

Wei-Ping Lin. *Materializing Magic Power: Chinese Popular Religion in Villages and Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. 220 pages. \$39.95.

Supported by the Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University, Wei-Ping Lin's *Materializing Magic Power* ethnographically profiles the material manifestations of divine power within modern popular religion in Taiwan. The purpose of the book is two-fold: to examine the development and cultural significance of divine power as it materializes in god statues and spirit mediums in villages, and to trace how migrant workers reconfigure the kinship ties and magic power of their traditional religion to negotiate the challenges of urban living.

Before delving into this program, however, Lin states in the introduction the questions driving the work: "What are the roles of god statues and spirit mediums in Chinese popular religion? What kinds of power do they create, and how do they reinforce each other? How can a study combining god statues, spirit mediums, and magic power improve our understanding of Chinese religion in particular, and religion in general?" (2). What differentiates Lin's approach is the unified treatment of both the material forms of divine power—god statues—as well as their efficacy through spirit mediums (shamans). Lin thus "analyzes the power of a deity from the perspective of materialization" by examining "the significance of materialization in terms of three interrelated aspects: its cultural mechanisms, social consequences, and material forms" (8).

In Part I, which includes the first three chapters, Lin elaborates the key concepts of "personification and localization" as the cultural mechanisms through which a god's power is established and a spirit medium works. Chapter one details this process, from choosing the deity, to carving its statue, to rituals for the spirit's entering. This process stabilizes the relationship and establishes bonds of mutual obligation between the gods and the people. Chapter two demonstrates how spirit mediums distinguish traditional Chinese religion from other transcendental religions (Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity) through its emphasis on the integration of people and place. The selection and development of the spirit medium makes this difference clear, not just by their existence but also through their role of extending the deity's powers and more deeply embedding the deity in the adherents' social world. Thus in the two forms—the god statue and the spirit medium—divine power has the durability and permanence of localization and the dynamism of personification. Chapter three deepens the analysis in the first two chapters by adding an historical lens and showing the development of the cultures in "Dialogues with the Past and Present."

Turning to part two, chapters four and five, Lin demonstrates how traditional folk religion reconfigures in a drastically different situation. Chapter four looks closely at the transformation of kinship ties under the stress of maintaining connection to and continuation of "hometown" religion. Whereas in the village everyone lived in close proximity, especially with family members, city living presents the challenge of communities that are not only more spread out but further rely more on kinship ties that are not reliant on biological connection. Hence chapter four is titled "Thicker than Blood." "Bereft of traditional social networks, therefore, on what basis is the power of urban shamanism constructed?" (105). Further, chapter five details the evolved role of the spirit medium in the urban context. Necessity is the mother of invention even in decisively understanding and communicating divine wisdom, and the urban spirit medium innovates new methods for quickly apprehending the divine will so as to accommodate more people and different lifestyles. Not only do family and kinship structures change in the urban context, but the configuration of the rituals and objects does as well. In both cases, however, the difference in the practices of popular religion in urban versus rural environments is not so much

the content of popular religion—the materialization of power through god statues and spirit mediums—but how the practices that engage magic power transform to meet the demands of the context.

Overall, Wei-Ping Lin adequately presents a careful study of modern rural and urban traditional religion in Taiwan, and all those interested in anthropological approaches to religion will find the clear prose and focused program illuminating. Only occasionally does Lin make explicit references to other religions, but the book could no doubt help greatly interreligious competence and engagement. The strongest appeal of this book will be for those interested in the relationship between contexts and expressions of worship and engaging with divine power. Those looking for a theological or comparative study, however, may be less interested in its more descriptive style, which can at times seem a little disconnected and reserved.

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