tianren qigong* into the Western medicine practised in the hospital. She uses *qigong* as a supplementary treatment for the care of chronic illnesses. *Qigong*, like other therapeutic methods from traditional Chinese medicine, is said to be suitable for treating chronic illnesses, particularly by its champions in the PRC.

The closely interlinked development of political and religious factors is well documented (28) and the success of the *xinxing jiao* groups is often explained by socio-political factors (29). The successful movements were usually founded by charismatic leaders from the mainland who had already established links with political circles. Such were the cases of the *Xuanyuan jiao* founded in 1957 by the deputy, Wang Hansheng, of the *Tiande jiao*, founded on the mainland in 1923 and legally recognised in Taiwan in 1989, and of the *Tiandi jiao* founded by Li Yuj-chieh in 1980. Chiang Wei-kuo, the youngest son of JChiang Kai-shek, who died in 1997, often took part in activities organised by the *Tiande jiao* and the *Tiandi jiao* (30). Li Yu-chieh was a patriotic figure playing an active role within the KMT. Vincent Siew, the present prime minister, is a former member of the *Tiandi jiao* (31), sometimes called "the religion of the Kuomintang" (32). In the ideological sphere, the explicit reference to the unity of "the three religions" shared by the *xinxing zongjiao* groups is a version of culture put out by the Nationalist government (33).

One aspect of the reformulation of religions, namely the continuing expansion of the "new religions" allows broad generalisations on social changes in Taiwan:

- the process of individualisation and privatisation in practices and beliefs;
- higher valuation placed on education, and rising levels of achievement;
- the emergence of remodelled forms of health and religious practices inherited from tradition;
- constant interactions between religious and political development;
- tensions over identity between different sections of the population;
- religious affiliation as an indicator of identity and socio-political affiliation.

These trends also show the importance of traditions and their reinterpretation by the whole population, that is both by those who defend the need for continuity and



those who stand for, or already live by, a complete break. To sum up, the changes affecting the *xinxing zongjiao* are at one with the general trends across the whole of Taiwanese society.

In a complementary perspective to the main one developed in this article (religious reformulation seen from the angle of its inclusion in health practices), the process of religious reformulation can be analysed in terms of collective identity in the context of Taiwan. The interrelations between religious and political affiliations shows the continuity of the traditional links between the state and religious groups in Chinese culture. For the state, the question is how to control and establish links with rapidly growing religious groups which can no longer be forbidden. For the groups themselves, it is how to take advantage of the agreements negotiated with the governing authorities, and how to benefit from the favours bestowed by the elite, so as to develop freely. This is the ongoing situation in Taiwan at present: the State's pragmatic use of these religions is demonstrated by socio-political factors which explain the institutionalisation and at last the legalisation of the "new religions" according to a diachronical approach (34). The organisation into networks of social relations, from the most official to the completely informal, is a contemporary trait which is in continuity with tradition. In this relationship of forces, with a tendency towards the renewal or reproduction of traditional practices, political and economic changes do not necessarily entail radical socio-cultural shifts. That is, they do not necessarily transform the deeper structures of society, and are not an obstacle to their reproduction.

An approach to the "new religions" related to health practices such as *qigong* is an original way to bring out distinctive features of these religions, more global aspects of social change in Taiwan, dynamic links between religion and politics, and a recurring characteristic of religious practice in the Chinese cultural context,

the integration of health practices in religious practice. Processes of therapy or therapeutic rituals which are well-known in various cultural contexts, are distinguished here from preventive or curing bodily practices that the "believer-patient" learns to master under the supervision of a "religious master-healer" in cult premises or other places that can be non-religious ones. This apprenticeship shows an original therapeutic relationship characterised by an active physical and mental involvement of the patient in prevention or cure. To conclude, I will stress the mediative role of *qigong* health practices in modernising cultural representations of a changing Taiwanese society; these practices operating with representations leaving no place for "supernatural entities", contribute to the rise of a more rational, objective view of man and nature, more in tune with the ideas of "modern science". The craze for these practices in a religious framework shows a trend towards secularisation of cultural representations. ■

1. In urban Taipei in 1995-1996 and in 1997. My research project from August to December 1997 was carried out in collaboration with the Centre for Chinese Studies (*Hanxue zhongxin*) of the National Library, Taipei.
2. Biomedicine works according to biomedical sciences' paradigm. It was called "modern Western medicine" *xiyi* (indicating the place of origin and the fact that there were and still are Western pre-modern medicines such as phytotherapy, homeotherapy, etc.) or "international medicine" (because it is practiced all over the world); about the discussions and opinions expressed on the terminology of this normalised and international medicine, see P.U. Unschuld, "The Social Organisation and Ecology of Medical Practice in Taiwan" in C. Leslie (ed.), *Asian Medical Systems*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, pp. 300-316 : p. 300.
3. R.C. Crozier, *Traditional Medicine in Modern China: Science, Nationalism, and the Tensions of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968. These last years, the health profession and authorities are reconsidering the role and functions of traditional Chinese medicine in the official health system, see "Development of Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy" in *Public Health in Taiwan*, Department of Health, The Executive Yuan, Republic of China, 1997, pp. 130-136.
4. The Japanese model was inspired by the German one; for instance, medical structures were under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. From 1949 to 1971, the KMT held on this measure; From March 1971 up until now, the Department of Health has been controlled by the Executive Yuan, see *Public Health in Taiwan*, op.cit., p. 9.
5. This research project was conducted under the Lavoisier programme of the French Foreign Ministry in 1995-1996. On *qigong* and its social significance in the PRC, see my doctoral thesis, *Un aspect de la pluralité thérapeutique en Chine populaire: les pratiques de qigong. Dimension thérapeutique/ dimension sociale.*, University of Provence, 1995.
6. A. Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, pp. 49-60.
7. According to recent information (Summer 1997), *qigong* is gaining more and more recognition in the traditional sector, which includes traditional Chinese medicine (*zhong yi*). The *qi* practices are benefiting from a growing enthusiasm for traditional Chinese medicine over recent years.
8. During the Sino-Japanese war, Wang Han-sheng was a member of the provisional "National Political Council". When the Republican government established itself in Nanking (1927), he became a delegate of the National Assembly and, later, a member of the Legislative Yuan. On *Xuanyuan jiao*, see also 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; Shu Yunxuan, "Xuanyuan jiao de lishi beiying ji qi jiaoyi" (History and doctrine of the Xuanyuan religion), *Taipei wenxian*, 1965, no. 10, pp. 188-196.
9. These teachings and practices show the influence of the *Zhai jiao* (Teaching of Zhai), a syncretic tradition which borrows from Chan Buddhism, the *Bailian jiao* (White Lotus religion), and popular Taoism.
10. See also B. Vermander, "Religions in Taiwan Today", *China News Analysis*, no. 1538-1539, July 1st 1995, pp. 1-5.
11. D.K. Jordan, and D.L. Overmeyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*, 1986, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 7.
12. For a deeper analysis of workings of the cult communities, of the role of territory, and of the interactions between local cults, local power, and central power in the Taiwan countryside, see F. Allio, *Rituel, territoire et pouvoir local. La procession du pays de Sai-kang (Taiwan)*, doctoral thesis, Paris X, Nanterre, 1996.
13. op. cit., p. 9.
14. Zhang Xinying, "Taiwan xinxing minjian zongjiao cunzai yiyi pianlun" (Significance of the "new religions" in Taiwan), *Zongjiao zhaxue* (Philosophy of Religion), April 1996, Taipei, pp. 157-165. Zhang Xinying is associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute for Research on World Religions, Beijing.
15. B. Vermander, "Le paysage religieux de Taiwan et ses évolutions récentes", *L'Ethnographie*, 1995, no. 91, pp. 12-52, particularly p. 41.
16. *ibid.* pp. 41-42.
17. See Zhuang Jifu, "'qingdao minjian zongjiao de yuanli jiqi shehui gong-neng" (Origin, development, and social functions of popular religion under the Qing Dynasty), *Dalu zazhi* (The Continent Magazine) . 1991, vol. 82, no. 2, pp. 1-17.
18. op. cit., p. 267.
19. See Li Yiyuan and Song Wenli, "Geren zongjiaoxing: Taiwan diqu zongjiao xinyang de ling yi zhong guan cha" (Individual religiosity: an inquiry into religious beliefs in the Taiwan region) *Qinghua xuebao* (Qinghua University Journal), June 1988, pp. 113-139. On the central role of pragmatism in the practices of popular religion, see F. Allio, 1996 op. cit.
20. See D.K. Jordan, and D.L. Overmeyer, op. cit. On the "new religions" in Japan, see C. Thomsen, *The new religions of Japan*, V.T. Rutland, Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1963; Lan Jifu, "Ribei rulin yiyu xinxing zongjiao" (The White Lotus system in Japan and the new religions), *Dangdai*, March 1991, pp. 20-39.
21. op. cit., pp. 275-6
22. op.cit., p. 276.
23. See J. Chesneaux, *Les sociétés secrètes en Chine (XIXe et XXe siècles)*, Archives, Julliard, 1965.
24. op. cit., pp. 6-7.
25. *Quan jia yiqi jingzuo, quan jia dou jiankang*. The expressions and phrases translated from Chinese in this article are deliberately literal, in order to highlight the elements of the representational system put in circulation by the texts or oral sources.
26. *Zhongguo zui gulao de zhengzong jing zuo rumen*.
27. She works in a well respected military hospital in Taipei.
28. Nearly all my bibliographical references bring out this aspect.
29. While account must be taken of the collected ethnographic data, this explanation must nonetheless be moderated by pointing out that the healthcare practices prescribed and practiced by these groups are also an important factor for explaining their growth. It is a feature common to all groups. See C. Jochim, op. cit., p. 33.
30. See B. Vermander, *China News Analysis*, op. cit., p. 9. (Chiang Wei-kuo died on September 23rd, 1997, aged 81.)
31. To my knowledge, no source clarifies whether he is still a member.
32. *Zhongguo Shibao*, January 26th 1995.
33. See B. Vermander, *China News Analysis*, op.cit., p. 9.
34. The most significant case is the political game that led to the legalisation of the *Yiguan dao* movement "Path of Unity" in 1987 with the support of the Taiwanese faction of the KMT. *Yiguan dao* was born in the troubled context of the 1930s in Shandong province. This "new religion" polarises more tensions over identity in the Taiwanese society and gathers the largest number of members (1.5 million followers and sympathisers). See Song Guangyu, *Tiandao gouchen. Yiguan dao diaocha baogao* (Rapport d'enquête sur Yiguan dao), Taipei, 1983; B. Vermander, op. cit., 1995; D.K. Jordan and D.L. Overmyer, 1986, op.cit., and D.K. Jordan, "The Recent History of the Celestial Way: A Chinese pietistic Association", *Modern China* vol. 8 n°4, 1982, pp.435-462; H. Seiwert H. "Religious Response to Modernization in Taiwan: The Case of I-Kuan Tao" *Journal of the Hongkong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* no. 2, 1981, pp. 43-70.