

Author:	Do, Thien
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Review: This is a fascinatingly valuable book on recent and contemporary religion in Vietnam, focused above all on the concept of *linh* (supernatural power) and seeking to locate the vitality of a range of religious practices and orientations in the paradoxes of postcolonial (and unified) Vietnam. It emerges that leaders and participants in religious activities wish to influence daily life to their various advantage while cultivating an independent "spiritual" position which is able to resist the threat of domination from elsewhere. Considering that the title is unavoidably reminiscent of Melford Spiro's *Burmese Supernaturalism* (1967, 1978), which however, strangely, is not in the bibliography, it is interesting to see how far academic styles of writing have changed since then. Thien Do's work is not only explicitly "post-colonial" but displays an almost aggressive use of recently fashionable post-modernist jargon. It would be interesting to have another version of this book without the surplus baggage derived from writers who have never researched anything on the ground for themselves! Moreover, there is a kind of inverted orientalism (which has been named "occidentalism") to be overcome, as when we read for example, "I see *linh* and self-cultivation as being able to dislodge a number of Western assumptions about the self and agency." But who holds such assumptions except the authors whose terminology seems to be so indispensable? However the value of this book lies not in the dressing but in the substance. Using all the resources of a native Vietnamese observer who is able to be present as an almost unnoticed participant, we are presented with a gold-mine of information, reported observation, and quotations from informants. The study treats firstly the local communal temples known as *dinh* (orthography simplified here) and secondly local Buddhist temples with a tendency to incorporate various elements of the "three teachings" derived from China. Incidentally, the Buddhist temples are referred to, as is widely done in the former French colonies, as "pagodas", which is confusing in that the term is used elsewhere in Asia to refer to the elongated stupas which are only one element of temple architecture, and it might be thought that a truly post-colonial account would somehow try to get over this. The following chapters move into a description and discussion of a variety of voluntaristic practices, notably trance and self-cultivation ("as a practice that underpins agency in popular patterns of supernaturalism") and also to more explicitly Daoist variations, which include a culture of healing. This is all wonderful reading

material. Taken together, the four phases of the study are regarded as amounting to "four windows" through which "popular beliefs and practices are viewed" (p. 18, and see also the concluding chapter). However, going beyond the common basket of "popular beliefs and practices", and precisely because the concept of "agency" has an analytically diversifying effect, one might expect a much stronger analytical play-off between, on the one hand, those religious forms (both rites and concepts) which are more or less obligatory, because they reflect the power of those who are locally powerful, and those forms, on the other hand, which create and defend free space for individuals in a shifting society and may in turn be attacked and repressed by the powerful as a potential threat to their dominance. This typological distinction, which is so important in the history of religions, seems to be somewhat neglected in current anthropological orthodoxy. As a result, it would seem, the need is felt in this work to bring out the functions of all references to the mysterious world of *linh* within a single continuum of "popular religion". It is time to realise that leading terms such as "popular religion" and "supernaturalism" themselves have a long colonialist history in East Asia and do not do justice to the complexities of the history of religions. But however this may be, Thien Do has certainly drawn out again and again, most interestingly, how religious symbol systems and ritual activity are related to the negotiation of social positions at the local level. Beyond this, let it be repeated that the great value of this rare work lies in its superb reportage, upon which others will surely draw for years to come.

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