

# ASIAN RITUAL SYSTEMS

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Pamela J. Stewart  
and  
Andrew Strathern

*Series Editors*

# ASIAN RITUAL SYSTEMS

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## SYNCRETISMS AND RUPTURES

*edited by*

Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern

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Back cover photo: View of the Luerhmen Temple in Tainan, Taiwan, upper level  
and plaza (18 May 2002) (Photo: P.J. Stewart / A. Strathern Archive)

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*To those who know compassion*



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## SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

We are delighted that this edited collection of essays is appearing in the Ritual Studies Monograph Series. We want to thank the set of people who contributed essays to this volume. Each of them was invited, by ourselves as editors, to discuss the broad topic of Asian ritual practices, syncretisms and ruptures, continuity and change. They have all done so admirably. The themes in this volume are ones that reflect well the dynamically altering state of ritual practices and their place in social life. All of the authors look at their topics both analytically and historically. Ruptures in history have occurred as a result of changing dynasties and political circumstances. Syncretisms, in a very general sense, occur when creative bricolage is applied to the re-invention or revival of rituals in such altered circumstances. Neither the ruptures nor the syncretisms need be radical or total. On the contrary they may be nuanced and partial. By using these terms in our title we want to draw attention to these nuanced aspects of change, and to the ingenious ways in which challenges to, as well as revivals of, "tradition" may be parsed by the participants. This point applies in a very clear way to the movements for cultural revival among Taiwan's indigenous peoples which we discuss in Chapter 1.

Looking through all of the chapters, readers may discern the working out of related dimensions of change. Joseph Lam documents how the Emperor Huizong ordained new musical forms to mark his reign; these innovations were then ruptured by his demise. Mark Moskowitz shows how a fluid, inventive agency, willing to take in elements from many sources, was at work in the performances of the Taoist master whose activities he observed. Joseph Lee elucidates how Christian religion became enmeshed with local politics in nineteenth century South China. Yu Siu Wah's study indicates the innovations, and subtle subversions, emergent from the 1997 reunification rituals in Hong Kong. Eric Reinders explores how both Buddhists and Christians made ruptures in the expectations of ritual bowing to the Emperors in China. Paul Katz documents the remarkable revival of ritual processions in Pucheng in Zhejiang, China, a resumption of rituals following a period of rupture. Michael

Szonyi's essay indicates a striking set of practices that emerged on Jinmen Island as a result of political confrontations with Mainland China: again, a set of ruptures and the creation of rituals both to express and to mediate, to some extent, those ruptures. Philip Clart's case studies exhibit the fluid, "syncretistic" ability to incorporate new themes into spirit writing and Taiwanese morality books. And finally, Vesna Wallace documents marked changes in Tantric Buddhism over time, with alternations of emphasis reflecting changing political contexts. These studies are quite diverse, and we could simply have expressed how they all deal with history and change. Looking at these changes a little more deeply, we suggest they all reflect blends of old and new practices ("syncretisms") and many deal with situations marked by powerful historical changes ("ruptures").

We want to thank the University of Aberdeen's Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies (RISS) where we were provided with affiliations and office space in 2004 to work on this project as well as others; the Institute of Ethnology, (Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan) for affiliations and office space during parts of 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005; and the Dong-Hwa University (Hualien, Taiwan) and Peking University (Beijing, China) for the opportunity to provide lectures and discuss our current thinking on related topics during periods of time in 2004. We thank those at the *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* for inviting us to submit the article "Divisions of power: Rituals in Time and Space among the Hagen and Duna Peoples, Papua New Guinea" (Strathern and Stewart, 2003, *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* 1.1: 51–76) which included some thoughts about Mazu ritual practices (see our Introduction, this volume). Our thinking on Asian ritual practices has benefitted from the discussions that surrounded the following lectures and seminars that we were jointly invited to present over the last five years:

"Female Spirits: New Guinea and Taiwan" (Stewart and Strathern), at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan (May 27, 2002);

"Transnational Flows, Agency and Power: The Daoist Goddess Mazu" (Stewart and Strathern), at the Asia Over Lunch Seminar Series, in the Asian Studies Center, University of Pittsburgh, PA, USA (Nov. 13, 2003);

"Songs, Places, and Pathways of Change" (Strathern and Stewart), at the conference "Dance, Music, and the Study of Culture: The Austronesian Perspective" held at Dong-Hwa University and College of Indigenous Studies, Hualien, Taiwan (Dec. 12th–15th, 2003); and

"Images of Cultural History and Identity" (Stewart and Strathern), at the Institute of Development of Indigenous People and Institute of Ethnic Re-

lations and Culture, Dong-Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan (Dec. 12th, 2003).

This volume should be of especial interest to anthropologists, historians, and scholars of religion and ritual studies.

The chapters in this volume have been reprinted, with permission, from the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol. 19.1. Those in an earlier volume in the series, "Contesting Rituals: Islam and Practices of Identity-Making," were also reprinted, with permission, from the same journal, vol. 18.2.

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21 April 2005  
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