



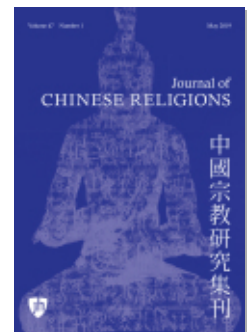
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Making Saints in Modern China ed. by David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert, and Ji Zhe (review)

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(Review)

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The Dimensions that Establish and Sustain Religious Identity, which reads like an unrevised dissertation, contains numerous lengthy literature reviews, general statements, and block quotes which distract readers from the focus of the book. For instance, akin to the first section of a dissertation, Low devotes chapters 2 and 3 to lengthy reviews and summaries of the literature with little critical discussion. Chapter 4, which presents the research methods and procedures, contains much irrelevant information and many general statements on “triangulation,” “member checks,” “peer review,” “reflexivity,” “rich and thick description,” “audit trial,” and “adequate engagement” (pp. 68–71). Perhaps the book’s most problematic aspect is the overuse of block quotes in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Although the extensive block quotes, which make up almost half of the length of each chapter, allow us to hear the voices of the informants, they seem to have taken over the prose and analysis of the findings. Furthermore, some of the Singlish terms and phrases in the quotes are not easy for non-Singaporean readers to follow.

There are additional problems in this book. The author points out that Chinese in Singapore have been practicing an “amalgamated form of Buddhism, Taoism, and the prevailing folk beliefs and customs” in the past, which he classified as “‘Shenism,’ Chinese religion or Taoism/folk religion,” (p. 9) but offers no further elaboration on the background and development of the religious landscape in Singapore. Low also did not explain why he chose not to categorize his research subjects according to the “main schools of Buddhism and Taoism” and to exclude “those who continue to practice a syncretic mix of Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese folk religions—i.e., Taoism/folk religion” (p. 11) in his study. I, for one, am perplexed as to why the author made these choices.

Nevertheless, the author should not be required to bear the entire responsibility for the book’s weaknesses. It seems that the publisher failed to provide peer review and editorial support over the publication of an unrevised dissertation. The book’s prose and style are rather technical, and at times repetitive (see for instance, pp. 3, 6, 8, 99, 140). It is also missing an index in the back.

Despite its shortcomings, *The Dimensions that Establish and Sustain Religious Identity* is a welcome addition to the fields of Chinese religions and Southeast Asian Studies. It should also be of relevance to Singaporean policymakers and interfaith organizations interested in interreligious understanding.

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DAVID OWNBY, VINCENT GOOSSAERT, and JI ZHE, eds., *Making Saints in Modern China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xii, 509 pp. US\$115 (hb). ISBN 978-0-190-49456-8

The twentieth century was an era of growing secularism within the Sinophone world. Nevertheless, religion and religious phenomena continue to have a large impact on Chinese culture. Following a line of inquiry that has been gaining momentum in the past two decades, this volume seeks to explain how charisma and authority have been constructed within the context of Chinese religion. Unlike other studies where biographies of religious figures are used merely to tell the story of a given tradition, this book takes as its focus the figures themselves, and the process by which their reputations were constructed.

Each of the book's three editors is a well-regarded scholar in the study of modern Chinese religion, and each has contributed a chapter to this volume. To these they have added chapters by nine other established scholars, resulting in a book comprised of studies of twelve figures active in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By and large, these individuals represent those traditions that were mainstream among Han people at the start of the twentieth century. As the editors themselves recognize, this volume does not include any Christian or Muslim figures, and Tibetan Buddhism is represented only by Longlian 隆蓮 (1907–2000), an erudite Han nun with a deep interest in Tibetan Buddhist studies (chapter 8). Longlian is also the only woman among the twelve figures studied. This is unfortunate. The editors are also clear that because their goal is to examine the nature of religious charisma in the context of a secular era, they have intentionally decided not to include any "secular" saints (such as Mao Zedong or Lei Feng) within the book.

There are other forms of diversity in the coverage, however. For example, this volume is not organized around the three major traditions of Confucianism, Daoism and Han Buddhism, and true to the editors' prior work, the book deals with individuals who are important to Chinese religiosity as a whole, but do not fit neatly within any of these categories. There is one chapter each on Duan Zhengyuan 段正元 (1864–1940) and Zhang Tianran 張天然 (1889–1947), the respective founders of two major redemptive societies, the Daode Xueshe 道德學社 and Yiguandao 一貫道 (chapters 4 and 6). In addition to these contributions by Fan Chunwu and Sébastien Billioud, David Ownby contributes a chapter on Li Yujie 李玉階 (1901–1994), the founder of Tiandijiao 天帝教, another redemptive society. Redemptive societies, those "organized, modern and contemporary expressions of a lay salvationist impulse that has long existed in Chinese religion" (p. 253), which often centered on charismatic founders, had a major impact on Chinese religion in the twentieth century and their inclusion in this volume provides welcome breadth. Additionally, there is also an excellent chapter by Catherine Despeux on the spiritual, scholastic, and political activities of the late Nan Huaijin 南懷瑾 (1918–2012). Nan wrote and spoke authoritatively on each of China's big three traditions, and his books can still be found for sale in bookstores throughout the Sinophone world. He did not, however, have a clear religious affiliation, and he is often overlooked in studies of modern Chinese religion despite his obvious influence.

The seven other figures in the book run the gambit in terms of the traditions they belonged to and the time periods in which they lived, though fully half of the book's twelve chapters are dedicated to well-known Buddhist figures. In chapter 1, Jan Kiely builds on earlier work to assess the process by which the Pure Land master Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940) became a media sensation in Republican China. Yinguang's popularity is often remarked upon by scholars of the period, but this chapter provides a clear and focused analysis of the route by which this came to happen. Daniela Campo also draws from her ongoing research to write about the creation of the story of Chan Master Xuyun 虛雲 (ca. 1864–1959) within Chinese Buddhist circles (chapter 3). And Raoul Birnbaum continues his own work on Hongyi 弘一 (1880–1942), focusing on two key events from the famous monk's life: His ordination and a moment when he reflected on his own death (chapter 5). Ji Zhe looks at the changing reputation of Zhao Puchu 趙樸初 (1907–2000), the layman who oversaw Chinese Buddhist activities during the period of most acute Communist oppression of religion. This chapter gives a nuanced view of the man's relationship to Buddhism, and the opinions that various groups have held of him. The last Buddhist figure discussed is the immensely popular, and controversial, modern Pure Land

master Jingkong 淨空 (b. 1927). Sun Yanfei highlights the increasingly sectarian nature of his message and his image (chapter 11).

Two chapters of the book are dedicated to figures that fall squarely within the Daoist tradition. In chapter 2, Goossaert discusses the ascension and later career of the 62nd Celestial Master of Daoism, Zhang Yuanxu 張元旭 (1862–1925). Goossaert is particularly interested in the impact of the transition from the imperial to republican governments on Zhang and the Celestial Masters' tradition, more generally. And in the book's final chapter, Adeline Herrou analyzes the reputation of the Quanzhen monk Ren Fajie 任法玖 (b. 1928), who is considered to be a living immortal by many of his followers.

As an edited volume, it is clear that significant care was taken by the authors and editors to ensure that all chapters addressed a common set of themes and concerns. This is a good thing as edited volumes are usually of varied quality, and their contents can sometimes be tangential to their stated foci. Most of the chapters do a good job of addressing the book's primary question. In the introduction, the editors state that although each chapter contains a good deal of biography, the main goal of the study is not to simply repeat the life histories of a given figure. Rather, the goal is to elucidate the process by which each figure was made into a "saint" (a term they use etically, with the appropriate amount of explanation and caution). The editors observe that the studies in the book tend to focus on three components: the composition and dissemination of hagiographies, the establishment of leadership, and the construction of charisma. Within these analyses, the editors' commitment to the theoretical tools of the social scientific study of religion is clear, especially with regard to charisma. They follow Stephan Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming 王銘銘 in defining it as the "expectation of the extraordinary,"¹ and use it to refer to a quality constructed in collaboration between the saint and their followers. Charisma is a key term throughout the text, and serves to focus much of the discourse. While all of the chapters do provide some theoretical analyses of their subjects in terms of charisma and saint formation, some chapters focus mostly on biographical data. Interestingly, two of the chapters that are most lacking in terms of analysis are by the book's editors (though they are well done, otherwise). Birnbaum, the author who engages most explicitly, and with the greatest finesse, the theoretical concerns of the book, does not think that his subject is a good example of charisma as defined by the editors.

The primary audience for this book is scholars of Chinese religion. Although the chapters hang together well and make a relatively coherent argument about the formation of saints, as social entities, within modern China, it is likely that most readers will use this book as a resource, reading only specific chapters relevant to their specializations within the field. The book may be of limited appeal outside of the field of Chinese religion given that it is not a comparative work. The editors do, however, express the hope that the book might provide raw material for the comparative study of saints across cultures (such as in comparison with saint formation in the early Christian church). As a secondary audience, the entire book might be assigned in a graduate-level course, but this seems unlikely given the book's price. Instead, it is far more probable that instructors will choose to assign specific chapters to undergraduate or graduate students.

Oxford University Press has produced a well-formatted, high quality book. The use of footnotes is convenient and much appreciated, especially given the length of the chapters, which average 35 pages. This makes for a rather hefty book, but it has allowed the

¹ Stephan Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming, *Grassroots Charisma: Four Local Leaders in China* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

various authors to engage with the primary research question in some depth. The variance in the treatment of the theoretical theme of the book is not a major issue, however, and the overall quality of the chapters is quite high. The editors have done well in helping the authors adhere to a general framework and a common level of detail. Unlike in some edited volumes, there is not one chapter in this book that could not stand on its own.

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JUSTIN R. RITZINGER, *Anarchy in the Pure Land: Reinventing the Cult of Maitreya in Modern Chinese Buddhism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. xii, 334 pp. US\$74 (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-049116-1

Even though there has been extensive research on Master Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), few works have the impact of Justin Ritzinger’s *Anarchy in the Pure Land*; this book changes the image we have had of Taixu to this point. Taixu, the reformer of the organization, educational system, and thought of modern Chinese Buddhism was, at the same time, the inheritor and promoter of traditional belief in and practices related to Maitreya. The significance of Maitreya worship in Taixu’s pursuit of the modernization of Chinese Buddhism has seldom been noticed in previous scholarly works. Ritzinger’s book focuses anew on what has been neglected in past scholarship on Taixu—even to the point of denying those parts of his work that were irrational or went against modernization—and fruitfully explores these topics.

I completely endorse Ritzinger’s approach, which is to attend to the problem of the continuity of Chinese Buddhist traditions in modern times. This is of a piece with my longstanding research into the issues that concerned Buddhists at the end of the Qing dynasty. For example, we can easily discover that Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), who has been acclaimed as the forefather of modern Chinese Buddhism, had a considerable influence on the social transformation at the end of the Qing dynasty through publishing Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist education, and through international exchanges with Christianity, as well as with Japanese and Indian Buddhism. Most research stops at recognizing Yang Wenhui’s endeavors in reflecting “modernization” or “modernity,” and seldom continues on to examine how Yang Wenhui thought of rules for the compilation of the Buddhist canon, or how he established his unique theory of the classification of the teachings (*panjiao* 判教), or how he promoted the traditional belief in the Western Pure Land of Amitābha. In other words, these are not only issues for Buddhists themselves in establishing their path, but also are important questions for the Chinese Buddhist tradition. These issues all fall outside the view of those who focus on modernization. In regard to research on Taixu, there is the same kind of deficiency, and Ritzinger’s research serves as an important turning point that allows us to look afresh at Taixu.

Apart from an introduction and a conclusion, Ritzinger’s work has three parts: “Taixu’s Buddhist Radicalism,” “The Cult of Maitreya,” and “Worlds Closing and Opening.” The introduction gets right to the point, and puts forth the book’s central topic, namely the issue of Taixu’s belief in Maitreya. As for why this issue has been consistently slighted or overlooked, Ritzinger clearly explains that it is because of the incompleteness of prior research, including that of Western scholars. Holmes Welch and Don A. Pittman,