8 Yiguandao under the Shadow of Nationalism

Traitors, Conspirators, Traditionalists, or Loyalists?

Ching-chih Lin

Abstract
In the name of nationalism, Yiguandao has been portrayed as double-faced by different political authorities since the 1930s: traitors, conspirators, loyalists, and traditionalists. To strengthen its legitimacy, Yiguandao has emphasized Confucian teaching and proclaimed its orthodox status as a successor to Chinese cultural heritage since the 1970s. However, Yiguandao faces another predicament between its Chinese national identity and rising Taiwanese nationalism, particularly after the 2000s. The modern fate and face of Yiguandao are closely entangled in the political struggles of nationalism. Revolving nationalism can be a double-edged sword because it can be reconstructed or manipulated by the state, political parties, or even religions to meet their own interests over time.

Keywords: Yiguandao, Chinese nationalism, Taiwanese nationalism, traitor, sectarianism

Introduction: Labeling religious sectarianism in the name of nationalism

In the name of nationalism, Yiguandao 一貫道 (I-Kuan Tao, the Unity Sect) has been politically portrayed as having various contradictory faces by different political authorities and even the Yiguandao itself, since Zhang Tianran 張天然 (1889-1947) succeeded the patriarch in the 1930s and made the religious sect one of the most influential religions in twentieth-century China. Unlike the modern Daoism considered as a part of national identity

---

1 I-Kuan Tao is the English romanization and translation of 一貫道 by the religious organization itself. Literally it means 'Way of Penetrating Unity', a quote from Analect, in which Confucius dialogues with his students, 'My Way is penetrated by a universal unity' (wu dao yi yi guan zhi 吾道一以貫之).
in Hsieh Shu-wei’s chapter in this book, Yiguandao followers were deemed traitors of the nation or the people, in line with the sentiment of the anti-Japanese campaign after World War II, because of their connection with Japanese rule and the leadership of Wang Jingwei’s government from 1940-1945. Moreover, members of Yiguandao were accused of being conspirators and Kuomintang (KMT) spies or American imperialist accomplices soon after the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949. Ironically, the KMT in Taiwan also viewed Yiguandao members as conspirators and Communist spies, and hence suppressed the religion’s organization and spread for more than three decades.

Yiguandao followers turned into loyalists three decades later. After the KMT government in Taiwan recognized Yiguandao’s legal status and rehabilitated its reputation in the late 1980s, its masses of adherents became sought-after voters for different political parties to win over in the process of democratization. To strengthen its legitimacy, Yiguandao emphasized Confucian teaching and proclaimed its orthodox status by succeeding in the tradition of promoting Chinese cultural heritage, working in concert with the KMT’s traditionalist ideology of politicized Confucianism – a tool of legitimacy used against the Cultural Revolution of the Communist Party.

Since the 1980s, Yiguandao has successfully propelled Confucian teaching forward and has helped preserve Chinese tradition by promoting the children’s movement of reciting Chinese classics and poets in Taiwan. This movement resonated also with the recent nationalist trend of restoring Chinese tradition in general education in mainland China. From the 1990s, Yiguandao members became traditionalists preserving cultural heritage in mainland China. Some Taiwanese Yiguandao educators were discreetly invited to return to the mainland and help promote Chinese tradition, in order to slow down the rapid growth of Christian churches and sectarianism in rural areas.

However, in Taiwan today, Yiguandao has a new crisis of nationalist legitimacy. It has had to face the predicament of its Chinese national identity encountering the rise of Taiwanese nationalism, particularly since Chen Shuibian’s presidency in the 2000s.

Yiguandao’s modern fate and face are thus closely entangled with political struggles under the shadow of nationalism. Dynamic nationalism can be a double-edged sword, as it can be reconstructed or manipulated by the state, political parties, or even religions themselves to meet their own needs over time. In the following pages, I unveil how in different periods Yiguandao members were portrayed as traitors, conspirators, loyalists, and traditionalists in the name of nationalism by different political authorities and by Yiguandao itself.
As John Lagerwey has pointed out, China has been a ‘religious state’, and the religious dimension of the Chinese state and society were and are inseparable from each other, past and present. Not only has the state tried to control or intervene in religious affairs, but religions have also utilized political symbols and resources as social, political, economic, and cultural capital. Nationalism became a new political symbol in the modern period, used by both the state and religious organizations. This essay endeavors to explain why Yiguandao has a multifaceted image, due to nationalist manipulation, whether by the state, political parties, or the religion itself. To borrow Prasenjit Duara’s phrase, the author here tries to rescue Yiguandao from nationalist narratives and political manipulation. Like the history of the Boxers in 1900, historians can reconstruct the past in at least three dimensions – as event, experience, and myth.

Nationalism has never been fixed; instead, it has been reimagined, reinvented or reconstructed at all times. Nationalism was a symbol or tool used by different state governments or political parties to manipulate the relationship between state and religion in China and Taiwan in the twentieth century and this continues even today. This chapter deals with both state-led nationalism and popular nationalism, and various types of cultural nationalism launched by either the state, political parties, or Yiguandao itself are explored in the following pages. Considering the party-state nature of both KMT’s Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), this chapter treats the party-centered nationalist discourse and strategies as part of state nationalism. The history of Yiguandao needs to be restored in the context of competing nationalist narratives in modern and contemporary China. Among those multifaceted images bearing the name of nationalism, we need to clarify whether they are autonyms, pseudo-autonyms, labels, or stereotypes, using the analytical categories inspired by B.J. ter Haar. In the following sections, this essay tries to answer these questions: How were

2 Lagerwey (2010, p. 1).
4 Cohen (1997).
6 Weller (1994); Madsen (2007); Kuo (2008); Yang Fenggang (2012); Kuo (2014).
8 Guo Yingjie (2004, pp. 24-48) discusses the intermingled relationship between state, nation, and ruling party, namely CCP, in terms of nationalism.
9 Ter Haar (1992).
these contradictory labels or stereotypes made? By whom and for what purposes were they constructed?

**Ambivalent faces of Yiguandao**

Under the shadow of nationalism, Yiguandao has been portrayed with ambivalent, contradictory faces by various political entities, from the state to ruling parties, and Yiguandao itself in different periods and for dissimilar purposes. Each label has had varying consequences, from the suspension or revival of religious activities, to the sacrifice of lives.

**Traitor**

Some leaders of Yiguandao were viewed as traitors during and after the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945). Yiguandao rapidly expanded during this period, particularly in the areas occupied by the Japanese army or the puppet government led by Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883-1944). The religion's boom under Japanese occupation may have had different causes, such as its charitable activities and the promise of religious salvation offered by Yiguandao believers, yet this boom also earned the group the label of traitor (hanjian 漢奸) and political suppression afterwards. Some religious leaders of Yiguandao were individually labeled traitors, especially those high-ranked officials in Wang Jingwei's government, such as Li Lijiu 李麗久, Sun Xiangfu 孫祥夫, Chu Minyi 褚民誼, Zhou Fohai 周佛海 and Zhou Xuechang 周學昌. The modern founder of Yiguandao, Zhang Tianran, was once appointed a Councilor in Wang Jingwei's administration, in order to facilitate passing through military checkpoints to preach in different areas. This connection with Japan and the puppet administration resulted in the traitor label.

This traitor label led to an official dismissal order from the Social Department on 31 January 1946, with the court accusing Yiguandao of treason. The headquarters and branches in Nanjing, then the national capital, were seized by the government. Yiguandao ceased public activities and had to use its social and political connections to regain its property and reputation. Eventually the court could not find significant evidence to accuse the group of treason, and Yiguandao won the lawsuit and regained its property and

---

reputation. On 1 August 1947, the major leaders of Yiguandao officially established a new charitable organization, the Association of Chinese Morality and Charity (Zhonghua Daode Cishan Hui 中華道德慈善會), in order to avoid the negative traitor label.

The trials against traitors were abundant and controversial after the end of World War II. Scholarly research has proved that a great number of the accused in traitor trials were actually innocent. The struggle between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party caused mutual accusations of treason during this period. Nationalism was manipulated by both political parties to instigate nationalistic sentiment against the Japanese by labeling the other side as collaborators and traitors. Yiguandao’s rapid and nationwide boom had threatened the political authorities. Nationalism thus became a convenient label and tool to weaken the legality and legitimacy of Yiguandao. Compared to conventional accusations against sectarian groups in the late Imperial dynasties, such as rebellion, swindling of money, rape of young girls and married wives, nationalism was a new charge during the twentieth century.

Conspirators

Both KMT and CCP governments still applied conventional labels to sectarian groups in the twentieth century. Both political parties accused Yiguandao of conspiracy and being enemies of the state, although using different terminologies. After the political separation of 1949, the KMT in Taiwan labeled some Yiguandao leaders from mainland China as Taiwan CCP spies and conspirators (feidie 匪諜) who were scheming to overthrow the government and jeopardize the survival of the state – the Republic of China which KMT claimed the authentic orthodox nation representing ‘the only Chinese nation’. Meanwhile, the CCP government, claiming the only orthodoxy as well, also suspected the leaders of Yiguandao of being KMT spies and conspirators (guote 國特 or guomindang tewu 國民黨特務) who were spreading rumors of the end of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and scheming to organize guerrilla warfare supported by the KMT or American imperialist accomplices. The latter charge involved the manipulation of nationalism also. Rumors in North China in the early

12 The Second Historical Archives of China (1999).
14 Lo (1994); Lo (1995); Chang (2001); Wakeman (2003); Brook (2005); Pan (2010); Lo (2013).
15 Liu Ping (2013, pp. 266-267).
1950s were that Yiguandao followers, as KMT conspirators or American imperialist accomplices, plotted to cut off women's breasts and steal boys' testicles. The other version of the rumor said that the KMT accused CCP cadres of cutting off men's testicles and women's breasts and removing wombs to make new weapons against America's atom bombs.16 All these rumors refer to the consequence of having no offspring, which would result in the death of the Chinese nation. Both the KMT government in Taiwan and the CCP government in mainland China launched campaigns against the Yiguandao after 1949.

Both KMT and CCP rulers claimed the orthodoxy (zhengtong 正統) of the Chinese nation and therefore considered spies and conspirators of the other to be major enemies. The Yiguandao became the scapegoat in the struggle between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. This is a different level of nationalism: the competition between two ruling governments claiming the orthodoxy of China as a nation. Both governments launched campaigns against the Yiguandao as being an ‘evil cult’ (xiejiao 邪教) although using different terminologies.

The CCP government launched a regional campaign against the Yiguandao in the areas occupied by the CCP’s army before 1949, and soon accelerated the nationwide eradication of Yiguandao personnel and organizations after the establishment of the PRC. The alleged crimes of Yiguandao members were collaboration with the Japanese, conspiracy with the KMT and American imperialist accomplices, counter-revolutionary behavior, the status of gangsters and landlords, and ‘feudal superstition.’ The accusation of feudal superstition was the contemporary ‘evil cult’ under the rule of the CCP along with animism. Central and local governments executed brutal suppression between 1950 and 1953 and fundamentally eradicated most of the organizations of Yiguandao.18

The KMT government considered Yiguandao members potential conspirators even before the Anti-Japanese War. Zhang Tianran was arrested by secret police in the spring of 1936 for his suspected conspiracy and collaboration with the Japanese and was finally released without conviction in January 1937.19 The KMT government arrested some Yiguandao leaders in the course of investigating CCP spies in the early 1950s, and then used

the Regulation of Prohibiting Unhealthy Popular Customs (Chajin Minjian Buliang Xisu 查禁民間不良習俗) to categorize Yiguandao as evil cult in 1951. The Ministry of the Interior reiterated the prohibition in 1958. After that, newspapers, magazines, and radio stations began to cooperate with KMT propaganda and reported the alleged crimes of Yiguandao. Buddhist associations were also mobilized by the Taiwan Garrison Command (Taiwan Jingbei Zongbu 台灣警備總部) to attack Yiguandao. Some leaders and followers of Yiguandao were arrested and tortured in prisons. In 1963, the Chief of Office of Police Affairs, Zhang Guoqiang (張國彊), strengthened the suppression, although no clear evidence could be found to link it to conspiracy. As a result, two top leaders of Yiguandao, Chen Wenxiang (陳文祥) and Zhang Peicheng (張培成) had to publicly announce the dismissal of Yiguandao in nationwide newspapers on 13 March 1963. Thereafter, Yiguandao activities became clandestine, and some branches joined Buddhist or Daoist associations, in order to maintain their legitimacy and legality. The Provincial Association of Daoism in Taiwan welcomed Yiguandao believers to join its membership, according to a newspaper published by the KMT. The top leader Zhang Peicheng joined Daoism and eventually became the deputy chairman. Two leaders of the Andong Branch of Yiguandao, Gao Binkai (高斌凱), and Liu Renhan (柳人漢), learned Zen meditation in Buddhist temples. Some branches emphasized Confucian teaching in order to fashion the orthodoxy of Confucianism which was officially sponsored by the KMT government in Taiwan, and which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. After the government’s crackdown in the 1960s, most Yiguandao leaders and followers transformed into clandestine organizations and activities and promoted charities and moral teaching to demonstrate their loyalty to the ‘Liberal China’, the KMT government in Taiwan. Most of the books they published during this period had loyal phrases on the covers, such as ‘restoring traditional culture’, being ‘patriotic to the nation’, and ‘loyal to the state leader’.

21 Ho (1996, pp. 75-76).
Loyalist and traditionalist in Taiwan

Leaders and followers of Yiguandao emphasize loyalty (zhong 忠) as one of the most important virtues, because they highlight Confucian teaching as the core element in traditional Chinese culture. Yiguandao members thus view themselves as the successors to Chinese orthodox culture. The roles of loyalists and traditionalists are two sides of the same coin. Loyalty to the state or ruler has been the most significant ethic among all social relations in Confucianism. Yiguandao emphasizes Confucian teaching, along with other teachings from Daoism and Buddhism. In Provisional Etiquette (Zhanding Fogui 暫訂佛規) published in 1939, Zhang Tianran emphasized that all Yiguandao followers should follow the Eight Virtues of Confucianism, among which loyalty is the foremost. During the political crackdown, Yiguandao followers did not choose to resist. Zhang Tianran constantly stressed that Yiguandao followers, including himself, should not be involved in politics. Instead, Yiguandao emphasized Confucian teaching even harder, in order to favor the ‘Movement of Renaissance of Traditional Chinese Culture’ (Zhonghua Wenhua Fuxing Yundong 中華文化復興運動) which was initiated by the KMT government during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Due to the destruction and eradication of traditional Chinese culture during the CCP-led Cultural Revolution, the KMT stressed its respect for traditional culture and highlighted Confucianism in particular, since Confucius had been seriously attacked by the Red Guards and CCP elites. Confucianism became the critical symbol of the Chinese nation. Regarding the competition of orthodoxy between the KMT and CCP governments, the attitude toward Confucianism became the critical value and criterion. Since Yiguandao had taught its followers the importance of Confucianism for decades, it found a niche in the KMT’s rule to rebuild the religion’s legitimacy. Yiguandao thus became one of the most influential movements promoting Confucian teaching outside the official educational system, including the movement of reciting Confucian texts and classical poems. The state-led nationalism and its popular counterpart converged at this point and mutually strengthened the legitimacy of each other. Song Guangyu 宋光宇 identifies Yiguandao

28 Zhang (1939, p. 6b).
29 Zhang (1939, p. 1a).
as ‘non-official Promotion Committee of the “Movement of Renaissance of Traditional Chinese Culture”’. In the 1990s and afterwards, Yiguandao members presided many times at the official Memorial Ceremony for Confucius in different Confucian Temples in Taiwan.

Yiguandao stressed orthodoxy by reconstructing the Confucian genealogy from ancient emperors and sages through the KMT’s founder Sun Yatsen and contemporary rulers, Jiang Jieshi and Jiang Jingguo, and then connected Yiguandao with orthodoxy. Before and after the crackdown, Yiguandao members tried to communicate with KMT rulers and high-ranked elites via intermediate personnel to the effect that Yiguandao would be very loyal to the government if legal status were granted. Within the preaching and spirit-writing rituals, loyalty and filial piety were often highlighted as the most important virtues. Yiguandao promoted traditional culture by organizing children reading Confucian classics and the politeness movement. Moreover, Yiguandao groups also organized various charities, from refuges for disasters, orphanages, preschools, social assistance for the poor and the elders, to health care and hospitals, and thus earned awards and honors from the government even before they were legalized. All these efforts to strengthen the civilized dimensions perfectly fit the modern category of ‘institutionalized religion’ demonstrated by authors of Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China. Yiguandao endeavored to present itself as a civilized modern religion to fulfill the expectations toward all religions of the modern state. In addition, Yiguandao stressed moral teaching as the foundation for social stability and organized numerous workshops and camps for students and teenagers. The former Interior Minister, Wu Boxiong, once remarked admiringly that wherever there is one more Yiguandao follower, the society would need one less police officer. The roles of loyalist and traditionalist were recognized positively by the state after the mid-1980s. Yiguandao’s emphasis on popular nationalism won the tolerance of the state and created the partnership between the religious association and KMT.

In the process of democratization in Taiwan in the mid-1980s, KMT elites found a new way to ask Yiguandao followers to demonstrate their

35 Ashiwa and Wank (2009).
37 Pingjiang Magazine Editor (2012).
loyalty: by collecting votes to elect KMT's candidates. To earn its legal status, Yiguandao cooperated with the KMT in various elections to help the candidates of the ruling party defeat the opposition party,38 the rising camp in favor of Taiwanese nationalism. By cooperating with the rulers, Yiguandao successfully removed their demonizing label and eventually earned legal status in 1987 when the Ministry of the Interior accepted the application for a national association of Yiguandao. The Republic of China Yiguandao Association was officially established and registered in 1988.

Both the KMT government and Yiguandao itself stressed the role of loyalty to the state and the ruling party from different perspectives and for distinct purposes. The party-state rulers wanted votes to win elections, while Yiguandao members desired legalization. However, as democratization proceeded, Yiguandao members had to face the predicament of how to interact with the rising opposition political party. Unfortunately, the predicament deteriorated as the opposition party tended to be more and more ‘pro-Independence’ in the 1990s and 2000s, the period of the expansion of Taiwanese nationalism. As Robert D. Weatherley points out in this book, nationalism is a double-edged sword. Yiguandao’s emphasis on Chinese nationalism might have helped the religion earn legitimacy and legality in the 1980s, but it also undermined the religion’s legitimacy and social support when Taiwanese cultural nationalism gradually inflated in the 1990s and 2000s.39 In fact, the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (Guowuyuan Taiwan Shiwu Bangongshi 國務院台灣事務辦公室), had already noticed the value of Yiguandao in the competition between Chinese and Taiwanese nationalist narratives,40 something which will be discussed further in the next section.

Another traditionalist’s predicament concerns Yiguandao’s global spread. The fact that the religion highlights traditional Chinese culture as its core element has hindered its reception by potential non-Chinese followers, although Yiguandao’s highlighting of Chinese nationalism has been helpful for the religion’s transmission among overseas Chinese communities.41 In some Southeast Asian countries, several branches have become successfully indigenized in non-Chinese cultural communities. Local ritual masters use local languages and concepts to preach and practice the rituals. Globalized transmission is the ultimate goal that Yiguandao has pursued

39 For details of the growth of cultural nationalism in Taiwan, please see: Hsiau (2012).
40 Yang Liuchang (2011, pp. 139-141).
41 Song (1983, appendix pp. 9-11).
for decades, but it requires more global adaptation to reduce the religion’s China-centered doctrine, which in some ways contradicts its emphasis on Chinese nationalism.

**Loyalist and traditionalist in mainland China**

There has been no legal status for Yiguandao as loyalist or traditionalist under the PRC’s rule. Yiguandao has been categorized an evil cult since the very beginning of the PRC. In order to be considered good citizens, followers of Yiguandao had to relinquish their membership and publicly denounce the religion and its leaders and followers. Traditional culture was disregarded and massively destroyed before the end of the Cultural Revolution. By then, there was no social or cultural space in which Yiguandao could survive. However, the situation changed in the mid-1980s.

The call for restoring traditional culture gave space for the reading of classics and the restoration of Confucius’ status. Taiwan’s experiences in promoting the movement of reciting classics and poems were then demanded in mainland China also. The PRC needed traditional culture to restore national glory and strengthen its national identity. The ‘National Studies Fever’ (*guoxuere* 國學熱) began in 1993 in the universities, gradually spreading to the public and becoming popular in the 2000s. Scholars, educators, and parents were devoted to the trend, while the state invested national resources to construct infrastructure and to promote the movement. The establishment of Confucius Institutes abroad represents the crystallization of the National Studies Fever. There are now 500 branches offering 1000 courses in 134 countries, educating in the Chinese language and propelling Chinese culture into the world. This can be considered a revitalization movement that the state and society use to try to restore the missing traditional culture, though Yiguandao also tries to syncretize Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and Islam with Chinese culture, mainly Confucianism. Yiguandao has thus participated in the trend. Some branches of Yiguandao sent followers back to China to set up preschools and extracurricular schools with specialization in reading Chinese classics and poems, plus highlighting moral teaching, which differentiates them from

---

42 Dong (2014, p. 33).
their regular competitors. In the 21st century, Yiguandao has been afforded a very promising opportunity to return to mainland China as part of the National Studies Fever. In fact, Yiguandao’s return was tacitly connived at by the PRC for multiple purposes: to promote the grassroots organizations of National Studies Fever, to win over the Taiwanese and overseas Chinese, and to stop the rapid growth of Christian churches and sects in rural areas.

Out of concern for Chinese nationalism, the PRC government has worried about the boom of Christian churches as discussed in this book by Tsai Yen-zen and Kuo Cheng-tian as regards to the relationship between state and church in China. One of the main under-the-table concerns is the foreign connection behind Christian churches and missionaries who can propel democratization and challenge the legitimacy of the PRC. To harness the rapid expansion of Christianity, the PRC government would rather give space to native religious organizations, even sectarianism. In fact, the backroom communication between the PRC and Yiguandao representatives started in the 1990s, and the public interactions began in the mid-2000s. In the first stage, the PRC government sent scholars with special backgrounds, such as retired police officers or officials of the Taiwan Affairs Office or the United Front Work Department to contact Yiguandao in Taiwan and abroad.46 Yang Liuchang (楊流昌), an official of the Taiwan Affairs Office, earned a PhD in Beijing investigating the history of Yiguandao and its development in Taiwan and published his dissertation in Hong Kong. This book suggests that the PRC government is seeking a way to allow Yiguandao to return to mainland China as it concentrates on the process of legalization and negotiations between the KMT and the religion. The PRC government is facing a similar situation that its KMT counterpart experienced three decades ago: after criticizing and suppressing Yiguandao for decades, how does it now legalize the religion and reinterpret that past criticism and suppression? One potential discourse explains that Yiguandao in Taiwan has fundamentally transformed its conspiratorial tendencies into a patriotic and philanthropic religious association. The PRC government needs a reasonable discourse to legitimate the return of Yiguandao.

Nationalism can be invoked to legitimate the return of Yiguandao to compete with the rapid expansion of Christianity. In the Annual Report on China’s Religions of 2009, published by the state think-tank Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Science, the authors clearly suggest mobilizing formerly prohibited sectarian religions, such as Yiguandao or Dejiao (德教), to form a team to spread Chinese culture globally, appeal to

46 Lin Wanchuan (2010, pp. 78-81).
overseas Chinese, enhance the nation’s ‘cultural soft power’ and maintain the ‘security of national culture’. Time will heal the wound. From feudal superstition and counter-revolutionaries to protectors and missionaries of national culture, followers of Yiguandao are now expected to be loyal to the PRC by playing the traditionalist role against Christianity. On the list of evil cults announced in 2000 and 2005, Yiguandao was no longer categorized as an evil cult. Some branches were tacitly connived with to return to mainland China, as long as they did not cross over the ‘red line’ and preach religion in public. In the past, most activities of Yiguandao in mainland China were under surveillance; some religious leaders were even arrested or exiled. Now Yiguandao shifts its status in China from ‘red zone’ to ‘gray zone’, to borrow Yang Fenggang’s concept. It took more than five decades to overturn the relationship between Yiguandao and the PRC government.

Mutual understanding began in the early 1990s when Yiguandao associations made donations to assist victims of several natural disasters. Yiguandao leaders entrusted messages to scholars to communicate with the think-tank Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Science in 1996, and also invited the Institute’s faculty members to visit branches of Yiguandao and attend academic forums organized by the religion in Taiwan from 1997 onwards. Yiguandao leaders were also invited to visit mainland China by various bureaucratic administrations from 2006 onwards. The United Front Work Department even invited several top leaders of Yiguandao branches to visit several historical sites of the religion and the hometowns of the religion’s modern founders, Zhang Tianran and Sun Huiming (孫慧明). Former KMT Chair Wu Boxion, helped pass the Yiguandao organization’s message to former CCP Chair and PRC President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) with the suggestion of legalizing Yiguandao in mainland China on 26 May 2008.

Being loyal to the PRC might earn legal space for Yiguandao in mainland China, but might also backlash in Taiwan. When the President of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, Chen Yunlin (陳雲林), led delegates to attend the first meeting with the Straits Exchange Foundation in Taiwan in December 2008, and encountered protests led by

47 Jin and Qiu (2009, p. 16; p. 228).
48 Lin Wanchuan (2010, pp. 80-81).
49 Yang Fenggang (2012).
50 Li Yu-zhu (2011, p. 229).
the pro-Independence camp, Yiguandao leaders mobilized hundreds of supporters to welcome and escort the PRC delegates. According to one of the organizers, they wanted to demonstrate the voice of Chinese national identity and show friendly intentions towards the PRC government. Later, in early 2009, the messenger from PRC contacted Yiguandao and inquired why they had organized the mobilization. The friendly intentions received a positive response. Top officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), Ye Xiaowen (葉小文) and Jiang Jianyong (蔣堅永), also met Yiguandao leaders in Taiwan in 2009. Several top officials, along with scholars, visited Yiguandao's branches in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Hong Kong in March 2009; then other delegate groups visited branches of Yiguandao in Taiwan in May and June 2009. In August 2009, delegates of scholars and officials from the PRC attended an academic conference and visited the most significant branches all over Taiwan. By showing classes of National Studies, children reciting Chinese classics and poems, and charities for social minorities and disaster victims, Yiguandao endeavored to persuade PRC officials that Yiguandao means no harm to the rule of PRC. Using the roles of loyalist and traditionalist again became the strategy for the religion to cooperate with the state, but this time the nation was the PRC.

Chinese nationalism is a double-edged sword for Yiguandao followers. On the one hand, it has helped Yiguandao earn trust from the PRC leaders. On the other hand, Yiguandao may risk losing social support in Taiwan as the Indigenization Movement launched by President Li Denghui 李登輝 (Lee Teng-hui) in the 1990s, and followed by President Chen Shuibian (陳水扁) in the 2000s, has educated a new generation of students with more Taiwanese national identity than their Chinese counterparts. Yiguandao voters no longer favor the KMT in elections. To attract the young generation to join Yiguandao, the religion needs to adjust the policy of highlighting Chinese nationalism and orthodoxy, which worked successfully in Taiwan in the 1980s and works well in mainland China in the 2010s, but could fail in Taiwan the future. If Yiguandao favors Chinese nationalism in order to obtain legalization in mainland China, it might offend Taiwanese nationalism and lose social support. As a result, the religion's adherents might be considered traitors once again.

52 Li Yu-zhu (2011, p. 231).
53 Personal communication with the top leader. To protect the person's privacy, identity is anonymous here.
54 Li Yu-zhu (2011, p. 231).
Concluding remarks

Under the shadow of nationalism, the images of Yiguandao have been manipulated by different parties, including the religion itself. The state and political parties have used nationalist narratives to control religious sectarianism; meanwhile, religions have their own autonomy and know how to utilize nationalist narratives to create social and political space and earn more resources. However, nationalism as a double-edged sword is essentially fluid and may change over time. Religion, nonetheless, is supposed to pursue ultimate, eternal concerns. When a religion tries to use nationalism as an expedient means of obtaining something, it can easily lose that thing or eventually even lose itself.

The image of religious sectarianism can be manipulated by governments or political leaders according to their needs, and nationalism has served as a useful and convenient mobilizing tool. Under the shadow of nationalism, Yiguandao has been portrayed with ambivalent and conflicting faces since its modern rising in the 1930s.

Religion cannot be free from politics, past and present; but that does not mean it has to serve politics or nationalist identity. Religions have their own autonomy, goals and significance.

Yiguandao has used nationalist narratives and labels to legitimate its orthodoxy and legality and to appeal to overseas Chinese in the past decades. However, it could also have undermined its social basis as the indigenization of political-cultural national identity has gradually increased in Taiwan in the past two decades. The ‘China-centered’ discourses and terminology in the teachings and rituals of Yiguandao might also be a barrier to its teaching to non-Chinese people and to spreading its religion across the globe.

Nationalism is a double-edged sword for religion. As nationalism can be reconstructed and manipulated for different communities for various purposes over time, the changing dynamics of nationalist discourses and labels can jeopardize the social and cultural basis of religion, which is usually expected to be ‘eternal through time’. If Yiguandao desires to become a world religion in the future, it needs to create advanced theologies and religious concerns that transcend China-centered nationalism.

Bibliography


**About the author**

Lin, Ching-chih. Assistant Professor in Chinese Religions Studies, Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University, Taiwan.

Email: cclin52@gmail.com