

# Religion and the State in Post-war Taiwan

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores the development of local religious traditions in post-war Taiwan, particularly since the ending of martial law in 1987. It focuses on the factors underlying the ongoing popularity of temple cults to local deities such as Mazu (originally the goddess of the sea, now worshipped as an all-powerful protective deity) and the Royal Lords (*Wangye*; plague deities now invoked to counter all manner of calamities). Special attention is devoted to the complex relationship between local community-based religious traditions and the state, including the loosening of restrictions on festivals, the use of temples as sites for political rallies during local elections, and the recent controversy over attempts to stage direct pilgrimages to mainland China. Other issues include debates over the “indigenization” of religious traditions in Taiwan and the growth of academic organizations devoted to the study of Taiwanese religion.

This article explores the development of religion in post-war Taiwan, particularly since the ending of martial law in 1987. In contrast with China, where religion is only now gradually emerging from the shadow of long-term oppression by a totalitarian regime,<sup>1</sup> in Taiwan religion is thriving and even expanding. Freedom of religion has always been guaranteed under the constitution of the Republic of China, article 13 of which clearly states, “the people shall have freedom of religious beliefs.” However, now that Taiwan has developed into a democracy, people can practise the religious tradition of their choice without fear of state suppression. Members of any religious faith are free to congregate and introduce their belief systems to others, while previously outlawed sectarian religions such as the Unity Sect (*yiguan dao*) now operate openly and continue to expand. Taiwan’s democratic environment has also furthered the growth of large-scale groups of lay Buddhists and the sangha, such as the Compassionate Relief Merit Society (*ciji gongde hui*).

Another striking facet of religion in Taiwan is that economic growth and technological development have not resulted in the decline of religious practice; on the contrary, many educated men and women who surf the web on a daily basis apparently feel no qualms about practising religion (in fact, most large religious organizations and temples now have their own websites). Religion continues to play an integral role in individual, family and community life, and temple cults in particular have retained their importance as sites for daily worship, community service and massive festivals. Popular deities such as Mazu (originally the goddess of the sea, now worshipped as an all-powerful protective deity) and the Royal Lords (*Wangye*; originally plague deities but now invoked

1. See the articles by Daniel Bays, Raoul Birnbaum, Nancy Chen, Kenneth Dean, Fan Li-chu, Richard Madsen and Pitman Potter in this issue.

to counter all manner of calamities) are still worshipped for their ability to provide health and prosperity, while temples themselves continue to contribute to the formation of local identity.

Government statistics about temples, albeit unreliable in their categorizing all temples as either Buddhist or Daoist, as well as their failure to count unregistered temples and household shrines (*shentan*),<sup>2</sup> can give some sense of the ongoing growth of temple cults. For example, according to the *Revised Edition of the Taiwan Provincial Gazetteer (Chongxiu Taiwan sheng tongzhi)*, the number of “Buddhist” and “Daoist” temples in Taiwan had nearly doubled in the space of 50 years, from 3,661 in 1930 to 5,531 in 1981.<sup>3</sup> According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of the Interior, by 2001 Taiwan was home to a total of 9,707 “Buddhist” and “Daoist” temples that had registered with the state. These temples currently operate a total of 20 hospitals and clinics (as opposed to 35 hospitals and clinics run by Catholic organizations, and 26 hospitals and clinics run by Protestant organizations), as well as 180 schools ranging from kindergarten to university (186 Catholic; 158 Protestant).<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, some scholars have begun to consider the degree to which political and socio-economic changes have influenced the development of religious traditions. For example, David Jordan cites four major transformations in post-war Taiwan that have affected its religious development: increasing wealth, changes in government policy, more widespread education and increasing geographic mobility. Jordan shows that greater wealth has led to the construction of ever more ornate temples, but that in urban areas exorbitant real estate prices may be inhibiting the building of new temples. In terms of government policy, he notes a trend from suppression and control to tolerance combined with gentler attempts to “reform” practices deemed to be wasteful or otherwise undesirable (see below). Jordan also claims that education may be prompting a greater degree of religious “standardization,” and that greater geographic mobility has reduced traditional ideas of regionalism and may even be contributing to the formation of a pan-Taiwanese identity.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars like Robert Weller and Meir Shahar have also studied the ways in which religious traditions have the potential to resist state attempts at imposing cultural hegemony. Their research has centred on cults associated with the unruly dead, or eccentric deities like Jigong, a 12th-century monk renowned for his spiritual powers despite a distinct penchant for eating meat and drinking wine. Such cults became extremely popular during the Everybody’s Happy (*dajia le*) lottery craze of the

2. See for example Sung Kuang-yü, *Gaoxiong shi gequ simiao shentan minglu (A List of Temples and Altars in Kaohsiung’s Districts)* (Kaohsiung: Kaohsiung City Documents Commission, 1993).

3. See *Chongxiu Taiwan sheng tongzhi, juan 3, zhumin zhi, zongjiao pian (Revised Edition of the Taiwan Provincial Gazetteer, Volume 3, Treatise on Inhabitants, Chapter on Religion)* (Nantou: Taiwan sheng wenxian weiyuan hui, 1992), pp. 975–1065.

4. For more details, see the Ministry of the Interior’s website: [www.moi.gov.tw/](http://www.moi.gov.tw/).

5. David K. Jordan, “Changes in postwar Taiwan and their impact on the popular practice of religion,” in Stevan A. Harrell and Huang Chün-chieh (eds.), *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 138.

1980s. Weller's fascinating case study of the cult of the 18 Lords (Shiba wang gong) in post-war Taiwan describes how the spirits of 17 men and their loyal canine companion ended up receiving offerings of cigarettes and other items from people wishing to make a quick profit, including prostitutes and members of Taiwan's criminal underworld. Efforts by the state and even the temple committee itself to mould popular opinion proved largely fruitless, which reflects the ability of local society to fulfil its own spiritual and ritual needs while proving largely impervious to attempts at state control.<sup>6</sup> The recent inauguration of the Lotto lottery in January 2002 has prompted a new wave of worship of Taiwan's unruly gods, although the current fervour has been somewhat tempered by the fact that more and more Taiwanese are choosing to rely on computer programs to try to predict winning numbers.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the greatest amount of research has been done on sectarian religions, lay Buddhist movements and so-called "new religions" (*xinxing zongjiao*), all of which are credited for stressing "religious neo-traditionalism" while also focusing on the needs of the individual. However, the majority of this research has treated the histories of such religions, biographies of their leaders or textual analyses of their scriptures, especially so-called "morality books" (*shanshu*).<sup>8</sup> Only a few scholars, notably Philip Clart, David Jordan, Daniel Overmyer and Gary Seaman, have paid much attention to the sociological aspects of sectarian religions in Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> In recent years scholars like Chiang Ts'an-t'eng, Charles B. Jones, André Laliberté and Robert P. Weller have begun to study how

6. See Meir Shahrar, *Crazy Ji. Chinese Religion and Popular Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robert P. Weller, "Identity and social change in Taiwanese religion," in Murray A. Rubinstein (ed.), *Taiwan. A New History* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 352–56.

7. Those interested in the current links between local religion and Lotto in Taiwan should visit the following website (<http://tw.yahoo.com/>) and input the key word *shenming pai*.

8. See for example Joseph Bosco, "Yiguan dao: 'heterodoxy' and popular religion in Taiwan," in Murray A. Rubinstein (ed.), *The Other Taiwan, 1945 to the Present* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 423–444; Cheng Chih-ming, *Taiwan xinxing zongjiao xianxiang: chuantong xinyang pian (The New Religions Phenomenon in Taiwan: Traditional Beliefs)* (Ta-lin: Nan-hua Business College, 1999); Soo Khin Wah, "A study of the Yiguan dao (Unity Sect) and its development in peninsular Malaysia," PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1997; Sung Kuang-yü, *Tiandao chuandeng – Yiguan dao yu xiandai shehui (The Celestial Way and the Transmission of the Lamp – The Unity Sect and Modern Society)* (Taipei: San-yang Publishing Company, 1996); Wang Chien-ch'uan and Li Shih-wei, *Taiwan de zongjiao yu wenhua (Religion and Culture in Taiwan)* (Lu-chou: Po-yang wen-hua, 1999); Wang Chien-ch'uan and Li Shih-wei, *Taiwan de minjian zongjiao yu xinyang (Popular Religion and Beliefs in Taiwan)* (Lu-chou: Po-yang wen-hua, 2000); Wang Chih-yü, *Taiwan de Enzhugong xinyang (The Cult of the Lords of Benevolence in Taiwan)* (Taipei: Wen-chin Publishing Company, 1997).

9. See Philip A. Clart, "The ritual context of morality books: a case study of a Taiwanese spirit-writing cult," PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1996; Philip A. Clart, "The phoenix and the mother: the interaction of spirit writing cults and popular sects in Taiwan," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, No. 25 (1997), pp. 1–32; David K. Jordan and Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Gary Seaman, *Temple Organization in a Chinese Village*, in Lou Tzu-K'uang (ed.), *Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs*, Volume 101 (Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service, 1978).

Buddhism has interacted with the state.<sup>10</sup> Their research has centred on the Unity Sect, as well as the Compassionate Relief Merit Society, and the data they have collected convincingly demonstrate the importance of religious activity in modern Taiwan.

The contributions of the scholars cited above have been many and varied, but many have tended to overlook the importance of local religious traditions, especially community temple cults, in contributing to the relationship between state and society in post-war Taiwan. For example, in his recent book *Alternate Civilities*, Robert P. Weller demonstrates how certain religious organizations and institutions have contributed to Taiwan's democratization and socio-economic development. Weller's research rightly emphasizes the importance of supposedly new religious phenomena such as sectarian religions and lay Buddhist movements. For example, he convincingly argues that the Compassionate Relief Merit Society is perhaps the largest civil organization in Taiwan, and serves as an intermediate institution between the private world and the state. He also points out that sectarian organizations like the Unity Sect are voluntary associations that transcend traditional ties of community and kinship, and that both sectarian religions and lay Buddhist organizations fit criteria for civil society in being voluntary and popular nation-wide. In these respects, Weller argues, they differ from temple cults, which are often ascriptive and popular on the local and regional levels.<sup>11</sup>

Weller's data and arguments are highly convincing, but also raise some important questions. For example, he may overstate the novelty of sectarian religions and lay Buddhist associations. Such organizations flourished throughout Chinese history, particularly during periods of dynastic transition or rapid socio-economic growth.<sup>12</sup> What appears new

10. See Chiang Ts'an-t'eng, *Taiwan Fojiao bainianshi zhi yanjiu, 1895–1945 (The History of Buddhism in Taiwan during the Past Hundred Years, 1895–1945)* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Company, 1996); Chiang Ts'an-t'eng, *Dangdai Taiwan Fojiao (Buddhism in Contemporary Taiwan)* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Company, 1997); Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); André Laliberté, "Mainstream Buddhist organizations and the Kuo Min Tang, 1947–1996," in Philip A. Clart and Charles B. Jones, (eds.), *Religion in Postwar Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, forthcoming)

11. See Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities: Democracy and Culture in China and Taiwan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 14–16, 83–84, 87–88, 93, 99–101, 357–58. Weller tends to overlook the importance of Presbyterianism. See Murray A. Rubinstein, "Mission of faith, burden of witness: the Presbyterian Church in the evolution of modern Taiwan, 1865–1989," *American Asian Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1991), pp. 70–108; Murray A. Rubinstein, "Christianity and democratization in modern Taiwan," in Clart and Jones, *Religion in Postwar Taiwan*.

12. See for example Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Susan Naquin, "The transmission of White Lotus sectarianism in late imperial China," in David Johnson *et al.* (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 255–291; Daniel Overmyer, "Values in Chinese sectarian literature: Ming and Ch'ing *pao-chüan*," in *ibid.* pp. 219–254; Daniel Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Barend ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

in the post-war era is that women can now participate in public activities with enhanced legitimacy, and that in Taiwan such organizations now operate on the national level. Perhaps most importantly, however, Weller overlooks the ways in which temple cults have begun to influence Taiwanese culture and politics.<sup>13</sup> This article argues that the importance of temple cults has not only persisted but even increased in modern Taiwan, because temples are no longer strictly local but now play a role on the national stage as well. This issue is examined in two ways: tracing changes in state policy towards local religious traditions, and documenting ways in which religious beliefs and practices have affected the state. Therefore, while this article begins by describing state policies towards religion and the changing role of the Council on Cultural Affairs (Wen-hua jianshe weiyuanhui or Wenjian hui for short; hereafter abbreviated as CCA) in attempting to assert state control over temples and festivals, it then proceeds to discuss attempts by candidates to utilize local religion to shape the outcome of elections, and the recent controversy over attempts by certain Mazu temples to undertake direct pilgrimage to the goddess's natal home in Meizhou (Fujian). Other related issues include the roles temples still play in resolving legal disputes, debates over the indigenization of religion in Taiwan and the growth of academic organizations devoted to the study of Taiwanese religion.

### *Government Policy*

One of the main problems confronting Taiwan's post-war rulers has been how to maintain some measure of state control over local religious traditions in the face of increasing democratization and cosmopolitanism. Such concerns are grounded in the Chinese state's traditionally ambivalent attitude towards its localities. In his article above about state regulation of religion in China, Pitman B. Potter observes that in China, the relationship between religion and state power has long been contested. Dynastic relations with religious organizations included attempts to capture legitimacy through ritual, while local religious traditions continued to thrive outside official control. As scholars like Hsiao Kung-ch'üan have documented, the Chinese imperial state endeavoured to control local society and culture through a combination of coercive and persuasive policies.<sup>14</sup> In the realm of religion, for example, the state attempted to sponsor or symbolically support local cults that matched its "orthodox" or "Confucian" agenda in an attempt to "standardize" local religion and

13. The fact that Weller downplays the importance of temple cults as forces on the national level may be because he often relies on the work of scholars whose work has focused on the late imperial or early republican eras, when temple cults rarely attained importance at the national level. See for example Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); James Watson, "Standardizing the gods: the promotion of Tien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') along the South China Coast, 960–1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 292–324.

14. Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1960).

“superscribe” the state’s political agenda on to local society.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, the state frequently attempted to suppress sectarian religions and so-called “secret societies,” particularly groups that openly espoused millenarian ideologies with the potential to resist or overthrow the established order.<sup>16</sup> The success or failure of the Chinese state’s cultural policies varied depending on the state’s strength in a particular region at a particular time, but its agenda tended to remain relatively fixed over time.

State attempts to control local culture became somewhat more complex during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as a result of the impact of Western technology and culture. During the May Fourth Movement in 1919, some intellectuals called for the widespread adoption of Western culture, arguing that traditional Chinese culture was preventing China’s successful modernization.<sup>17</sup> Such views were highly prevalent during the Republican era, but were by no means universal or unchallenged. For example, other intellectuals continued to advocate the study of Chinese history and traditional culture despite being influenced by Western ideas, while a group of folklorists began detailed research on China’s popular culture.<sup>18</sup> For its part, the Nationalist (Kuomintang or KMT) state attempted to find a middle ground between these two positions, while also promoting policies such as the New Life Movement (*Xin shenghuo yundong*) of 1934, which attempted to use traditional “Confucian” values and Sun Yat-sen’s “Three Principles of the People” (*San min zhuyi*) to maintain social stability and unify popular support for the KMT.<sup>19</sup>

The history of cultural policies in Taiwan overlaps somewhat with that of China, but also features some important differences. As John Shepherd has shown, the Qing dynasty also attempted to implement various cultural policies after it assumed control over Taiwan. These policies, like those in the rest of Qing China, centred on the areas of education and religion, and had the common goal of maintaining social control and asserting cultural hegemony.<sup>20</sup> However, things began to change when the Japanese took over Taiwan following the Sino-Japanese War. During the colonial era (1895–1945), the colonial government was largely tolerant of Taiwan’s indigenous culture, with the exception of those groups that resisted

15. Daniel Overmyer, “Attitudes toward popular religion in the ritual texts of the Chinese state: *The Collected Statutes of the Great Ming*,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie*, No. 5 (1989–1990), pp. 191–221. See also Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*; Watson, “Standardizing the gods.”

16. See especially ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings*; ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998).

17. See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

18. See Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, 1985).

19. For an overview, see Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 361–434.

20. See John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993), pp. 208–214.

its authority, particularly sectarian organizations. By the 1930s and 1940s, though, the advent of Japanese military campaigns in East Asia caused the colonial government to promote the *Kōminka* Movement (1938–45) in Taiwan (and Korea as well), when the authorities attempted the “Japanization” of their colonial subjects. During these years, the authorities displayed a much more repressive attitude towards Taiwanese culture and religion, destroying a number of temples and their statues and persecuting some local religious specialists.<sup>21</sup>

After the Nationalist government assumed control over Taiwan following the end of the Second World War, it was acutely aware of the impact of Japanese culture on the Taiwanese people during the colonial era, and attempted to implement changes that would promote a form of state-approved Chinese culture and enhance the KMT’s legitimacy. However, before these policies could be implemented mismanagement combined with economic depression and various misunderstandings sparked the February 28 Uprising.<sup>22</sup> In the years following these tragic events, KMT cultural policy appears to have evolved according to a three-stage pattern described by Edwin Winckler.<sup>23</sup> During the first stage (1945–60), KMT policies tended to focus on negative control, especially in the realms of language and education. The second stage (1960–75) marked a period of gradual transition. The KMT began to spend more money on the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities (particularly at Academia Sinica), but also had to confront a significant brain drain as members of the elite who went abroad often failed to return. At the same time, however, it continued its policy of cultural restraint, especially in terms of suppressing the media.<sup>24</sup> The third stage (1975–90) saw the KMT faced by a series of crises on both the domestic and international fronts. In terms of cultural policies, it responded to these problems by investing more heavily in science and technology, as well as placing greater emphasis on and providing increased funding for cultural programmes.

Murray Rubinstein has made the important observation that during the first two stages the Nationalist government actively attempted to discourage pan-Taiwanese cults, a policy that only began to change during the 1980s and has now been almost completely abandoned.<sup>25</sup> For example, as

21. See Chou Wan-yao, “The *Kōminka* Movement in Taiwan and Korea: comparisons and interpretations,” in Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (eds.), *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 40–68; Ts’ai Chin-t’ang, *Nihon teikoku shūgi ka Taiwan no shūkyō seisaku (Religious Policies during the Period of Japanese Rule over Taiwan)* (Tokyo: Dohsei Publishing Company, 1994).

22. See Lai Tsehan, Ramon H. Myers and Wei Wou, *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). See also Steven E. Phillips, “Between assimilation and independence: the Taiwanese elite under Nationalist Chinese rule, 1945–1950,” PhD thesis, Georgetown University, 1998.

23. See Edwin A. Winckler, “Cultural policy in postwar Taiwan,” in Harrell and Huang, *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*, pp. 28–35.

24. See especially Ming-Yeh T. and Gary D. Rawnsley, *Critical Security, Democratization, and Television in Taiwan* (London: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000).

25. See Murray A. Rubinstein, “Statement formation and institutional conflict in the Mazu Cult: temples, temple-created media, and temple rivalry in contemporary Taiwan,” in Chou Tsung-hsien (ed.), *The International Academic Conference on the History of Taiwan: Society, Economics, and Colonization* (Taipei: Kuo-shih kuan, 1995), pp. 189–224.

early as 1968 the Ministry of the Interior promoted a series of guidelines in an attempt to regulate local religion by “improving frugality in folk sacrifices” (*gaishan minjian jidian jieyue banfa*).<sup>26</sup> Emily Martin Ahern’s study of festivals in the northern Taiwanese town of San-hsia clearly shows that such policies did have an impact on local religion during the 1970s, despite local resentment and attempts at passive resistance.<sup>27</sup> However, as David Jordan points out, in the long run the reduction in the scale of festivals and feasting may be less attributable to government policy than the transition from an agricultural to an urbanized society.<sup>28</sup> During this period, many intellectuals sided with the state, and did not hesitate to label local religious traditions as “superstition” (*mixin*) in their writings.<sup>29</sup>

As Taiwan’s Nationalist government began to shift the emphasis of its cultural policies from mere negative control to promotion of its own agenda combined with regulation of cultural elements it found unsavoury, two government agencies were formed to be responsible for supervising the island’s local culture.<sup>30</sup> The larger and more important of these was the Committee for the Revival of Chinese Culture (*Zhonghua wenhua fuxing weiyuan hui* or *Wenfu hui* for short; hereafter abbreviated as CRCC), which was established in August 1967 as a response to the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–76). This agency was mainly responsible for promoting the KMT’s vision of Chinese culture (referred to as *Zhongyuan wenhua* or *Zhonghua wenhua*), which combined traditional Confucian values such as loyalty to the state and filial piety with doctrines created by party leaders like Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. The CRCC enacted a number of programmes to inculcate these ideas, including: “What citizens should know about daily life [activities]” (*Guomin shenghuo xuzhi*),<sup>31</sup> which focused on patriotic values and proper

26. For more on these and other government regulations, see Chiu Hei-yuan, “*Zhonghua minguo youguan zongjiao ‘faling’ ji faling caoan huibian*” (“Compendium of laws and draft bills concerning religion in the Republic of China”), *Field Materials, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, No. 2 (1990), pp. 113–139; Chiu Hei-yuan, “Changing relationships between state and Church in Taiwan,” paper presented at international conference entitled *Taiwan: State and Society in Transition*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 21–23 September 1997. See also *Taiwan sheng jingwu dang’an huibian – Minsu zongjiao pian* (*Taiwan Police Administration Archives – Folk Religion*) (Taipei: National History Office, 1996).

27. See Emily Martin Ahern, “The Thai Ti Kong Festival,” in Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (eds.), *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), pp. 416–425. See also Hill Gates Rosenow, “Prosperity settlement: the politics of Paipai in Taipei, Taiwan,” PhD thesis, University of Michigan.

28. Jordan, “Changes in Postwar Taiwan,” pp. 148–150.

29. See for example Juan Ch’ang-jui, “*Ruhe duanzheng minjian zongjiao xinyang*” (“How to reform popular religion and beliefs”), in Li Yih-yuan and Chuang Ying-chang (eds.), *Minjian zongjiao yishi zhi jiantao yantaohui lunwenji* (*Proceedings of the Conference on Evaluating the Rituals of Popular Religion*) (Nankang: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1985), pp. 130–144.

30. For more on these two agencies, see Shih Chih-hui, “*‘Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong’ yanjiu*” (“Research on the Movement to Revive Chinese Culture”), MA thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, 1995.

31. This movement was modified in the mid-1980s, and renamed “What modern citizens should know about daily life [activities]” (*Xiandai guomin shenghuo xuzhi*).



behaviour; and “Models for citizens’ rites and ceremonies” (*Guomin liyi fanli*), which attempted to shape religious practice by stressing the importance of good manners and simple (that is, not lavish or expensive) rituals (see above). The CRCC drew up handbooks to promote these movements, and their contents were widely publicized through the mass media, as well as at schools and government offices. Throughout most of its existence, the CRCC stood for the KMT’s ideal of a pan-Chinese culture, and tended to oppose the growth of indigenous Taiwanese culture, including temple cults. By the late 1980s, ongoing democratization and the rise of opposition parties such as the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) had begun to affect the degree to which the CRCC could enact the programmes it desired. In the summer of 1990, stiff opposition in the Legislative Yuan resulted in the elimination of the CRCC’s budget, thus marking the formal end of this agency. The KMT preserved a portion of the CRCC in the spring of 1991 by creating a non-government organization known as the General Committee of the Movement to Revive Chinese Culture (*Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong zonghui*).<sup>32</sup>

The second government agency responsible for cultural policies was the Bureau of Culture (*Wenhua ju*), which was created by the Ministry of Education in November 1967 and existed until May 1973. This agency assisted the CRCC in promoting the KMT vision of Chinese culture, although its efforts tended to concentrate more on the realm of education. For example, the Bureau helped the CRCC set up 96 branch offices in various colleges and universities, and sponsored over 300 lectures at these schools during its brief seven-year existence. In addition, it also engaged in various publication projects, and sponsored a number of local and international conferences on Chinese culture.

The current agency in charge of cultural policy, the Council on Cultural Affairs (CCA), was formed during the third stage of KMT cultural policy, at a time when Taiwan was gradually becoming a more cosmopolitan society and taking its first steps towards democracy. The establishment of the CCA, which was known as the Cultural Council for Planning and Development (CCPD) until 1995, can be traced back to an administrative report to the Legislative Yuan delivered on 23 September 1977 by the late president Chiang Ching-kuo, who was serving as premier at the time. This report, and a subsequent report to the Legislative Yuan in February 1978, stressed the importance of preserving and developing Taiwan’s culture. In order to implement these ideas successfully, the Executive Yuan announced “Proposals for strengthening cultural and recreational activities” in February 1979 and began to plan for establishing an agency to carry out these proposals, the CCPD. The Executive Yuan officially established the CCPD on 11 November 1981. It was listed

32. For an introduction to the General Committee of the Movement to Revive Chinese Culture, please see [www.ncatw.org.tw/Info.php](http://www.ncatw.org.tw/Info.php).

as a first-level agency (the functional equivalent of a ministry), and placed under the direct control of the Executive Yuan.<sup>33</sup>

At the time of its founding, the CCPD was placed in charge of ten tasks, including the research and drafting of important policies for cultural development, the promotion and protection of cultural assets, and the establishment of local cultural centres (*wenhua zhongxin*).<sup>34</sup> These goals have changed somewhat. According to the “Guiding principles and objectives” (*shizheng linian yu mubiao*) section of the CCA’s website, its current goals include: rectifying Taiwan’s “fast-food culture” mentality, unifying cultural administrative authority, encouraging corporate sponsorship, investment or patronage of arts groups and activities, and integrating culture and technology.<sup>35</sup>

One of the most striking features of the CCA’s self-proclaimed goals is their failure to mention one of the key nodes of traditional Taiwanese culture, namely temples. This contrasts with the early years of its existence, when the CCPD seemed to be working to replace temples and other traditional public spaces as a focus for promoting and even controlling Taiwanese culture. Such an attitude can be seen in the following statement presented by Shen Hsüeh-yung, the third chairperson of the CCPD, in a report to the Central Standing Committee of the KMT on 21 October 1993:

Let us look at our history in retrospect. How did our society evolve? How did the traditional villages, towns and communities consolidate their common identity through various folk art and cultural activities before the cultural centres and the government’s cultural administrative systems came on to the scene? What bonded them to a system of mutual ethical beliefs, rituals and rules of order? A unique and united society was created ... under the auspices of temples and through various cultural and artistic temple activities ... In the face of dramatic social transitions, the traditional social structure in Taiwan, bonded by a common religious belief, has broken down irreversibly. Is there an alternative system ... to take over the social function performed by community temples in the past? ... We have always hoped that the municipal and county community activity centres and cultural centres would be able to shoulder the responsibility of social construction ... I believe that through planned campaigns these [state-sponsored activities] will penetrate levels of communities more deeply ... The political connotation of this strategy is apparent. If government authorities do not give priority to the absorption of the private sector’s

33. This discussion of the CCPD/CCA is based on Paul R. Katz, “Cultural policies in late twentieth century Taiwan: a case study of the Council on Cultural Planning and Development,” paper presented at the conference Taiwan: State and Society in Transition. For more on the history of the CCPD/CCA, as well as its current activities, see [www.cca.gov.tw](http://www.cca.gov.tw).

34. See Chen Chi-lu, “Xingzheng yuan Wenhua jianshe weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao” (“Report on work undertaken by the CCPD of the Executive Yuan”), *Yijiubasi nian Beimei huaren xueshu yantaohui taolun beijing cankao ziliao* (Reference Materials on the Background of the North American Chinese Conference of 1984), pp. 1–22.

35. For more on the CCA’s current goals, see [www.cca.gov.tw](http://www.cca.gov.tw).

social resources, then the ruling party is handing this valuable asset over to its opponent.<sup>36</sup>

This remarkable statement is particularly notable because it reflects the government's increasing appreciation of the constructive roles temples have played (and in fact still do play) in Taiwanese society. This represents a significant change in traditional Chinese policy, which in the past tended to focus on reforming local cults, reducing the size of festivals and otherwise combating "superstition" (see above). In recent years, the government has attempted to reform some festivals by helping to sponsor them while also attempting to regulate their contents (for example, the Floating Lanterns' Festival in Keelung and the Boat Festival of Tung-kang (East Haven), albeit with rather mixed results.<sup>37</sup> Whether the CCA and its cultural centres (many of which are now run by the bureaus of culture of county governments) can actually replace temples as key public spaces is far from certain, but the very fact that the government is paying attention to this problem indicates a major transformation in state attitudes towards Taiwan's local religious traditions. At the same time, more and more temples in Taiwan are beginning to compete with the CCA by sponsoring their own cultural activities, from chess tournaments to classes in traditional music, literature and calligraphy to large-scale re-enactments of Koxinga's landing at Luerhmen. Some temples have even been co-operating with the CCPD/CCA in planning and carrying out some cultural projects.<sup>38</sup> If one enters the Chinese term for temple (*simiao*) into the search engine for the CCA's website, it will provide a total of 133 entries consisting of reports or articles published in the mass media that detail this agency's links with temples from the 1990s to the present day. These data indicate that officials at the CCPD/CCA have begun to show more restraint in attempting to reform local religious traditions, and have begun to appreciate the importance of temples as public spaces that contribute to the formation or strengthening of Taiwanese culture.

The data presented above clearly show that the state has had to give ground in its efforts to control community temple cults in post-war Taiwan. However, since Taiwan began to democratize during the 1980s, temple cults have been more than passive observers of government policy; they have played an important role in furthering local interests and asserting local identity. The sections below discuss the following examples of this phenomenon: the roles temples play in local elections, the ways in which elites who manage some renowned Mazu temples have

36. See Shen Hsüeh-yung, "Special topical report to the Central Standing Committee of the Kuomintang," 21 October 1993. See also "Report to the Education Committee of the Legislative Yuan, Second Session, Second Triennial," 8 December 1993.

37. See Chuang Ying-chang and Huang Mei-ying, "Guanguang yu minsu zongjiao de jiehe – yici guanban yingshen saihui zhi jiantao" ("The combination of tourism and folk religion – an evaluation of one state-sponsored festival"), in Li and Chuang, *Proceedings of the Conference on Evaluating the Rituals of Popular Religion*, pp. 56–68.

38. See Virginia Sheng, "Sacred bases for secular service," *Free China Review*, Vol. 45, No. 10 (1995), pp. 26–33.

attempted to influence Taiwan's cross-straits policy, and the importance of judicial rituals performed at temples.

#### *Local Religion and the Electoral Process*

One striking example of the diverse forms of interaction between local religious traditions and the state may be found in the presidential election of 2000, during which candidates such as Chen Shui-bian, Hsü Hsin-liang, Lien Chan and James Soong (Sung Ch'u-yü) attempted to attract grass-roots support and work with local elites by actively campaigning at temples to popular local deities such as Mazu. According to an article published in the 14–18 March 2000 issue of the weekly magazine *The Journalist* (*Hsin hsin-wen* (*Xin xinwen*)), representatives of the Lien campaign actively publicized supposedly miraculous events that occurred at temples, including the spontaneous flaring up of incense burners, while Lien himself professed to be optimistic about his chances after one of his supporters drew an auspicious poem (*qianshi*) in the course of a divination ritual. Other KMT legislators claimed that Jigong had declared his intention to support Lien. Not to be outdone, supporters of Soong, especially Yen Ch'ing-piao, the chairman of one of the island's most popular Mazu temples (the Zhenlan Gong of Ta-chia in Taichung county; see below), held divination rituals of their own to demonstrate that the goddess was solidly behind Sung. As for the eventual winner, Chen Shui-bian, he attempted to shore up his strongest base of support in southern Taiwan by claiming that the region's Royal Lords supported his cause. In addition, his party (the Democratic Progressive Party or DPP) set up a special sub-committee to organize rallies held at temples, as well as publicize supposedly miraculous occurrences linked to the Chen campaign and those of candidates for the Legislative Yuan. One example involved predictions of Chen's victory by the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool (Yaochi jinmu) during spirit-writing rituals.

#### *Local Religion and Cross-Straits Links*

While Taiwan's political establishment has attempted to take advantage of local temples to win elections, some aspiring local politicians have attempted to turn the tables by using temple cults to advance their own interests against those of the state. One recent example of the intense and also complex links between religion, politics and identity in contemporary Taiwan involves the attempt by the Zhenlan Gong to undertake a direct pilgrimage to Mazu's ancestral temple in Meizhou.<sup>39</sup> When Taiwan and China established informal contacts back in 1987, people from Taiwan who rushed across the Taiwan Straits included war veterans who had accompanied Chiang Kai-shek from China to Taiwan after the fall of

39. For a lengthier account of the events summarized above, see the introduction to Paul R. Katz and Murray Rubinstein (eds.), *Religion, Culture, and the Creation of Taiwanese Identities* (New York: St. Martin's Press, forthcoming).

the Republic of China in 1949, as well as businessmen and industrialists seeking a chance to make a profit. However, one of the largest and most visible groups of travellers was pilgrims from Taiwan seeking their religious roots in China. One of the first pilgrimages to China was undertaken by the Zhenlan Gong, which took advantage of the occasion to assert its legitimacy and authority as one of Taiwan's leading Mazu temples. Between 1987 and 2000, numerous temples organized pilgrimages to China, but because of restrictions on cross-strait contacts were always forced to take indirect routes through third countries such as Hong Kong. More recently, Chinese worshippers and officials also brought a statue of Mazu from Meizhou to Taiwan (via Hong Kong) for a pilgrimage of their own in 1998, a move which caused great controversy among Taiwanese Mazu temples concerning which of them were willing to welcome this "Chinese Mazu".

During the winter of 2000, however, some of Taiwan's Mazu temples laid plans to challenge the status quo. The leadership of the Zhenlan Gong, which included the former Speaker of the Taichung County Council Yen Ch'ing-piao, initiated an effort to organize a direct pilgrimage from Ta-chia to Meizhou. It was around this time that Yen attempted to establish himself as local elite, religious leader and political king-maker, by declaring his support for the presidential candidacy of James Soong. The issue of direct pilgrimage to China became more pressing during the spring and early summer, with Yen Ch'ing-piao and KMT members of the Legislative Yuan and National Assembly from central Taiwan gathering at the Zhenlan Gong on 4 June to throw divination blocks in order to determine a date for the pilgrimage. The ritual proceeded smoothly, with the goddess setting 16 July as the departure date. From this point, a political tug-of-war ensued between Chen Shui-bian's new government (which tends to oppose reunification with China) and members of the opposition, including elected representatives of the KMT, the New Party and Soong's newly formed People First Party (PFP). At the same time, Chinese officials, particularly local officials from Fujian who anticipated a windfall yet were also well aware of the symbolic importance of Taiwanese pilgrims travelling directly to China, made every effort to express their willingness to allow a direct pilgrimage, albeit with some strings attached (for example, only vessels from China or Hong Kong could be used to transport pilgrims). Caught in the middle were members of the government's Mainland Affairs Council, who pointed out that regulations governing direct links between Taiwan and China had not been passed, and that there was no way to guarantee the safety or rights of pilgrims who participated in this event. As for Chen Shui-bian, he attempted to persuade the Taiwanese people that going on direct pilgrimage to China would only serve China's propaganda efforts. Finally, the Zhenlan Gong relented, and chose to take the usual indirect route through Hong Kong. On the surface, this represented a victory for the DPP, but representatives of local temples who also enjoy nation-wide influence continue to pressure the new government to change its policies.

The situation has changed since the opening of the "Small three links"

(*xiao san tong*) in January 2001, which allowed direct shipping links between Chin-men (Quemoy) and Matsu, and Xiamen and Mawei in Fujian province. On 2 October 2002 a large group of Taiwanese pilgrims made a direct voyage to China from Kaohsiung via Chin-men. The 426-member delegation, jointly organized by ten temples dedicated to Mazu, was the largest pilgrimage group to visit China since the opening of direct Chin-men–Xiamen shipping services. More such activities are highly likely to occur in the future.

#### *Local Religion and the Judicial System*<sup>40</sup>

Another fascinating example of how some temples work to bridge the gap between state and society involves the performance of judicial rituals, especially oaths and indictments made in the presence of gods of the underworld. The rite of making an oath before a god has long played an important role in local election campaigns, and in some cases candidates accused of lying or vote-buying would behead live chickens in temples dedicated to the gods of the underworld as a way of demonstrating their innocence.<sup>41</sup> Chicken beheadings are not performed often in Taiwan today, mainly due to pressure from local animal rights groups, opposition on the part of temples where such rites used to be staged and a general sense of disgust at their bloody nature. However, chicken-beheading rituals occasionally function as a metaphor in local political campaigns. For example, when James Soong was accused of wrongdoing during his presidential campaign, a local political cartoon depicted him performing a chicken-beheading ritual in order to emphasize his innocence.<sup>42</sup> Oaths unaccompanied by chicken beheadings are still performed today as a form of dispute resolution, and political figures will not hesitate to make oaths in popular local temples. In one example, when Yen Ch'ing-piao was accused of extortion and attempted murder, he made an oath in the Zhenlan Gong proclaiming his innocence.<sup>43</sup>

Indictment rituals, which date back at least a millennium, continue to be popular in Taiwan today, perhaps in part due to ongoing dissatisfaction with the legal system. For example, at sites like the Dizang Abbey (Dizang An), a popular temple in the city of Hsin-chuang in Taipei county, jointly dedicated to the Bodhisattva Dizang (Dizang wang pusa) and a controller of unruly ghosts known as the “Lord of the Hordes” (Dazhong ye), over 3,000 people a year continue to file indictments against individuals they feel have wronged them. Perhaps the most renowned indictment was filed at this temple by the television actress Pai

40. For more on the significance of judicial rituals, see Paul R. Katz “Divine justice: chicken-beheading rituals in Japanese occupation Taiwan and their historical antecedents,” in Wang Ch'iu-kuei, Chuang Ying-chang and Chen Chung-min (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Society, Ethnicity, and Cultural Performance* (Taipei: Centre for Chinese Studies, 2001), pp. 111–160.

41. See Li Yih-yuan, “Zhan jitou” (“Chicken-beheading rituals”), in *Shitu, shenhua, yu qita* (*Master-Pupil, Myth, and Other Things*) (Taipei: Cheng-chung, 1983).

42. See the 18 December 1999 issue of *Ziyou shibao* (*The Liberty Times*), p. 15.

43. See the 30 April 2001 issue of *Zhongguo shibao* (*The China Times*), p. 6.

Ping-ping, following the kidnap and brutal murder of her teenage daughter Pai Hsiao-yen by three local gangsters. Members of the temple committee followed the case with intense interest, and crossed out photographs of each man on a wanted poster circulated by the police as each one was captured or killed. Local police and prosecutors have also been known to burn incense and/or file indictments at the temple in order to help solve difficult criminal cases. For example, when an investigation into a major bank robbery dragged on for months without a breakthrough, the Chief of the Police Administration made offerings at the Abbey, following which the robber was apprehended. In another case, a suspected arsonist refused to confess until prosecutors brought him to the Abbey and filed an indictment with the Lord of the Hordes.

#### *Academic Research on Local Religion*

Like the state, Taiwanese intellectuals have begun to change their traditionally conservative attitudes towards local religious traditions, and the vast majority now present religion in a positive light in their writings. The past decades have witnessed the publication of a substantial body of research about the importance of religion in post-war Taiwan. The *Bibliography of Taiwanese Folk Religion*, edited by Lin Mei-rong, remains the most comprehensive collection of bibliographic data available to date, although Laurence G. Thompson's *Chinese Religions: Publications in Western Languages* provides better coverage of Western research.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Chang Hsün, Chiang Ts'an-t'eng and Randall Nadeau have completed thorough state of the field reports with detailed bibliographic data.<sup>45</sup> David Jordan and Yü Guang-hong have published well-written analyses of religious growth in post-war Taiwan, while *Religion in Postwar Taiwan*, edited by Philip A. Clart and Charles B. Jones, contains numerous essays on this subject.<sup>46</sup>

Social scientists, especially a group led by Chiu Hei-yuan of the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, have completed substantial

44. See Lin Mei-rong (ed.), *Taiwan minjian xinyang yanjiu shumu (zengding ban)* (*A Bibliography of Taiwanese Folk Religion (Revised and Enlarged Edition)*) (Nankang: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1997). The Association of Asian Studies has published three volumes of Thompson's bibliography: the first up to 1980, the second from 1981 and 1990, and the third (also edited by Gary Seaman) from 1991 to 1995. Philip A. Clart has continuously updated the bibliography, and the fruits of his efforts may be found at <http://web.missouri.edu/~religpc/bibliographyCPR.html>.

45. See Chang Hsün, "Guangfu hou Taiwan renleixue Hanren zongjiao yanjiu zhi huigu" ("A review of anthropological studies of Han Chinese religion in Taiwan"), *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, No. 81 (1996), pp. 163–215; Chiang Ts'an-t'eng and Chang Hsün (eds.), *Taiwan bentu zongjiao yanjiu daolun (Reader in Contemporary Religious Studies in Taiwan)* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2001); Randall Nadeau and Chang Hsün, "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors: religious studies and the question of 'Taiwanese Identity,'" in Clart and Jones, *Religion in Postwar Taiwan*.

46. See Jordan, "Changes in postwar Taiwan and their impact on the popular practice of religion"; Yü Guang-hong, "Taiwan diqu minjian zongjiao de fazhan" ("The development of popular religion in Taiwan"), *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, No. 53 (1983), pp. 67–105; Clart and Jones, *Religion in Modern Taiwan*.

research on Taiwan's religious traditions.<sup>47</sup> The results of their most recent project, based on questionnaires administered to 2,333 individuals, provide valuable data on religious beliefs and practices in Taiwan today. For example, the data indicate that sūtra-recitation, breath control and meditation are common among members of both sectarian and lay Buddhist movements. Other important topics include the impact of urbanization and rural–urban migration on religious beliefs, as well as forms of charitable giving to temples and religious movements.<sup>48</sup> There appear to be some methodological problems, however: categories like “Daoism” (*Daojiao*) and “folk beliefs” (*minjian xinyang*) are not rigorously defined, and while 1,851 questionnaires were administered at random, 482 were distributed to the leadership of small-scale religious movements to administer to their own believers. Nevertheless, these data go a long way towards quantifying the changes observed by many other historians and ethnographers.

One key step forward is the formation of the Taiwan Association of Religious Studies (Taiwan zongjiao xuehui; hereafter abbreviated as TARS). TARS was founded on 18 April 1999 when 37 professors and researchers from academic institutions throughout Taiwan gathered for an inaugural ceremony at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica. During the past two years, membership has increased to well over 400, including faculty, students, independent scholars, religious practitioners and religious organizations. Long before TARS came into existence, many scholars in Taiwan from fields like history and anthropology had been doing research on religion. However, at that time religious studies had not been established as an independent discipline. Taiwan's first Department of Religious Studies was founded in 1992 at Catholic Fu-jen University, and in the next few years ten other universities followed suit. More recently, National Chengchi University established an Institute of Religion in 1999, which has an MA programme in religious studies.<sup>49</sup> As a result, Taiwanese scholars became increasingly aware of the need for establishing a professional association for individuals interested in studying religion. TARS was created as a response to this awareness. It also attempts to reflect the multi-disciplinary nature of religious studies in Taiwan by being a broadly inclusive organization. Moreover, its membership is not restricted to academics; members of religious organizations are also welcome to join.

At present, TARS holds lectures and seminars on a monthly basis, and has begun to publish the *Taiwan Journal for Religious Studies*. It continues its efforts to bring together individuals from different back-

47. See Chiu Hei-yuan, “Taiwan diqu minzhong de zongjiao xinyang yu zongjiao taidu” (“Popular religious beliefs and attitudes in the Taiwan region”), in Yang Kuo-shu and Chiu Hei-yuan (eds.), *Bianqian zhong de Taiwan shehui (Taiwan Society in Transition)* (Nankang: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1988), pp. 239–276.

48. See the essays presented in *Zongjiao yu shehui bianqian (Religion and Social Change)*, Conference Proceedings, Academia Sinica, Institute of Sociology, 23–24 February 2001, especially pp. 17–18, 63, 87, 114, 196.

49. The Institute's website is located at [www.religion.nccu.edu.tw](http://www.religion.nccu.edu.tw).



grounds who are pursuing work in religious studies. Its lectures and seminars, as well as publications like the newsletter and the new journal, facilitate the circulation and exchange of data and ideas among scholars and members of the religious community in Taiwan. However, TARS does not intend to be simply an organization for Taiwanese; it also includes members from other nations, including China, Japan, Europe, Canada and the United States.<sup>50</sup>

Taiwanese scholars also frequently refer to local religion as part of the ongoing debate over cultural identity. Like other debates about identity the world over, this discourse has centred less on discernible and objective distinctions between two groups of people (in this case mainland Chinese and Taiwanese) than on perceived differences often inextricable from the realm of sentiments and beliefs. Some papers presented at academic conferences over the past few years have been notable in their attempts to define Taiwanese religion as a cultural phenomenon unique to Taiwan. These papers also view religion in Taiwan as being based on a sense of identity that largely excludes China as a source of cultural tradition. Whether this new sense of identity has gained widespread acceptance among the people of Taiwan, or has only been embraced by some of the island's intellectuals and politicians, remains to be determined. Nevertheless, the impact of such arguments on academic discourse has been considerable, with an increasing number of scholars attempting to find ways in which southern Chinese religious traditions have adapted to Taiwan's unique historical conditions. At the same time, however, such arguments appear to have had little impact on the general public, and local religion does not appear to be deepening divisions between the island's different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups.<sup>51</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The evidence presented above shows that the relationship between state and society in post-war Taiwan is entering a new phase, in part a result of the island's political development and economic growth, but also in part a result of the increasing influence of local religious traditions at the national level. As noted at the beginning of this article, local community-based religious traditions in traditional China tended to survive in local societies beyond the scope of state control. In Taiwan today, however, local religious traditions are not merely autonomous but

50. Those interested in learning more about TARS can visit its website at <http://140.109.24.171/taoist/>.

51. For more on identity debates in Taiwan, see Thomas B. Gold, "Civil society and Taiwan's quest for identity," in Harrell and Huang, *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*, pp. 50–53, 59, and Alan M. Wachman, *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994). For more on how identity debates have influenced the study of Taiwanese religion, see Paul R. Katz, "Morality books and Taiwanese identity – the texts of the palace of guidance," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, No. 27 (1999), pp. 69–92; Katz and Rubinstein, *Religion, Culture, and the Creation of Taiwanese Identities*; Nadeau and Chang, "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors"; P. Steven Sangren, "Anthropology and identity politics in Taiwan: the relevance of local religion," Fairbank Center Working Papers, No. 15, 1996.

actively involved in attempting to mould state policy to meet community needs. Not only are cults and festivals flourishing, they are also intricately connected to Taiwan's political, social and even judicial realms.

The fact that this has occurred should not come as a surprise to those who have studied religion and society during the late imperial and modern eras. Temple cults have long constituted one of the most important public spaces or arenas in late imperial Chinese or Taiwanese society, and have been key arenas where elites and representatives of the state vied to assert or reinforce their dominance over local society. Evidence in the form of temple inscriptions (*miaobei*) and placards (*bian'e*) reveals that for centuries officials have not hesitated to support prominent local temples, particularly those to deities who had been included in the state cult. Thus, both representatives of the state and local elites had vested interests in supporting local religious traditions. Although their goals may have differed (officials tended to be more interested in control, while elites endeavoured to enhance their power and legitimacy), both recognized that temples were important public spaces where state and society could interact.<sup>52</sup> In Taiwan today, democratization has further enhanced the importance of local power, and prompted representatives of the state to be more proactive in terms of tapping into local resources, particularly key public spaces such as temples. A similar process may be beginning in China. Kenneth Dean's article in this issue indicates that local society is reasserting its autonomy in South-east China, while temple networks are once again functioning as a second government in the sense of providing services and mobilizing the population. The extent to which the growth of local religious traditions may have a long-term impact on the relationship between state and society in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong remains to be seen, but the outpouring of new ethnographic work on China, as well as the continuing efforts of scholars researching Taiwan and Hong Kong, should give us a more comprehensive perspective on this issue in the future.<sup>53</sup>

52. See Paul R. Katz, "Temple cults and the creation of Hsin-chuang Local Society," in T'ang Hsi-yung (ed.), *Papers from the Seventh Conference on Chinese Maritime History* (Nankang: Sun Yat-sen Institute of Social Sciences, 1999), pp. 735–798. See also Ch'en Shih-jung, "Qingdai Taoyuan de kaifa yu difang shehui jiangou" ("The settlement of Taoyuan and the construction of local society during the Qing"), MA thesis, National Central University, 1999.

53. See Daniel L. Overmyer with Chao Shin-yi (eds.), *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results*, (Taipei: Yuan-liou Publishing Co. Ltd., 2002).