Making Religion, Making the State. The Politics of Religion in Modern China, Edited by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, Stanford University Press, 2009, 304 pp.

ISBN-10: 0804758425, ISBN-13: 978-0804758420

Since the opening up of China that accompanied the beginning of the economic reforms in the 1980s, news and studies on the life of religious traditions in the country have not been lacking. Yet most of them were either fragmentary or presented under a framework of tension in the local communities and control or opposition by the state apparatus. The editors of the volume under review: Ashiwa Yoshiko, Professor of Anthropology and Global Studies, and Director of the Centre for the Study of Peace and Reconciliation, Hitotsubashi University, and David L. Wank, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Graduate Program in Global Studies, Sophia University, Tokyo, must be congratulated for conceiving and realizing a multi-disciplinary publication of high standard studies that "draw upon anthropology, history, political science, religious studies and sociology" and written by specialists on the various religious traditions of China.

The originality of the approach taken in the studies assembled here consists in observing, beyond the data they rely on, how the religious bodies (presently recognised in China) and the state are not to be seen in a framework of opposition between adversaries, as it is commonly supposed from the part of a self-asserted atheist political apparatus, but in an ongoing mutual interplay where many actors intervene: believers and practitioners, leaders and clergy, organisations, local officials, provincial governments and state agencies. Moreover situations and contexts may have varied with time and locations in this ongoing process of a mutually built "institutional framework" (p. 6).

This interaction is part of the quest for modernity that was initiated in China at the end of the Qing dynasty. The editors base their analysis on the thought of Talal Asad, renowned scholar of religion,[1] whose argument is that "the modern category of religion defined as individual belief emerged through the politics of modern state formation in Europe" (*ibid.)*, at the time of Enlightenment and later. "In the late nineteenth century, colonialism and capitalism spread the modern category of "religion" and "state" to other parts of the world. To enlightened elites in Asian countries, these two categories appeared as necessary components of the doctrine of modernity. "Religion" was one of the categories that, alongside "market", "nation", "rational bureaucracy", "police", "education", "science" and so on, was considered necessary in a modern state." (*ibid.)*. In other words, a modern state cannot dispense with considering "religion" (in its so called "modern" meaning) as an object of scientific inquiry like any of its other components.

It is in the above mentioned context that the ongoing quest for modernity all along the twentieth century until now includes also "how to position the idea of modern religion in the state ideology". This is all the more important that religious beliefs and practices in China, being of various traditions, would have to fit within state formation. It is therefore also within this historical background that several aspects of the religious revival in China might appear more clearly, as the title and the sub-title of this volume try to express.

Going beyond such legacy of European modernity (pp. 6-8) and Marxist state political institutions (pp. 10-12), the editors, in their "Introductory Essay" present four patterns of the ongoing interaction between state and religions, each of them having some different dynamics as shown in various chapters of the book.

First comes "Politics Within the State". It concerns the many debates among officials and intellectuals that were related to the definition of "religious" institutions and their practices within the state. Already towards the end of the Qing state and at the turn of the twentieth century, as Timothy Brook relates in chapter 2, Daoism and Buddhism that were regarded as unorthodox under the Confucian imperial state ideology regain, after the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, their religious legitimacy in the eyes of the political, intellectual and religious elites. — In a similar manner, "modern religion" grew up to some institution status, as Ashiwa Yoshiko shows in chapter 3, when in the 1920s and 1930s, a state campaign debated against what was deemed "superstition" to the effect of taking legal decisions on local temples, their land and buildings property rights. Again in the 1980s, central authorities intervened to resolve disputes on leadership of communities and ownership of assets, transforming by these measures local tradition into state culture and history. — In chapter 10, Utiraruto Otehode, in analysing "the shifting definitions of *qigong* and their links to different interests in the state's modern medical,

[1] See *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam,* Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973, and *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity,* Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2003.

science and sports sectors", shows eloquently "how this debate has proceeded through attempts to frame *qigong* by such modern principles as "science", "superstition", "nation" and "medicine" and how this politics both reflects and creates interests in different sectors of the state." (p. 13).

A second pattern developed soon in the Republican era inside the interactive process at work between the state and religious bodies, that is "State Imposition of 'Religion' on 'Religions'". In other words: the imposition by the state of its categories upon religious practices and beliefs. It was particularly noticeable, as Carsten Vala exposes in chapter 5, in Protestant seminaries recognised by the state. In the 1930s there was some anxiety to control by "patriotic education" the excessive foreign influence of foreign missionary leadership on newly appointed Chinese ministers. But such effort back lashed insofar that the best candidates for ministry left the seminaries for the sake of better apostolate, in such a way as to affect the governance of state-recognised churches and to create some appeal from the part of non-registered communities. In different terms, a similar situation of "unpredictable" results developed with Islam's position in the process of state building, as Dru Gladley's contribution clearly shows (chapter 7) under the title "Islam in China: State Policing and Identity Politics". Islam's history in China is made of fear of rebellions in the western new borderlands and tension in Muslim accommodation to Han majority culture in some inland provinces. But imposition of modern categories of "religion" and "ethnicity" coupled with the typically Islamic *ummah* international links have been enough to stimulate nationalist movements in this global modern world.

Within the third pattern entitled "Accommodation of State Institutions by Religions", it is interesting to note some evident evolution: the actors of the state-building process take some clearer positions through which religious bodies obtain legitimacy and state recognition. Two instances are given of quite different nature. In chapter 6, David Wank shows how the Buddhist community of Xiamen, Fujian Province, with at its centre, the 南普陀寺 Nanputuo Temple, has managed to implement the stipulations elicited in *Document 19* (1982) regarding religious institutions ("self-management", "religious freedom", "administrative guidance"). At the same time, it has been able to deal with the local state authorities and agencies, occasionally when necessary in connection with the central government, so as to enhance the autonomy of the temple and its Minnan Buddhist Academy. An other instance of similar dynamics developed also around the contemporary revival of the Black Dragon King Temple, in 陕北 Shaanbei, analysed by Adam 周越 Chau Yuet[2] in chapter 9. There, to avoid being stigmatised by local authorities as engaging into merely "superstitious" divination practices, the local communities and their leaders shifted to more "politically correct" activities the returns of which were invested into education and protection of the environment.

In fact, any study of the state of religions in China cannot ignore the various popular roots of these, examined here under a fourth pattern entitled "Popular Institutions and the Politics of 'Religion'". The editors present diverse instances. Somehow paradigmatic in this regard is the case of the Catholic pilgrimage centre of 舍山 Sheshan near Shanghai presented by Richard Madsen and 范麗珠 Fan Lizhu in chapter 4. By its origin doubly foreign as a Catholic and western institution, it has nevertheless for many years and under different political regimes become of regional and national importance and influence, a kind of testing ground. The revival of *qigong* practices in its various forms, already mentioned (chapter 10, by Utiraruto Otehode), is another instance where the same pattern is at work in the evolution and the various ways these practices have been interactively integrated into the politics of religion. Last but not least, mention has to be made of the many Daoist institutions less known, as Kenneth Dean explains (chapter 8), for the fact that rely more on ritual practices than on "discursive clarity of the Party's modern definition of religion" (p. 16).

The ten chapters of the book (each of them has a generous bibliography) do not seem to follow any easy or obvious order (hence the usefulness of the orientation given in the introduction). They are followed by a long character list (although with some loopholes) and an abundant general Index (pp. 281-294) that would help further research. One might nevertheless regret the absence of some more comprehensive concluding remarks on the advantages and the limits of the new approach adopted by the whole volume. Even if the premise given to it by its editors is the modern definition of religion as Talal Asad understands it, one might wonder if its European genesis as he sees it can be transposed and applied so easily in some other historical and cultural contexts like, beside Marxism, the Chinese quest for "modernity".

[2] See his monograph on the same topic: *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, reviewed in《神州交流--*Chinese Cross Currents*》, 2006, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 156-159.

Perhaps, to go farther afield beyond "Politics of Religion in Modern China", beyond the building of a modern state, is it worth here to quote two of Asad's theoretical contributions as summarized by William E. Connolly:

> "Secularism is not merely the division between public and private realms that allows religious diversity to flourish in the latter. It can itself be a carrier of harsh exclusions. And it secretes a new definition of "religion" that conceals some of its most problematic practices from itself.
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> In creating its characteristic division between secular public space and religious private space, European secularism sought to shuffle ritual and discipline into the private realm. In doing so, however, it loses touch with the ways in which embodied practices of conduct help to constitute culture, including European culture." [3]

Yves Camus

[3] William E. Connolly in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 75-76. — Cf. Wikipedia, "Talal Asad", accessed on June 30 2010.