ABSTRACT

What causes changes in the development of religion and religious groups? The factors may vary as the subject in question changes. However, most of the studies would focus more on the environmental factors, such as social change and political influence. On the other hand, as one examine the subject of this paper, two sub-branches of Yiguandao (Unity Sect), Baoguang jiande and Fayi tian’en (quying) in Singapore, one could discover that they are similar, but not identical. Why causes the difference since they have identical doctrine, and are subjected to the same environmental factors?

In view of this, this paper aims to study the development of the two groups in question closely in various areas of their development. The paper would start with questioning the perspective of the present studies on religious development, as well as that on Yiguandao. It would then propose to study the sub-branches of Yiguandao in details and to study not just the external environmental factors, but the internal factors such as the internal attributes of the group, which would affect the development of the group.

Next, this paper would go on to trace the overall development of the subject in question, so as to better understand how the groups have changed as the situation they face changes. In addition, the religious environment of Singapore is also examined to understand how it affects religious groups in Singapore.

With the mentioned external factors in mind, this paper proceeds to compare the development of Baoguang jiande and Fayi tian’en (quying) in Singapore. The areas to compare include their positioning, targets of activities and missionary efforts, trends of activities organised, and organizational structure. After a close examination of their similarities and differences, this paper argues that the differences are possible because each sub-branch is independent from the other sub-branches and also, there exists a certain degree of flexibility in their
doctrine. With that, this paper further argues that environment factors would only narrow down the direction in which particular religious group can develop. Attributes of the group would further limit the choices. Where the environment and attributes of the group permit, it is the choice of the respective groups which determines the final form of the group.