Being able to see history in the broad sweep takes the historical argument beyond observations of personal foibles and corruption as the centerpiece of Chinese history. For that purpose, this book will be well used for a long time to come.

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What can Americans and Europeans learn from religious change occurring in a small marginal place such as Taiwan? Richard Madsen, a veteran sociologist of religion in the United States and China, has recently moved his field across the Taiwan Strait. His latest book is short in length and wide in significance. The Western reader will be reminded that “the clash of civilizations” prophecy does not hold in this Confucian society, and find hope that progressive religion might thrive in modernity.

Madsen coherently engages the two main themes of the volume—how religion may contribute to democracy and how progressive forms of religion grow (p. xxiii)—in his preface and conclusion. Chapter 1 provides the context for religious change in Taiwan. Chapters 2–5 focus on one religious group each: Tzu Chi (*Ciji*), Buddha’s Light Mountain (*Foguangshan*), Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagushan*), and the Enacting Heaven Temple (*Xingtian Gong*). The first three are Buddhist organizations that originated in the postwar period and are now the most prominent in Taiwan. The fourth is a popular Daoist temple for Lord Guan (*Guan Gong*).

To Madsen, Taiwan is a happy marriage between democratization and non-Christian, religion-inspired civic morality. The four cases reviewed here show how Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism may contribute to democracy by forming voluntary associations for civil society and acting as the “belt buckles” between the private and the public, by encouraging a civil religion to take the form of an “ecumenical nationalism” that respects domestic and international pluralism (p. 137), and by combining Asian values and global communication. Moreover, writing in the tradition of Robert Bellah’s sociology of religion and following Karl Jaspers’s philosophy of religion, Madsen suggests that, amid the “moral vacuum” of modernity, Taiwan’s successful stories of religion and civility show wherein lies the precursor of small movements leading toward a new “axial age” because, as he elaborates on Jaspers’s hint, “the initial breakthroughs took place on the margins of powerful empires” (p. 149), read perhaps, China.

Chapters 2 to 5 are structured alike: An opening scene introducing the subject to a non-area specialist readership, and an overview on how the
subject is related to democracy and appeals to the middle class. This is followed by a history of the group’s development (mainly the founder’s biography), a description of the organization and practices, and an analysis of the subject’s niches in Taiwan’s nationalism and democracy. We learn from Madsen’s thesis that Tzu Chi contributes to democracy by reproducing “what Western theorists call civic virtue—those habits of the heart that embody a disciplined sense of responsibility for the public good” (p. 46); Buddha’s Light Mountain promotes a model of civic morality that emphasizes tolerance and self-reliance; and Dharma Drum Mountain’s leader, Sheng Yen, teaches the transcending of all divisions and engagement in global dialogues. The Enacting Heaven Temple practices a hybrid ethic and embodies hybrid modernity.

The volume also features a new term, “religious renaissance,” defined as “a revitalization, reform, and renewal of Buddhism and Daoism to meet the needs of the new middle classes in a modernizing society” (p. xxiii). This is, of course, a classic theme from Max Weber’s treatise on the link between religious rationalization and artisan social strata. The theme also harkens to the concern of religious transformation vis-à-vis secular individualism since the time of Madsen’s participation in the now-classic *Habits of the Heart* (Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985]). Madsen brings in new light by using an old tool: Mary Douglas’s cultural typology of “grid” (clarity of rules and roles) and “group” (tightness of group ties) dimensions (see Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* [London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970]), and posits an interesting typology of different segments of the middle class for the three Buddhist movements: Tzu Chi’s downplay of rituals for the professionals and managerial segment of strong grid, Buddha’s Light Mountain’s ritual and authority for the business people of strong group, and Dharma Drum Mountain’s “humanist philanthropy” for intellectuals. The Enacting Heaven Temple seems to cover all sorts of urban inhabitants. It would be useful for future studies to follow this typology by conducting either a survey among the followers to garner statistics on their class backgrounds, or long term ethnography to generate in-depth description of the followers.

*Democracy’s Dharma* adds to a growing series of works on religion and civil society in Taiwan. It will be a good introductory text for classes on Chinese societies and on contemporary Buddhism. The book makes an important contribution by not only providing a wide-range update on Taiwan’s religious changes, especially the new modern Buddhist organizations, but also engaging the East Asian case with the faith-based charity debate in the United States, and with its continuous concern for religion and liberal individualism. *Democracy’s Dharma* shows hope for religion to engage modern morality. Indeed, there is a great deal that everyone can learn from Taiwan’s religious renaissance.

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