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Marc L. Moskowitz. *The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. viii + 206 pp. $49.00 (cloth) ISBN 0-8248-2354-0; $17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-2428-0.

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The Haunting Fetus is a well-timed book, coming as it does close on the publication of several books and articles on the topic of *mizuko kuuyou*, the ritual of presenting offerings to the spirits of aborted fetuses in Japan. With the appearance of so much scholarship on this subject by such distinguished scholars as William LaFleur and Helen Hardacre, it is natural to wonder whether this phenomenon has made an appearance anywhere else in East Asia, and, if so, to what extent it resembles or has any connection with the Japanese ritual.

Marc Moskowitz's book affirms that, indeed, such rituals have made their appearance in modern Taiwan under a number of guises, and his fieldwork and research place it within an entire network of contexts: social change, attitudes toward sexuality, ritual practices, representations in popular media, changes in family structure and dynamics, and modernization, to name a few. He also amply demonstrates the variety of meanings, attitudes, and practices that make up this ritual complex among the ritual technicians that provide the service, the clients who pay for it, and the population at large.

At the center of this study is a ritual, or more accurately, a ritual type called *yingling gongyang*, or "making offerings to the spirits of [aborted] fetuses." This is a practice that seemingly crosses the borders between religious traditions, or rather presents itself in the guise of various religious traditions according to the sympathies and worldviews of the purveyors and clients. Thus, there are masters who represent themselves as Buddhist or Daoist in appealing to their prospective clientele and in explaining the meaning of the act of making offerings. For the most part, these are independent operators not affiliated with any larger organization such as the Taiwan Taoist Association or the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China.

After introducing the subject in chapter 1, Moskowitz delineates the general context in chapter 2. Individual sections of this chapter deal with the rising abortion rates in Taiwan, trends in family planning, prostitution, inequality in family structures and divorce laws (all of which favor the patriline and give wives almost no rights), prefernce for male progeny, religious beliefs, and the role of men (especially the fathers) in demanding abortions and in participating in the offerings afterward.

The author goes on to present the popular hypothesis that this ritual was imported from Japan and adapted to Taiwan sensibilities in chapter 3. I happened to be in Taiwan at the time I read the book, and an informal polling of friends and associates certainly confirmed that this is the majority opinion, and that this opinion serves to distance the practice from "native Taiwan" identification. In other words, since so many in Taiwan find it distasteful or superstitious, they would rather think of it as foreign than consider the possibility that it arose from within. Moskowitz shows, however, that some sort of offering to the spirits of dead infants is attested to in literary sources as far back as the Han dynasty. Nevertheless, Moskowitz shows that the ritual, as it now exists, is largely due to the pressures of rising population, urbanization, and shrinking family size. That these trends are similar in both Japan and Taiwan has meant that the Taiwanese have looked to Japan for models in formulating the rituals and in prompting people to seek them out. While those who would prefer to think of the practice as foreign may find their bias confirmed by the author's findings, they should be aware that he also points to ways in which they have adapted the ritual and made it their own.

Chapter 4 takes up the nature of the fetus ghost (*yingling*) itself. Here Moskowitz makes the very interesting suggestion that the idea of the fetus ghost is ideal for the practicing spirit medium. When a family experiences trouble and the medium diagnoses the cause as a disgruntled ancestor, the medium must find out something about that ancestor in order to make a credible case to the fam-

ily. An aborted fetus, on the other hand, is a complete cipher upon which the medium can inscribe anything at all, a circumstance that may help in explaining the upsurge in fetus-ghost appeasements. Given this flexibility, it is not surprising to find out that there are many types of fetus ghosts, and the author presents six basic scenarios of fetus-ghost hauntings with differing degrees of malevolence or disappointment on the part of the spirit.

The author then looks at the literature produced by practitioners of fetus-ghost appeasement, and finds that in the morality books (*shanshu*) published, they generally come out against abortion and advocate a return to more traditional moral ideals. Their rhetoric in positioning abortion as a morally bad deed creates guilt, and thus paves the way for the moral assuagement that the appeasement ceremony provides. Moskowitz calls this "the commodification of sin" (p. 69).

Chapter 6 is devoted to reporting on the portrayal of fetus ghosts in novels and motion pictures. Chapter 7 presents case histories of individual religious masters who practice appeasement rituals, including one very colorful character whom the author inexplicably dubs "Daoist Master Bob." Chapter 8 focuses on the clients, and reports the reasons for which they seek to make offerings to fetus ghosts, and their subsequent satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the results.

Chapter 9 takes up the issue of changing attitudes towards sexuality in modern Taiwan, especially in the urban areas, where social and familial changes have resulted in increased sexual activity among the young and the replacement of traditional Chinese ways of arranging marraiges to more western-style dating. Chapter 10 takes a darker turn and leads the reader into the underground world of fetus-ghost sorcery. It appears that some practitioners, including Daoist Master Bob, actually ensnare fetus ghosts to do their will on behalf of paying clients.

Chapter 11 presents the author's general conclusions, drawing together all of the threads from the personal, religious, social, and familial spheres. The author rightly identifies fetus-ghost appeasement as a phenomenon that sits at the nexus of multiple anxieties about social change, sexuality, guilt, death, and money. He takes a detour away from academic "objectivity" at the very end to remind the reader that the entire phenomenon revolves around extremely emotional issues that touch people's lives at the very deepest levels, a reality that mere qualitative/quantitative reportage cannot fully convey.

In general, this is a very strong study, and anyone seeking to understand the popular religious scene in contemporary Taiwan, or wishing to do a comparative study of attitudes towards abortion, sexuality, and religion in East Asia, will need to refer to it. The author is to be commended for the diversity of interpretive angles taken to shed light on a religious ritual that straddles so many lines as indicated above.

What few dissatisfactions I have with the book are largely technical. First, in a study such as this, the specialist needs to know from the outset what Chinese technical terms are being translated as "appeasement" or "offerings." The author explains these terms only in an endnote (p. 178) where we find that two Chinese terms are being used: *gongyang* and *chaodu*. These terms may have different meanings and connotations depending upon the religious master using them, but in general, *gongyang* could perhaps be translated as "appeasement," since it is often used in the sense of making offerings. The second terms, *chaodu* should be differentiated when interviewees use it, since it indicates "salvation" or "liberation" rather than simple appeasement with offerings. It seems to me that it makes a significant difference whether the client intends simply to appease the spirit in order to put an end to household disturbances, or actually seeks to save the spirit from its plight. The same critique goes for other terms used, such as "spirit" (*ling*) and "demon" (*gui*). Some idea of the semantic range of the emic categories is essential for grasping the subject.

Some aspects of the presentation also could have been improved by reference to research done within the discipline of religious studies. Scholars of East Asian Buddhism, for example, have long noted the connection of the bodhisattva Dizangwang with the salvation of spirits of the dead. At the very least, some reference to Buddhist studies materials would help avoid the error of calling the Buddha a "god" (p. 95).

Some note might also have been taken of the occurrence of similar phenomena across time and space. One thinks, for instance, of the *utburd*, or ghost of the infant abandoned and exposed by impoverished parents in Scandinavia, who returns to wreak vengeance. On an even wider scale, perhaps some note could be made of the fear of the hidden power exercised by the most weak and helpless in any society: the power of the conquered, of the slave, of women, and of children.

These are the quibbles of a specialist in East Asian Buddhism and a dabbler in folklore, however. I'm certain that scholars from other disciplines–history, social psychology, human sexuality–would also wish that the author had developed the subject more in the direction of their study. The topic certainly lends itself to making a wide variety of connections across fields and disciplines,

and no single book can do everything without becoming forbiddingly bloated. Even given the shortcomings listed above (and they are not many), I have no hesitation in warmly recommending this book.

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