



*Religion and
Democracy
in Taiwan*

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IN TAIWAN

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IN TAIWAN

CHENG-TIAN KUO

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Preface

Many religious elites and scholars have encouraged and escorted my adventure into this new territory of research. Among the numerous supporters for this work in the past five years, except for those who requested anonymity, are Christopher Achen, Christie Chang, Chen Lu-hui, Thomas Gold, Dennis Hickey, John Hsieh, C. Julia Huang, Guo Wen-ban, André Laliberté, Leng Ze-gang, Li Feng-mao, Lin Ji-wen, Emerson Niou, David C. Schak, Shen Xin-yuan, Robert Weller, and Joseph Wong, who read different parts of the manuscript and offered constructive comments. The two anonymous reviewers of the SUNY Press provided insightful and practical revision suggestions, including adding “sights, sounds, and smells” to the otherwise esoteric analysis.

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Finally, no one else deserves more appreciation than my dear wife, Lee Chin-jung, who has replaced black-and-white with flying colors in both my academic and real life. Therefore, she shares with me both the merit and responsibility for this book.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It was in the chilly morning of 3 March 2004, hundreds of men and women nervously waited in a magnificent ballroom. Outside the building, more than ten thousand men and women patiently lined up in preparation to welcome their distinguished guests. When presidential candidate Lian Zhang and vice presidential candidate James Song arrived, the crowd's emotion exploded with thundering applause and repeated shouts of: "*Lian-Song, Dongswan!*" (which means "winning the election" in Taiwanese dialect.) Joyful tears ran down on their faces like waterfalls. The solemn host rose and made an inspiring welcome speech. He vehemently accused President Chen Shui-bian for his miserable economic performance, disastrous social policies, acrimonious ethnic maneuvers, violations of religious rights, sabotage of democracy, and provocation of war in the Taiwan Straits. Fists clenched, he spoke loudly and with exaggerated body language. Bitterness, anger, and frustration permeated the air and the crowd's mind. "Only Lian Zhang can save us from these political, social, and economic disasters," he emphatically concluded. During his speech, the crowd echoed every sentence the host said with deafening applause and "*Lian-Song, Dongswan.*"¹

This might have been any of the ordinary campaign gatherings during an ordinary election in an ordinary democracy. But this campaign was anything but ordinary. The hall was not at the headquarters of any political party but at the center of a newly constructed Buddhist temple worth US\$ 300 million. The emotional men and women were not devoted party workers or representatives, but monks, nuns, and sincere believers of the otherwise tranquil temple. And the host was certainly not an ordinary convention organizer, but the abbot of the largest Buddhist organization in central Taiwan, proclaiming a membership of over five-hundred thousand.

The scene is changed to a different place and a different time. On 25 May 2006, President Chen Shui-bian attended the Sixth National Prayer Breakfast, hosted by the major Christian denominations in Taiwan. He seemed a little bit disoriented when he stood among the jubilant pastors on the platform. He had reason to be disoriented, because his son-in-law was just arrested for insider trading, his wife was implicated in a bribery case, and he himself was involved in a looming case of corruption.

The convention host, Presbyterian pastor Gao Jun-ming, walked to the podium to deliver a sermon and pray for the president. President Chen squeezed a comforting smile on his face. After all, Pastor Gao was a long-time and ardent supporter of him. Their relationship was as cozy as those of American evangelist Billy Graham and President Richard Nixon—at least before the Watergate scandal broke out. The president expected to hear something cheerful in the pastor's prayer and sermon. To the president's great dismay, however, Pastor Gao looked straight into the president's eyes when he sternly quoted, word by word, from I Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The smile on the president's face suddenly vaporized as Pastor Gao went on elaborating upon the verse. After the sermon, the president emotionlessly delivered a short speech without responding to Pastor Gao's comments and left the convention in a hurry.²

When religions resurface elsewhere in national politics and world politics of the twenty-first century, we might want to ask as well: does religion matter in Taiwan's democracy? The two aforementioned scenes seem to provide an affirmative answer to this question. However, despite voluminous research on Taiwanese religions in both Chinese and English literature, little of that research deals with the subject of the relationship between religion and state; even less discusses the transformation of this relationship during and after the political democratization of the 1980s. No study has yet compared the relationships between democracy and all major Taiwanese religions. Therefore, we have not been able to answer the following important empirical and theoretical questions about the relationship between religion and democracy in general and in Taiwan in particular: If religions matter at all in Taiwanese democracy, do Taiwanese religions contribute to or hinder the establishment and consolidation of democracy? Do different religions and religious groups support different political parties? Do various religions and religious groups have varying support for democratic values and behavior? And are Christians more democratic than believers of traditional Chinese religions?

In the process of answering these questions, this book will make three original contributions to the study of the relationship between religion and democracy in general and in Taiwan in particular. First, it provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of these relationships by examining the democratic theology and democratic ecclesiology of religions as well as their interaction with the state. Second, in contrast to the lack of comparative studies in current literature, it compares nearly all major religions and religious

groups in Taiwan. Finally, it utilizes both case studies and statistical methods in order to verify theoretical hypotheses and to correct misperceptions in the current literature based solely on case studies.

THEORIES OF RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

Many scholars regard democracy as incompatible with religious revivalism.³ The incompatibility thesis is built on one or more of the following elements: democracy cherishes pluralism, accountable leadership, tolerance, compromise, separation of state and religion, peace, gender equality, and respect for human rights, while religious revivalism, particularly religious fundamentalism, espouses a dominant value system, charismatic leadership, intolerance, dogmatism, unity of state and religion, violence, male chauvinism, and disrespect for human rights (Marty and Appleby 1991: 817–835).

Major historical and contemporary events seem to support the incompatibility thesis. St. Augustine's "correction of heresy" was used to justify the burning of witches and sorcerers in the Middle Ages. The "Holy War" was used by Crusaders to justify the slaughter of Muslims, heretics, and pagans. Six million Jews were massacred by the Nazis because of their ancestors' alleged religious crime of crucifying Jesus, although Hitler had planned to abolish all religions including Christianity (Steigmann-Gall 2003). The "White Man's Burden" was regarded as a sacred mission to save the people of the Third World through military, cultural, and/or economic means. In Asia, the integration of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism with politics prevented the birth of democratic ideas in China for 2,500 years (Zhang Hao 1990). In prewar Japan, state Shintoism helped deify the emperor and sanctify the military's attempt to create an Asian coprosperity zone (Hardacre 1989). But it has been the global ascendance of religious fundamentalism since the 1980s that has elevated the incompatibility thesis to the academic altar.

In 1993, Samuel P. Huntington warned of a "clash of civilizations" in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*. Although Islamic fundamentalism seemed to be his major concern, Huntington also cited evidence of severe conflicts among and within the eight major civilizations (Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African) sponsored by religious fundamentalists (Huntington 1993: 26). The September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States seem to give credence to his thesis and contributed to worldwide sales of the book version of "The Clash of Civilizations" (Huntington 1996). In the meantime, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences along with the McArthur Foundation provided generous funding to the Fundamentalism Project (Marty and Appleby 1991; 1993a; 1993b; 1994; 1995), documenting the history, environment, strategies, and development of various fundamentalist movements. In general, the conclusion of the Fundamentalism Project seems to reconfirm the incompatibility thesis.

Borrowing heavily from the findings and conclusions of the Fundamentalism Project, Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan define religious fundamentalists as “militant and highly focused antagonists of secularization. They call a halt to the centuries-long retreat of religious establishments before secular power. They follow the rule of offense being better than defense, and they often include the extreme option of violence and death.” Furthermore, “a fundamentalist ‘family trait’” is “the defense and consolidation of patriarchy as the divine plan for the moral ordering of society” (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003: 2, 11).

However, the incompatibility thesis has encountered theoretical, empirical, and philosophical criticisms. Many theoretical and empirical works have suggested important linkages between democracy and religion in general. In the early nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber explained the establishment and consolidation of American democracy in terms of Protestant theology and practices (Tocqueville 1969; Weber 1978). The establishment of democracy further led to the “democratization of American Christianity” in the first fifty years of the new country (Hatch 1989).

The connection between democracy and religion attracted renewed interest from academia in the 1970s when Catholic democracies in Latin America and Southern Europe fell like dominoes. From these and other cases, scholars concluded that democracy seems to prosper better in Protestant countries than in Catholic, Confucian, or Muslim countries. Nevertheless, in the “Third Wave of Democratization,” religion, especially the Catholic Church, played a critical role in establishing democracy in Poland, South Korea, the Philippines, and Latin American countries, while some Confucian countries and most Muslim countries continued to resist democratization (Huntington 1991; Ostrom 1997; Jelen and Wilcox 2002; Gill 1998; Monsma and Soper 1997; Diamond and Plattner 2001; Tamadonfar 2002). Rejecting the secularization thesis he championed in the 1960s, Peter L. Berger (1967; 1999: 14) has recently been impressed by the compatibility of Evangelism and democracy in many Third World countries and now argues that “the Evangelical resurgence is positively modernizing in most places where it occurs. . . . [It serves] as schools for democracy and for social mobility.”

Even regarding Muslim countries, Abdou Filali-Ansary (2001: 40–41) points out that Islam has several features that are compatible with modern democratic values, such as utilitarianism, individualism, egalitarianism, republicanism, and rule-based governance. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll (1996) argue that Islamic fundamentalism is not necessarily incompatible with democracy; it depends more on strategic calculations of major political and religious groups than on theological doctrines or values. Mark Tessler (2002) has found statistical evidence that, contrary to American academic perceptions, there is strong popular support for democracy in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria, where fundamentalist movements are significant political forces. Steven Ryan Hofmann (2004) surveys Muslims in eight

other countries and reaches a similar conclusion that Islam and democracy are compatible at the micro level.

Philosophical challenges to the incompatibility thesis are represented by the research of social philosopher José Casanova (1994) and political philosopher Peter Berkowitz (1999). Casanova argues that the “deprivatization of religion” can contribute to democracy when religion gets involved in politics to protect all modern freedoms and rights, to question and contest the absolute lawful autonomy of the secular spheres, to protect the traditional lifeworld from administrative or juridical state penetration, and to open up modern discursive ethics (Casanova 1994: 57–58). After reexamining the works of Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Mill, Berkowitz (1999) argues that these political philosophers regarded liberal institutions and virtues as inseparable, and that religion, among other private institutions such as family, school, and social organizations, could play a critical role in promoting those virtues that facilitate the smooth functioning of democracy.

The question remains, however, how does religion actually influence democracy or vice versa? Most literature tends to focus on the theological side of religion. Protestant theology emphasizes “covenant,” “the priesthood of all believers,” and “the freedom of conscience,” based on which government accountability, individual freedom, and political equality in modern democracy are built (Locke 1683, 1993; Morgan 1965; Shields 1958; Paine 1776, 1995; Witte 2000; Eidsmoe 1987). By further mixing Catholic teaching with Marxism, the progressive Catholicism that emerged after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) advocated human rights and launched the Latin American liberation theology (Sigmund 1990; Gutiérrez 1988). These Protestant and progressive Catholic theologies have provided religious legitimacy to democratic movements in various countries.

Important as it is, theology alone does not necessarily lead to behavioral change on the part of believers (Gill 2001: 128). There may be limits to the political influence of the clergy’s public speech (Greenberg 1999; Djupe and Gilbert 2000). Furthermore, even if liberal theology may explain the establishment of democracy, it still needs to find expression in concrete institutional forms in order to explain the consolidation of democracy. After all, democracy is not just a system of ideas but also a way of life.

When Max Weber and Alexis de Tocqueville analyzed Protestantism, they discussed not only the theological component but also the institutions that translated abstract democratic theology into concrete democratic practices. For instance, in America, abstract democratic theological arguments like the idea of a covenant with God, freedom of conscience, the priesthood of all believers, and original sin all found concrete expression in institutional forms within many Protestant churches. These include the protection of the freedom of speech, congregationalism, and checks and balances between the clergy and the laity (Clark 1994; Nettels 1963; Schlesinger 1968). In this book, I call a theology that includes key components of democratic theories a

democratic theology, and a religious institution that resembles key institutions of democracy a *democratic ecclesiology*. The exact criteria for what constitutes a democracy will be elaborated further on.

The differentiation between the ideational level (democratic theology) and the institutional level (democratic ecclesiology) is useful in explaining the relationship between religion and democracy in Taiwan. Fundamental to a democratic theology are the promotion of human rights, the theological transformation from spiritual equality to political equality, and an assertive attitude toward the relationship between religion and state. Key elements of a democratic ecclesiology include the rules and norms that provide institutional checks on religious leaders, relatively equal power between clergy and laity, and the autonomy of local religious organizations.

Theories of social capital have advocated the importance of civic organizations to the development of democracy. Civic organizations cultivate values of trust, duty, norms, and social networks, which are essential to the functioning of democracy (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993; Wuthnow 2002). However, both logical and empirical gaps seem to exist between social capital theories and theories of democracy. Logically speaking, do the values of trust, duty, norms, and social networks necessarily lead to the democratic values of checks and balances, regular leadership turnover, voter sovereignty, fair election, freedom of speech, and other democratic values? Empirically speaking, the proliferation of civic organizations in modern authoritarian societies, such as prewar Japan and contemporary Singapore, not only failed to contribute to democracy but, on the contrary, helped to consolidate their authoritarian regimes. Therefore, in addition to the provision of social capital, civic organizations (including religious ones) must also cultivate norms and rules that are directly related to the functioning of a democracy.

According to the aforementioned criteria, one would suspect that most Taiwanese religions—folk religions, Daoism, and Buddhism—lack either a democratic theology or a democratic ecclesiology to exhort their believers to respect democratic values and to learn democratic behavior. To varying degrees, they are all affected by the traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism. Many scholars have suggested that certain characteristics of Confucianism are inimical to the functioning of democracy: dependence on authority and hierarchy; reliance on a benevolent ruler rather than on governing institutions; fear of chaos; loyalty to collectivity over individual rights; emphasis on consensus over open conflicts to resolve disagreements; low social trust toward out-groups; and governance based on particularism instead of universalism (Pye 1985; Ling and Shih 1998; T. Shi 2000; Hwang 1988; Rozman 2002; Solomon 1971).⁴ Most Taiwanese Christians, with the exception of Presbyterians, are also weak in democratic theology and ecclesiology, although they might have a head start in these two analytical dimensions because they have been less affected by traditional authoritarian culture. All of these aspects might explain the low level of commitment

to democratic values shown by Taiwanese elites and by the general public almost two decades after the lifting of martial law (T. Shi 2001).

A few scholars have noted the connection between religion and democracy in Taiwan. But most of them have either concentrated on one particular religion or a few sects of a religion, or have not fully captured the significant transformation of the relationship between religion and state after the Democratic Progressive Party took over the government in 2000. In particular, they have focused more on the external relations between religion and democracy than on the interaction between democratization and the internal institution/theology of religion, which this book will systematically examine and compare.⁵

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of this book consists of both “between-systems” (religions) and “within-system” (religious groups) comparisons.⁶ The between-systems design allows us to find systemic similarities or differences among different religions. The within-system design enables us not only to find variation among religious groups but also to make comparisons across religions. Therefore, a combination of between-systems and within-system research designs may verify general theoretical arguments across both religions and religious groups without the deficiencies that arise when each design is employed alone (Przeworski and Teune 1970).

Following the between-systems design, I select Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and folk religions for comparison. Buddhists constitute about 28.3% of the Taiwanese population; folk religion believers, 25.5%; Daoists, 21.3%; and Christians (including Catholics), 5%; together they constitute 78.1% of the population.⁷ For within-system design, I choose the largest and/or the most representative sects of each religion. In Buddhism, I include the Buddhist Compassion Relief Ciji Foundation (about 4,000,000 members), Buddha Light Mountain (*Foguangshan*, about 1,000,000 members), Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagushan*, about 1,000,000 members), and Zhongtai Zen (Chan) Monastery (about 400,000 members). The representative cases in Christianity include the Presbyterians (about 227,000 members), Baptists (about 24,000 members), and Local Church (*Jiaohui Juhuisuo*, about 91,000 members). Within Daoism and folk religions, Way of Unity (Yiguandao, about 1,200,000 members) is chosen as a representative case, although it is a syncretic religion of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam. The Mazu belief (about 6,000,000 worshipers) is a syncretic folk religion of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism with a strong Daoist flavor. Other smaller sects of each religion are also briefly discussed for illustration.

As other scholars have found, the aforementioned numbers of believers and worshipers are usually exaggerated and can be best treated as references only. The Buddhist numbers are estimates based on my interviews with these