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CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
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CHINESE TRADITIONAL
SECTS IN MODERN SOCIETY:
A CASE STUDY OF YIGUAN DAO
當代社會中的中國傳統教派：一貫道研究

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ABSTRACT

This study extends the religious economy model to analyzing the operation of Yiguan Dao, a modern successor of Chinese traditional sects. At the individual level, this thesis proposes that the reasons for people's conversion to Yiguan Dao are a complex of individual rationality, missionary efforts and state suppression. This study also finds that religious experiences, which are deeply personal phenomena, are also influenced by competition in the religious markets. At the group level, this research reveals that Yiguan Dao tried its best to fight against schismatic tendencies, update its theological explanations, and reform its organizational structure to make the sect more theology-centered and more organizationally stabilized, after the sect gained its legal status in 1987. On the macro level, this research analyzes the Chinese religious markets in which Yiguan Dao is located, arguing that Chinese sects bridge, and at the same time are shaped by, the popular religion and the three religions, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Thus, this in-depth study of Yiguan Dao illuminates important aspects of Chinese sects in the modern society.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Religious Economy Model and China Study

This thesis extends the religious economy model to analyses of Yiguan Dao (hereafter YGD)¹, a Chinese sect² on Taiwan. The sociology of religion has been undergoing “a paradigm shift” (Warner 1993) since the 1980s, in which the secularization theory has been challenged by the religious economy model (Stark and Finke 2000). As a “new paradigm”, the religious economy model offers integrated and animated theoretical discussions of religions, ranging from the religiousness of individuals, to the dynamics of religious groups, and then to the religious market (Stark and Finke 2000).

On the individual level, the new paradigm offers a micro theory of religion, exploring why people are religious, what they seek from the gods and what the processes of conversion are. Influenced by exchange theory, Stark and Bainbridge (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a; 1980b; 1981; 1985; 1987) build their theory on the premise that

¹ This religion calls itself alternatively the “Way of Unity” (Yiguan Dao) or the “Way of Heaven” (Tian Dao). Since both the scholarly literatures and official documents tend to use the term “*Yiguan Dao*”, I follow them in using the name “Yiguan Dao”.

² Some scholars (e.g. ter Haar 1992; Dean 1999) think that the word “sect” is inapplicable to Chinese society because it contains notions of protest and resistance so central, suggesting that alternative terms such as “religious group”, “teachings” or “branch” are more value-free. Those who incline to using the term “sect” to describe certain Chinese religious groups are very cautious about the notion of rejection the term inherently owns in Christian society. To reform the term sect to be a universal one, Overmyer purposely ignored some factors of the term sect which he thinks is inapplicable to Chinese society, such as “exclusiveness and detachment” and the notion of rejection (Overmyer 1976: 62). Overmyer uses the word sect “to mean ‘a founded voluntary association, oriented toward personal salvation’” (Overmyer 1976: 62). I use the term “sect” in this sense.

people seek to gain rewards, which are defined as anything humans will incur costs to obtain. However, rewards are always limited in supply and some of them actually do not exist in the observable world. To the degree that rewards are scarce, or are not directly available at all, humans will tend to formulate and accept explanations for obtaining rewards in the distant future or in some other non-verifiable context. Stark and Bainbridge call such explanations “compensators” since they serve in lieu of actual rewards. Nevertheless, a compensator is more than *an explanation*; it is also a promise of future rewards, promising that “in return for value surrendered now, the desired reward will be obtained eventually.” (Stark, 1981:161) In some cases, “compensators are treated by humans as if they were rewards” (Stark and Bainbridge, 1987:331) and can be used to exchange rewards. For example, some religious entrepreneurs, who are motivated by the desire for profit, incline to manufacturing and offering a set of new compensators in return for rewards from their followers. In essence, a compensator is an explanation of reward, a promise of future reward and also a substitute for rewards. These “compensators” or its current alternative “otherworldly rewards” (Stark and Finke 2000: 84), from the perspective of Stark and his collaborators, are the very potent resource which distinguishes religious organizations from secular firms.

At the group level, the new paradigm (Stark and Finke 2000, 2001) expands the sect-to-church theory and explains the long-term evolutions of religious institutions. As a model mostly concerning the evolution of religious organizations in Christian society, the sect-to-church theory argues that a sect that originates in response to protest against the outside societies would reconcile itself to prevailing circumstances. With the change in socio-economic status of the membership, a revolutionary sect deemed to develop into a

church which accepts the secular societies. When sects eventually turn into churches, on the other hand, dissident members who prefer a higher-tension religion would break away and found a new sect. Thus, the sect-church process was an endless cycle of a repeated birth, transformation, and rebirth of sect movements (Niebuhr 1929). Stark and Finke (2000) develop the sect-to-church theory by proposing that under certain conditions religious organizations will shift in the direction of higher tension with their environment. In other words, in addition to the process of sect-to-church, there exists another tendency of the evolution of religious organization, namely church-to-sect. This means that religious organizations, as rational actors, can freely choose the degree of tension and move along the continuum from rejection to acceptance of the environment. But what Stark and Finke (2000) provide is more than a description of a new tendency, they offer a parsimonious and elaborate explanation of these tendencies: the degree of tension play a vital role in influencing the strength and vitality of religious firms, so religious organizations, as rational actors, tend to choose an optimal degree of tension and thus move along the continuum from rejection to acceptance of the environment.

At the macro level, the new paradigm is devoted to analyses of the religious economy (Stark and Bainbridge 1985; 1987; Finke and Stark 1992; Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 1997; Stark and Finke 2000). Centered on the economic approach, this model views religion as an economy with the same phenomena found in other economies: a “market” of current and potential consumers, a number of products and services provided by religious “firms”, a set of one or more religious firms seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and a certain degree of competition and state regulation. Like any other economies, the religious economy can be distinguished into elements of supply and

demand. While the secularization theory (Berger 1967; Wilson 1966, 1982) argues that religious demand, which is being eroded by modernity, is of the primary importance to accounting for religious decline (at least for the secularization theorists), the religious economy model turns this argument on its head by proposing that religious supply is “the primary dynamic propelling religious change” (Stark and Finke 2000: 193). Since “the most significant changes in religion derive from shifting supply, not shifting demand” (Finke 1997: 47), the religious economy theorists stress that religion must be studied from the supply-side perspective which focuses on religious firms rather than religious consumers (Stark 1997; Finke 1997; Stark and Finke 2000). Guided by this perspective, the religious economy model explores how religious organizations compete with each other for patrons or adherents by means of offering attractive religious goods and services.

The religious economy model also pays attention to state regulation of the religious market, and to the regulatory influences. According to the model, competition is the key variable which determines the vitality of a religious market, while state regulation plays a vital role in influencing the degree of competition. When the state does not repress religion or enforce a monopoly, theorists have largely ignored the state and focused on competition between religious organizations. One central argument of the model is that competition will drive religious firms to be active, energetic and efficient in providing religious products and thus competition will produce a high rate of religious activities and a vigorous religious market. When a religious economy is regulated by state, the model predicts that the regulation decreases the vitality of religious organizations by restricting competition (Finke 1990, 1997; Finke and Stark 1997; Stark and Finke 2000).

As Finke argues, “regulation restricts competition by changing the incentives and opportunities for religious producers (churches, preachers, revivalists, etc.) and the viable options for religious consumer (church members)” (Finke 1997: 50).

Empirically, the religious economy model is derived from the observations of America where the state acts as the role of guaranteeing religious freedom and an open market is available (Warner 1993). With the efforts of the theorists of religious economy model, the new paradigm has been applied to explain religious phenomena in South America (Gill 1998), Western Europe (Iannaccone 1991; Stark and Iannaccone 1994), Eastern Europe (Froese and Pfaff 2001; Froese 2004a, 2004b) and East Asia (Lang and Ragvald 1993, 1998; Lang, Chan and Ragvald 2002, 2004; Miller 1995; Seiwert 2003; Yang 2003, 2004).

Graeme Lang and his collaborators are pioneers who extend the religious economy model to analyses of Chinese religions. In *The Rise of A Refugee God*, Graeme Lang and Lars Ragvald (1993) explore factors leading to the great success of the god Wong Tai Sin in Hong Kong from the perspective of the religious economy model. They argue that the location and size of Wong Tai Sin temple, the existence of shrewd religious entrepreneurs, the offering of such rewards as free herbal medicines, and the simplicity of worship contributed to the popularity of Wong Tai sin in Hong Kong (Lang and Ragvald 1993: 148-51). In their recent researches, Graeme Lang and his coauthors (Lang, Chan and Ragvald 2002, 2004) direct their attention to the state regulation through examining the rebuilding movement of Wong Tai Sin temples in mainland China beginning at the 1980s. They reveal that the regulatory states of Chinese religious market are complex: “state may provide subsidies, set and monitor standards, criminalize misbehaviour, and

engage in joint ventures with economic organizations” (Lang, Chan and Ragvald 2002: 2). The state acts not only as regulators, but also as religious entrepreneurs and as joint-venture partners with outsiders. Thus, “China is developing a ‘mixed’ religious economy comprised of private, collective, and state-owned enterprises” (Lang, Chan and Ragvald 2002: 38). Furthermore, they (Lang, Chan and Ragvald 2002, 2004) examine the operation of religious firms in this mixed economy, the reasons why some temples succeed and others fail, and the privatization tendency of state-managed religious units in mainland China.

Since the end of the 1990s, more scholars have applied the economic theory of religion to explain religious situation in ethnic-Chinese societies. Philip Clart (1996, 1997) analyzes the competition between phoenix halls and YGD in Taiwan. He observes that some phoenix halls, driven by the competition, attempt to distinguish themselves with the YGD and other sectarianisms by establishing their own institutional setups and developing the mythologies. Tamney and Chiang (2002) provide an analysis of religious markets in China and other ethnic-Chinese environments. Seiwert (2003) applies the religious economy model to explain the sectarian movements in imperial China. Der-Ruey Yang (Yang 2003) analyzes the Taoist ‘market economy’ and the trend in the 1990s toward the marketization of Taoism in Shanghai. Yunfeng Lu (Lu 2004) explores how market competition and entrepreneur logics promoted the transition of Falun Gong from a secular healing system to a new religion. Fenggang Yang (2003, 2004) examines state regulation and the religious markets in contemporary China. He develops a model which seeks to outline the consequences of state regulation over religion, proposing that

heavy regulation will not decrease religious demand, but will lead to the formation of three religious markets: an open market, a black market, and a gray market.

The above empirical studies applying the model to Chinese societies have enriched the understandings toward Chinese religions as well as theoretical discussions on the rational choice theory of religion. In comparison with the extensive studies on the Christendom in European-American societies, however, the studies on Chinese religions are rare and brief (Lang 2004). Sociological studies on Chinese religions are neglected to a large degree. Sharot (2002) has pointed out that the religious economy model should be re-conceptualized when it is applied to eastern religions. Up to now, the re-conceptualization work is under developed. As a theoretically-oriented research, this thesis attempts to systematically examine the applicability of the religious economy model to Chinese religions, from the individual level to the macro level. Empirically, this thesis focuses on the case study of Yiguan Dao.

1.2 A Brief Review of Previous Studies on Yiguan Dao

Yiguan Dao is a modern successor of Chinese traditional sectarian movements which focused on providing a theory of personal salvation and a synthesis of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The sect was the biggest Chinese sectarian movement in the 1940s. After the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, CCP) came into power in 1949, the sect was regarded as “reactionary organization” and was nearly destroyed in mainland China in 1953 (Deliusin 1972; Lu 1998). Some YGD sectarians came to Taiwan and spread their faith there since the late 1940s. More sectarians fled

to the island together with Kuomintang (hereafter KMT) which lost the Chinese civil war in 1949. During the following three decades, YGD had developed into the biggest sect on Taiwan although it was also suppressed by the KMT state. In 1987, through constant efforts, the sect finally gained its legal status.³

In a sense, YGD is something of laboratory for the scholars interested in religion. The sect offers them an opportunity to study the operation of religious movements against the background of suppression. It also offers an opportunity to study the process of conversion to unorthodox and deviant beliefs and practices and how such deviance is maintained under the pressure of the wider society. Since the KMT state released the state regulation of religion in the 1980s and YGD became legal in 1987, the sect offers opportunities to probe the relationship between religion and politics. Finally, the sect's recent development in a deregulated market offers insights into religious change against the background of deregulation. For the above reasons, YGD has widely captured the interest of both foreign academics and native scholars.

English studies on YGD are mainly carried out by anthropologists and historians. Deliusin (1972) gave an English description of the sect and the anti-sect movement by the CCP. David Jordan (1982) introduces the sect's development on Taiwan till 1982. Later Jordan and Overmyer (1986) provides the most thorough English description of YGD, introducing the sect's origin, recent development, rituals, doctrines and the sect's operation under suppression. Philip Clart (1997, 2000) presents the latest development of YGD after the sect gained the secular recognition. Based on field

³ However, some YGD divisions, especially some branches of the Xingyi division, did not want to be legalized and they refused to be officially registered, so some divisions of YGD still keep a secret status in Taiwan and are not open to outsiders. A detailed analysis is available in Song 1996. My analyses focus on those divisions which gain a secular recognition and are open to researchers.

research in Taiwan, he (Clart 1997) explores the ways in which YGD competes with phoenix halls. In *Opening the Wilderness for the Way of Heaven*, Clart (2000) delineates the spread of the YGD in the Greater Vancouver area, Canada. He also analyzes the factors and patterns influencing the local development of the YGD in foreign countries and lists problems that the sect had to face when they did missionary work in a foreign society.

Among Chinese works on YGD, *Secret Religions in Current North China* by Li Shiyu (1948) is a milestone. Though YGD was secret at that time, Li managed to visit a couple of YGD Buddha halls located in Beijing and Tianjin, participate in their activities and interview the sectarians. Based on the fieldwork, Li Shiyu gave a detailed introduction to the sect's origin, doctrines, rituals, religious books and missionary activities of the YGD. This book later became the main source for people to understand the sect in the following three decades. During the period from the 1950s to the 1970s when the sect was outlawed and repressed in both mainland China and Taiwan, no Chinese academic literature on YGD was produced. Only pamphlets attacking the sect were available. This situation did not change until the early 1980s when Song Guangyu (1983) published *An Investigation of the Celestial Way (Tiandao Gouchen 天道勾沈)* which updated the academic understandings of YGD. Since Song develops a good relationship with the sectarians, he has accesses to get a large number of inner stories and secret data about YGD. By using these data, Song (1990, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2002) finally produces a large number of publications which have covered nearly every aspect of YGD: missionary activities, education programs, charitable activities, commercial business, innovations, inner competition and conflicts, and sectarian schisms.

Due to the legitimization of YGD, the sect received a great deal of attention from scholars in the late 1980s (Wang 2000: 181). The central topic in this period is the sect-state relationship. A representative study is *The Religion-state Conflict State in Taiwan* by Lin Benxuan (1990). In this book, Lin carefully examines the sect's efforts and strategies to fighting for the secular recognition, the responses of KMT state and the social background against which YGD was finally legitimized.

In the 1990s, more researches on YGD emerged both in Taiwan and in mainland China. Because of the anti-sect movement in the early 1950s, it was sensitive to study YGD in mainland China and nearly no academic literatures on YGD were produced until the 1990s when researches on YGD became less sensitive. By utilizing official documents in the Qing dynasty, Ma and Han (1992) describe the sect's origin and development before the 1930s. When the sect was outlawed by the CCP, many important leaders were arrested and forced to confess what they had done in detail. As a result, a large number of confessional records were made. These data were of great values to reveal the sect development from the 1930s to the 1940s. As a policeman who studies traditional popular religious groups and then makes some suggestions to some policy-makers, Lu Zhongwei (1998) is the first man who utilized these official documents and authored *The Inner Stories of The YGD* (Yiguan Dao Neimu, 一贯道内幕). Lu Yao (2000) also utilizes a chapter to introduce the sect's development in Shangdong before 1949.

On Taiwan, a couple of theses centering on YGD have been produced in the 1990s. Lin Rongze (Lin 1992), focusing on the *Fayi Lingyin* branch, analyzes the modes of YGD's operation and the sect's main activities. Yang Hongren's excellent

thesis (Yang 1997) reveals the doctrinal and ritual innovations introduced by the sect, the ways in which YGD transforms its adherents' habit and preferences, and the significance of such transformation. Wu Jingyi (1998) introduces the institutionalization of the *Fayi Chongde* (发一崇德) branch. Chen Junting (Chen 1999) provides an analysis of the strategies adopted by the *Jichu Zhongsu* (基础忠恕) branch to sustain sectarian students.

1.3 Aims of the Study

As the above part has introduced, YGD is of great importance in Chinese society: the biggest sect in China in the 1940s, the first Chinese sect changing from illegal to legal and one of most influential sects in contemporary Taiwan and a worldwide sect as well. Jordan and Overmyer have presented some of the developments of YGD up to the late 1970s or early 1980s before the sect was legalized, but there are few studies on the sect's development after 1987 when it was legalized. In this study, I am providing a much more detailed and complete picture of this important sect over the past twenty years than any other English-language scholarly study up to the present. Since this is the first detailed treatment of YGD in English, it will be useful for scholars overseas as they encounter the growth of YGD divisions which are proselytizing in other societies of this sect over the past twenty years. As a theory-driven study, this thesis not only systematically probes the applicability of the religious economy model to Chinese society, ranging from the micro-level to the macro-level, but also challenges some concepts and theories which are derived from the Christian society.

To sum up, the aims of this thesis are two-fold. On one hand, I hope this study could enrich the theoretical discussion by extending the model to Eastern religions which are largely neglected by the core theorists of the new model. On the other hand, I envisaged that the result of this empirical study would be useful for people to understand the operation of Chinese sects, especially YGD, the competition between them, the religion-state relationship and the religious markets in Chinese societies.

1.4 Methodology

Methodologically, this study is based primarily on the analysis of field data I collected during a three month period of field research in Taiwan between September and December 2002. Before going to the field, I had collected a large amount of information about YGD from the Internet, including spirit writings and morality books produced by the sect, the sect's activities, and discussions of the sectarians. From these materials available in the Internet, I not only got a primary image of the sect but also outline the items I should observe in future fieldwork. With the help of my supervisor who once visited YGD on Taiwan, I get the World I-Kuan-Tao Headquarters' (hereafter WITH) permission to help me arranging an academic trip. In the early September 2002, I went to Taiwan and lived in academia Sinica, Taiwan where I spent the first week in visiting and interviewing a couple of scholars expert at YGD studies, such as Song Guanyu and Qu Haiyuan. Then I visited a couple of important YGD public Buddha halls (temples) from the north to the south with the assistance of WITH, as indicates in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Temples I Visited during my Fieldwork

| Temple name | location | Founders |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Zhongshu Daoyuan | Taoyuan County | Jichu Zhongshu Division |
| Guanghui Foyuan | Nantou County | Fayi Chongde Division |
| Chongde Wenjiao guan | Taipei County | Fayi Chongde Division |
| Chunyang Daoyuan | Gaoxiong County | Xingyi Nanxing Division |
| Yihe Shengtang | Tainan County | Xingyi Yihe Division |
| Tianhuang Gong | Taizhong County | Baoguang Jiande Division |
| Tiantai Shenggong | Gaoxiong City | Baoguang Jiande Division |
| Shengwei Tiantaishan | Gaoxiong County | Baoguang Jiande Division |

During the trip arranged by the WITH, I had access to several divisions' chief leaders who permitted me to do the study. In the following two months, I interviewed forty-two YGD believers. Most of these interviewees were randomly selected. But I also purposely interviewed two female celibates and two divisions' chief leaders. In detail, I interviewed thirty-one sectarians who converted to the sect before 1987 when it was still illegal and eleven young sectarians who inherited their religious identity from their parents. Among these interviewees, twenty persons are male and twenty-two are female. Thus, the interviews are helpful for me to compare the older generations and the younger generations, the male and the female. These interviews were usually conducted in a quiet

room, recorded by the electronic recording pen, and then input into my personal computer. Most interviews last between one and three hours. To protect the interviewees' privacy, I use pseudo names of persons involved with interviewees in this thesis and mark them with an asterisk "*". Conversely, all person and place names not marked with an asterisk are real.

When I stayed in Taiwan, I was also engaged in "participant observation". From September 21 to September 27, 2002, I had lived in Shenwei Tiantaishan (神威天台山), a huge YGD temple which was still in building at that time. There, I worked as a volunteer, participated and observed the sectarians' activities, lived together with them, and had chats with them who were the potential interviewees. In the following two months, I attended some seminars and research courses which were respectively designed for children, young college students, and veteran YGD sectarians. I also attended some important congregations conducted by different divisions of YGD, such as the Fayi Chongde's "progressing assembly" (*Gan-en Jingjin dahui* 感恩精进大会) which was held in September 28, 2002. Participation not only enabled me to gain some kind of empathic understanding of the sectarians' ideas and practices, but also offered me opportunities to ask some awkward or naïve questions that I was reluctant to voice in other occasions.

The fieldwork on Taiwan also enabled me to collect the materials produced by YGD. Four kinds of data were gathered. The first is important sacred books or scriptures of YGD, such as *An Exploration of Three in One* (Sanyi tanyuan 三一探源) by Wang Jueyi and *Answers to Doubts and Questions Concerning Yi-guan Dao* (Yi-guan Dao Yi-wen Jie-da 一貫道疑問解答) by Zhang Tianran. The second is spirit writings that were

manufactured by the sect in the past few decades. The third is influential books and pamphlets recognized by the sectarians. Finally, I gathered periodical magazines issued by YGD divisions which documented the sect's activities and important news. All of these materials helped me to understand the doctrines and practices of YGD.

When I did fieldwork in Taiwan, I also wrote diaries to document factual information and my personal reactions and comments to what was happening. It is no doubt that the diary was useful for recording factual data. But its advantages are more than that. The process of writing diaries was also a process of understanding what was happening from a reflective perspective. The diary served to record what I had taken to be strange or exotic at the start of the study, and the process of clarifying these puzzles. The diary also drove me to reflect what should be probed in the next step and which issues I should pay more attention to in future studies. In a sense, the diary guided my research.

YGD includes dozens of divisions. I would have liked to get a better or more detailed understanding of all YGD divisions, however, my access to data or to those kinds of people was limited, mainly confined to the *Baoguang Jiande* division, the *Jichu Zhongshu* branch, the *Fayi Chongde* division, the *Fayi Lingyin* division, the *Xingyi Nanxing* division and the *Huiguang* division. Because the time was limited, I can not provide an entire investigation of all YGD divisions. The situation becomes more complex due to the fact that some YGD divisions do not get a membership of WITH and some self-defined YGD branches are regarded as heterodoxies by WITH. I had no access to these divisions, so, I do not claim to I have offered a complete analysis of YGD. Actually, this will have to wait for some future researches.

Unless indicated otherwise, where the present tense is used in the following account it refers to the field research period of 2002. For the transcription of Chinese names, I have used the pinyin system because it is more widely used than the Wade-Giles alternative and my field research was conducted exclusively in Mandarin. Two exceptions are noted here: Kuomintang and Taipei, since the transcriptions are widely received by the English world. Another exception is “World I-Kuan-Tao Headquarter” (WITH). Because the sectarians tend to use “WITH” to refer to this institute, I follow the routine usage adopted by the sectarians. In references to other people’s works, I use the authors’ names as they appeared in the cited works. As a rule, at the first occurrence of a Chinese term, both transcription and Chinese characters are given, and all following occurrences are marked in transcription only. The characters for all Chinese terms are listed in a separate glossary.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven substantive chapters, an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter. The substantive chapters are organized into four parts. Part I (Chapter 2 and 3) presents the historical and environmental background of the rise of YGD in Chinese societies; part II (Chapter 4 and 5) explores the individualistic-level issues such as religious commitment and religious experiences from the supply-side perspective; and, at the group level, part III (Chapter 6 and 7) attends to the ongoing doctrinal and organizational transformations occurring in YGD. Part VI (Chapter 8) offers a macro-level analysis of Chinese religious markets.

Chapter 1, the current chapter, introduces the theoretical framework, briefly reviews existing studies on YGD and sets out the substantive issues to be addressed in this thesis and methodology. It also sketches an outline of this thesis.

The second chapter offers a general introduction to YGD, including a brief history of YGD, its pantheon and its theologies. In this chapter, I use a historical approach to present a picture of the movement as it has emerged during the last few centuries. The historical introduction can help us to understand how YGD has reached its present position in Chinese societies.

Chapter 3 discusses the operation of YGD when it was suppressed by the authoritarian state in Taiwan before 1987, focusing on the unintended consequence of religious suppression. This chapter proposes that moderate suppression could act as the energizing force which drove the suppressed sect to be innovative, adaptive and aggressive; moderate suppression was helpful not only because it induced the sect to increase the other-worldly rewards but also because it reduced the risk of religious goods; and finally moderate suppression made the suppressed sect be immune to the free-rider problem. All of these unintended consequences of religious suppression ironically benefited the growth of YGD and the sect became the biggest sect of Taiwan when it was under suppression.

Chapter 4 examines the mechanisms adopted by YGD to recruit new members and increase the commitment of both new and existing members. Since most of YGD sectarians are previously adherents of Chinese popular religion who focus their attention on efficacy, it is especially difficult for the sect to maintain followers. YGD devotes itself to generating and sustaining the sectarians' commitment through holding research

courses. These courses are divided into several levels, ranging from the primary one to the highest one. After attending a course, the sectarians are required to make a vow. Then they are usually encouraged to take part in a higher level course and establish a further vow. This process continues. Guided by the vows they make, new recruits of YGD could choose to become core members step by step. Through case study, this chapter shows that a progressive strictness exists in YGD; this mechanism is helpful to increase the commitment of YGD believers because of its flexibility and consideration, as well as its ability to mitigate the free rider problem. This study also shows that the dichotomies, such as members vs. nonmembers, strictness vs. liberality, and organizational efforts vs. personal choices, do not exist in Chinese sect.

Chapter 5 tries to bring sociological theory to the studies of religious experiences, proposing that the fluctuation of categories of religious experience is also influenced by market forces. Before the 1980s, spirit-writing and spirit-possession were widely practiced by YGD, while meditation was prohibited by the sect. Today, the situation is reversed: spirit possession is discarded; meanwhile, meditation becomes more and more popular in the sect. Based on ethnographic data, this chapter proposes that religious suppliers appear to compete to provide “religious experiences” which maximize their appeal to members and potential adherents. At the same time, suppliers try to control these experiences so that they can only be properly pursued and understood within the group. They control these experiences to prevent innovations which could threaten the group’s leadership and structure. The analysis of the sect’s evolving positions on spirit writing and meditation provides a very good illustration of those processes.

Chapter 6 focuses on the ongoing doctrinal adaptation of YGD and its consequences. Previous studies stress that doctrinal adaptations usually breed the sect-church tendencies through increasing or reducing the tension between religious firms and the outside societies. However, this chapter finds that adaptive innovations of teaching do not inevitably lead to the sect-to-church tendency. Doctrinal innovations by YGD are making the sect more intellectually complicated and theology-centered. But these orientations are not necessarily confined to the sect-church tendencies.

Chapter 7 explores the ways in which organization structure influences religious vitality. When the sect was suppressed, it developed an organizational structure which was helpful to avoid persecution, sustain the sectarians' morale, and promote competition and innovations. After the sect gained its legal status in 1987 and operated in a deregulated religious market, however, such structure not only became a roadblock to the implementation of religious innovations but also induced religious schisms. In order to sustain religious vitality, the sect devotes itself to institutional innovation. Through case study, this chapter proposes that institutional factors always play important roles in sustaining religious vitality, both in a free market and in a repressive environment.

Chapter 8, by providing an analytical model of Chinese religious markets, places Yiguan Dao into a broader context. This chapter finds that the tension is not appropriate to label Chinese people's religious preferences. In addition, state regulation by imperial China contributed to the weakness of institutionalized religions. The dominating religions in China exerted influences on their adherents not through formal bureaucratic organizations but through the extensive incense-division networks that were loose and non-hierarchical. China's sectarian tradition bridged popular religion and the three

religions, namely Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. On one hand, most of Chinese sectarian leaders and adherents are from popular religion and thus sects keep many elements of popular religion. On the other hand, Chinese sects are influenced by the three religions. They manufactured their salvation theory on the basis of Buddhism, drew their magical rituals from Taoism, and borrowed their ethical systems from Confucianism.

Chapter 9 summarizes the findings of this dissertation and concludes the thesis by presenting possible further questions in future researches.

CHAPTER 2

YIGUAN DAO ON MAINLAND CHINA

Imperial China had a long history of sectarian movements which stressed individual salvation. YGD is a modern successor to this sectarian tradition. In this chapter, I will introduce Chinese sectarian tradition briefly (part 1) and then examine the origins and development of YGD (part 2), its pantheon (part 3), its theologies (part 4), its rituals (part 5), and its organizations and missionary activities in mainland China before 1949 (part 6). The final part is a discussion.

2.1 A Brief History of China's Sectarian Movements

The origin of Chinese sectarian tradition could be traced to the Han dynasty (200 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) when *Tai ping Tao* emerged and was involved in the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans (Ma and Han 1992; Seiwert 2003). In the following one thousand years, however, Chinese sectarian tradition did not have a good development. With Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism establishing their orthodox statuses in the Tang (618-906) and Song dynasty (960-1279), these orthodox groups, especially Confucians, became more active in defining and suppressing unsanctioned religious groups whose leaders and organizations fell out of the official framework. Among those state-defined 'heterodox' religious movements, the White Lotus Sect (Bailian Jiao) is most famous. Originated from a completely orthodox Buddhist tradition, the White Lotus Sect was

finally labeled heterodox in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and later the term “Bailian Jiao” were used by later imperial officials to refer to all heterodox movements conceived by the officials (Overmyer 1976; Naquin 1985; ter Haar 1992).

Chinese sectarian tradition became full-fledged in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when hundreds of sects emerged. Luo Qing¹(1442-1527) exerted great influence on the formation of a literary sectarian tradition by publishing “Five Books in Six Volumes” (*wu-bu Liu-ce* 五部六册) in 1509 (Overmyer 1999; Seiwert 2003). Though Luo regarded himself as totally loyal to Buddhism, he was not recognized by Buddhism but widely welcomed by the masses remaining outside the Buddhist clerical establishments. Luo’s ideas were inherited and developed by later sectarian writers through producing their own “precious volumes” (*Baojuan* 宝卷), a kind of popular scriptures. On the other hand, many sectarian groups which adopted Luo’s theories and venerated Luo Qing as the founding Patriarch occurred in the Ming dynasty. With the print and wide distribution of various *Baojuan*, and with the emergences of various new sectarian groups by means of schisms and the homogenization of beliefs as a result of mutual influence, a common sectarian milieu came into being in the late Ming dynasty (Seiwert 2003). Most of those sects accepted the Eternal Venerable Mother myth, produced their own scriptures, emphasized personal salvation, and had a hierarchical structure headed by their respective Patriarchs (*zushi* 祖师).

In the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the officials adopted stricter policies to persecute sects, but sectarian groups tended to prosper rather than wither. As Seiwert observes, “even during the Qing dynasty with its severe persecutions, the number of sectarian

¹ For a detailed description of Luo’s hard-won enlightenment experiences, please see Ma and Han 1992: 187-202; English reader can refer to the description by Overmyer 1999: 93-102.

groups did not decline but appears to have increased constantly” (Seiwert 2003: 445). When the Chinese Republic was founded in 1911, there was a veritable explosion of sectarian movements among which the Morality Society (*Tongshang she*), the Red Swastika Society (*Hong Shizi hui*), and Yiguan Dao were well-known (Li 1948). While these sects were nearly uprooted in mainland China by the Chinese Communist Party after 1949, some of them (e.g. Yiguan Dao) successfully survived in Taiwan and Hong Kong which were beyond the control of CCP (Deliusin 1972; Jordan 1982). Since the 1980s, some sects (e.g. Yiguan Dao, Sanyi Jiao) have begun to spread and thrive in the mainland again (Munro 1989; Dean 1998).

2.2 A History of Yiguan Dao

Yiguan Dao can trace its origin to Luo Sect (*Luo jiao* 罗教), the most influential sect in Ming period (Zheng 1985; Ma and Han 1992; Wang 1996; Lin 1986; Fu 1999). Organizationally, Yiguan Dao traces its origin to the “Prior-to-heaven Dao” (*Xiantian Dao* 先天道, Hereafter, XTD) which was founded in the eighteenth century by Huang Dehui (黄德辉), its ninth patriarch (Mu 2002). Huang established XTD on the basis of the Mother belief, regarding himself as the carrier of a secret teaching (*Xinfa* 心法) which originates from the Eternal Venerable Mother. The “mind-dharma” is the knowledge of the Dao that is only imperfectly given expression by the existing religions, according to the sect, but is totally inherited and revealed by the sect.

Because the imperial officials regarded voluntary religious organizations as rebellious forces, they took severe measures in suppressing those sects and XTD could

not be exempted from repression, too. In the early nineteenth century, some XTD leaders were killed and others were exiled. But repressions did not prevent XTD from developing. When some XTD leaders were exiled to Guizhou, a province of southwest China, they continued their religious activities and recruited a large number of believers in southwest China. Gradually, the sect spread to other places and by the middle of the nineteenth century it became a countrywide sect. But a split also accompanied its success and XTD was divided into several small sections (Ma and Han 1992).

In 1877, according to Yiguan Dao's account, "the Venerable Mother reached the spirit writing [*Fu-ji*] altar and designated Wang Jueyi as the fifteenth Patriarch." (Lin 1986: 188) From then on, Wang Jueyi purported himself as the fifteenth patriarch of this sectarian tradition and renamed his sect as "The religion for final salvation" (*Mo-hou Yi-zhu jiao* 末后一著教). Wang was a good fortune teller, an adept of inner-alchemy cultivation, an outstanding sectarian theorist and, in all, a charismatic religious leader. He reformed XTD's theologies and rituals and introduced many innovations into the sect's practice, as we will see in the following sections. Due to his contribution, Wang is regarded as the real founder of modern YGD by some the sectarian scholars (e.g. Zhong 1995; Yang 1997). Under Wang's leadership, the sect expanded to all over the country in a few years (Zhong 1995: 35). Unfortunately, with the sect becoming more and more influential, the Qing government suspected that it intended to rebel and a suppression fell to the sect in 1883. Wang's elder son was killed by the Qing government and Wang was forced to live secretly until his death.

After Wang died, Liu Qingxu succeeded the leadership and became the sixteenth Patriarch of the sect. In 1905, borrowing Confucius' saying that "the Dao that I follow is

the one that unifies all” (*Wudao Yi-yi-guanzhi* 吾道一以贯之), Liu gave the sect a new name: “Yiguan Dao” which means “the Dao of Unity”. However, the sect remained a very small scale during the following years, with no more than 200 followers (Lu 1998: 7). The situation changed a little after Lu Zhongyi became the sect’s seventeenth Patriarch in 1919 when Liu died. Claiming to be the incarnation of the Maitreya Buddha, Lu Zhongyi recruited nearly ten thousand believers in Shandong province (Lu 1998: 8). However, compared with other sects of the time, Yiguan Dao was still a very small local sect. Worse still, when Lu died in 1925, the sect split into several small sections one of which was led by Zhang Tianran² (Lu 1998: 9-10).

In 1930, Zhang Tianran formally viewed himself as the new Patriarch of YGD, namely the Eighteenth Patriarch (Lu 1998; Fu 1999: 17). As a shrewd religious entrepreneur, Zhang Tianran reformed the organizational structure of YGD, put much emphasis on missionary activities, utilized the technique of spirit writing to train missionaries, and produced several spirit writings to popularize the YGD doctrines and rituals. These efforts finally paid off. In the following two decades, YGD developed from a small local sect into the biggest sect of China, recruiting millions of followers and spreading to 81% counties of China (Fu 1999: preface). Though the exact number of YGD sectarian is not available³, it is no doubt that YGD was the biggest sect in China in the 1940s (Lu 1998; Fu 1999). In short, under the leadership of Zhang Tianran, YGD

² Zhang’s secular name is Zhang Guangbi. Since he gave himself a religious name “Tianranzi” (天然子), he was later more mentioned as Zhang Tianran than Zhang Guangbi by his followers. So in this thesis, I follow the sectarians’ tradition and use the name “Zhang Tianran”.

³ Lu Zhongwei estimated that YGD had recruited fifteen million believers in 1947 when Zhang Tianran died (Lu 1998: preface).

developed into a full-fledged sect with theologies, pantheon, rituals, organizations and missionaries peculiar to itself, as the follows analyze.

2.3 The YGD pantheon

2.3.1 The Eternal Venerable Mother

Like many other Chinese sects, YGD centers on the worship of Eternal Venerable Mother (*wu-sheng-lao-mu*), the personified deity of the primordial force of the cosmos. According to Ma and Han (1992), the Eternal Venerable mother was given its prototype by Five Books in Six Volumes (*Wu-bu Liu-ce*), the precious volumes (*Bao-juan*) written by Luo Qing. Influenced by Chan Buddhism, Luo Qing holds that the enlightenment does not depend on the external forces such as worshipping the statue but on the realization of “true emptiness” (*Zhenkong* 真空). According to Luo’s understanding, the true emptiness covers and surrounds the human body; and it is the primordial source of all things as well. In some passages, Luo Qing borrows the Taoist term “the Limitless” (*Wu-ji* 无极) to refer to the origin of the cosmos. For example, he declares that “*Wu-ji*” gives birth to heaven and earth and supports all beings. On the basis of this idea, Luo creates a new personified deity who supposedly dominates the world. The deity is “the Limitless Holy Patriarch” (*wu-ji sheng-zu* 无极圣祖), a personified deity. Luo also suggests that the Sakyamuni Buddha is also an incarnation of the Limitless Holy Patriarch. Manifestly, this Holy Patriarch is the chief deity in his theological system (Ma and Han 1992: 213). In addition, Luo repeatedly emphasizes that the deity is without a gender: “The Patriarch is the Mother, the Mother is the Patriarch.” Considering this suggestion, we can refer to the

deity as the Limitless Sacred Mother (*Wuji ShengMu* 无极圣母), too. Today, Yiguan Dao is still using the term “The Limitless Mother” (*Wuji Mu* 无极母) or The Limitless Venerable Mother (*Wuji Laomu* 无极老母) to refer to its chief deity.

The term “Eternal Parents” (*Wu-sheng Fumu* 无生父母) is also mentioned by Luo Qing in Five books in Six Volumes. However, Luo never elevates the term *Wusheng Fumu* to the source of the cosmos; neither does he regard *Wusheng Fumu* as a personified deity. As Overmyer argues, Luo Qing takes an abstract and mystical approach rather than a mythological one in building his theory (also see Zheng 1985: 110-114). “For him, this [the term “Mother”] is still a mystical symbol, not a mythological deity” (Overmyer 1999: 2). Nevertheless, the situation later changes because of the reinterpretation of Luo’s works.

In the sixteenth century, the term “Eternal Venerable Mother” (*Wusheng Laomu*) began to take the place of “Eternal Parent” (*Wusheng Fumu*) and the Mother was delineated as a personified deity rather than a mystical force (Ma and Han 1992). A set of mythology about the Mother gradually came into being through integrating some elements of Maitreya belief (Ma and Han 1992; Overmyer 1999). Chinese sectarians had been familiar with the Maitreya belief since Yuan dynasty (1264-1368), long before Luo Qing established the Non-action sect (*Wu-wei-Jiao* 无为教, another name of Luo-jiao). According to this mythology, there are three stages of cosmic time or *kalpas* which are presided over by three successive Buddhas: Randeng fo, Sakyamuni and Maitrya; now we are in the end of the second *kalpas* which would be accompanied by great cosmic catastrophe which would destroy the world; and Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, will incarnate himself in this world to save humankind. In the late sixteenth century, this

theme became a part of Eternal Venerable Mother belief. The belief held that the Eternal Venerable Mother was the creator of the cosmos who sent his/her own children to the eastern world. However, being allured by the secular enjoyments, these children lost their true nature and never wanted to return to “the original home in the world of true emptiness” (*Zhenkong jiaxiang* 真空家乡). With the coming of the end of the second *kalpa* and accompanying catastrophes, these lost children were facing destruction. To save them, the Venerable Mother would send the Buddha Maitreya to earth to save some of her children (the believers) and ultimately take them back to their “original home in the world of true emptiness” (*Zhenkong jiaxiang*). Thus, the Maitreya belief and the Mother belief intertwined each other in the late sixteenth century. Since the Eternal Venerable Mother is associated with Universal salvation, it seems that the Mother theology absorbed and strengthened the image of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva (Guanyin pusa 观音菩萨), the goddess who is believed to offer “universal salvation”⁴.

More contents were added into the story of Venerable Mother creating the cosmos in the seventeenth century. *Dragon Flower Precious Scripture* says: “The Unborn Venerable Mother, being pregnant prior to heaven, gives birth to Yin and Yang....The Yin is a girl whose name is Niu-wo; and the Yang is a boy name Fu-xi.” Niu-wo and Fu-xi are primogenitors of the human being in Chinese orthodox mythology. Manifestly, sectarians integrate this myth into the Mother belief through regarding Niu-wo and Fu-xi as the Venerable Mother’s son and daughter (Overmyer 1976).


The belief of Eternal Venerable Mother also draws some elements from the cult of Queen Mother of the West (*Xi-wang-mu* 西王母) which has a long history in China.

⁴ Guanyin had several images in traditional China: the fertility goddess, the goddess resisting marriages and valuing celibacy, and first of all, the goddess offering universal salvation.


According to Cahill, “the earliest mention of the Queen Mother of the West occurs in oracle bone inscriptions of the *Shang* dynasty (traditional dates 1766-1122 B.C.)” (Cahill 1993: 12). By the fifth or sixth century A.D., the Queen Mother reached her mature form as a divine matriarch and teacher, the most honored goddess of Taoism. In Song and Yuan dynasty, the Queen Mother of the West was described as the greatest Taoist goddess and the wife of Jade Emperor in Chinese oral literatures. This image was strengthened with the popularity of *Record of a journey to the west* (*Xi-you-ji* 西游记). But with the rise of Eternal Venerable Mother belief, the Venerable Mother took the place of Queen Mother as the greatest goddess. When studying phoenix halls in contemporary Taiwan, Clart (1996) observes that “the Jade Thearch plays a role similar to the earthly emperor of traditional China, while the venerable Mother may be compared to the Empress Dowager: her authority is largely informal, but always deferred to” (Clart 1996: 353). Obviously, the adherents of phoenix halls confuse the images of Queen Mother and Venerable Mother, or in other words, “the Venerable mother belief absorbed the image of Queen Mother” (Ding 2004: 84).

Now we can overview the Mother belief briefly. Emerging in the late fifteenth century as a mystical symbol, the term *Wusheng Fumu* (Eternal Parent) gradually developed into *Wusheng Laomu* (Eternal Venerable Mother); a set of mythology was gradually established surrounding the “*Eternal Venerable Mother*” (*Wusheng Laomu*); and the Mother eventually became a personified deity, replaced the role of Limitless Sacred Patriarch, and acted as the chief deity of all the gods and Buddhas as well as “cosmic parent of humankind” (Overmyer 1999: 2). Though the Eternal Venerable Mother is omnipotent, she is not awful but merciful to ordinary people. Actually, she is

not a serious teacher who delivers abstruse theories and criticisms. Rather, she is an amiable mother, being worried about her sons and daughters who lose their true nature and trying all means to bring them back to the heaven. In the later development, the Venerable Mother gradually had the qualities of the following female deities simultaneously: the Queen Mother (the greatest Taoist goddess), Niu-wo (Chinese fertility deity who believed created the mankind) and Guanyin (the goddess offering universal salvation). Since the Venerable Mother absorbs the images of earlier goddess, and since the Venerable Mother has both concrete images and an abstract expression, she is attractive to peasants and literates. As a result, the Venerable Mother had gained a mass popularity since the seventeenth century, especially among sectarians (Ma and Han 1992).

The Venerable Mother is also the main deity worshiped by YGD. The sectarians give the Mother a full name which is “the most brilliant super emperor, the true god who is measureless and void, the most revered and scared divinity who govern the universe and all beings” (*Mingming-shangdi Wuliang-qingxu Zhizun-zhisheng Sanjie-shifang Wanling-zhenzhai*, 明明上帝无量清虚至尊至圣三界十方万灵真宰). But the deity does not have a concrete image and YGD sectarians represent the god with the symbol ⁵ or fire. They state that:

Because the Tao is the ultimate force or principle rather than a father-figure supreme being, I-Kuan Tao [namely YGD] represents it with fire instead of some human visage. No human likeness or material symbol can capture the essence of

⁵ This is a new Chinese character which is especially created by the sectarian to refer to the Mother. Its pronunciation is same with the pronunciation of Chinese character “母” (mu) which means “mother”. The sectarians want to emphasize that the god is sexless through the creation of .

the Tao. Fire, the ethereal manifestation of energy, is a far better symbol than anything human beings can craft⁶.

Based on the above understanding, the most important thing in the pantheon of YGD is the flame which represents the Mother. It can be called Buddha Light (*fo-deng* 佛灯) or Mother Light (*mu-deng* 母灯). The Mother Light is the central focus and the most essential part of YGD shrine. This makes the sect very flexible when doing missionary work. Indeed, the YGD sectarians have remarked that in times of war, chaos or strife, when it is not possible to create the shrine completely, a single lit candle with nothing else is entirely sufficient to serve as the representation of Mother/ Dao and hold all kinds of YGD rituals (Yang 1997).

2.3.2 The Jigong Living Buddha

The religious economy model holds that a religious firm, as a rational behavior, would try to borrow some elements of other religions to attract and hold followers in the face of competition from other religious organizations (Stark and Fink 2000). This argument can be verified by Zhang Tianran's innovations. As a religious entrepreneur, Zhang Tianran incorporated the "Jigong" belief into the YGD pantheon.

Jigong was a late twelfth- and early thirteenth- century Buddhist monk who was famous for his miracles as well as crazy behaviors transgressing monastic regulations. His nickname "Crazy Ji" (*Jidian* 济颠) which was given by his contemporaries suggested

⁶ From: <http://www.taoism.net/enter.htm> which can be retrieved in 10/04/2004.

that he was not an ordinary Buddhist cleric. Though his eccentricity estranged him from the Buddhist establishment, the crazy god was venerated by his lay contemporaries as a miracle worker; and shortly after his death in 1209, he became the object of a local cult primarily in Zhejiang. In the early twentieth century, Jigong became one of most popular deities of Chinese popular religion and active in spirit-possession and spirit writing⁷, partly as a consequence of oral literature on this eccentric saint (Shahar 1998).

Since the Jigong belief was under its way in the 1930s, Zhang Tianran tried to bring this crazy god into his pantheon. In *Answers to Doubts and Questions Concerning Yiguan Dao*, a spirit-writing supposedly written by Jigong himself, Jigong was assigned the fourth-ranking position in Yiguan Dao's hierarchy of divinities, preceded only by the Eternal Mother, the Buddha Maitreya, and the Bodhisattva Guanyin. It says that:

At the time of doomsday, the Mother specially mandates the Maitreya Buddha, the Guanyin Bodhisattva and the Jigong living Buddha to save the world and do the great salvational work altogether. Maitreya Buddha is in charge of the business in the heaven, while the Jigong living Buddha is in charge of missionary work. ...As for the Jigong living Buddha, we should particularly worship him. (Zhang 1937a: 34)

⁷ Jigong may have figured in spirit-possession cults prior to twentieth century. The tendency of official sources to ignore this form of religious activity might account for our ignorance of Jigong's early role in it. In any event, the earliest extant record of a mediumistic cult involving Jigong dates from 1900, and it concerns the Boxer uprising. The Boxers believed that they went into battle possessed by deities who guaranteed them invulnerability. One frequently invoked deity was the eccentric Jigong. A detailed analysis is available in Shahar 1998.

What is more, Zhang Tianran publicly claimed that he was just the incarnation of Jigong. As a result, the sectarians hold that Jigong and Zhang Tianran are one and the same. Both figures are addressed as “the living Buddha and venerable teacher” (*Huofu Shizun* 活佛师尊) and other honorific titles, including the living Buddha Jigong, Jigong the Saintly Monk. For this reason, the crazy god became more significant than that suggested by his fourth ranking, as Li Shiyu (Li 1948: 50) commented that “Jigong’s prestige in Yiguan Dao is almost equal to that of the Eternal Mother. So much so that in most believers’ eyes his position is even higher than hers.” In addition, the crazy Ji became the most active deities who are invoked by the sectarians to produce spirit writings. During Zhang Tianran’s life time, about 80 percent of the YGD’s divine revelations were signed by the crazy god, among them the YWJD is most famous (Shahar 1998: 203). “Indeed, Zhang Guangbi [Zhang Tianran’s secular name] may have chosen Jigong to deliver the Unity Sect’s message of salvation precisely because of this crazy god’s popularity in fiction, drama, and oral literature” (Shahar 1998: 205). It is the first time that the Jigong belief was brought into Chinese sectarian tradition.

2.3.3 Other Deities

In a typical YGD shrine, there are also figurines arrayed in front of the Mother Light. The Maitreya Buddha is always in the center position. He may be accompanied by Jigong, Guan Yin, and Guan Gong. The Maitreya Buddha, who was believed to offer the final salvation to humankind, usually plays a vital role in traditional Chinese sectarian movements. YGD inherits the tradition and worships the Maitreya Buddha, but the

Jigong living Buddha holds a special status since Zhang Tianran incorporated the god into his sect in the 1930s, as the foregoing section has pointed out. In addition to the Mother, the Maitreya Buddha, the Jigong living Buddha, Guanyin and Guanggong, more deities are available in the pantheon of YGD, such as Laozi, Confucius, Sakyamuni, Jesus, Mahomet, the stove god, etc. Actually, all gods available in Chinese popular religion hold positions in the pantheon of YGD, and the sectarians call them “all celestial deities and saints” (*Zhutian Shensheng* 诸天神圣). The YGD pantheon also extends to the level of earth god (*Tu-di gong* 土地公). An interesting spirit writing we get is about how the earth god and his wife in *Xinwei* (新威) village of Gaoxiong county converted to YGD in December 1st, 2000. The spirit writing states:

The earth god Yang Dechuan and his wife Wang Yulian were born in Hunan province, China. They and their ancestors accumulated a large number of merits through doing charitable activities, such as building bridges and roads. Therefore, after Yang and Wang died, the Jade emperor appointed them as the earth gods who were in charge of the *Xinwei* village, *Gaoxiong*. Because they established a good relationship with all of you in their past lives, they were waiting for the final salvation there. Now the *Baoguang Jiande* branch of YGD decides to build a big temple in the *Xinwei* village to spread Dao, so the earth gods have the opportunity to receive the Dao and get the salvation” (A record of the earth god in *Xinwei* village and his wife converting to YGD: 1).

In December 1st, 2000, the sect held the ritual and converted the earth god and his wife. During the fieldwork, I once lived in the big temple in the *Xinwei* village. Every morning, after worshipping the gods available in the YGD Buddha hall, the sectarians would go to the earth god shrine to give a special hello to the earth god and his wife, wishing the earth god to make all things go well. It seems that the earth god receives more attention than many other deities. Apparently, as a sect deeply rooted in popular religion, YGD accepts but reinterprets the pantheon of popular religion. After reinterpretation, all the deities of YGD are salvation-oriented rather than efficacy-centered. This is a big difference between the YGD pantheon and the pantheon of popular religion. Another difference is that the “imperial metaphor”, which is derived from the observation of popular religion, is not applicable to YGD, as will analyze in the following paragraph.

Many studies (e.g. Wolf 1974; Feuchtwang 1992) have found that there is an “imperial metaphor” in the pantheon of Chinese popular religion that is organized as a bureaucracy; most of gods are male, serious and bureaucrat-like. However, this metaphor is not applicable to YGD’s deities⁸, not only because female deities play important roles in or even dominate the sectarian pantheon, as Sangren (1983) has pointed out, but also because the main deities of the sect are equipped with good-tempered, affable and humorous images. As we know, the Mother is like an old graceful lady, with a kind heart to welcome all of her children. Another female deity, Guanyin Bodhisattva, has been with a peaceful, kindly and merciful image for a long time. With regard to male deities, the

⁸ In fact, the imperial metaphor of popular religion has little significance to the sectarians. They show little respect to the deities of popular religion, since the sectarians think that those gods are just celestial beings who dwell in *Qitian* and that they themselves are even superior to these gods in the sense that they have gained the Dao while those gods not, as Yang Hongren (Yang 1997: 50) reveals.

Maitreya Buddha is a happy Buddha, not only with a smile all times but also with a big stomach which suggests it he can bear all unbearable things. The Jigong Buddha is so lively and humorous that he is crazy-like, always dressing simple, shabby or even dirty clothes, wearing a beat-up cap, taking a ragged fan, and making facetious remarks. Manifestly, all of the above deities are not like divine bureaucrats but like considerate and dependable friends.

2.4 The YGD Theology

Wang Jueyi made a fundamental contribution to the formation of YGD doctrines. He produced a couple of books to expound his theological understandings, including the cosmology, the Eschatology, the Salvationism, and the syncretism of YGD. On the basis of Wang's contribution, Zhang Tianran systematically and explicitly presented YGD's doctrine in *Answers to Doubts and Questions Concerning Yi-guan Dao*. The pamphlet is an endeavor of rationalizing and popularizing YGD's theological claims, as Jordan and Overmyer (1986: 264) argue, "this is a self-conscious defense of the faith, a moral philosophy in popular form". From the point of view of religious economy model, these explanations are otherworldly rewards which a religion deals with. Without understanding the sectarian beliefs and theologies, we could hardly understand their practices. So, it is worthy to spend a lengthy part to introduce the main points of the sect's theological theories.

2.4.1 The YGD Cosmology

For the adherents of Chinese popular religion, cosmology conceives of three realms of existence: Heaven (*Tian* 天), Earth (*Di* 地), and the underworld (*Ming* 冥). Heaven is in the sky, Earth is on the ground, and the underworld is below the ground. Cross-cutting this tripartite scheme is a two-zone division: the zone of light (*Yangjian* 阳间) and the zone of darkness (*Yinjian* 阴间). Heaven belongs to the zone of light and the underworld belongs to the zone of darkness. Earth, however, is split into two dimensions: the *yang* (day) and the *yin* (night). Chinese people believe that ghosts usually occur at night, especial mid-night, the *yin* dimension of earth.

YGD rationalizes the above cosmology and gives it salvation significances. The sect conceives of the cosmos as tripartite, consisting of the Heavenly World (*Li-tian* 理天), the Spiritual World (*Qi-tian* 气天) and the Material World (*Xiang-tian* 象天)⁹. *Li-tian*¹⁰ (the Heavenly World) is the paradise of the Eternal Venerable Mother; living in *litian* means that one breaks out of samsara and gains salvation. Apparently, YGD understands salvation from the Buddhist perspective and emphasizes the extrication from samsara. *Qitian* (the Spiritual World) is dwelled by the deities of the popular pantheon. From the viewpoint of Chinese popular religion, loyal imperial official, filial persons and dutiful women would hold chances to become gods after they die. YGD inherits this idea but

⁹ These are the translations offered by the sectarians. Clart (1996) translates *Litian* as Principle Realm, *Qi Tian* as the Ethereal Realm and *Xiangtian* as the Phenomenal Realm.

¹⁰ In *YWJD*, Zhang Tianran explained that “Li Tian is just the True Emptiness (Zhenkong).” (Zhang 1937a: 86) As we have known, the “true emptiness” is regarded as the primordial source of all things by Chinese sectarian tradition. YGD just renames it “Litian”, a term borrowed from the neo-Confucianism (Zhong 1995).

emphasizes that these gods dwell in *qitian* and still face the danger of the cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth, though these celestial deities enjoy a longer life and are more powerful than mankind. With regard to *Xiangtian* (the Material World), it “includes all visible things with colors and shapes: sun, moon and all star in the heaven; mountains, rivers, plants and animals on the earth” and “all substances with concrete forms belong to *Xiangtian*” (Zhang 1937a: 87). The sect also holds that both *Xiangtian* and *Qitian* will be destroyed, and only *Litian* is eternal; so the salvation of human beings in the *Xiangtian* realm and gods in the *Qitian* realm becomes urgent. Accordingly, from the sectarian perspective, the cosmos can be divided into two worlds: the world of salvation (*Litian*) and the world of samsara (*qitian and xiangtian*). Obviously, the YGD cosmology is salvation-oriented.

2.4.2 The YGD Eschatology

The sect holds that the Venerable Mother altogether created ninety-six billions original souls which were sent down on earth. However, these primordial children (*Yuanzi* 原子) lost their primary spirituality and became worse and worse. To save these primordial spirits (*Yuanling* 原灵), the Mother sent three Buddhas to the world. Accordingly, the human history is divided into three stages: the Green Sun period (*qingyang qi* 青阳期), the Red Sun period (*Hongyang qi* 红阳期) and the White Sun period (*baiyang qi* 白阳期). Randeng Buddha (燃灯佛) presided over the salvation business of the Green sun period; then Sakyamuni in the Red sun period; and four billion primordial spirits had been saved in these two periods. The rest ninety-two billion

primordial spirits (*Jiu-shi-er-yi yuan-ling* 九十二亿原灵) will be saved by the Maitreya Buddha presiding over the White Sun Period, which began in 1912, corresponding with the founding of the Republic of China. Since those primordial spirits have lost their true nature for a long time, “human being’s ruthlessness and craftiness have achieved the extreme point and so have brought upon themselves an unprecedented disaster. This is what is meant by “the last disaster at the end of the third period” (*Sanqi mojie* 三期末劫) (ZHANG 1937A: 53) Catastrophes will accompany the final salvation: there shall be widespread disasters everywhere; darkness shall prevail and the whole world shall be in chaos. Some sectarian books directly call it “doomsday” and describe that:

The end of the White (Sun) stage marks the beginning of the earth’s dooms-day. There shall be widespread disasters everywhere, darkness shall prevail and the whole world would be in chaos. Hell’s gate shall be opened and all devils shall be let loose to take revenge on those who are indebted to them. Only those who are good and have cultivated Dao earnestly would be spared. Maitreya Buddha would come down and lead those spiritually good beings up to Heaven to enjoy eternity bliss there. The White (Sun) Period is also sometimes referred to as “the nuclear age”, because at the ending period all living things on earth shall be wipe-out and dissolved by the action of wind.--- After that the whole earth and the sky would be destroyed. (*Realization of the Truth: 24*)

These descriptions of calamities and sufferings of the last age reveal the intensely eschatological orientation of YGD. Frequently, these descriptions are utilized to support the urgent task of entering and cultivating the Dao, as the passage continues:

Our merciful Heavenly Mother has specially given the order for Dao to be spread to all people so that everybody shall have the opportunity to repent and purify themselves during this white-(sun) stage. ---- Those who practiced Dao will lead a quiescent and everlasting life. Those who have devoted in their efforts to Tao will be paid for their merits, regardless of their society status; or of gods, humans, animals or ghosts. It is a golden opportunity once in every 129,600 years.
(*Realization of the Truth: 25*)

Against this eschatological background, we can understand why YGD puts so much emphasis on salvation, as the following analysis shows.

2.4.3 The YGD Salvationism: *Sancao Pudu* (三曹普度)

As we have seen, offering salvation is the core feature of Chinese traditional sects. YGD is with no exception. Moreover, Yiguan Dao extends its salvation to gods and ghosts. In *The Truth of Past Years according to Yijing (Li-nian Yili, 历年易理)*, Wang claimed that the sect would “save gods in the high level, human beings in the middle level and ghosts in the lowest level” (LNYL: 14). This is what “universally saving three beings” means.

As for the salvation of ghosts, the sectarians argue that the Mother once laid down the rule that only man could learn the Dao whereas the deceased people could not. However, since the sages asked Mother for permission, both man and his deceased ancestors were eventually allowed to learn the Dao. To elevate the spirits of one's deceased ancestors to Heaven where they can enjoy eternal happiness, people must practise the Dao persistently and strictly, donating money, actively propagating the Dao, and abstaining from meat and wine forever. For those families in which all members follow the Dao, they stand a bigger chance to help their ancestors to break out of samsara. At the same time, when those spirits of ghosts reach the Heavenly World, "they will confine themselves to a room where they will be able to purify themselves. After one hundred days, the Mother will adjust their positions according to their merits" (Guo 1996: 103).

In saving human beings, "offering three treasures" (*Chuan Sanbao* 传三宝) is its main content. The three treasures, including the Mysterious gate (*Xuanguan* 玄关), the Heavenly Password (*koujue* 口诀) and the Holy Covenant (*Hetong* 合同), are supposed to be a special saving grace offered by the Venerable Mother to the sectarians. The three treasures, in the viewpoint of sectarians, not only can open up their inborn capacity for cultivation, but also can be used as an amulet when facing dangers. Moreover, the three treasures enable the initiates to transcend the circle of birth and death and enter the Heavenly World directly. This is called "registering in the Heaven and removing one's name from the list of Hades" (*Tiantang Guahao, Difu Chouding* 天堂挂号, 地府抽丁). Without first having obtained the way in form of the three treasures, it is virtually impossible to get the final salvation in the sect's view. They write,

No religious individual (except the sectarians) can achieve the Dao or get the fruits of Nirvana within his life-time, even when he puts forth the utmost possible effort in both study and practice of that particular religions. He can only become a good spirit who dwelled blissfully in the Spiritual World for some few hundred years in his next rebirths. (*Realization of the Truth: 9*)

Chinese popular religion holds that humans can become gods by means of cultivation and accordingly “the existing gods are former humans that have risen to their exalted status through their successful cultivation” (Clart 1996: 179). Yiguan Dao accepts but reforms this idea, holding that successful cultivators, loyal imperial officials, filial persons and dutiful women could rise to the Spiritual World (Qi Tian) and become celestial beings, a kind of gods, as a reward of their moral behaviors. However, those gods in the Spiritual World still have to experience the eternal cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth, though they can enjoy a longer and more happy life than man. “In order to remove from samsara,” we are told by the sectarian, “gods in Qi Tian often come to spirit altars together with Buddhas, borrowing a spirit mediums’ body, looking for an appropriate person to act as their introducers to gain the Dao” (Mu 2002: 25).

An English spirit writing by YGD totally presents the content of saving gods, according to which, the American General Douglas MacArthur was entitled as the Noble Guard of the East (*Zhengdong Dadi* 镇东大帝) and lived in the Spiritual world when he died. Unfortunately, the claimed spirit of Douglas MacArthur says:

I didn't have the affinity to attain Dao in my lifetime. Since I was born in the West where Dao had not been propagated yet, there was hardly any chance to learn about it. All of you present are fortunate to have the affinity to be born in China, as Dao was disseminated in Asia first. Though I was granted (the status of) a celestial being after death, I still couldn't return back to heaven without attaining Dao. Thanks to my benefactor, Great Master Wang. With his referral, I was able to attain Dao and to have an audience with God.---- My benefactor, if you are in need of help in the future, I would like to offer my services to repay your kindness. From now on, you can just call my name three times whenever you are in trouble, I will serve you promptly. (*The Revelation of General Douglas MacArthur*: 16-18).

In addition, he reveals that: "All celestial beings (which) haven't attained Dao are anxiously longing for it. Their anxiety is beyond description." (*The Revelation of General Douglas MacArthur*: 22)

From the claim of "universally saving three beings", we can see that YGD wants to stress the universal nature of its salvation. However, the sect also suggests that human beings, especially Chinese will stand a bigger chance to gain the Dao. They write,

It is interesting to note that we human beings actually have the best chance to obtain and cultivate Dao and to become Buddhas than the other four forms of existence. Hell-dwellers, ghosts and animals practically have little or no chance of getting it because of their self-insufficiency and limitation. ...Life in heaven is too rich with too many pleasures. A heaven-dweller, so busy just enjoying life, has no

inclination toward further cultivation. ... Various good spirits and deities possess certain powers which human beings usually lack. However the powers of these good spirits and deities are limited because they are also transitory beings. They exist in happiness and enjoy their life for a longer period than human beings. When they have exhausted all the good *kalmas*, they shall be reborn some where else according to the merits of their *kalmas*. (Realization of the Truth: 15-16)

In another pamphlet, the sect definitely claims that “it is rather difficult for the gods to learn the Tao”, because “they must first of all look for appropriate people who will bring them to learn the Tao in order to go to Heaven.” (*Ninety Questions Concerning the Great Tao*: 14)

With regard to the priority of Chinese people to gaining salvation, the sect thinks that the origins of Dao started in China; “Each time when Heaven sent Dao down to earth, the Chinese are always given preference to hear of it and to cultivate it. There is nothing peculiar because Dao started originally there. Hence, the Chinese speak more of morality. The Chinese are therefore, the most fortunate people to hear of Dao so much earlier than other races.” (*Realization of the Truth*: 16)

2.4.4 The YGD Syncretism: Three Religions in One (*Sanjiao Heyi* 三教合一)

China has witnessed a long history of the “three in one” movement which aims to syncretize Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. As a philosophical movement, the “three in one” achieved its peak in the Ming dynasty when many top intellectuals,

including Wang Yangming (Confucians) and Zhang Sanfeng (Taoist), were involved. Also in the late Ming dynasty, the movement was echoed by the sectarian tradition and then gained its mass popularity. Many sects, such as “religion of three in one” (*Sanyi jiao* 三一教), claimed to offer a set of theories which integrate the three traditions. This syncretic tradition has continued down to the present (Dean 1998; Lang and Lu 2004).

As a modern successor of traditional sects, YGD inherits the idea of syncretizing three in one, arguing that the three traditions are originally born from the same source, though they are different in appearance. Unfortunately, the sect argues, these three religions were gradually separated from Dao in their later development; and as a result, “the Buddhists, the Taoists and the Confucians do not understand the basic doctrines of these three religions. They only have a superficial knowledge of the doctrines. But, they do not know how to preserve their Eternal Spirits well. It is not surprising therefore that very few people understand the basic principles of these religions nowadays” (*Ninety Questions Concerning the Great Dao*: 23). Hence, Yiguan Dao holds that it is necessary to unite three religions in one.

In practice, YGD stresses syncretizing Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism into its cultivation system. Specifically, three facets are emphasized: performing Confucian rituals, adopting Taoist cultivating ways and obeying Buddhist commandments.

Unlike mystical rituals of Taoism and Buddhism which emphasize exorcisms, the sectarians argue that YGD performs the Confucian rituals which are without any mystical colors. For example, “the ritual for presenting offerings (*Xiangong li* 献供礼) imitates the ritual of worshipping Confucius, ---- sacred and ceremonious.” In addition to rituals, YGD claims to practice Confucian ethics through cultivating the sacred and the secular

simultaneously (*Sheng-fan jian-xiu* 圣凡兼修). As a religious organization made up of laymen (*Su-jia jiao-tuan* 俗家教团), YGD is rarely equipped with professional priests; and most of its religious staffs have their own secular businesses and families. The sectarians do not need to become monks or nuns when they engage themselves in religious activities. These are what “performing Confucian rituals” (*Xing Ru-men zhi Liyi* 行儒门之礼仪) means.

Following Taoist cultivation practices, according to YGD, is to cultivate inner alchemy through concentrating one’s mind on the mysterious gate. In YGD’s history, cultivating inner alchemy was an important content for sectarians’ cultivation. Though Wang Jueyi reformed Xian Tian Dao’s doctrines and gave up cultivating inner alchemy in the late nineteenth century, some kind of meditation, namely “concentrating on the mysterious gate” (*Shou-xuan-guan* 守玄关), still exists in the sectarians’ everyday cultivation, as we will see in chapter three. In this sense, YGD holds that it “adopting Taoist cultivation practices” (*Yong Daojiao zhi Gongfu* 用道教之功夫)

Obeying Buddhist commandments means a sectarian should avoid killing, stealing, improper sexual behaviors, eating meats and telling lies. Today, eating vegetables becomes one of most salient characters of YGD. But Buddhism exerts more influences than what the sect would like to admit. As we will see in the following chapters, YGD borrowed many elements from Buddhism in performing its educational work, charitable activities and missionary work.

2.5 Rituals

2.5.1 Wang Jueyi's Reformation

Xiantian Dao, the precursor to Yiguan Dao, put much emphasis on practicing the “inner alchemy cultivation with nine steps” (*Jiujie Neigong* 九节内功) which was highly influenced by its Taoist counterpart (Mu 2002: 40). XTD held that it was vital for people to open the mysterious gate (*Xuanguan*) through which one's spirit could enter the Heaven at the time of death. In some degree, opening the mysterious gate was equal to gaining the salvation. In the process of gaining salvation, according to the XTD's understanding, the enlightened master would first point out where the sectarian's “mysterious gate” was and solely offered the “secret teaching” (*Xinfa*) and pithy formulas (*Koujue*) of inner alchemy to believers. However, opening the mysterious gate was a very tough task; it required a constant cultivation of the inner alchemy and a strict vegetarian diet which must be taken since the time of becoming a sectarian. For many sectarians, it is in fact an impossible task to open the mysterious gate. In this sense, XTD emphasized that “one must first cultivate the Dao before he could receive the Dao” (*Xianxiu Houde* 先修后得) and that “sometime one could not gain the Dao even though he practiced the Dao assiduously” (*kuxiu Nande* 苦修难得).

Wang Jueyi simplified rituals formerly performed by XTD. According to Lin Wanchuan's study, “pointing the mysterious gate” (*dian xuanguan* 点玄关), “offering the pithy formulas” (*chuan koujue* 传口诀), and “giving the hand sign” (*shou hetong* 受合同) became three most important contents in XTD's ritual of initiation. When pointing the mysterious gate, the initiator would speak the following sentences: “opening the eyes of

wisdom, [is equal to] being equipped with an eternal body, being free of the disaster of the doomsday and never suffering in the hell” (Yang 1997: 24). The “pithy formulas” include the guidance for the sectarians to cultivate inner alchemy; they also include the sentence of “*Zhenkong Jiexiang Wusheng Fumu*” (真空家乡，无生父母) which, the sectarians think, could be used as an amulet when in danger. As for the “hand sign”, it is a gesture utilized to cultivate *Qi*. It is obvious that these issues are tightly related with the cultivation of *Qi* through which one can open the “mysterious gate” (Fu 2002).

Wang Jueyi thought that XTD paid too much attention to the inner alchemy cultivation. Since he held that the doomsday was coming, Wang asked the sectarians to spend more time in propagating the Dao and recruiting more followers, rather than cultivating inner alchemy. Accordingly, Wang gave up the cultivation of inner alchemy and emphasized “first receiving the Dao and then cultivating it” (*Xiande houxiu* 先得后修). In the level of ritual, “opening the mysterious gate” replaced “pointing out the mysterious gate”. Wang argued that he would open the followers’ “mysterious gate” when they received the Dao. This means that the sectarians had gained the access to the Heavenly World (*Litian*) and there is no need for them to open the gate through meditation. The sectarian could gain the salvation through the ritual of initiation, although the Heavenly Position (*guowei* 果位) of each sectarian is different¹¹. As for the part of “pithy formula”, Wang totally refused to offer the pithy formulas of inner alchemy to the followers. With respect to the hand sign, it changed from a gesture of cultivating *Qi*

¹¹ In the view of YGD believers, the Heavenly Position is determined by one’s merits and virtues. Merits can be accumulated through an inner way and an outer way. To accumulate inner merits (*neigong*), one must follow the Confucian rituals and moral requirements, practice the Taoist life style and obey the Buddhist commandments. At the same time, to accumulate outer merits (*waigong*), one must recruit sectarians and donating money to the sect. The more one recruit, the more merits one can accumulate.

to a symbol representing the rule of cosmos development (Yang 1997: 25). In addition, Wang integrated the three rituals into one ritual: “offering the three treasures”¹², which is the core ritual of YGD today.

2.5.2 Zhang Tianran’s Contributions

Zhang Tianran put Wang Jueyi’s doctrinal innovation into practice and created “the ritual of saving gods” (*Du Daxian* 渡大仙) and “the ritual of saving ghosts” (*Du Wangling* 渡亡灵) according to Wang Jueyi’s theory of salvation. In addition, Zhang Tianran wrote *The Temporary Buddhist Regulations* (*Zan-ding Fo-gui* 暂定佛规), devoting to discussing all kinds of rituals of Yi-guan Dao. Though he promotes several kinds of rituals, these rituals are not rigid but flexible and the “liveliness” (*huopo* 活泼) is repeatedly emphasized by Zhang Tianran in the ZDFG.

The spirit of “flexibility” is emphasized throughout the pamphlet of *The Temporary Buddhist Regulations*. In the preface of this pamphlet, Zhang emphasizes that:

These rituals must be adapted according to the different people or places. ----I hope everyone could study these rules carefully, perform them considerately and lively,

¹² The term “three treasures” comes from Buddhism, referring to Buddha, dharma, monk (Fo, Fa, Seng). YGD uses it to indicate “mysterious gate”, “pithy formula”, and “hand sign”. Since the sectarians regard the detailed contents of these three issues as the highest secrecy from the Mother and strongly prohibit making them known to outsiders, I do not intend to explain them in detail except briefly introducing them, though the contents is not secret any more and have been sent to the internet. The mysterious gate is the point rightly between two eyebrows; the pithy formula includes five words which praise Maitreya Buddha, also known as “the incantation of five words” (*Wuzi Zhenyan* 五字真言) or “the real sutra without words” (*Wuzi zhenjing* 无字真经); the hand sign requires the left hand to put under the right hand and two thumbs press on the special part of right hand.

and realize their inner sincerities. Through experiencing these rituals, one can correct his mind and shape his behavior (Zhang 1937b: 2).

After listing the detailed rules of rituals, Zhang always emphasizes that these rules are just a principle and the sectarians should make use of these rules flexibly. For example, after discussing the ritual of presenting daily incense offering, he comments:

According to the regulations one should offer incense three times a day in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. However, if because one is busy with religious affairs there are times when this schedule is interrupted, there is no fault. If one extremely fulfills wishes (to follow the rules) but simply has no time to do so, then to offer incense only once or twice a day is all right. If in special circumstances one is unable to burn incense at all, it is quite permissible to offer prostrations in the darkness. In sum, people should not be bound by physical forms; what is important is ceaseless sincerity within, which is never forgotten for a moment (Zhang 1937b: 58-59).

In a section on ritual of bowing, Zhang reminds that “although the above ritual regulations are firmly established, some are busier than others, so people should apply them in a flexible way; the regulations should not be rigid.” (Zhang 1937b: 61) In the section on ritual of offerings, he stresses that “don’t be restricted by these rules, just show your sincerity and perform these rules lively” and that “in sum, what’s important to a cultivator is the sincerity rather than the offerings.” (Zhang 1937b: 69-70)

Yang Hongren (1997) thinks that the “flexibility” is a mechanism of “de-ritualization” (*Qu Yishihua* 去仪式化). For a religion, certain rituals are quite necessary. But paying too much attention to these rituals would easily lead to ritualism; it is possible for the sectarians to forget the spirit of rituals and just perform concrete rituals rigidly. Thus, the “flexibility” is helpful for the sectarians to reflect the significance of rituals all times, to grasp the essence of rituals and, in all, to avoid the tendency of ritualism.

2.6 Organization and Missionary Activities

XTD, the precursor to YGD, adopted a bureaucratic structure quite similar to imperial bureaucracy. In the Qing dynasty, the officials were classified into nine levels (*Jiupin* 九品). Similarly, XTD had nine positions, namely “*Jiupin Liantai* (九品莲台)”. The first level is patriarch (*Yipin zushi* 一品祖师) who was in charge of the whole religious business. The second level is the vice-patriarch (*erpin wuhang* 二品五行). There were five vice-patriarchs. In case the patriarch was executed, these vice patriarchs could lead the sect. In practice, these vice-patriarchs were independent religious entrepreneurs. When the patriarch died, they led their followers respectively. The third level is titled as “*San-pin Shi-di* (三品十地)” who usually supervised two provinces. The fourth level is “*Si-pin Ding-hang* (四品顶航)” who was in charge of one provinces. The fifth level is “*Wu-pin Bao-en* (五品保恩)”, a vice-province leader. The sixth is “*Liu-pin Yin-en* (六品引恩)”. The seventh is “*Qi-pin zheng-en* (七品证恩)”. The eighth is “*Ba-pin Tian-en* (八品天恩)”, the local cadres in charge of conversion business, like the

“initiators” today. The ninth is “*Jiu-pin zhong-sheng* (九品众生)”, namely ordinary sectarians (Li 2000: 55-7).

The sectarian bureaucracy of “*Jiupin Liantai*” functioned in YGD till Zhang Tianran reformed it. Before he became the eighteenth patriarch, Zhang was in the level of “*Bao-en*”, a vice-province leader. Then he reorganized the sect and canceled the in-between levels. The whole structure included only four ranks: the Patriarch (*Zushi* 祖师), Dao Seniors (*Daozhang* 道长), initiators (*Dianchuanshi* 点传师), and Dao relatives (*Dao-qin* 道亲), namely ordinary sectarians. Zhang regarded himself as the eighteenth Patriarch and he was in charge of all the YGD business, including appointing the senior Dao leaders and initiators. Initiators (for the sectarians) are representatives of Zhang Tianran. They received the Celestial Mandate (*Tianming* 天命) from Zhang and then transcended it to neophytes. Theoretically, all YGD sectarians are Zhang’s disciples. So Zhang called himself as “teacher” (Zhang 1937a: 36-7). Zhang also promoted eight Dao Seniors (*Daozhang*) who were very successful in recruiting members. These Seniors managed their own branches independently, though all of them were responsible to Zhang. Consequently, the internal diversity promoted competition within the sect. In order to gain the praises of Zhang, these branches competed with each other and tried their best to do missionary work (Lu 1998). Since initiators were appointed by Zhang, this mechanism is helpful for Zhang Tianran to control the middle-level leaders and centralize the authority of patriarch.

Zhang Tianran also paid much attention to training missionaries. Since 1938, hundreds of core missionaries had been trained through “stove meetings (Lu-hui, 炉会)

and sent to all over the country. The “stove meeting” is a kind of training course, in which most of its trainers were performed by spirit mediums¹³. The trainees were asked to pass a set of strict tests, including long-time kneeling with little clothes in severe winter and taking serious beats (Lu 1998: 137-52). It has been proved that training courses are very helpful to create active missionaries most of whom later became influential leaders of Yiguan Dao. Training missionaries laid the foundation for the following quick development of YGD in the whole country.

One important missionary technique adopted by Zhang Tianran is spirit writing. In Yiguan Dao’s history, Wang Jueyi discouraged the sectarians to do spirit writing for he thought that it was difficult for them to tell whether the god was good or evil. But in the 1930s, because of the high popularity of spirit writing, Zhang Tianran not only broke the sect’s tradition but also drew “innate spirit writing” into practices. According to Zhang, the “the innate spirit writing” (*Xiantian Ji*, 先天乩), in which vegetarian children acted as the spirit writers, was superior to the “acquired spirit writing” (*Houtian ji*, 后天乩), in which adult spirit writers were used, because children’s purity was conducive to divine revelation. In addition, Zhang emphasized that only YGD’s spirit writing belonged to “innate spirit writing” which was more credible than others. On the basis of this theory, YGD trained many spirit-writer teams; each team usually included three children: *Tiancai* (天才), *Rencai* (人才) and *Dicai* (地才). During the ritual of spirit writing, *Tiancai* used a Y-shaped stick to write character on a table or tray which is usually covered with a layer

¹³ In China, the stove is a utensil used by alchemists to make pills of immortality. The sect named its training course as “stove meeting”, maybe, to show the training is very strict and that the trainees will be powerful if they pass the training course.

of sand; *Rencai* identified each character, read them loudly and then scrapes the tray; and *Dicai* recorded each character (Zhang 1937: 48).

Though Zhang Tianran borrowed the technique of spirit-writing from the popular religion, he stressed that spirit writing could not be used to resolve “trivial things” except propagandize doctrine (Zhang 1937: 49). By making use of this updated technology of spirit writing, YGD absorbed many followers, especially intellectuals (Lu 1998: 188). More important, by means of spirit-writing, Zhang produced two important pamphlets. One is *Answers to Doubts and Questions Concerning Yi-guan Dao* which introduces Yi-guan Dao’s teachings, the other is *The Temporary Buddhist Regulations* that mainly presents the rituals of YGD. The two books facilitated missionary work a lot.

With competitive missionary branches and the large number of active missionaries who were equipped with updated technology of spirit writing and easy-understanding missionary pamphlets, Yiguan Dao soon became the biggest sect of China in the 1940s, covering all over the country and spreading to Taiwan. With the death of Zhang Tianran in 1947, however, a serious schism took place and the sect broke into two main sections: the Mistress Section (*shimu pai* 师母派) and the Committee of Righteousness (*Zheng-yi Fudao hui* 正义辅导会) or the Senior Disciple Section (*shi-xiong pai* 师兄派). The former section acknowledges the leadership of Sun Shuzhen, the second wife of Zhang Tianran, while the latter does not acknowledge the leadership of Sun Shuzhen and regards Zhang Tianran’s first wife and her eldest son as the leader (Lu 1998).

When the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, CCP) came into power in 1949, the sect suffered a ruthless suppression. Being viewed as the biggest “Reactionary Society, Dao Organization and Community” (*Fan-dong hui-dao-men* 反动会道门) by the CCP, YGD became the target of repression: Some YGD sectarian leaders were executed, more sectarians were put into jail, and the sect was nearly destroyed and could not publicly operate in mainland China in 1953 (Deliusin 1972; Lu 1998).

2.7 Discussion and Conclusion

YGD is rooted in Chinese popular religion which will be discussed in detail in chapter 8. The sect includes many elements of popular religious belief: the polytheism, ancestor worship and rituals. But it redefines these elements and gives them a salvation-orientation which is mainly constructed on the basis of Buddhist concepts and ideas, as the preceding sections have discussed.

The religious economy model holds that religious entrepreneurs play important roles in creating successful religious firms. This point can be supported by the growth of YGD in mainland China in the 1930s and 1940s. As a shrewd religious entrepreneur, Zhang Tianran established his authority by restructuring the sect, absorbed popular religious elements into the sectarian tradition, trained missionaries and produced pamphlets by means of spirit writing to propagate his salvation theories. These endeavors finally paid off and YGD became developed from a small local sect into the biggest one of China in the 1940s. But explanations for the great success of YGD in mainland China are complex.

The mass conversion of YGD in the 1930s and 1940s need more explorations and future studies should probe other factors except religious entrepreneurship.

CHAPTER 3

YIGUAN DAO ON TAIWAN:

SUPPRESSION AND ITS UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Yiguan Dao began to spread in Taiwan in the middle 1940s. While the sect was strictly suppressed in mainland China, some YGD sectarians moved to Hong Kong and Taiwan. In 1951, the sect was prohibited by the KMT state on Taiwan, too. However, in the following decades, it gradually and steadily became one of most influential religious groups of Taiwan in spite of suppression (Qu 1982; Song 1983; Lin 1994; Wang, Zhou and Lin 1997: 48). Why could YGD be so successful even under the suppression? This question has been probed by many scholars (Song 1995: 201; Lin 1994: 38-42; Wang 1997: 355) who directed their attention both to the demand side and to the supply side. In the view point of these studies, the dramatic social change of Taiwan in the past decades enhanced the religious demand; on the other hand, Yiguan Dao's innovative activities catered for the demand and thus the sect succeed. Though these studies are highly suggestive, they pay little attention to the regulatory influences. In this chapter, I will try to throw new light on this question from the perspective of rational choice theory, arguing that religious suppression is helpful to make the suppressed sect strong.

This chapter includes four parts. Part 1 presents why and how YGD was suppressed by the KMT state on Taiwan. As the main body of this chapter, part 2 probes the unintended consequences of religious suppression which ironically contributed to the growth of YGD. Part 3 briefly introduces the growth of YGD

under suppression and delineates that the success of YGD in recruiting members led to its legalization against the background of Taiwan's democratization. In the final part, I offer a model that seeks to outline the unintended consequences of religious suppression which contribute to the success of suppressed religions.

3.1 Yiguan Dao under Suppression On Taiwan

Imperial China had a long history of suppression on sects which were regarded as political threats by imperial officials (De Groot 1903; Yang 1967; Overmyer 1976; ter Haar 1992; Lang 1998). The end of the imperial regime in 1911 did not signal an end to religious repression, although Article 13 of the constitution of the Republic of China claimed a right to "freedom of religious belief". When the KMT state retreated to Taiwan, religious freedom was highly restricted and the nationalist's control of religious institutions "became more subtle and, in some ways, more effective" (Rubinstein 1991: 41). Western missionaries of Christianity were welcomed and supported by the KMT state (Rubinstein 1991); the Buddhists were strictly regulated through the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (hereafter, BAROC) (Jones 1999); the popular religion became the target of reformation and restriction (Feuchtwang 1977); and sectarians were still under suppression (Song 1983).

YGD became the main victim of sectarian persecution and was prohibited by the KMT state in 1951 on Taiwan. In the following three decades, YGD was criticized by the Buddhism, stigmatized by the state-controlled press, and repressed by KMT.

The Buddhists played an active role in lobbying the state to suppress YGD. They produced many pamphlets to attack YGD. The main theme of those books is to claim that YGD is heterodoxy and an offspring of the dangerous and rebellious White Lotus Sect (*Bai-lian Jiao*)¹. As we will see, these charges were readily accepted by the authoritarian state. Even when the authoritarian state considered lifting the suppression of YGD in 1981, the BAROC still tried to cooperate with other “orthodox” religions to attack YGD and urge the state to insist on continued suppression of YGD (Song 1983). Religious economy theorists (e.g. Finke 1997) say that dominating religions tend to use political power to restrict competition. This theory is strongly supported by the behaviors of BAROC.

The state-controlled press also attacked Yiguan Dao. Since the sect was prohibited in 1951, it had to operate underground. As Jordan and Overmyer (1986: 246) points out, “underground sects are subject to extravagant suspicions, and hence to unrealistic legal charges, which are easily believed by a populace that lacks firsthand knowledge of them.” Social stigmas accompanied YGD after it became secret. Because the sectarians only eat vegetarian foods and eggs, some people called YGD “the sect of duck eggs” (*Yadan Jiao*). This disparaging nickname soon became popular together with the rumors that the followers of “the duck egg sect” held naked congregations and raped the female believers. Moreover, these charges were echoed and exaggerated by newspapers run by the state. For example, *New Life News* (*Xinsheng Bao* 新生报 Feb. 2. 1963) reported that one YGD leader committed adultery with female believers; *Minzu Evening Paper* (*Minzu Wanbao* 民族晚报 March.8. 1963) reported that Yiguan Dao, the duck egg sect, held naked

¹ The White Lotus Sect was regarded as a representative of rebellious sects by the imperial state in the *Ming* and *Qing* dynasty. For extensive analyses of this sect, please refer to Naquin 1985 and ter Haar 1992.

congregations and raped female believers. To clarify matters, three YGD leaders published an announcement in *New Life News* in March 13th, 1963, which was titled “A serious announcement by the representatives of YGD”. Under the title are the following contents:

Recently, some newspapers in Taipei published such news that “the sect of duck eggs” (*Yadan Jiao* 鸭蛋教) is a branch of Yiguan Dao whose members worship gods nakedly, rape the female believers, and force the female to smuggle or prostitute themselves to support the sect. These news are not in accordance with facts and full of misunderstandings, so we publicly claim that (1) the Yiguan Dao has nothing to do with the so called “the sect of duck eggs”, and we also know nothing about the situation of “duck eggs sect”; (2) To stabilize the society and achieve the grand purpose of Three Principles of People (*Sanmin zhuyi* 三民主义), our society [Yiguan Dao] emphasizes correcting the mind and cultivating the body, propagandizes Confucian ethic, practices the old moral requirements and stresses being filial to parents and harmonious with neighbors. As for the name, it comes from the Confucius’ saying that “the Dao that I follow is the one that unifies all”; and it is without any heterodox meanings. However, now some newspapers purposely confuse “the duck eggs sect”, a heterodox sect, with our Dao and make use of the above slanders to attack our Dao. These behaviors should be criticized by the wise people. Actually, our Dao strictly follows Confucius’ teachings to motivate the good nature of humans, cultivates mind and seeks to achieve the unity of man and nature. In fact, Yiguan Dao is not only the most progressive religion of

our country, but also an important force in opposition to the CCP and the USSR (*fan-gong Kong-e* 反共抗俄). Our Dao also criticizes the so-called “the duck eggs sect” and its behaviors which are revealed by the newspaper. (3) All of the believers of our Dao obey the law, fulfill their social responsibility and spontaneously change their minds to correct the social atmosphere and benefit the country. However, we are stigmatized by the above rumors published in newspapers. Though it is unnecessary for us to argue against these reports, considering that the state is during the important period of opposing the CCP and the USSR and that, if we keep silence, such wicked slanders would violate the social morality and weaken the forces against the CCP, we purposely publish this announcement to clarify some facts. (*New Life News* 1963. 3.13)

The announcement concludes with information on announcers’ name and their addresses. This is the first time for Chinese sectarians to use the mass media to argue for their beliefs. As we can see, Yiguan Dao was very cautious to stress the following themes: (1) morally, Yiguan Dao follows Confucian ethic and has nothing to do with naked congregations; (2) politically, Yiguan Dao is a force loyal to KMT and in opposition to CCP. However, the announcement per se was audacious and violated the authority of the state from the point of view of KMT, although YGD clearly showed its loyalty to KMT. The authoritarian state responded to the announcement with a stricter repression, and declared that:

“The police had strictly prohibited the heterodox sect Yiguan Dao according to the law. ... However, the sect still held illegal activities and even published an advertisement on newspapers to praise the heterodox sect and show contempt for the rules and laws. According to the information we get, the sectarians held naked congregations which violate the social morality; they also illegally accumulated wealth, rape female believers and terrify believers in the name of religion; worse still, they spread rumors which are helpful to the bandit (Here, it refers to the CCP). These behaviors not only threaten the public security but also violate the current policies. In addition, the sect can be easily utilized by the bandit. To protect the national security and public security, the police decide to strictly prohibit the heterodox sect Yiguan Dao.” (*Lianhe Bao* 联合报 1963.5.6)

It is obvious that there are great differences between the sect’s explanations and the state’s charges, as are indicated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: A comparison between Yiguan Dao’s announcement and the state’s charges

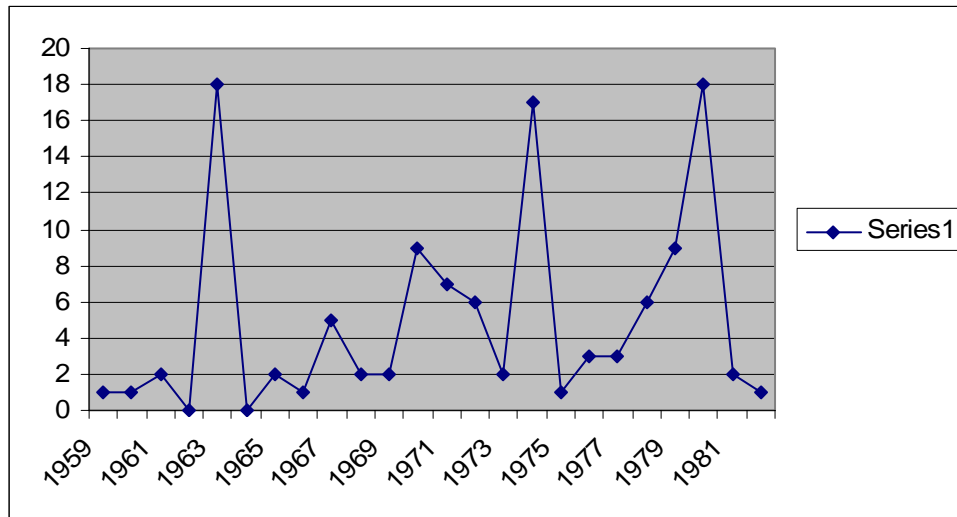
| | Yiguan Dao’s explanations | The state’s charges |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| The nature of Yiguan Dao | The most progressive religion | An evil religion (xie jiao 邪教) which is rebellious in nature |
| The teaching of Yiguan Dao | Following the saints’ teachings. | Distorting orthodox doctrines; the theory of “The Last Disaster at the End of the Third Era” is superstitious and heretical. |
| Morality | (1)Correcting the mind and cultivating bodies; (2)Practicing old moralities; (3)Being filial to parents | Nakedly congregating ; Violating the social morality. |

| | | |
|-----------------|--|---|
| | and compatible with the neighborhoods; and (4) in all, benefiting the social morality. | |
| Public security | (1) Obeying the laws; (2) fulfilling their social responsibility; and (3) spontaneously improving their spirits and moralities; and (4) in all, stabilizing and benefiting the society. | (1) Cheating the gullible mass; (2) Accumulating wealth by illegal means; (3) Raping female believers; (4) Terrifying believers; and (5) in all, threatening the public security |
| Politics | (1) supporting the Three Principles of People and being loyal to the KMT; (2) opposing the CCP and the USSR; and (3) in all, doing good to the state | (1) Being used by the CCP; (2) spreading rumors which are helpful to the CCP; (3) violating the policy through operating underground; (4) controlling elections; (5) in all, doing harm to national security. |

Triggered by the announcement incident, a high wave of persecution occurred in 1963. In this year, under the great pressure of KMT state, the three announcers mentioned above had to advertise that YGD decided to disband itself because it did not gain recognition from the state. Still in 1963, thirteen high-level YGD leaders were regarded as “rogues” and were arrested by the authoritarian state. Some of them were abused by

the police during the custodies. Since then, persecution had become more serious: the police frequently swept down Yiguan Dao’s congregations and took sectarians into custody; especially, the sectarian leaders became “ready targets for blackmail and charges of fraud” (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 241). Song (1983: 186) points out that there are at least 118 crackdowns on Yiguan Dao from 1959 to 1982, as the chart 1 shows. This figure, however, is not a perfect measurement: it includes only those crackdowns that had been reported in newspapers from 1959 to 1982. Some persecution cases were not revealed by the official press and there are still many sectarian repression cases which occurred before 1959. Consequently, these suppression cases are not reflected in Song’s figures. Anyway, the figure provided by Song gives a general impression of the suppression of YGD.

Chart 3.1: The number of reports about repressing YGD from 1959 to 1982



Source: Song 1983: 186.

Though the KMT state regarded YGD as a political threat and tried to restrict the sect's activities, the suppression was somewhat moderate. As Ding Renjie (forthcoming: 50) argues, "although the KMT authoritative state suppressed YGD, the suppression was a moderate one compared to the traditional empire states' regulation of sects, and YGD could still develop in local societies." Indeed, the KMT state was more moderate in the process of suppressing YGD than the CCP state in mainland China: the former did not kill a sectarian because of the faith even during the most severe period of suppression, while the latter executed most of important sectarian leaders on mainland China in the early 1950s (Lu 1998).

Could the state successfully prevent the existence of YGD? How much can the state control religion through suppression? In the following sections, I will try to probe these questions from the perspective of rational choice theory. My answer is that suppression can not destroy the vitality of religious firms because it tends to breed some unintended consequences which contribute to the growth of suppressed religion

3. 2 The Unintended Consequences of Religious Suppression

3.2.1 Suppression Facilitating Innovations

An important argument of the religious economy model is that competition, or sometimes conflict, is the energizing force which drives religious firms to be creative, while suppression reduces the vitality of religious organizations (e.g. Stark and Finke 2000). Religious economy theorists have demonstrated that the dominating religions in a restricted religious economy tend to become inefficient in providing religious services because they used to utilize political power to restrict competition (Iannacone 1991;

Finke 1997). But the regulatory influences of suppression towards the suppressed religious firms need further investigation. This section will argue that suppression could not stultify the repressed sect. On the contrary, in the case of YGD, suppression to some extent drove the sect to be aggressive, innovative and adaptive.

To fight for its survival, YGD gradually developed a special organizational structure to keep the sect secret, as chart 2 indicates. When YGD spread to Taiwan in the middle 1940s, eighteen divisions carried out their missionary works independently². Each division, led by a Senior Master (*Qianren*前人)³, is divided into several sub-divisions, and a sub-division consists of several units which are led by “initiators” (*Dian Chuanshi*点传师)⁴. The basic unit of Yiguan Dao is the Buddha hall. As the basic unit of Yiguan Dao, the Buddha hall has two forms: the family Buddha hall and the public Buddha hall. “Public Buddha halls are usually established and managed by several unmarried believers, while family Buddha halls are set up by married believers in their private houses” (Lin 1992: 86). Because of the existence of Buddha halls, two or three people can gather together and form a small religious group; families or groups of neighbors can meet in secret; congregations can be addressed by itinerant “initiators” or they can be self-supervising; and various religious activities--such as rituals, spirit-writing, and research courses--held in the Buddha hall. To avoid the possible persecution, YGD deliberately

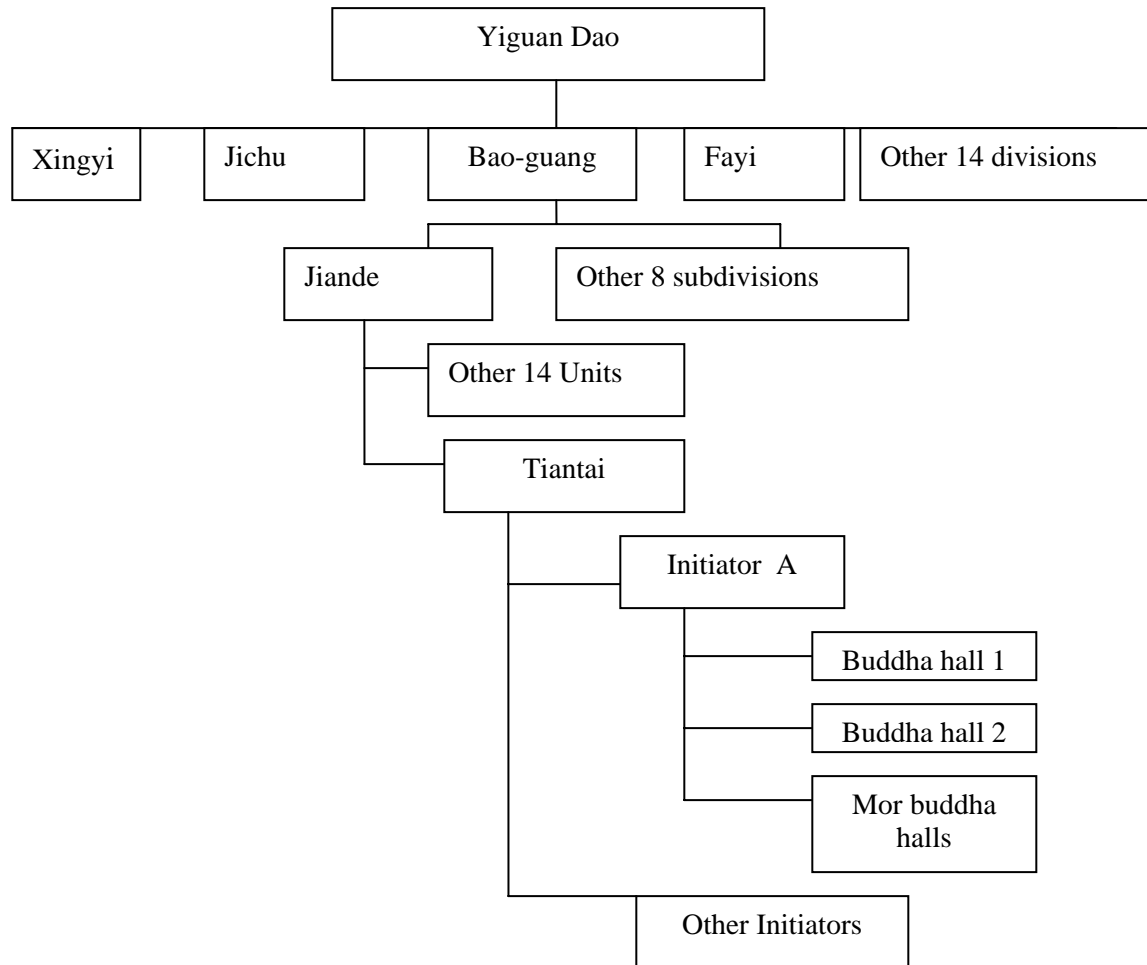
² They are: Bao-guang, Xing-yi, Fa-yi, Ji-chu, An-dong, Hao-ran, Chang-zhou, Wen-hua, Tian-xiang, Hui-guang, Zheng-yi, Zi-guang, Ming-guang, Jin-guang, Peking, Li-zhi, Tian-zhen, and Pu-guang.

³ The term “Senior Master” did not occur until the sectarians fled to Taiwan, referring to chief leaders of YGD divisions. Though “Senior Masters” are also initiators, they hold the right of appointing other “initiators” and make the final decisions.

⁴ The term “initiator” refers to the sectarians who could act as the representative of Patriarch Zhang Tianran to hold the ritual of initiation. It usually spends an YGD sectarian ten or more years to get the position of initiator. When one successfully gets such position, he/she can develop his/her own group.

reduced the interactions between Buddha halls. For this reason, a secret police in one Buddha hall knew nothing about the information of other Buddha halls even if these halls are led by the same initiator (Song 1996). Such organizational structure is helpful for the sect to avoid persecution and eventually survive the repression period⁵.

Chart 3. 2: The Organizational Structure of YGD



⁵ In order to avoid the persecution and keep organizational vitalities, Protestantism in contemporary China also adopts a flexible organizational structure similar to the YGD's. For details, see Hunter and Chan 1993: 71.

The above chart shows that YGD was actually an association of numerous small units which operated independently and were managed by initiators respectively. Consequently, an internal pluralism existed within the sect⁶. Iannaccone points out that the internal diversity of the Catholic Church is helpful to “introduce additional competition within the Catholic church that substitutes for competition between Catholicism and other denomination” (Iannaccone 1991: 170). Similarly, the internal pluralism derived from the organizational structure of YGD is the major source of competition and innovation within YGD. In fact, some division leaders of YGD self-consciously made use of such internal diversity to promote the competition of recruitment. For example, He Zonghao, the chief leader of *Xingyi* division shrewdly held a missionary competition every year to encourage the sub-divisions to recruit members actively. The top three sub-divisions in recruitment would be honored with medals by He Zonghao. Since receiving the medal was regarded as a big honor by the sectarians, they were very aggressive in doing missionary work. As a result, a competitive atmosphere was created in *Xingyi* division which quickly became the biggest division of YGD (Song 2002: 372).

Partly due to the internal diversity, the divisions of YGD are not free of competition even when the sect was under suppression. As Jordan and Overmyer observe, “directing a Unity branch is not easy. Success ...depends upon one’s ability to attract followers from other sects or other Unity subsects” (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 221). Clart (1998) also

⁶ The relationship of regulation and religious pluralism is frequently discussed by theorists. Proponents of the new paradigm (e.g. Iannaccone 1991; Stark and Finke 2000) usually regard state regulation as a force pursuing religious monopoly. But regulation does not necessarily “involve the imposition of monopoly” (Sharot 2002: 449), especially in imperial China where sectarian persecution coexisted with religious pluralism. In China, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have existed together for ages without one of them being successful in destroying the other two. In addition, though imperial China persecuted sects, sectarian groups tended to prosper rather than wither. As Seiwert argues, “Even during the Qing dynasty with its severe persecutions, the number of sectarian groups did not decline but appears to have increased constantly” (Seiwert 2003: 445). These oriental data suggest that more studies are needed to probe the relationship of suppression and religious pluralism.

reveals that competition, or sometimes conflicts, existed between the different divisions of YGD before 1987 when the religious market of Taiwan was still strictly regulated. Facing the competition, the YGD divisions had to update their religious products to keep followers. In the battle for survival, such divisions as the *Jinguang* division disappeared, while some were able to gain many followers and expanded both geographically and socially. For example, the *Jichu* division established a good social network among merchants of cities; the *Xingyi* division and the *Baoguang* division were famous for their missionary work in factories; the *Fayi* Division was good at recruiting members from college students (Song 1983). At the same time, a couple of important innovations were introduced into the sectarian practice. YGD as a whole was so innovative that scholars (e.g. Wang, Zhou and Lin 1997) regard the sect as the most innovative religious group on Taiwan during the period of suppression. We can see this point from the missionary innovations of “the combination of missionary work and business activities” (*Shang-jiao He-yi* 商教合一) and “the meal groups” (*Huo-shi-tuan* 伙食团).

Taiwan had experienced a high rate of economic growth beginning in 1960 and industrial development produced an urban revolution. In the 1970s, *Taipei* and *Kaohsiung* became world-class cities, boasting commercial centers and industrial facilities. Smaller cities, such as *Tainan*, also moved out of a pre-industrial rural economy and into manufacturing industry. As a large number of factories were built around the cities, many people moved to the suburbs and to the cities, making their livings as workers.

Under the trend of urbanization, some divisions of Yiguan Dao began to focus their missionary work on the work forces: managers, workers and engineers. As mentioned before, YGD is a religious group made up by laymen; nearly all of its clergy have their

own secular businesses. Many sectarians became big capitalists with the economic development. For example, Yao Wunian, a leading initiator of *Baoguang Jiande* division, primarily began his business career as a repairman and became one of the richest men on Taiwan, managing a big steel factory. Zhang Rongfa is the founder and chairman of Evergreen Marine Corp (*Changrong gongsi* 长荣公司) and the chief leader of a *Xingyi* sub-division; his company also developed from a small enterprise to one of the most influential companies on Taiwan in the past decades (Song 2002). Besides these influential sectarian capitalists, more sectarians managed small or middle scale enterprises (Song 1987); about 21 percent of Yiguan Dao initiators were entrepreneurs (Li 2000: 75). The sect also directly put sectarians' donations into the secular business investments. Song Guangyu labels these phenomena "the combination of missionary work and business activities" (Song 1995: 204).

The model of combining missionary work and business activities facilitated YGD's expansion in several ways. First, these sectarian leaders could make use of their entrepreneur identity to recruit new sectarians from their employees. Usually, they added some religious contents into the training courses, promoted the trainees' religious interests, and then encouraged workers to be initiated. Since most of, if not all, management staffs in these enterprises are YGD sectarians, employees are easily converted to the sect (Li 2000)⁷. Second, the identity of entrepreneur, to a significant extent, protected the sectarian entrepreneurs' religious activities. They often built big Buddha halls in their factories and held religious meetings in the name of training workers. Accordingly, these sectarian congregations could successfully avoid the

⁷ For example, 99.8 percent of managers in the Evergreen Marine Corp are YGD sectarians (Guo 1990).

government's attention. In the field work, I was told that this strategy is still used in the mainland China today by the YGD sectarians⁸. Thirdly, the sectarian enterprises could give financial support to the missionary work. For example, in 1974, the *Baoguang Jiande* branch of YGD utilized believers' donations to build "Tianran Chemical Plant," a factory manufacturing corn mint in Singapore. Within a few years, this factory became one of top five mint factories of the world. With its business success, this sectarian company routinely uses a part of its profits to support the sect's missionary work in return. (Song 2002: 367-370). In sum, the model of combining missionary work and business activities is a great innovation which helps YGD to run secretly and efficiently under suppression.

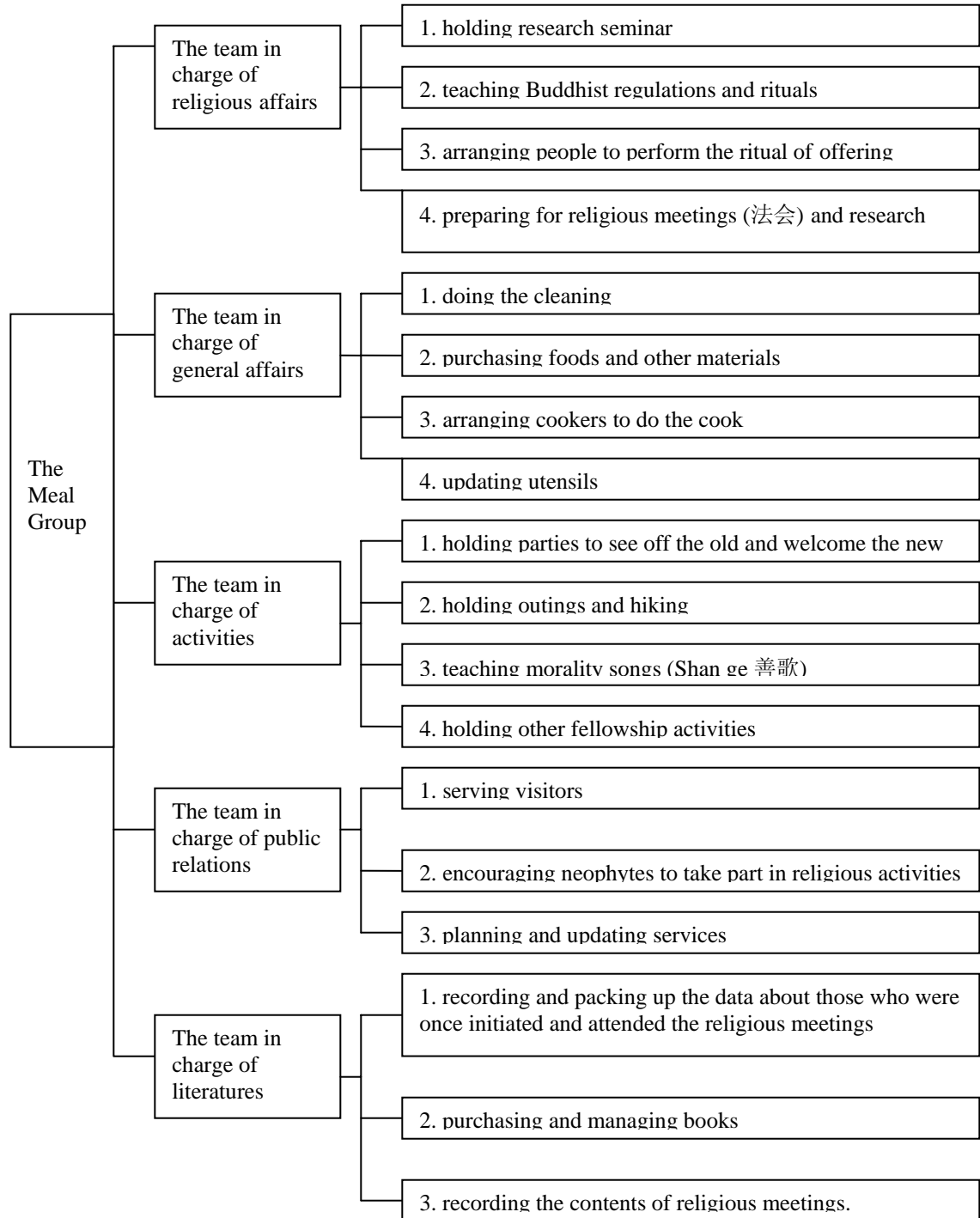
The economic development also increased the number of colleges and universities. With the development of higher education in Taiwan, more and more college students came from the rural areas and they were poor. To save expenses, in 1968, several students in the *Fengjia* University (逢甲大学) who converted to the *Fayi* division of the YGD decided to organize a meal group (*huoshi tuan*), living and eating together. In the following years, more functions were added to the group. In addition to providing vegetarian diets, the meal group of YGD also held such activities as hiking. The meal group eventually became a basic missionary unit in charge of recruiting new members from colleges. The detailed functions are presented in chart 3.3. The innovation of meal groups soon extended to other colleges. Partly because of this innovation, YGD became one of most active religious firms in campuses and about sixty thousand college students

⁸ Song (1995) also reveals that YGD spreads in mainland China by means of business activities. Perhaps the local officials in mainland China actually know the existence of YGD in some Taiwanese factories, but in order to accelerate the local economic development, they would tolerate their religious activities if the sectarians do not violate the state publicly.

had converted to YGD from 1967 to 1979 even though the authoritarian state took several measures, such as dismissing the sectarian students, to prevent college students joining the sect (Song 1983).

The above analysis indicates that YGD was adept at taking hold of every chance to extend its missionary work and adapting itself to the changing environment when it was under suppression. The moderate suppression could not restrict the vitality of the suppressed religions. Instead, suppression has been helpful to drive the sect to be innovative and adaptive.

Chapter 3.3: Functional teams of a meal group



Source: Lin 1992.

3.2.2 Suppression Increasing Religious Rewards

Suppression did not decrease the sectarians' enthusiasm of spreading their faith. Instead, a set of new explanations were developed to cope with the persecution. According to YGD, in the process of cultivation, one must experience tests (*kao* 考) such as "official tests (*guankao* 官考)" which refer to "suppression and violence from government officials" (Guo 1985: 120). These tests are especially arranged by the Mother to judge who are eligible to enter Heaven. The sectarians who pass the tests are believed to be able to reduce "karmas" (*yezhang* 业障) and accumulate merits. From the perspective of Buddhism, the karmas are accumulated because of a person's wrong actions and conducts during the successive phases of the person's existence; the merit is the positive matter which can help people to get rid of the circle of birth, death and rebirth. YGD borrowed these ideas from Buddhism and added new contents, arguing that the more the sectarians suffered, the more karma they would reduce; and then the more merits they would accumulate (Guo 1985: 118-120). These explanations were helpful to strengthen the believers' faith. During my fieldwork, a female believer told me: "Each time after I was released by the police, I would go to the Buddha hall, burn a big bundle of incenses, kowtow to the Mother, and thank the Mother for offering me a great chance to get rid of the 'karma' I accumulated in my past lives."

Many YGD sectarians shared these ideas. Actually, it is a common phenomenon that repressed sects would develop a set of explanations to cope with the suppression and

strengthen their believers' faith. An imperial official of the *Qing* dynasty once gave the following comments in the *Poxie xiangbian* [A detailed refutation of heresies]⁹:

The current evil religions (*Xiejiao*) hold that “if one is punished but without execution, he/she will be free of falling hell but can not go directly to heaven; if one is sent to the gallows, he/she will go to heaven without red followers; if one is decapitated, he/she will ascend to heaven with red followers; if one is put to death by dismembering the body, he/she will directly ascend to heaven with a big red robe.” Now I have read more than forty heterodox scriptures produced in the *Ming* dynasty, but I fail to find such ideas in these scriptures. Followers of evil religions in the *Ming* dynasty were not executed, so they did not need to produce these words. However, from the establishment of our dynasty [the *Qing* dynasty] on, evil religions are strictly prohibited. The followers of evil religions are bastinadoed, exiled, garroted, beheaded or executed by dismembering the body, according to the degree of their crimes. Though the followers of evil religions are foolish, they also fear death. To conquer the fear of death, the current evil religions developed such ideas as “the sectarians being executed can directly ascend to heaven.” As a result, the current sectarians regard execution as a treasureable opportunity to ascend to heaven and thus punishments can not forbid the activities of evil religions. However, the stupid followers of evil religions do not know that there are no such ideas as “one being executed can directly ascend to heaven” in the past evil

⁹ This book was produced in 1834 by Huang Yubian, a *Hebei* magistrate. Huang collected sixty-eight sectarian scriptures, most of which were written near the end of the sixteenth century. In order to refute the teachings of these texts, Huang wrote this book. Though this book is full of official prejudices, it contains rich materials about sectarian belief because Huang quoted long passages verbatim from scriptures.

religions. These ideas were added by the current evil religions recently (Sawada 1972: 113).

The above quotation includes much valuable information which suggests that in history persecuted sects tended to manufacture innovative teachings to transform sufferings into religious rewards. On this issue, *Falun gong* (法轮功) provides us a recent case. After this group was outlawed by the Chinese state in 1999, Li Hongzhi, the founder of *Falun gong*, keeps producing new explanations to encourage the practitioners to confront the CCP, arguing that such resistance could increase the practitioners' merits¹⁰. Equipped with these innovative explanations, repressed sectarians believe that it is worth running the risk of confrontation with the authoritarian state to insist on their faith. For the sectarians, punishments are the very way to gain religious rewards: traditional sectarians “call death ‘Recovering the Origin’ (*shou-yuan* 收元) and believed they ascended straight to heaven” (Yang 1961); YGD believers regard imprisonment as a good opportunity to gain merits; and today *Falun gong* practitioners view resistance as a way towards “Spiritual Accomplishment” (*Yuanman* 圆满). Due to the innovative theories invoked by persecution, sufferings can be imaginatively transformed into religious rewards and thus suppression unintentionally increases the other-worldly rewards offered by the suppressed religious organizations.

¹⁰ For teachings newly developed by Li Hongzhi, one can download them from www.falundafa.com. For cases about resistance of *Falun gong* believers to CCP, please refer to <http://media.minghui.org>.

3.2.3 Suppression Reducing the Risk of Religious Commodities

The religious economy model regards religious commodities as highly risky other-worldly rewards which lie beyond the range of empirical proof. Due to the risk and uncertainty of religious rewards, “religious consumers are tempted to backslide, thereby reducing their levels of participation and commitment” (Stark and Iannaccone 1996: 266). Therefore, religious firms must take measures to reduce the risk of religious commodities to maintain high levels of commitment. In the case of YGD, I find that suppression is helpful to decrease the risk of religious commodities in the following ways.

Rational choice theorists hold that the less the clergy benefit materially from their followers’ faith, the more persuasive the clergy are (Iannaccone 1994; Stark 1996). As I have stated, YGD provided no salary to the missionaries who made their livings through their secular businesses. Moreover, suppression made these missionaries lose rather than gain from their religious services. They encountered ridicule from the society and persecution from the state. How could one doubt the credibility of the sectarians’ faith if they would like to sacrifice time, money and even freedom to insist on their faith? As a result, sacrifice is helpful to reduce the risk of religious commodities and strengthen the believers’ confidence, as Stark (1996: 163-191) reveals in *The Rise of Christianity*.

In order to keep secret, YGD emphasized that the sectarians should obey the rule that “relatives convert relatives and friends convert friends” (*qin-chuan-qin, you-chuan-you* 亲传亲, 友传友) when they do missionary work. This strategy also helped the sect

to reduce the risk because “friends and fellow congregants have fewer incentives to overstate the benefits of religion than do clergy” (Stark 1996: 174).

Finally, the differences between the social stigma and the reality the believers experienced made YGD become more believable. When recalling the process of becoming a sectarian, an interviewee¹¹ who joined Yiguan Dao in 1974 told me that:

One of my cousins first joined Yiguan Dao, then my uncle and aunt followed her. They told me that Yiguan Dao was very good. “Is it really good? You close the door when you congregate. How do I know what you are doing?” I asked them. ... However, I was a little curious to see what Yiguan Dao on earth was, so I followed them to the Buddha hall of YGD. The Buddha hall and the rituals were very sacred. I had visited a large number of temples before. Although those temples were also sacred, people in temples were not serious and they usually walk disorderly and speak loudly. The Buddha hall of Yiguan Dao was quite different. People in Yiguan Dao’s Buddha hall never speak loudly, and they just stood there quietly and smilingly, with the male on one side and the female on other side. They were also very polite. They would say “good morning” to you after you entered the Buddha hall and then politely gave you a clean wet towel to clean hands. In short, the situation was quite different from what the rumors described. I realized that Yiguan Dao was good. From then on, I kept on going to the Buddha hall and introduced the Dao to others.

¹¹ This interviews was conducted in 25th Spetember, 2002. The interviewee is a driver.

A female interviewee¹² who joined Yiguan Dao in 1971 stated:

Before receiving the Dao, I had heard rumors that Yiguan Dao was the duck egg's sect and that Yiguan Dao held naked congregations. But after I received the Dao, I was amazed that the real situation was extremely different from what the hearsays described. Why was there such a big difference? So after receiving the Dao, I was not influenced by the rumors. On the contrary, the rumors increased my faith in the Dao because the difference between the reality and the rumors was too extreme.

Such statements are typical of converts. As mentioned before, to justify its religious persecution policy, the KMT state declared that Yiguan Dao violated the social morality through holding naked congregations. The sect was described as an immoral group full of rogues, cheats, lecherous male leaders and ignorant female believers. These negative images were exaggerated and widely spread by the state-controlled press. However, the reality strongly contradicts the widespread hearsays: the Buddha halls of YGD are very clean and tidy; no disturbing noise exists in the temple; the sectarians in Buddha halls are neat and formally dressed, modest and pious; they are divided into two parts when performing rituals, with the males on one side and the females on the other side; they greet visitors with smile, bows and a clean warm towel which is used to clean hands. All of these facts reveal that both the KMT state and the press were liars, while YGD was believable and dependable. Accordingly, the negative hearsays contrarily strengthened the sectarians' faith, as suggested by the interviewees.

¹² The interview was conducted in 12th December, 2002.

When discussing the regulatory influences of suppression, previous studies (e.g. Finke 1997) usually stresses that suppression tends to increase the cost of membership, such as “the additional costs of concealing their membership or facing public harassment” (Finke 1997: 50). Undoubtedly, this observation is still valid. But this is just one side of the coin; the other side is that suppression also result in some unintended consequences which are helpful to reduce the risk of religious commodities offered by the pressed religious firms, as this section reveals.

3.2.4 Suppression Reducing Free Riding

Iannacone’s excellent analysis has demonstrated that religion, like other collective activities, is susceptible to the free-rider problem (Iannacone 1994). The free-rider problem is really a dilemma for religious groups. On the one hand, to recruit member in a large scale, religious institutions must tolerate free riders who are “potential consumers”, or even “inviting them to enjoy the benefits of the church as ‘quasi-public goods’ -- to experience the benefits of the church as ‘free samples’ with the promise of even better things to come (after a free-rider becomes ‘serious’)” (Hadaway and Marler 1996: 201). On the other hand, religious groups must reduce the number of free riders either through screening out half-hearted members or through turning free riders to serious believers. Otherwise, the large scale of free riders would wreck religious firms (Iannacone 1994; Stark and Finke 2000).

In the case of YGD, suppression mitigated the free-rider problem from two aspects. First, the suppression created a social barrier that filtered out half-hearted members.

Iannacone (1992) has demonstrated that religions may benefit from stigma, self-sacrifice, and bizarre behavioral restrictions which can overcome free-rider problems. Stark (1996: 174-184) also argues that sacrifice and stigma made early Christianity immune to free-rider problems by creating a barrier to group entry and increasing participation. These arguments are applicable to explain the case of YGD. As mentioned before, social stigma, such as “naked congregation” and the nickname of “duck egg sect”, was attached to YGD when it was suppressed by the KMT state. Under such situation, few people, if any, would try to free ride in an illegal and infamous sect which could provide few practical supports to believers. Accordingly, both suppression and social stigma directly helped YGD to overcome the free-rider problem.

Another unintended consequence of suppression which has proved to be helpful to mitigate the free riding is the innovation of “research courses (*Yanjiu ban*)”. In the 1970s, to respond to the “cultural revolution” in mainland China, the KMT state on Taiwan launched the movement of “cultural renaissance” and encouraged people to study Chinese traditional culture. In order to build a good relationship with the KMT state and earn the state’s trust, most of YGD divisions devoted themselves to conducting “research courses of traditional Chinese culture (*Guo-xue Yan-xiu-ban* 国学研修班)” (Song 1983). Actually, the sect put so much emphasis on these courses that “the Unity Sect is perhaps second only to the public school system in its pursuit of education for its members” (Jordan and Overmyer 1987: 237).

The research courses are classified into different levels, ranging from the primary to the highest. At the beginning of each course, an initiator presides over a ritual in the name of gods; when the course is over, a formal ritual is performed. The most important

content of the commencement ritual is to “make a vow” (*Xuyuan* 许愿); a big bundle of incenses is burned in the ritual; the attendees will receive a form listing the vows which include “removing bad habits and refining bad temper” (*gai-piqi qu-maobing* 改脾气, 去毛病), “prioritizing holy affairs over worldly matter” (*Zhong-sheng qingfan* 重圣轻凡), “contributing material wealth and spreading Dao” (*cai-fa shuang-shi* 财法双施), “leading people to receive the Dao” (*duren qiudao* 渡人求道), “becoming a vegetarian” (*qing-kou ru-su* 清口茹素), “establishing a Buddha hall” (*she-li fo-tang* 设立佛堂) and “doing missionary work overseas” (*haiwai kaihuang* 海外开荒); the attendees are required to choose a vow to fulfill and sign on the form; then the form recording the vow is burned (Yang 1997).

After being initiated, the neophytes of YGD are usually invited to attend the family congregations, worshiping gods and listening to missionaries. Then they are encouraged to attend the primary course and make a vow. After finishing the course, they are usually encouraged to take part in the higher level course and make a new wish. This process continues. Guided by the courses and vows, a neophyte would learn more explanations of YGD and became a core member step by step. Of course, only those willing to make further vows go on to higher level courses.

As Iannacone points out, in mixed populations where levels of religious commitment vary from person to person, “people with low levels of religious commitment tend to free ride off those with higher levels; they tend to take more than give”, although “they may do so unintentionally” (Iannacone 1994: 1184). In the case of YGD, we find that the research courses, together with the mechanism of “vow”, successfully classified the mixed population into different levels; and the attendees in the

same course usually have a similar degree of commitment. The vows act like entry fees, thus discourage anyone not seriously interested in “buying” the product. At the same time, the courses are very patient and adaptive in religionizing members. Therefore, the mechanism of research courses can not only keep all of the potential believers in a large degree but also mitigates the free-rider problem. Keep in mind that this innovation is also an unanticipated consequence of suppression: it was not purposely designed to reduce the free riding but to earn the authoritarian regime’s trust and establish a positive social image (Song 1983).

3.3 The growth of YGD under suppression

Periodic government campaigns against YGD on Taiwan forced the sect to cease its activities or even disband temporarily, but the sect tended to continue where it had left off as soon as government pressure eased. Actually, the sect steadily developed during the period of suppression. Though it is difficult to estimate exactly how many YGD sectarians were on Taiwan when it was prohibited because of its underground nature, we can make sense out of the following data: according to police investigations, the sect had about fifty thousand believers in 1963 (Song 1983: 27); in 1982, Qu Haiyuan estimated that the sect included more than three hundred thousand believers (Qu 1982: 41); Song Guangu estimated that the number of YGD believers in 1983 is about five hundred thousand (Song 1983: 1). Though these numbers are not quite precise, what is certain is that YGD successfully developed from a minor immigrant religion into the biggest sect on Taiwan even under suppression (Wang, Zhou and Lin 1997: 48).

Since the 1960s, competitive local elections existed on Taiwan. With YGD becoming more and more powerful, the KMT realized that it could utilize the sectarians to win elections. According to the biography of Zhang Peicheng, the senior of Jichu division, the KMT officials began to ask him to motivate the followers to help the party win elections in 1971 (Song 1998: 240). As a result, an ironical phenomenon emerged. On one hand, the KMT state publicly charged that YGD manipulated local elections; on the other hand, the officials privately utilized the sect to gain votes. Anyway, the institution of elections provided the sect an opportunity to build a patron-client relationship with the authoritarian officials. Many officials who were once helped by the sectarians were reluctant to repress the sect strictly. With the help of those officials, YGD finally gained its legal status in 1987.

3.4 Discussion and conclusion

The current discussion of state regulation on religion, however, mainly focuses on the state-religion relations in contemporary America, where the state acts as the role of guaranteeing religious freedom, and in Europe where a religious monopoly is largely enforced. Though core religious economy theorists (Finke 1997; Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 1997) have briefly discussed state regulation of the religion in Japanese society, they mainly try to use Japanese data to support the argument that suppression restricts the growth of religious firms and deregulation leads to religious prosperity. Up to now, the operation of suppressed religions and the regulatory influences of suppression in a restricted religious economy have remained unexplored in a large degree (Lang 2003).

This chapter theoretically extends the religious economy model to the Chinese religious phenomenon which is of great significance in shaping the contours of the theory. A couple of unintended consequences of religious suppression are discussed. First, in contrary to the prediction of previous studies (e.g. Finke 1997) that suppression creates inefficient religious suppliers through constraining choice and muffling competition, I find that repressed religions tend to be innovative, adaptive and aggressive. YGD was a good example. As scholars (Song 1983; Lin 1990) point out, YGD was virtually the most innovative religious group on Taiwan during the period when the sect was suppressed. Why could YGD be so active and innovative even under suppression? One possible reason, I think, had much to do with the marginalized status of YGD. In a restricted religious economy, unlike the dominating religions which could utilize political power to strike rivals, YGD had to actively update its services and develop innovations to attract and retain members. “Innovate or die,” this is the situation which the YGD sectarians were facing. In order to survive, the sect had no choice but to introduce innovative adaptations into the practice.

Another factor helpful in facilitating the innovation of YGD is its organizational structure. Primarily developed to avoid persecution, the organizational structure of YGD unexpectedly produced internal diversity within the sect. Though whether religious pluralism and religious participation are positively associated or not is still a controversial topic (Finke and Stark 1988; Olson 1998, 1999; Olson and Hadaway 1999; Stark and Finke 2000), it is true that the internal pluralism within YGD was very helpful to keep the sect’s organizational vitality when it was under suppression. Some shrewd YGD sectarian leaders intentionally utilized such pluralism to hold recruitment competition. Competition

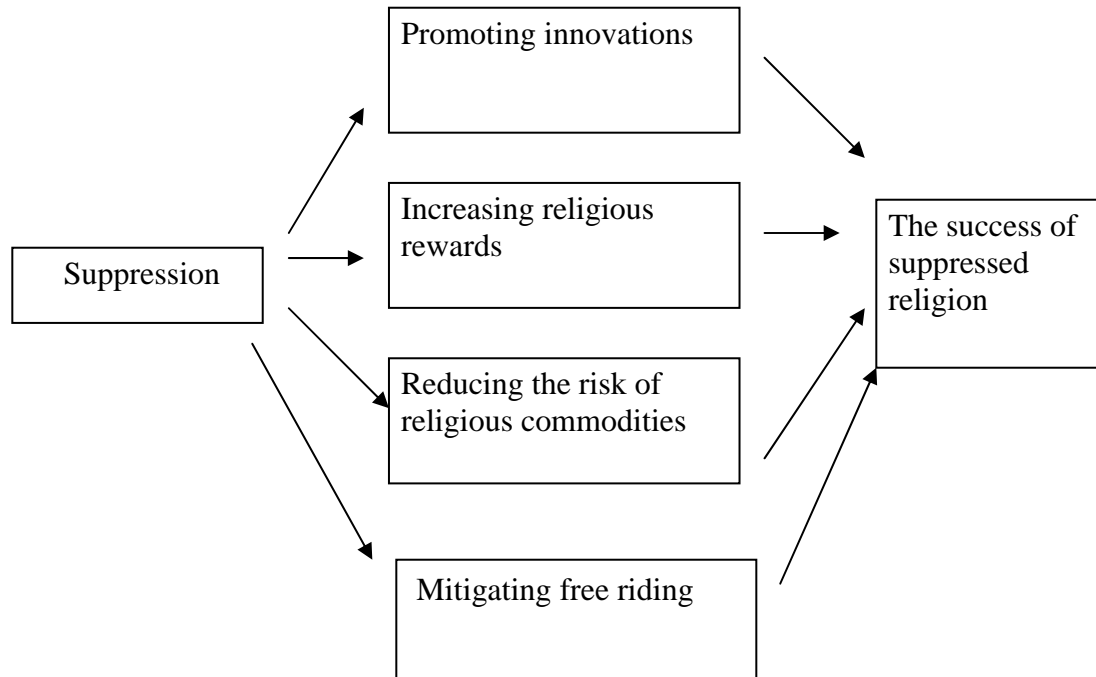
within the sect also drove the divisions of YGD to develop innovations to attract and retain followers. In addition, when one division of YGD introduced a new service to the practice, other divisions tended to imitate the innovation. For example, after the *Fayi* division utilized “the meal groups” to do missionary work in colleges, other divisions soon followed the *Fayi* division and established their own meal groups (Chen 1999). As a result, the sect as a whole became very innovative and adaptive.

Second, this study reveals that state suppression can unexpectedly make the religious commodities of suppressed religions become more attractive and less risky. These unintended consequences make the conversion to suppressed sects become a reasonable choice: though the suppressed sectarians have to sacrifice more, they can gain more other-worldly rewards and more credible religious products. This finding is helpful to understand the long-standing puzzle that why people would like to contribute their time, enthusiasm, money and even lives to a suppressed and stigmatized religious group. When addressing why people join sects, Chinese imperial officials always hold that the mass of sectarians is stupid, ignorant and gullible (Overmyer 1976). Officials used to directly call sectarian believers “stupid people” (*Yumin* 愚民) and put “the constant emphasis on the ‘ignorance’ and ‘confusion’ of the people” (Overmyer 1976: 38). In contrast, this study shows that people convert to repressed sects at least partly because the suppression unintentionally increases the other-worldly rewards and reduces the risk of religious commodities provided by the oppressed religions. Since state suppression makes their religious rewards more profitable and more dependable, it is reasonable for people to convert to the suppressed religions. This finding sharply contrasts with the official view that conversion to suppressed sects is a consequence of ignorance and irrationality.

Finally, this chapter proposes that suppression can mitigate the free riding. Suppression, along with sacrifice and social stigma, may act to filter out half-hearted members. Therefore suppression was helpful for the sect to overcome the free-rider problem. Specially, in the case of YGD, the mechanism of research courses, which was invoked to build a good relationship with the authoritarian regime, unexpectedly reduces free riding.

Let us take stock. I have argued that moderate suppression can act as the energizing force which drives the sect to be innovative, adaptive and aggressive; moderate suppression was also helpful to increase the other-worldly rewards and to reduce the risk of religious goods offered by the suppressed religions; and third, suppression can mitigate the free-rider problem. All of these are unintended consequences of religious suppression. Undoubtedly, these unintended consequences benefit the survival and growth of suppressed religions, as Chart 3.4 shows. Though these observations are derived from the case study of YGD, the sect is not exceptional. Most of, if not all, strong religions today were once suppressed. Similar logics exist under the success of these once-suppressed religions.

Chart 3.4: A model of unintended consequences of religious suppression



But this analysis does not imply that repressed religion always benefit from suppression, no matter how extreme the suppression. This analysis, instead, applies mainly to the religious economy where a moderate religious suppression exists. It is interesting to compare the different fates of YGD in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The sect nearly disappeared in mainland China because of strict suppression; it did not have much influence in the Hong Kong religious market where state regulation was weak; and the sect is the most successful in Taiwan where moderate suppression existed before 1987. The different developments of YGD in three Chinese societies indicate that state regulation plays a vital role in influencing religious vitality. In short, whereas moderate suppression may be salutary, the regulatory influences of more extreme persecution are still to be investigated in future researches.

CHAPTER 4

MANAGING TO EDUCATE:

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT IN YIGUAN DAO

When studying religious commitment, the new paradigm mainly focuses on exclusive religions in western societies, stressing membership, exclusivity and institutional strictness (Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Finke 2000). The religious commitment in a polytheistic setting has been rarely studied. This chapter tries to examine how YGD could increase the commitment of members in Chinese society where religions were not mutually exclusive and thus people attached little importance to religious commitment. Because most of new recruits of YGD are adherents of Chinese popular religion who direct much of their attention to efficacy, it is especially difficult for YGD to keep its believers. Focusing on the mechanisms adopted by YGD to increase its members' commitment, this chapter is to study the process of new recruits eventually becoming veteran members of the sect.

Five parts compose this chapter. Part 1 reveals that most of YGD believers come from the popular religion and presents research questions as well as a literature review. The following three parts will respectively deal with three important mechanisms of increasing the sectarians' commitment: the research courses (part 2), the dharma assemblies (part 3) and the mechanism of vows (part 4). The final part is to offer some theoretical discussion of this issue.

4.1 From Popular Religion to Yiguan Dao

YGD mainly recruits its members from the popular religion. This statement is more than my impression during the fieldwork; it also can be supported by quantitative researches.

An island-wide survey on Taiwan in 1994 indicates that among 1682 respondents, there were 49 YGD believers; among these 49 believers, there were 43 persons who came from other traditions, as table 4.1 shows. In detail, among these 43 sectarians, 12 previously belonged to the Buddhism, 13 came from popular religion, and 13 had no previous religious belief, as table 4.2 shows. Furthermore, none of these twelve persons, who said they were Buddhists, had held a ritual of conversion to Buddhism. This suggests that these people are most probably the believers of popular religion.

We must note that there is no clear distinction among self-defined popular religion believers, Buddhists and atheists. A sampling investigation of Taiwan (Zhang and Lin 1992: 102) shows that 87% of Taiwanese who claim to have no religious belief actually believe or worship gods; only 6.3% of the population really have no religious belief and do not believe or worship gods. Qu Haiyuan (1997: 241) points out that about 70% of those who claim to be Buddhists are actually practitioners of folk religion. Those studies show that most of those self-defined Buddhists or atheists actually are participants of popular religion. For this reason, I hold that YGD believers mainly come from the popular religion.

Table 4.1: Religious Switching on Taiwan (1)

| | Buddh- ism | Taoism | Folk Religion | Yiguan Dao | Islam | Christ- ianity | No belief | others | total |
|-----------|---------------|--------|------------------|---------------|-------|-------------------|--------------|--------|-------|
| Adherents | 717 | 169 | 577 | 49 | 1 | 99 | 242 | 11 | 1682 |
| Converts | 164 | 18 | 45 | 43 | 1 | 57 | 27 | 5 | 360 |

Source: Taiwan Social Change Survey, 1994.

Table 4.2: Religious Switching on Taiwan (2)

(Excluding respondents whose previous and current belief are the same)

| The previous belief \ The current belief | Buddhism | Taoism | Folk Religion | Yiguan Dao | Islam | Christian- ity | No belief | others | total |
|---|----------|--------|------------------|---------------|-------|-------------------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Buddhism | | 13 | 43 | 4 | 11 | 16 | 73 | 4 | 164 |
| Taoism | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 1 | 18 |
| Folk Religion | | 3 | | 2 | 2 | 5 | 29 | 4 | 45 |
| Yiguan Dao | 12 | 2 | 13 | | | 3 | 13 | | 43 |
| Islam | | | | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Christianity | 8 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 13 | | 24 | 1 | 57 |
| No Belief | 8 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 | | 3 | 27 |
| others | 1 | | 3 | | | | 1 | | 5 |
| total | 30 | 21 | 72 | 10 | 30 | 35 | 151 | 13 | 360 |

Source: Taiwan Social Change Survey, 1994.

Many ethnographers (Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974; Weller 1987; Sangren 1987) find that in China the consumers of popular religion put the primary and explicit consideration to deities' reputation for efficacy (*ling* or *lingyan*). They usually ask for divine help from a god when personal crises or desires emerge. If the god satisfies their wish, they would reward the god with incenses, delicious foods, beautiful images, new temples, spectacular plays, or adulatory inscriptions. If the god fails to perform miracles, however, they will not feel obligated to make offerings to the god and they usually turn to another deity who is believed to be more responsive and more efficacious. In short, these efficacy-oriented popular religionists tend to establish a temporary exchange relationship with specific spirits when they want to achieve practical ends.

Since folk religionists have been relatively indifferent to religious identities (Tamney and Chiang 2002), it is not difficult for the YGD sectarians to recruit them. These folk religionists, however, are also easy to be attracted by other sects. As Susan Naquin had noted, switching one's religious affiliation was common within China's sectarian tradition: "there were some people who went from sect to sect, joining first one and then another, always searching for the 'best' system" (Naquin 1976: 37). So, the question arises: How can YGD sustain these efficacy-oriented new recruits and increase their commitment?

The YGD sectarians themselves use the term "*Cheng-quan*" (成全) to summarize the process of making committed members. Literally, the word "*Cheng-quan*" means "helping people to fulfill their wishes", but the sect prefers the translation of "supporting and encouraging people to cultivate Dao." Indeed, "*Cheng-quan*" involves tremendous

organization endeavors and a long period of training and education which encourage the sectarians to increase their commitment step by step. Two forms of educational activities are practiced by the sect: the research courses (*Yanjiu ban* 研究班) and the dharma assembly (*Fahui* 法会). Together with the two educational activities, there is still a mechanism of vows employed by YGD. In the following, I will examine these activities by analyzing data collected from the *Fayi Lingyin* (发一灵隐) division of YGD. Although there are minor differences among divisions of YGD with regard to the educational activities¹, we can get a basic understanding of YGD's educational efforts from the case of *Fayi Lingyin*.

4.2 Research Courses of YGD

In her classic, *The Making of a Moonie*, Barker (1994: 94) finds that there are “several stages through which the potential recruit normally has to pass as part of the conversion process.” So does YGD. Usually, the YGD sectarians establish an initial contact by inviting the potential converts to “worship gods” (*Bai-bai*) at their home. Next the potential sectarians will be persuaded to attend a family gathering or “ordinary research courses” (*Putong ban*) which are held in family Buddha halls (*Jiating fotang*). In the family gathering, the lecturer would share some religious stories or witnesses with the guest and persuade him to be initiated by the sect. After the ritual of initiation, or “pointing out Dao” (*Diandao*), people formally become Dao relatives (*Daoqin*) and they

¹ For example, the names of research courses are different in different divisions. The courses conducted by the *Baoguang Jiande* division are *Xin-jin-li-jie* course, *ji-chu* course, etc. (Yang 1997: 69).

will be invited to attend the *Ming-de* course, a regular and formal workshop which is held once a week and lasts five months. If he survives the *Ming-de* course, the initiates will be encouraged to progress to the *Xin-min* course, and then to the *Zhi-shan* course, and finally to the *Jingdian ban*, the highest level, as table 4.3 shows.

Table 4.3: Research courses in Fayi Lingyin (in 1992)

| Course Name | Time | Number of participants |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. Ordinary research course | No limitation | unclear |
| 2. <i>Ming-de</i> Course | Five months; once a week; 7: 30 p.m.-9: 30 p.m. | About 3000, divided into 42 groups |
| 3. <i>Xin-min</i> Course | Five months; once a week; 7: 30 p.m.-9: 30 p.m. | About 2000, divided into 40 groups |
| 4. <i>Zhi-shan</i> Course | Five months; once a week; 7: 30 p.m.-9: 30 p.m. | No data |
| 5. <i>Xuan-de</i> course | Five months; once a week; 7: 30 p.m.-9: 30 p.m. | No data |
| 6. The course for studying classics I | One year; once a week; 7: 30 p.m.-9: 30 p.m. | About 1200, divided into 12 groups |
| 7. The course for studying classics II | Two years; once a week; 7: 30 p.m.-9: 30 p.m. | About 800, divided into 7 groups |

Source: Lin Rongzhe 1992: 162

Like Moonies' workshops in which the theology is "the central focus" (Barker 1984: 19), the research courses by YGD also devote to teaching its theology and dogma. The *Ming-de* course is a basic one whose contents include eighteen issues, such as what is the Venerable Mother, the YGD's cosmos theory, and the three in one. Table 4.4 lists these issues nearly covering all of YGD's main doctrines. The *Xin-min* course (新民班) mainly focuses on regulations, rituals, missionary skills, testimonies and spirit writings. Table 4.5 summarizes its main contents. The *Zhi-shan* course (至善班) and *Xuan-de* course (宣

德班) stress on further probing YGD’s doctrines and improving the attendees’ ability of speech, as table 4.6 and 4.7 show. The purpose of the course for studying classics is to train potential lecturers. Its contents involve twenty books of five religions, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and Christianity. The detailed contents and analysis are available in table 4.8.

Table 4.4: the contents of Ming-de Course

| Items | Contents |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. The Venerable Mother | Introducing the mythology of Mother. |
| 2. Patriarchs | Introducing the past patriarchs of YGD, especially the current patriarch, Zhang Tianran and Sun Yuehui |
| 3. The Last Disaster | Introducing three stages of human history: the Green Sun period, the Red Sun period and the White Sun period; introducing what “the last disaster at the end of the third period” means |
| 4. Dao community | Introducing the significance of Dao community and development of various divisions of YGD. |
| 5. Principles of Yiguan Dao | Revere heaven, earth and all Divinities. Be patriotic and responsible. Build a noble and righteous character. Honor the practice of propriety. Fulfill filial devotions to parents. Honor teachers. Be trustworthy to friends. Live harmoniously with neighbors. Correct the bad and pursue the good. Expound the Five Major Relationships and the Eight Cardinal Virtues. Preach the essence of the teachings of the five major religious saints. Adhere to the Four Moral Principles and Values. Purify the heart and mind. Cultivate True-self by properly using the physical body. Restore the original True-Nature. Develop the innate goodness and virtues to the fullest. Establish yourself and others. Enlighten yourself and others. Transform the world into a peaceful and orderly society. Revert human heart and mind to the original benevolence Help build eternal harmony in the world. |
| 6. The celestial mandate | Discussing the significance of celestial mandate and enlightening masters |
| 7. Dao and | Revealing the treasure of Dao through exploring the differences between |

| | |
|---|--|
| religion | Dao and religion |
| 8.Spirituality | Introducing the meaning and testimonies of spirituality and soul |
| 9.Universally saving three beings | Introducing and confirming this doctrine. |
| 10.Karma & retribution | Introducing the law of causation in the Buddhism. |
| 11. Three in one | Introducing the Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and that YGD embodies three religions. |
| 12. The theory of cosmos | Introducing what are Litian, Qitian and Xiangtian |
| 13.Three levels of Buddhism | Introducing Mahayana Buddhism, Madhyamayana Buddhism, and Hinayana Buddhism. |
| 14.Vows and practices | Telling the stories of past Buddha’s vows, and introducing “the ten great vows” of YGD |
| 15. Basic Buddha regulations | Introducing basic Buddha regulations and rituals, such as offering rituals |
| 16. Five cardinal relationships and five constant virtues | Five cardinal relationships refer to relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, between brothers and between friends. Five constant virtues include benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom and honesty (<i>ren-yi-li-zhi-xin</i> , 仁义礼智信) |
| 17.Belief and life | Discussing the relationship between belief and life, as well as how to choose right beliefs. |
| 18.Vegetarian and health | Introducing the benefits and virtues of vegetarianism |

Source: Lin 1992: 172

Table 4.5: The contents of *Xin-min* course

| Items | Contents |
|------------------------------|--|
| Regulations & Rituals | 1. Temporary Buddha regulations |
| | 2. Temporary rituals in Buddha halls |
| | 3. Holy document of great vows |
| | 4. Guidance of conducting Dao affairs |
| | 5. Guidance of everyday behaviors |
| | 6. The revelation of vows |
| Missionary Skills | 7. How to introduce YGD |
| | 8. The qualities which Dao helpers should own |
| | 9. How to cultivate Dao in a secular world |
| | 10. How to converts all family members |
| Testimonies & Stories | 11. The stories of past Buddhas and gods |
| | 12. The stories of Dao believers |
| Spirit Writings & Holy Songs | 13. Spirit writings of Patriarchs |
| | 14. Selected readings of spirit writings in ordinary words (four readings) |
| | 15. Classic spirit writings: teachings from the Mother (1) |
| | 16. Classic spirit writings: teachings from the Mother (2) |
| | 17. Holy songs |

Source: Lin 1992: 173

Table 4.6: Contents of *Zhi-shan* course

| Items | Contents |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Ideals & virtues | Encouraging sectarians to establish an high goal and shape a good character |
| 2. rituals | Exploring the significance of rituals |
| 3. Three treasures | Introducing the meaning of three treasures |
| 4. Mind law of three treasures | Presenting the testimonies of three treasures; discussing how to make use of three treasures to cultivate Dao |
| 5. Bodhi-heart | Encouraging attendees to cultivate Bodhi-heart(hear of wisdom and mercy) through reading and discussing related Buddhist sutra |
| 6. Four-loving heart | Learning Buddhist sutra which expounds four loving, namely loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and sharing |
| 7. Daoism | Introducing Daode-Jing |
| 8. Heterodoxy | Introducing what are heterodoxies |
| 9. The sacred & the secular | Stressing that sectarians should fulfill their secular responsibilities |
| 10. Cultivation in everyday life | Introducing Han Yulin, the senior master of Fayi division, how to cultivate Dao in everyday life |
| 11. Spirit writings | Learning spirit writings selected |
| 12. Vows | Introducing the importance of establishing and fulfilling vows |
| 13. Testimonies | Introducing distinguished sectarians' stories |
| 14. Tests | Introducing how to deal with difficulties |
| 15. Cultivation and social conditions | Discussing the relationships between cultivation and social conditions |
| 16. reflections | Introducing the Confucian way of reflections |
| 17. Experiences sharing | Sharing the experiences of doing missionary work overseas |

Source: Lin 1992: 174

Table 4.7: Contents of *Xuan-de* course

| Items | Contents |
|--|---|
| 1. The essence of life | Revealing the significance by discussing life and death, happiness and bitterness, and values of life |
| 2. The rarity of Dao | Discussing the benefits of cultivating Dao |
| 3. Dao rituals | Discussing the origins, significance, categories, and contents of YGD rituals |
| 4. Ten great vows | Expounding the connotation of ten great vows |
| 5. Dao and religion | Analyzing the differences of Dao and religion, distinguishing the orthodox from the heterodox |
| 6. Samsara (the circle of birth and rebirth 轮回) | Presenting testimonies of samsara |
| 7. Dao and disaster | Analyzing why the Dao and the disaster arrive simultaneously |
| 8. testimonies of celestial mandate and enlightening masters | Exploring what are the celestial mandate and enlightening masters; presenting related testimonies |
| 9. Karma | Discussing where Karma comes from and how can one remove karma |
| 10. The significance of vegetarianism | The significance, benefit and practice of being a vegetarian. |
| 11. Tests | Introducing the significance and categories of tests, and discussing how to deal with tests. |
| 12. Spirituality | Presenting testimonies of spirituality |
| 13. elements of cultivation | Discussing how characters, virtues, duration and rituals function in cultivation |
| 14. Fate | Discussing how to know and use fate |
| 15. The sacred and the secular | Discussing how to prioritize holy affairs over worldly matter |
| 16. cultivation and the society | Probing the relationship between cultivation and the social trend. |

Source: Lin 1992: 174

Table 4.8: Contents of the course for classic studies (1)

| Volume | Contents | Belonging to | Times of Seminars |
|--------|--|--------------|-------------------|
| I | 1. <i>The Scripture of Filial Piety</i> (Xiao-jing, 孝经) | Confucianism | 8 |
| | 2. <i>Menius</i> (Menzi, 孟子, selected), focusing on nine chapters about mind; | Confucianism | 2 |
| | 3. <i>Zhuangzi</i> (庄子 selected), discussing fourteen allegories | Daoism | 4 |
| | 4. <i>The Lotus Sutra</i> (Fa-hua Jing 法华经 selected), discussing seven stories | Buddhism | 4 |
| | 5. An introduction to Christianity, introducing the biography of Jesus and basic doctrines of Christianity | Christianity | 2 |
| II | 1. <i>Menius</i> (孟子 selected), focusing on the discussion of human kind's nature | Confucianism | 6 |
| | 2. <i>Zhuangzi</i> (庄子 selected), focusing on the issue of "interaction between human and the nature" | Daoism | 6 |
| | 3. <i>The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch</i> (六祖坛经 selected), introducing the Six Patriarch's experiences and ideas | Buddhism | 6 |
| III | 1. <i>The Analects</i> (Lunyu, 论语 selected), introducing Confucian's basic ideas | Confucianism | 6 |
| | 2. <i>Daode Jing</i> (道德经 selected), studying fourteen chapters to probing what is Dao. | Daoism | 6 |
| | 3. <i>Quotations from Zen</i> (Zong-menYu-lu, 宗门语录) | Buddhism | 6 |
| IV | 1. The Great Learning (Da-xue, 大学 selected), | Confucianism | 5 |
| | 2. <i>Daode Jing</i> (道德经 selected), | Taoism | 5 |
| | 3. The Diamond Sutra (Jin-gang Jing 金刚经 selected), | Buddhism | 6 |
| | 4. Bibles (selected) | Christianity | 2 |
| | 1. The Doctrine of Mean (zhong-yong 中庸 selected) | Confucianism | 6 |
| | 2. The Book about rites (Liji, 礼记 selected), | Confucianism | 6 |
| | 3. The Scripture of Purity and Tranquility (qingjing jing 清静经) | Daoism | 3 |
| | 4. An Introduction to Islam | Islam | 3 |
| | 1. Yi-jing (易经 selected) | Daoism | 6 |
| | 2. Shi-jing (诗经 selected) | Confucianism | 6 |
| | 3. Mind sutra (心经) | Buddhism | 3 |
| | 4. Koran | Islam | 3 |

Resource: Lin 1992

Table 4.9 Contents of the course for classic studies (2)

| | Frequency of seminars | The number of books studied |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Confucianism | 45 (43.3%) | 9 (45%) |
| Buddhism | 25 (24%) | 5 (25%) |
| Taoism | 24 (23.1%) | 4 (20%) |
| Islam | 6 (5.8%) | 1 (5%) |
| Christianity | 4 (3.8%) | 1 (5%) |
| Total: | 104 (100%) | 20 (100%) |

Resource: Lin 1992

When probing YGD’s education, Jordan and Overmyer conclude that:

Within the idiosyncratic limitations of its system of exposition, the Unity Sect [as they refer to Yiguan Dao] is perhaps second only to the public school system in its pursuit of education for its members, and the bulk of almost every Unity meeting is in fact devoted, not to worship, but to the study of and commentary on moral books. (Jordan and Overmyer 1987: 237)

Their observations are still valid today. Especially, YGD provides opportunities for working-class and less-educated sectarians to access to a range of Chinese heritage.

During the fieldwork, I once spent seven days in a huge building temple together with sectarian workers. My job was to plant trees and my partner is Mr. Zhen*², a forty-seven years old believer who was initiated in 1976 in the Philippines where he worked as a foreign worker. Mr. Zhen* has the typical appearance of peasants: a sun-darkened face, deep wrinkles and coarse hands. But when Mr. Zhen* tried to convert me during the work, he told me many interesting stories which are available in Chinese classics such as *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*liuzu tanjing* 六祖坛经). Sometimes, he could even recite some classic sentences. I do not suggest that Zhen is very familiar with Chinese heritage, but it is evident that he indeed knew something about traditional culture although he only has a primary education. He told me that all of these were learned from the research course held by the *Bao-guang Jian-de* division. When answering why he took part in the courses, Mr. Zhen* told me that he liked to listen to all kinds of stories and courses held by YGD provide him opportunities to enjoy stories. Every time before he attended the course, he would first read the materials offered by the lecturer with the help of dictionary. At the same time, as a master of Buddha hall, Zhen* also acted as a lecturer when he paid family visits to neophytes. Thus, after each course, he had to spend some time to prepare for the conversations through reading more related materials. It is obvious that such arrangements enable Mr. Zhen* to grasp YGD's doctrine as well as parts of Chinese traditional culture.

Another case which impresses me most during the fieldwork is Mr. Jiang*³.

According to his description, he was a little stupid in his childhood. Not only did his

² I had several informal talks with Mr. Zhen* during the period from 21th to 27th September, 2002. Mr. Zhen is a master of family Buddha hall of the *Baoguang Jiande* division. The talks with Mr. Zhen* were not recorded but I documented most contents of the conversations in my field diary.

³ The interview was conducted and recorded in 11th December, 2002. Mr. Jiang is a master of family Buddha hall of the *Jichu Zhongsu* division.

peer group always make fun of him but also his family regarded him as a fool. After attending three years of elementary school, Jiang* failed in his academic life and gave up going to school. In 1971 when he was nineteen years old, his old sister introduced him to receive the Dao. From then on, he became interested in courses held by the *Jichu* division of YGD, although he could not understand the contents. He always arrived on time and left with ignorance but satisfaction. Gradually, his wisdom was activated and promoted to such a degree that his family found that he became smarter and smarter. Now he is an excellent lecturer of the *Jichu* division, especially expert at *Dao-de Jing*. When describing his transformation, Mr. Jiang* especially stressed the function of research courses. He said,

YGD is without any constraints and very open. It is fit for every one to practise, no matter you are an intellectual or an idiot like me. You know, research courses held by the Dao play an important role. These courses are helpful to activate wisdom. They are divided into different levels and the attendees in a course are usually in the same level of understanding the Dao teaching; through discussing with each other, they can enlighten each other and bring out inner wisdoms which are born with us. In addition, the attendees often develop a close relationship with each other after attending the courses.

The above two cases can partly support the image that the study of the Chinese heritage not only attracts many working-class and uneducated people to enter and stay in YGD but also changes their life through bringing their minds to a traditional and spiritual

world. But the functions of research courses are more than the above; the activities also bring the individual into continual and intensive contact with other members and the group as a whole. Actually, in addition to attending the workshop for studying classics, the attendees of a concrete course also held other activities, such as hiking, outing and even traveling to other countries. These regularized group contacts facilitate the intensive interaction which is essential to cementing the conversion process (Lofland and Stark 1965; Greil and Rudy 1984). The contacts and interaction are helpful to serve a communion function which can bring out higher commitment “because they bring together the entire collectivity and reinforce its existence and meeting, regardless of the purpose of the gathering” (Kanter 1972: 99). Frequent attendances at research courses make sectarians more involved in the group and gives them a stronger sense of belonging and “we-feeling”. In short, by conducting research courses to promote YGD’s ideology, YGD has generated a successful and lucrative recruitment and education vehicle.

4.3 Dharma assemblies of YGD

As mentioned above, the research courses usually last a long period and the attendees must be present regularly. But some sectarians are quite busy and can not take part in such courses. For these people, there is another kind of activities: “dharma assemblies” (*Fahui*). YGD’s dharma assemblies are usually held in a big temple where a large space is available; and the meetings usually last one to three days. Thus, those who do not have time to attend the research courses can spend a weekend to take part

in the dharma assemblies held by YGD. According to the types of attendees, dharma assemblies can be classified into the following categories, as table 4.10 shows⁴.

Table 4.10: Religious meeting in *Fayi Lingyin*

| Name | Attendees | Time | Contents |
|--|---|----------|--|
| Three-day class | Neophytes | 3days | Basic doctrines of YGD |
| Classes for review | Neophytes who once attended the three-day class | 1 day | Further discussing basic doctrines learned in the former 3-day class |
| Ordinary one-day class | Neophytes who never attend the congregation | 1 day | Introducing basic doctrines |
| One-day class for Dao helpers | Dao helpers | 1 day | Learning Buddha regulations and rituals; learning how to conduct Dao affairs |
| Class for Buddha-hall masters | Buddha-hall masters | 1-2 days | Learning Buddha-hall masters' responsibilities and role; further learning doctrines. |
| Class for lecturers | Lecturers | 1-2 days | The responsibilities and role of lecturers |
| Class for vegetarians | Vegetarians | 1 day | The significances of being a vegetarian |
| Class for initiators | Initiators | 1day | Discussing important Dao affairs |
| Class for confession | Initiators, lecturers, Buddha-hall masters, Dao helpers and all vegetarian sectarians | 2 days | Confessing sins and faults |
| Class for annual review | Initiators, lecturers, Buddha-hall masters | 1-2 days | Reviewing Dao affairs in the year and designing activities of next year |
| Class for Oversea missionaries | Oversea missionaries | 1-2 days | Training oversea missionaries |
| Class for high-school and college students | College students | 1-3 days | Educating high-school and college students |
| Class for families | Families all of whose members are YGD | 1 day | Encouraging all family believers to cultivate Dao |

⁴ Here, I just make use of the data of *Fa-yi Lingyin* to represent the whole situation of YGD. I must acknowledge that there are minor differences in other divisions.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| | believers | | |
| Class for Female sectarians | Housewife sectarians | 1 day | Discussing life and Dao |
| Class for Male sectarians | Young male sectarians | 1 day | Discussing life, family, work and Dao |

Source: Lin 1992: 164-5

The religious meeting of YGD can trace its origin to “stove meeting” (*Lu-hui* 炉会)⁵ which was held in the 1930s. According to Lu Zhongwei’s study, the stove meeting was very strict. The spirit mediums, who were regarded as the spokesmen of Buddhas and gods, acted as the trainers; and they usually utilized dilemmas to test the trainees. For example, they asked the trainees to drink alcohol. If the trainees obeyed, they would violate the Buddha regulation which requires the sectarian not to drink; but if the trainees refused to drink, they would be regarded as disrespecting gods. In any case, the trainees would be beaten. Through Stove Meetings, a lot of pious missionaries were trained and this is one of important reason which led to YGD’s success in the 1940s in mainland China (Lu 1998: 137-152).

Today, most of dharma assemblies of YGD have given up using spirit mediums⁶. But some dharma assemblies are still very strict; the training course for young cadres (*qingnian ganbu xunlianban* 青年干部训练班) is a typical one. During the fieldwork, I only gathered the data about this training course which is held by the *Jichu Zhongshu*

⁵ In China, the stove is a utensil used by alchemists to make pills of immortality. The sect named its training course as “stove meeting”, maybe, to show the training is very strict and that the trainees will be powerful if they pass the training course.

⁶ As I will analyze later, the *Fayi Chong-de* division still keeps the practice of spirit writing. But except this division, other divisions I have visited, such as *Baoguan*, *Jichu* and *Xingyi*, have given up spirit writing.

division. Thus, the following analysis just makes use of data available, and I am not sure whether the same course exists in other divisions or not.

According to informants' descriptions, they did not know the detailed contents of training course and were asked to attend a course which would last for two days. After they arrived at the remote temple where the course was held, they found that the trainers became very strict, although they were very kind before. The main trainer, who was called as "administrant" (*Zhi-xing guan* 执行官), would ask people to obey him. The trainees could not speak, laugh or even wash hands without his permission. One part of training content was about some details of YGD rituals, such as how to place the shoes, how to wash and place fruits which were offered to gods, etc. Though the trainees knew well about these issues and can conduct rituals properly, the "administrant" would find mistakes and ask the trainers to repeat the same action until it was perfectly conducted. As a result, one often spent half an hour to place shoes.

Another important content of such training courses is to simulate the situations which one may encounter when doing missionary work. I was told that⁷:

The trainer would ask you to do some ridiculous things. For example, he asked me to find ten ants, five male and other five female. How could I do that? It is impossible. The trainer just purposely created difficulties for us. He also asked us to put dust on our faces. I would not do such things in ordinary times. But at that time, I had to do that. The trainer was very strict and seems terrible. I was fearful of him. Many trainees cried, so did me. We wanted to leave the temple but dared not because the temple is very remote. These things were without any significance to

⁷ The interview was conducted and recorded in 28th December, 2002. The interviewee, Miss Huan*, is a female sectarian who was born in 1978.

me at that time, but now I know that it is to remove our self-centered orientation and educate us to be humble when doing missionary work. In addition, the trainers would ask you to buy an egg, with a dusted face and bizarre dresses. It is really a test. Many people would look at you strangely, and no one will sell an egg to you because eggs are sold in terms of kilograms. This suggests that, if you will “open wilderness overseas”, maybe foreigners will regard you as an unusual person. So, you should learn to deal with such awkwardness. I think that the training course strengthened my character. In addition, I made many good friends.

The above training contents are related to the idea of test which is emphasized by the sect. According to YGD, in the process of “cultivating the Dao” (*Xiu-dao* 修道), one must experience tests; no tests, no improvement. YGD identifies several kinds of test, such as the inner test (*nei-kao* 内考 such afflictions as illness, pain, fire, flood, and robbery), the outer test (*Wai-kao* 外考 such as ridicule from relatives, friends, and neighbors, and oppression and violence from government officials), the test of anger (*qi-kao* 气考), the unusual test (*qi-kao* 奇考), the test of success (*shun-kao* 顺考), the test of adversity (*ni-kao* 逆考), the test of confusion (*Dian-dao kao* 颠倒考), and the test of Dao (*Dao-kao* 道考). In training courses, the trainers simulate tests and then make use of these simulated tests to train the sectarians. This is quite helpful to strengthen the trainees’ faith. In history, most of YGD’s core leaders were once trained in stove

meetings. Today, when discussing the training course, a young female believer told me that⁸:

After my younger brother attended the training course, he totally became another person. I formerly did not like him because he was spoiled by my parents. At that time, from my perspective, he knew nothing and did nothing, never doing housework, such as washing bowls and sweeping the floor. He would not do anything except play electronic games. After attending the training course, I felt that he was changed in many aspects. His words and behaviors became humble. What is most important, he became more responsible than ever before. In short, he improved a lot in those years.

According to Kanter (1972), those nineteenth-century communes exacting sacrifices survive longer because sacrifice is functional for their maintenance. “Once members have agreed to make the ‘sacrifice’,” Kanter (1972: 78) argues, “their motivation to remain participants increases”. The tests emphasized by YGD can serve a “sacrifice” function. For example, the training courses ask attendees to give up self-esteem and bear the simulated abuses and tribulations. Since these sacrifices can increase “their motivation to remain participants” and “keep commitment strong” (Kanter 1972: 78), it does not surprise us that so many attendees become the core members of YGD.

4.4 The mechanism of vows

⁸ The interview was conducted and recorded in 28th December, 2002. The interviewee, Miss Liu*, is a female sectarian who was born in 1976.

In addition to the research courses and dharma assemblies, another dynamic mechanism is tightly integrated with the above educational activities and makes the sectarians practice what they learn from the courses and meetings. That is to make vows (*Xu-yuan* 许愿) and fulfill vows (*Huan-yuan* 还愿).

As the basic behavior forms of adherents of Chinese popular religion, *Xu-yuan* and *Huan-yuan* play an important role in Chinese religious life. C.K. Yang writes,

Xu yuan was the making of a wish before the god with the vow that, if the wish should come true, one would come again to worship and offer sacrifice. *Huan yuan* was worship and sacrifice to the god as an expression of gratitude after the wish had come true, whether it was recovery from sickness, the bringing of prosperity, or the begetting of a male heir. One might thank the god for the fulfillment of a wish during the past year, and then make a new wish for the coming year. (Yang 1991: 87)

As a sect rooted in Chinese popular culture, YGD borrows the practice of establishing vows (*Xu-yuan*) and fulfilling vows (*Huan-yuan*) from the popular religion. When discussing why vows should be made, the sectarians explain that:

As we strengthen the faith in ourselves and in Tao, we should all make a lifelong plan for ourselves, which is our holy mission in this world. And what can we do to accomplish this mission? As the saying goes, 'Without making vows, one sails without guide.' So only when one makes the great vows can he or she get more

driving force from the bottom of the heart (*English Reference Manual for Tao Propagation*: 76).

The ritual of making vows is usually held when a research course or a religious meeting is over. A big bundle of incense is burned in the ritual; the attendees will receive a form which lists the vows which include “removing bad habits and refining bad temper” (*gai-piqi qu-maobing*), “prioritizing holy affairs over worldly matter” (*Zhong-sheng qingfan*), “contributing material wealth and spreading Dao” (*cai-fa shuang-shi*), “leading people to receive the Dao” (*duren qiudao*), “becoming a vegetarian” (*qing-kou ru-su*), “establishing a Buddha hall” (*she-li fo-tang*) and “doing missionary work overseas” (*haiwai kaihuang*); the attendees are required to choose a vow to fulfill and sign on the form; then the form recording the vow will be burned (Yang 1997). In the following, I will selectively analyze the significance and practice of these vows.

4.4.1 Removing Bad Habits and Refining Bad Tempers

To “remove bad habits and refine bad temper” is the basic requirement for the sectarians. This vow requires the YGD believers to give up such bad habits as smoking, drinking, eating areca nuts and speaking dirty words; it also asks to correct bad tempers such as impatience, pride and selfishness. These moral requirements are quite in accordance with Chinese traditional values, but YGD reinterprets these issues from the perspective of Mother Theology. The theology holds that those primordial spirits sent by the Mother were pure; but they gradually lost their true nature and became ruthless and

crafty, full of bad habits and tempers; so, to return to the true nature, the sectarians must get rid of such bad things. Through such reinterpretation, to “remove bad habits and refine bad temper” is more than a moral requirement people are familiar with; it also embodies religious meanings.

How can the sectarians remove bad habits and tempers? From the perspective of YGD, one can not expect to remove bad habits in a couple of days. It is a long process to get rid of bad habits which were formed in a long time (Guo 1990). The sectarians should learn to reflect on themselves according to YGD’s doctrines and keep a status of constant self-reflection; then they should try to alter the bad habits with the help of YGD’s rituals, especially the ritual of kowtow. In his excellent thesis, Yang Hongren tells us a story with regard to “removing bad habits and refining bad tempers”. Yang’s father was formerly a very bad-tempered person, but he changed a lot after joining YGD. Influenced by his father’s dramatic transformation, Yang became an YGD sectarian and attended the courses held by the sect. He describes as follows.

At that time, I could not fully remove my bad habits and temper according to the doctrines I have learned in the research courses. One day, after completely reading *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* [*liuzu tianjing*], I proudly made use of the ‘superior’ theories of this book to test my father and other Dao relatives to show off. Later, I disputed with my father on some issues and my father angrily left. After self-reflection, I suddenly realized how ridiculous it was to utilize *The Platform Sutra* angrily arguing against the ideas of other cultivators who have a better cultivation than me. After a while, I decided to apologize to my father. However,

when I caught my father, he apologized to me before I opened my mouth, telling me that he was very angry after the disputation and so he went to the Buddha hall, knelt before the Mother, told her about his complaints, and kowtowed. During the process of kowtow, he gradually realized that he also should be responsible for the disputation since he was impatient and bad-tempered. Thus, complaints became self-confession. After hundreds of kowtow, he was not angry any more and decided to apologize to me. (Yang 1997: 98)

The above quotation shows that YGD is efficient in changing the followers' attitude toward life. What the sect provides is more than a set of canonical teachings; the sect also offers feasible guidance of behaviors. At the same time, the sect input new meanings to traditional practices such as kowtow. As a core practice of ancestor worship, kowtow is regarded as a behavior filled with authoritarian meanings. Consequently, few young people who are influenced by the current democratic trend would perform such ritual without any doubts now. Facing the situation, the sect reinterprets the significance of kowtow, arguing that kowtow is not to worship authority but to show respect to saints and gods who were good cultivators in nature. These saints and gods also encountered many difficulties; but they conquered these difficulties and finally achieved a high moral and spiritual status. So they are worthy of respect. In addition, kowtow is a best way to conquer the pride and the adherence to the concept of self (Guo 1993). Because of such reinterpretations, those who are formerly reluctant to kowtow would accept it naturally (Yang 1997). As we see in the above story, kowtowing and confessing to the Mother

actually becomes a powerful tool for the sectarians to reflect on themselves and shape new behavioral models.

In addition to redefining the meaning of the kowtow, YGD ritualizes the practice of kowtow. Though kowtow is widely practiced by adherents of popular religion, it is unsystematic and seems chaotic, without any guidance. YGD keeps but ritualizes the element of “kowtow”. They also ritualize the practice of “burning incense”. Most of people unconcernedly burn incense and then throw the incense into the stove in a disorderly manner. The ritual of burning incense of YGD is quite different from the way it is performed by adherents of popular religion. First, the ritual is performed communally rather than individually; and the number of incense to each deity is strictly defined. Secondly, the ritual of offering incense is presided by two persons who are seniors; if one says “offering three bundles of incenses”, the other people would follow: “first offering”, “second offering”, “third offering”. Finally, when the sectarians offer incense, they should rise up the incense to the level of eyebrows to show their respect and piety; then use the left hand which represents “goodness” to put the incense into the stove orderly and vertically; and the location of incense has its special meaning (Yang 1997).

Worshiping gods, kowtow and burning incense are main elements of popular religion. Unlike Christianity which strictly rejects the above practices, YGD welcomes these traditional symbols and practices which Chinese people are familiar with. On the other hand, the sect redefines and rearranges these old elements in a new ritual system in which new religious meanings are added. Through such creative transformation, the ritualized old practices not only are helpful to keep the sectarians’ religious capital⁹ and

⁹ This is important, because such old practices as burning incenses have durable vitalities and influence although they are unsystematic and chaotic. For example, the adherents of popular religion on Taiwan

create a holy space, but also become a powerful tool for the sectarians to remove their bad habits and temper. Every time the sectarians meet problems in life, they kowtow, burn incenses, and confesses to the Mother, as described in Yang's dissertation (Yang 1997). Through such practices, the sectarians gradually learn to deal with problems through self-reflection and self-improvement, rather than expecting the gods to give immediate resolutions. By exerting influence on people's thoughts, feelings, and the way of viewing the world, the practice of "removing bad habits and refining bad temper" binds the sectarian's inner feelings and evaluations to the group's norms and beliefs.

Aside from the self-criticism emphasized by the practice of "removing bad habits and refining bad temper", there are confession courses conducted by the sect, as table 4 shows. In such courses, the attendees are required to admit their shortcoming, failings, faults, and imperfections. "Religious groups often attempt to erase the "sin of pride," the fault of being too independent or self-sufficient, substituting instead a self that identifies with the influence of the collectivity" (Kanter 1972: 103). So does YGD. Both the confession courses and self-criticism emphasized by the vow of "removing bad habits" contribute to mortification which "facilitates a moral commitment on the part of the person to accept the control of the group" (Kanter 1972: 105).

4.4.2 Prioritizing Holy Affairs over Worldly Matter

YGD makes a distinction between the sacred and the secular. But YGD does not implement the mechanism of renunciation. Renunciation, according to Kanter (1972),

always use the term of "those who do not take incenses" (那些没拿香的) to refer to Christianity. Taking incenses or not becomes a criterion which distinguishes "us" from "the other". This fact shows that old religious practices are still influential and durable.

requires people to abandon relationships that are potentially disruptive to group cohesion. Successful nineteenth-century communes placed clear-cut barriers and boundaries between the member and the outside; they also tried to weaken the exclusive relationships in couples and families. The sect, however, attaches much importance to family and secular life by emphasizing “the simultaneous cultivation of the sacred and the secular” (*Shengfan Jianxiu*). YGD is rarely equipped with professional clergies; both ordinary members and leaders are lay, making their livings through doing their secular businesses. At the same time, all YGD sectarians should work as missionaries; priesthood returns to the people. So how to balance the sacred and the secular in practice is very subtle for the sectarians to deal with. We can get a sense from the following which are given by a local organizer of YGD.

The cultivation of Dao is after all half-sacred and half-secular (*Ban-sheng Ban-fan* 半圣半凡). Every sectarian has to deal with their secular affairs, so the cultivation can not be too rigid. Cultivating Dao should not become a pressure and burden. We should know how many times each sectarian attends Dao activities every week. If he/she just stays home and watches TV rather than attends Dao activities, it is not so good and we should have a family visit. But if his/her economic situation is not good, then we should let him/her earn money. First for the stomach, second for the Buddha. If we urge him/her to spend much time in attending activities of YGD; it must influence his/her life and later his/her children can not cultivate Dao. In short, if you can not support your self and your family, people will laugh at you and distrust you when you say the cultivation of Dao is good. (Yang 1997: 80)

The above words show that the sect is very considerate and flexible in dealing with the relationship between the secular and the sacred. One principle which is always emphasized by the sect is that in different life stages, people should put different ratio of energy to sacred affairs and secular matters; the sectarians should gradually shift their life focus from the secular to the sacred as they are growing older. When one's children are young, he should put more emphasis on secular life; when one's children grow up and can support themselves, he should devote himself to the religious life. In any case, the sect does not ask followers to give up secular life exclusively, although it encourages people to attend the activities as much as possible.

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4.4.3 Leading People to Receive the Dao

The idea of merit is popular in Chinese society due to the influence of Buddhism. Many Chinese people in Taiwan believe that karma results in illness and suffering; and the merit is useful to reduce karma and hence it is helpful to cure illness. YGD accepts these ideas and further argues that, with enough merits, one not only can be free of the

circle of birth and rebirth, but also can gain a high status in the Heaven. In addition, merits can also be transferred to others such as the sectarians' ancestors. So, people can save their ancestors' spirits through accumulating merits. This interpretation is in accordance with Chinese people's ancestor-worship and can be easily accepted by them.

YGD utilizes the idea of merit to encourage people to do missionary work, arguing that the more members one recruits, the more merits one can accumulate. Encouraged by this argument, the sectarians of YGD are very active in "saving people" or "recruiting neophytes" (*du-ren*). Especially when one's relatives are suffering illness, they would try their best to persuade people to receive Dao. A young female sectarian leader told me that "sometime they knocked at the door one by one to propagate Dao, just like Mormonism. And then they transferred the merits they gained from the missionary work to the sectarian who were ill."¹⁰ Encouraged by the idea that doing missionary work can accumulate merits, even new sectarians would devote themselves to doing missionary work immediately. This enabled the sect to constantly recruit neophytes in a large scale.

In addition to encouraging people to spend time in recruiting neophytes, the sect also encourages its believers to make financial contributions to the group or work as volunteers. This is what "contributing material wealth and spreading Dao" means. As a rule, one must submit a number of money, usually 100 NT\$ (about 3 US\$) to the sect as the "merit fee" (*Gongde fei*) when he becomes an YGD sectarian. The process of becoming core members includes more investments to the sect, requiring the sectarians to such activities as publishing morality books, building temples, and even business

¹⁰ Here, the informant use the term "they" to refer to the sectarians in *Tianhui* unit (天惠組) which is one part of *Jichu* division. I do not know whether the same situation occurs in other divisions or not. But I am sure that "transferring merits" (*Gong-de Hui-xiang* 功德回贖) is widely accepted by various YGD divisions.

investment. When I did my field work in a building temple in Gaoxiong, I found that dozens of volunteering workers worked there everyday and hundreds of volunteers at weekend. The land is provided by a sectarian for free and most of building materials are donated by the sectarians. Donation is regular and popular for the YGD sectarians. Commitment is further promoted by the mechanism of investment because it makes individuals integrated with the group, and because it ensures that the sectarians' time and resources have become part of the sect's economy, as Kanter (1972) has pointed out.

But "recruiting neophytes" is more than a missionary task, it is also an effective way for the sect to cultivate veteran sectarians (Yang 1997). To act as a missionary, one must firstly study YGD theologies. In the process of converting other people, missionaries tend to reflect and change themselves constantly. Accordingly, many bad habits and tempers are discarded and the life is newly-oriented in this process. In this sense, the sectarians hold that "to save others is just saving selves" (*duren jiushi du-ziji* 渡人就是渡自己).

4.4.4 Becoming A Vegetarian

Abstinence from meat is highly stressed and justified by YGD's theologies. From the point of view of YGD, a genuine sectarian is made when he becomes a vegetarian (Guo 1996). Influenced by Buddhism, the sect believes that killing and eating animals is immoral and harmful because it not only builds a bad relationship with all beings (*yu zhongsheng jie e-yuan*) but also accumulates karma. To get the salvation, according to the sect, one should not eat meat. In practice, YGD follows a flexible way to persuade people to become a vegetarian. For example, if a student sectarian wants to get a good mark in

exams, he is encouraged to make a vow to the Mother, promising to eat no meat in a certain period, or be a vegetarian forever when having breakfast.

Becoming a vegetarian is helpful to promote the commitment in two ways. On one hand, it can function as a sacrifice mechanism which can generate commitment, as Kanter (1972) argues. On the other hand, abstinence from meat is helpful to weaken extra-cult affective bonds, because it is quite inconvenient for vegetarians to intensively interact with non-vegetarians (Song 2002). Sectarials usually form a new life style and social networks as well. After they become vegetarians, most of their close friends are YGD vegetarians, too. Thus, becoming a vegetarian is helpful to weaken extra-cult affective bonds and facilitate interaction among members. Since individuals with weak extra-group affective bonds could engage in continued involvements with the ideological organization (Lofland and Stark 1965), abstinence from meat is useful to promote commitment by weakening extra-sect bonds.

4.5 Discussions and Conclusions

When discussing the religious commitment, the religious economy model enlightens me to pay attention to some interesting aspects of this issue, such as organizational factors, social networks and individual choices. However, the model also falls into several dichotomies: members vs. nonmembers, strictness vs. liberality, and organizational efforts vs. personal choices. This study shows that these dichotomies do not exist, at least in YGD. The following will give a brief discussion of these issues.

As for members vs. nonmembers, we can make a sense out of Iannaccone' argument that "[t]he sect naturally creates two classes: the members (or 'true believers'), who fully embrace the sect norms while rejecting the society's, and the nonmembers (both 'heathen' and 'heretics'), who reject the sect and are in turn rejected by it" (Iannaccone 1988: 257). These observations may be historically true, but they are not applicable to the current situation any longer. Miller (1997: 36) finds that some "new paradigm" churches in contemporary, such as the Calvary movement, do not draw "a hard line on who is 'in' and who is 'out'"; membership in these movements is a matter of whether one is in regular communication with the movements or not.

YGD resembles those "new paradigm" churches studied by Miller. Membership in YGD is a continuum, falling outside the "in-or-out" model. According to the data offered by the *Tianhe* unit of *Baoguang Jiande*, from 1953 to 1999, 146,411 people had been recruited by the unit, and 3367 people became vegetarians.¹¹ This means that about one out of forty-four new recruits becomes a vegetarian believer. Table 4.3 shows that there are 3000 *Fayi Lingyin* attendees in the *Mingde* course while the number of the *Jingdian* course attendees reduces to 800. Since graduates of the *Jiangdian* course will normally be invited to become vegetarian members, we can imprecisely estimate that among those involved in the primary YGD workshop, 29% of attendees will survive the workshop system and finally become vegetarians. Considering *Tianhe*'s data and *Fayi Lingyin*'s data simultaneously, we can approximately guess that about 8.6% of YGD neophytes would get involved in YGD's workshop system, namely attending the *Mingde* course; 5.7% remains the *Xinmin* course at the price of following the vow of "removing bad

¹¹ From <http://www.yitkuant.com.tw/chinese/default.htm>.

habits and bad temper”; only less than 2.3% of recruits would like to become vegetarians. Although these estimations are very imprecise, they indicate that the commitment in YGD is a spectrum ranging from doubtfulness to devoutness, rather than a dichotomy of members and nonmembers.

Iannaccone also makes a distinction between strict churches and liberal churches, holding that strictness increases commitment through reducing free-rider problems (Iannaccone 1994). This chapter, however, find that YGD can be both liberal and strict and it permits a range of commitment. New recruits of YGD enjoy the liberality offered by the sect and they are rarely restricted, while the veteran sectarians should conform completely to established rules, such as abstinence from cigarette, alcohol, meat and even sex. Both liberality and strictness simultaneously exist in YGD. But the sect is not an isolated case. Barker (1984) reveals that there is a type of stratification system in the Unification Church and potential recruits should pass several “hurdles” before becoming full-time Moonies. “New paradigm” churches adopt flexible ways to approach to potential converts, allowing them to participate in many activities but restricting membership to those who pass various tests. Those churches can not be easily classified into “traditional categories”, such as “liberal church” or “strict church”; they are both (Miller 1997). It seems that a progressive strictness is available in these religious groups. Take YGD as an example. Driven by the mechanism of vows, newcomers of YGD can eventually become core members step by step. I refer to this model as “a progressive strictness”, because the requirements are considerate, patient, and flexible. Of course, such gradual strictness is helpful to increase the level of commitment though mitigating the free rider problem: only those willing to make a vow remain.

Though the religious economy model claims that it insists on the supply-side perspective, it places more emphasis on individuals' choices than organizational influences when discussing conversion (e.g. Stark and Finke 2000). To refute such claims as "brainwashing", "thought reform" and "mind control" which suggest that converts are more or less passive victims of organizational manipulations, Stark and Finke (2000) emphasize that converts are active in choosing and evaluating their religious beliefs. They are certainly right and we can see that YGD believers can freely decide which levels of involvement they would accept. Actually, only a small part of recruits become core members and about one out of 44 people being initiated becomes a vegetarian believer. Nevertheless, exclusive emphasis on individual rationality would be insufficient because it would neglect the role of missionary efforts. As we can see in the case, YGD tries its best to increase the level of commitment through holding research courses and dharma assemblies, and utilizing vows to guide the sectarians' cultivation. These organizational endeavors indeed play an important role in the process of commitment. Both personal and organizational factors simultaneously influence the commitment, and form a coherent whole.

Now I can use a few words to generalize the characteristics of religious commitment in YGD. As a syncretic sect, YGD holds a very open attitude when it recruits neophytes. Since its potential recruits are adherents of Chinese popular religion, the sect keeps, ritualizes and utilizes many elements of popular religion, such as burning incenses, kowtow, worshipping gods, spirits and ancestors, and establishing and fulfilling vows. After recruiting new members, the sect devotes itself to generating and sustaining the commitment of sectarians through holding research courses and dharma assemblies.

These practices, together with the mechanism of vows, guide the new recruits to becoming core members step by step. In this process, the sectarians fulfill more and more strict requirements, if they are willing to. This means that a progressive strictness exists in the YGD. The Buddhist saying that “first using desirable things to attract people and then bringing them into the wisdom of Buddha” (*xian yiyu gouqian, hou lingru fozhi* 先以欲勾牵，后令入佛智) is quite applicable to the process of religious commitment in YGD (Yang 1997).

CHAPTER 5

MARKET FORCES AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

Any meaningful discussion of religion must not ignore religious experience which “exists at the core of all religions” (Young 1997: 138). Though religious experience is an important aspect of religion, studies on religious experience are mainly dominated by psychologists. Sociological studies on religious experience are underdeveloped and theoretically poor (Spickard 1993), although many sociologists stress that we should develop an experience-centered sociology of religion. For this reason, “some people might think that sociologists are afraid to deal with mysticism” (Greeley 1995: 108).

This chapter will extend the religious economy model to the study of religious experience. Two types of experience are discussed: spirit writing and meditation. Before the 1980s, spirit-writing was widely used by the sect while meditation was prohibited. Today, the situation is reversed: YGD discards the practice of spirit writing whereas meditation becomes more and more popular among the sectarians. Why could such transition occur? This chapter tries to address this question from the supply side through delineating conditions under which the two forms of religious experiences flourish and decline.

There are four parts in this chapter. Part 1 offers a literature review of studies on religious experience; part 2 and part 3 discuss spirit writing and meditation respectively; and the final part is a theoretical discussion.

5.1 Sociological Theories and Religious Experience

There are two main competitive views to explaining religious experience: the experiential-expressive and cultural-linguistic views (Lindbeck 1984; McClenon 1990; Fox 1992; Yamane and Polzer 1994). The experiential expressive theories treat experience as an independent variable which not only exists relatively independent of its interpretation and social forces but also affects individuals and culture. This approach holds that subjective aspect of individual experience is essential to religion; religion is the outward manifestation of inner experiences and the inner experience of ultimate reality or supernatural agency as the trans-cultural “core” of religion. (Luckmann 1967; Berger 1979; Campbell 1968, 1972, 1988). In the past decades, the experiential source theory has been challenged by the cultural source perspective which argues that all experience is socially and culturally constructed. It regards religious experience as dependent variables which are affected by socio-cultural forces, such as community, culture and social stratification. In the following, I will focus on the second approach and summarize how social forces influence religious experience on the basis of previous researches.

The deprivation theory posits that paranormal experiences are responses of social deprivation; religious experiences provide people with the means to cope with the psychological and physical strain of disadvantaged social and economic status (Glock and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1980). According to this theory, belief in the paranormal should be higher among marginal social groups, such as minorities and the poor (Ben-Yehuda 1985; Greeley 1975; Lett 1992; Goode 2000). Some scholars have

suggested that blacks are more likely than whites to report having paranormal experiences because they have historically been in the midst of deprivation (Fox 1992; MacDonald 1995). Sometimes disadvantaged status of women may partially explain why they are more likely than men to report paranormal experiences (Fox 1992; Goode 2000). Persons with lower incomes may rely on paranormal experiences as ways of coping with the structural strain associated with their economic conditions (Fox 1992; MacDonald 1995). But the relationship between the deprivation and religious experience is controversial. A recent research (Rice 2003) finds that people who are routinely marginalized, such as African Americans, the poor, and the less educated, are often no more likely than other people to believe in classic paranormal phenomena.

The second approach holds that religious experience is culturally constructed. Yamane and Polzer (1994) find that the more immersed people are in their religion, the more likely they would be to have ecstatic experiences; the most frequent attendees and prayers (i.e. those most involved in their religious traditions) have much higher probabilities of ever having had ecstatic experiences. Spikla et al. (1996) also claim that culture exerts influence on religious experience. This argument is empirically supported by Lazer (2004) who investigates cultural influences on measures of religious experience by comparing persons belonging to the same religious belief but coming from different ethnic backgrounds.

The third approach argues that there is no pure experience which can be separable from communities or belief; religious groups exert influence on religious experience. By ethnographically studying a charismatic Catholic prayer group, Mary Jo Neitz (1987) has shown that “having” such an experience involves knowing what a prayer request is,

knowing when such a request is appropriate, having ideas about the kinds of ways in which God might answer such a request, and being able to recognize otherwise ordinary events as the answer one seeks. These are all matters of belief on which the experience it depends. One can “have” such experiences only after one has accepted the ideas that make these experiences possible. A similar opinion is that people can learn to have religious experiences (Blackmore 1986). They can learn to produce certain brain-states (e.g. Zen), which then interact with labels to make experiences they call religious. It suggests that religious experiences are social products and could be influenced by religious groups.

Religious rituals and music also function to facilitate ecstatic experiences because they “manipulate sensory stimuli to focus their participants’ concentration.” (Neitz and Spickard 1990: 22) People practice their religions together, side by side as it were, in shared time. By structuring inner time, both rituals and music unite people, living and dead, in a common experience. Ritual forms community and keeps it alive; the shared experience of ritual is at the center of religious life. In addition to rituals and music, it seems that organizational structure can also influence the frequency of RE. Miller (1997) finds that in all three groups he studied individuals report powerful, life-changing experiences of the sacred because “their organizational form enables people to experience the sacred more directly than is possible through the more pyramidal and reified forms of the mainline churches” (Miller 1997: 156).

All of these studies indicate that religious experiences are socially constructed more or less, but they fail to capture the fluctuations of religious experiences over time. While most of previous studies understand the relationship between RE and social-demographic

factors statically, the religious economy model is useful in articulating the conditions under which certain kinds of religious experience are most likely to flourish or decline (Young 1997). We must note that the religious economy model is not an “experience-centered” theory. Although Stark and Finke (2000) adopt Young’s (Young 1997) suggestions and add a few paragraphs to discuss how RE reduces the risk of religious products, RE is not fully probed by the model (Jerolmack and Porpora 2004). But the model is potential to generate some hypotheses to further the future study on RE. Lawrence Young (1997) presents four testable predictions. Asserting “that the most significant changes in religion derive from shifting supply, not shifting demand,” religious economists suggest that the fluctuation of religious experience is related to religious suppliers. Guided by this perspective, I paid much attention to religious group’s attitudes toward religious experience in my field work. In this chapter, I will show that the religious market theory can be extended to religious experiences, which seem to be the most personal phenomenon. In detail, I will discuss meditation and spirit writing.

5.2 Yiguan Dao and Spirit Writing

5.2.1 An Introduction to Spirit Writing

Spirit-writing, known to Chinese as “*Fuji*”, is a practice directly receiving revelation from a spirit, as Lang and Ragvald write:

Fuji divination produces messages from a god or spirit through a stick, held by one or two persons, which writes Chinese characters on a table or tray. As soon as a

character has been written on the tray and identified, it is copied into a notebook by one of the participants so that the complete message can be studied later. The procedure requires a minimum of two persons: one to wield the stick, and one to write the characters in the notebook. The god was evidently thought to control the stick, but the wielder of the stick had to be worthy to serve as the god's spirit-writer and to inscribe the god's messages. Spirit-writers do not show dramatic manifestations of spirit-possession, but a mild kind of "trance" behaviour is frequently observed. (Lang and Ragvald 1998: 312)

Spirit writing activity in China seems to have a long history that is firmly rooted in Chinese intellectual tradition. As a divinatory way of gaining some foreknowledge of examination questions, spirit-writing had been widely practiced by the educated, especially examination candidates, since the Song dynasty (Clart 1996). In the second half of nineteenth century, the technique of spirit writing served the gods to implement the moral education of the human race. Thus spirit writings combined with religious activities when it was used to produce morality books. "Indeed, exhortations and threats for centuries been received by means of it [spirit writing] throughout China in very large numbers; many are, by the care of virtuous men of erudition, printed to this day for circulation by thousands, reprinted over and over, and bound up into books for gratuitous distribution" (De Groot 1989: 1309).

Spirit-writing, however, had uses that went beyond the limited function of manufacturing morality books. It could be and was utilized for offering oracles for everyday problems, such as remedies for illness, searching for the lost, resolving family

troubles, and consultation of “the lucky and unlucky”. “Such client-oriented spirit-writing seems to have sometimes been practiced by professionals. Such spirit-writers provided services similar to those of fortune-tellers and shamans and may well have belonged to the same social class” (Clart 1996: 17).

5.2.2 The Prevalence of Spirit Writing on Taiwan before the 1980s

The emergence of spirit writing on Taiwan can at least trace to 1719 (Clart 1996: 59). Patronized by local elites (officials, merchants and teachers), many spirit writing halls, namely “phoenix halls” (*luan tang* 鸞堂), were built “to admonish to transformation by transmitting the teachings of the gods” in the second half of the nineteenth century on Taiwan (Clart 1996: 70). In the early twentieth century, a popular myth was gradually accepted as the common theme of spirit writings: the Jade Emperor was enraged by the moral decline of humans and decided to destroy all of humanity through a great cataclysm. Some deities persuaded the Jade Emperor to postpone the punishment of humanity and allow them to transform humans by their teachings. These gods, known as Benevolent Lords (*enzhu gong* 恩主公) by worshipers, utilized the planchette to deliver the divine teachings and spread them by means of morality books, which were used to guide humans to moral reform. Apparently, the production and distribution of these spirit writings were to strengthen Confucian ethics.

Although the activity of spirit writing was prohibited by Japanese rulers who govern the island until 1945, it experienced a boom. At least one hundred and eighty-four books had been produced by means of spirit-writing between 1890 and 1945 (Wang 1995).

Considering some spirit-writings did not survive, the exact number should be more than the figure offered by Wang Jianchuan. In addition, a denominational consciousness among phoenix halls was developed through the efforts of Yang Mingji, a highly influential phoenix hall leader and planchette medium of the Japanese era. In 1919, Yang introduced the term “Confucian Divine Religion” (*Ruzong Shenjiao* 儒宗神教) into the spirit-writing circle and later this term became the general name for the common religious system shared by a large number of Taiwanese phoenix halls. Though the Confucian Divine Religion was just a diffuse assemblage of individual religious associations and was lack of a central and powerful organization, it developed quickly after 1945. Many new spirit halls were established and in 1978 the number of phoenix halls was over five hundred; about four hundred morality books were manufactured by these phoenix halls; and dozens of spirit-written magazines were regularly published to spread “divine teachings” (Wang 1997).

In addition to the Confucian Divine Religion, the Compassion society (*Ci-hui Tang* 慈惠堂) has been the main group which devoted to spirit writing on Taiwan since 1949. As a spirit medium who came from mainland China, Su Liedong was believed to be efficacious in seeking the lost and offering magical therapy. Thus, a religious group gradually came into being through adopting “sons” or “daughters” of the “Golden Mother” (*Jinmu Liangliang* 金母娘娘),¹ the deity supposedly possessing Su Liedong. This group experienced a schism in 1950 and divided into two main systems: *Sheng-an Gong* (胜安宫) and the Compassion Society (*Ci-hui Tang*). The number of “branch

¹ This is another name of “venerable mother”.

halls” of *Sheng-an Gong* was over one hundred until 1988 (Zheng 1988: 64). Compared with *Sheng-an Gong*, the Compassion Society was more successful in developing a full-scale religious system, owning a number of scriptures, a set of rituals peculiar to itself, a collection of cultivation way and an articulated organizations centered on the founding temple in *Hualian*. Hundreds of organized “branch halls” or affiliated congregations of the Compassion Society dot the island in 1986. These branch halls came into existence by fission and each of them was run by a group of believers, varying from a handful to a couple of hundred, who engage in spirit writing activities, divination, meditation and liturgy (Jordan and Overmyer 1986).

The spirit writing, however, was practiced by other religious firms other than phoenix halls. As a popular way of communicating with the supernatural realm, spirit-writing also became popular in local temples of popular religion. Wang Zhiyu found that many local temples accepted the worship of benefactor lords and became phoenix halls during Japanese era (Wang 1997: 50-51). After 1950s, most of newly-built temples in which Guan-gong works as the main deity actively involved in spirit writing activities; these temples usually built a special “phoenix hall” for spirit writing (Ding Forthcoming: 81). The temples of *Ji-gong* on Taiwan also provided the service of spirit writing in the past decades (Shahar 1998). In addition to the aforesaid religious firms, “sects such as *Shijie Honghua Yuan* (世界弘化院), *Tongshan She* (同善社), *Xuanyuan* sect (軒轅教), *Tiande* sect (天德教), and *Tiandi* sect (天帝教) also had made use of spirit writings to spread their doctrines from 1945 to 1987”(Ding 2004: 86).

It is no doubt that before the 1980s spirit writing was widely practiced as the main way of communicating with the other realm by many religious firms: organized or

unorganized phoenix halls, local temples of popular religion and sectarian groups. In addition, believers of spirit writing activity were drawn from a wide range of societal categories, cross-cutting status, educational and socioeconomic distinctions.

5.2.3 Spirit Writing By YGD

As mentioned in chapter 2, Wang Jueyi, the fifteenth Patriarch of YGD, was reluctant to engage in spirit-writing activities since he believed that it was difficult to tell whether the god possessing the medium was good or not. Facing the high popularity of spirit writing, however, Zhang Tianran had to put much emphasis on the technique of spirit writing and brought the “Prior-to-Heaven Revelation” (*Xiantian Ji*,) into practice. Zhang claimed that all “Prior Heaven Revelation” came from the gods dwelling in “*Litian*” while “Posterior Heaven Revelation” (*Houtian ji*,) was delivered by spirits in “*Qitian*”. Thus, the Prior Heaven Revelation is superior to the “Posterior Heaven Revelation”. In addition, according to Zhang, the Prior Heaven Revelation was more credible than the “Posterior Heaven Revelation”, since the former utilized vegetarian children as the spirit mediums while the latter utilized adult mediums who was highly possible to manipulate the revelation. Finally, Zhang emphasized that only the sect’s revelation belonged to “Prior to Heaven” while others were all inferior revelations (Zhang 1937a: 48).

In practice, as mentioned in Chapter 2, YGD’s spirit-writer team usually included three children: *Tiancai*, *Rencai* and *Dicai*. *Tiancai* uses a Y-shaped stick to write character on a table; *Rencai* identifies each character; and *Dicai* records each character. It

proved that the updated technique was vital to YGD's development. Actually, YGD could not successfully do its missionary work without the activity of spirit writing in 1940s (Lu 1999; Lian 2000).

When the sectarians came to Taiwan, spirit possession and spirit writing were the main content of "dharma assemblies" (*fahui*) of YGD. Usually, a god is claimed to possess the body of *Tiancai*, the spirit medium of YGD, having a talk with the attendees and then writing some sentences to encourage the sectarians. Then the sectarians would record the god's activities, words, writings and the attendees' responses as well. The recorded contents would thus consist of a morality book. In addition to gods, ghosts could play some roles in spirit possession occasionally. We can get a basic understanding of the activity of spirit possession and spirit writing within YGD from the following story recorded in *An Account of Ghosts' Presences* (*Yinguo Yuanqian Xianhua Shilu* 因果怨愆显化实录).

At 3: 00 p.m., the fifth day of the first month of lunar year, 1987, the Teacher of Living Buddha (*huofo laoshi* 活佛老师) reached the altar and indicted that a ghost would possess the medium.

.....

At 5: 00 p.m. the teacher of living Buddha possessed the *Tiancai* again and said: "The ghost will arrive when the evening comes. You should be careful about the safety of *Tiancai*. *Dicai* and *Rencai* should not think too much and they'd better sit in the room quietly."

At 7: 15 p.m., all people were ready for the revelation. The male sectarians and female sectarians stood individually and quietly. The atmosphere was serious.

At 8: 10 p.m., the Teacher possessed the body of *Tiancai* again and said: “Now it is the End of the Third Era (*Sanqi mojie*) and all must be responsible for their wrongs done in their prelife. Without the mercy of the Mother who descends the Great Dao for you to cultivate, who can avoid the retaliation of ghosts? Today, I follow the Mother’s decree to bring the ghost who was murdered by Yunmei Li’s prelife to the Buddha hall. You must be careful.” Then the Teacher turned to the manager: “would you like to bring the ghost here?” The manager bowed and answered: “Merciful Teacher, it is my pleasure to witness such a demonstration. The revelation is very welcome.” The Teacher said: “OK, I will order the ghost to enter the Buddha hall immediately. The female helpers please get hold of *Tiancai* after she is possessed by the ghost.” Then he told Yunmei Li: “Don’t worry! Calm down and face the ghost with a confessional heart.”

At 8: 20 p.m., the Teacher threw the fan, face upward and then pushed forward. [This means that] the ghost had possessed the *Tiancai*’s body. The ghost [actually the spirit medium] opened his eyes widely and angrily, cried out sadly and shook his body so violently that more than ten female Dao relatives could hardly get hold of him.

The manager: “Please calm your anger. This is the Buddha hall where you can not make any noise. If you have any grievances, please express them. The living Buddha of Jigong will give you a fair judgment.”

.....

The ghost said to Yunmei Li who had knelt down: “I hate you! I hate you! Your prelife treated me so cruelly. I must take your life to answer for the wrongs your prelife had done. Don’t take hold of me. I must take her life.”

Yunmei Li: “Please forgive me. It is my fault that my prelife murdered you. Now I have sought the Dao. I promise to transmit the merits to you if you forgive me.”

The ghost: “How could it be so easy to forgive you? I must take your life. Don’t take hold of me! Don’t take hold of me.” The ghost kept on crying and struggling. The female believers had to force him on a chair.

The manager: “Don’t make noise any more. Your experiences are pitiful and we all want to help you today. Since the Living Buddha of Jigong has led you to the Buddha hall, you should take hold of this chance and get a favorable solution.” (*An Account of Ghosts’ Presences* P: 8-13)

After struggling, the ghost told the story eventually. According to the story, the ghost’s prelife is Deguang Song, a merchant who deal with drug in Taiwan. In 1946, Song and all of his family members were murdered by Xianxin He, namely the prelife of Yunmei Li, a person who once gained help from Song. Because Song was a viper, he was sent to the hell after death where he suffered a lot. Specially, the ghosts described the sufferings in hell in detail. Then the manager asked the ghost to forgive Yunmei Li who would like to transmit merits to the ghost. Let’s continue to have a look at what happened later.

The manager: “What kinds of merits do you want Yunmei Li to transfer?”

The ghosts: “In addition to recruiting newcomers (*duren*), she must donate three hundred morality books and afford the expenses of the following Buddha halls: *Renyi*, *Qianhua*, *Dade* and *Zongxin*.”

The manager: “Well, we will try our best to fulfill your requirements.”

The ghost: “300 morality books to each Buddha hall, understand?”

The manager: “Do you know that Senior Qi owns twenty four Buddha halls in Malaysia? How could Li Yunmei afford to print 7,200 morality books? She is just a middle school student. Could you reduce the number of morality books donated by her?”

.....

The ghost: “Then she must print 600 morality books totally and afford the four Buddha halls’ expenses. In addition, she must record what happens today through manufacturing a morality book. My story must be spread widely, warning people not to follow me.”

The manager: “OK, we promise to produce a morality book to record this story and publicly lecture it. You would have merits because the book could motivate people to seek Dao. You should not bother Li Yunmei any more and help her to recruit members, OK?”

The ghost turned to the Dao relatives who were present at that time and said: “How fortunate you are! You could receive the Dao. Now the time is urgent and the Dao will be ceased soon. Is there anybody who still does not believe this? Do you think Tiancai is acting to cheat you? Tiancai is a very quiet girl. How would she like to be in such a shameful shape with hair disheveled? You must know that I am

following the Mother's decree to ask for fairness. Without the help of Teacher, I can not gain this opportunity. Please help me to say thanks to Tiancai. It really brings trouble to her." (*An Account of Ghosts' Presences* P: 22-26)

Whether the spirit medium was acting to cheat the attendees or not goes out of the purpose of this chapter. The point here is, as phenomenologist stresses, the meaning of such experience to the attendees. I must acknowledge that nearly all of YGD sectarians I meet during my fieldwork believe that there indeed exist ghosts and gods. Quite a number of YGD sectarians sincerely told me how they dealt with the evil ghosts or interacted with other spirits ordinarily and lively. Actually, I heard so many "ghost stories" that my mind was also deeply influenced. I was an agnostic when I entered the field, but a strange experience occurred after I immersed myself too much into YGD's spirit world. The following is the field note I made in the 3rd, November, 2003.

A strange thing occurred last night. I dreamed that I returned to my hometown at night. It was very dark and I asked my mother to turn on the light, but she did not respond to me. Then I tried to turn it on by myself. Suddenly, I touched a brushy stuff which felt like a boy's head. The strange thing soon seized my left hand. I thought I must dream a ghost and should try my best to wake up. But I could not wake up. Maybe everyone who experience nightmares can understand the situation. The strange animal pressed my left hand and I caught it by my right hand. I was even curious about it. At the same time, I tried to make use of YGD's "three treasures" to deal with the ghost, but I forgot the pithy formulas (*Koujue* 口诀).

Since I once studied Christianity, I knew something about how Christians using prayers to fight with ghosts. Then I prayed: “God, let it go, please.” Gradually, I waked up. Turning the light on, I found that the time is 8: 40 a.m. I lay in the bed, recalling what just happened. It was so real and I could recall every details. The more I thought, the more fearful I became. I know how to explain religious experience scientifically, but now I really feel scared.

At that time, I was so scared that I immediately asked for help from other scholars who study religion. They suggested me to change a house. Then I lived in a rest house in the following two days before I rented another house. Although the former landlord refused to return the rest rent to me, I would like to lose about twenty thousand NT\$ to avoid being bothered by the ghost again. Yes, at that time, I indeed believed that I was bothered by a ghost. Such an explanation dominated my mind.

Now it seems ridiculous and irrational for me to spend so much money to avoid the so-called ghosts’ disturbance. With such an “irrational” experience, I can fully understand why YGD sectarians would like to invest time, money and energy to their belief. The influence of religious experiences as well as the explanations to these experiences is so powerful that people could hardly resist it. Religious zest could be easily motivated through such “mystical” experiences. As the above quotations of *An Account of Ghosts’ Presences* indicate, YGD usually utilized spirit possession and spirit writing to encourage the followers to invest a lot to recruit neophytes, to support the sect’s expenses and to donate money. In this sense, religious experience such as spirit possession became an important tool for the sect to motivate resources which were vital to the survival of any

groups. Partly for this reason, spirit possession was a routinized content of the sectarians' congregation and a large number of spirit writing were produced by the sect².

5.2.4 The Decline of Spirit Writing on Taiwan

The practice of spirit possession and spirit writing can facilitate the sect's missionary work and strengthen the sectarians' faith. However, since the 1960s, some divisions of YGD have begun to discard the activity of spirit writing. Today, all divisions except the *Fayi Chongde* division have given up spirit writing. Why do they discard spirit writing?

The most important reason is that new revelations revealed in spirit writing are easy to cause religious schisms. By Wang Jueyi's time it had already become an established practice within YGD to choose new patriarchs by means of spirit-writing (Clart 1996). A new patriarch of YGD usually claims that he/she holds the updated "celestial mandate" (*Tianming*) without which salvation is invalid. But such revelations are inherently threatening to existing structures of authority and cause religious schisms. Since new revelations is a revolutionary force which threatens institutionalization, the mainstream of YGD, namely those divisions which join the World I-kuan Dao Headquarters³, opposes any claim of the nineteenth patriarch. But dozens of people claimed that they were the new patriarch after Sun Yuehui died in 1974. For example, in 1982, Wang Haode

² One can download these spirit writings from the following websites: <http://www.cd.org.tw/becute/>; <http://yestw.com/shini/poem/story.asp>; <http://netcity2.web.hinet.net/UserData/t6227627/>; <http://book.bfn.org/>; and <http://home.kimo.com.tw/yy7533967/>. All of these websites could be retrieved in the 18th, February, 2004.

³ This is an official YGD organization which was permitted to register in Taiwan Ministry of Interior in 1987.

regarded himself as “the representative of Mistress Sun” (*Shi-mu Daibiao* 师母代表) who owned the updated celestial mandate. Later this group renamed itself as “the Great Dao of Maitreya” (*Mile Dadao* 弥勒大道) to differentiate from YGD. Many former YGD followers converted to *Mile Dadao* which soon became a world wide religious group. Because it “steals” followers from YGD divisions, a conflict exists between *Mile Dadao* and YGD, as Clart (2000) has pointed out. Such challenges as the emergence of *Mile Dadao* have never ceased during the past two decades. Recently, a sectarian of *Jichu* division motivated about four thousand million NT\$ to build a super temple in *Yulin*, *Guangxi* province of China. This person also regards himself as the reincarnation of Maitreya who will do the last salvation in the super temple (Guo 1996). Accordingly, these so called new patriarchs, as well as their followers, are regarded as “heterodox schools” by the mainstream of YGD. Table 5.1 lists seven main “heterodox groups” of YGD. Since the activity of spirit writing is highly possible to receive new revelations that threaten the existing order, all divisions of YGD except *Fayi Chongde* officially discarded the activity of spirit writing.

Interestingly, the sect directly expresses the reason why spirit possession is discarded in the following spirit writing:

A long time before, the Mother has pointed out that there would be thirty-six false Maitreya Buddha and seventy-two false Patriarchies (三十六假弥勒七十二假弓長) when the world came to the end. I [Jigong buddha] also warned you this issue before. These false Patriarchies would be equipped with huge theurgy. The false Patriarch can not only produce wonderful spirit writing, but also catch your mind,

cure the illness with a touch and make the dead alive. In addition, he would act as the real Jigong Buddha and say: “Oh, poor disciples, why don’t you believe the real Teacher? Why do you still believe the agent Teacher? You are really poor! Now I come here by myself. If you have any problems, I will help you to solve them. You are my disciples, how can I leave you aside?” Then what will you do? Do you believe it or not? It’s really dangerous.

So, considering this, the mother arranges a meeting which all gods attend and decides that the spirit possession will not be allowed when the last salvation is coming in order to prevent the emergence of false patriarchs. Though it is not in that stage today, the Mother begins to test you through these false Patriarchs. This is a test, understand? (Words from the Teacher (the fifth volume) : Understanding the Spirit Possession and its relationship with the truth 《老师的话（第五辑）：认清乱窍与借相明理》⁴)

A spirit writing in name of the Venerable Mother also indicates that:

I tell you that spirit writing will be out of time soon. I establish the teachings by means of the way of the gods in order to help you to understand the truth. But spirit writing can not be practiced forever and I will not send gods to do spirit writing any more. Later, there will be heterodox schools which still make use of spirit possession. They will be equipped with theurgy and can produce wonderful spirit writings; they will claim that they have the celestial mandate and hold the Mother’s

⁴ This book can be downloaded from <http://www.cd.org.tw/becute/> which could be retrieved in the 18th, February, 2004. More spirit writings related to why the sect discarded Fuji are collected in this book.

decree to do the last salvation. Various schools will emerge and many mystical phenomena will occur. My children, you must be careful to avoid being tested. You should reflect yourselves and improve your mind. That is the right way to accumulate merits. (Kind Teachings from the Mother, revealed in the 15th, December, 1994)⁵

From the above quotations, we can clearly see that spirit writing is easy to be utilized by false Patriarchs, so the mainstream of YGD discarded this activity.

Table 5.1: A partial list of “Heterodox” groups of Yiguan Dao

| Name | Founder | Founding year | website |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---|
| Mi-le Da-Dao 弥勒大道 | Wang Haode 王好德 | 1982 | http://www.pro-maitreya.org.tw |
| Hai-zi Dao 亥子道 | Lin Jixiong 林吉雄 | 1984 | http://www.haitzetao.net |
| Zhonghua Sheng-jiao 中华圣教 | Ma Yongchang 马永常 | 1980 | Not available |
| Guanyin Dadao 观音大道 | Chen Huoguo 陈火国 | 1984 | Not available |
| Yuan-de | Wu Rui-yuan | | Not available |

⁵ This message can be downloaded from <http://www.cd.org.tw/becute/> which could be retrieved in the 18th, February, 2004.

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------|---|
| shen-tan, 原德圣坛 | 吴瑞源 | | |
| The Superior Temple of Guangxi Yulin 广西玉林大庙 | Unknown | 1994 (?) | Not available |
| Jiulian Shengdao 九莲圣道 | Lin Zhen-he 林振和 | 1992 | http://www.st.nine-lotus.com/ |

YGD discarding the spirit writing also has much to do with the validity of spirit-written messages, which was often questioned by both the sectarians and outsiders. In the *fujī* procedure, the stick itself writes the messages. To some believers, the revelations come from the gods, not from the mind of the *fujī*-master. But there are also some people who doubt whether spirit writers control the messages. In the field I was once told that

Every time when I attend their religious meeting, I feel it is very funny. Gods or Buddhas would reach the altar, possess the medium and talk some in general. Sometime they would have a talk with somebody particularly. Of course, some one would be moved and could not keep crying. However, there are also many people do not believe the spirit possession and would think: “where do you find a little girl to cheat us?” In short, though a lot of things must be prepared to hold a religious meeting, the effect is not so good.

The critics towards the validity of spirit writing achieved the acme in 1980 when a spirit medium of *Fayi Chongde* publicly revealed how the Senior (*qianren*) taught her to control the message to cheat the sectarians. Let us see the background against this event first.

Fayi Chongde is led by Chen Hongzhen, a female celibate who comes from *Tianjin*. A large number of spirit writings had been produced by *Fayi Chongde* to encourage the young sectarians most of whom were college students to “be a celibate” (*qingxiu* 清修) in the 1970s. However, “being a celibate” is in conflict with the requirement of “simultaneously cultivating the sacred and the secular (*Sheng-fan jian-xiu* 圣凡兼修)” which was especially stressed by YGD. So, messages from the gods became an appropriate way to propagate such ideas. These revelations always emphasize the shortcomings of marriage and the significance of being single. For example, a spirit written message which was supposedly received from Guanyin Bodhisattva writes that:

Today I (the old Buddha) write the following messages to encourage the Dao relatives who are celibates. Celibates get rid of the karma of family, free of disturbance of the spouse. No children would bother you when cultivating mind and it is comfortable without the burden of family. It is good to make a vow and promise to be single forever. Procreating children is really painful and dealing with complicated relationship among the families is intractable. Parent-in-law would not concern about you if you were lazy. Being celibate is to spread the great Dao and it would facilitate your missionary work.

If one decides to be celibate, his/her ancestors will benefit a lot.

If one gives up the vow of being celibate, his/her ancestors will also be punished.
(Guo 1985: 348)

A spirit writing warns the male sectarians that:

You should not be enchanted by the beauty. Although she is nice, she also brings you countless afflictions. Once you are entwined by her, there is no way to get rid of that bondage. You'd better not be affiliated with her, so you could live freely, away from affection and desire. Once there is happiness, surely there will be sadness; once there is sweetness, surely there will be distress. How often can the pleasure be? Ancient cultivators could leave their wives and children away or even never marry in the whole life. (*A Collection of Words from Saints and Buddhas* 1980: 18)

Supported by the above theories, *Fayi Chongde* division actively utilized spirit possession to encourage its young followers to make “a vow of being a celibate” (*Qingxiu Yuan* 清修愿). A spirit writing in *The Record of Gods and Buddhas' Words* (*Xianfo Yulu* 仙佛语录) well documents the situation. It happened in the 16th, May 1976 when a religious meeting was held by the sectarians most of whom were college students promising to be graduates. In this congregation, the *Jigong* Buddha borrowed a spirit medium's body and gave the following speech.

Although your ideal is to spread Dao, you still can not give up secular love and emotions. ...If the God test you and a beautiful girl strongly shows love to you, can you still insist on cultivating Dao and refuse her? To tell the truth, few people could

do so. According to my observation, the test of sex is difficult to pass. ... Disciples, I tell you frankly, the sacred task cannot be finished if you still treasure the secular love. You can understand this point if you study the experiences of the sacred and saints in history most of whom had given up secular love.

.....

You should make a decision to sacrifice yourself to helping more people. --- Are you ready for sacrifice?

The sectarians: Yes.

The god: Ok, then you should make a vow and I will report these vows to the Mother.

Considering that some of graduates are newcomers who did not know the importance of making vows, Aunt Chen said to the Jigong Buddha that: "They are young plants and in a low level. Could you mercifully permit them to make the vow later?"

The god: It is time to make a vow. You should not regard them as young plants any longer.

Then the god turned to the attendees: "What do you want to express now?" (*A Collection of Words from Saints and Buddhas* 1980: 11-2)

Under such situation, many young sectarians would make a vow of being celibates. Even if one just had such an idea occasionally, it could be regarded as a formal vow. A spirit writing claims that

the decision of being celibate is from the heart. Even if you do not burn the sacred document which documents your vows, the vow is made when you have such ideas in mind and I totally know it. You will be punished if you change your mind. (Guo 1985: 348)

But fulfilling the vow of being celibates is very difficult. The sectarians who decide to be single are not permitted to see films, read novels and drink coffee with the opposite sex. We are told that

If you secretly go to the cinema or drink coffee or tea with the male, you would be recorded and punished by the god in charge of your merits. Be careful and think about the vow you make! I do not want to say too much and just admonish you to respect yourself. If you change your mind, how can you face your past ancestors as well as saints after you die?

The male and the female can not ride a motorbike together, since they are easy to fall in love in such situation.

You'd better not see foreign films nor should you read native novels. They are not useful for your cultivation. Seeing a film must spend fifty dollars. If you donate these monies to publish morality books, your merits will be increased. Next time, if you go to cinema again, I will document your behavior and reduce your merits. (Guo 1985: 348-9)

The messages which encourage the sectarians to reject marriage and family cause many critics from other divisions of YGD. Guo Wuwang thinks that these messages are in conflict with YGD doctrines. From his point of view, these messages are either from evil spirits or from the will of Senior master. In short, gods would not send these revelations (Guo). The validity of these revelations was also questioned by Fayi Chongde sectarians. In 1980, a meeting was arranged by several important sectarians of Fayi Chongde to enquire why the Senior Aunt Chen cheated them through manipulating the spirit writings. A female spirit writer publicly revealed how the Aunt Chen asked her to manufacture revelations. Specially, she acted the spirit possession and wrote a paragraph of revelation to confirm the accusation. Some of the attendees asked Aunt Chen to explain why she deceived them. Aunt Chen could do nothing except crying. The attendees recorded the whole process and widely mailed the record to other YGD sectarians to reveal the “truth”. Most of *Fayi Chongde* followers left the division. The validity of spirit writing was also seriously questioned by both the sectarians and the outsiders. In short, this event played an important role in facilitating the process of YGD discarding the practice of spirit writing.

5.3 Yiguan Dao and Meditation

5.3.1 The Rise of Meditation

When most of Yiguan Dao divisions gave up spirit writing, other religious groups which once centered on spirit writing also discarded this practice. It is a consequence of competition more or less.

Yiguan Dao influences phoenix halls in many respects. The first is the mythology. As mentioned before, the spirit writings on Taiwan centered on Confucian moralities and the worship of Benefactor Lords before 1949. YGD's mythological terms soon dominate the content of spirit writings after the sect came to the island (Clart 1996; Wang 1995). YGD's doctrine and terms, such as "universal salvation of the three categories of beings" frequently occurred in Yang Mingji's spirit writings after 1949. As the most influential and active spirit writer in his peers, Yang brought so many YGD doctrines into his spirit writing that Wang Jianchuan holds that Yang actually converted to YGD. Whether Yang was an YGD sectarian or not is a controversial topic⁶; what's certain is that phoenix halls indeed accepted many YGD terms as well as the worship of Venerable Mother.

Because YGD has a more competitive and systematic mythological explanations, the sect successfully converted many followers of phoenix halls. For example, Lin Shuzhao, the chairman of *Chongxiu Tang* (崇修堂) in *Douliu* (斗六) led all of his followers converted to the *Fayi* division of YGD in 1951. In a long period, this hall was the most important missionary foundation of *Fayi* division. According to previous studies (Clart 1996; Song 1983), many phoenix halls were "swallowed" by Yiguan Dao though the exact number is absent. Thus, a keen competition exists between phoenix halls and YGD. Philip Clart has pointed out that "relations between phoenix halls and the YGD were not free of conflict ...that arose from competition for members and different views on the status and legitimacy of phoenix halls" (Clart 1996: 12). Thus a researcher comments that:

⁶ Wang Jianchuan (1996) holds that Yang was converted while Wang Zhiyu (2000) argues against this statement.

During the fieldwork, I was impressed by a phoenix hall master who complained that the sectarians of YGD repeatedly ‘invaded’ (*qinru* 侵入) in folk religion and Compassion Society and they had to try their best to ‘kick out’ (*zhu-chu* 逐出) YGD. When he described these cases, he used the terms of “invade” and ‘kick out’ repeatedly. Exactly, a high tension, which derives from the “survival competition”, exists among these religious firms. (Wang, Zhou and Lin, 1997: 141)

Competition plays an important role in shaping some phoenix halls’ mythological and institutional innovations which are used to differentiate themselves from YGD (Clart 1996). To keep their independent identity, phoenix halls tried their best to reduce the activities which were quite similar to the YGD’s, such as the publication of local spirit-writings and morality books and the activity of lecturing doctrines related to the Venerable Mother. On the other hand, followers of phoenix halls gradually shifted their cultivation activities to meditation through which the practitioners could gain some kinds of “theurgy” or “supernatural ability” (*Shen-tong* 神通) (Wang, Zhou and Lin 1997). Both meditation and seeking theurgy are regarded as heterodoxy and prohibited by YGD. Apparently, according to the observation of Wang, Zhou and Lin, followers of phoenix halls consciously change the way of communicating with the other realm to differentiate themselves from YGD. They write

In the process of interview, several masters of phoenix hall repeatedly stressed that they were not YGD. While YGD permitted to do something, they would not do that purposely; when YGD prohibited the way of meditation, they would choose to do

so. In short, they deliberately discarded some activities and adopted some new activities to differentiate themselves from YGD. (Wang, Zhou and Lin 1997: 141)

Partly because of competition, phoenix halls have become more and more meditation-centered since the middle 1980s. We can see this tendency from the Shengde Tang, a former phoenix hall led by Yang Zanru. As an influential spirit writer who produces *Journey Through Hell (Diyu Youji)* and *Journey Through Heaven (Tiantang youji)* which are probably the most popular morality books in the spirit-writing circle, Yang established his own phoenix hall in 1981, named “the Sacred Virtue Hall” (*Shengde Tang* 圣德堂). Like other phoenix hall, the Sacred Virtue Hall devoted itself to manufacturing morality books and it published a couple of spirit-written books in the following four years. Since 1986, Yang had gradually reduced the activities of spirit writing and then began to focus on meditation, emphasizing that meditation was vital to cultivation because it can reduce complains, cultivate patience, improve mind and enlighten self-reflection. After spending half a year in meditating and reading Buddhist classics in 1988, Yang brought more Buddhist theories and practices into his religious group. In 1998, Yang eventually became a monk; and the spirit-writing group led by Yang totally evolved into a Buddhist sect which centered on the Zen of meditation. All spirit writing activities are discarded and meditation becomes the main means of receiving messages from the other realm (Zheng 2000).

In addition that some traditional phoenix halls became more meditation-centered, a large number of groups which provided the service of meditation emerged after 1987 when the martial Law was released. In 1989, all people were permitted to establish legal

groups according to The Act of People's Group (*renmin tuanti fa* 《人民团体法》). Thus, a religious pluralism occurred when religious groups can freely register themselves as “people groups” and run legally. In the meantime, the GMD state permitted Taiwanese to travel freely to mainland China where “the *Qigong* fad” achieved its highest point in the early 1990s. Partly influenced by the *Qigong* fad of mainland China, hundreds of thousands of *Qigong* organizations emerged in Taiwan. Though the exact number is hard to get, I lists twenty influential *Qigong* organizations which originated on Taiwan in table 5.2. Still, many qigong organizations come from mainland China, among which *Xiang gong*, *Zhong gong* and *Falun Gong* are most famous. At the same time, India meditation groups were also imported to Taiwan, as table 5.3 shows.

The rise of Buddhist sects also plays an important role in increasing the popularity of meditation. Today, there are eighteen island-wide Buddhist organizations most of which provide the service of teaching how to meditate, as table 5.4 shows. Among Buddhist sects, *Ciji* (慈济), *Foguangshan* (佛光山), *Zhongtaishan* (中台山) and *Fagushan* (法鼓山) are most famous. These Buddhist groups, which regard the meditation of Zen as the first step of cultivation, are active in holding workshop to teach meditation of Zen⁷. Besides these island-wide Buddhist sects, local Buddhist temples also involve in meditation.

Since the 1980s, a large number of new religions which center on meditation have emerged in Taiwan religious market. These new religions regard themselves as Buddhist

⁷ Zhongtaishan provides the way of meditation on its website: <http://www.chungtai.org.tw/index.htm>. People who are interested in meditation can learn it freely. Fagushan also provide such information on its website: <http://203.66.138.66:81/gate/gb/www.ddm.org.tw/index.asp>. I find Foguangshan also offers such services in <http://www.fgs.org.tw/main.htm>. The above websites could be retrieved in the 18th, February, 2004.

sects; however the “orthodox” Buddhists regard them as “heterodox schools”. Anyway, most of these new religions focus on the immediate communication with the otherworld realms by means of meditation (Ding 2003). Four typical groups are listed in table 5.6. Take the “Research association of Zen meditation of Republic China” (*zhonghua minguo chanding xuehui* 中华民国禅定学会)⁸ as an example, which is led by Qinghai, a female leader⁹. In practicing “the Dharma Way of Guanyin” (*guanyin famen* 观音法门), practitioners are asked to spend at least two and a half hours in meditating every day. During the meditation, practitioners should watch inner lights and listen to inner voices. The possible inner lights include blue lights, red lights, yellow lights, etc; the potential inner voices include the sound of wind, the sound of rains, the sound of train, the sound of bell, etc. The light and sound which the practitioners experience during the meditation represent the level of their cultivation and spirit. People should try their best to meditate and improve their level of spirit. Apparently, meditation is the core of cultivation of *Qinghai* group.

All of the above data show that meditation had gradually taken the place of spirit writing as the main way of communicating with the other realm in the last two decades of twentieth century. Meditation is practiced by different religious firms: former phoenix halls, *Qigong* organizations, meditation groups from India, meditation-centered new religions and various Buddhist sects. In the past, religious experiences were dominated by

⁸ For more information about this group, please refer to Ding 2003, or its website: <http://www.chinghai.org.tw/ch/index.htm>. One can also download Qinghai’s works and speech records from <http://www.godsimmmediatecontact.org/video>. Both websites could be retrieved in the 18th, February, 2004.

⁹In May 19th, 2000, the World Buddhist Headquarters (Shijie Fojiao Dahui, 世界佛教大會) officially decided that Song Qili, Li Hongzhi (the founder of the Falun Gong法輪功), Zhang Hongbao (the founder of the Zhong Gong 中功) and Qinghai are evil religion leaders. For details, please refer to http://www.nectars.org/news_c.htm which could be retrieved in the 1st, September 2002.

such professionals as spirit mediums. Now the popularity of meditation enables more people to own such mystical experiences. People realize that they can learn to own spiritual experiences if they would like to.

Table 5.2: A partial list of Qigong organizations originating in Taiwan

| Name | Founder |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Kunlun xianzong 昆仑仙宗 | Liu Peizhong 刘培中 |
| Xiao jiutianmen 小九天门 | Qiao Changhong 乔长虹 |
| Tianren qigong 天人气功 | Li Yujie 李玉阶 |
| Xuanzhen jingzuo 玄真静坐 | Qiu Fengsen 邱丰森 |
| Xiandao qigong 仙道气功 | Lin Qisheng 林启生 |
| Dari qigong 大日气功 | Wu Ximing 武锡铭 |
| Ziyun changong 紫云禅功 | Zhong Guoqiang 钟国强 |
| Laozi qigong 老子气功 | Wang Guorong 王国荣 |
| Zhenyuan qigong 真源气功 | Xie Shuiyuan 谢水远 |
| Longmen dangong 龙门丹功 | Wang Laijing 王来静 |
| Mingguang qigong 明光气功 | Xie Mingguang 谢明光 |
| Yiqi liuxing 一气流行 | Li Fengshan 李凤山 |
| Baobing qigong 宝瓶气功 | Ye Jinfa 叶进发 |
| Tianxin qigong 天心气功 | Chen Wenliang 陈文良 |
| Quanzhen qigong 全真气功 | Tu Jinquan 涂金泉 |
| Dazizai changong 大自在禅功 | Xu Yongzhi 许永枝 |
| Danlunxuan Qigong 丹轮玄气功 | Liao Youyi 廖友义 |
| Xuanyuan neiqi 轩辕内气 | Tan Qingyun 谈青云 |
| Da-ai shou 大爱手 | Zhou Ruihong 周瑞宏 |
| Huatuo neigong 华佗内功 | Zhang Zhefu 张哲夫 |

Source: Zheng 2002: 8-15

Table 5.3: A partial list of meditation group imported from India

| Name | Leader |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Transcendental Meditation | Maharishi Mahesh Yogi |
| Ananda Marga Meditation Association | P.R.Sarkar |
| Sant Mat | Thakar Singh |

Source: Qu&Zhang 2002: 43

Table 5.4: Island-wide Buddhist organizations registered in Ministry of Interior

| Organization | leader |
|--|-----------|
| Foundation of Zhong Taishan Buddhism 財團法人中台山佛教基金會 | 釋惟覺 |
| Foundation of Agama Sect of Buddhism 財團法人中國佛教阿含宗基金會 | 堤真壽雄 |
| Foundation of Chinese True Sect of Nichiren 財團法人中華民國日蓮正宗基金會 | 尾林廣德 |
| Foundation of Museum of World Religion 財團法人世界宗教博物館發展基金會 | 釋星道 |
| Foundation of Taiwan True Sect of Nichiren 財團法人台灣日蓮佛教基金會 | 林釗 |
| Foundation of Ksitigarbha Sect of Buddhism 財團法人地藏悲願基金會 | 施秀珠 (釋覺宗) |
| Foundation of Jiayeshan Sect of Buddhism 財團法人伽耶山基金會 | 陳夏珠 |
| Foundation of Fagushan Sect of Buddhism 財團法人法鼓山佛教基金會 | 聖嚴法師 |
| Foundation of Dailai Nama Tibet Buddhism 財團法人達賴喇嘛西藏宗教基金會 | 阿底夏.旦增彭措 |
| Foundation of Chinese Chenyen sect of buddhims 財團法人中華民國佛教金剛乘蓮花精舍 | 田璧雙 |
| Foundation of Southern Baosheng Temple 財團法人南方寶生佛刹 | 嚴仲熊 |
| Foundation of Lingjiushan Sect of Buddhism 財團法人靈鷲山佛教基金會 | 釋星道 |
| Foundation of Wanfoshan Shengyin Sect of Buddhism 財團法人萬佛山聖印佛教事業基金會 | 邱明亮 |
| Foundation of Tianzhongtin Sect of Buddhism 財團法人天中天佛教基金會 | 楊銘璋 |
| Foundation of Chiguangshan Sect of Buddhism 財團法人慈光山佛教基金會 | 釋大願 (李文達) |
| Foundation of Lingyanshan Sect of Buddhism 財團法人靈巖山佛教基金會 | 釋妙蓮 |
| Foundation of Jingtu Sect of Buddhism 財團法人中國人間淨土功德基金會 | 張益瑞 |
| Foundation of Xinsheng Sect of Buddhism 財團法人新生佛教基金會 | 賴朝明 |

Source: Taiwan Ministry of Interior.

Website: http://www.moi.gov.tw/div1/religion/religion_2.asp

Table 5.5: Four influential new religions which centered on meditation ¹⁰

| Name | Leader | Founding year | Website |
|--|-------------|---------------|---|
| True Buddha School | Lu Shengyan | 1982 | http://www.tbsn.org |
| Taiwan Zen Buddhist Association | Miaotian | 1983 | http://www.zen.org.tw |
| Research association of Zen meditation of PR | Qinghai | 1986 | http://www.chinghai.org.tw/ch/index.htm |
| The association of xianxiang | Song Qili | 1994 | http://www.sungchili.com |

Source: World Wide Web

¹⁰ The exact number of these organizations is hard to get. In 1994, True Buddha School itself claimed that more than three million people converted to the group (Zheng 2000). As for Qinghai group, Ding Renjie holds that more than fifty thousand practitioner regularly attend Qinghai group's activity on Taiwan (Ding forthcoming: 149). I do not get the information of other two groups. The websites I provide could be retrieved in the 18th, February, 2004.

5.3.2 Challenges to Yiguan Dao

As mentioned in chapter 1, Prior-to-heaven Dao, the former body of YGD, put much emphasis on meditation through which one could open the “mysterious gate” and gain the salvation. Wang Jueyi discarded the practice of meditation on the basis of his eschatological theory, arguing that the doomsday was coming, and thus believers should spend the limited time on saving people rather than meditating. To save sectarian’s time, he opened the followers’ “mysterious gate” when they received the Dao, from his perspective. So, there is no need to open the gate through meditation. Because of such explanation, meditation was prohibited by YGD.

But the current popularity of meditation made YGD in a quite awkward and difficult situation. On the one hand, it must prohibit the practice of meditation in accordance with its doctrine. On the other hand, such prohibition could easily push the sectarians to other meditation-centered groups. In fact, many YGD sectarians indeed seek such mythical experience in other groups. Though it is impossible to get any concrete figure about this issue, I am fortunate to get a case in which a former senior YGD sectarian converted to the *Qinghai* group¹¹. This man was born in 1964 and became a sectarian of YGD when he was still a middle-school student. He says,

I belonged to *Fayi* division before my marriage. Because my wife is a sectarian of *Jichu* division, I shifted to *Jichu* division then. I said that “well, I begin to seek something.” But how could I penetrate into YGD faith? The initiator told me that I should become a vegetarian. Ok, that’s fine, and I gave up eating meat immediately.

¹¹ This case was collected by Ding Renjie when he studied Qinghai’s group. This is the 35th case of Ding’s interview. Thank Dr. Ding very much for generously sharing the primary record with me.

After a few months, the initiator asked me to be a master of Buddha hall. No problem, I established a family Buddha hall in my home and became a master of Buddha hall. At that time, I also took part in courses held by *Jichu* division and read classics. Reading classics really made my life different. Then I decided to become a lecturer. However, I find that the further study focused on ethic and morality. It stresses Confucianism rather than Buddhism. This is not what I want to seek..... I had spent about three years in YGD but I failed to get what I seek. I find that there is no way to further the cultivation.

Later, he left YGD and attended a Zen group to learn meditation before he eventually joined the Qinghai's group. He thinks that

This group mostly fits me. I like meditation very much and this group requires you to sit at least two hours every day. It's the best one [I ever meet]. (Laugh) ... Later I said "I want to be equipped with theurgy." She [Qinghai, the leader] does not discuss this issue in her book, but she told me that: "if you achieve the second level, you can naturally gain some kind of theurgy." That [theurgy] is what I expected.

It is no doubt that this person is a core member of YGD: he is a master of Buddha hall and a vegetarian. But he eventually shifted to other religious groups because he could not get what he wants to seek: meditation and theurgy. He is just an example of various "apostate" YGD sectarians. When asking if he meet other YGD sectarians in *Qinghai* group, he said that many YGD believers converted to this group, including an initiator of

YGD. This case strongly supports my impression which I got in the field that YGD is losing its members because of the popularity of meditation.

In addition to turning to other meditation-centered organizations, some former YGD sectarians even established their own groups in which meditation was emphasized. Pan Tiansheng (潘添胜) and Li Yuansong (李元松) are two typical cases. Pan Tiansheng converted to *Fayi* Division of YGD before he joined the army in the 1970s. He had kept the sectarian identity more than twenty years before he established his own religious group, the Way of Wisdom (*Zhihui Famen* 智慧法门). This new religion provides a set of theory about spirit as well as the way of improving people's spirituality by means of meditation (Zheng 2000: 83-136). Li Yuansong was a former YGD sectarian of the Jichu division. In 1990, he established "Modern Zen" (*Xiandai chan* 现代禅), a very influential lay-Buddhist group which put much emphasis on the meditation of Zen (Zhang 2000; Xing 2001).

5.3.3 Yiguan Dao's Responses to the Challenge

Before the 1980s, YGD was equipped with a superior technique of spirit writing which enabled the sect to occupy a favored status when competing with other religious firms; and accordingly the sect "swallowed" many competitors (phoenix halls). But in the 1990s, the sect found itself in a quite disadvantaged situation: many followers were shifting to other meditation-centered groups. How could the sect keep its followers under the challenge of various meditation groups? According to my interviews and observation

in the field, I find that YGD at least is bringing the following innovative activities into practice. All of these activities could act as an alternative way of meditation.

The first is “focusing on the mystical gate” (*Shouxuan* 守玄). “The mysterious gate” (*Xuanguan*), “the pithy formulas” (*Koujue*), and “the hand sign” (*Hetong*) are “three treasures” (*Sanbao* 三宝) of YGD. In the past, three treasures are used to deal with the calamity. When one concentrates on the mysterious gate, let one’s hands in the gesture of “hand sign” and repeat the pithy formulas silently, according to YGD sectarians, and the gods would offer him/her help to survive the disaster. A popular story in the 1940s within YGD is that Chu Minyi, a high official in Wang Jingwei’s government, survived a crash because of three treasures (Lu 1998). Today, the sectarians emphasize that three treasures actually could be utilized in ordinary life as an alternative practice of meditation. Such activity was named as “focusing on the mystical gate” by the YGD.

What is “focusing on the mystical gate”? How could one practice this activity? Guo Mingyi, the chief leader of Huiguang division as well as an influential theorist of YGD, especially discusses these issues in his books. When answering “how to bring the mind back to the mystical gate”, Guo says,

The first step is to kowtow. When you are kowtowing, you should put all things aside, keep the hands in the gesture of “the hand sign” (*Hetong*) and just focus on the mystical gate through counting one, two, three, etc. These practices could easily help one concentrate on the mystical gate and bring the mind back. This is the primary step; it is also the most efficient and safe way for the beginner.

But kowtowing should be practiced in Buddha halls. Since we can not go to a Buddha hall and kowtow, we could use a more convenient way to cultivate---- that

is, “silently repeating the pithy formulas”... Imagine the mystical gate as a sound box through which the word of pithy formulas is articulately spoken one by one, one can concentrate on the mystical gate and avoid being bothered by the outside.

The third stage is to put your mind directly on the mystical gate. You’d better avoid concentrating on the mystical gate by means of sitting quietly. You should “*Shouxuan*” in your everyday life. When you drink tea, you should concentrate on drinking and then you would feel that the tea is fragrant and sweet. When you eat a piece of bread, you should concentrate on eating and then you taste its sweetness. You can remind yourself to bring the mind back to the mystical gate when you do every thing: speaking, talking, driving, etc. It would help you focus on the things you are doing, but also benefit your cultivation. This is the process of “*Shouxuan*”: from kowtowing to silently repeating the pithy formulas and finally to the stage of “directly *Shouxuan*” (Guo 1996: 55-7).

The above quotations are the general principles of “*Shouxuan*”. In the real practice of “*Shouxuan*”, the sectarians usually try to focus their attention on the point of mystical gate, keep the hands in the “*Hetong*” gesture, put the tip of tongue on the maxilla, swallow the saliva when necessary and repeat silently the words of “pithy formulas”. Apparently, it belongs to a kind of meditation. In fact, Guo argues that *Shouxuan* is the most efficient way towards meditation. In his book *Cultivation of Yiguan Dao*, Guo Mingyi (1996) explores the history of “*Shouxuan*” and holds that Buddha also involves in *Shouxuan*. According to Guo, people usually equalize “Zen meditation” (*Chanding* 禅定) to “quietly sitting” (*Dazuo* 打坐); this is not right. Sitting quietly is just one way of

achieving the status of meditation. There is other ways of meditation among which *Shouxuan* is the best. Thus, Guo distinguishes “quietly sitting” from “Zen meditation” and suggests that YGD prohibit the former but permit the latter. These explanations legitimate the practice of Zen meditation within YGD and *Shouxuan* is widely practiced by the sectarians. Today, four main divisions of YGD, namely *Fayi*, *Baoguang*, *Jichu* and *Xingyi*, encourage their followers to “*Shouxuan*” and provide special courses to teach how to “*Shouxuan*”.

5.4 Discussions and Conclusions

This chapter explores the fluctuation of religious experiences within Yiguan Dao from a historical perspective, probing the background against which such fluctuation occurred. Let me summarize the story before drawing some conclusions.

Under the leadership of Wang Jueyi, YGD was reluctant to involve in both spirit writing and meditation. Facing the popularity of spirit writing in the 1930s, however, Zhang Tianran broke the sect’s tradition, updated the technique of spirit writing and brought “Xiantian Ji” into practice. What’s more, Zhang produced a set of theories to legitimate the activity. History proved that Zhang’s innovation was very successful in recruiting members and motivating social resources when it competed with other religious firm. But with the process of institutionalization, spirit writing could also act as a revolutionary force which threatens the existing structure. To prevent the emergence of

potential challengers, the mainstream of YGD ceased to receive new revelations by means of spirit writing.

The shift of YGD's attitude towards meditation is also interesting. The sect formerly forbade its followers to involve in the activity of meditation which is regarded as a time-waste by YGD. But the emergence of various meditation groups in the past two decades threatened the development of YGD: many YGD sectarians turned to these meditation-centered groups. To keep its followers, the sect updates its services and introduces "*Shouxuan*", a kind of meditation, into the practice. Of course, such a service is legitimated by new theories which derive from YGD's traditional doctrines.

From the above stories, we can learn the following points.

First, religious experience is quite useful in motivating resources. And thus it could enable a new religion to develop quickly. As a result, new religions are active in the pursuit of religious experience. Second, religious experience is also a source of religious schisms. As Young (1997) predicts, "religious organizations which encourage the pursuit of religious experience will ... experience higher rates of sect formation" (Young 1997: 143). Third, since religious experience is helpful to motivate resources and recruit neophytes, new religions usually encourage the occurrence of religious experience. Fourth, since religious experience is a source of schisms, institutionalized religions tend to control religious experience. Finally, religious suppliers appear to compete to provide "religious experiences" which maximize their appeal to members and potential adherents. At the same time, they try to control these experiences so that they can only be properly pursued and understood (i.e. theologically) within the group. They must control these experiences to prevent innovations which could threaten the group's leadership and

structure. In this sense, religious experience, like other religious product, is also influenced by market force more or less: competition forces religious firms to encourage or forbid some categories of religious experience. The analyses of YGD's evolving positions on spirit writing and meditation provide a very good illustration of those processes.

CHAPTER 6

DOCTRINAL TRANSFORMATION WITHIN YIGUAN DAO

The religious economy model argues that “religious groups sustain organizational vitality by preserving core teachings and promoting adaptive innovations” (Finke 2004: 19). Adaptive innovations of teaching, which are vital for religious firms to accommodate to new cultures and contexts, usually result in the tendencies of sect-to-church or church-to-sect. This chapter extends this theory theoretically and empirically by analyzing how YGD accommodates its teachings to the changing circumstances, especially after it gained its legal status in 1987.

This chapter includes four parts. Part 1 offers a brief literature review about the tendencies of sect-to-church and church-to-sect. Part 2 proposes that the sect-to-church tendency was absent in imperial China; persecution by central governments induced Chinese sectarian movements to be organizationally unstable, intellectually underdeveloped, and doctrinally syncretic. Part 3 delineates the evolutionary trends of YGD in the past decades, analyzing how YGD updates its teachings to prevent schisms, to be more intellectually sophisticated and to be more syncretic. The fourth part is a theoretical discussion which proposes that doctrinal innovations do not necessarily breed the sect-to-church tendency and that religious group dynamics can produce other outcomes in Chinese societies.

6.1 The Sect-to-Church Tendency

The evolution of religious organizations in Christian society has been extensively explored (e.g. Weber 1985; Yinger 1970; Beckford 1973; Stark and Finke 2000). Ernst Troeltsch (1981) identifies two kinds of religious groups. A church is a religious organization that accepts the secular order. A sect, on the other hand, originates in response to protest against the social environment in which it exists. “Put another way, the orientation of churches is more worldly and less otherworldly, while sects reverse the emphasis.” (Stark and Finke, 2000: 142). Niebuhr (1929) gives the static sect-church typology a dynamic nature through pointing out that a sect would reconcile itself to prevailing circumstances and become more church-like sooner or later. With change in socio-economic status of the membership, Niebuhr observed, a revolutionary sect is likely to develop into an accommodating church. When sects eventually turn into churches, on the other hand, dissident members who prefer a higher-tension religion would break away and found a new sect. Thus, the sect-to-church process was an endless cycle of a repeated birth, transformation, and rebirth of sect movements.

Stark and Finke (2000, 2001) find that under certain conditions religious organizations will shift in the direction of higher tension with their environment. In other words, besides the tendency of sect-to-church, there exist church-to-sect movements. This means that religious bodies can freely choose the degree of tension and move along the continuum from rejection to acceptance of the environment. In sum, there is a tendency for religious groups to undergo a gradual process of modification in organization and ideology towards either more sect-like or more churchlike.

6. 2 Group Dynamics of Chinese Traditional Sects

The above observations are developed mainly against the background of Western religious tradition. Are these observations applicable to Chinese sectarian movements? Before answering this question, I'd like to discuss the regulatory influence of religious suppression by imperial China.

Overmyer has pointed out that “a divided political situation made possible the secular recognition and support which is vital to the establishment of a denomination” (Overmyer 1976: 63). The absence of a powerful central state in Europe and Japan facilitated the emergences of “revolutionary” sects, in that it reduced the risk of being “heterodox”. The existence of competitive secular forces usually increases the possibility of dissenting sects to get a secular recognition. For example, “Luther could gain the support of Philip of Hesse, while Shinran’s Jodo sect could establish its own town at Osaka and enjoy the devout favoritism of Ieyasu, the founder of the Yokugawa shogunate” (Overmyer 1976: 63). However, Chinese sectarian movements had few opportunities to gain a secular recognition. China had been dominated by a strong central power over long periods of time, prohibiting the existence of sectarian movements. As a result, Chinese sectarians could hardly find any refuges in imperial Chinese regimes because competitive political forces were absent in most of China’s history. Facing the threat of being exiled or killed, they had no choice but to try their best to keep secret.

The sectarian persecution, which was implemented by a powerful central state, influenced the long-term development of Chinese sectarian movements in the following ways. First, persecution facilitated sectarian schisms and thus impeded the formation of

church structure. One salient characteristic of Chinese sectarian movements is their frequent splitting. As Seiwert observes, “the majority of the countless sectarian groups of the Ming and Qing probably came into being through separation from existing organizations, that is, schisms” (Seiwert 2003: 451). Though many factors, such as geographical distance and master-disciple networks, contributed to the frequent separations, persecution played an important role in promoting such schisms (Seiwert 2003: 451-454). In China, “the death of a sect founder seems to have almost regularly engendered schismatic tendencies as the major disciples each had their own following” (Seiwert 2003: 451-452). Persecution accelerated the tendency of schisms through eliminating the sectarian leadership, a central measure adopted by imperial China (Overmyer 1976). This measure weakened the central organizations and made communication between dispersed communities difficult. Therefore, “the segmentation of sectarian movements into smaller units was a natural outcome” (Seiwert 2003: 454).

Second, suppression delayed the intellectual development of Chinese sectarian movements. While the recognized public status led to the result that “both the European and Japanese reformations were led and sustained by an educated professional clergy,” the absence of secular recognition led to the result that Chinese sects lacked an independent professional priesthood (Overmyer 1976: 64). Overmyer continues,

While for a time Luther was forced to hide in Wartburg castle, and Shinran was exiled to Echigo, yet both returned to a political favor from which their movements were thenceforth never completely dislodged. Their successors were trained leaders, given a special status by their communions to consciously carry on a unified theological and cultic tradition. In China, by contrast, while ordained monks were

involved in the founding of such sects as the White Lotus,..... yet their role was illegal, and they were rejected by both government and the celibate Sangha. This double rejection meant that their chief available base was the peasants and other folk at the bottom of the social system, and thus what organizing and training they did was limited by the poverty and lack of education of the people. ... Thus, the Chinese sects of necessity turned to a variety of “folk intellectuals” for guidance. (Overmyer 1976: 64)

Though these “folk intellectuals” were devoutly religious, they often had a vague understanding of intellectual tradition. “This relative absence of educated leadership had incalculable significance for Chinese Religious and cultural history” (Overmyer 1976: 65). Chinese sectarian movements “lacked thorough-going intellectual formulation and that dissenting religious ideas rarely had the chance to find legitimate social expression” (Overmyer 1976: 65). Sectarian teachings may be attractive to the mass who are accustomed to the concrete images of mythological narratives, but for the educated, these teachings are coarse and lack abstract explanations. Worse still, there is a tendency of anti-intellectualism in Chinese sectarian movements, as I will discuss in detail in part 3. Chinese sects were intellectually decapitated because of state suppression.

Thirdly, suppression promoted the syncretic tendency of Chinese sects. Due to persecution, Chinese sectarians were usually guided by folk intellectuals most of whom were previously adherents of Chinese popular religion. Since Chinese popular religion has been highly syncretic from at least the Song dynasty, Chinese sects also became very syncretic, offering everything available in the general popular religion and adding to it a

new orientation for faith. In short, “as such folk leadership took a more active role, the sects became more syncretic” (Overmyer 1976: 64).

It is time to discuss whether the sect-church tendency is applicable to Chinese religious firms now. The first question is that in what sense scholars use the term “sect” to refer to the relevant Chinese religious groups. In fact, some scholars (ter Haar 1992; Dean 1999) think that the word “sect” is inapplicable to Chinese society because it contains or implies notions of protest and resistance. Ter Haar holds that “the term ‘sect’ in the corresponding field of Chinese religion is commonly used for any group to which ‘heterodox’ beliefs are ascribed, with complete disregard for its degree of institutionalization or its religious contents” (ter Haar 1992: 12). Considering this, they think that alternative terms such as “religious group”, “teachings” or “branch” are more value-free and more appropriate in describing so-called Chinese “heterodox” religious groups. Even those (e.g. Overmyer) who incline to using the term “sect” to describe Chinese dissenting religious groups are very cautious about the notion of rejection derived from Christian society. To reform the term sect to be a universal one, Overmyer purposely ignores some factors of the term sect which he thinks are inapplicable to Chinese society, such as “exclusiveness and detachment” and the notion of rejection (Overmyer 1976: 62). Chinese sects do not typically reject the outside society or the mainstream cultures. Instead, they are highly syncretic and stress that they include all of the good elements of the dominant culture and religions. As Jordan and Overmyer argue,

The something that is central to the appeal of these sects is this: a member can participate simultaneously in “all” that he has come to learn is morally and

cosmologically “best” in Chinese civilization, but in which he has little other institutional support for participation (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 10).

Due to the syncretic nature of Chinese sects, they self-consciously embrace and incorporate, rather than reject, the mainstream cultures. Researches based on fieldworks (DeGroot 1903; Li 1948; Jordan and Overmyer 1986; Song 1983, 1995; Dean 1999) have also testified that Chinese sects accommodate to the surrounding society to a considerable degree. So, if the term “sect” refers to religious firms which prefer high tension with the surroundings, as the religious economy theorists do, the concept “sect” is not applicable in Chinese society. Moreover, “incipient ‘denominational’ or ‘church’ structures were never allowed to develop to their full potential because of official hostility, an opposition present even during periods of political disunion” (Overmyer 1976: 62). Indeed, in imperial China, no suppressed sect ever gained a public recognition. This means that both the sect and the church, in the sense in which those terms are used in Christian society, had never occurred in Chinese society, let alone the sect-to-church tendency. Schism was the dominant internal dynamic of Chinese sectarian movements in imperial China where sects were ruthlessly persecuted. What are the new tendencies of Chinese sects when they operate in a deregulated religious market? The development of YGD after 1987 offers us a good opportunity to probe this question and I will explore this question in the following sections.

6.3 Doctrinal Innovation and Group Dynamics of Yiguan Dao

6.3.1 Preventing Schisms through Doctrinal Innovation

Stark and Finke hold that doctrine plays an important role in sustaining the organizational vitality of religions, because doctrine defines a legitimate basis of leadership through determining who may lead, how leadership is obtained, what powers are granted to leaders and what sanctions leaders may impose (Stark and Finke 2000: 34).

In YGD, the theory of “the Mandate of Heaven” (*Tianming*) is vital to legitimate the leadership. As the fundamental theory of the Chinese state and governmental authority in China, the Mandate of Heaven theory occurred in the early Zhou period and was widely accepted by the common people (Overmyer 1976: 147). The theory holds that rulers are predetermined and ordained by Heaven, the supreme deity. However, when the ruler fails to bring about the welfare of his subjects, Heaven chooses another ruler to revolt and displace him. Thus, the succession of dynastic power in China is usually “decided by war and bloodshed” (Creel 1937: 367) and Heaven always stands at the side of winners to “force popular acceptance of the new leaders” (Yang 1961: 132).

YGD borrowed the Mandate of Heaven concept to support the Heaven-ordained nature of its Patriarchs, arguing that the Patriarchs are sent and ordained by the Mother to offer salvation. Thus Patriarchs, who receive the decree of the Mother, are equipped with “the Mandate of Heaven”. After they died, they would return to Heaven to report their salvation work and return the “holy decree” to the Mother. Two points concerning the Mandate of Heaven are emphasized by the sect. One is that “the Mandate of Heaven” is believed to be the key to the valid salvation. YGD holds that only “the Enlightening

Master with the Celestial Mandate (*Tianming Mingshi* 天命明师)” can open the mysterious gate of people. When an YGD sectarian is dying, according to the sect, the spirit will go through the opened mysterious gate to the *Litian* and thus the dead body remains flexible and does not get rigid. In this sense, the YGD sectarians stress that “a point at the mysterious gate by the enlightening Master is better than reading through all Sutra and Classics [to get the salvation]” (*du-puo qianjing wandian, bu-ru mingshi yizhi* 读破千经万典，不如明师一指). Another point is that “the Mandate of Heaven” is often updated. When one Patriarch dies, his Celestial Mandate is out of time; accordingly, the salvation by him is invalid. Valid salvation can only be provided by the new Patriarch who is equipped with the latest Celestial Mandate. So, “the Mandate of Heaven” can be classified into two categories: the false and the genuine. The YGD sectarians emphasize that the sect holds “the true Dao, the true principle and the true Celestial Mandate” (*Dao-zhen, Li-zhen, Tianming-zhen* 道真，理真，天命真). In the field, I was told that most of YGD believers’ dead bodies are not stiff. The so-called soft bodies of YGD sectarians are regarded as the best testimonies of the true Celestial Mandate which is held by YGD, according to the sectarians.

YGD puts much emphasis on the importance of “Celestial Mandate”, but it offers a vague idea about who is eligible to run for the position of Patriarch, how the Patriarchs receive the “Mandate” from the Mother and how the succession of “Celestial Mandate” is determined. Such mysteries were settled by spirit writings. Indeed, by Wang Jueyi’s time it had already become an established practice for YGD to choose new patriarchs by means of spirit-writing (Clart 1997). But spirit-writing is not a dependable and undisputable way to choose the leadership; rather, it facilitates

schisms, as chapter 5 has discussed.

In YGD's history, the death of a sectarian leader is usually followed by further religious separations. Actually, YGD's history is a history of splits, and the splits are still in process. The sect per se is a result of religious separation, developing from a small section of Xian-tian Dao. After Lu Zhongyi died the sect soon split into at least four divisions (Lu 1998). These divisions developed independently and the leaders of these divisions all claimed that they received the "Mandate of Heaven". All of them made use of spirit writings to verify their own Celestial Mandates and reject others'. It seems that Zhang Tianran finally won the competition of Mandate partly because his effective missionary performance became the justification of his Mandate of Heaven. With the death of Zhang Tianran, further schisms took place and the sect broke into two main sections: the Mistress Section (*Shimu pai*) and the Committee of Righteousness (*Zheng-yi Fudao hui* 正义辅导会). The former section argues that Zhang and Sun share the position of the eighteenth Patriarch and commonly receive "Mandate of Heaven" (Fu 1999; Mu 2002: 53-58). The latter is also called the Senior Disciple Section (*Shi-xiong pai*) or the Master Section (*Shi-zhu Pai* 师尊派) by some scholars (e.g. Song), but the followers of this section do not like these two titles which they think stigmatize them. They prefer to the name of Righteousness Committee which means that they represent the "righteousness" of YGD. This section insists that Madam Sun is not the eighteenth Patriarch because the twenty-fifth question of YWJD has clearly claimed that no one except Zhang Tianran receives the Mandate of Heaven and Zhang's Mandate will last ten thousand and eight hundred years (Zhang 1991, 1992a, 1992b). So, Ms. Sun does not share the position of Patriarch or the Mandate of

Heaven.

The Mistress Section is more successful than the Righteousness Section in Taiwan. Today, more than ninety percent of YGD followers belong to the Mistress Section and regard Madam Sun as the Patriarch with Celestial Mandate (Zhou, Wang and Lin 1997). But when Madam Sun died in 1975, many people claimed that they were the new Patriarch holding the latest Celestial Mandate, as chapter 4 has revealed. These so-called new patriarchs try their best to attract followers from other sub-sects. For example, Wang Haode, a man who viewed himself as “the representative of Madam Sun” (*Shimu Daibiao*), successfully converted a large number of adherents of the *Baoguang Jiande* division in the 1980s. Accordingly, the mainstream of YGD regards these so-called new patriarchs as heterodox. Partly due to the idea of succession of Celestial Mandate, schisms frequently occurred within YGD.

In order to prevent further schisms, YGD has been trying to reinterpret the Mandate of Heaven theory since the 1980s. The central point of reinterpretation is to stress that Zhang and Sun are the last Patriarch and there will be no new Patriarchs. The theology of Yin-yang and the Five Elements (*Yinyang wuhang* 阴阳五行) are invoked by the sectarians to provide a mystical explanation for this argument. When answering if there will be a new Patriarch, Guo comments that:

The Patriarch Zhang and the Mistress Sun share the Mandate of Heaven as the eighteenth Patriarch of the White Sun period. If we take the Patriarchs in both the Green Sun period and the Red Sun period into account, we can find that Zhang and Sun are just the sixty-fourth Patriarch. According to Yijing, ---, Dao will “return to

the origin” (*Shouyuan* 收元) when it reaches the sixty-fourth *Gua* (divinatory symbol 卦). All things will return to *Taiji*, the primary status of Dao. So Patriarch Zhang and the Mistress Sun are the last Patriarch; there will be no new Patriarchs. Now it is the best time and the last opportunity to universally save people and bring them to return to their origins. If new Patriarchs constantly occur, the Primary Spirits (*Yuanling* 原灵) will totally depend on Patriarchs and fail to shoulder their own missions and tasks. The last salvation depends on people’s own reflection and repentance according to the truth. Therefore, there is no new Patriarch after the Master and the Mistress. Those who claim to be Patriarchs are to test people whether they follow the truth to cultivate, or depend on others. (Guo 1997: 78)

From the above quotation, we can see that the succession of Patriarch is thought to be predetermined by the rotation of the Five Elements. Since a circle is ended when the number reaches sixty-four, and since there have been sixty-four generations of Patriarchs, according to Guo, the age of Patriarchs is over. Moreover, Guo stresses that today it enters the age of ordinary people and everyone shares the Mandate of Heaven. Senior masters’ Celestial Mandate is to lead and expand the Dao communities; initiators’ Mandate is to preside over the ritual of initiation, point the mysterious gate and offer three treasures; masters of Buddha hall hold the Mandate of keeping the Buddha hall in good order and taking care of other Dao relatives; lecturers’ Mandate is to preach teachings, etc. The Mandate of Heaven is not the authority enjoyed by a few persons, but the true-self people are inherited from Heaven. It is a popular but wrong idea that Senior masters and initiators represent Heaven. Neither is it right to obey every word of them.

Rather, the sectarians should follow the truth revealed by the previous Patriarchs. For ordinary people, it is their Mandate to make full use of their potential abilities endowed by Heaven to realize the true-self by means of self-reflection (Guo 1997: 131). The theme that people should direct their attention to self-reflection and morality rather than the mysterious function of Celestial Mandate also appears in spirit writings, as the following spirit writings show.

You should not depend on the concrete images but follow the truth. Borrowing bodies and spirit writing are after all a convenient means. Later many people will claim that they hold the Mandate of Heaven and offer the last salvation. They can produce wonderful spirit writings according to which they will purport to be an incarnation of some Buddha. This is a big test. How can you do when you meet the test (*Kao*)? The answer is: be yourselves and not follow them like sheep. (Words from the Teacher (the fifth volume): Understanding the Spirit Possession and its relationship with the truth)

If you obey the will of Mother, respect the Patriarchs and do not regard yourself as the new Patriarch, the Mandate of Heaven of every division is valid. After all, the Mandate of Heaven is on the base of your morality and your everyday cultivation. (One hundred and one kind teachings by Master Zhang: the ninety-eighth teaching)

This is what YGD is doing: on the one hand, the sect keeps the Mandate of Heaven theory, one of its core teachings, and emphasizes only YGD is equipped with the latest Celestial Mandate; on the other hand, the sect discards the idea that the

Mandate of Heaven will be renewed again and insists that no new Patriarch will occur. All of these endeavors are to sustain the organizational vitality and avoid further schisms.

But another question arises when the sect rejects the emergence of new patriarchs. The Mandate of Heaven always relates to the appointment of initiators: only the Patriarch owns the Mandate and can appoint initiators who act as representatives of the Celestial Mandate. During the period of Zhang Tianran, all initiators were appointed by Zhang himself. But when missionaries spread Dao in a distant place, they could apply for a number of “Celestial Mandates” to appoint initiators first and then reported to Zhang. Most of senior initiators on Taiwan coming from mainland China followed this routine; they applied for a quota of Celestial Mandate; and they could freely appoint initiators within the quota. However, there are no new quotas which can be applied after Zhang and Sun died. At the same time, the quota is limited. What can the sectarians do after they use up the quota?

Within the main stream of YGD, namely the divisions joining in the WITH, there are different understandings towards this question. For most of the YGD divisions, the number of initiators is limited; “when one initiator dies, one quota as the representative of Celestial Mandate is used up” (*Siyige, Shaoyige* 死一个, 少一个). So the quota promises to be used up in future. When the quota is over, some divisions hold that they can apply for new quotas from “the committee in charge of Celestial Mandate” (*Tianming Baoguan Weiyuanhui* 天命保管委员会) which was established by Madam Sun in Hong Kong in the early 1950s before she came to Taiwan. For example, the *Baoguang Jiande* division once applied for hundreds of Celestial Mandates from this committee in the

1980s. But the *Fayi* division has a different understanding towards this issue, holding that Madam Sun permits this division to appoint initiators freely. This means that the number of initiator in *Fayi* division is not limited.

The diverse understandings towards the Mandate of Heaven theory breed conflicts. In practice, the initiators usually regard themselves as the real representative of Celestial Mandate even within the mainstream of YGD. In “one hundred and one kind teachings by Master Zhang” (*101tiao shizun cixun* 101 条师尊慈训), a very popular spirit writing within the sect, Patriarch Zhang criticizes that:

Some initiators insist on pointing the Mysterious Gate again when other divisions’ believers turn to them, claiming that the previous ritual of initiation is invalid even if the ritual is presided by other initiators of the same division. I follow the Mother’s decree to save the people, with the treasureable Mandate of Heaven. All of you are my representatives. Is it ridiculous that you are superior to others? Are your figures made by gold while others’ figures are by iron? (one hundred and one kind teachings by Master Zhang: the ninety-eighth teaching)

The above quotation suggests initiators usually interpret the Mandate of Heaven in favor of their own interests. Some leaders of YGD realized that this was a problem which the sect must resolve, so they began to promote the discussion about this issue in the early 1990s. In the field, I once interviewed such a sectarian leader. He told me that, logically, there were two ways to resolve the problem of the quota of Celestial Mandate. One is not to emphasize the Mandate of Heaven and never transmit the Mandate, because the Mandate of Heaven is over. This means that the ritual of pointing the Dao will not be

held any more. But it does not influence the later cultivation. According to him, religion will lose something in the process of development; that is not a problem. Especially, he mentions that Buddhists also secretly transmitted Mind dharma before but now there is no such secret ritual in Buddhism. Cultivation depends on self-reflection and the Heaven is in this world, he stresses. Besides this choice, there is still another one which is more active: all senior leaders collectively make a decision about the issue of Mandate of Heaven. In practice, the sect chooses this way and the WITH has arranged a special meeting to discuss the Mandate of Heaven. Most of the senior leaders of YGD divisions attended the meeting and made a decision that the quota of Celestial Mandate can be circularly used. When one initiator dies, his/her position as the representative of Celestial Mandate will be left to others. This is called “one initiator dies, one new initiator can be appointed” (*Siyige, buyige* 死一个, 补一个) and is different from the previous understanding that “one initiator dies, one quota is used up”. This common understanding ends the chaos with regard to the debate of Mandate of Heaven more or less. But further endeavors are needed. According to a sectarian leader who plays an active role in promoting the discussion of Mandate of Heaven issue, many problems with respect to this issue still remain: “Is it necessary to set a limitation about the number of initiators? If the Dao business is very successful, what’s the significance of such limitation? Can that limitation be more flexible and reflect the reality? What’s the standard of the qualification of initiator? Can the title of initiator be withdrawn if one is not eligible?” These questions need further discussions and the conference of Seniors (*qianren huiyi* 前人会议) will promote such discussions, the informant tells me that.

The Mandate of Heaven theory plays a vital role in defining the succession of leadership of YGD. But the idea that Celestial Mandate is updated frequently always results in schisms. In order to prevent further schisms, the sectarians choose to reinterpret the Mandate of Heaven theory. Though the sectarians still argue that YGD owns the latest Mandate of Heaven, they reject the idea that such Mandate will be renewed again. They do not emphasize the mysterious function of Celestial Mandate any more; rather, they direct much importance to self-cultivation and morality. At the same time, the YGD sectarians are active in promoting the common understandings on the Mandate of Heaven theory. The influences of such endeavors, however, are to be observed in future researches. Up to now, the doctrines of YGD which define the succession of leadership are still poor and there is no definite understanding about how to choose its leaders. I will not be surprised if further schisms occur within YGD in future.

6.3.2 Discarding Rubbishes and Becoming More Intellectually Sophisticated

Due to the constant persecution by imperial states, Chinese sectarian movements lacked a full-fledged intellectual leadership, as part 2 has discussed. Worse still, there existed an anti-intellectual inclination within Chinese sects more or less. As a successor of Chinese traditional sects, YGD also depreciates the importance of intellectual exploration. In YWJD, Zhang Tianran writes that:

The purpose of studying Sutra and Classics is to gain the [Mind] dharma. Since you have gained the dharma, it does not matter if you do not read any books. ... In

addition, Buddhist sutras have five thousand four hundred and eighty scrolls. This means that even if you read one scroll everyday, it will take you fifteen years to read through all of these sutras. Time elapses quickly. How can you spend so much time in reading sutra? (Zhang 1937a: 93)

Such attitude towards intellectual tradition is still held by the YGD sectarians today, including some important YGD intellectuals. Guo Mingyi holds that “intellectual exploration is not a necessary process of cultivation, especially for YGD believers” because the intellectual growth usually breeds pride (Guo 1990: 38). During the fieldwork, I once had a talk with a sectarian intellectual who is very acquainted with the development of YGD and Indian Buddhism. He told me that Indian Buddhism directed too much attention to intellectual exploration so that it later declined in India. Thus, YGD should not follow the same old disastrous road, from his perspective.

In the field, I once attended a course held by the sect. During discussion, I asked: “according to the *Daode Jing*, Dao is an impersonalized force, invisible and intangible, but the Mother worshiped by Yiguan Dao is a personalized god. So, what is the difference between them?” The female initiator who conducted the course commented that:

You can not think that the Dao mentioned in the *Daode Jing* is equal to the Mother of Yiguan Dao, since they are different in essence. Of course, it is natural for you, an intellectual who study religion, to make such a comparison. But for us, cultivators of Dao, the comparison is without significance. We do not care whether it should be named as Dao, or *Mingming Shangdi*, or the Eternal Venerable Mother,

or Sakyamuni. Why don't we care? We do not need so-called dialectic thinking. We do not need it. We do not need to do such things. To tell the truth, sometimes I wonder whether such knowledge is helpful for us to cultivate the Dao. I think it is not. (Several people laughed, and the Initiator paused for a few seconds again.) Then what is most important to our cultivation? I think the followings are important. All pious believers, including Dao relatives of Yiguan Dao, would not explore their faith from the philosophical perspective, or point out the contradiction of the scripture. Some Dao relatives criticize that the Lineage of Dao (*Dao tong*, 道统) is questionable and illogical. Sometimes, when I meet such people, I usually ask them: Why do you want to understand it? Do you resist cultivating the Dao until you understand it? Will you not cultivate the Dao until it [the Lineage] becomes logical? Will you become more faithful after you understand these questions? I don't think so. ... I often tell students that we are studying the sutra and classics just to follow the vogue. People in other religions read the classics, so we YGD sectarians read them, too. In fact, we need not read those books. The classics are unimportant to us. What we should do is just to use the Three Treasures in our everyday life. That is the most important.

The above comments strengthen my impression that YGD does not attach importance to the intellectual development of their faith. Indeed, YGD puts too much emphasis on the mysterious function of "Celestial Mandate" and "Mind dharma". Meanwhile, the sect ignores intellectual activities to a large degree. The anti-intellectualism of YGD is clearly and completely expressed by the saying that "a point on

the mysterious gate by the Enlightening Master is better than reading through all Sutra and Classics.”

Partly due to the rejection of intellectual tradition, YGD turns to the folk culture. The sectarians used to interpret the teachings by means of fairy tales. For example, when they explain the process of spirits returning to the Principal Heaven, they describe that spirits, who are dressed in “god’s clothes and shoes” just like the people in Chinese drama, will pass three gates, nine doors and finally the South Heaven Door (Nantian Men). Heaven soldiers and Heaven generals are often invoked by the sectarians to appeal to the audiences. In sum, the whole process is described as drama-like (Yang 1997: 86). Another example is related to the understanding of three periods. The YGD sectarians argue that “brides wore red clothes when Sakyamuni Buddha was in charge of the Red Sun Period. Now brides wear white clothes in the wedding ceremonies. It is proved that today is in the White Sun Period and the doomsday is coming.” It sounds ridiculous to intellectuals but reasonable to the masses without good educations.

The above two instances indicate that, in the early decades when YGD spread in Taiwan, most of YGD teachings were interpreted in a highly personified style to appeal to audiences most of whom were indifferent to intellectual exploration. Accordingly, the YGD doctrines at that time were full of concrete images and in a low level of abstractness and intellectual elaboration. In addition, there are many mistakes in YGD teachings. For example, the YGD sectarians held that the Heavenly Mantra of Green Sun period is four Chinese words: *wu-liang-shou-fo* (无量寿佛); in the Red Sun period, the Heavenly Mantra is six Chinese words: *nan-wu-a-mi-tuo-fo* (南无阿弥陀佛); now, in the White Sun period, the Mantra is “the true sutra with five words” (*wuzi zhenjing* 五字真经).

Actually, both the term “*wu-liang-shou-fo*” and the term “*nan-wu-a-mi-tuo-fo*” refer to the Amitabha Buddha; the former is a free translation while the later is a transliteration. For Buddhists, this is an unforgivable mistake to stress the difference of the two terms, but YGD regarded the difference of the two terms as the key to salvation. Because of such mistakes, Buddhists have published a couple of pamphlets to criticize that YGD always distorts the Buddhist doctrines.

Within the past decades, more sectarians who receive their belief from their parents could get a higher education when the Taiwan society developed. These educated sectarians tend to be unsatisfied with the YGD teachings which are intellectually underdeveloped. Zheng Zhiming is a good example. Zheng became an YGD follower when he was still in high school (around 1973). But the anti-intellectual inclination of YGD finally drove him to leave the sect. He writes that:

YGD is very attractive, but why are its doctrines so coarse? The sectarians always read a limited number of pamphlets. They emphasize the enlightenment of true-self but neglect the details. Of course, YGD has a theory to interpret this shortcoming, arguing that Dao is not necessarily interpreted by means of words; it can be understood by intuition. They often take the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, as an example. Huineng has achieved the highest enlightenment though he is an illiterate. This interpretation is undoubtedly true. But only people with a great wisdom are able to achieve the highest enlightenment status. Today, few ordinary people hold such wisdoms. What’s more, I am an intellectual; I am seeking not only spiritual accomplishment but also intellectual explanations. I want to get an abstract

“principle” which can link my religious experiences and my intellectual understandings. When my knowledge can not logically explain my religious experiences, I expect to improve my knowledge. (Zheng 1989: 13)

Due to the coarseness of YGD teachings, Zheng did not stay in the sect any longer. Zheng is not an isolated example; many talented YGD believers later shifted to other religious traditions because they can not intellectually resolve their problems (Song 2002). In the field, I once had a formal meeting with Mr. Li Yuansong. Mr. Li is the founder of “modern Zen”, one of most influential Buddhist sect in Taiwan. When I asked him why he left Yiguan Dao and turned to Buddhism, Li told me that when he was young, he had a lot of questions, but he can not get the answers because the senior sectarians discouraged him to probe them. As a result, he had to teach himself and tried to find answers from Buddhist sutra; gradually, he was absorbed by Buddhism and established the Modern Zen. The coarse teachings of YGD gradually became a roadblock to sustaining and retaining educated members.

Many YGD intellectuals apparently know the above problem and try to resolve the problem. For example, Lin Jinsheng, an influential intellectual of the *Baoguang Jiande* division, holds that it is time to filter out the teachings which are out of date. He even uses “classifying rubbishes” to refer to the work of doctrinal transformation (Yang 1997: 90). Since some of the traditional teachings are out of date; Lin argues, YGD must discard these “rubbishes” because they become a roadblock to attracting and sustaining followers. At the same time, Lin stressed that doctrinal transformation should be gradually performed. In fact, since the 1980s, some intellectual sectarians have been

reinterpreting YGD teachings to accommodate the changing surroundings. Li Yuzhu (1988) systematically offers new explanations of YGD teachings and rituals from the perspective of neo-Confucianism. Guo Mingyi (1992), an initiator who is an expert in the field of Chan Buddhists research, produces a couple of popular books which are intellectually sophisticated and highly readable. In addition to Li and Guo who enjoy an inter-divisional influence, there are many other young educated sectarians who are active in promoting doctrinal innovations. Their books are welcomed by young educated sectarians (Yang 1997).

In the process of doctrinal transformation, the sect throws away some “rubbishes”. For example, the explanation about the difference of the term “*wu-liang-shou-fo*” and the term “*nan-wu-a-mi-tuo-fo*”, which is absolutely wrong, is officially rejected by the Headquarters of Yiguan Dao. The sect also gives up the teachings which result in criticisms by other religious systems. For example, some religions, including Buddhism and Christianity, criticize that Yiguan Dao makes use of severe oaths to terrify believers. From their perspective, “these oaths seriously influence believers’ life, preventing believers to leave Yiguan Dao even when they find that the sect is not an ideal faith” (Ma and Liu 1993: 16). In response to such criticism, YGD reformed the contents of the oath and cancelled the punishment of thunder-killing¹.

While the sectarians get rid of some “rubbishes,” they keep the core teachings by emphasizing that parts of its teachings are unalterable. Guo Mingyi argues that the ritual of pointing Dao, the three treasures and the ten great vows are unalterable truths of YGD.

¹ Now the detailed oath is that “after we attain the Three Treasures, we promise not tell them to any other person. The Three Treasures can only be transmitted through authorized masters in front of God. If we reveal them to any person, they become invalid to the person, and we also defy the Heavenly Decree”. This is from <http://www.fecdcm.org/english/IntroTao>.

These are the core of YGD teachings and can not be altered (Guo 1997: 138). At the same time, the sectarians try to reinterpret these core teachings. After reinterpretation, the teachings become more reasonable and more attractive to the educated followers.

Consequently, these reinterpreted teachings are very helpful for the sect to recruit and sustain young educated followers (Yang 1997: 92).

6.3.3 Becoming More Syncretic

As one of the most salient characteristics of Chinese sectarian movements, syncretism has been extensively discussed (e.g. Yang 1961; Overmyer 1976; Berling 1980; Jordan and Overmyer 1986). Berling has argued that syncretism and sectarianism are not logically incompatible; rather, they are commonly united in China. Jordan and Overmyer go further, holding that what is unique in the syncretism of Chinese sects is its self-conscious nature. They argue,

The word “syncretism,” when applied to this tradition, refers to the self-conscious creation of a new religious system out of materials that are seen as separate traditions. There is no blurring of sources, and no attempt to elevate one contributing font above another, but a pride in their separateness, and a strong sense of using them as raw materials to create something distinctive, new, and greater than the sum of its parts. At the same time that sectarians claim to be creating something new, they also claim that it is primordial, a restoration of the “true” unity underlying the component traditions. The sect itself is new; the sectarian

conception is seen as being the ancient whole of which the contributing traditions are but parts. (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 10)

Indeed, syncretism seems to act as the engineering force which generates religious innovations in China: Chinese sectarians are always ready to create “a new religious system out of materials that are seen as separate traditions” (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 10). YGD is not exceptional. “Incorporating three religions (Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) in one system” is one of its central teachings, as I have argued in chapter 1. Confucian ethic and rituals, Taoist cultivation and Buddhist commandments are especially stressed by the sect in practice. Now the sect goes further and extends its integrative ambition to Christianity and Islam, claiming to syncretize five religions. Guo Mingyi, an influential intellectual of YGD, writes that:

In the Tang dynasty, Buddhism incorporated Confucian teachings and thus a new tradition syncretizing three teachings emerged. That is Chan Buddhism, an indigenized Chinese Buddhism. Today, western teachings are spreading to the east; Chinese culture is showing its amazing ability of synthesizing the western culture. Against this background, YGD today not only studies and incorporates teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, but also draws salutary elements from such western religions as Christianity and Islam. YGD are syncretizing the doctrines of these five great religions. This syncretic force promises to create a new world religion which will be even more influential than the Chan Buddhism. (Guo 1997: 121-122)

In an English website of YGD, the sect emphasizes its open attitude towards other religions, especially Christianity. It states:

He [Jesus] left a legacy that would come to serve as the foremost foundation of spirituality in the West. With the same openness and receptivity that it has for all beliefs, I-Kuan Tao embraces and incorporates Christian teachings. Many Tao practitioners respect and study the Bible, again seeking the common thread of truth and wisdom that can bring the different beliefs closer to oneness.²

Guided by such ideas, YGD purposely makes use of Bible to enrich its theology. Such pamphlets as “the testimony of Tao through parables and scriptures in the Bible” are produced by the sect. In the past, Yiguan Dao usually depended on Buddhist sutra to demonstrate its eschatology. Now the Bible provides a large source of such information. Matthew 24: 3, 7, 8; Jeremiah 25 31-34; 2 Peter 3: 5-7, 10; are frequently quoted by the sectarians to declare that the end of the world is coming. What’s more, YGD begins to cite the Bible to strengthen the faith that Zhang Tianran is the last Patriarch who brings the latest and last revelation. Revelation 7: 1-4, Revelation 9: 4~5, and Matthew 3: 11 are frequently quoted by the sect.

Revelation 7: 1-4 records that “Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four Angells who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ‘Do not harm the land or the sea or

² From: <http://www.taoism.net/enter.htm> which can be retrieved in 10/04/2004.

the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” According to the sectarians’ understanding, Zhang Tianran was born in East China; he is just the angel who held the seal of God—the celestial mandate—to save the servants of God.

Revelation 9: 4~5 says: “And from the smoke locusts came out on the earth; and power was given them, like the power of scorpions. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” YGD interprets that, in the ritual of “pointing the Dao”, the initiator should point out the sectarian’s “mysterious gate”, transmit the secrets of the sect to new initiates. The “mysterious gate”, located roughly between the eyes, is a point at the intersection of a line running vertically through the nose and a horizontal line running through the eyes or slightly higher. So, the sectarian thinks that “pointing the mysterious gate” is just putting a seal of god on the foreheads of those who are selected by God.

Matthew 3: 11 predicts that the messiah will baptize people with “the Holy Spirit and fire.” YGD holds that in the ritual of “pointing the Dao”, there are three lamps. The middle one represents the mother. In addition, the initiator is the representative of the Celestial Mandate which is the very Holy Spirit. So, the sect baptizes people with the Holy Spirit (Celestial Mandate) and fire (the Mother lamp), just as what John predicted. “In conclusion, the testimony of the Enlightened Patriarch (the Spirit of Truth) will come at the harvest time, and can be proven through passages from the Bible” (the testimony of Tao through parables and scriptures in the Bible: 24).

Though YGD deliberately incorporates some teachings of other beliefs, it regards these materials as “notes” (*Zhujiao* 注解) which can be utilized to prove the exclusive

truth only inherited by the sect (Guo 1997: 121). From the perspective of YGD, other religious systems include some useful elements, but only YGD can offer valid salvation. In the past history the Mother has sent saints, Buddha and gods, including Jesus, to work as messengers to establish religions and bring the message of salvation, but the task of salvation has entered a new stage and all religions can not provide valid salvation. Being the latest savior who owns the updated Mandate of Heaven, according to the YGD sectarians, Zhang Tianran brings the latest and best revelation. We can understand this from a spirit writing produced by the sect in Hong Kong in the 25th December, 1950 which was in name of Jesus³. It says:

I am Jesus Christ. Following JHVH's mandate and together with *Yue-hui pusa*⁴, I come here to meet you all. ... I received the decree of God and was born in Bethlehem. ... I decided to sacrifice myself and became a bridge through which mankind could go to the paradise.This is god's mind as well as the power of my own oath. But now the time is over, and I have handed in the holy decree and return the Principle Heaven (*Li Tian*). I will rest in peace. Today, the dooms

³The photocopy of this spirit writing is an appendix of the pamphlet written by Christian Church to reveal "the true story of Yiguan Dao" (Ma and Liu 1993). To verify the authenticity of this spirit writing, I have tried to contact with the authors several times but all failed. From the content of this spirit writing, we can see that the revelation was produced in *Zhao-de* altar, Christmas Day, 1950. It also suggests that this is the second time for Jesus to go to *Zhao-de* altar. Fortunately, before I decide not to use this spirit writing, I got another spirit writing which was produced by *Zhaode* altar in 16th June, 1950. The content of this spirit writing is quite similar with that of spirit writing provided by Christianity: the same style, the same topic, namely Jesus is out of time and Zhang and Sun are the Messiah. But this time I get the spirit writing from "*Yiguan Dao Fazhanshi*" [A history of YGD development], (Fu 1999: 820-824), a book by a YGD believer. This spirit writing also notes that the *Zhao-de* altar is in Hong Kong. So I refer to "An introduction to YGD", an official introduction by the sect. In this book (Mu 2002: 130), I find that the *Zhao-de* altar was founded in 1949, in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong by He Zhonghao and Wu Jingyu, the leader of Xingyi division of YGD. According to these messages, I can conclude that these two spirit writings were produced by YGD in Hong Kong.

⁴ This goddess is only worshiped by the mistress section of YGD, and Sun Shuzhen, the mistress, is regarded as the incarnation of this goddess.

day is coming, but I can not save you because I do not have the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*). Those who believe me, listen carefully! Today's salvation is on the shoulder of Gong Chang and Yuehui [namely, Zhang Tianran and his wife Shu Shuzhen].Although I was together with you, I can not save you now since I have handed in the celestial mandate. To those who still believe me, I inform you again: only Gong Chang and Yue-hui receive the Celestial Mandate of White Sun period; there is no salvation except following them.

The above spirit writing shows that YGD keeps and strengthens its core teaching though it purposely incorporates more elements of other religious systems. While other religions are incomplete and out-dated, from the perspective of the sect, YGD is complete, distinctive, new and superior to all religions; at the same time, it includes all good doctrines of other religions. In this sense, YGD is something like a supermarket in which all good products of other religions are available; the sectarians can enjoy all civilizations that are morally and spiritually best in the world; but the core product, namely salvation, is only provided by the sect. YGD used to be syncretic; now the increased interaction between YGD and other religions during the 20th century makes the sect even more syncretic.

6.4 Conclusion

The religious economy model argues that religious firms tend to introduce doctrinal innovations into practice in order to make adjustments to the outside society. While

doctrinal innovations are vital to keep organizational vitality, they also increase or decrease the tension between religious firms and the surroundings. Thus, doctrinal innovations drive religious firms to be more church-like or sect-like.

This chapter tests this theory by analyzing the case of YGD. I agree that religious firms keep on adapting their teachings to the surroundings. But the increase or decrease of tension as a result of doctrinal innovation is only one of the many possible consequences of such adaptation. Adaptive innovations of teaching do not inevitably breed the sect-church tendencies; neither must they affect the degree of tension. In the case of YGD, the pressure of potential schisms, the increase of followers' educational degree and the tendency of globalization drive the sect to update and elaborate its teachings. Consequently, the sect becomes more intellectually elaborated, more theology-centered and more syncretic. These dynamics have little to do with "tension" which is emphasized by the religious economy model. All in all, there exist other group dynamics of religion in addition to the "sect-to-church" and "Church-to-sect" tendencies.

CHAPTER 7

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND RELIGIOUS VITALITY

This chapter is concerned with how organizational structure constrains or promotes religious vitality and how the sect adapts its organizational structure to accommodate to the changing social context. When YGD was suppressed, it developed an organizational structure which was helpful to avoid persecution and sustain the sectarians' morale and motivation. When the sect operated in a deregulated religious economy, however, such structure not only became a roadblock to religious innovation but also induced frequent schisms. As a result, the YGD sectarians self-consciously introduce institutional innovations into their practices in order to sustain the sect's vitality.

There are five parts in this chapter. Part 1 reviews the literature on religious vitality and its sources. Part 2 explores how traditional organizational structure promoted the vitality of YGD when the sect operated in a repressive environment. Part 3 presents how such structure becomes a burden and prevents the sect's growth when YGD runs in a free market. Part 4 describes how divisions of YGD, triggered by different reasons, purposely update their organizational structure. The final part is a theoretical discussion, arguing that institutional factors always play an important role in creating strong religious firms, both in a free market and in a restricted religious economy.

7.1 Existing views on religious vitality

Proponents of the religious economy model have devoted much attention to religious vitality and its sources. According to them, state regulation, the degree of competition among religious suppliers, and the level of organizational strictness are the keys to maintaining the vitality of religious organizations.

A central argument of the religious economy model is that state regulation threatens the vitality of religious firms through restricting competition while a free religious market can increase the vigor of religious organizations by promoting competition (Finke 1990, 1997; Iannaccone 1991; Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 1997; Stark and Finke 2000). Two forms of regulation have been discussed: suppression and subsidy. Subsidy, which is usually adopted by the state to enforce a monopoly religious economy, tends to produce a lazy clergy and consequently a less religiously socialized population. Suppression not only prevents the formation of new religions which are a source of innovation and growth, but also makes dominant religions become inefficient. In short, “regulation restricts competition by changing the incentives and opportunities for religious producers (churches, preachers, revivalists, etc.) and the viable options for religious consumer (church members)” (Finke 1997: 50).

In an unregulated market, religious economy theorists argue that, competition derived from religious pluralism drives religious firms to “cater to the special needs and tastes of specific market segments, in precisely the same way that competition produces specialization among commercial firms in free markets” (Stark and Mccann 1993: 114). Due to the greater competition in free markets, religious firms in unregulated markets

tend to be vigorous and strong. Empirically, they argue that greater competition within the American religious market has resulted in greater efficiency in the supply of religion and therefore greater religious vitality; whereas in Europe, regulated and even monopolistic religious markets have resulted in inefficiency and hence much lower religious vitality (Finke 1990; Iannaccone 1991; Stark and Iannaccone 1994).

When discussing the religious vitality of individual firms in a free market, the new paradigm theorists also locate religious vitality in strictness. Facing the keen competition of religious market, religious organizations must provide attractive products and services in order to absorb new followers and sustain old followers. But their abilities in providing efficient services are constrained by such institutional factors as strictness. Though no religious firms want to lose in the survival competition, it has been argued that liberal religions are weaker than strict religions (Iannaccone 1994). The strict churches have efficient clergy, attractive theologies and services, and good recruitment strategies, so they are growing. In other words, institutional factors are the key to understanding why people join conservative churches while leaving liberal or mainline churches. According to Iannaccone (1994), an optimal level of church strictness is quite helpful in solving the free-rider problem. Because organizational strictness screens out members who lack commitment and stimulates participation among those who remain, strict religions can efficiently offer more attractive religious products than liberal religions which are suffered from free riding. Though strictness is not a desirable product per se, it indeed serves as a mechanism facilitating the production of desirable goods for religious believers. Thus, organizational strictness plays an important role in sustaining religious vitality.

In addition to market competition and organizational strictness, more factors contribute to the vitality of religious firms. Warner holds that “what is essential to religious vitality is for leadership to keep in touch with the grassroots” (Warner 1997: 93). Neitz and Mueser (1997) suggest that factors which prevent religious firms achieving an optimal level of strictness should be probed. Especially, they mention that bureaucratic structure is a variable influencing religious growth, though a detailed analysis is not offered. In this chapter, I will follow Neitz and Mueser’s suggestion to explore how organizational structure influences YGD’s growth.

7.2 Organizational Structure and Religious Vitality in A Regulated Economy

In chapter 3, I have discussed the organizational structure which was developed by the sect against the background of suppression. Generally speaking, YGD consists of dozens of independent divisions; each division includes a couple of sub-divisions; the separation continues and YGD is actually a gathering of thousands of small initiator-disciple cliques respectively managed by individual initiators. To understand how this complicated organizational structure is historically developed, we can explore it from the down-to-up perspective. Theoretically, each YGD sectarian holds a chance to establish his/her own sub-sectarian group. Suppose there is a sectarian X who recruits member Y and Z. Then Y and Z become X’s “pupil believers” (*Houxue* 后学). In addition, the sectarians recruited by Y and Z are also A’s pupil believers. If Y and Z set up their own Buddha halls, then these halls becomes the “son-halls” (*Zitang* 子堂) of X’s; and the later

becomes “the mother hall” (*Mutang* 母堂). When more and more pupil believers are recruited, and when more and more “son halls” are established, X stands a chance to be promoted as an “initiator” (*Dianchuanshi*). Initiators are actually independent religious entrepreneurs who are responsible for managing their followers and Buddha halls respectively. When X is appointed as an initiator, it means that a new initiator-disciple clique comes into being by fission from the mother branch, though X’s group is still supervised by its mother branch. When the group size of X’s group increases to a certain extent, X stands a chance to serve as a senior master who holds the right of appointing other initiators. Thus each YGD division’s organizational structure approximates a pyramid: the senior master stands at the top and various ordinary followers occupy the base, with other levels in between. A hierarchy of authority passed down through senior masters (*qian-ren*), initiators (*Dian-chuan-shi*), lecturers (*jiang-shi* 讲师), Buddha hall masters (*tang-zhu*), assistant lecturers (*jiang-yuan* 讲员), Dao business helpers (*ban-shi-yuan* 办事员) and ordinary sectarians. Specialized vows are required of those who fill these various specialized roles, but the most important factor which determines YGD sectarians’ promotion is their missionary achievements.

The above organizational structure, which is an environmental adaptation to the religious suppression, contributed to the sect’s survival and expansion when it was suppressed. First, such structure is helpful to keep secret and accordingly avoid persecution. When the sect was under suppression, it stressed “the single-line leadership” (*Dan-xian Ling-dao* 单线领导). Principally, an ordinary YGD sectarian could only get in touch with the sectarians who belong to the same Buddha hall; and he/she had no access to know other sectarian leaders except the Buddha hall master who presides over the

congregation. According to the same principle, a Buddha hall master could only access the specific initiator who served as the supervisor; and initiators were respectively supervised by a senior master, the chief leader of an YGD division. Due to “the single-line leadership,” the vertical relationship within the sect is in particular strengthened. Meanwhile, horizontal interactions within the sect are reduced to a large extent. In the field, I found that YGD sectarians who belong to the same division but different subdivisions nearly had no interactions with each other even if they lived in a same community. There is less communication among YGD believers who affiliate to different divisions. The absence of horizontal communication is of course helpful to keep the sect in a secret status and reduce the harm of religious persecution. Because of the organizational arrangement, a secret police in one Buddha hall knows nothing about the information of other Buddha halls even if these halls are led by the same initiator (Song 1996). Thus, the potential persecution is limited to a small range. In practice, such divisions as *Xingyi* even deliberately reduced the horizontal interactions between halls to deal with persecution.

Second, the organizational structure is helpful to stimulate the sectarians to be active in doing missionary work. One important principle of YGD is that “who plants, who harvests” (*shui-zhong shui-de* 谁种谁得). Under this principle, as the beginning paragraph of this section delineates, each YGD sectarian holds a good chance to establish his/her own initiator-disciple group by means of missionary efforts. This mechanism produces a large number of active missionaries. Usually, an active YGD sectarian can build a big sub-group. For instance, He Zonghao, the previous chief leader of *Xingyi* division, established the biggest division of YGD which includes thirty-one units and

hundreds of thousands of believers (Song 2002: 372). Chen Hongzhen, the senior master of *Fayi Chongde* division who came from mainland China to Taiwan in 1948, built an YGD group which now has more than ten thousand Buddha halls (Mu 2002: 110). Nearly all senior masters of YGD today can tell a story about efforts and successes. Indeed, the mechanism of “who plants, who harvests” promoted the incentives of religious suppliers to a large degree, especially when the sectarians were suppressed.

Third, the internal diversity promotes religious innovations. As I have discussed in chapter 3, an internal pluralism derived from the organizational structure exists within the sect. The pluralism is the major source of competition which not only exists between different divisions of YGD but also occurs in the same division. Driven by the competition, YGD divisions introduced a couple of important innovations, such as the research courses, the meal groups and the combination of missionary work and business activities, into the sectarian practice to attract and retain followers. In addition, when one division of YGD introduced a new service to the practice, other divisions tended to imitate the innovation. As a result, the sect as a whole became very innovative and adaptive. Scholars (Wang, Zhou and Lin 1997) usually regard the sect as the most innovative and energetic religious group on Taiwan during the period of suppression.

When discussing state regulation, previous studies (Finke 1997; Stark and Finke 2000) hold that suppression plays a vital role in restricting competition and decreasing the incentives of religious suppliers. However, in the case of YGD, we can see that suppression does not inevitably reduce the incentives and opportunities for religious producers. Instead, an appropriate institutional arrangement can activate religious suppliers' energy even if they are suppressed. In addition, suppression does not inevitably

strangle religious competition. The above analysis has proved that the organizational structure adopted by YGD, which breeds internal pluralism, is quite helpful to promote competition. Of course, these functions are unintended consequences of the organizational structure which was historically developed by Chinese sects to keep secret and avoid persecution. All in all, even under suppression, religious firms can be smart and flexible in adopting appropriate institutional innovations to fight for their survival and preserve their vitality. Contextual factors, such as state regulation, can not determine the fate of religions; institutional factors always play an important role in sustaining religious vitality, whether in a free market or a restricted market.

7.3 Organizational Structure and Religious Vitality in a Deregulated Economy

In the preceding section, I explore that the organizational structure contributed to the growth of YGD when the sect operated in a restricted religious economy. However, after the KMT state decided to loosen religious regulation in 1987, the old organizational structure of YGD became a negative factor restricting religious vitality. It induces religious schisms, prevents innovations and makes the sect less efficient in providing services.

7.3.1 Inducing Religious Schisms

The organizational structure discussed above is unstable and can lead to religious schisms. An institutional schism exists in Chinese sects in general and YGD in particular. With the group size becoming bigger, a new initiator-follower clique would split off from the mother group. Thus the whole sect grows and expands by means of fission reproduction. When founded by fission from a parent group, an initiator-follower clique naturally carries with it much of the organizational and theological “tradition” of the original group, and normally continues to retain a close relationship with that group. A powerful YGD division may thus spawn numerous smaller ones and form an extended-family-like group which is centrally controlled by a senior master. When discussing the organizational characteristics of Chinese sects, scholars (e.g. Song 1990; Lin 1992) stress that Chinese sectarian groups have been deeply influenced by conceptions based on the Chinese family and operated like a large-scale extended family. Lin observes that:

The most salient characteristic of YGD’s leadership is the family-like relationship among the leaders and ordinary Dao followers. The relationship between senior masters and the initiators he appoints is parent-children like... So it is easy to understand why initiators of *Fayi Lingyin* would regard them as the children of Chen Jinlian, the senior master of this sub-division. (Lin 1992: 93)

Since the establishment of the initiator’s authority is like the patriarchal authority of the clan which is based on the Confucian values, we can understand why the sect put

much emphasis on Confucian ethics. Confucian values, together with the idea of Mandate of Heaven, are vital to legitimate the leadership of YGD. However, just as an extended family can not exist without eventual divisions in the long term, Chinese sects tend to disband within several decades, especially when the chief leader of a sectarian group dies. This argument can be supported by the frequent schisms within YGD which have been discussed in chapter 6. We can also see this point from the development and schism of Xingyi division.

In 1953, the *Xingyi* division consisted of three subdivisions. Due to the principle of fission reproduction, more subdivisions occurred in the following years. In 1956, the number of the subdivisions of *Xingyi* was ten and it became an island-wide division. In 1973, the *Xingyi* division included thirty subdivisions. Intense competition existed among these subdivisions. It is common for these subdivisions to attract adherents of other subdivisions (Song 2002: 372). In chapter 3, I have pointed out that the chief leader of *Xingyi* division self-consciously held a missionary competition every year to encourage the sub-divisions to recruit members actively. These efforts paid off. It is estimated that ten subdivisions of *Xingyi* had more than one hundred thousand adherents in 1983; the whole division had more than 1.4 million followers (Song 2002: 372). Though the validity of these numbers is uncertain, what's certain is that *Xingyi* was the biggest division of YGD: according to the official introduction by YGD, *Xingyi* had about twenty or thirty thousand Buddha halls, more than any other YGD divisions' Buddha halls (Mu 2002: 123). However, when He Zonghao died in 1988, the *Xingyi* division disbanded immediately and the whole division was separated into five subgroups. The inner conflict of *Xingyi* shocked many YGD leaders of other divisions (Mu 2002: 123).

7.3.2 Preventing innovations

The initiator-centered organization also becomes a roadblock to innovations when the sect is operating in the deregulated market. We can see this point from the failed imitation of the meal group.

In chapter 3, I have briefly discussed that *Fayi Chongde* was and is very successful in recruiting educated adherents in colleges and universities. The success has much to do with the operation of meal groups. The meal groups are specific missionary groups aiming at college students, with several functional teams, as chart 3.3 shows. Because of the operation of meal groups, more than 90% of YGD sectarians who had a high education belonged to *Fayi Chongde* in the early 1980s (Song 1983). In 1998, *Fayi Chongde* was running more than one hundred and forty meal groups (Wu 1998: 33). Encouraged by the *Fayi Chongde*'s success, other YGD divisions tried to imitate *Fayi Chongde* to set up their own meal groups in universities. In 1978, the *Fayi Lingyin* division tried to establish the meal groups. Under the leadership of Li Yumin, the senior master of *Fayi Lingyin*, two meal groups were developed in 1981. But when Li died in 1983, the meal groups established by *Fayi Lingyin* failed to operate (Lin 1992: 113). *Jichu Zhongsu* also managed to copy the innovation of meal groups by *Fayi Chongde*. In 1984, *Jichu Zhongsu* developed its first meal group: *Tianqi* meal group (*Tianqi huoshi tuan* 天齐伙食团). But the imitation failed in 1988 when the *Tianqi* meal group was disbanded. In 1992, Zhang Peicheng, the senior master of *Jichu Zhongsu* announced that the division would no longer operate meal groups, because such operation can not succeed in recruiting and retaining young educated sectarians (Chen 1999: 63). *Baoguan*

Jiande began to organize meal groups in 1993, but there were only three meal groups in 1997 (Yang 1997: 13). When I did the fieldwork in 2002, one had ceased activities and the other two were near death. All of these imitations ended in failure. Why was *Fayi Chongde* successful in operating the meal groups? Why did other divisions fail in running the meal groups?

As we have known, YGD is an association of a very large number of small-scale religious societies; each YGD society is initiator-centered. Due to this kind of organizational structure, horizontal coordination rarely occurs within the sect. Even in the same division, followers belonging to different initiators have few opportunities to interact with each other. Because of the intense competition within the sect, the initiators are very careful to prevent their followers from being attracted by other initiators. As Susan Naquin had noted, switching one's sect affiliation was common within China's sectarian tradition: "there were some people who went from sect to sect, joining first one and then another, always searching for the 'best' system" (Naquin 1976: 37). In order to keep the followers, the YGD sectarians put a special emphasis on the principle of "[Following] one gold line and no change of affiliation" (*Yi-tiao jin-xian, bu-luan xi-tong* 一条金线, 不乱系统). "One gold line" means the line of "the Eternal Venerable Mother – the Maitreya Buddha—the *Jigong* living Buddha (Zhang Tianran)—the *Yuehui* Bodhisattva (Sun Suzhen)—the senior master—the initiator". According to this principle, YGD sectarians should follow the initiator who initiates them forever and should not change the affiliation. Neither could the sectarians attend other YGD groups' activities. If they do so, they would be regarded as "disorganizing the Dao society" (*Luan-cuan Dao-chang* 乱窜道场). This is a very serious charge for the sectarians. Since the principle put

too much emphasis on the initiator-follower relationship, factionalism gradually came forth within the sect. Initiators usually regard their followers as their private properties. They also tend to resist any innovations which they think may weaken their power or make them lose followers, even when the innovations are initiated by the senior master.

Previous studies (Lin 1992; Wu 1998; Chen 1999) by the YGD sectarian students hold that the factionalism derived from YGD's organizational structure contributed to the failure of the imitation of meal groups. When a division decides to establish a meal group, the first step is to gather the sectarian students who had inherited the faith from their parents who belong to the same division. It seems to be easier to organize the current sectarians than totally recruit neophytes. But the later development shows that such choice is not reasonable. Though these college sectarians belonged to the same division, they usually came from different "lines" and were led by different initiators. Then problems arise from the affiliation to different lines. Most of initiators are reluctant to allow their followers to be involved in any activities which are held by other initiators, since such involvement (they think) runs a risk of losing followers. Without the support of initiators, few resources can be gained to run the meal groups. Worse still, many activities which transcend the initiator-follower cliques were difficult to be held. Yan*, a young educated sectarian of *Baoguang* division, shared with me some of his experiences when he was acting as the leader of a meal group¹. When he decided to establish a

¹ I learned these experiences from an occasional opportunity. When I began to make contact with *Fayi Chongde*, the senior master permitted her staff to help me arranging interviews and participating their activities. Then initiator L was appointed to be in charge of the business of helping me. (Later I knew that without the permission of the senior master, it is impossible to do research in a division.) L and other initiators of *Fayi Chongde* were very friendly and satisfied nearly all of my requests. When I told L that I wanted to interview some female celibate believers, he attempted to find some sectarians but failed. So I decided to have a try in other divisions. Then I asked for help from a chief initiator of another division serving in the Headquarters. He promised to help me but there were few celibate sectarians in his division. He introduced me to another initiator of *Fayi Chongde* who serves in Headquarters, and told me that this

sectarian group for the college sectarians, many initiators were very friendly to him and trusted him, because he is smart, highly educated and, most important, active in the sectarian activities. But with the further operation of his meal group, he found that the trust was vulnerable. When he decided to hold some activities to strengthen the communication and interaction among sectarian students belonging to different divisions, he received indifference from the initiators. They even implied that one should not “disorganize the Dao society”. Due to these unhappy experiences, his enthusiasm gradually cooled down. When I interviewed him in 2002, the meal group founded by him had ceased activities.

The emphasis on the distinction of different initiator-follower cliques also leads to the problem of affiliation when neophytes are recruited. When probing why other divisions except *Fayi Chongde* can not successfully manage meal groups, a sectarian familiar with the operation of meal groups says:

The distinction of different “lines” is very clear in these divisions. So it is difficult for their “pupil believers” to cooperate with each other. I once met two college students. They belong to the same division but different initiators. It is different for them to form a meal group. Even if they can finally make up of a meal group, problems exist. For example, if A recruits a neophyte, A’s initiator will preside over the ritual of pointing Dao; the same is true for B. So it is impossible for the

initiator would arrange for me to interview some female believers. After contacting this initiator, I went to the temple I have visited several times. But when I arrived there and called the initiator who promised to meet me, I was told that I should contact initiator L. Then I visited L’s office. I had several talks with L and made friends with him. But in that day, I felt that I was not welcome. L told me that he was attending a meeting and had no time that day. So I left the temple quickly. I knew I had done something wrong but I did not know the exact reason. When I mentioned this experience to Yan, he congratulated me that I was touching some secrecies of YGD. He told me that I was “disorganizing the Dao society” from the perspective of certain initiators. Then he shared some of his experiences.

meal group to act as an independent and efficient missionary group. The different affiliation limits their activities and they can hardly cooperate with each other. They have few opportunities to change the situation because the traditional value of YGD emphasizes “one gold line.”

If we explore why *Fayi Chongde* succeeded in founding meal groups, we can understand the role of organizational structure in influencing religious vitality. When Chen Hongzhen, the senior master of *Fayi Chongde*, began to recruit college adherents in Taipei in 1960, she had only two Buddha halls and dozens of followers among whom two were college students (Lin 1992: 107). With the success of the meal group in *Fengjia* University (*Fengjia Daxue* 逢甲大学), Chen attempted to extend this innovation to universities in Taipei. Since Chen began her missionary work in Taipei nearly from zero, she led the meal groups by herself and transcended the level of initiators. The later development proves that the direct leadership by the senior master is the key to successfully running meal groups, because this kind of leadership can break through the initiator-follower clique (Lin 1992: 113). Later, with the further development of meal groups, some student sectarians were appointed as initiators. Unlike traditional initiators, they do not have their own Buddha halls or specific “pupil believers”. Usually, they help the senior master to manage the business of the College Section (*xuejie* 学界). Today, the college section is led by a group of initiators, but the student adherents do not necessarily regard themselves as the pupil believers of a certain initiator. All of them are the senior master’s pupil believers. When managing the college section, the initiators follow the principle of “group leadership; concerted coordination and cooperation” (*Ji-ti Ling-dao*,

Zhen-ti Dai-dong 集体领导、整体带动). The initiator-follower cliques which block other divisions' coordination are reduced to a large extent. Organizational innovation is the key to successfully managing meal groups.

7.3.3 Blocking coordination

The factionalism stemming from YGD's organizational structure, which blocks horizontal coordination, also makes the sect less efficient in providing services than the newly rising Buddhist groups. When the KMT state regulated the religious economy and suppressed YGD, the sect was very active and energetic in introducing innovations into practice. At that time, Buddhism was not efficient in providing service, especially the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC), the Buddhist group which was officially supported by the KMT state. BAROC tended to lobby the state to suppress its rivals, rather than attempting to offer competitive religious services. When the state deregulated the religious economy in 1987, BAROC declined quickly (Jones, 1999). Though BAROC withered away, Buddhism began to reorganize itself in the 1980s and four influential Buddhist groups occurred. They are: the *Ciji* merit society (*Ciji Gong-de-hui*) led by Shengyan, *Fo-guang-shan* led by Xingyun, *Fa-gu-shan*, and *Zhong-tai-shan* led by Weijue. These Buddhist groups, unlike traditional Buddhism which is not active in missionary work, are very active and efficient in doing missionary work and charitable activities. According to the Taiwan Social Change Survey in 1999, among 1925 respondents, 52 were YGD believers, while 242 respondents were involved in the *Ciji*

merit society and 72 respondents attended *Fo-guang-shan*'s activities². These data shows that YGD became less influential than these Buddhist groups when the religious market was deregulated. We can also understand this point from the rescue work of the 9.21 earthquake.

Through actively involved in charitable activities, *Ciji* established a quite positive image in Taiwan. The financial affairs of *Ciji* are very normative; receipts and expenditure are clearly documented. So people trust *Ciji* and they are glad to donate their money to *Ciji*. Compared with *Ciji*, YGD is less efficient in providing charitable activities. We can understand this difference from the rescue work of the 9.21 earthquake. In 21st, September, 1999, a big earthquake occurred in central Taiwan. According to the data offered by the inner ministry of Taiwan, during this calamity, 2488 persons died or disappeared; 11306 persons were hurt and the loss was more than four hundred billion NT\$. After the earthquake, various religious groups engaged in rescue operations. Among these groups, *Ciji* was the first to enter the disaster area. The *Ciji*'s volunteers searched and collected corpses; they saved and cured the wounded; they also provided food, water and psychotherapy to the victims, and finally they built temporary houses for the victims. In short, *Ciji* led the whole rescue work efficiently and systematically and gained a lot of prestige, while Yiguan Dao was slow and inefficient in absorbing and distributing resources to help the victims. Both outsiders and sectarians criticized the sect a lot. One of YGD sectarian who witnessed the rescue operations recalled that:

When the earthquake happened, I was working as an assistant of legislator Cao, a politician worthy of respect. After the earthquake, Cao immediately drove to the

² These data are available in <http://140.109.196.10/sc1/>, retrieved from the web June, 6, 2004.

disaster area and I followed him. So I witnessed the whole process of salvage work and it really shocked me. At that time, *Ciji*'s response was very quick, even quicker than the state. Particularly, *Ciji*'s rescue operations were very comprehensive, systematic and in an orderly way. The first aim was to provide foods which were badly needed by the victims of earthquake. At the same time, some *Ciji*'s volunteers helped the victims to "control the shock" (*Shou-jing* 收惊). "Controlling shock" is a ritual which was widely practiced and accepted by Taiwanese. It is considered to be the best psychotherapy. Many Buddhist temples and temples of popular religion were offering the service of "controlling the shock". It is interesting to note that victims, in order to receive such service, were waiting in long lines, while few victims asked for help from the professional psychiatrists of *Rongzong* hospital [one of the best hospitals in Taiwan]. The comparison is very interesting. Thirdly, *Ciji* immediately contacted Japanese companies to book materials for building temporary houses. It is not long ago when Japan experienced a serious earthquake. Because *Ciji* also attended part of the rescue operations in Japan, *Ciji* members were expert at salvage work. Later more religious groups joined the rescue work and they mainly provided food and psychotherapy by means of "controlling the shock", so *Ciji* ceased such services and shifted the emphasis of rescue to reconstructing the community. As an YGD believer, I wanted to know what YGD was doing at that time. To tell the truth, I rarely saw YGD sectarians in the disaster areas. Later, the YGD sectarians also attended the rescue work. But they acted as a minor role in the whole rescue operation: they usually provided foods. By the way, the fast foods by YGD are very delicious. I had enjoyed these

foods for two weeks (laugh). But that is the difference between *Ciji* and YGD: the former was the soul of rescue work, guiding all activities, while the latter could only serve as an assistant.³

The factionalism within YGD led to a lack of cooperation, and thus these rescue works were not efficient, though the sect as a whole utilized a large number of resources and persons to do the salvage work. Actually, there was little communication and cooperation among different divisions, they just did rescues respectively. Even in the same division, cooperation was also absent. Each one did things respectively. The earthquake was in central Taiwan. While many Buddha halls in central Taiwan had sent people to the mountain areas which suffered the calamity, the sectarians in the north or south still did not know how to coordinate. As a result, some sectarians were very busy while others had nothing to do. Though many YGD sectarians were eager to engage in rescue operations, they did not know what to do and how to do it. No one attempted to organize them to provide efficient services. So many YGD sectarians called to the Headquarters and angrily enquired why YGD was so inefficient compared with other religious groups, especially *Ciji*. Indeed, the mass media intensively reported the rescue work by *Ciji*. The YGD sectarians saw the active role of *Ciji* but failed to see what YGD was doing at that time. After YGD gained its legal status in 1987, the sectarians devoted themselves to building big temples. A large number of big temples were built in the past two decades. From the perspective of outsiders, YGD was very rich; but when the disaster happened, the sect was lazy and reluctant to offer actual help. So a negative image was contributed to the sect because of its behaviors in the rescue work. But

³ The interview was conducted in 1st October, 2002. Yan*, the interviewee, is a young educated sectarian.

according to the investigation of the Headquarters, YGD as a whole devoted a large amount of money to rescue work; simply because the absence of cooperation made these efforts less impressive, their work failed to draw the mass media's attention. In any case, the rescue operations after the 9.21 big earthquake exactly reveals that factionalism made YGD less efficient in providing services. In the current deregulated religious economy of Taiwan, YGD is less competitive than Buddhist groups. Many YGD sectarians have realized that it is time for the sect to reform itself now. As the following section presents, some divisions have self-consciously reorganized themselves.

7.4 Organizational Reforms

7.4.1 Organizational Innovation in the Fayi Chongde Division

Fayi Chongde is the first division which considers reforming the traditional organization. Before 1960, Chen Hongzhen mainly developed her sectarian network in central Taiwan, following the principle of “one gold line and no change of affiliation”. But when she came to Taipei in 1960, she found that the traditional organizational arrangement was a roadblock for her to recruit followers in colleges. In a speech, she said:

The operation of Dao business in *Yunlin* (雲林) and *Zhanghua* (彰化) was in a traditional way [centered on initiators]. However, when I went to Taipei and did missionary work there [in 1960], I found that the traditional way of operation could not work, especially in managing the college section. After careful consideration, I decided to follow the way of collective leadership and concerted coordination and

cooperation. ---- Fortunately, such kind of leadership was accepted by the Dao relatives (*Daoqin* 道亲) in Taipei, so I decided to extend this innovation to *Taizhong*, *Tainan* and *Gaoxiong* (Chen 1992b: 2).

In 1980, due to the crisis of spirit-writing which has been discussed in chapter 5, *Fayi Chongde* lost a large number of followers. But the crisis also drove Chen Hongzhen to reorganize the group. The “vertical and horizontal coordination structure”⁴, or the *Zhong-yi* assembly (*Zhong-yi zi ban* 忠义字班) was introduced into the practice by Chen Hongzhen, the senior master of *Fayi Chongde*. In Chinese, “*Zhong*” means loyalty and “*Yi*” means justice. In the field, one interviewee told me that the institutional innovation of *Zhong-yi* assembly was triggered by the spirit-writing crisis. According to him, Chen thought that those followers who questioned the validity of spirit writing were not loyal or just to her, so she stressed loyalty (*Zhong*) and justice (*Yi*) and used *Zhong-yi* to name the assembly which was established to facilitate the vertical and horizontal coordination within the division. In addition, the schism of *Xingyi* division in 1988 also strengthened Chen’s decision that *Fayi Chongde* should insist on reforming its organization. Chen said:

In other divisions, when their senior masters live, they are active in doing Dao business. But when their senior masters pass away, they become independent and there is no leadership. Due to this reason, a couple of divisions declined or even disappeared. In order to accomplish the sacred mission and ensure a bright future,

⁴ This is an official translation of the term “*Zhong-yi* assembly” (*Zhong-yi zi ban* 忠义字班) offered by *Fayi Chongde*.

we have to change ourselves. So we need to practice “collective leadership and concerted coordination and cooperation” (Chen 1992a: 4)

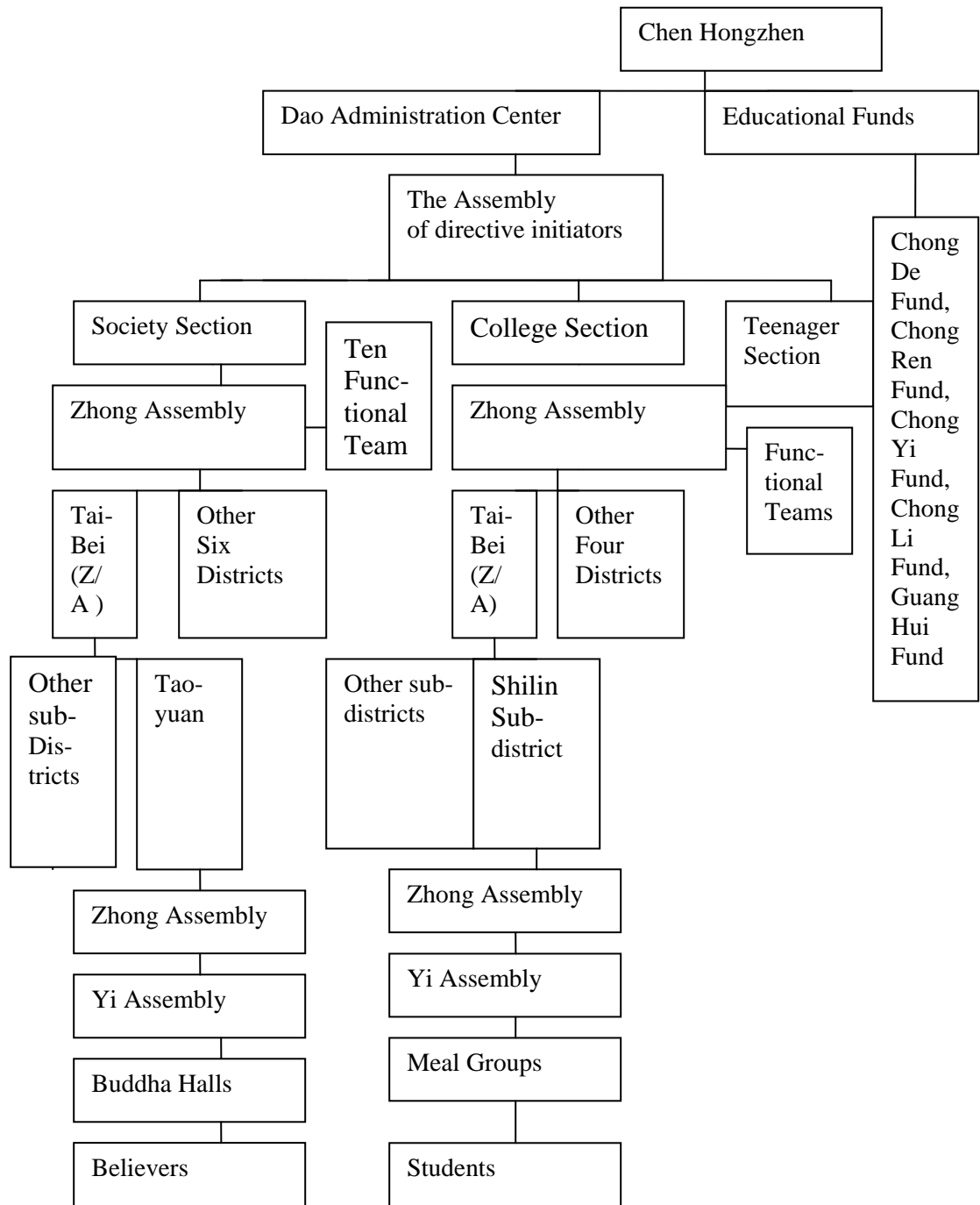
Apparently, Chen is very aware that traditional organizational structure breeds schisms, so the division must reform the organization. The disadvantages of traditional organizational structures and the spirit-writing crisis contributed to the institutional innovation of *Fayi Chongde*. The new organizational structure is centered on the *Zhong-yi* assembly and ten functional teams. The *Zhong* assembly, which is available at different levels, is the managing panel in charge of the horizontal coordination among different units in its administrant area, as chart 7.1 shows. The *Zhong* assembly also plays a role in the vertical coordination, delivering information, supervising the implementation of policies and recommending the promotion of sectarians. The *Yi* assembly only exists at the lowest level, implementing policies and gathering information. The members of *Yi* assembly are elected from lecturers or ordinary believers, while most of the *Zhong* assembly members are initiators. Both the *Zhong* assembly and the *Yi* assembly hold meetings regularly and discuss the operation of religious business. In addition to the *Zhong-yi* assembly, there is also an “administration center” (*bang-ban zhong-xin* 帮办中心) in charge of coordination and management of the whole division’s business. The administration center regularly updates its members who are elected from local *Zhong* assemblies. At the same time, the center also includes ten functional teams. As groups increase in size, there is greater need for labor division and coordination. Through establishing functional teams, *Fayi Chongde* is able to provide more professional and competitive products. Besides, greater efficiency is achieved because each functional team organizes the specific activities in a long term so that the whole group does not need

to meet and take a lot of time reaching a democratic decision. When discussing the purpose of *Zhong-yi* assembly and ten functional groups, Chen says,

The establishment of *Zhong-yi* assembly and the operation of ten functional groups are to achieve the purpose that everyone has things to do and everything can be done by people (*Ren-ren you-shi-zuo, shi-shi you-ren-zuo* 人人有事做，事事有人做). Each functional group of the assistant center is equal and in charge of different issues. The team leaders are in an equal status and should design the orientation and annual plan which are carried out by the *Zhong-yi* assembly (Chen 1992b: 37).

According to the difference of components, *Fayi Chongde* also divides its religious businesses into three sections: the society section, the college section and the teenager section. The society section is made up of those sectarians who have graduated from university. Similarly, the proponents of the college section are college students while the teenagers form the teenager section. In managing each section, *Fayi Chongde* adopts the district-centered leadership. For instance, the society section is divided into seven districts: *Yunlin*, *Zhanghua*, *Taipei*, *Taizhong*, *Tainan*, and *Gaoxiong*. Each district includes several sub-districts. The detailed information about *Fayi Chongde*'s organizational structure is available in Chart 7.1.

Chart 7.1: The organizational structure of *Fayi Chongde*



Source: Wu 1998: 27

The new organizational structure is helpful to conquer the factionalism which accompanied initiator-follower cliques. The new structure stresses the district-centered and collective leadership and thus it centralizes the power and weakens the power of initiators to a large degree. The initiators are not independent religious entrepreneurs any longer, and all decisions are collectively made by *Zhong-yi* assembly. According to their interests and professional trainings, initiators can be distributed to certain functional teams. In a sense, their roles begin to be bureaucratized. If an initiator dies, it exerts little influence on the operation of the whole group because another professional will soon occupy the vacant position left. Bureaucratization appears to be an inevitable trend in *Fayi Chongde* as it grows larger and develops an increasingly complex division of labor requiring careful coordination. The institutional innovation by *Fayi Chongde*, which focuses on collective leadership and both vertical and horizontal coordination, really makes the division strong. Though a large number of its followers left *Fayi Chongde* because of the spirit-writing crisis in 1980, *Fayi Chongde* successfully develops into one of the biggest YGD groups today. According to data offered by the WITH, *Fayi Chongde* has more than ten thousand Buddha halls, only less than *Xingyi* division which has more than twenty thousand Buddha halls, as Table 7.1 shows. Considering the fact *Xingyi* is actually made up of five independent groups (Mu 2002: 125), it is safe to argue that *Fayi Chongde* is one of the biggest YGD groups now. The institutional innovation finally pays off.

Table 7.1: The divisions of YGD and the numbers of their Buddha halls

| Division | subdivision | The number of Huddha halls |
|--------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Jichu 基础 | Zhongsu 忠恕 | 4,000+ |
| | Tianji 天基 | 400+ |
| | Tianci 天赐 | 400+ |
| Wenhua 文化 | | 1,000+ |
| Fasheng 法圣 | | 30+ |
| Qianyi 乾一 | | 50+ |
| Tianxiang 天祥 | | 300+ |
| Jinguang 金光 | | 100- |
| Tianzhen 天真 | | No data |
| Huiguang 慧光 | | 100- |
| Huaran 浩然 | Haode 浩德 | 180+ |
| | Yude 育德 | 200+ |
| Zhongyong 中庸 | | 100+ |
| Andong 安东 | | 500+ |
| Baoguang 宝光 | Chongzheng 崇正 | 2,000+ |
| | Yuande 元德 | 1,000+ |
| | Jiande 建德 | 6,000+ |
| | Shaoxing 绍兴 | 400+ |
| | Jiayi 嘉义 | 1,000- |
| | Yushan 玉山 | 1,000+ |
| | Qingde 亲德 | 10+ |
| | Taizhong 台中 | 100+ |
| | Mingben 明本 | 300+ |
| Mingguang 明光 | | 20+ |
| Puguang 浦光 | | 60+ |
| Changzou 常州 | | 1,000+ |
| Fayi 发一 | Tian-en 天恩 | 600+ |
| | Chongde 崇德 | 10,000+ |
| | Lingyin 灵隐 | 4,000+ |
| | Tianyuan 天元 | 5,000+ |
| | Guangyao 光耀 | No data |
| | Fengtian 奉天 | 200+ |
| | Dehua 德化 | 500+ |
| | Tongyi 同义 | No data |
| | Ciji 慈济 | No data |
| | Huiyin 慧音 | No data |
| | Cifa 慈法 | 3,000+ |

| | | |
|-----------|--|---------|
| Xingyi 兴毅 | | 20,000+ |
| Chande 阐德 | | No data |
| Zhenyi 正义 | | 1,000+ |

Source: Mu 2002: 80-127

7.4.2 The Effort of “Organizational Integration” in the *Jichu Zhongsu* Division

After witnessing the failed imitation of meal groups and the schism of *Xingyi*, Zhang Peichen, the chief leader of *Jichu Zhongshu* division, realized that it was vital to reform the organizational structure (Chen 1999: 47). Therefore, in 1992, Zhang decided to “integrate” (*Zheng-he* 整合) the division. According to the plan of “organizational integration”, *Jichu Zhongsu* would adopt the collective leadership based on districts. There are ten districts; in each district, the boundaries between different initiator-follower cliques are to be broken and the sectarians are collectively led by a group of initiators (Song 1998: 361-364). In short, the organizational structure of *Fayi Chongde* is copied by *Jichu Zhongshu*.

During the process of “organizational integration”, however, most of the initiators rejected the reformation. Their rejection is largely linked with power. One main purpose of the division’s institutional integration is to weaken the initiators’ power and reduce the independence of initiator-follower groups. So it is a natural response for initiators to reject the reformation. A middle-aged male sectarian who was once involved in the organizational integration said that:

Previously, our Dao society was centered on initiators. In order to develop our Dao society, we must change the organizational structure and focus on organizations

rather than individuals. Then the senior master decided to integrate the division. My unit also designed an organizational structure which stressed labor divisions and cooperation. Initiators were in charge of specific tasks respectively. At the same time, they cooperated with each other. After the discussion, all initiators agreed and the new organizational structure began to operate. But after the operation, some problems arose. Some initiators found that their power was limited. They used to make all decisions by themselves and could do what they wanted. But under the new organizational structure, all decisions are collectively made. So it is natural for them to feel lost. Then the conflicts occurred and the innovation was rejected. All things returned to the previous status. Though we are cultivating Dao, some people still can not abandon selfish aims. They usually regard Dao relatives as their private properties and are reluctant to reform anything. I have experienced a couple of such failures. We want to do something innovative and efficient. Sometimes it is obvious that these innovations are helpful, but an initiator can negate it with a single sentence. I always feel depressed. I have no way to disobey the initiators' decisions. In the Dao society, the ethic [of respecting the initiators] is very important. Every Dao society has Dao relatives who want to reform some things, just like me. But it is really difficult to do that.⁵

With regard to the institutional reform, A young female sectarian comments that

Actually, there are many problems after the integration. If a couple of units are integrated into one system, who will lead them? Each unit has formed a set of

⁵ The interview was conducted and recorded in 11th December, 2002. Mr. Jiang*, the interviewee is a Buddha hall master of the *Jichu Zhongsu* division.

specific operational forms. Now if you put them together, how could they cooperate with each other? The distribution of power is a problem, though principally this issue can not be discussed and addressed publicly. Anyway, we [ordinary sectarians] are not concern with the power.⁶

Due to the rejection of local units and their initiators, the “organizational integration” promoted by Zhang Peicheng can not be successfully implemented. Finally, Zhang had to compromise, agreeing that the effort of integrating “Dao affairs” (*Daowu* 道务) could be temporarily ceased while the integration of “course affairs” (*Banwu* 班务) continued (Chen 1999: 47-8). The so-call “Dao affairs” refer to the recruitment of neophytes. According to the primary purpose of “organizational integration”, initiators should not establish the “initiator-pupil believer” relationship any more, because the cliques are the source of schisms. Now, after bargaining, initiators keep the right of developing their own groups. The integration of “course affairs” means that sectarians are encouraged to attend the research courses and other activities which are held by other units. In practice, such encouragements are rare, according to the impression I gained from the fieldwork. The effort of organizational reform by *Jichu Zhongsu* makes little progress. The future development of “integration” needs further observation.

⁶ The interview was conducted and recorded in 28th December, 2002. The interviewee, Miss Huan*, is a female sectarian who was born in 1978.

7.5 Discussion and Conclusion

When addressing religious vitality, Stark and his colleagues direct their attention both to contextual factors such as state regulation and to institutional factors such as organizational strictness. Where the state does not repress religion or enforce a monopoly, they have largely ignored the state and focused on institutional factors, arguing that organizational strictness is of primary importance to create a strong religion. But when a religious economy is regulated by the state, the core religious economy theorists attach little importance to institutional factors and shift the analytical emphasis to contextual factors, stressing that state regulation indirectly constrains religious vitality through restricting competition and reducing religious suppliers' incentives.

In this chapter, I examine the role of institutional factors in creating strong religions. As the preceding sections show, the initiator-centered organization of YGD is very helpful to reduce the threat of persecution, to stimulate the sectarians' incentive and to promote competition. The "single-line leadership" decreases the possibilities of suppression because it keeps the sect in a secret status to a large degree; the principle of "who plants, who gains" encouraged the sectarians to be active in doing missionary work because each of them stood a chance to build his/her own group; and finally the internal diversity and competition drove the sectarians to be innovative and efficient in providing services. All of these consequences, which were derived from the sect's organizational structure, contributed to the vitality of YGD and the sect expanded quickly by means of fission-reproduction when it was suppressed. The rise of YGD in Taiwan shows that institutional factors, even in a restricted religious economy, can play a vital role in

sustaining religious vitality and that state regulation can not reduce religious suppliers' incentives or suffocate competition. Religious firms can imaginatively develop institutional innovations to keep their strength.

This empirical study also reveals that the organizational structure, which was developed against the background of suppression, has become a roadblock to the sect's long-term development when the sect gained its legal status and operated in a deregulated market. The factionalism which stemmed from traditional organizational structure tends to induce religious schism. The absence of vertical coordination and internal communication also make the sect inefficient in adopting innovations and providing services. Though the sectarians had self-consciously tried to imitate the successful services initiated by their rivals, the organizational structure caused their efforts to end in failure. Religious firms' rational choices are constrained by institutional factors. When probing the role of institutional factors in influencing religious vitality, previous studies by the religious economy theorists mainly focus on organizational strictness. This research on YGD divisions, however, shows that organizational structure is vital to create a strong religion when state suppression is strong, but can also affect the ability of sectarians to cooperate and implant innovations when state suppression declines. Further researches on this issue are needed.

CHAPTER 8

THE RELIGIOUS MARKET IN CHINESE SOCIETY

The religious economy model provides a macro-level analysis of religious markets. This chapter tries to explore China's religious markets and locate YGD in a broader context. The current chapter includes five parts. Part 1 introduces the model of religious niches promoted by Stark and Finke. Part 2 offers some critical comments about this model, arguing that this model is not applicable to Chinese religions. Part 3, on the basis of anthropological and historical studies, provides a new model of traditional Chinese religious market. Part 4 outlines some characteristics of the market and points out that Chinese religious life was not congregationally-oriented but pilgrimage-centered. The final part presents a discussion and lists questions to be probed in future research.

8.1 A Model of Religious Niches

The religious economy model holds that all of the religious activities going on in any society constitutes a religious economy which includes "a 'market' of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organizations" (Stark and Finke 2000: 193-195). Since religious demand, comparing with religious supply, remains relatively stable in a long time, and adherents hold quite difference religious preferences, Stark and Finke argue that a religious market can be imaginatively classified into several "segments

of potential adherents sharing particular religious preferences (needs, tastes, and expectations)” (Stark and Finke 2000: 193).

How can we define the “religious preferences”? Stark and Finke try to answer this question through borrowing some elements from the theory of sect-to-church. As chapter 6 has pointed out, the sect-to-church model is mostly concerned with the evolution of religious organizations in Christian societies, holding that sects tend to decrease the degree of tension and eventually become church-like. Stark and Finke (2000, 2001) find that some religious organizations would like to increase the tension with their environment. Based on these observations, Stark and Finke extract “the tension” from the sect-to-church theory and then use this variable to indicate people’s religious preference. Assuming that the most significant religious preference is “the degree of tension between their religious body and the surrounding society”, Stark and Finke use it to measure all religious markets. They write,

Suppose we ranked people according to the intensity of their religious desires and tastes, and hence by the degree of tension between their religious body and the surrounding society that they would accept. We think the results would somewhat approximate a bell-shaped curve, in that people would cluster towards the center of axis in the area of medium tension.---- It seems reasonable to assume that to the extent that people prefer levels of intensity that are higher or lower than medium, the less numerous they will be. (Stark and Finke 2000:196)

But whether “the degree of tension” is universal to such a degree that it can be applied to measure religious preferences in all societies or not needs further examinations. Both the sect-to-church theory and the religious economy model are developed against the Christian background. Are they applicable to non-Christian societies such as China? If not, what should be revised? In the following sections, I will probe these questions based on the analyses in the preceding chapters and other anthropological researches.

8. 2 Critical Reviews

In chapter 6, I have argued that the “heterodoxies” in imperial China are not the “sects” in the sense of Western society. Many scholars who are expert at Chinese religions refuse to use the word “sect” to label the so-called “heterodoxies” in imperial China (e.g. ter Haar 1992; Dean 1999). As a pioneer introducing sociological concepts into the research of Chinese religions, Overmyer redefines the term “sect” and uses it “to mean ‘a founded voluntary association, oriented toward personal salvation’” (Overmyer 1976: 62). He finds that China, like Japan and Europe, had nourished sects which “maintained that ordinary lay life was a most adequate context in which to attain salvation”. These groups, which “had a married clergy, stressed the equality of believers, and granted a higher status to women,” usually paid a special attention to the salvation offered by personal saviors. In addition, these groups were equipped with “simplified rituals, short invocations, and popularized preaching based on vernacular scriptures” (Overmyer 1976: 65). Manifestly, three facets of these groups are emphasized by Overmyer: 1) voluntary association; 2) individual lay components; and 3) orientation

toward personal salvation. Overmyer purposely discards some elements of the term sect which he thinks are inapplicable to Chinese society. These elements include “exclusiveness and detachment from the world stressed by Ernst Troelsch,” in that they are “an echo of Western dualism” and “are not relevant to a definition which intends to be universal” (Overmyer 1976: 62). In particular, he excludes the notion of rejection from the word “sect” when he applies it to Chinese religious studies. He writes,

An important difference between the European groups and their Japanese and Chinese counterparts is the characteristic emphasis of the former on holy poverty and withdrawal from the world, which led to an insistent attack on the church for its wealth and its involvement with the political realm. The Asian sects, on the other hand, were fundamentally world affirming and always ready either to fight for their existence or to accept political recognition. (Overmyer 1976: 66)

Whether Chinese sects are rebellious or peaceful is an over-discussed issue and a large number of works have been produced on this topic (Chan 1969; Ma and Han 1992; Overmyer 1976; ter Haar 1992). While those (e.g. Chan 1969) who relied on official documents tend to emphasize the potential for rebellion supposedly inherent in these religious groups, researches based on fieldwork (DeGroot 1903; Li 1948; Jordan and Overmyer, 1986; Song 1983, 1995; Dean 1999) have testified to the profoundly peaceful nature of most of these groups and to a considerable degree of accommodation to the surrounding society. Today, the latter view has gradually been supported by most of the scholars in this field (Overmyer 1976, 1985; Naquin 1985; ter Haar 1992; Dean 1999).

Indeed, unlike sectarians in Christian societies who tend to protest and resist the dominant culture, Chinese sectarians accepted the mainstream culture. In China, sectarianism “is a major means for self-conscious popular participation in the Chinese ‘great tradition’” (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 7). To avoid cruel suppression, sects were even more ready to keep a low tension with the authoritarian state than other legal organizations (Song 1995). Chapter 3 has described that the sect cautiously tried to remain secret to avoid direct confrontation, frequently showed its loyalty to the KMT state and actively responded to the state’s policies such as reviving Chinese traditional culture. All of the above show that Chinese sectarians (at least YGD sectarians) prefer a low tension with the imperial powers to a high tension; the tension is never the most salient characteristic of their religious preferences.

Chapter 6 also points out that the persecution implemented by imperial China prevented the occurrence of the sect-to-church tendency in China. The persecution by central governments induced Chinese sectarian movements to be organizationally unstable, intellectually poor, and doctrinally syncretic. Even though various so-called “heterodox” religious groups existed in China, they held few opportunities to become church-like.

The above analyses indicate that both the sect-to-church theory and the religious market model which stresses tension are not extendable to the Chinese context. Furthermore, Stark and Finke ignore popular religion which is non-exclusive in nature. They are concerned with exclusive religious organizations, and state that “all nonexclusive organizations ... [are] inherently weak” (Stark and Finke 2000: 142). In Western societies where religions are highly institutionalized and popular religions

remain weak, the neglect of popular religion is not a big problem. But in China where popular religion dominates the population and exclusive religious firms are exceptions, ignoring popular religion is quite problematic. To analyze niches of the Chinese religious market, we must probe Chinese people's religious preferences directly.

8. 3 Exploring China's Religious Markets ¹

What are the particular religious tastes of Chinese people? What are the differences within Chinese people's preferences for religious goods? Let's first review the typologies of Chinese religions promoted by historians and sociologists.

As a pioneering sociologist who paid special attention to Chinese religion, Granet (1975) noticed that the peasant religion and the official religion were quite different. Peasant religion was more often than not related with practical ends, such as "fertility" and "the arrival of rains" (Granet 1975: 47), while the official religion, or "the religion of the literati" (Granet 1975: 34), was characterized by its high "abstractions" and "metaphysical speculations" (Granet 1975: 107).

In his great work, *Religion in Chinese Society*, C.K. Yang systematically distinguishes two forms of Chinese religion: institutional religion and diffused religion. Institutional religion, which includes Buddhism, Taoism and sectarian societies, has independent theological system, unique worship forms and organizations. On the other

1. Tamney and Chiang (2002: 157) argue that since "the market analogy assumes the existence of distinctive (bounded) religions in the same society," the analogy is not useful in pre-modern China where the boundaries of religions were blurred. I think that a religious market existed in imperial China because there were independent religious suppliers, such as Buddhist priesthood, Taoists, fortune tellers, sects and various temples. Although most of those suppliers were not bureaucratic organizations, they competed with each other to attract devotees who felt free to choose rival suppliers (Wolf 1974; Lin 2003).

hand, diffused religion has no such independent factors; rather, it is pervasive in such major social institutions as family, community and the state (Yang 1961: 294-301). One fundamental difference between institutional religion and diffused religion, according to Yang, is that the former holds great ability and interest in developing mythical or theological interpretations while the latter relies upon “institutional religion for the development of mythical or theological concepts.” (Yang 1961: 295)

Eric Zurcher (1980) suggests a metaphor of Chinese religion according to which Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism can be pictured as three pyramid-shaped peaks sharing a common mountain base: popular religion. “Unlike the popular tradition, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism were all based on a set of canonical texts” (Gregory and Ebrey 1993: 12), while “popular religion --- was linked to immediate concerns of health, long life, good fortune, success, and happiness” (Gregory and Ebrey 1993: 28) A similar classification is introduced by Hansen (1990) who discusses Chinese religion in terms of popular religion and textual religions. Textual religions, namely Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, “all shared a conviction in the power of the written word” and “their practitioners were supposed to be well-versed in the canon of texts recognized by their respective school” (Hansen 1990: 12). In contrast to textual religions, Chinese popular religion cared little about the “established canon of texts” (Hansen 1990: 13) and emphasized the efficacy of gods.

Enlightened by Stark and Bainbridge’s work that draws a single criterion from the typology of set-church and then utilizes it to measure religious market; I also try to find a single axis of variation from the above typologies before I apply it to measure Chinese people’s preference for religious goods. In fact, all of these typologies suggest that a

different taste for religious goods exists within Chinese people: While some people are interested in concerning or manufacturing theological interpretations, the majority of Chinese people have an apathy to these interpretations and are only concerned with immediate rewards such as health, wealth and success when they look to the gods for help. Hence, a single criterion can be drawn out of these: the varying interest towards theological interpretations (compensators or otherworldly rewards in Stark's term). From the perspective of this criterion, Chinese religious bodies would range along a continuum from a low to a high ability/interest of producing theological interpretations. In detail, three basic niches can be found in traditional Chinese religious markets, namely popular religion, sects and the three religions.

8.3.1 Popular Religion

Daniel Overmyer defines popular religion as “the religion of the whole population except those who specifically opted out of it, such as orthodox Taoist priests, Buddhist monks, Confucian scholars, and other state officials in their public roles” (Overmyer 1987, 3: 281). This definition asserts that almost all people practiced popular religion in traditional China. Quantitative researches also support this argument, as revealed in chapter 4. But for most Chinese people, this popular religion was not perceived as a distinct part of Chinese culture. The term “popular religion” is a modern idea conceived by contemporary scholars (Tamney and Chiang 2003). Scholars hold that Chinese popular religion as a tradition in its own right had existed at least since Song dynasty, separating from such religious systems as Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism (Teiser

1995: 380; Overmyer, 1987: 281; Seidil, 1989-90: 284-285). Although popular religion is not “a religion” with theologies, organizations and theists peculiar to itself, both historians (Hansen 1990; Gregory and Ebrey 1993) and anthropologists (Wolf 1974; Ahern 1981; Jordan 1972; Weller 1987; Sangren 1987) hold that Chinese popular religion at least includes the following elements:

- 1) The worship of the three classes of supernatural beings: gods, ghosts and ancestors (Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974; Freedman 1974; Sangren 1987) and various forms of exchange between people and categories of spirits.
- 2) Annual festivals and communal religious activities, such as temple fairs. (C.K. Yang 1961; Gregory and Ebrey 1993: 28). And,
- 3) Territorial-cults organizations or village temples which manage the communal rituals. (Seaman 1978; Sangren 1987; Feuchtwang 1992)

Three categories of spirits exert their influences on Chinese everyday life: gods, ghosts, and ancestors. With regard to the system of Chinese gods, the “imperial metaphor” is widely used as an explanatory model by anthropologists (e.g. Wolf 1974; Feuchtwang 1992). The gods are organized into a complex bureaucracy. The Jade emperor reigns over this divine bureaucracy and governs the heavens, the human world, and the ghost world². Most gods are commonly believed to be deceased persons who have been assigned a rank in the supernatural bureaucracy by the Jade Emperor. These Divine bureaucrats, who are ranked in different levels, assist the Jade emperor to

² Chinese cosmology conceives of three realms of existence: Heaven (*Tian* 天), Earth (*Di* 地), and the underworld (*Ming* 冥). Heaven is in the sky, Earth is on the ground, and the underworld is below the ground. Cross-cutting this tripartite scheme is a two-zone division: the zone of light (*Yangjian* 阳间) and the zone of darkness (*yinjian* 阴间). Heaven belongs to the zone of light and the underworld belongs to the zone of darkness. Earth, however, is split into two dimensions: the *yang* (day) and the *yin* (night). So Chinese believe that ghosts usually occur at night, especial mid-night, the *yin* dimension of earth.

administer local administrative districts. While the City God (*Cheng Huang*) usually governs larger communities, the Earth god (*Tudi gong*) administers smaller communities³. Besides these divine administrative officials, there are a large number of functional deities who are in charge of specific businesses. For example, the King of Dragon (*Long wang*) is the god in charge of rain. At the lowest level of this supernatural bureaucracy, the Stove God serves as “a kind of policeman” (Wolf 1974: 133), supervising and spying on the affairs of a single household. All of these divine officials engage themselves in recording the merits (*gong* 功) and demerits (*guo* 过) of each individual and then reporting their findings to the Jade emperor. On the basis of these reports, a person is blessed or punished. Apparently, the hierarchical structure of imperial bureaucracy is replicated in the Chinese pantheon. This divine bureaucracy is like the government of the entire universe; and its principal duties are to supervise humanity and to keep the system functioning (Vee 1977; Clart 1996).

In addition to *Shen*, there is another kind of supernatural being: ghost (*gui*). The term *gui* is used to refer to the soul (*linghun*) of a deceased person. For Chinese, most of people become ghosts after death; and in the few exceptional cases where godhood is attained, the soul can ascend to the Heaven and become a god. A fundamental characteristic of all ghosts is that they are dependent on offerings made by human beings. If they are neglected, they pester human beings for the offerings they need (Wee 1977). So it is important for Chinese to care for the souls of their deceased ancestors who are ghosts in nature. Usually, they set up spirit tablets for ancestors with their name inscribed

³ Both the City God and the Earth God are divine positions which are open to everyone: if one behaves well and does good deeds in the human world, one has a chance to be appointed as a City god or an Earth god to manage a local community and enjoy the worship of the local people after he/she dies, though in most cases the origins of these local gods are vague and hard to trace.

and make regular offerings to these spirit tablets. Thus the traditional ideas of looking after ghosts were embedded in the practice of ancestor-worship.

The distinction between ghosts and ancestors depends on the context: spirits are ghosts to one person but ancestors to someone else, and thus most spirits are relatively neutral and unimportant in the lives of anyone but their own descendants. Two kinds of ghosts can act as public figures and are believed to be dangerous and important: lonely ghosts (*guhun* 孤魂) and wild ghosts (*yegui* 野鬼). The former is spirits of people who have no descendants to sustain them with offerings and must therefore prey on others for their livelihood. To get offerings, the lonely ghosts usually make trouble for human beings who thus have to appease them; thus these ghosts are like beggars who are both pitiful and troublesome. Wild ghosts are spirits of people who died violently, such as by drowning, suicide, death in childbirth or “other violent means and lurk near the place of their death seeking to avenge themselves upon the living” (Harrell 1974: 193). When a violent death occurs, the soul of the deceased person is trapped and cannot be reborn. However, these trapped souls can liberate themselves by catching substitute souls, that is, other human beings. Accordingly, this kind of ghosts is violent and dangerous and anthropologists (e.g. Wolf 1974) usually regard these wild ghosts as the supernatural equivalents of dangerous strangers, such as bandits and gangsters.

Generally, gods are good, safe and willing to help human beings while ghosts are dangerous, evil and may harm living beings. But in certain conditions, such distinction does not work. On one hand, gods’ attitudes toward worshipers are changeable. When a devotee does something wrong in ritual performance or is ungrateful for the favors rendered, the god might become angry and punish him. On the other hand, ghosts could

be helpful especially the souls of ancestors always guard and benefit their offspring. Considering the fact that dangerous ghosts still hold opportunities to become god-like, the distinction between gods and ghosts becomes more blurry. In China, the efficacy (*Ling*) is enough to attract people to seek favors from any spirits, including ghosts. With the increase of devotees, the efficacious ghosts can have an intermediate status that contains both *gui* and *Shen* elements, and occasionally even change their nature entirely and become full-fledged gods (Harrell 1974). Such spirits are numerous in Taiwan, among which the *You-ying Gong* (the lord who is responsive to every request) is the most famous. The term *You-ying Gong* refers to the souls of deceased immigrants who lost their lives in collective fighting. As its name suggests, *youying gong* is said to be ready to satisfy all requirements of worshippers, no matter whether these requirements are unethical or immoral, such as a success in gambling. Due to its efficacy, the worship of *youying gong* is popular in Taiwan and this spirit becomes a quasi-god.

The foregoing analyses show the cosmological difference between Western society and Eastern society. While Western society holds a dichotomy of God versus Satan and good gods versus evil gods, Chinese society holds an ambivalent attitude toward spirits. Whereas Christians only view gods as sacred, the Chinese believe both gods and ghosts, especially deceased kin, are sacred. Stark proposes that “the more complex the culture, the clearer the distinction drawn between good and evil gods; the older, larger, and more cosmopolitan societies become, the clearer the distinction drawn between good and evil gods” (Stark 1997: 15). Apparently, these propositions are not applicable to Chinese societies: China has one of the oldest and most complex cultures in the world, but it seems that the distinction between good and evil gods is not clear in Chinese society. For

Chinese, “gods and ghosts are ambiguous beings; they are both helpful and harmful. They can better a person’s welfare by endowing him with additional good luck, but they can also harm him” (Vee 1977: 24)

The religious economy model assumes that the fundamental relationship between individual consumers and spirits is a relationship of exchange and reciprocity (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; Stark and Finke 2000). This assumption can be perfectly verified by Chinese popular religion in which devotees offer sacrifices to gods, ancestors and ghosts from whom they get secular rewards, such as security, wealth and health (Ahern 1981). As Sangren (1987: 52) argues, “much of Chinese ritual activity can be viewed in terms of various forms of exchange between people and categories of spirits. To put it rather crudely, one propitiates dangerous ghosts, provides for the material and spiritual needs of deceased kin, and bribes powerful gods.” Let us have a brief look at this feature.

Since Chinese people view gods as sacred human beings, Chinese gods are highly anthropomorphized and their needs are basically understood in human terms. Not only did they needs offerings of meat, wine, or grain to maintain both their life and supernatural ability⁴, they also “craved human recognition in the forms of images, temples, and titles” (Gregory and Ebrey 1993: 29). Gods appreciate secular enjoyments to such a degree that “even the lowly Tu Ti Kong [tudi gong, the Earth God] is usually provided with a wife, and some take it upon themselves to add a concubine” (Wolf 1974: 163); and like imperial officials, their human counterpart, gods also tend to require bribes or gifts when people are asking help from them. Gods’ abilities were also closely related

⁴ According to the popular faith, the gods’ abilities are related with the offerings they get. It is believed that those gods who can regale themselves with meat or fish offerings are more powerful than those only getting vegetarian offerings. See Kleeman, 1996: 552.

with secular life, from searching for the lost, treating diseases, intervening in rainfalls to manipulating market price and “the government quota system to make an enormous profit” (Hansen 1990: 10).

Since gods exercise themselves much as humans do, sometimes with benevolence and sometimes with vengeance, and since their powers are supposed to surpass those of mortals, *Xu Yuan* and *Huan Yuan* become the fundamental form of individual religious activities, as chapter 4 has pointed out. By asking favors of a god, a person enters into a relationship with that god. If the god satisfies the devotees’ wish, the devotees would reward the god with delicious food, beautiful images, new temples, spectacular plays, and adulatory inscriptions. If the god fails to offer the favor, the worshipers do not feel obligated to make offerings to the god and they usually turn to another deity who is more sympathetic and more efficacious. Those inefficacious deities with their shabby statues and leaked-roof are common in China. In sum, it is the gods’ efficaciousness in answering prayer and in bringing benefits to the worshipers that determines their fates.⁵

The reciprocity also exists in ancestor worship, though ancestor worship is mainly viewed as an act of obeisance. Wolf finds that “the ancestors may ignore many of their descendants’ requests without endangering the relationship, but they cannot consistently ignore urgent and repeated supplications. If they do, their descendants may forswear their obligation” (Wolf 1974: 161). In his fieldwork, Wolf knew a man who destroyed his ancestor’s tablets because of his ancestor’s supposed indifference and then converted to Christianity. When he was asked why he no longer worshipped his ancestors, the man

⁵ Wolf (1974: 160) provided a story exposing how a particular deity who was once reluctant to answer people’s demand and then discarded by people gradually became popular after he performed miracles again

replied, “What use are your ancestors? You spend money making offerings to them all the time, and then when you need their help they don’t do anything for you.”

The utilitarian nature of popular religion is best embodied in the exchange between humans and ghosts. In order to win the gambling, some gamblers engage themselves in the exchange relationship with lonely and wild ghosts (*guhun yegui*). The gamblers provide offerings to the ghosts who are believed to be responsive and beyond the control of morality; while the ghosts give the related information to the gamblers. But when the message is proved to be wrong, some gamblers even destroy the spirit tablet of the ghost to punish it. Though these are extreme cases, they perfectly reflect the efficacy-oriented preference of Chinese popular religionists.

Let’s summarize the characteristics of the preferences of popular religionists. The adherents of Chinese popular religion tend to establish a temporary exchange relationship with supernatural beings when tradition or crisis makes it seem advisable. When the exchange is over, the relationship ceases. Thus, they are concerned less with the logical coherence and theological explanations of their religion than with its practical efficacy (Harrell 1974). The concern with efficacy is closely associated with the idea of spiritual power. If a spirit is proven to be *ling*, “then it matters little what his origin is or what a religious specialist might say about his position in the supernatural social order” (Harrell 1974: 204). Though some Buddhist elements are widespread among Chinese popular religionists, such as beliefs in Karma and rebirth, acceptance of Buddha and of bodhisattvas as gods, and the use of Buddhist practices of self-cultivation (Wee 1977: 400); these elements are “redefined to fit a religion that centers on gaining control of, or at least winning this-worldly favors from, a superhuman power that inhabits the world”

(Tamney and Chiang 2003: 156). In sum, the religious preference of Chinese popular religionists centers on efficacy rather than theological concerns.

8.3.2 Sects

China has a sectarian tradition since the Han dynasty. Scholars (e.g. Overmyer 1995) usually regard these sects as “a sectarian form of popular religion”, but the differences between sects and popular religion are great. While popular religion is efficacy-oriented and loosely-organized, sects are salvation-oriented and well-organized. These sects are voluntary religious associations which own a textual tradition and are composed of individual lay persons who orientate toward personal salvation. Salvation is the most important of the goods which sects deal with, according to Yang, who writes, “Whatever its content, the salvational proposition was the core of popular religious movements.....the basic claim of the sects was their ability to bring universal deliverance to tortured humanity” (Yang 1961: 231). Their salvation-oriented mythologies were expounded first by “precious volumes” and later by spirit writings, through borrowing “bureaucratic terminology, Chan language about the Buddha-nature within, Taoist concepts of refinement of the internal elixir, Confucian ethical principles, veneration of many types of deities, and many other aspects of their cultural and religious surroundings” (Overmyer 1999: 273). A unique theological system that centered on the cult of Venerable Mother who would offer the coming salvation had gradually come into being since Lo Qing (1442-1527) published his “Five Books in Six Volumes” (wu-bu Liu-ce) in 1509 (Ma and Han 1992; Overmyer 1999).

Though Chinese sects had begun to manufacture their own scriptures and texts, their theologies were poorly developed in the past few centuries. Unlike European and Japanese sects which “were led and sustained by an educated professional clergy” (Overmyer 1976: 65), Chinese sects were prevented by constant suppression from ever developing an independent professional and educated priesthood. Chapter 6 has argued that the absence of educated leadership made Chinese sects intellectually underdeveloped. In short, though Chinese sects own a textual tradition, its theology is immature, especially in comparison with Buddhism.

8.3.2 Three Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

There have been the “three religions” (*Sanjiao* 三教) of China: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The three religionists have their otherworldly orientations respectively. “Being a saint” (*ChengSheng* 成圣) is perfect for Confucians; “becoming an immortal being” (*Chengxian* 成仙) is the highest pursuit of Taoists, and “achieving a spirit status of Buddha” (*Chengfo* 成佛) is treasured by Buddhists. To guide the practices and cultivation towards these extramundane orientations, the three religions have produced a large amount of intellectual texts. As Hansen (1990) argues, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism are textual religions. They “all shared a conviction in the power of the written word” and “their practitioners were supposed to be well-versed in the canon of texts recognized by their respective school” (Hansen 1990: 12). Indeed, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism exerted a great influence on Chinese spiritual life

through maintaining literate traditions and manufacturing theological or moral interpretations.

As “China’s indigenous high religion,” Taoism placed much emphasis on the manufacture and transmission of sacred texts, for they believed that “the rightful possession of such texts gave one religious authority in this world and guaranteed one’s sanctified status in the next” (Gregroy and Ebrey 1993: 24). With the imperial sponsorship, Taoism not only brought *Daode Jing* and other Taoist books into the imperial examination system, but also assembled all extant Taoist texts and compiled them into a canon, copies of which were then distributed to Taoist temples throughout the land. All the above show that Taoism “was always a literate tradition” (Gregroy and Ebrey 1993: 24).

Whether Confucianism is a religion is controversial, but few would deny that Confucianism at least contains religious dimensions. In practice, many Chinese religious groups were constantly drawing intellectual elements from Confucianism to both guide their cultivation and enrich their own theological theories (Zhong 1995). In this sense, Confucianism can be regarded as a main source of intellectual innovations for Chinese religious firms. Table 4.9 has revealed that Confucian classics are of primary importance for YGD sectarians. The sectarians used 45 seminars to study Confucianism, while the number of Buddhist seminars was 25 and the number of Taoist seminars was 24 (Lin 1992). These figures exactly show that Confucianism still exerts a great influence on Chinese spiritual life.

With reference to Buddhism, Colins thought that it was so powerful in the realm of abstract ideas that “Buddhism dominated the intellectual life of medieval China” (Colins

1998: 272). He observed that “With its network of economically powerful monasteries and its internal hierarchy of trained specialists, Buddhism was organizationally much more powerful than indigenous Chinese institutions as a basis for intellectual life” (Colins 1998: 176). This claim is still valid today. Buddhism is active in updating their theories and social involvements in Taiwan (Jones1999).

8.3.4 Dynamics within Chinese religious market

The typology promoted in this study tends to provide a dynamic framework for analyzing Chinese religious markets. Like any typology, it is certainly too simple to circumscribe the richness of the Chinese religious situation. Some might even argue that the market analogy is not applicable in pre-modern China because there were no “distinctive (bounded) religions” in traditional China (Tamney and Chiang 2003). However, as the foregoing section argues, it is true that Chinese people’s religious preferences are different: the majority of Chinese pay more attention to immediate, “this worldly” benefits while a small part of them are concern with other worldly rewards. We’d better regard the difference of Chinese religious preferences as a continuum rather than separate and isolated points. I hold such a view because I notice that not only are individual’s religious preferences adaptive, but also religious bodies would move from one niche to another.

In chapter 5, I have pointed out that some popular religious groups became more theology-centered as a result of religious competition. “The compassion society” (*Ci-hui Tang*) is a typical example. This society emerged as an efficacy-oriented group providing

the immediate magical benefits such as seeking the lost things, resolving family troubles and offering magical therapies. Later, the Compassion Society gave up these services and devoted itself to producing “morality books” by spirit writing. These “morality books”, as its name suggests, concentrate on religious instruction and moral exhortation, persuading readers to shift their attention from secular rewards to other-worldly religious rewards, such as accumulating religious merits. Gradually, the Compassion Society developed into a full-scale religious system, owning a number of scriptures, a set of rituals peculiar to itself, a collection of cultivation methods and articulated organizations centered on the founding temple in *Hualian*. The transition of the Compassion Society from an efficacy-centered organization to a theologically-oriented group is not an isolated case in Chinese society. A recent case is *Falun Gong*. Emerging as a *qigong* organization in China in the early 1990s which provided immediate treatments to practitioners, *Falun Gong* eventually developed into a salvation-oriented religious firm under the pressure of keen market competition (Lu 2004). The transition of *Shengde Tang*, which has been discussed in Chapter 5, also shows that religious firms tend to shift from one niche to another. *Shengde Tang* was a phoenix hall when it was founded in the early 1980s. However, within the next two decades, its founder eventually became a Buddhist monk and this spirit-writing group totally evolved into a Buddhist sect. In addition to the tendency for religious firms to change from efficacy-oriented to theology-centered, a reverse tendency also exists in China where religious groups still hold a chance to become more efficacy-oriented or even secular groups. For example, *Qingbang* (青幫), the most influential secret society in the 1930s of China, was formerly a branch of the Luo sect (Ma & Han 1992).

This section offers a model of Chinese religious market niches. Note that this is just an ideal-type and many details have been neglected. Considering the influences of state regulation, the actual situation is more complicated than what the model has presented. In the following section, I will briefly analyze other characteristics of Chinese religious life which are associated with state regulation.

8. 4 The Influences of State Regulation

In his masterpiece, *Religion in Chinese Society*, C.K. Yang has provided a detailed delineation of government control of religion in imperial China (Yang 1961, Chapter 8). As the ruling group, Confucian officials tried to systematically control religious affairs to strengthen the established power structure. The traditional governments tried to demonstrate their mastery over supernatural forces, imposed a monopoly over certain rituals and interpretations of religious matters, exerted administrative control over the management of religious organizations, the erection of new temples and monasteries, and the size of priesthood, and, above all, tried to prevent and suppress the development of heterodox sectarian movements (Yang 1961: 180). In chapter 6, I have investigated how state regulation influenced the long-term development of Chinese sectarian movements. The following will broaden the discussion and argues that state regulation makes Chinese religions lack strong bureaucratic organizations and become pilgrimage-oriented.

8.4.1 The Absence of Strong Bureaucratic Religious Organization

In traditional China, both Buddhism and Taoism never developed elaborate bureaucratic structures comparable to those of the medieval Catholic Church. The absence of matured religious organizations in traditional China had much to do with the strict state regulation. Beginning at the tenth century, the imperial states required that all Buddhist and Taoist priests must get the official license. Otherwise, those who surreptitiously received ordination by Buddhist and Taoist priesthood without an official ordination certificate would be punished. When a priest died, his ordination certificate was surrendered to the government, in order to prevent the certificate from being circulated through unofficial channels. In addition, the law of the Qing dynasty required that Buddhist and Taoist priests must be over forty years old before they offered apprenticeship to a neophyte, and each ordained priest was permitted to train only one neophyte (Yang 1961: 188-9). These measures not only restricted the size of Buddhist and Taoist priesthood, but also prevented Buddhism and Taoism developing mature institutionalized organizations.

Popular religion also lacks a hierarchical structure, but it does not mean that popular religion has no organization. Lin Meirong (2003) identifies two types of popular religious organization: Ritual Community (*jisi quan* 祭祀圈) and Belief Circle ⁶(*xinyang quan* 信仰圈). A ritual community refers to “a territorial unit which holds rituals to worship

⁶ Lin Meirong, the scholar who creates the Chinese term “xin-yang quan”, translates this term into “Belief Sphere”.

common spirits” (Lin 2003: 4); while a belief circle is “a voluntary religious organization which centers on the cult of a specific god” (Lin 2003: 7).

A ritual community is actually a “territorial-cult organization” by Sangren (1987: 75). Different levels of rituals exist in a ritual community: neighborhood-cult ritual is associated with worship of Earth God (*Tudi gong*); village ritual is conducted at more elaborate village temples, and honors the lords of three spheres (*San-jie-gong*), the deities of higher celestial status than Earth God; and multi-village ritual centers on the worship of local patron gods, such as Mazu or Guangong. These rituals are arranged according to the Chinese calendar: the Spring festival (*Chunjie* 春节) is for the worship of all the spirits, but the emphasis is on gods in the Heaven in general and on the Stove God in particular; the Lantern Festival (*Shangyuan jie* 上元节, the fifth day of first lunar month) is to worship the lord of Heaven (*Tiangong* 天公); the whole seventh lunar month is “the season of ghosts” (*guijie* 鬼节) which all “lonely souls and wild ghosts” in the community are cared for and “universally saved” (*pudu* 普渡)⁷, the fifth day of seventh lunar month is also the birthday of the Lord of Earth Sphere (*diguan* 地官), the mid-autumn festival (*zhongqiu jie* 中秋节 the fifth day of eighth lunar month) is the birthday of Earth God, and finally, the ending festival (*Xiayuan* 下元节), the fifth day of tenth lunar month, is the festival for conducting “operas for peace and harmony” (*Pinganxi* 平安戏) to thank all the gods.

Attending these rituals is compulsory for families. All the families in a ritual community share the expenses of rituals. Money is collected each year for the following

⁷ A brief but accurate introduction to the “*pudu*” ritual is available in Sangren 1987: 82.

year's celebration. Each household contributes an equal amount; sometimes assessments are made according to male population. In addition, village temples, which are commonly owned by all the residents in a ritual community, usually have a number of properties, such as lands. The income gained from these temple properties are usually used to maintain the village temples and support part of expenses of celebrations.

These festival rituals are arranged by a temporary organization which is headed by *Lu-zhu* (炉主 host of incense burner). *Lu-zhu* is responsible for collecting funds, hiring opera troupes and religious specialists, building the opera canopy, preparing for the offerings and making general arrangements. Each year, a *Lu-zhu* will be chosen by means of casting divination blocks which represents the deity's choice. Only men who are respected household heads are considered for the honor of serving as *lu-zhu*. As a rule, a *lu-zhu* is chosen on a rotating basis; one who has recently served as *Lu-zhu* for a particular ritual is unlikely to hold the same position again for a number of years (Sangren 1987: 55-6).

A belief circle is a voluntary religious organization focusing on the worship of a specific god. "Deity associations" (*Shen-ming-hui* 神明会) are typical belief circles. Most of the deity associations are formed in honor of the god who has well-established position in the local religious system. When a deity is believed to be efficacious in answering prayers and in bringing miraculous benefits to the devotees, the worshipers may organize a deity association. The members of these associations are voluntary individuals rather than compulsory families. The main activities of these associations are to make pilgrimages to the "mother temple" where the god is believed to be most efficacious. Sometimes they build "branch temples" to worship the god. When a ritual community

holds celebrations, a deity association tends to take a image of the god in a sedan chair to watch operas and “inspect the territory” (*xunjing* 巡境) (Lin 2003: 9).

Religions play a prominent part in organizing the traditional Chinese communal events such as temple fairs, religious procession, and collective celebrations of festive occasions. “No community in China was without one or more collective representations in the form of patron gods, the cults of which served as centers for communal religious life” (Yang 1961: 81). But the organization of popular religion does not develop a bureaucratic structure. They are loosely and temporarily organized when rituals are needed. When the rituals are over, these organizations perform secular functions, such as the protection of village from bandits, irrigation issues, etc. (Duara 1988; Dean 1998).

Let’s summarize the organizational characteristics of Chinese religion. Neither Buddhism nor popular religion did develop highly bureaucratic organizations. As we will soon see, Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion developed extensive pilgrimage networks on the basis the non-bureaucratic principle. Strong religious organizations were absent to a large degree in imperial China and such absence exerted a great influence on Chinese religious life in many aspects. One result is that the affiliation to a specific religion is not important and weak for Chinese people. As Tamney (1978) has pointed out, neither did Chinese parents pay attention to their children’s religious identity; nor did they share their religious preference with their children. Children raised in traditional Chinese families usually encounter gods and goddesses in their homes on family altars. They regard these spirits as part of family life, rather than being associated with a separate institution (Tamney and Chiang 2003: 156). Religion outside the home means individual spirits and specific temples but not religions; these temples are highly

syncretic and “even priests in some country temples were unable to reveal the identity of the religion to which they belonged” (Yang 1961: 25). People would maintain an exchange relationship with spirits and their temples and tend to switch their loyalties according to the degree of efficacy. But they have little consciousness about the boundary of or affiliation to specific religions. Indeed, “the first striking characteristic [of religious life in China] is the general absence of any membership requirement for worshiping in a temple or convent” (Yang 1961: 327). The sectarian groups were exceptions, in the sense that they possessed a strong organizational system which copied the imperial bureaucracy, as chapter 2 has pointed out. But the membership in sectarian groups accounted for “only a tiny minority of the total population” (Yang 1961: 327).

8.4.2 The Popularity of Pilgrimages in China

Another consequence which is associated with the absence of strong religious organizations is that the majority of Chinese religions are not congregationally-oriented but pilgrimage-centered. Because this is an important topic which has not been fully investigated, I use a special section to discuss it.

Most Chinese gods, either Buddhist or Taoist, expand their influences by means of “efficacy division” (*Fenling* 分灵) or “incense division” (*fenxiang* 分香). Both concepts refer to “the practice by which new temples are chartered by the division of incense representing a god’s efficacy from a source temple” (Sangren 2000: 99). These branch temples can themselves spawn newer temples as well. This institutional division becomes the main way in which Buddhist or Taoist gods spread their influences. The branch

temples normally continue to retain a relationship with the source temple. To increase the efficaciousness of gods, the branch temples make a yearly pilgrimage to the mother temple, usually at the “birthday” of the god they worshiped. In addition, all branch temples can return to the founding temple but are treated on an equal basis. Competition exists in these branch temples and “status within the system is won by competitive gift-giving” and donations which “are carefully recorded and carved on steles lining the walls of the founding temples” (Dean 1998: 54). Thus, extensive pilgrimage networks, which operate with flexible and non-hierarchical principles, existed in traditional China: the source temple occupied the precedent status of the incense-division network, and various competitive branch temples shared the efficaciousness of the gods and made pilgrimages to the founding temple (Dean 1993, 1998; Sangren 1987, 2000). Dean (1998: 53) holds that “popular cult temples develop nonhierarchical, transverse flows of communication and coordination outside of government lines of interference”. This argument is also applicable to Buddhism and Taoism each of which developed their own complex pilgrimage networks surrounding the various pilgrimage centers.

“Four famous Buddhist mountains” (*sida fojiao minshan* 四大佛教名山) are important Buddhist pilgrimage centers each of which is associated with a particular bodhisattva (or “*pusa*” in Chinese). *Pu-tuo Shan* (普陀山), in the eastern province of Zhejiang, is related with *Guan-yin pusa* (Avalokitesvara) who represents mercy; *Wu-tai shan* (五台山), in the northern of *Shanxi*, is associated with *Wen-shu pusa* (Manjusri) representing wisdom; *O-mei Shan* (峨眉山), located in the western province of *Shichuan*, is associated with *Pu-xian pusa* (Samantabhadra) who represents happiness; and *Jiu-hua*

Shan (九华山), in the central province of *Anhui*, is associated with *Dizhang pusa* (Ksitigarbha) who represents filial piety.

Taoism also has its pilgrimage centers, even more than Buddhism. Equally important to four famous Buddhist mountains are the “five famous Taoist mountains” (*wuyue* 五岳). East Mountain *Taishan* (*Dongyue Taishan* 东岳泰山), in *Shan-dong*, is governed by “the sacred king of Qi” (*qi-tian-wang* 齐天王); Western Mountain *Hua-shan* (*xiyue hua-shan* 西岳华山), in *Shanxi*, is supervised by “the sacred king of Jin” (*Jin-Tian-wang* 金天王); Southern Mountain *Heng-shan* (*Nan-yue Heng-shan* 南岳衡山), in *Hunan*, is associated with “the sacred king of Si” (*Si-tian-wang* 司天王), Northern Mountain *Hengshan* (*Bei-yue heng-shan* 北岳恒山), is administered by “the sacred king of An” (*An-tian-wang* 安天王); and Central Mountain *Song-shan* (*Zhongyue Song-shan* 中岳嵩山), in *He-nan*, is governed by “the sacred king of Zhong” (*Zhong-tian-wang* 中天王). In addition to these five famous mountains, Taoism also has ten “Fascinating Places” (*Dong-tian* 洞天) and seventy-two “Happy Lands” (*Fu-di* 福地). Among these Taoist sacred places, which are believed to be dwelled by Taoist gods, the followings are most famous: *Wu-dang Shan* (武当山) in *Hubei*, *Long-hu shan* (龙虎山) in *Jiangxi*, *Qiyun Shan* (齐云山) in *Anhui*, and *Qing-cheng Shan* (青城山) in *Sichuan*. Taoism also adopts some gods who emerged as popular religious deities, such as Mazu and Huang Daxian. Accordingly, the original place of the god tends to become a new center for pilgrimages. For example, *Meizhou* (湄州), where the belief of Mazu originated, is the most important pilgrimage center for the devotees of Mazu.

These pilgrimage centers play important roles in linking various ritual communities and facilitating the communication between different communities. Most of (if not all) important pilgrimage centers in China are located in peripheries and far from economic central regions (Yang 1961: 87; Turner 1974; Sangren 1987). Participants of pilgrimage are either organized by local territorial-cult temples or motivated by the promise to thanking a deity for help rendered. To make pilgrimages, the devotees must pass through many areas and visited many temples, including those located at important sacred sites and those along the major pilgrimage routes as well. These temples and monasteries usually “derived significant portions of their income from providing food and lodging for pilgrims” (Sangren 1987: 122). To facilitate the journeys of pilgrims, important temples and monasteries also produced a large number of itineraries or guidebooks to introduce pilgrimage destinations, the routes, lodgings, local customs, and so on (Brook 1981). Thus, the long journey of pilgrimage facilitated the intense internal interactions within pilgrimage networks.

Pilgrimages in China are popular and usually in a large scale. Large-sale pilgrimages are still available in contemporary Taiwan. For example, every year some 4 to 5 million Taiwanese (roughly 20% percent of the island’s population) make pilgrimages to *Beigang* (北港), home of the *Chaotian* temple (*Chao-tian gong* 朝天宮) of the goddess Mazu (Sangren 2000). Pilgrimages offer the pilgrims an opportunity to give public expression to their experiences and testimonials. When describing pilgrimages on Taiwan today, Chen writes that “participating in the pilgrimage is essentially an engagement in a legend-telling session. The incense guests [pilgrims] like to exchange their own memories [testimonies] to invite friendly conversation” (Chen 1984, cited from Sangren 2000: 91).

Thus Sangren comments that: “in these conversations, pilgrims find sympathetic audiences for their own religious autobiographies and learn from others the characteristic autobiographical idiom for such narratives. In other words, pilgrimage provides a public occasion for individuals to validate the religious significance of their own lives” (Sangren 2000: 91). Sangren is correct in revealing the public significance of pilgrimages, but we can go further, and must.

In Chapter 3, I have introduced that the religious economy model regards religion as highly risky commodities. To deal with risk, institutions and arrangements, which are designed to increase information and reduce fraud, emerge. In western society, according to Iannaccone, the congregational structure and collective activities associated with congregations are such institutions which are helpful to increase the credibility of religious goods (Iannaccone 1997). Testimonials, which usually place greater emphasis on material blessings, are helpful to increase religionists’ faith, especially when these testimonials come from a trusted source. Iannaccone thinks that this point helps to explain why the character of religious activity is so often collective and the structure of religious organizations is so often congregational: congregational structure can “limit the need for full-time professionals and provides a source of credible product endorsements”, “thereby making religion more compelling and attractive;” and collective activities “provide continuous assurance through the enthusiasm, devotion, conviction, and testimony of fellow members” (Iannaccone 1997: 35).

In imperial China, however, congregations did not work as a significant institution in Chinese religious life though they indeed existed in sectarian groups. A congregational structure is usually associated with strong religious organizations, but such organizations

were absent in traditional China because of the state regulation. For most Chinese, pilgrimages functioned as the main arrangements to attend collective religious activities and share their testimonials with others. Participation in pilgrimages means that pilgrims can publicly testify their faith to the gods' efficacy, responsiveness and supernatural power. These testimonials, from the perspective of rational choice theory, are very helpful to reduce the risk of religious commodities, because these pilgrimage testifiers are not professional clergies and have relatively little to gain from having their claims heard and believed (Iannaccone 1997: 35). Thus, the testimonials expressed in pilgrimages can transfer individually motivated desire into a collective validation of the gods. Pilgrimages substitute for congregation to serve as the main institution of increasing the certainty of religious goods and devotees' commitment as well. In this sense, "Chinese Buddhism maintained a degree of ritual and doctrinal unity not through formal organization and bureaucratic discipline, but through informal institutions such as the pilgrimages of wandering monks and lay devotees" (Sangren 1987: 123). So did Taoism.

8.5 Discussion and Conclusion

In Western society, exclusive religious organizations are the main streams and popular religion is weak; the boundaries between religious firms are clear; these religious firms emphasize membership and socialize their members through formal organization and bureaucratic discipline; they are congregation-centered rather than pilgrimage-oriented; and, finally, they would become more church-like or more sect-like. Based on the observation of these phenomena, Stark and Finke argue that there is a religious

market which can be classified into several niches according to the degree of tension between religious firms and the surrounding society; mainly derive their conclusions from the analysis of Western societies where religions are highly institutionalized and popular religions remain weak. So it is reasonable for them to ignore the popular religion and focus on the highly organized religious firms which generate exclusive beliefs and memberships. In China, however, the situation reverses: while the non-exclusive popular religion dominates the population, exclusive religious firms are exceptions in Chinese markets. The weakness of organized religious firms in traditional China has much to do with imperial suppression.

In China, “the imperial regimes were careful to ensure that no religious organization became sufficiently well-organized and powerful to produce political challenges” (Lang and Lu 2004: 8). The imperial officials tried to restrict the size of Buddhist and Taoist priesthood and prevent Buddhism and Taoism developing mature institutionalized organizations. Thus, in traditional China, both Buddhism and Taoism never developed elaborate bureaucratic structures comparable to those of the medieval Catholic Church. Let alone the popular religion. Under the strict state regulation, Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion gradually developed extensive pilgrimage networks which consist of temples in various levels, such as the source temple and branch temples. These networks were organized on the non-bureaucratic principle and maintained a degree of ritual and doctrinal unity through informal institutions such as the pilgrimages (Sangren 1987). As Chapter 8 has argued, the pilgrimage activities play important roles in Chinese religious life. Pilgrimages functioned as the main institution which substitutes for congregations to

increase certainty of religious goods and devotees' commitment, because the pilgrimage activities offer people opportunities to share their testimonials with others.

In traditional China, Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion did not have strong organizations; they exerted the influences on their adherents through the extensive pilgrimage networks which were organized on the basis of the non-bureaucratic principle rather than through formal organization and bureaucratic discipline; their main public religious activities were pilgrimages, temple fairs and all kinds of festivals; since the boundaries of religions were not clear, religious competition mainly occurred among different pilgrimage networks and temples, though in history Buddhism and Taoism indeed competed with each other.

In a sense, Chinese sects were exceptions in the Chinese market. While Chinese popular religion, Taoism and Buddhism lacked strong organizations and depended on the loose incense-division networks, Chinese sects were equipped with strong and highly bureaucratic organizations. While pilgrimages were the main form of popular religious practice, congregation was adopted and highlighted by the sectarians. While other religious traditions did not stress membership or were inactive in recruiting members (partly due to the state regulation), Chinese sects paid more attention to missionary work and membership. All of the above shows that Chinese sects constituted an independent or exceptional tradition which is quite different from other religious traditions. But Chinese sects are not an isolated tradition. By fusing popular religion and the three religions, Chinese sects offer a highly synthetic belief system which bridges popular religion and the three religions, namely Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. On one hand, most of Chinese sectarian leaders and adherents are from popular religion and thus sects keep

many elements of popular religion, such as the polytheism, ancestor worship, rituals (such as burning incense, kowtow, etc.), practices (e.g. making and fulfilling vows) and syncretism. On the other hand, Chinese sects are influenced by the three religions. They manufactured their salvation theory on the basis of Buddhism, drew their magical rituals from Taoism, and borrowed their ethical systems from Confucianism. As Jordan and Overmyer (1986: 8) argue, “sectarianism in Taiwan, perhaps in China more generally, is a major means for self-conscious popular participation in the Chinese ‘great tradition’.”

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS

The primary intellectual interest of this study was to explore the operation of Chinese traditional sects in the modern society from the perspective of the religious economy model. At the beginning of this research, I was puzzled by some questions. Why would people like to be a member of stigmatized and suppressed sects? How could suppressed sects survive the suppression? What's the influence of state regulation? Would the legalized sects become more church-like? What's the relationship between Chinese sects and other religious traditions? This in-depth study of YGD has answered these questions. In addition, it offers a systematic theoretical explanation of people's conversion to suppressed religions, group dynamics of Chinese sects, and the Chinese religious market. The following will briefly summarize these findings, outline what the thesis has accomplished, and then give some suggestions for further work which needs to be done in the future.

9.1 On Conversion

Why would people like to be a member of unorthodox and suppressed sects, such as YGD? This is one of the initial cognitive interests guiding this study. Chapter 3 has argued that most of the sectarians were previously adherents of folk religion. Since folk religionists have been relatively indifferent to religious identities and are open to accept any new gods (Tamney 1978), it is not difficult for the sectarians to bring the adherents of

folk religion to contact with the sect. Usually, the sectarians invited their relatives and friends to “worship gods” (*Bai-bai* 拜拜) in home and, of course, they did not reveal their religious identity. After coming into contact with YGD through their relatives and friends, people have the potential to be recruited by the sect. However, while these people are easy to be attracted by YGD, they are also easy to be converted by other sects or gods. As Susan Naquin had noted, switching one’s sect affiliation was common within China’s sectarian tradition: “there were some people who went from sect to sect, joining first one and then another, always searching for the ‘best’ system” (Naquin 1976: 37). So, the key is to probe how YGD could sustain the followers.

Chapter 4 has discussed this issue, arguing that the mechanism of vow and research courses plays an important role in transforming the religious preferences of neophytes and strengthening their loyalty to YGD. We have known that YGD conducted many courses which are divided into several levels. After attending a course, the sectarians are required to make a vow; and they are usually encouraged to take part in a higher level course and establish a further vow. Guided and encouraged by the vows they make, new recruits of YGD could choose to become core members step by step. The mechanism of vow and research courses is helpful to increase the commitment of YGD believers because it is able to mitigate the free rider problem. In addition, this study suggests that the conversion in YGD, or in Chinese sects in general, is a continuing process rather than a choice of yes or no; the dichotomy of “sectarians vs. non-sectarians” is not applicable to Chinese sects¹.

¹ This can partly account for the difficulty of making clear of the exact membership of a Chinese sect. For example, many people were “initiated” by YGD; but most of them do not attend the further services offered by the sect. As Chapter 4 points out, about one out of forty-four neophytes could finally accept the core belief of YGD and become a vegetarian. If we regard people being initiated as the members of YGD, the

Chapter 4 analyzes the institutional factor which can partly explain why some people left YGD while others stay in the suppressed sect. But we would resist any attempt to reduce the explanation for the people's conversion to suppressed sects to any single factor, such as individual rationality or missionary efforts. Rather, my explanation for the conversion is complex and also stresses the influence of contextual factors. In detail, as I have pointed out in Chapter 3, suppression ironically helped people to convert to the suppressed religions. To cope with the persecution, for instance, YGD developed a set of explanations which promise to increase the other-worldly rewards of the believers. At the same time, persecution led to sacrifices by YGD believers, the dependence on personal networks when the sect was doing missionary work, and the difference between the social stigma and the reality being experienced by the YGD believers. All of these consequences, which have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3, are helpful to reduce the risk of religious goods offered by the sect, because they made the YGD clergy more persuasive and believable. In short, people convert to the repressed sect at least partly because the suppression unintentionally increases the other-worldly rewards and reduces the risk of religious commodities. State suppression per se made their religious rewards more profitable and more dependable, so it is reasonable for people to convert to the suppressed religions. This finding argues against the official view that conversion to suppressed sects is a consequence of ignorance and irrationality. What I stress here is that contextual factors, such as state suppression, can apparently play a role in helping people to accept a repressed and stigmatized sect.

number of YGD sectarians is much bigger than the number of vegetarian sectarians. But the latter sectarians are usually regarded as "true" YGD believers. So the definition of membership plays an important role in defining the group scale of Chinese sects.

The main proponents of the religious economy model (e.g. Stark and Finke 2000) emphasize the rationality of religionists when they choose and evaluate their religious beliefs. They are certainly right. As chapter 4 reveals, one out of forty-four YGD neophytes could finally become a veteran and stay in YGD. This study, however, goes beyond the explanation which focuses on the individual rationality. Insisting on the supply-side perspective, this thesis integrates institutional factors and contextual factors to explain why people become a member of stigmatized and suppressed sect. Becoming a member of a suppressed sect is, but more than, an individual choice; it is also associated with the missionary efforts and the state regulation. The active missionary work and the unintended consequences of suppression can partly account for the people's conversion to YGD.

This thesis provides an institutional-contextual model explaining why suppressed religions are attractive to people. Today, many YGD divisions shift the emphasis of their missionary work to overseas where YGD still has a large space to develop, especially mainland China. I expect that my explanation for the conversion to suppressed religions is applicable to the case of YGD and other suppressed religious movements in contemporary mainland China where religions are still regulated by the state. But further empirical studies are needed.

The above explanation, however, can not extend to the next generation of YGD believers who inherited their religious identities and beliefs from their parents. In the 1960s and 1970s, the sect had recruited followers in a large scale. A sectarian leader of the *Baoguang Jiande* division tells me that in the 1960s and 1970s the division could initiate thousands of people in a single congregation. Today, however, the sect has

converted nearly all Taiwanese adults who have the potential to be YGD sectarians; and it is difficult for the sect to convert Taiwanese adults in a large scale, he says.

Whether YGD has converted all of the potential followers among Taiwanese adults or not is not sure and beyond the discussion of this chapter. What is certain is that the sectarian leaders do not expect large scales of conversion. Rather, they direct much attention to the religious socialization carried out by families. In other words, today, YGD depends on socialization rather than conversion to sustain its influences on Taiwan. This is a great change which scholars should pay attention to. In traditional China, as Tamney observes, “religion is not important in a Chinese family so that there is no attempt to control children’s religious identity” (Tamney 1978: 217). But now the situation changes, at least in the case of YGD. The sect encourages its followers to share their religious preference with their children. One of most frequently quoted slogans by YGD sectarians is to “make all the whole family members believe in [Yiguan] Dao” (*Dao-hua Jia-ting* 道化家庭). Indeed, the YGD sectarians put much emphasis on passing on their belief to the next generation. As chapter 4 has revealed, YGD conducts various kinds of research courses. Parts of these courses are designed to cater to the need of people in different ages ranging from young to old. Most of young YGD believers I encountered during my field work inherited their religious identity from their parents. They had eaten vegetarian food since they were born; they were familiar with the rituals and services of YGD when they were still in childhood; they began to attend the research courses by YGD, such as “the course for children to read Chinese classics” (*Er-tong Du-jing-ban* 儿童读经班), before they went to the primary school; they were accompanied with various research courses, dharma assemblies and summer camps designed by the

sect to cultivate and strengthen their religious identity; when they grew up, some of them became the important cadres of YGD. In short, the next generation of YGD believers follows a different way to be an YGD believer. This issue, however, has not been fully explored in this study. Future research could make further explorations on the role of family in religionizing children and the long-term influences it exerts on the second and the third generation of YGD sectarians.

9.2 On Group Dynamics of Religion

An important puzzle at the beginning of this study is whether YGD would become church-like or not. With the investigation going further, I find that this question, in a sense, is a wrong question since it assumes that Chinese sectarians, like their counterparts in Christian societies, tend to protest and resist the dominant culture. Chapter 8 has argued that this assumption is not applicable to Chinese sectarians. In Judeo-Christian tradition, religious firms usually adapt their doctrines to reduce or increase the tension between them and the surrounding society; and the doctrinal adaptation would result in the sect-to-church or church-to-sect tendency. But in China's history, as chapter 6 points out the persecution implemented by imperial China prevented the occurrence of the sect-to-church tendency in China. The persecution by central governments induced Chinese sectarian movements to be organizationally unstable, intellectually poorly-developed, and doctrinally syncretic. Even though various so-called "heterodox" religious groups existed in China, they had few opportunities to become church-like. Thus the sect-to-church tendency was absent in China to a large degree.

What are the group dynamics of Chinese sects then? One salient characteristic of Chinese sectarian movements, as Chapter 6 argues, is the frequent schisms. The majority of the countless sectarian groups of the Ming and Qing probably came into being by means of schisms; the death of a sect chief leader usually triggers schismatic tendencies because the major disciples would establish their own groups (Seiwert 2003); and, worse still, persecution accelerated the tendency of schisms through eliminating the sectarian leadership (Overmyer 1976). As a result, religious schisms dominated the development of Chinese sectarian movements and most of them were organizationally unstable and could not exist for a long period. YGD is not an exception. In Chapter 6, I have concluded that the sect's history is a history of schisms, and the schisms are continuing. So, how to cope with the schismatic tendency has been challenging the YGD sectarians in the past decades. In addition, the legalization permits the sect to stabilize its organization and fight against the potential schisms.

In the preceding chapters, I have separately discussed the measures adopted by the sect to prevent schisms. Generally speaking, YGD has attempted to avoid schisms through discarding spirit writings, updating doctrines and restructuring the organization. Chapter 5 reveals that all divisions of YGD except *Fayi Chongde* give up the practice of spirit-writing, because new revelations revealed in spirit writings may cause religious schisms and thus threaten the group's leadership and structure. In Chapter 6, I use a lengthy part to analyze how the sect reinterprets the Mandate of Heaven theory to prevent schisms. The sectarians stress that Zhang and Sun are the last Patriarch and there will be no new Patriarchs. Chapter 7 presents the institutional innovations adopted by YGD to deal with the schismatic tendencies. The *Jichu Zhongsu* division, for example, tries to

reform its organizational structure in order to weaken the middle-level leader's power and avoid the initiator-disciple cliques which could easily lead to schisms. In short, the prevention of schisms is a main task for YGD, especially after it became legal in 1987.

In addition to the prevention of schisms, theological transformation is another tendency which occurred after the legalization of YGD. State repression prevented the elite intellectuals from leading Chinese sectarian movements; the absence of educated leadership led Chinese sects to be "theology-poor"; and, worse still, there is a tendency of anti-intellectualism in Chinese sectarian movements, as Chapter 6 has discussed. YGD was also theologically underdeveloped and "lacked thorough-going intellectual formulation" (Overmyer 1976: 65). Its teachings may be attractive to the masses who are accustomed to the concrete images of mythological narratives. But with the social development of Taiwan in the past decades, more and more YGD sectarians receive good education. For the second or the third generation of YGD sectarians who are well educated, these teachings are coarse and lack abstract explanations. To sustain these educated sectarians, YGD must update its doctrine. It does. Now the sect discards teachings which are considered to be out of date, strengthens some core teachings, and borrows more elements from other religions, such as Christianity. The purpose is simple: to make its doctrine more attractive and more reasonable.

Let us outline the sect's changes within the past two decades after it was legalized on Taiwan. Before its legalization, schisms and anti-intellectualism were common in YGD; with the sect legitimated, the situation reversed and YGD tried its best to fight against schisms and devote more attention to theological issues. It is possible that the sect will become much more like Judeo-Christian sects or churches, because the state-pressure

which prevented such developments has mostly ended in Taiwan. But the premise is that the sect can survive the competition and become institutionalized. In any case, it will be interesting to observe the long-term evolution of YGD on Taiwan. Since the sect now stresses that Zhang and Sun are the final messiah or Patriarch, will they become “the one true god” of YGD believers in the future? Will the sect become more and more exclusive on its core belief and finally become a Judeo-Christian-like sect which generates exclusivist claims and exclusivist socialization? Or will it be more syncretic? Can the sect be successfully institutionalized? Are schisms unavoidable in the sect? To what degree can the sect avoid being challenged by other new sects centering on charismatic leadership? What is the long-term influence of doctrinal adaptations by YGD? Further studies are needed to probe these questions.

9.3 On Chinese Religious Markets

This study also explores the religious market in which YGD operates. When discussing religious markets, Stark and Finke (2000) mainly derive their conclusions from the analysis of Western societies where religions are highly institutionalized and popular religions remain weak. Perhaps it is reasonable for them to ignore the popular religion and focus on the highly organized religious firms which generate exclusive beliefs and memberships. In China, however, if we only analyze exclusive religions, we will ignore most of the Chinese religious phenomena, because the non-exclusive popular religion dominates the population of China and exclusive religious firms are exceptions in Chinese religious markets.

State regulation could partly account for the weakness of exclusive religion and the popularity of non-exclusive religions in China. On the one hand, state regulation destroyed the clerical basis of Buddhism and Taoism. Both of them did not develop highly bureaucratic organizations which can generate exclusivist beliefs and exclusivist socialization. On the other hand, imperial regimes encouraged and supported the efforts of syncretizing different beliefs in order to “complement and support the political unity of the state, and to promote greater religious harmony” (Lang and Lu 2004: 9). These syncretic efforts assert that there is a basic truth (e.g. Tao) underlying the competing religions; and thus the further step is to probe the deeper common truth rather than emphasize the diversities of various religions which could easily lead to exclusiveness.

Due to the strict regulation, Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion could not develop highly bureaucratic organizations. Instead, they gradually developed extensive pilgrimage networks which arranged temples in different levels. These networks were loosely organized on the non-bureaucratic principle and barely maintained a degree of ritual and doctrinal unity through informal institutions such as the pilgrimages (Sangren 1987). Thus, in traditional China, Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion exerted an influence on their adherents through the extensive pilgrimage networks rather than through formal organization and bureaucratic discipline; the public religious activities are pilgrimages, temple fairs and all kinds of religious festivals, rather than congregations; since the boundaries of religions were not clear and most people are indifferent to religious identities, partly a result of state regulation, religious competition in traditional China mainly occurred among different pilgrimage groups and local temples (Sangren 2000).

In a sense, Chinese sects were exceptions in the Chinese religious market. While Chinese popular religion, Taoism and Buddhism lacked strong organizations and depend on the loose incense-division networks, Chinese sects were equipped with strong and highly bureaucratic organizations. While pilgrimages were the main form of popular religious practices, congregation was adopted and highlighted by the sectarians. While other religious traditions did not stress membership or were inactive in recruiting members (partly due to the state regulation), Chinese sects paid more attention to missionary work and membership. All of the above show that Chinese sects constituted an independent or exceptional tradition which is quite different from other religious traditions.

But Chinese sects are not an isolated tradition. They bridge popular religion and the three religions, namely Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. On one hand, most of Chinese sectarian leaders and adherents are from popular religion and thus sects keep many elements of popular religion, such as polytheism, ancestor worship, rituals (such as burning incense and kowtow), practices (e.g. making and fulfilling vows) and syncretism. On the other hand, Chinese sects are influenced by the three religions. They manufactured their salvation theory on the basis of Buddhism, drew their magical rituals from Taoism, and borrowed their ethical systems from Confucianism. By fusing popular religion and the three religions, Chinese sects offer a highly synthetic belief system. As Jordan and Overmyer (1986: 8) argue, “sectarianism in Taiwan, perhaps in China more generally, is a major means for self-conscious popular participation in the Chinese ‘great tradition’.”

The differences between the Chinese religious market and its counterpart in Judeo-Christian society are obvious: the purpose of state regulation in the Western society is to pursue religious monopoly, while in imperial China, the state regulation is to “ensure that no religious organization became sufficiently well-organized and powerful to produce political challenges” and thus the imperial states could sustain “a diversity of hobbled religions which coexisted without any of them becoming dominant” (Lang and Lu 2004: 8-9); in Western societies, exclusive religions are the majority, whereas non-exclusive religions dominated the Chinese religious market; the sect-to-church tendency is obvious in Western societies but is absent in China. All in all, many analyses of Western religious markets are not applicable to the Chinese society.

The religious economy model, however, can enlighten us to probe many interesting issues, such as how competition exerts an influence on the evolution of religious firms. This thesis has devoted much attention to this issue. Chapter 5 notes that some phoenix halls purposely abandoned or adopted some practices in order to compete with YGD, and thus they became more theology-centered. Competition drove Buddhism to lobby the state to suppress YGD (Chapter 3). Competition also forced the sect to provide some new services to attract and sustain followers, though such services as meditation were prohibited by its doctrine; this case shows that market forces can even account for the fluctuation of religious experiences which are believed to be a deeply personal phenomenon (Chapter 5). Competition also made some divisions of YGD to copy the successful innovations introduced by other divisions, such as the operation of meal groups (Chapter 7). Finally, in Chapter 8, I argue that competition plays a role in driving some religious firms to develop from efficacy-oriented to theology-centered.

In the past decades, however, some changes have been occurring in the religious market of Taiwan: the decline of Confucianism as a dominating ideology, the rise of Christianity in Taiwan and the deregulation of religion. These changes raise more questions which need to be investigated in future studies. With the decline of Confucianism as a dominant ideology, will YGD try to occupy the niche of Confucianism and regard itself as the representative of Confucianism? How will they reinterpret Confucianism and bring it into the sectarian doctrines? What will the sect learn from Christianity during the process of institutionalization? How does the sect distinguish itself from and compete with Buddhism? With the growth of Christianity, will congregation become more widespread in Chinese religious life? Will Chinese religions, including Buddhism, Taoism, popular religion and sects, become more organized to compete with Christianity? What are the long-term influences of deregulation?

Some further comparative analyses with other groups are also needed. We could probe why some of the YGD divisions are relatively more successful than others; we could also compare the growth of YGD with the growth/decline of other religions, including Buddhism, in Taiwan. This thesis has presented the evolution and development of YGD in Taiwan. I believe that further comparative analyses on other religions in Taiwan could give us a more complete and overall picture which includes those other groups and the competition among them.

GLOSSARY

- An-tian-wang 安天王
 Baiyang qi 白阳期
 Bang-ban zhong-xin 帮办中心
 Ban-sheng Ban-fan 半圣半凡
 Ban-shi-yuan 办事员
 Baobing qigong 宝瓶气功
 Baoguang Jiande 宝光建德
 Bao-juan 宝卷
 Ba-pin Tian-en 八品天恩
 Beigang 北港
 Bei-yue heng-shan 北岳恒山
 Cai-fa shuang-shi 财法双施
 Chanding 禅定
 Chao-tian gong 朝天宫
 Chen Huoguo 陈火国
 Chen Wenliang 陈文良
 Chengfo 成佛
 Cheng-quan 成全
 ChengSheng 成圣
 Chengxian 成仙
 Chongxiu Tang 崇修堂
 chuan koujue 传口诀
 Chuan Sanbao 传三宝
 Chunjie 春节
 Ci-hui Tang 慈惠堂
 Ciji 慈济
 Ciji Gongdehui 慈济功德会
 Da-ai shou 大爱手
 Danlunxuan Qigong 丹轮玄气功
 Dan-xian Ling-dao 单线领导
 Dao tong, 道统
 Daode Jing 道德经
 Dao-kao 道考
 Daoqin 道亲
 Daozhang 道长
 Dao-zhen, Li-zhen, Tianming-zhen 道真, 理真, 天命真
 Dari qigong 大日气功
 Dazizai changong 大自在禅功

- Dazuo 打坐
 Dian xuanguan 点玄关
 Dianchuanshi 点传师
 Dian-dao kao 颠倒考
 Dicai 地才
 Diguan 地官
 Di 地
 Dong-tian 洞天
 Dongyue Taishan 东岳泰山
 Douliu 斗六
 Dounan 斗南
 Du Daxian 渡大仙
 Du Wangling 渡亡灵
 Dupuo qianjing wandian, buru mingshi yizhi 读破千经万典，不如明师一指
 Du-ren 渡人
 Duren jiushi du-ziji 渡人就是渡自己
 Duren qiudao 渡人求道
 Enzhu gong 恩主公
 Erpin wuhang 二品五行
 Fagushan 法鼓山
 Fahui 法会
 Falun Gong 法輪功
 Fayi Chongde 发一崇德
 Fengjia Daxue 逢甲大学
 Fenling 分灵
 Fenxiang 分香
 Fo-deng 佛灯
 Foguangshan 佛光山
 Fudi 福地
 Gaipiqi qumaobing 改脾气去毛病
 Gaoxiong 高雄
 Gong 功
 Gong-de Hui-xiang 功德回飨
 Gua 卦
 Guanyin Dadao 观音大道
 Guanyin famen 观音法门
 Guhun 孤魂
 Guijie 鬼节
 Guo 过
 Guowei 果位

- Haiwai kaihuang 海外开荒
 Haizi Dao 亥子道
 Hetong 合同
 Hongyang qi 红阳期
 Houtian ji, 后天乩
 Houxue 后学
 Huang Dehui 黄德辉
 Huan-yuan 还愿
 Huatuo neigong 华佗内功
 Huiguang 慧光
 Huofo laoshi 活佛老师
 Huofo Shizun 活佛师尊
 Huopo 活泼
 Jiang-shi 讲师
 Jiang-yuan 讲员
 Ji-chu course 基础班
 Jichu Zhongshu 基础忠恕
 Jidian 济颠
 Jin Xiang 进香
 Jindian Ban 经典班
 Jingang Jing 金刚经
 Jinmu Liangliang 金母娘娘
 Jisi quan 祭祀圈
 Jiti Lingdao, Zhenti Daidong 集体领导、整体带动
 Jiu-hua Shan 九华山
 Jiujie Neigong 九节内功
 Jiulian Shengdao 九莲圣道
 Jiupin Liantai 九品莲台
 Jiupin zhongsheng 九品众生
 Jiupin 九品
 Jiu-shi-er-yi yuan-ling 九十二亿原灵
 Koujue 口诀
 Kunlun xianzong 昆仑仙宗
 Kuxiu Nande 苦修难得
 Laozi qigong 老子气功
 Li Fengshan 李凤山
 Li Yuansong 李元松
 Li Yujie 李玉阶
 Liao Youyi 廖友义
 Liji, 礼记
 Lin Jixiong 林吉雄

- Lin Qisheng 林启生
 Lin Zhenhe 林振和
 Ling 灵
 Lingyan 灵验
 Li-nian Yili, 历年易理
 Li-tian 理天
 Li-tian, Qi-tian, Xiang-tian 理天, 气天, 象天
 Liu Peizhong 刘培中
 Liu-pin Yin-en 六品引恩
 Liuzu tanjing 六祖坛经
 Long-hu shan 龙虎山
 Longmen dangong 龙门丹功
 Luan tang 鸾堂
 Luancuan Daochang 乱窜道场
 Lu-hui 炉会
 Lunyu 论语
 Luo-jiao 罗教
 Lu-zhu 炉主
 Ma Yongchang 马永常
 Meizhou 湄州
 Menzi 孟子
 Mile Dadao 弥勒大道
 Mingguang qigong 明光气功
 Mingming-shangdi Wuliang-qingxu Zhizun-zhisheng Sanjie-shifang Wanling-zhenzhai,
 明明上帝无量清虚至尊至圣三界十方万灵真宰
 Ming 冥
 Mohou Yizhujiao 末后一著教
 Mu-deng 母灯
 Mutang 母堂
 Nan-wu-a-mi-tuo-fo 南无阿弥陀佛
 Nan-yue Heng-shan 南岳衡山
 Nei-kao 内考
 Ni-kao 逆考
 O-mei Shan 峨眉山
 Pinganxi 平安戏
 Pudu 普渡
 Pu-tuo Shan 普陀山
 Qianren huiyi 前人会议
 Qiao Changhong 乔长虹
 Qi-kao 奇考

- Qi-kao 氣考
 Qingbang 青帮
 Qing-cheng Shan 青城山
 Qingjing jing 清静经
 Qing-kou ru-su 清口茹素
 Qingnian ganbu xunlianban 青年干部训练班
 Qingxiu Yuan 清修愿
 Qingxiu 清修
 Qingyang qi 青阳期
 Qinru 侵入
 Qi-pin zheng-en 七品证恩.
 Qi-tian 气天
 Qi-tian-wang 齐天王
 Qiu Fengsen 邱丰森
 Qiyun Shan 齐云山
 Qu Yishihua 去仪式化
 Quanzhen qigong 全真气功
 Randeng Buddha 燃灯佛
 Randeng fo 燃灯佛
 Rencai 人才
 Renmin tuanti fa 人民团体法
 Ren-ren you-shi-zuo, shi-shi you-ren-zuo 人人有事做，事事有人做
 Ren-yi-li-zhi-xin 仁义礼智信
 Ruzong Shenjiao 儒宗神教
 Sanbao 三宝
 Sancao Pudu 三曹普度
 Sanjiao Heyi 三教合一
 Sanjiao 三教
 San-pin Shi-di 三品十地
 Sanqi mojie 三期末劫
 Sanyi jiao 三一教
 Shangyuan jie 上元节
 She-li fo-tang 设立佛堂
 Sheng-an Gong 胜安宫
 Shengde Tang 圣德堂
 Sheng-fan jian-xiu 圣凡兼修
 Sheng-fan jian-xiu 圣凡兼修
 Shengyan 圣严法师
 Shen-ming-hui 神明会
 Shen-tong 神通
 Shijie Fojiao Dahui, 世界佛教大會

- Shijie Honghua Yuan 世界弘化院
 Shi-jing 诗经
 Shi-mu Daibiao 师母代表
 Shimu pai 師母派
 Shi-xiong pai 师兄派
 Shi-zhu Pai 师尊派
 Shizun cixun 师尊慈训
 Shou hetong 受合同
 Shou-jing 收惊
 Shouxuan 守玄
 Shou-xuan-guan 守玄关
 Shouyuan 收元
 Shui-zhong shui-de 谁种谁得
 Shun-kao 順考
 Sida fojiao minshan 四大佛教名山
 Si-pin Ding-hang 四品顶航
 Si-tian-wang 司天王
 Siyige, buyige 死一个，补一个
 Siyige, Shaoyige 死一个，少一个
 Su-jia jiao-tuan 俗家教团
 Taibei 台北
 Taizhong 台中
 Tan Qingyun 谈青云
 The Great Learning Da-xue, 大学
 The Superior Temple of Guangxi Yulin 广西玉林大庙
 Tian 天
 Tiancai 天才
 Tiandao Gouchen 天道勾沈
 Tiande jiao 天德教
 Tiandi jiao 天帝教
 Tiangong 天公
 Tianhe 天和
 Tianhui unit 天惠组
 Tianming Baoguan Weiyuanhui 天命保管委员会
 Tianming Mingshi 天命明师
 Tianming 天命
 Tianqi huoshi tuan 天齐伙食团
 Tianren qigong 天人气功
 Tiansheng 潘添胜
 Tiantang Guahao, Difu Chouding 天堂挂号，地府抽丁

- Tianxin qigong 天心气功
 Tongshan She 同善社
 Tu Jinquan 涂金泉
 Tu-di gong 土地公
 Wai-kao 外考
 Wang Guorong 王国荣
 Wang Haode 王好德
 Wang Laijing 王来静
 Weijue 惟觉
 Wu Rui-yuan 吴瑞源
 Wu Ximing 武锡铭
 Wu-bu Liu-ce 五部六册
 Wu-dang Shan 武当山
 Wudao Yi-yi-guanzhi 吾道一以贯之
 Wuji Laomu 无极老母
 Wuji Mu 无极母
 Wuji ShengMu 无极圣母
 wu-ji sheng-zu 无极圣祖
 Wu-ji 无极
 Wu-liang-shou-fo 无量寿佛
 Wu-pin Bao-en 五品保恩
 Wu-sheng Fumu 无生父母
 wu-sheng-lao-mu 无生老母
 Wu-tai shan 五台山
 Wu-wei-Jiao 无为教
 wuyue 五岳
 wuzi zhenjing 五字真经
 Wuzi zhenjing 无字真经
 Wuzi Zhenyan 五字真言
 Xian yiyu gouqian, hou lingru fozhi 先以欲勾牵，后令入佛智
 Xiandai chan 现代禅
 Xiandao qigong 仙道气功
 Xiande houxiu 先得后修
 Xianfo Yulu 仙佛语录
 Xiangong li 献供礼
 Xiang-tian 象天
 Xiantian Dao 先天道
 Xiantian Ji 先天乩
 Xianxiu Houde 先修后得
 Xiao jiutianmen 小九天门
 Xiao-jing, 孝经

- Xiayuan 下元节
 Xie Mingguang 谢明光
 Xie Shuiyuan 谢水远
 Xinfa 心法
 Xing Ru-men zhi Liyi 行儒门之礼仪
 Xingyi Nanxing 兴毅南兴
 Xingyun 星云法师
 Xin-jin-li-jie course 新进礼节班
 Xin-min course 新民班
 Xinwei 新威
 Xinyang quan 信仰圈
 Xinying 新营
 Xiu-dao 修道
 Xi-wang-mu 西王母
 Xi-you-ji 西游记
 Xiyue hua-shan 西岳华山
 Xu Yongzhi 许永枝
 Xuan-de course 宣德班
 Xuanguan 玄关
 Xuanyuan neiqi 轩辕内气
 Xuanyuan sect 軒轅教
 Xuanzhen jingzuo 玄真静坐
 Xuejie 学界
 Xunjing 巡境
 Xu-yuan 许愿
 Yangjian 阳间
 Yanjiu ban 研究班
 Ye Jinfu 叶进发
 Yegui 野鬼
 Yiguan Dao Neimu 一貫道内幕
 Yiguan Dao zonghui 一贯道总会
 Yi-jing 易经
 Yinguo Yuanqian Xianhua Shilu 因果怨愆显化实录
 Yinjian 阴间
 Yinyang wuhang 阴阳五行
 Yipin zushi 一品祖师
 Yiqi liuxing 一气流行
 Yi-tiao jin-xian, bu-luan xi-tong 一条金线，不乱系统
 Yong Daojiao zhi Gongfu 用道教之功夫
 Yuande shentan 原德圣坛

Yuanling 原灵
 Yuanzi 原子
 Yunlin 云林
 Zan-ding Fo-gui 暂定佛规
 Zhang Zhefu 张哲夫
 Zhanghai 彰化
 Zhengdong Dadi 镇东大帝
 Zheng-yi Fudao hui 正义辅导会
 Zhenkong Jiexiang Wusheng Fumu 真空家乡，无生父母
 Zhenkong jiexiang 真空家乡
 Zhenkong 真空
 Zhenyuan qigong 真源气功
 Zhihui Famen 智慧法门
 Zhi-shan course 至善班
 Zhi-xing guan 执行官
 Zhong Gong 中功
 Zhong Guoqiang 钟国强
 Zhonghe 中和
 zhonghua minguo chanding xuehui 中华民国禅定学会
 Zhonghua Sheng-jiao 中华圣教
 Zhongqiu jie 中秋节
 Zhong-sheng qingfan 重圣轻凡
 Zhongtaishan 中台山
 Zhong-tian-wang 中天王
 Zhong-yi zi ban 忠义字班
 Zhong-yong 中庸
 Zhongyue Song-shan 中岳嵩山
 Zhou Ruihong 周瑞宏
 Zhuangzi 庄子
 Zhu-chu 逐出
 Zhujiao 注脚
 Zhutian Shensheng 诸天神圣
 Zitang 子堂
 Ziyun changong 紫云禅功
 Zong-menYu-lu 宗门语录
 Zushi 祖师

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