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Religions and the Development of Taiwan's Welfare Regime

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Received 28 July 2022 | Accepted 8 March 2024 |

Published online 16 April 2024

Abstract

This article seeks to evaluate the applicability of theories on the influence of religion on the development of the welfare state in an East Asian society like Taiwan. To achieve this, I will present four hypotheses discussed in this new research tradition about the effects of religious cleavages, the legacy of relations between religions and state, the influence of theology, and the consequence of political participation by religious actors. To assess the effects of these factors on the evolution of Taiwan's successive welfare regimes, I use a historical neo-institutional perspective to examine the path dependency of previous policy decisions and actions after 1945 and distinguish between three stages of authoritarian rule and four presidencies during the democratic period. I argue that religious diversity and largely positive relations with the state have facilitated the inclusion of religious organisations as providers of social services but limited their influence on the design of social policies. The diversity of theologies and the absence of any party identified with one religion have undermined their capacity to shape social policies.

Keywords

welfare state – welfare regimes – religious cleavages – relations between religions and state – social theologies – political parties of 'religious defence'

1 Introduction

Recent theories on the welfare state by Van Kersbergen and Manow (2009) and Pavolini, Béland, and Jawad (2017) have added the religious factor to their explanations about the differences between countries in their choice of distinctive welfare regimes. How well does this theory apply to an East Asian society like Taiwan? An in-depth observation of such a society could help us distinguish between the particular and the universal and assess whether cultural specificities such as religious values matter or not. In this paper, I present the four main hypotheses of this emerging research tradition and propose a strategy to assess them. While comparisons between Western societies have yielded findings leading to generalisations about the impact of religions on the evolution of welfare regimes, its main limitation is its Christo-centric bias. There is too little research on the effects of other religious traditions in other parts of the world. This research seeks to fill this gap in order to build a decentred and inclusive theory.

Using a historical neo-institutional approach that focuses on the path dependency of previous policy decisions and actions (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lecours, 2005; Hogan, 2019; Chohan, 2022), as well as the critical junctures that led to new directions in social policies, I will introduce four hypotheses about the effects of religious cleavages, relations between religions and the state, the influence of theology, and political participation on the evolution of Taiwan's successive welfare regimes. Subsequently, I will present the seven transformational stages of Taiwan's social policies and outline the main changes for each period. Finally, I will assess how much each of the hypotheses helps explain the observed changes between different welfare regimes.

2 Religions and Welfare Regimes' Formation

There is little research on religion and the welfare state in Taiwan available in English, and even less on the issue of welfare regimes, which includes the market, the family, and other non-state social actors, alongside the formal institutions of the welfare state (Gough & Wood, 2004). Writing about the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, Huang and Weller (1998) came close to doing such research: they differentiated between philanthropy and the welfare state but stopped short of discussing how the former could shape the latter. Other research on the welfare state in Taiwan stressed the role of democratisation (Aspalter, 2002), political parties (Wong, 2005), and institutional change (Goodman & Peng, 1996) but paid little attention to the broader context of

welfare regimes. Such scholarship neglected the impact of religion, except for references to how traditional values affect households' choices in caring for aged parents. Scholars writing in Chinese in Taiwan, such as Shunmin Wang, did publish on the issue of religion and welfare (Wang, 1998) and on religious non-governmental organisations (Wang, 2001). These works, however, documented the activities of philanthropic associations in different traditions, yet they stopped short of connecting with the political dynamics of welfare regimes. The little attention paid to this issue is surprising considering the research on Taiwan's religious life that has been produced for decades (Jordan & Overmyer, 1986; Clart & Jones, 2003). In this article, I address this issue by thinking comparatively about religion and welfare state formation in Taiwan, starting with insights from research about religion and the welfare state in other parts of the world.

Although research about relations between religions and states in non-Western societies exists (Künkler, Madeley & Shankar, 2018; Shichor, 2021), such research rarely looks at how these relations have shaped social policies (Iyer, 2018; Pavolini et al., 2017; Mietzner, 2020). Conversely, a research tradition has emerged which examines how religion has influenced the development of the welfare state in Western societies. Van Kersbergen and Manow (2009) identified four factors in the religious sphere likely to shape social policy in Western Europe and North America: religious cleavages, relations between religion and state, theology, and political parties of 'religious defence'. This article evaluates the applicability of these findings to the situation observed in Taiwan, a society indirectly influenced by Western trends—some of which are mediated by Japanese colonial rule—but also shaped by the legacy left by Chinese settlers who displaced the indigenous population over centuries.

Van Kersbergen and Manow (2009: 14) argued that the nature of religious cleavages shapes specific welfare regimes differently. They noted that societies with deep religious differences had influenced political divisions and class coalitions, and societies with deep religious cleavages have adopted trajectories different from those that do not have such diversity. According to Ertman (2009: 53), religious divides have led to the creation of parties of 'religious defence' discussed below; for Morgan (2009: 84), it explains different approaches to policies affecting working mothers; and for Quadagno and Rohlinger (2009: 262), it sheds light on the polarisation over social policies in the United States. Taiwan's religious diversity offers an opportunity to evaluate the validity of this argument about how religious cleavages generate another societal division that could influence the evolution of political parties. Religious cleavages also contribute to other forms of social and political divisions, such as those between the left and right on the political spectrum or between labour and

capital, and these have influenced the evolution of political parties in industrial societies (Van Kersbergen & Manow, 2009: 18).

Relations between religion and state have also played a role in the shaping of core policies of the welfare state, such as governments' provision of childcare, which favoured the entry of women into the workforce and freed them from traditional roles promoted by religious teachings. In her study of work-family policies, Morgan (2009: 84) found that by adopting Protestantism as an official religion, Nordic nations facilitated the incorporation of the clergy into the state apparatus, thereby leading to a peaceful secularisation that pre-empted religious resistance to the adoption of gender-egalitarian policies (Morgan, 2009: 65). In countries with a Catholic majority, where an anti-clerical tradition existed, the state expanded its role in education and family well-being at the expense of churches (Morgan 2009: 68–72). Such processes came later in other continental European countries, where churches resisted state intervention for a longer time. Little research exists about such issues in post-colonial societies shaped by a non-Christian religious tradition. Although much is written on relations between religion and state in Chinese societies (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011), it remains unclear how this relationship has shaped the welfare state in societies influenced by Chinese religious traditions like Taiwan.

A third approach in examining the influence of religion on welfare state development looks at the effects of theology and religious doctrine. Quadagno and Rohlinger (2009: 262) have argued that the American welfare state reflects a variety of religious orientations, ranging from Catholicism's views on social justice to the Calvinists' belief that society should force the poor to work. Khan (2009: 289) looked at the three main Christian denominations' views on poor relief and found characteristics with important consequences for the welfare state. She found that Catholicism promotes an obligation to give to the poor, Calvinism enjoined the faithful to work, while Lutheranism brought together the societal responsibility to support the poor with the requirement for the able-bodied to work. The case of Taiwan presents researchers with an additional methodological challenge as they investigate theological differences between and within religions.

Ertman (2009: 53) found that in recently formed nation-states, conflicts between religions and the state have led to the creation of parties of 'religious defence'. Such political parties have often emerged because they saw the expansion of the welfare state as the latter's encroachment of what they viewed as churches' prerogative in matters of education, health care, and public morality. This kind of resistance has also existed in Latin America, where the Catholic Church has exercised an important influence (Loveman,

2005). Similar dynamics have unfolded in post-colonial societies where political parties have emerged that promote programmes inspired by other religious traditions, such as Islam (Dean & Khan, 1997), Hinduism (Jaffrelot, 2008), or Buddhism (Shimazono, 2012). In Japan a political party supported by the Buddhist religious movement Soka Gakkai, the Komeito, won seats in the legislature promoting welfare and pacifism (Fisker-Nielsen, 2012). Since Taiwan embarked on its path of democratisation, many political parties have registered, and although no party of ‘religious defence’ has emerged in Taiwan, religious actors have come close to doing so.

In a multi-religious society such as Taiwan, where Chinese popular and communal religions, Taoism, and Buddhism co-exist with Christianity and—thanks to recent labour migration—with Islam (Abe, 2019), how much influence do religions exert upon social policies? To what extent has religious heterogeneity facilitated or hindered the expansion of state intervention in the equitable delivery of social services? What obstacles to the implementation of these policies did the legacy of previous conflicts between religion and the state leave behind? What have theologies and doctrines had to say about the welfare state? Finally, what political parties or civil society organisations have served as conduits for the views of religious actors?

Tracking the effects of path dependency and identifying the causality behind policy changes with the analytical lens of the historical neo-institutionalist approach (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lecours, 2005) is one way to answer these questions that spans long periods of time and thus can generate findings applicable to many regions and cases over time and space. This article will proceed accordingly by first outlining seven stages in Taiwan’s transformation from an authoritarian conservative welfare regime to a democratic post-productivist welfare state, and for each stage, it will assess whether religions have affected these changes. It will consider the four factors identified so far: religious cleavages, relations between religions and state, theological innovations, and mobilisation by parties or associations of ‘religious defence’.

3 The Evolution of Taiwan’s Welfare Regime

The chronology used in this article looks beyond the purely political distinction between the authoritarian and democratic periods Taiwan went through after Japanese colonial rule and pays attention to the variation in social policies within each period. In their analysis of social policy during martial law, Wang, Wang, Hu, Gou, and Zou (2002: 361) identified three distinct stages of economic

development that had consequences for social policies. This periodisation suggests that Taiwan had started to adopt some of the policies embraced by the proponents of the neo-liberal approach to state intervention in the management of the welfare state before Western industrialised powers did so. Wang et al. (2002) also distinguished between an early stage in the period of democratisation—which corresponds to the tenure of the Lee Teng-hui presidency (1988–2000)—and another one that followed with his successor Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008). I have decided to add to this chronology the administrations of Chen's successors, Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016) and Tsai Ing-wen (2016–2024), because of changes in political alignments in the legislature and the executive branch of government, which affected social policies differently.

3.1 *Taiwan's Welfare Regimes under the Three Stages of Authoritarian Rule: 1945–1988*

From 1945 to 1966, Taiwan went through a stage of reconstruction. It experienced a rapid mobilisation of resources to rebuild the country following the end of Japanese colonial rule, managed the influx of migration from China, and weathered military threats (Lin, 1991; Tsang, 1993). Chiang Kai-shek oversaw long-range plans to develop the country, starting with land reform, which improved the conditions of farmers and laid down the foundation for future growth (Koo, 1966). The Kuomintang's (KMT) political control prevented the development of non-state organisations, which meant little alternative recourse for those who could not receive support from the government. In 1950 it introduced social insurance to cover employees in the government, the military, private schools, and firms or mines with more than 20 employees. In 1953 the Ministry of National Defence launched insurance for military personnel; five years later, the Ministry of Civil Services implemented an insurance programme for civil servants and teachers; and in 1960, the Council of Labour Affairs set up a national labour insurance scheme (Chang, 2011: 80).

Between 1966 and 1979, Taiwan entered a stage of rapid industrialisation. On the political front, however, it saw a deterioration in its international status. With the recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the United States, Taiwan lost the diplomatic support of its most important ally. However, during the same time, Taiwan experienced the beginnings of its economic miracle. The oil shock that affected the global economy did not prevent Taiwan's growth, but the loss of diplomatic support weakened the government's legitimacy, while the rise of the middle class increased the pressure for social and political change. The programme of social assistance to help the poor set

up in the 1960s by the Taiwan provincial government and the municipalities of Taipei and Kaohsiung became available via county governments, but it remained delivered on a 'piecemeal basis' (Lin, 1991: 175). Responding to political pressures from civil society and international organisations, however, the government passed a Child Welfare Law in 1973.

The last years of martial law, from 1979 to 1987, saw growing pressure from civil society for political liberalisation and some improvement in social welfare. In 1980 the Ministry of the Interior implemented public assistance measures to help low-income households. In the same year the KMT passed two laws improving social assistance: the first one helped the elderly, and the second one benefited people suffering from disabilities (Chang, 2011: 80). On the eve of the process of democratisation, spending by the government on social welfare had tripled between 1952 and 1987: as a proportion of total state expenditures, it moved from 5.61 percent to 15.48 percent and, relative to gross national product, it expanded from 1.17 percent to 3.67 for the same period (Lin, 1991: 172). Before then, people who did not receive any assistance had to rely on their relatives, and if they could not do so, depended on charity.

3.2 *Social Welfare in Democratic Taiwan: the First Four Presidencies after 1988*

During the crucial years of political and social transition leading to democratic consolidation under the presidency of Lee, the intensification of electoral competition put pressure on political parties to offer better policies for social welfare (Aspalter, 2002; Wong, 2005). The government expanded its social insurance programmes, reducing the need for social assistance. In 1989 the Ministry of the Interior amended the Child Welfare Act to ensure it conformed with the standards of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Chen & Tang, 2019). In the same year, it set up a programme of social insurance for farmers, who—at the time—represented a diminishing part of the labour force: they represented half of the total for workers in 1960–1964, which decreased to 15 percent in 1985–1989 (Huang, 1993: 46). In 1991 only 1.4 percent of total social welfare expenditure helped children, youth, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities (Lin, 1991: 176). As Kwon (2005) argued, moving towards a more inclusive welfare state relied on structural economic reform. In 1995 the Ministry of Health introduced National Health Insurance, a single-payer system managed by the government, which covered over 99.9 percent of the population (Lu & Hsiao, 2003).

In 2000, when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came to power with the presidency of Chen Shui-bian, the government tried to deliver on its electoral promises to expand social welfare. Budgetary constraints created

problems; critics chastised the new government for lacking a long-term plan, and the president faced a majority in the legislature opposing his agenda (Tsai, 2001). Commenting on the Chen administration, Lin and Chou (2010: 118) noted that infighting in the DPP, as well as KMT's systematic obstruction in the legislature, prevented progress in the three key policy issues of unemployment insurance, a solvable health insurance system, and a national pension system. The Chen administration made some improvements in 2003 when the Council of Labour Affairs established an employment insurance programme designed to destigmatise those who received benefits from the previous programmes of unemployment assistance. It fared less well on the issue of pensions; the Ministry of the Interior tried but failed in the last year of Chen's presidency to implement a national programme.

Even though the KMT controlled the executive and the legislature during the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou, social welfare matters took a back seat to civic activism, prioritising a variety of other pressing issues. During his first term, the Ma administration was met with widespread opposition to the construction of a fourth nuclear power plant (Shih, 2012; Grano, 2017) and mobilisation over issues such as the anti-casino movement in the offshore islands of Penghu and Mazu (Tsai & Ho, 2017). During Ma's second term, his government had to respond to an anti-media monopoly movement (Rawnsley & Feng, 2014) and the rejection of a Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement with the PRC (Ho, 2015; Hsu, 2017). Civic activism throughout both of his terms challenged the government on social issues, such as the rights of indigenous people (Simon, 2017) and the welfare of Chinese migrant spouses (Momesso & Cheng, 2017). However, the focus on those priorities of civil society did not pay attention to other social issues, such as long-term care, that affected most of the population. Ma left the task of solving them to his successor.

The presidency of Tsai Ing-wen saw two social policy priorities becoming more pressing due to Taiwan's ageing population. The first issue relates to labour migration. To address shortages in various sectors, ranging from hi-tech to long-term care, her administration has sought to reconcile the needs of social policy and for a competitive economy. This was achieved by drafting a New Economic Immigration Act to amend existing legislation, distinguishing between migrant spouses, low-skilled guest workers in the long-term care sector, mid-level technicians, and professionals (Cheng, 2021). The second issue, pension reform, presented her first administration with a challenge that remained unresolved and carried into her second one. Affecting civil servants, army veterans, and retired government employees, it proved divisive and weakened her government following the mid-term local elections (Chen et al., 2021). The challenge of reforming the pension system exposed the fiscal

limitations that would arise from any further expansion of Taiwan's social welfare. It also brought to light why successive governments have been willing to outsource the delivery of some social services to religious actors. Next, I look at four factors that could have framed such decisions in other societies and assess whether that applies to Taiwan: the effect of religious cleavages, the legacy of relations with the state, the influence of social theologies, and the creation of political parties of 'religious defence'.

4 The Relevance of Religious Cleavages

The evolution of Taiwan's welfare regime over the decades presented above has occurred in a context where religious diversity has not led to salient religious cleavages. To apply Van Kersbergen and Manow's hypothesis about the effects of religious cleavage—or its absence—on political divisions and class coalitions to the case of Taiwan, a practical definition of such cleavages in Taiwan is required. No salient religious chasm exists in Taiwan that compares to those observed in Central Europe, and no single religion receives the support of a majority of the population. The 2020 social survey conducted by Academia Sinica mentioned that 18 percent of the Taiwanese population surveyed identified as Buddhists, 14 percent as Daoists, slightly over 5 percent as Christians, and only 3 percent as identifying with another religion (Wu, Fu, and Xiao, 2021: 295). The survey also showed that 28 percent of Taiwanese citizens have no religious beliefs, and 32 percent hold what is known as folk beliefs, which are not institutionalised to the same extent as the aforementioned religions. In sum, the religious landscape in Taiwan does not conform to the traditional sociological model of a binary division between the secular and the sacred commonly observed in Western societies (Chang, 2012). The numbers of religious believers and the status of some religions have changed along with political transformations and social evolutions; migrations have affected the demographics of churches and new religions, and state recognition has influenced their visibility in the public sphere.

During the stage of reconstruction, the immigration of refugees following the KMT's defeat in China changed the composition of the population's religious affiliations. The Christian community swelled rapidly, with Protestant denominations reviving institutions in Taiwan that were closed in China, registering 29 corporate entities (財團法人, *caituan faren*), and 3 social groups (社會團體, *shehui tuanti*): the China Protestant Association, the Christian Salvation Service, and the YMCA (NZB, 1994). This influx introduced a key cleavage among Protestants between the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan

(PCT)—which identified with the local population—and the denominations from China (Rubinstein, 1999). When Chinese and foreign Catholic missionaries arrived in Taiwan after 1949, there was little trace of the Dutch missions left behind centuries before. These missionaries gave the religion a second life, with 14 Catholic corporate entities and 2 social groups being registered between 1945 and 1966 (NZB, 1994). Buddhist monastics who escaped China sought to shape the evolution of their religion during the following decades, imposing their authority and seeking to limit its diversity (Jones, 1999). Three redemptive societies banned in China established a presence on the island: the Way of Pervasive Unity (一貫道, *Yiguandao*), the Teachings of the Abiding Principle (禮教, *Lijiao*)—which arrived in Taiwan in 1949—and those of the Heavenly Virtue (天德教, *Tiandejiao*), introduced in 1953. A KMT politician founded a new religion named the Teachings of the Yellow Emperor (軒轅教, *Xuanyuanjiao*) in 1957 (Jochim, 1990). Followers of these religions often looked down on the popular religions of the Taiwanese population, which they considered to be unsophisticated (Gates, 1987).

The stage of industrialisation under martial law witnessed both the stabilisation of religious diversity and the growth in the importance of Buddhism. Different associations co-existed within the recognised religions, often exhibiting vastly different identities and theologies, with their leadership adopting quite different strategies. Among Buddhists, for example, a single organisation representing all Buddhists in Taiwan—the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC)—has been registered with the Ministry of the Interior since 1950 (NZB, 1994). In its shadow emerged officially non-religious organisations that registered with other government agencies: the monastic order of Foguangshan, the lay Buddhist philanthropic organisation Tzu Chi, and the Dharma Drum monastery-affiliated Cultural Center. During the same period, Protestant churches registered ten new corporate entities, and likewise did three of the new religions: *Xuanyuanjiao*; the newly created Teachings of the Heavenly Emperor (天帝教, *Tiandijiao*), which split off from *Tiandejiao* (Ownby, 2016); and the Taiwanese branch of a new Japanese religion, Tenrikyo (天理教, *Tianlijiao*) (Huang, 2016).

During the stage of social mobilisation, localised popular religions embedded in Taiwanese society experienced ever-increasing vitality. This mounting visibility went along with the rise in influence of other Chinese religions such as Buddhism and Daoism, which saw their number of followers expanding. This prominence did not find much institutional expression, however, as very few Buddhist and Daoist corporate entities and social groups were registered. While *Yiguandao* became the third largest religion in terms of followers (Billioud, 2020), the number of followers of the Catholic Church

started to stagnate. In 1982, 43 percent of the 290,000 registered Catholics were ageing immigrants from China (Chen, 2008/2009: 20–21). These religions avoided social mobilisation: as the next section discusses, recognised religions benefited from collaborative relations with the state, while the others aligned with local authorities due to their conservative attitude (Jordan & Overmyer, 1986). The exception to that quietist approach at the time was the PCT, which revealed a rift within the Protestant community.

The political transition into a democratic regime under the presidency of Lee and the social transition into an increasingly wealthy and urban population coincided with the institutionalisation of many new religions, such as the Confucian Spirit Religion (儒宗神教, *Ruzong shenjiao*). Some of these religions appeared as small groups, emerging as offshoots of older ones. A large number of new religious movements also resulted from the initiatives of entrepreneurial individuals who claimed supernatural powers, such as Sung Chi-li, a trend leading to concerns that mercantilism was debasing religious activities (Vermander, 1997). In the five years from 1989 to 1994, the Ministry of the Interior recorded a major increase in the number of newly registered Buddhist and Daoist corporate entities and social groups, far surpassing the number registered by the Protestant churches. The institutionalisation of inter-religious dialogue, exemplified by the founding of the Taiwan Conference of Religions for Peace in 1994, pre-empted the emergence of religious cleavages (Paulin, 2015).

Under the presidency of Chen, the trends of inter-religious dialogue culminated with the creation of the Museum of World Religion (Habito, 2002), and Taiwan briefly became an important centre for adherents of Falun Gong, a new religion banned in China. Most institutional obstacles to the emergence of new religious movements had gone, and the number of registered religions reached over 28. Moreover, established religions also experienced dramatic changes. Lay Buddhist associations such as Tzu Chi (Huang, 2009), Foguangshan (Chandler, 2004), and the Dharma Drum Mountain became important social actors involved in philanthropy (Hsiao & Schak, 2005), which politicians could not ignore during electoral campaigns (Laliberté, 2004). Quiescent during the period of martial law, they remained uninvolved in oppositional politics, except for the intervention by Foguangshan and Chungtaichan during the presidential campaign of 2004 (Chiu, 2004). The most salient case of an intra-religious cleavage remained the one that opposed the PCT—which remained the largest Protestant denomination with 200,000 followers (Kuo, 2008: 38)—and two other denominations, the Local Church—which counted over 90,000 (Kuo, 2008: 50)—and the Baptist Church—which counted about 20,000 (Kuo, 2008: 45)—over the issue of the Taiwanese right to self-determination. Finally,

the arrival of temporary migrant workers from the Philippines again increased the relevance of the Catholic Church in Taiwan.

Under the presidency of Ma, the government paid less attention to the registration of new religions. However, as female migration to Taiwan from Southeast Asia increased the number of foreign-born citizens, the two main political parties received criticism for not paying enough attention to the recognition of their distinctive cultural heritage (Cheng & Fell, 2014). By the end of Ma's second administration in 2016, a chasm had opened between the older generations, who often embraced conservative religions that have imported the social values of their American counterparts, and younger Taiwanese people, who were more liberal. The trends of deepening religious diversity among the Taiwanese that had emerged since Lee and continued under his two successors have stabilised under the presidency of Tsai. The exception is the growing visibility of a large minority that is transient but increasingly important: migrant caregivers from Indonesia, whose practice of Islam differs from that of veteran KMT migrants from China (Setiawan et al., 2020).

In sum, Taiwan is a society of religious diversity, but this has never led to pillarisation as it has in Western European countries, where people born into Catholic or Protestant churches joined professional associations and social organisations and voted for political parties affiliated with them (Lijphart, 2004). The cohesive Taiwanese state presents a much more unified social field than the heterogeneous field of religion. The low support for welfare expansion and Taiwan's situation of religious diversity seems to support Van Heuvelen's (2014) finding about the effect of religious heterogeneity on limited support for the welfare state. This effect, however, disappears with the process of democratisation; religious diversity remains constant, but support for welfare expansion increases. In the absence of a major religious cleavage, political divisions and class coalitions have resulted from other dynamics centred on the issue of national identity, relations with China, and the tensions between the generations in the context of a rapidly ageing society. If the absence of conflicts between religions did not show a clear effect on the development of Taiwan's welfare regime, then how did relations between religions and the state affect changes in social policies?

5 The Legacy of Relations between Religion and State

During the entire period of martial law, no religious institution was powerful enough to resist the control exercised by the state, which licensed organisations that included KMT party cells, exercised control of local religions through the

Law Regulating Temples and Shrines and monitored religions through several key agencies, such as the Garrison Command, the Investigation Bureau, military intelligence, and the National Security Bureau (Kuo, 2008: 11–12). The government had the capacity to rein in religious activity which it disapproved of, but it also obtained the cooperation of some religious leaders who were grateful to authorities for allowing their flock to worship, in contrast to what was happening in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

The KMT looked to impose its cultural hegemony during the stage of reconstruction. Its corporatist control of religions meant that there could be only one umbrella organisation per religion, representing its clergy and followers. The only exception to that rule was Protestant churches, which retained their denominational diversity (Kuo, 2008: 11). The provincial police administration subjected groups the authorities did not recognise as Christian denominations to surveillance, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses (Ho, 1996). It also enforced regulations on religious affairs that imposed many constraints, cautioned against practices and rituals the government disapproved of, and required religious associations to devote part of their revenues to charity (Qu, 1989).

During the stage of industrialisation, the state adopted a wider range of policies combining control over religious practices the regime objected to and the promotion of moral values that it encouraged. In 1967 the government created a Committee for the Revival of Chinese Culture. Until 1973 the Ministry of Education assisted the Committee in the diffusion of its values through speeches in schools. This included the Confucian ideas of respect for authority, as well as filial piety (Liu, 2000). Meanwhile, the Ministry of the Interior issued directives in 1968 to regulate local religions, which they referred to as 'superstitions' (迷信, *mixin*) (Katz, 2005: 402). The provincial police continued close surveillance of new religious movements: it kept checks on the Seicho-no-ie (生長之家) (Ho, 1996: 508–512), a Japanese religion with Taiwanese followers, out of fear that its followers may oppose the government. Additionally, the provincial police kept a close watch on the New Testament Church (NTC) and the Jehovah's Witnesses. While it proved lenient towards Christianity in general, the KMT harboured suspicion towards the NTC because of its apocalyptic beliefs (Ho, 1996: 523–549), and it considered the Jehovah's Witnesses' advocacy of conscientious objection to military service to be seditious (Ho, 1996: 550–562).

During the stage of social mobilisation, relations between the state and churches entered a more conflictual phase (Rubinstein, 2003). In response to PCT criticism and support of social mobilisation against authoritarian rule in 1979, the KMT government arrested Presbyterian clerics who had joined the

movement. Subsequently, the PCT general secretary Pastor Gao Jun-ming (高俊明) was sentenced to four years imprisonment for supplying shelter to an opposition leader (Kuo, 2008: 43). However, the repression against this particular church did not escalate into the eradication of religious life in any way comparable to what the CCP had done a decade before. In fact, except for the actions against the PCT, the KMT proved tolerant towards religions and encouraged the development of Buddhism. The administration of Chiang Ching-kuo approved the registration of the new religion *Tiandijiao* as a corporate entity in 1986, and two years later the Ministry of the Interior approved the registration of social groups for two new religions that had hitherto been the object of police surveillance: *Yiguandao* and the Confucian Spirit Religion (NZB, 1994).

Under the presidency of Lee, the government's attitude towards religions reversed some of the previous policies upheld under martial law; the liberal KMT faction led by Lee showed little interest in control over religious affairs. This policy led to one unforeseen consequence: some religious leaders campaigned for a law on religious affairs to end what they saw as the preferential treatment granted to Christian churches, while others worried about the proliferation of 'cults', such as the Sung Chi-li Miracle Association (Luo, 1994). Lee deferred discussing these matters to the mechanism of inter-religious dialogue and trusted that people would exercise their judgement on new religions (Laliberté, 2004). However, the policy of outsourcing the delivery of social services to religious associations encouraged by the Ministry of the Interior remained in place (Huang, 1994). Some religious actors sought to obstruct Lee's policies: key among them was Hsing Yun, the founder of the monastic order of Foguangshan. The candidate he supported during the presidential campaign of 1995, Chen Lü-an, came fourth in the election (Jacobs, 2012: 117).

During the presidency of Chen, Lee's liberal policy of state non-intervention in religious affairs continued (Shih, 2006). The attempts to show appreciation for all religions, however, led to some unwanted consequences. For example, Chen's participation in the festival for the goddess Matsu—which could be interpreted by many as the valorisation of popular religions—received criticism as soliciting money from illegal sources (*Taipei Times*, 2003). Hsun Chang (2012), however, countered these reproaches with the observation that temple committees also exploit religious pilgrimage to express dissent against the central government. Although Chen tried to maintain good relations with all religious leaders, he faced pushback from some Buddhist clerics. For example, during the 2004 campaign for the presidential election, Wei Chueh, the abbot of the Chungtaichan Monastery—one of the five major Buddhist associations

in Taiwan—opposed him because of his stance on Taiwan's independence and endorsed his rival Lien Chan instead (Brown & Cheng, 2012: 63).

The government tried to remain at arm's length with religions during the presidency of Ma, but conservative actors imposed their concerns on his agenda. Ma, a Catholic by birth, did not let his background shape policies, and in the same spirit of openness as Lee and Chen before him, he visited temples of popular religions (CNA, 2015). Moreover, his policy towards China favoured an increase in cross-strait pilgrimage and exchanges between Buddhists on both sides (Brown & Cheng, 2012: 61). This projection of equidistance between religions did not prevent religious actors from attempting to influence his agenda. In addition to the cleavage between the supporters of Taiwan's self-determination and the advocates for closer relations with China, a new fracture had widened over issues such as same-sex marriage. The protagonists in that new conflict mirrored the divisions over 'culture wars' observed in the United States, with conservative Christians leading religious coalitions on such matters (Ho, 2020).

With the DPP holding a legislative majority during the presidency of Tsai (2016–2024), the government paid less attention to religious affairs because it faced many pressing issues left unresolved by the previous administration (Lin, 2016: 8–9). The severe restrictions on civil liberties in Hong Kong hardened Taiwanese resistance to pressure from China, which contributed in 2020 to Tsai's re-election as president and to the DPP's increased majority in the legislature. Concerns over national security displaced the critical issues of welfare expansion or retrenchment from the agenda, reform of the pension system (Chen et al., 2021), and changes in Taiwan's immigration regime, which has become inadequate in meeting the needs for labour in the sector of long-term care.

Three of the four KMT presidents were Christians: Chiang Kai-shek had converted to Methodism (Wang, 2014), Lee Teng-hui turned to the Presbyterian Church before entering politics (Tsai, 2005: 98–110), and Ma Ying-jeou grew up a Catholic. The KMT secretary-general Wu Po-hsiung and the ex-KMT independent candidate Chen Lü-an were both Buddhists. Although these politicians did not show bias towards their religion, it is plausible that the social doctrine of their respective affiliations influenced their attitudes. Such an effect is not clear for DPP politicians either, whether they ran for the opposition or ruled the country. For instance, Peng Ming-min was a Presbyterian when he ran for the DPP against Lee for the presidency in 1996, and Chen was close to *Yiguandao*. The presidential candidate for the 2008 election, Frank Hsieh Chang-ting, was close to Sung Chi-li. Tsai Ing-wen has no known religious affiliation, but her running mate and vice-president Chen

Chien-jen was a devout Catholic. To conclude, religious affiliations transcend political cleavages, albeit the PCT stands closer to the DPP than to the KMT after Lee left that party. The complicated legacy of relations between state and religion makes it difficult to establish unequivocally that religious associations influenced the development of Taiwan's welfare regime in specific ways.

6 The Influence of Social Theologies and Doctrines

Without a dominant religious tradition in Taiwan, no theology could decisively shape the making of social policies, as we can observe in societies where the clergy of a dominant or hegemonic religion holds some authority. Moreover, in the context of a strong state that proves cohesive enough to avoid capture by social actors—including religious organisations—the government can make decisions on social policies without interference or resistance from clerics and their followers. Yet, in the context of democratisation, religious organisations that can mobilise enough resources may obtain support among political leaders, either because they share the same beliefs or the same political values. Religious organisations with enough followers can mobilise larger proportions of voters if they can prove persuasive and willing enough in promoting their values. Christian clerics and their followers in government, thanks to intellectual traditions dating back for over a century, have developed social doctrines that the Taiwanese government found compatible with its social policies during the period of martial law. Once they adopted doctrines that promoted engagement with society, Buddhist clerics and devotees—more numerous than Christians—could shape the evolution of social policies once the democratic transition could translate their larger numbers into votes.

During the stage of reconstruction, many religious theologies reflected the anti-communist ethos of the KMT. However, espousing that position of the authoritarian government also meant for many of these leaders that they stood out of the mainstream of developments elsewhere in the world that contributed to significant religious change. For example, the changes in the Second Vatican Council in 1962 and the activism of mainline Protestant churches in the United States during the high tides of the civil rights movement did not find much support in Taiwan (Chang, 2018). The clergy leading the BAROC, the institution representing all Buddhists in Taiwan—and theoretically, all of China—came from eastern China, and in the first years after their arrival, they expressed disdain for Taiwanese Buddhism and tried to reform it (Jones, 1999: 112). They also opposed the approach of Buddhism for the human realm (人間佛教, *renjian fojiao*) promoted by some monastics from China because of its

association with Taixu, who had expressed sympathies for socialism. In this climate, religious leaders remained silent on issues of social policy.

During the stage of industrialisation, prominent monks chose to put the tenets of Buddhism for the human realm into practice by implementing their own interpretation: for Hsing Yun, the founder of Foguangshan, and Sheng Yen, the leader of Dharma Drum, this meant predication through the media and monastic education; for Cheng Yen, this meant the provision of humanitarian relief (Pacey, 2005: 72). Meanwhile, the Catholic Liberation Theology's progressive social teachings—popular in Latin America—stood little chance of influencing Taiwanese Catholics because of its closeness with Marxism. Moreover, the Vatican downgraded its relations with Taiwan after China's admission to the United Nations, hoping for a conciliatory gesture from China about Catholic autonomy that did not materialise (Leung & Li, 2018: 111–112). Among Protestant churches, the PCT stood out as the exception as the most vocal and progressive among the religions whose theology had a politically relevant dimension. Its theology supported social activism, first among the indigenous people and then the broader Taiwanese population (Seitz, 2021). Members of the PCT advocated human rights, political reform, and self-determination for Taiwan (Sawatzky, 1981: 459–460). Its three communiqués put it at odds with the government: 'Our national fate' in 1971 called for an elected government; a second one in 1975 issued more demands for freedom of religion, mutual trust between church and state, reconciliation between all ethnic groups, respect for human rights, and participation in international organisations; and in 1977 it called for the recognition of Taiwan as an independent state (Rubinstein, 2003: 224–236; Seitz, 2021).

During the stage of social mobilisation, only the PCT spoke out in favour of human rights and Taiwanese self-determination, often at great personal cost to its leaders. The congregation also put into practice what it preached in its social policies: it promoted the welfare of young indigenous female victims of sex trafficking and in 1988 sponsored the creation of the Garden of Hope, a shelter for young women who had been involved in sex work (Li, 2006). At the end of this period, enormous ferment worldwide had consequences for democratisation, which were about to reverberate in Taiwan. The Catholic Church—which has been instrumental in regime change in Poland—was also deeply involved in Taiwan's immediate neighbourhood, with the Philippine bishops taking sides with the Laban movement in the Philippines and Minjung theology inspiring popular mobilisation against military rule in South Korea. The Catholic Church in Taiwan, involved in inter-religious dialogue, education, and philanthropy, proved more quiescent than its sister churches, leaving it

to the PCT to take a more active part in the democratisation movement (Rubinstein, 2003: 236–240; Rychetska, 2021).

During Lee's presidency, rapidly changing political conditions gave the different religions unprecedented opportunities to intervene in the public sphere and openly debate theological matters through the media. During that period, Buddhist associations promoted their respective interpretations of Buddhism for the human realm. In the case of Tzu Chi, this meant providing humanitarian assistance in Taiwan and abroad; for the Buddha Light International Association—the lay branch of Foguangshan—it involved promoting moral education; and for the Dharma Drum Mountain, this meant stressing environmental issues (Pacey, 2005). Until then, the Ministry of the Interior expected religious associations to devote a portion of their revenue to charitable activities for the public interest. In the new context of democratisation, religious associations with fewer resources felt emboldened to protest these regulations, which they saw as too heavy a burden (Yao, 2007). One logical option for relieving the burden on some religions to provide social services would be to transfer this responsibility to the state.

During the presidency of Chen, Taiwan experienced, from a distance, the trauma of 11 September but, because of its small Muslim community, did not feel much impact. However, with the growing presence of migrant workers from the Philippines, who came to Taiwan as live-in caregivers, Catholics became more socially active. The encyclicals of the Catholic Church and the communiqués of the PCT expressed their concerns for the dignity and rights of these new migrants and thereby showed the importance of social theology (Wei, 2019). The large membership of Buddhist lay associations and the expansion of the Tzu Chi network of hospitals expressed the social significance of their teachings in concrete ways (Hsiao & Schak, 2005). In his research on the social determinant of giving, Wen-chun Chang (2006) found a positive relationship between a longer religious affiliation to a religion and giving among adherents of Buddhism and Daoism but did not find such a relationship for Christians.

During Ma's presidency, a theological current grew in strength among conservative evangelical Christians: when the government proposed legislation recognising same-sex marriage in 2013, a coalition including Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, and Unification Church leaders emerged to oppose it under the name of the Alliance of Taiwanese Religious Groups for Caring Family (台灣宗教團體愛護家庭大聯盟, *Taiwan zongjiao tuanti aihu jiating dalianmeng*). It succeeded in stopping the reform bill after mobilising over 300,000 people (Ho, 2019: 491). However, the voices of religious actors were absent from the important issues of social welfare becoming more salient during that time, especially with respect to long-term care and the labour migrations that were

meant to partly address the problem of a shortage of nurses caring for elderly people.

Tsai's presidency faces challenges of unprecedented proportions, with continued military pressures from the People's Liberation Army Air Force's intrusions in Taiwan's airspace and the global scourge of Covid-19, which Taiwan has avoided thanks to the disciplined actions of its government and citizens. Religious actors responded positively to these developments at the level of policy implementation rather than policymaking. For instance, the Tzu Chi Foundation helped the government procure doses of the vaccine when it was difficult to obtain from international suppliers based in China. However, assessing the effects of these collective traumas on theologies awaits investigation and survey.

Apart from the PCT's earlier communiqués, the Catholic Church's statements on migrant workers' dignity, and the reference to 'humanistic Buddhism' in philanthropy, I am not aware of authoritative and publicly available documents issued by religious leaders on social welfare, nor on specific policies such as long-term care and support for people with disabilities, orphans, and other vulnerable populations. A survey by Su, Chou, and Osborne (2011: 1009) found that 'religious belief moderates the effect of religion on both the decision to give and the amount to give, with the strongest positive relationship found for those professing the Christian faith'. These findings did not give much indication about how theologies can inform decisions on social policy and shape the development of the welfare state. One proxy would be to explore the influence within political parties and movements of people with well-known identification with a religious tradition.

7 Religions and Political Parties

No party of 'religious defence' has emerged in Taiwan because it has not experienced major conflicts between religion and state. Moreover, the KMT did not incorporate any religion into its administration: in its governance, it had entrenched the approaches to modernisation adopted by the Chinese Republican state before, which had deprived religions of all ability to establish an alternative legitimacy in education, healthcare, and social assistance. When the KMT asserted control over Taiwan after 1945, organised religions had been so weakened by the imposing of Shinto through Japan's late colonial policies that they had no basis on which to articulate a defensive motivation against state intervention in social policy. Even though its delivery of social services and its corporatist welfare state during the period of martial law was wanting,

no religious actor had the ability to organise and propose an alternative. The KMT pre-empted political mobilisation by religious actors near the end of the martial law period, as it outsourced religious associations to offer social services. The closest thing to a party of 'religious defence' that Taiwan experienced happened on three separate occasions once new political parties could legally register after the lifting of martial law.

During the stage of reconstruction, one way for religious leaders to influence politics was by ensuring that they could find sympathetic ears within the government. As mentioned above, KMT leaders were affiliated with a number of different Protestant denominations. However, other leaders were agnostic or held different religious beliefs, which could cancel out the influence of Christian churches. Due to their small membership, these churches had little chance of influencing or opposing the government during that period. However, the government welcomed their involvement in the delivery of social services to refugees, orphans, people suffering from disabilities, and other vulnerable populations. These churches had no reason to protest the government's taking of responsibilities away from them.

Throughout the stage of industrialisation, relations between the state and the PCT entered a conflictual phase over the issues of self-determination and human rights (Rubinstein, 2003). In its public acts of remonstrance, however, the Church did not act as a political party of 'religious defence': it spoke on behalf of people outside of its flock—aboriginal people and the broader Taiwanese society. The only form of political participation possible for religious associations was to sponsor independent candidates running as 'outside the party' (黨外, *Tangwai*) or KMT candidates that would favour the interests of their religion. Kuo gives the example of *Yiguandao*, whose members supported the KMT candidates to the Taipei County assembly in 1971 after obtaining a promise that the latter would not ban their activities if elected (Kuo, 2008: 76).

During the stage of social mobilisation, the opposition party that emerged near the end of the period of martial law—the DPP—shared the non-denominational and religiously neutral attitude of the KMT. Even when the transition to democracy made the creation of new political parties possible, none emerged to represent a particular religion seeking to defend the interests of its members, let alone to obtain specific advantages for itself. Because the PCT agreed with the DPP's stance on Taiwanese self-determination, it did not see the necessity to create its own party. The large lay Buddhist associations supported the government, and, until the last moment, they did not support popular mobilisation in favour of democratisation (Jones, 1999). As a rare exception, *Yiguandao* openly became a politically active religious association: it supported KMT candidates in local elections and recruited KMT officials as

members to obtain legalisation (Lin, 1990). Besides this objective, however, it did not express much concern for welfare policies.

During Lee's presidency, the first case of political mobilisation by a religious actor—a Buddhist cleric—emerged at the onset of the process of democratisation in 1989. This instance represented a case of incipient state-religious conflict, but it fizzled out because it failed to generate much support. As previously mentioned, Hsing Yun—the founder of Foguangshan—supported the candidacy of Chen Lü-an, a devout Buddhist, during the first free election to the presidency and thus came the closest to creating a political party of 'religious defence'. However, although the Foguangshan monastic order could influence many followers, it could not provide the cadres necessary to run a political party (Laliberté, 2004). After Chen failed to gain more than ten percent of the popular vote, his organisation withered, and no political party resulted from that attempt to create an alternative to the KMT and the DPP inspired by a Buddhist ethos. Hsing Yun paid a price for that support: he saw membership of his association decline, and in 1997 he decided to temporarily close Foguangshan to visitors (Kuo, 2008: 25).

However, alternative paths to creating new political parties existed: religious associations could influence political parties and encourage or dissuade voters to select one candidate or another. Buddhist leaders took this opportunity before and during the Chen presidency: in 2000 Hsing Yun cautioned against voting for Taiwanese independence, the option that Chen supported; in 2004 Wei Chueh took sides with Chen's opponent, Lien Chan. However, such influence can backfire. For example, in the 2000 presidential election, most *Yiguandao* members opposed the DPP candidate, but because they remained divided in their choices between the KMT ticket and that of a third party, their decision favoured their least preferred outcome (Kuo, 2008: 78–79). Relations improved in 2004 when *Yiguandao* members rewarded President Chen with their support for his help in the resolution of legal problems with a construction permit.

The KMT's return to power and the Ma presidency brought expectations of a détente with China, leading *Yiguandao* leaders to expect recognition in the PRC if they demonstrated their loyalty by opposing pro-independence movements (Lin, 2017: 245–246). The existing policy of outsourcing the provision of social services to religious associations continued. However, the legalisation of same-sex marriage emerged as a new issue that elicited the political activism of some religious believers. Emerging at the end of the second Ma administration, it led to the creation of a short-lived political party with a religious identity: the Faith and Hope League. Created by the small Taiwan Lutheran Church in 2015, it ran on a single issue: the opposition to the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

Sponsoring the aforementioned Alliance of Taiwanese Religious Groups for Caring Family, the organisation vanished during the return to power of the DPP in 2016 (Ho, 2020).

Some Christian denominations have taken the lead on other social issues that have become increasingly salient over the years, but they did not establish political parties to defend their cause. For instance, as an important proportion of Taiwanese households rely on an immigrant labour force of Indonesian women to look after the welfare of the elderly living at home, demands for religious accommodation have grown, as most of these women are Muslims (Sampurna, 2019). Taiwanese education authorities have tried to address this issue by introducing the awareness of Taiwan as a multicultural society into civic education (公民教育, *gongmin jiaoyu*) (Jackson, 2014). However, besides awareness about Taiwanese indigenous people and cleavages among the Han majority population, civic education overlooks migrant workers. The PCT, the Catholic Church, and Islamic associations have been active in providing support to them, as well as to 'migrant brides' and undocumented migrants, although their advocacy has faced challenges (O'Neill, 2012). Turning this solidarity into effective action depends on cooperative relations with the government. For instance, the PCT operates the Garden of Hope in coordination with local governments, which is a network of shelters for migrant workers in difficulty and women fleeing from domestic violence.

In sum, Taiwan has not seen the emergence of a party like the Komeito in Japan, which could promote the interests of an important religious minority. Religious minorities in Taiwan are secure in their rights, which leaves little motivation for a political party of 'religious defence'. As seen above, however, such parties have emerged in Europe because Catholic and Lutheran churches in Europe saw modern state intervention in matters of education, healthcare, and public welfare as an usurpation of what they believe to be their traditional responsibilities. Most religious institutions in Taiwan had little involvement in these domains during the period of martial law and little to defend against. Moreover, when religious organisations got involved in the delivery of social services—whether during the authoritarian period or under democratic consolidation—both the KMT and DPP governments approved them. In such conditions, there is no point in creating a political party of 'religious defence'.

8 Conclusions

The evidence presented above has shown that different religions appear unequally motivated and prepared to face the welfare challenges ahead.

Moreover, as the chronology I presented has emphasised, this has changed numerous times during the period of martial law and since the beginning of Taiwan's democratic transition. Buddhist associations have emerged as key actors, but this increased visibility has also generated unease in the population, especially for supporters of Taiwanese self-determination. Hence, the role of religious organisations such as the Tzu Chi Foundation has attracted criticism from civil society organisations that reckon it siphons money away from them raised by philanthropy. Christian churches, which have been so important in providing social assistance, see their numbers stagnating, if not diminishing. The dramatic ageing of the population and, subsequently, the increasing demand for the provision of long-term care that Taiwanese society will soon experience is dire and will increase fiscal pressure on the government as it seeks to meet these challenges (Chang, 2022).

It is not clear at all whether religious actors will be able to rise to the challenge if the government wants to continue its policy of outsourcing the provision of social services to them: ageing affects the clergy and the personnel of religious institutions just as much as the rest of society. As Taiwan moves into uncharted territory as a 'super-ageing society' (Agustin & Chou, 2019), how likely will it be that religious associations attract volunteers? Demographic changes may affect the size of the different religions relative to each other, especially if migration policies change and a greater number of migrants from Southeast Asia—often of Muslim faith—settle in Taiwan. I could not find the most recent breakdown by age among religious believers, which the religious associations themselves provide to the Ministry of the Interior. Without such data, it is difficult to predict future trends. The global reach of Covid-19 has not only brought to light the ability of Taiwan to tackle this scourge with minimal disruption—including for its religious life—but it has also exposed the discrepancies of welfare states and their healthcare systems around the world and how major religious traditions influenced state responses, whether those of Christianity (Perry, Whitehead & Grubbs, 2020), Islam (Hasyim, 2020), or Hinduism (Apollo et al., 2020).

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