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Ambience Contaminated: An Analysis of the Elusive Characteristics in Contemporary Religions

The appearance of religions in modern society is a question that always attracts much interest. Living in the 21st century, we may observe that religions today appear to be increasingly more complex and fluid, making it difficult to decode them with traditional theories. Although they still attract many devout believers, the “religions” that rely on clearly-defined institutions, specific rituals, and clear symbols seem increasingly distant from us. In contrast, the religious or spiritual experiences that cannot be clearly separated from our daily life seem to be closer to the contemporary mind. How can we understand this shift and its implications?

Ambience Contaminated: Sensory Experiences and the Frontier of Religion introduces the concept of “ambient religion” to analyze the elusive qualities of contemporary religions. Ambient religion is a kind of religiosity floating in the senses and space of consciousness. It creates an ambience that converses with our senses through the material and emotional effects of the medium, summoning our emotional and religious imagination in a fleeting aura. The five articles in the book take Taiwan and China as examples to explore how ambient religion hides on the frontier between religion and non-religion, connecting to wider cultural and natural experiences through our empathy and resonance. Such a process not only enables religions to break through the control of politics and attract more adherents, but it also generates religious and spiritual experiences with more layers than traditional religions.

The chief editors of this book are Wei-ping Lin and Ke-hsien Huang. Wei-ping Lin is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology, specializing in religion, kinship, and imagination. Ke-hsien Huang is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, specializing in sociology of religion, urban underclass studies, qualitative methods, and microsociology. His research topics include the development of religion in Chinese society, the relationship between church and state, Christianity and urban fringe groups.



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National Taiwan University

+886-2-3366-2577

No.1, Sec. 4, Roosevelt Road Taipei, 10617 Taiwan

ntuhighlights.ntu.edu.tw

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Taiwan
University
國立臺灣大學