Eleanor B. Morris Wu, *From China to Taiwan. Historical, Anthropological, and Religious Perspective*

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Philip Liddell

- 1 The title of this book is not very clear—and its purpose is scarcely more so. Judging by what we are told in the short introduction, the aim is to look at the religion of the Taiwanese people within its overall anthropological and historical context. The first chapter, based largely on *Agricultural Involution* by Clifford Geertz (1963), outlines the overall development of Taiwanese society. It depicts it as a model of modernisation that has maintained and sometimes even strengthened the family network, creating continuity between rural and urban communities.
- 2 The next four chapters provide generalised pictures of Taiwan's anthropological context, its historico-political, economic and family development, and then of Chinese religious beliefs. There follow two detailed studies on three well-known Taipei temples, *Longshan si*, *Bao'an gong* and *Xingtian gong*. These chapters are probably the most interesting, in that they endeavour to establish a connection between the inner iconography and the economic and familial model of the population to whom the temple is addressed. Next, a chapter is devoted to the historical roots of the new religions (sectarianism), even though the range of new religions attributed to the White Lotus sphere of influence and other groups from the past is not clearly established. The final chapter offers some haphazard remarks on the contemporary religious landscape in Taiwan.

- 3 While the subjects tackled are interesting, the book suffers from at least three major faults. Firstly, its subject remains undecided right to the end. The general chapters are really too eclectic and their sources are often doubtful (government publications and English-language extracts from the press). The two chapters on Taipei temples are meticulous in their iconographic analysis but sketchy when it comes to the real life of the temples and their management structure. Moreover, these temples have already been extensively studied and are well understood. Then, the sources are largely skipped over : with one exception (evidently a last-minute addition), all the titles date from before 1995 and the most important of them are a selection from the classic studies of the 1970s and 1980s. To take an example, Robert Weller is almost absent from the bibliography, Schipper, and Sasso too, are represented by only one article each, both dating from 1977 ; and more recent work, by Katz, Dell'Orto, Clart, Laliberté and others, is ignored. Lastly—and more seriously still—the sources are almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon : this means that Chinese-language contributions by Taiwanese anthropologists themselves are neither discussed nor quoted. This is astonishing, in a field where the local output of the past twenty years has been so abundant.
- 4 While the writer displays good knowledge and real sensitivity in dealing with the temples of the popular religion, no serious analysis is attempted of the Buddhist movements or the new religions. One would not make this objection if the subject of the study had been made more clear from the start. Admittedly, the book has the merit of showing that it might be possible to combine Taiwan's socio-political, anthropological and religious developments into a comprehensive study. But while outlining a programme in this way, it falls far short of carrying it out.