



The Resurgence Of
Buddhism And Yigwan Dao
In Taiwan,
And Their Challenges
To The Christian Mission

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OUTLINE

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I. Introduction

This paper was first presented in The Second Consultation of the East Asian Chinese Church Leaders on Theological Education at The Chinese YMCA, Singapore, October 3~5, 1995, and subsequently at the board meeting of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan (R.O.C.), held in China Lutheran Seminary, Hsinchu, on December 19th, 1995. The topic of the paper was “The Resurgence of Buddhism and Yigwan Dao (一貫道), and Their Challenges to the Christian Mission.” Although I am interested in the topic, I must admit I am no expert on folk religions nor in the field of comparative religion. I can only express my reflections and personal viewpoints based on the information I have gathered, and I sincerely invite my readers for feedbacks.

My purpose in examining the renaissance of Buddhism and Yigwan Dao is to discover the significant challenges that traditional beliefs and folk religions pose to churches in Taiwan. Traditional beliefs and folk religions differ from each other in many significant ways. On the other hand, they also share many characteristics. I will not attempt to draw a clear line of distinction between the two, but I think that Buddhism, a long-standing traditional religion, should be categorized as the former, i.e., as a traditional belief. Yigwan Dao, although it is different from many other folk religions in its well-established teachings, organizations, and ritual services, will be categorized for our purposes here as a folk religion.

II. The Reformation and Renaissance of Buddhism

A. The Contemporary Reformation of Buddhism

Buddhism was the first foreign religion introduced into China, and it has exerted a greater influence on Chinese culture than any other religion. During the past two thousand years, Buddhism has survived oppressions and undergone introspection, transformation and evolution. As a result, it has become firmly rooted in Chinese culture and has permeated Chinese thought and life. Formerly, people regarded Buddhism as a religion of passivity; its sole emphasis was the pursuit of personal enlightenment and the escape from this mundane existence to the spiritual world. Many Christians still hold this view. When we Christians compare ourselves with Buddhists, we often consider our faith and life to be actively engaged in the redemption of this world not in the flight from it; we feel we are more concerned about society and human need.

To our great amazement, however, Buddhism has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. Keeping pace with the rapid social changes in Taiwan, Buddhists have modernized their religious beliefs, becoming active participants in society and toiling for the betterment of the whole world through the purification of the individual. Due to their efforts, more and more people in Taiwan are turning to a study of the Buddha's teachings: meditation steadily grows in popularity; a large number of the social elite contribute their professional skills and talents to promoting Buddhism; and several million people financially support Buddhist charity organizations.

This renaissance of Buddhism in Taiwan is not the result of chance. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Buddhism suffered a decline in China. By the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic, the degeneration had worsened to an extent that anguished conscientious Buddhists. One of the conscientious Buddhists, Master Tai Xu (太虛法師, 1889-1947), initiated a Buddhist reform movement. He urged the reform of three aspects of Buddhism: teachings, institutions, and the management of the property of Buddhist monasteries. He said the purpose of Buddhist meditation was not for Buddhists to escape

from the mundane world. On the contrary, it was aimed at improving life in the world and saving people. He advocated the ideal of "Buddhism in daily life." Master Tai Xu's ideal was never realized due to a number of obstacles, but it paved the way for the modernization of Buddhism. The idea of "Buddhism in daily life" inspired Master In Shuen (印順法師), who in turn influenced Master Hsing Yun (星雲法師), the founder of the Buddha Light Temple (佛光山), and Master Cheng Yen (證嚴法師), the founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (慈濟功德會, hereafter Tzu Chi). Both Hsing Yun's ideal of "Buddhism in the mundane world" (人間佛教) and Cheng Yen's ideal of "A this-worldly pure land" (人間淨土) inherit and expand Tai Xu's "Buddhism in daily life."

B. The Renaissance of Buddhism in Taiwan

In Taiwan, Christianity grew fastest during the years 1950 to 1965. However, from 1965 until now, the growth of churches in Taiwan, except The Assembly Hall Church and The True Jesus Church, has experienced stagnation and even regression. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, the number of Buddhist monasteries in Taiwan varied little from 1950 to 1980. With the rapid development in politics and economics that followed, Buddhism and folk religions, instead of disappearing or declining, have accelerated their expansion. After the lifting of martial law, their influences reach farther and deeper. We now turn to a brief examination of the vigorous development of the Buddha's Light Temple and of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation as examples of the renaissance of Buddhism in Taiwan today.

1. The Buddha's Light Temple

In 1977, Master Hsing Yun delivered a speech to the students of Fokungshan Tsun Lin Institute of Buddha (佛光叢林學院). The title of the speech was "The Sun Has Risen: the Bright Prospect of Buddhism." This speech was Master Hsing Yun's response to an article entitled "Where are the obstacles to a contemporary renaissance of Buddhism?" which had appeared in Wakening the World magazine. The author of this article identified eight problems that obstructed Buddhist groups' propagating activities: the inability to organize and systematize; the lack of an enterprising spirit; an overemphasis on the spiritual world; the censure of materialism and sensualism which makes acceptance by the general public difficult; an indifference toward education; excessive conservatism; a lukewarm enthusiasm for service; and widespread resentment and jealousy toward talented Buddhists.

In a Chinese Culture Seminar organized by the Taiwan Municipal Government in 1982, Master Hsing Yun delivered a speech entitled "The Lost Heart Retrieved--the Modernization of Buddhism." He pointed out that

Buddhism must utilize great ingenuity adapted to the needs of each age to make the spirit of Buddhist mercy manifest throughout society, that is, Buddhism must be "modernized" for each age. For this reason, we urge the modernization of Buddhism. This does not mean the creation of an entirely new Buddhism, but the rejuvenation of ancient Buddhism: it means to present the fundamental teachings of Buddha and the sages in a way familiar and palatable to the public.

The Buddha's Light Temple was established in 1967 in Dashu, Kaoshiung County. For the past 28 years, the temple has benefited from a very enterprising management and has developed into the largest and most modern temple in South-east Asia. Today it is a Buddhist center for tourism, worship, self-cultivation, and education. In addition to the

Buddha's Light Temple, Master Hsing Yun reaches out to other Chinese-speaking areas through the Hsilai Temple (西來寺) in California, the Nantien Temple (南天寺) in Australia, and more than forty Buddhist temples in Hong-Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, India, Canada, Brazil, Paraguay, Britain, Germany, France, Holland, New Zealand. There are two hundred some nations in the world today, and the Buddha's Light International Association has set up branches in more than one hundred of them.

According to the author of "Buddha Catches Up with the Times", Ms. Ren Xiao-qi, (任孝錡),

Thirty to forty years ago, Master Hsing Yun had foreseen the importance of mass media, and therefore, he became the first to record Buddhist chants and to put Buddhist teachings on TV.... He was a pioneer in many ways. For example, he organized a chorus and parades with floats. He established a kindergarten. He was an organizer of summer camps for college students and children. Twenty or thirty years ago, he was blasted for being heterodox. Today he is admired for bringing about the modernization of Buddhism.

A Buddhist named Lan Chi-fu (藍吉富) once remarked that Master Hsing Yun "is a very insightful person. He manages Buddhist temples the way people run chain stores." Currently, the Buddha's Light Temple claims to have 1,000,000 followers in Taiwan and 400,000 followers overseas. While establishing temples and lecture halls in Chinese-speaking areas, Master Hsing Yun was also engrossed in cross-cultural mission. In April 1992, Master Huili (慧禮法師), resolute to devote the rest of his life to his religious career, became the first missionary appointed to propagate Buddhism in South Africa. In 1993, Master Huili returned to Taiwan for the Second Annual Buddha's Light International Conference with five Congolese youth who were converted to Buddhism and became Master Hsing Yun's followers. After two months of training at the Buddha Light Temple China Buddhist Research Center, the five Congolese returned to their country to propagate Buddhism. According to one report, the five Buddhist devotees were originally Christians. It was under the influence of Master Huili that they changed their religious affiliation.

During recent years, the Buddha's Light Temple has been encouraging people to take the World Buddhist Examination. The last examination in June 1996, cosponsored by China Times and United Daily, was held throughout the island. It was estimated that, of those taking the exam, the adolescents alone numbered 800,000. Presently, the Buddha's Light Temple is planning to establish a Buddha's Light University in Mount Lin-mei, Jiaoxi, Yilan. The university will cover an area of about 55 hectares. With the establishment of a Buddhist university, the temple hopes to educate more people for the future development of Buddhism.

2. The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation

The Buddha's Light Temple does not reflect the whole truth of revitalized Buddhism in Taiwan since its grand facade always reminds people of its commercial elements. The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, standing out as another important Buddhist movement in Taiwan, gives an image totally different from the Buddha's Light Temple. Committed to following Buddha's steps rather than to expanding business, Tzu Chi Buddhism remains a simple and not-for-profit Buddhist organization. Like a lighthouse, the movement directs people in Taiwan out of the darkness of desires, violence, and confusion.

The leader and guru of Tzu Chi Buddhism is a slim Buddhist nun, Master Cheng Yen. Although her formal education did not go beyond elementary school, she has had a great influence on Taiwan's society. Master Cheng Yen was born in 1937. In 1961, at the age of

24, she left home for being a lay Buddhist nun, but was brought home by her mother three days later. She became a nun in 1962, and the next year, 1963, she was ordained by Master In Shuen, who named her "Cheng Yen." In 1966, she went to Fenglin, Hualien County to visit a Buddhist who was hospitalized for stomach disease. As she was leaving the hospital, she noticed a puddle of blood on the floor. Demanding an explanation from those present, she was told a miserable story: an aboriginal woman had had a miscarriage. It had taken her family eight hours to bring her from their mountain village to the hospital. The woman, who was unconscious when she arrived at the hospital, was refused treatment by the hospital because her family could not afford the NT\$8,000 medical deposit. Her family had no alternative but to take her back home again. Hearing this tragic story saddened Master Cheng Yen, and she vowed to build a hospital in Hualien that would not demand security deposits from patients.

Later on three nuns from Haihsing Girls' Senior High School came to visit Cheng Yen, hoping to convert her to Roman Catholicism. Master Cheng Yen and the three Catholic nuns talked about life and religion, and debated with each other, comparing the teachings of their two religions. One of the nuns said to Master Cheng Yen, "I don't understand why Buddhists spare no effort to cultivate their minds but care very little about helping the unfortunate!" Her remarks further strengthened Master Cheng Yen's determination to build a hospital.

After that, Master Cheng Yen invited thirty housewives to join her, and they started the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. To raise the funds needed to build a hospital, the members of the foundation themselves produced baby shoes. In addition, they started a campaign entitled, "Save a Life With Fifty Cents". They placed many bamboo containers in the markets to collect donations. The bamboo containers were each labeled with the campaign slogan: "Save a Life With Fifty Cents". Many housewives donated money when they went to the market, and soon all the containers were full. Some people suggested to Master Cheng Yen that it would save a lot of trouble if people donated more money at a time instead of donating a little money every day. Master Cheng Yen replied, "If they donated more money at a time, people would do good only once. By donating a little money every day, people do good every day". Master Cheng Yen's wish to establish a hospital for the service of the public became known to more and more people. Tens of supporters soon grew to hundreds of supporters, and hundreds to thousands. Tzu Chi Buddhism was flourishing: the number of financial supporters snowballed while the number of those sympathetic to her cause were like drifts after a heavy snowfall.

In 1986, the Buddhist Tzu Chi General Hospital, a modern hospital with 100 sickbeds, was opened in Hualien. With the opening of the hospital, Master Cheng Yen finally fulfilled her wish after 20 years of work. A huge and colorful mosaic, tenderly depicting Buddha and his disciples carefully treating the ill and suffering, greets all who enter the hospital lobby. On every floor of the hospital, a Buddhist sanctuary provides patients and their families with a place for prayer. Master Cheng Yen often goes to the hospital to personally visit and comfort patients. Once, some medical school students of National Taiwan University visited the hospital. Master Cheng Yen told them, "this hospital is full of love. It is like an excellent temple which takes care of the body as well as the mind".

Master Cheng Yen continues to hold resolutely to her principles: she does not solicit alms for personal use, perform Buddhist rituals for money's sake, build up temples, or accept her followers' offerings. She lives a simple life. Even today, she and the nuns of the Pure Abode of Still Thoughts still make their living by their handicraft skills. Master Cheng Yen insists on using all the donations received to help those in need. She and the other nuns assume the responsibility of raising the operational funds. Tzu Chi Buddhism has always made its

financial records available for inspection, and thus has won the praise and the trust of its supporters. The movement relies heavily upon volunteers, many of whom are housewives. Although much of the relief work is performed by these volunteers, the Tzu Chi movement has made sure that the service it provides to the needy is quality service. Master Cheng Yen does not concentrate on preaching and teaching; yet, her words and actions have demonstrated that Buddha's teachings can be applied to the day-to-day lives of people today. She has expressed her aspiration and her mission with respect to her work in the statement: "First enter the gate of virtue, then enter the gate of Buddhism."

Twenty-nine years have passed since the establishment of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. The foundation currently has more than four million members, with branch associations in America, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Britain, Austria, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, and Singapore, etc. In 1994, this movement raised NT\$ 4.64 billion and spent NT\$ 4.29 billion on charity activities, medical assistance, education, and cultural development. When the Jiangsu and Anhui provinces of the People's Republic of China suffered from flooding in 1991, Master Cheng Yen, in the spirit of "Wuyuan daci, tongti dabi" (無緣大慈、同體大悲, great kindness for those with whom we do not have affinities, great compassion for those of the same substance), initiated a campaign to help relieve the damage. By means of a charity sale held at National Taiwan University on December 25 of that year, this campaign raised NT\$8,000,000, setting a new record for charitable fund raising in Taiwan.

Master Cheng Yen stresses that the purpose of their efforts to benefit society, through projects like the building of hospitals, is not simply to help the sick and the poor; it has the even greater purpose of bringing deliverance to the hearts and minds of humanity. She repeatedly exhorts Tzu Chi members to carefully nurture their own hearts and minds, for it is the truly sincere person alone who can completely devote herself or himself to works of true compassion and virtue. Whoever would benefit others through works of charity and compassion must use their eyes to truly see, ears to truly hear. They must see in everything that happens an opportunity to train their own heart, in everything an opportunity to cultivate their own mind. Although the Tzu Chi movement has made a name for itself as the society of meritorious deeds, when Cheng Yen encourages her workers, she strongly emphasizes thankfulness. A thankful countenance, she holds, surpasses all worldly beauty. Master Cheng Yen admonishes Tzu Chi members that before they can serve the Bodhisattva, they must first serve the two noble Bodhisattvas at home: their own father and mother. Those who meet Master Cheng Yen are drawn to her by her kindness and charisma. Some compare her charisma to a great magnet which attracts a multitude of followers. These followers, moved by her words and actions, become small magnets who recruit even more people to follow her. Thus the ranks of this army of compassion and mercy grow.

III. The Sudden Rise and Expansion of Yigwan Dao

A. Historical Background and Basic Teachings of Yigwan Dao

Yigwan Dao is a new, rising, and rapidly evolving folk religion. The history of its development can be seen to differ markedly from that of the Buddha's Light Temple and the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation. Even though Yigwan Dao traces its origins back to Bodhidharma (who introduced the Zen sect into China during the sixth century), and even back to the legendary Chinese ruler Fu Hsi, the modern movement was founded during the Qing Dynasty by the 9th generation Master Huang De-huei (黃德輝). Master Huang founded the *Xiantian-Dao* (先天道) which combined Sung Dynasty alchemy

with the *Quanzhen-Jiao* (全真教), which was itself a synthesis of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. In addition, Master Huang incorporated certain teachings from two Ming Dynasty lay movements: *Wusheng laomu* (無生老母) and *Luenghua sanhuei* (龍華三會).

In order to respond to *Sangi muojie* (三期末劫), the three periods of end-time catastrophe and to return all human beings to natural state, Master Huang established the supreme teachings *Shouyou wushang-fa* (授有無上法), and held the *Shouyan daomen* (收圓道門), in order to save all beings. There formed the beginning to the *Xiantian-Dao* religious organization.

Throughout the period of Master Huang Dehuei leadership of *Xiantian-Dao*, Jiangxi province remained the center of the new movement's growth. Afterwards, *Xiantian-Dao* spread to *Guizhou* province through the work of the 11th generation Master *He Ruo* (何若), who had been sent to *Guizhou* by the military. Later still, the 12th generation Master *Uang zhi-gian* (袁志謙) introduced *Xiantian-Dao* to *Yunnan* province, and from there it spread to *Sichuan* province and the center of Mainland China. In 1877, the 15th generation Master *Wang-Jue-yi* (王覺一) began to use Confucian thought to expound and propagate *Xiantian-Dao*. He abolished the requirements of vegetarianism and celibacy. In addition, the group would discontinue the use of alchemic rites; *Xiantian-Dao's* sole purpose was now to instruct people how to extend knowledge to its farthest reaches, how to nurture and cherish the mind. In 1886, the 16th generation Master *Lie Qing-xu* (列清虛) formally named this movement "Yigwan Dao". When the couple *Zhang Tian-ran* (張天然) and *Shuen Huei-mieng* (孫慧明) became the 18th generation Masters in 1930, the movement had already spread into northern and central China and Manchuria. In 1940 Master *Zhang Tian-ran* renamed Yigwan Dao "Tian-Dao." Since then, both Yigwan Dao and Tian Dao have been used interchangeably as the name of this movement. *Zhang Tian-ran* died in 1947, and his wife led the adherents to Taiwan and established bases for their religion. Before the arrival of this movement, there already existed in Taiwan a vegetarian cult called *Wusheng laomu*. During the Qing Dynasty, a vegetarian-based religion, *Zhai-Jiao* (齋教) was popular in Taiwan. Later, it declined because of Japanese persecution. The resulting vacuum was filled by the very similar Yigwan Dao.

When Yigwan Dao first arrived in Taiwan and before it was strongly established, it was more commonly called "Yadan Jiao" (鴨蛋教, i.e., the duck egg religion). This movement was falsely accused, persecuted, and banned by the government. In spite of such adversity it quickly gained a large following among the people, and increased its influence in the political sphere. In order to gain the votes of the adherents of this movement, and due to the lobbying of influential Yigwan Dao entrepreneurs and parliamentarians, the Taiwanese government finally legalized this religion in 1987.

Yigwan Dao is polytheistic. All of the divinities, immortals, and saints of five different religions (viz., Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam) are the objects of worship. In this movement *Wusheng laomu* is regarded to be the greatest god. Moreover, the founding Masters and members of rank, such as *Zushi* (祖師, masters), *Tangzhu* (堂主, head of a temple), *Qianren* (前人, predecessor), and *Dianchuan Shi* (點傳師, instruction and guiding master), believed themselves to be the reincarnations of various gods, saints, and immortals. For example, Master *Zhang Tian-ran* was regarded as the reincarnation of *Jigueng hufo* (濟公活佛, a Maitreya Buddha); his wife, Master *Shuen Huei-mieng*, thought of herself as the rebirth of *Yuehuei* Bodhisattva (月慧菩薩). Yigwan Dao believes that human nature had become corrupt and morality had sunk to a dreadful state of degradation.

Unless a way could be found to avert this crisis, humankind was headed for a terrible catastrophe. But due to the mercy of Heaven, He has sent wise teachers, such as *Jigueng* and *Yuehuei* Bodhisattva, to earth. Through the practices of *Xuanguan*, *Koujue*, and *Hetueng sanbao* (玄關、口訣、合同三寶) they will deliver as many as they are destined to be saved.

A Fast-spreading Folk Religion

Though Yigwan Dao was banned by the government, it never ceased propagating itself and recruiting members in Taiwan. The places where members gather and ceremonies are held are called *Daochang* (道場), members call each other as *Daoqin* (道親), and the shrines are called *Fotang* (佛堂) or *Jiangtang* (講堂). In the beginning, this movement relied heavily upon spiritualism in its teachings, so prophecy and communication with the spiritual world through mediums were the main features of the gathering. Moreover, most religious activities were held in private homes, because, still an illegal religion, this movement did not yet have temples of its own. During this period, the temples of this movement were established under the Taoist umbrella.

During the 1970's, Taiwan economy skyrocketed. There was a mass migration from villages into cities, an upsurge of utilitarianism, and a rising tension in interpersonal relations. These sudden social changes awakened people's nostalgia for traditional moral values. In the 1980's, Yigwan Dao became one of the main advocates of a moral renaissance, for Yigwan Dao had in the meantime converted itself from a religion full of shamanistic practices to one with a fundamental emphasis on ethical teachings.

Prior to Yigwan Dao's arrival in Taiwan, there had been no plan for an organized resettlement. Members who came individually were penniless and lost contact with each other. As a result, some members left the movement shortly after their arrival. Nonetheless, there were a few members who managed to remain faithful to Yigwan Dao even after the move to Taiwan. These faithful established new groups and became branch leaders. These leaders are now called *Qianrien* or *Lao Qianrien* (老前人). In contrast to many Buddhist monks and nuns, (recall the example of Master Hsing Yun of the Buddha's Light Temple) who have their own temple estate and receive support from the laity, members of this movement had nothing upon which to depend. Despite such deprivation, this movement took up the double challenges of finance and mission, and managed to emerge as a commercial as well as a missionary religious community.

In Mainland China, both the 15th generation Master Wang Jue-yi and the 18th generation Master Zhang Kuang-bi (張光璧) made their living as fortune tellers, and the members who preached Yigwan Dao from Tianjin to Shanghai were mostly living by selling sundry goods. These members also founded a shrine called *Jichu Tan* (基礎壇) in order to spread their religion to their customers. Moreover, members who migrated to Manchuria were mainly running flour mills and soy-oil stores, they concurrently engaged in business and carried on their work of proselytism. After moving to Taiwan, the members of *Jishu Tan* established cake factories in Taipei. Members of another group, *Foyi Ju* (法一組), managed photography shops in Eastern Taipei and founded soy-sauce factories in Gangshan. There were some members who even set up vending businesses to sell textiles, dumplings, or vegetables. In keeping pace with the development of the economy, it was a rather common feature for members to cooperate in business. They started to organize companies and factories. These commercial developments enabled the members of Yigwan Dao to become financially stable and to extend their social contacts to the wider public.

Consider, for example, the *Xingyi* (興毅) group, which consisted of twenty two members. Having raised the necessary capital, this group established an automotive service center on Chung-cheng 3rd Road in Kaohsiung. The service center building also housed an Yigwan Dao shrine. This location became prime real estate when Kaohsiung prospered. Developers contracted with them to build a 12-story building. The *Xingyi* group was granted ownership of the first, second and top three floors. The first and the second floors were sold to the Hwanan Bank, the shrine was relocated to the 12th floor, and the 10th and 11th floors were converted into guest houses. The profits were used in two ways. Some was returned to the members who had invested capital at a rate of about double the initial investment. Another portion was used to establish a trading cooperative dealing exclusively with the Japanese. Eventually, the *Xingyi* group founded a trading company and a shrine in Japan: an overseas base for commercial as well as missionary expansion.

Of all of the Yigwan Dao groups, the *Xingyi* group is the one that has put the commercial/missionary principle into practice most successfully. The current president of EVA Airlines and tycoon of the Evergreen container shipping company, Mr. Zhang Rung-fa (張榮發), is a committed member of this movement. He once stated that all of his achievement can be attributed to his deep faith in Yigwan Dao. He has, therefore, set up shrines in his companies for employees to study and come to understand the teachings of this movement. It has been alleged that there might be some pressure placed upon employees to attend these religious lectures and to join this religion: refusal could jeopardize advancement.

Yigwan Dao is managed and maintained according to a philosophy in which preaching and commerce are considered equally important. As a result, this movement has not only ensured that business enterprises prosper and founded shrines and lecture centers, it also has established quite a few cultural foundations for the purposes of academic research, charity, and proselytism. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of the Interior of Taiwan, as of 1994, there were eighty-three temples and shrines which had been established by Yigwan Dao, and the movement claimed about 918,000 members in Taiwan alone. In addition, it operated four seminaries, thirty-four schools, twenty-nine clinics, and thirty publishing companies in Taiwan. On the other hand, its overseas branches had scattered to over twenty-four countries, including Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, Philippines, New-Zealand and Australia; Yigwan Dao is also present in both North and South America and Europe. At the time of the survey, there were approximately 150,000 overseas members.

IV. The Enormous Challenges Facing Christianity

The above presentation provides a brief account of the Buddha's Light Temple, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, and Yigwan Dao, all of which have developed rapidly during the last thirty years in Taiwan. We have also pointed out their respective paths and characteristics of growth. Now, we need to examine closely how these three movements were able to make such remarkable growth in the rapidly changing society of Taiwan. We also need to examine carefully the various ways these groups have posed enormous challenges to the Christian mission. Here, I use the word "enormous" without exaggerating the challenges confronting us. Unless we choose to cut ourselves off from the present and live only in the past, it is impossible not to see how these movements have made lasting and significant strides in a challenging environment. Indeed, the accomplishments of other religious groups seems to pale us by comparison. It is not necessary for us to demean ourselves as we look at other's advancement, nor to weaken our own conviction and aspiration. On the contrary, the crucial task before us is to discover how we can humbly

learn from the strength of these three movements, candidly examining our past mentality and blind spots, and then face with courage the challenges of mission in the future.

After all, what challenges have the growth of these three movements brought us? Is it because they attract people to their beliefs? Or is it because they absorbed Taiwan society's resources to their advantage? Or is it because the rapid increase of membership and possession of rich resources constitute pressure and threat to Christian mission work? If we evaluate from these angles alone, our evaluation is questionable. There is great reason to fear that such self-examination will be misleading from the outset. What we must focus on is not how to improve the overall image of our religion, or how to upgrade our competitiveness in order to attract a larger share of the religious followers. Rather, what must concern us is whether the resurgence of these movements has exposed the weaknesses and blind spots of church work in Taiwan, and whether they have stimulated us to engage in a thorough and comprehensive re-examination of the role and mission of the church.

Let us first list the kinds of challenges the church faces from the Buddha's Light Temple and the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation:

1. They facilitate a Buddhist pure land on earth, practice "Buddhism in the mundane world" or "living Buddhism", create a form of Buddhist doctrine which is relevant to the modern person's needs and perplexity. Through attending religious lectures, and practicing Buddhist teachings, the devotees may reorient their perspective, attitude, and way of life.
2. They have turned the traditional negative Buddhist norm of quietism into an active and yet detached way of service to the needs of the modern persons. That is to say, they embody what it means to be in the world but not of the world.
3. Master Cheng Yen uses the sufferings of our neighbors to awaken human compassion. And the living model of the master's compassion has inspired people to participate in the Tzu Chi vision.
4. They attract a large number of the elite who contribute their expertise in the tasks of management and mass communication.
5. Tzu Chi Buddhism excels at organizing volunteers, especially housewives, who become most fervent members whose zeal is an inspiration to others.
6. Tzu Chi Buddhism is highly professional with respect to charity management, stressing the quality of relief work and financial accountability. The relief provided by their medical services is praised by all. Thus, through "the gate of virtue" people are drawn to enter "the gate of Buddha."
7. The teaching of "*Wuyuan daci, tongti dabei*" promotes the limitless mercy and compassion of this Buddhist sect.
8. They are excellent in using the media to introduce the movement and disseminating the Buddhist teaching.
9. They make effective use of all the methods employed by Christian missionary work to propagate their thoughts. They compose Buddhist hymns and music; hold Buddhist retreat camps for children and youth; establish young persons' Buddhist associations, place sutras in hotels, found Buddhist study clubs in universities, organize large scale Buddhist lectureships, etc.
10. They establish solid Buddhist seminaries to train qualified monks and nuns, stressing "Where there is no quality education, there can be no convincing of minds, no

converting of hearts." In addition to establishing Tzu Chi medical college, they also prepare and plan for the establishment of the Tzu Chi University and Buddha's Light University. In so doing, they will equip many more people to serve the future needs of Buddhism.

As to the challenges faced by Christian churches due to the rapid rise of Yigwan Dao, the following deserve to be noted:

1. This movement has a strong indigenous nature, which penetrates to the grassroots and pervades all levels of society.
2. It emphasizes that every member is a "missionary", who must live by his/her own support.
3. Members ought to disseminate their beliefs wherever they travel. The proper life of a member is to trade and to preach at the same time, and blending religion and career together in their daily conduct.
4. It advocates the teachings of Confucianism and promotes the study of classical Chinese literature.
5. It encourages members to install shrines in their own homes, for the home is regarded as the basic unit for primary outreach and as the center for propagation.
6. It emphasizes that the relationship between members should be one built upon a willingness to support and serve one another.
7. It establishes seminaries for continuing education and for training the needed personnel for propagation.

Moreover, we must bear in mind that all three movements actively engage in international and cross cultural mission. They first establish their bases in areas where Chinese are prevalent, then use these bases as beachheads for launching cross cultural mission. From these developments, we realize that the Buddha's Light Temple, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, and Yigwan Dao have made remarkable advancement in overseas mission. As we have observed the tremendous momentum of their growth in Taiwan, it would not be too early to predict the acceleration of their overseas mission around the world.

V. Some Soul-searching Self-examinations the Chinese Christian Churches Should Make to Meet the Enormous Challenges

Following this brief description of the resurgence of Buddhism and Yigwan Dao, it is without doubt that these three movements pose enormous challenges to Christianity in Taiwan. As members of the Christian churches, and especially as leaders of Chinese churches and as theological educators, we can not help but begin to meet these challenges through in-depth self-examination.

We begin with a brief reflection upon our own recent history in Taiwan. From the Second World War until 1987, Buddhism and Yigwan Dao were both suppressed by the government, whereas Christianity, on the contrary, was well-treated. When martial law was revoked in 1987, Buddhism and Yigwan Dao immediately became very popular, and their membership

increased dramatically. For the sake of gathering votes and support from these massive religious groups, the government began to uphold these religions, and, to certain extent, patronized the development of these three movements. This historical review should in no way prompt a cynical criticism of other religions for taking advantage of the favoritism of the government to promote their beliefs. To the contrary, we must remind ourselves that the proclamation of the Gospel is not dependent upon the powerful, but upon the power of God. A favorable environment does not necessarily ensure the spread of the Gospel. Our own history has taught us that an “unfavorable environment” had often proven to be not only “favorable” but instrumental in forging Christian character and manifesting the power of the Gospel.

From W.W.II to the mid-Sixties, the period when Christianity in Taiwan developed most rapidly, Taiwan’s dependency on USA aid was at its high point. The Seventies witnessed a rapid development of the economy of Taiwan, but a significant slow down in the growth of Christian membership. This slow down in growth would later become an actual decline in membership. Christianity, a religion which was considered a “foreigners’ faith”, grew due to an admiration of things foreign in Taiwan at that time. During the Eighties, the economy thrived and further accelerated; hence, indigenous consciousness was awakened. Consequently, the indigenous religions such as Buddhism and Yigwan Dao rapidly grew in popularity.

To compare Christianity with Buddhism and Yigwan Dao in their waxing and waning throughout the past decades should be of interest not only to sociologists of religion, it should also be an urgent issue confronting pastors, theological educators, and believers who care deeply how the Gospel may reach people at the grassroots level of society and firmly take root in Chinese culture. To limit the length of our discussion, we will list only some of the most essential questions, which can serve as guideposts for our further in-depth reflection:

1. What is the uniqueness of the gospel? How does it relate to the pulse of the times, the changes of society, and the profound needs of people at this time and in this place?
2. What are the similarities and differences between Buddhist mercy and Christian love?
3. Is there any difference between Buddhist emptiness and Christian kenosis? What sort of differences will manifest themselves as Buddhists and Christians engage in service from their respective self-understandings?
4. How do the churches in Taiwan perceive the relationship between the gospel and culture? Have we let the Gospel penetrate deep into the local culture and transform the life of the local community?
5. In this profit-seeking and merit-making society, what is the special significance the Gospel of costly grace can bring to the people of Taiwan?
6. What is our understanding of the Church? What is the relationship between our church and society? Do we penetrate deeply into the society? If not, why not?
7. Is the evangelistic strategy in Taiwan church-centered or family-based? Why is our evangelistic outreach still focused on individuals rather than families?
8. Is “the priesthood of all believers” a frigid doctrine or a persistently taught and practiced truth, warm with life, or better yet, burning with passion?

9. How do Christians in Taiwan integrate their life, career, and witness?
10. Do the churches in Taiwan lay great emphasis on identifying and nurturing the talents of their members? In the cultivation of talents, do we have a broad vision? Are we willing to make far-reaching investments on it?

VI. Conclusion

“Revival” (復興) is a nostalgic term Chinese churches often use. It symbolizes the longing, the heart’s desire of many believers who are concerned about the condition of the church, and earnestly pray for the mighty work of the Holy Spirit to bring about a spiritual renewal. This essay points out the revival and thriving growth of the present Buddhism and Yigwan Dao. By so doing, we do not mean to lift them high and bring ourselves down. Our purpose is to understand the process of their revival and to identify the essential elements which contribute to such revival. The children of God are God’s elect, rather than favorites. We are chosen not because we are able or worthy, but for the purpose of proclaiming to all nations God’s name, and His atoning grace in Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament period, God often raised up Gentiles to serve as the instruments of His will. And now, could it not be the divine providence that we are pricked to make a soul-searching self-examination by the revival of both Buddhism and Yigwan Dao? It is now the seventh year since the Year 2000 Gospel Movement was initiated. As we are confronted by the resurgence of Buddhism and Yigwan Dao, conscious of the fact that this century will, after three short years, fade into history, can we anticipate the coming of the third millennium without fear and trembling? Can we not but pray to God to revive His works through His Church so that the Gospel will resound like evening drums and morning bells to awaken people in Taiwan, and shower like the seasonable rain upon the drought-blighted hearts?

(Translated from Chinese by Ms. Yao Yu-shuang, and
edited by Dr. Thomas Yu and Dr. Jeffrey Oschwald)

GLOSSARY

A this-worldly pure land	人間淨土
Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation	慈濟功德會
Buddhism in the mundane world	人間佛教
Daochang	道場
Daoqin	道親
Dianchuan Shi	點傳師
Fokungshan Tsun Lin Institute of Buddha	佛光叢林學院
Fotang	佛堂
Foyi Ju	法一組
He Ruo	何若
Hetueng sanbao	合同三寶
Hsilai Temple	西來寺
Huang De-huei	黃德輝
Jiangtang	講堂
Jichu Tan	基礎壇
Jigueng hufo	濟公活佛
Koujue	口訣
Lan Chi-fu	藍吉富
Lao Qianrien	老前人
Lie Qing-xu	列清虛
Luenghua sanhuei	龍華三會
Master Cheng Yen	證嚴法師
Master Hsing Yun	星雲法師
Master Huili	慧禮法師
Master In Shuen	印順法師
Master Tai Xu	太虛法師
Nantien Temple	南天寺

Qianren	前人
Quanzhen-Jiao	全真教
Ren Xiao-qi	任孝錡
Revival	復興
Sangi muojie	三期末劫
Shouyan daomen	收圓道門
Shouyou wushang-fa	授有無上法
Shuen Huei-mieng	孫慧明
Tangzhu	堂主
The Buddha Light Temple	佛光山
Uang Zhi-gian	袁志謙
Wang Jue-yi	王覺一
Wushen laomu	無生老母
Wuyuan daci, tuengti dabei	無緣大慈、同體大悲
Xiantian-Dao	先天道
Xingyi	興毅
Xuanguan	玄關
Yadan-Jiao	鴨蛋教
Yigwan Dao	一貫道
Yuehuei Bodhisattva	月慧菩薩
Zhai-Jiao	齋教
Zhang Kuang-bi	張光璧
Zhang Tian-ran	張天然
Zhang Rung-fa	張榮發
Zushi	祖師