

Thought and Religion

TAIWAN IN THE 1990s has experienced a flourishing of modern democratic and scientific thought at the same time traditional Taiwanese folk traditions are being renewed and adapted to a modern industrialized society. The economic gains of recent decades have brought a boom in renovating and building Buddhist and Taoist temples. New religious groups have arisen that meld traditional Chinese religious ideas with modern concerns.

Taiwan's religious culture reflects a unique status as a culture brought by immigrants from Fujian and Guangdong, influenced by Japanese and Western presence, and then regulated by the Guomindang Party since 1947. The dominant religious activities are ancestral rituals and community temple festivals. According to 1994 ROC statistics, 11.2 million out of the 21 million people in Taiwan identify themselves as religious. Of these religious Taiwanese, 43 percent are Buddhist, 34 percent Taoists, 8 percent Yiguandao, 6 percent Christians, and 9 percent followers of other religions.¹ These figures do not adequately portray the rich diversity of religious rituals, sects, temples, and deities that are part of Taiwanese life. Moreover, the ongoing vitality of Taiwanese folk religion and ancestor reverence makes the distinction between Buddhists and Taoists more a matter of preferred designation than actual practice.



2.1 Relaxation at the temple.

CONCEPTS OF NATURE, TIME, AND SPACE

Traditional Chinese concepts of humanity, nature, time, and space continue to be meaningful to the Taiwanese despite the dominance of the modern scientific worldview. The traditional worldview envisions humans living in harmony with the natural order, usually referred to as Tian, or Heaven. Human beings should live in harmony with the natural order by understanding and adjusting their lives to the natural order as seen in the changes of the seasons and the landscape of the earth. The transformation within this natural order is known as Dao, or the Way. Dao is not only the way of nature; it is the way humans should follow to live in harmony with self, others, and the natural world. All religious and philosophical approaches teach the Way, but with different emphases and interpretations.

According to the Chinese view of a harmonious natural order, all things of heaven and earth are connected by the life force, *qi*. *Qi* is the breath of the universe, and in humans, the breath of life. The flow of *qi* and the patterns of change are understood in terms of two polar opposites: *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are polar opposites seen in the transformations and re-

lationships of all things. Cold and hot, male and female, dry and wet, moon and sun, night and day, all are examples of *yin-yang* dichotomy. Another Chinese concept that interprets relationships and change is that of the five agents: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. These traditional concepts—*qi*, the five agents, and the *yin-yang* polarity—are used to conceptualize and order all aspects of nature and society. Seasons can be understood in terms of the ebb and flow of *yin* and *yang* and the alternating dominance of the five agents. Historical change can be seen as the movement of the five agents overcoming each other. Most significantly, the human being is a microcosm of the natural universe. Like the rest of the universe, human life is governed by *qi*, the five agents, and the *yin-yang* polarity. The major organs of the body are dominated by the five agents; the forces of *yin* and *yang* are balanced in a healthy body.

In Taiwan two different calendars mark the passing of time: the Western calendar for business, school and government, and the lunar calendar for religious observances and personal guidance. The Western (Gregorian) solar calendar is the official calendar and the basis for government-designated national holidays: Founding Day of the Republic of China, Women's Day, Youth Day, Children's Day, Armed Forces Day, Teachers' Day (celebrated as Confucius's birthday), Double Ten (National Day), Taiwan's Retrocession Day, and Constitution Day. These days celebrate ROC nationalism and social progress. The official government calendar begins with the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, so the date of "retrocession" of Taiwan to China would be given as the year 34. Some government holidays conveniently coincide with Western and Christian holidays: Founding Day is January 1, and Constitution Day is December 25, Christmas Day.²

Chinese festivals follow the traditional lunar calendar. This calendar is based on twelve lunar months and twenty-four solar divisions and is eleven days shorter than the Western solar calendar. The biggest festival for families in Taiwan is the lunar New Year's Day, also known as Spring Festival. On New Year Taiwanese families try to share a meal of abundance with the entire family as they face a year of new beginnings with new clothes, newly clean homes, new finances, and renewed hope for good fortune. (See Chapter 3 for more information on festivals.) The Chinese almanac gives information about the lunar festivals and information about auspicious and inauspicious activities for each day. For example, the Taiwanese may consult the almanac or a specialist to find out the most auspicious days for opening a new business, getting married, or moving.

To live in harmony with nature, the Taiwanese have used the tradition of *fengshui*. In the natural landscape there is the interaction of *yin* and *yang* and

the flow of *qi*. Humans must live in accordance with those natural forces and not disrupt them when they build new structures. In building temples, homes, or gravesites, the Taiwanese continue to acknowledge the need for humanity and nature to live in harmony. Thus the natural-urban landscape is conceptualized through traditional concepts such as *yin-yang* and *qi*. The Chinese science of *fengshui* (wind and water) is a tradition in which experts attempt to analyze the landscape in order to see the flow of *qi* and the relationships of *yin* and *yang*.³ *Fengshui* experts are consulted to position a building or a grave in a way harmonious with its surroundings and therefore auspicious for its inhabitants (or their descendants). A well-positioned home or temple brings good fortune, wealth, and good crops to the family or community. Poor positioning brings various kinds of ill fortune. The tools of the trade include ancient manuals and a special compass (*luoban*) that incorporate the eight trigrams (*bagua*), the nine primary stars and twenty-eight constellations, the five elements, and the twelve-year and sixty-year cycles. (For more information, see Chapter 6, "Architecture.") Although fully trained traditional experts are few, a generalized knowledge of *fengshui* principles is widespread. Popularizers of *fengshui* are numerous, and the field has become quite lucrative for those consulted in the construction of large building projects. Now interior design and furniture placement have become areas for the application of popularized *fengshui* principles.

MORAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Moral philosophy and political philosophy play central roles in Taiwanese history, just as they have in China since the time of Confucius (born ca. 551 B.C.). The Confucian tradition emphasizes moral cultivation of the individual and harmonious ordering of society. The *Analekts*, written by Confucius's students to represent his teachings, places great value on the moral virtues of benevolence (*ren*) and propriety or ritual (*li*). The more specific virtue of filial piety (*xiao*) is also extolled in the *Analekts* and countless philosophical and popular texts seeking to inculcate this respect and obedience to parents and ancestors. Much of Confucian philosophy resonates with folk tradition and organized religion in Taiwan. The Confucian ideal of filial piety, for example, is ritually expressed in Taiwanese funerals, ancestral shrines, and religious festivals. The Confucian tradition is also strongly hierarchical because it emphasizes the obligations in a hierarchically ordered society centered around the bonds of father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, elders and juniors, and rulers and subjects. The authori-

tarian and patriarchal tendencies of these relationships are increasingly being questioned by the more egalitarian, democratically minded Taiwanese.

The official ideology of the Guomindang Party and the Republic of China came from the father of the ROC, Sun Yat-sen, and his "Three Principles of the People" (*sanshin zhuyi*). Sun Yat-sen was a product of the meeting of East and West. With his Western training, lack of classical Chinese training, and life in Western-influenced ports such as Macau and Hong Kong and abroad, he advocated a form of Chinese revolution that was highly Westernized. His three principles were nationalism, democracy, and the people's livelihood—basically concepts from the modern West sufficiently vague to be embraced by a large portion of the Chinese. Chiang Kai-shek, successor to Sun Yat-sen and leader of the Guomindang government in Taiwan for thirty years, had a less-Westernized background and was more interested in traditional Confucian morality. His New Life Movement advocated four Confucian virtues as a means of strengthening the party and the nation. He defined the classical moral virtues of propriety (*li*), righteousness (*yi*), integrity (*lian*), and a sense of shame (*chi*) in modern terms of regulated attitude, right conduct, clear discrimination, and real self-consciousness. He envisioned a highly disciplined, rational, and frugal lifestyle. The New Life Movement was a failure in China, but its ideas took new forms in ROC educational and social policies.

There has always been a strong Confucian emphasis in the ideal culture supported by the Guomindang government. Chiang Kai-shek's political and moral program reflected the Confucian commitment to virtues as the foundation of leadership and government. The Guomindang Party's early commitment to Confucian culture is seen most visibly in Taipei with its streets renamed for Confucian virtues and its temple celebration for Confucius's birthday on September 28. Textbooks used to teach language, literature, and social studies contain moral tales illustrating the Confucian values of filial obedience, loyalty, and frugality. The Confucian orientation of education in Taiwan goes back to the examination system by which Chinese men were trained and tested in classical texts in order to become government officials. The official examination system entered Taiwan in 1687 and lasted until 1895. Under Japanese rule until 1945, the educational system in Taiwan was carried out in Japanese language to further Japanese colonial rule. When the Guomindang Party came into power in 1949, education became a means of inculcating an ideal of reunified Chinese culture. Teaching was conducted in the Mandarin Chinese dialect, a dialect unknown to most Taiwanese. Inculcation of loyalty to the Republic of China and its party leaders was

accomplished in the schools through civics and history classes and through the rituals of Chinese patriotism with the ever-present ROC flag and portraits of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, President Chiang Kai-shek, and later Presidents Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui. President Lee Teng-hui, the first native Taiwanese president and the first to be directly elected by the people of Taiwan, officially upholds the ideal of reunification with China but also seeks greater democratization and a larger international role for Taiwan.

Although the "Three Principles of the People" and the reunification of Taiwan with China are official ideology of the Republic of China, they are now being challenged openly and with vigor. With growing awareness of Taiwanese identity, many Taiwanese express resentment at an educational system that has taught them about the history and geography of an idealized China and nothing about Taiwan and its local culture. Education and the philosophy of education is in the midst of Taiwanization. Advocates of education reform seek to change the examination system to make it more compatible with a modern, pluralistic society. This would include the elimination of testing on the "Three Principles of the People," which critics say should not be singled out as the only political thought appropriate to modern Taiwan. With the lifting of martial law in 1987 and growing freedom for dissent, advocates of Taiwanese culture and Taiwanese independence have become more vocal and more numerous. The Taiwanese have been embracing their own history and culture, often suppressed by the Guomindang Party to foster a sense of identity with China. Instead of being viewed as inferior, Taiwanese language and customs are now extolled as the culture of a free Taiwan. Especially since the first direct presidential elections in 1996, the Taiwanese have great pride in their embodiment of democratic ideals. Democracy, freedom, and political autonomy are the new ideals for many Taiwanese.

Philosophical interests mirror Taiwanese social changes. In the 1960s during rapid social change and industrialization, intellectuals and students were drawn to translations of existentialists: Sartre, Camus, Kafka, and Heidegger. Some philosophers in Taiwan are engaged in the centuries-old effort to synthesize Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, with Western philosophy. For example, the "contemporary Neo-Confucian synthesis" represented by Tang Chün-Yi and Mou Tsung-san incorporates the idealistic school of Neo-Confucianism (emphasizing texts by Mencius and Wang Yang-ming) and the German philosophers Kant and Hegel. New intellectual trends have mirrored new social concerns. Recently philosophers have begun work on the philosophy of science and technology to understand the place of humanity in the highly technological society in which the Taiwanese now find themselves. Groups silent in the past have found their voices in the more

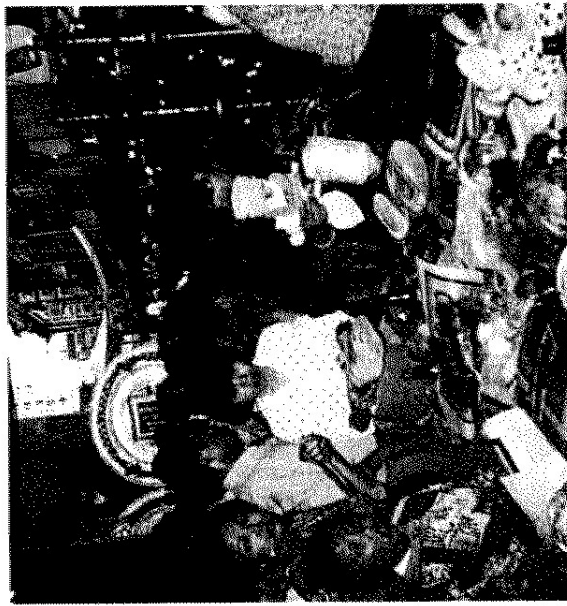
open political and social environment. Environmentalists write essays, songs, and poetry in support of a renewed appreciation and concern for the ecological well-being of the island in the face of nuclear energy and naphtha cracker plants. Feminists such as Lyu Xiulian (Annette Lu) have offered critiques of Confucianism as they involve themselves in Taiwanese politics. The single voice of the "Three Principles of the People" has been replaced with a multitude of voices struggling to define moral and political principles for a modern Taiwan.

POPULAR RELIGION

The renewal of interest and pride in a distinctively Taiwanese culture shows itself clearly in Taiwanese folk religion. Taiwanese folk religion is the oldest of all religions in Taiwan, with the exception of aboriginal religions.⁴ Folk religion is overwhelmingly the most prevalent of all religious activity. The early settlers from Fujian and Guangdong brought with them the devotion, rituals, and images of their villages and countryside. Early immigrant life was tough and difficult. Religious and intellectual elites were not among the immigrant groups that developed early religious life and folk traditions. The immigrants' safe arrival in Taiwan was often marked by the building of simple shrines for their protector deities as a means of repaying them for their safe arrival on the island. Towns formed by immigrants from the same counties created temple traditions that gave them a sense of community in spite of the loss of their older clan traditions. Some of these temples later became the enormous temple complexes in modern Taiwan.

Many deities worshipped in Taiwan have their roots in traditions found throughout China, such as Guanyin Bodhisattva and Lord Guandi. The Chinese Buddhist Guanyin Bodhisattva is worshipped not only by Taiwanese Buddhists but also by Taiwanese who see her as a goddess of mercy in the folk tradition. She is worshipped for saving people from sea wrecks, fires, and illnesses and also for bringing children to women who pray for them. The god Guandi, originally a general of the Three Kingdoms period, has been known in China as a loyal, brave hero and later as a god. In Taiwan his status and perceived power have grown; today he is worshipped as a healing god and a patron of businesspeople. These two figures, Guanyin and Lord Guandi, are the deities most often pictured on the family ancestral shrines.

Most deities of Taiwan are portrayed in religious art and literature with images of bureaucratic power. Gods and goddesses are emperors, empresses, or appointed bureaucratic or military officials who have received imperial

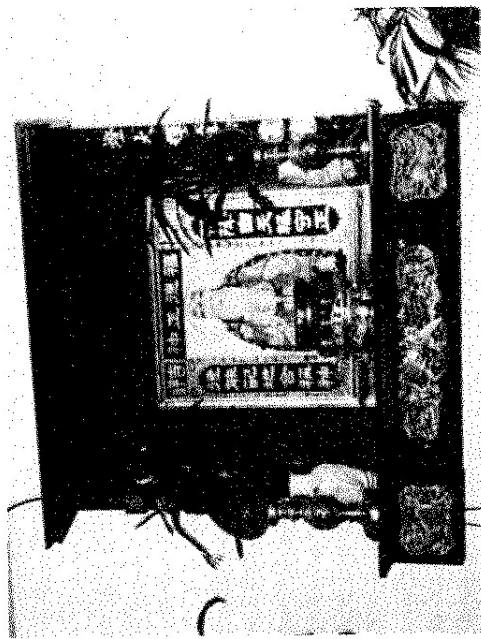


2.2 Offerings to the city god of Taipei: spirit money, liquor, and food.

designations of their status. Gods of folk tradition look like Qing dynasty officials sitting on thrones in their palatial temples. The Stove God, Zaojun, is one of the lower members of this supernatural hierarchy. His image is found in homes, especially during the New Year's Festival. Another popular god, Lord Tudi, sits in small shrines to bring good fortune to the farms, towns, businesses, and surrounding area. The Jade Emperor is at the top of the hierarchy, but he is not all powerful or by any means the most important of Taiwanese gods: He reigns on high, but other deities are emotionally and practically more significant to the Taiwanese.

Other Taiwanese deities are more local spirits or divinized heroes and saints. They are valued for their healing powers and for the protection they afford from plagues and natural disasters. Offerings and promises made to the deities ensure their continued protection. In Taiwanese folk religion, deities are worshipped primarily because of community membership, but individuals may also choose to worship a specific deity because of his or her reputation for providing protection, good fortune, or healing.³

One of the most popular deities of Taiwanese folk religion is the goddess



2.3 Small shrine to the earth god commonly found in businesses.

Mazu. In fact, she is often considered the patron goddess of the island. According to Taiwanese traditions, Mazu grew up in the tenth century as a pious child on the island of Meizhou in Fujian Province. When she was just sixteen she miraculously saved her father and brother from a shipwreck. Miraculous stories of her saving interventions multiplied, and after her death a temple was built in Meizhou. Worship of Mazu eventually spread throughout the southern coastal fishing and farming villages and onward to the Taiwanese frontier. She is affectionately called *Mazu-po*, or "Granny," by the Taiwanese, but she has numerous exalted titles given to her by Chinese emperors. In 1409 she was given the title Tian Fei, or Imperial Concubine of Heaven. Then in 1683 she was further elevated to Tian Hou, or Consort of Heaven.

Mazu temples and festivals are the grandest in Taiwan. One of the Mazu temples in Peikang traces its history back to 1694, when a statue of Mazu from Meizhou was enshrined in gratitude for her protection. Peikang's annual festival for Mazu attracts more pilgrims than any other religious festival in Taiwan. Busloads of pilgrims from Taiwanese communities travel to Peikang to bring their Mazu statues home to the mother temple and to participate in feasting, processions, and rituals. Taiwanese celebrated the 1,000th anniversary of her ascent to heaven in 1987 with an elaborate procession and

special rituals. Since the opening of travel to the mainland, some pilgrims have made religious journeys to the island of Meizhou to worship Mazu at the original mother temple. Bringing back images and incense from older temples in Fujian has been one way in which Taiwanese temples have increased their stature in relation to competing Taiwanese Mazu temples. The ties between Fujian and Taiwanese temples is a complex issue in the current discussion of Taiwanese identity. The connections to Fujianese religions and culture reinforce specifically regional—that is, Taiwanese—culture at the same time that they acknowledge the close cultural ties to China.

Numerous temples in Taiwan are devoted to the Wangye, or Royal Lords—deities who drive away evil spirits and protect against plagues. There are over 700 registered temples to Royal Lords on the island, but the identities of the “lords” and the rituals honoring them vary locally. Some folk traditions tell of a lord who died while trying to stop plague spirits from harming people. The status of Royal Lords in the supernatural hierarchy is low; they are simply ghosts who have been elevated to the status of gods. Their powers have expanded in Taiwanese traditions to include not only preventing plague (no longer of grave concern) but also bestowing general healing and prosperity. The Royal Lords festivals involve the destruction of plague spirits by the burning of wooden or paper boats on which the evil spirits have been placed.⁶

In addition to the gods and goddesses, Taiwanese popular religion also recognizes other spirit-beings, particularly ancestor spirits and ghosts. Gods, ghosts, and ancestor spirits are all closely related to the human realm. Ancestor spirits are simply the deceased and honored ancestors who contributed to a family's patrilineal line. The honoring of ancestors is an important part of most family rituals and religious festivals. One of the highest moral values in Taiwanese society, filial respect (*xiao*), is ritually expressed through offerings to the ancestors and the maintenance of a family shrine for the ancestors' tablets.

Ghosts are the spirits of dead strangers, particularly the dead who died a violent death or have no descendants to make offerings to them. Offerings are given to them to prevent them from causing accidents or illnesses. The seventh lunar month is a period of heightened awareness of the dangers of ghosts because they are allowed out of the underworld to roam freely. Ghosts are an active part of the popular Taiwanese imagination: They appear in fearsome and humorous forms in folk tales, modern horror movies, and popular television series. Ancestor spirits and ghosts are similar to the gods of folk religion because the gods are often ancestors or ghosts who eventually became respected and worshipped for their power in a larger community.

The temples and festivals of Taiwanese folk religion are the foundation of Taiwanese folk arts, puppet and opera theaters, and community identity. Temples are the center of more than just community religious life. They are a place to socialize over tea, to play chess, or to watch Taiwanese opera during festivals. The elaborate festivals for the community temple bring the Taiwanese together in ways that celebrate folk traditions and solidify community leadership, hierarchy, and relationships. Communities strengthen mutual ties by sending representatives to one another's religious processions; representatives include temple leaders, musical bands, statues of the temple's gods, and groups of young men to perform the lion dance. Grand feasting at Taiwanese festivals celebrates and expresses hope for continued good fortune in the community. The temple deities are given offerings of pigs, roosters, wine, tea, fruits, and sweets. (Buddhist-related deities and the celibate goddess Mazu are generally not offered meat or wine.) An abundance of food is offered to the gods and then eaten with family or a larger group. This extravagant feasting at festival time or for weddings or other special social events contrasts to the relatively frugal meals of daily life.

Taiwanese folk religion has changed over the past decades. Temples and festivals have modernized along with society. Religious processions include elaborate lighted floats with modern nightclub entertainers. Moreover, the Guomindang government has worked to simplify and regulate Taiwanese folk religion to reduce waste and expense.⁷ In some temples, such as the popular Xing Tian Gong in northern Taipei, the government's influence has been successful in eliminating elaborate offerings of livestock or spirit money. Also banned are spirit mediums who become possessed by gods and spirits at other temples. At Xing Tian Gong and other “reformed” temples worshippers seek the healing power of the enshrined god through the burning of incense and the making of petitions. Blue-robed volunteers assist and advise visitors needing help with the ritual or interpretation of the written fortunes.

HEALING TRADITIONS

The traditional healing arts of China are based on concepts such as *yin-yang*, the five agents, and *qi*. Traditional Chinese medicine is also based on several millennia of experimentation. *Yin* and *yang* are polar opposites that exist in all of nature; in the human body these two polar opposites must be in harmony for one to be healthy. The five elements of wood, fire, metal, earth, and water are symbolic means of ordering the universe and the human body. The human body is a microcosm of the universe, containing the move-

ment of *yin* and *yang* and the five major internal organs associated with the five elements. In the human body it is *qi*, the life force, that circulates and animates the body; it is the breath as it moves through the respiratory and circulatory system.

Chinese medicine brings order and harmony to a body out of balance and maintains balance for the healthy. The practice of Chinese medicine goes back to traditions recorded in texts beginning in the third century B.C.: the *Nei jing* (ca. 221–207 B.C.). And it is heavily dependent on the influential *Ben cao gang mu* by Li Shizhen of the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368–1644). Based on this ongoing tradition, herbalists in Taiwan prescribe medicine to treat imbalances in their patients, usually by combining plant and animal products into a mixture made into a tea and ingested.

Two other means of bringing harmony back to an unhealthy body are acupuncture and moxibustion. Acupuncturists insert slender needles in order to stimulate *qi* within the body and harmonize the *yin* and *yang* energies. Today the acupuncturists often use mild electrical current at the acupuncture points instead of puncturing the skin in order to achieve the same effect. Moxibustion is based on similar principles; it is the technique of burning Chinese mugwort at certain points along the channels through which the *qi* flows.

Modern Western medicine is widely available in Taiwan. Some Taiwanese continue to value traditional medicine for its ability to maintain health and its gentle means of restoring balance. At the same time many Taiwanese view modern medicine as a necessary means of dealing with major health problems requiring surgery, though often too harsh for less serious and chronic conditions.

The Taiwanese concern for good health is also evident in the resurgence of interest in the practice of *qigong* and the martial arts. In *qigong* practitioners direct the movement of their *qi* in order to heal themselves and increase their energy. Someone who has very strong *qi* is able to use it to heal others as well. *Qigong* is taught through self-help books, in classes, and even on television.

Chinese martial arts make use of the understanding of *yin-yang* and *qi* to strengthen and discipline the body and mind, as well as to prepare for the defense of the person. There are some 100 different kinds of martial arts (*gung-fong*). The gentle art of *taijiquan*, popular with both the young and the old in Taiwan, is now taught at Chinese Culture University and is part of the Asian Games. One often sees its practitioners in the early morning in parks or on temple grounds exercising for good health and emotional calm.

Traditional medicine, *taijiquan*, and *qigong* are health practices derived

from traditional religious and philosophical concepts. They can, though, be practiced independently of one's religious worldview; indeed, these traditions are increasingly used in the West as alternative medical treatments that are gaining increased attention from the Western medical community.

Although truly religious means of healing have declined in popularity with the increased accessibility of modern medicine, they continue to be popular for chronic or incurable conditions. Offerings are made to gods and goddesses known for their healing power along with petitions for help. When healing does occur, the worshipper returns to the temple or shrine with more offerings in order to *hào en*, or repay the deity for its help. Those who worship the Buddhist Guanyin Bodhisattva typically seek her healing power by chanting her name a specified number of times. To repay her for her help, a follower may continue chanting or perhaps become a vegetarian for a period of time.

RELIGION AS FOLK PSYCHOLOGY

Taiwanese gods and goddesses are known for more than just physical healing. Individuals seek divine power to protect their children from harm, to become pregnant, to do well on the college entrance examinations, and to prosper financially. Religion provides much in the way of folk psychology. In Taiwan, religion continues as a popular means of self-help and therapy despite rapid Westernization in most other areas. Western therapeutic models that require revealing personal and family problems to a stranger are quite at odds with Taiwanese family ideals. Religious books on self-cultivation through the Book of Changes, through various forms of meditation, and by traditional divination techniques remain popular. Fortune telling thrives in various traditional forms. Fortune telling is not primarily about predicting the future but, rather, about understanding the factors that influence a person's life and must be understood if one is to make decisions in harmony with the conditions of one's life. Some experts base their conclusions and personal advice on facial physiognomy. Others rely on Chinese astrology to interpret the influence of a person's exact time of birth on his or her present circumstances. In temples, visitors throw crescent-shaped, red divination blocks in order to receive from the gods answers to their questions.⁸ Then a numbered stick may be chosen to determine which numbered fortune should be applied to their problems. The printed text of these "fortunes" is ambiguous, classical Chinese that can be freely applied to questions of marriage, illness, relocation, or a troubled child. Temples have professional interpreters or volunteers who assist in the reading and application of the printed text.

For those inclined to high-tech advice, modernized divination appears in the form of computer software of the Book of Changes or astrological texts.

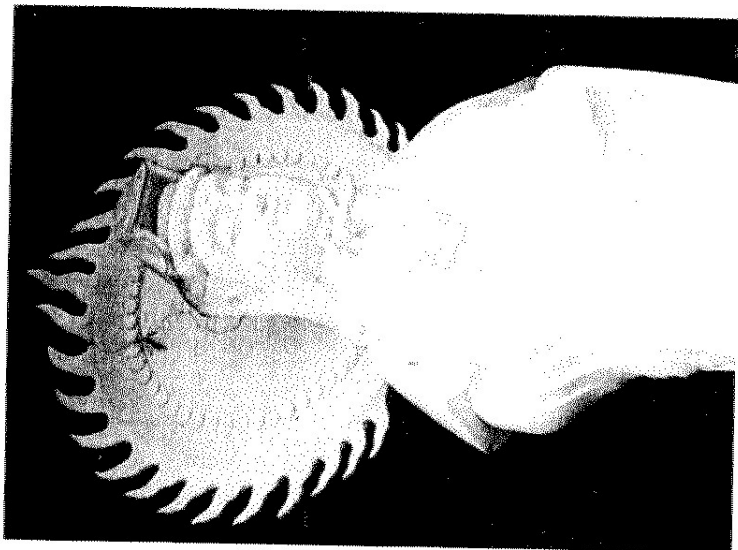
ORGANIZED RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Whereas participation in the festivals and rituals of folk religion generally comes from membership in a community, participation in an organized religious group is a matter of individual decision. There are Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, and syncretic religious sects registered with the government as religious groups.

Taoism as a religion is difficult to define. According to 1994 government figures, 34 percent of Taiwan's population who identify themselves as religious consider themselves Taoist. Often, though, this term is used to describe the vibrant folk religion of Taiwan that draws on ideas, images, and figures from Taoist, Buddhist, Confucian, and regional folk traditions whose temples usually rely on Taoist priests for cyclical rituals. This Taoist-identified folk religion was brought in various forms to Taiwan with Fujian and Guangdong immigrants who worshipped their ancestors and a variety of gods, goddesses, and other spirits. During the Japanese occupation, Taoism was suppressed because it was viewed as supporting Chinese patriotism. Some community temples switched to a Buddhist identity until after the Japanese left. These changes of identity between Taoist and Buddhist temples aided the syncretism of Taoist and Buddhist traditions in the Taiwanese temples. In many Taiwanese temples, Taoist goddesses are worshipped in Buddhist temples while a Buddhist Bodhisattva is worshipped in a Taoist temple. Organized Taoism as a separate religious sect was brought to Taiwan by Zhang Enpu and other Taoist priests of the Zheng Yi sect after 1945. In 1994 there were two Taoist seminaries and 31,950 Taoist priests.

Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan has undergone a renaissance in recent years. About 22 percent of the population identifies itself as Buddhist, but the visibility of Buddhism seems greater than that number would indicate. Books on popular Buddhist masters are on bestseller lists. The numbers of monks, nuns, and temples have risen sharply in the 1980s and early 1990s. Large lay organizations have founded new schools and hospitals. College student groups have become more visible and active on campuses. The growing importance and influence of Buddhist leaders based on the island extends beyond Taiwan to the large number of Taiwanese living in North America and elsewhere. Their followers, however, are not limited to people from Taiwan or even to Asians.

Buddhism in Taiwan has in the course of the twentieth century experi-



2.4 White-robed Guanyin Bodhisattva.

enced radical changes that have eventually led to this renaissance. Before this century, Taiwanese Buddhism was a folk tradition of the frontier. Fully ordained monks were few, and nuns nonexistent. Many of the monks were simply temple caretakers with little Buddhist education. With the Japanese rule of Taiwan came the sudden presence and oversight of Japanese Buddhist schools, which led to new organizations for Taiwanese Buddhist temples and lay Buddhist groups. Then the end of Japanese rule and the end of the Chinese Civil War between the Guomindang and the Communists brought large numbers of prominent Chinese monks to Taiwan with the Guomindang army and government.

Monks and nuns in Taiwan follow Chinese ordination traditions requiring celibacy, the shaving of the head, and numerous other practices in addition to the five precepts recommended for lay Buddhists. With the lay precepts,

Buddhists vow to abstain from killing living beings, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and partaking of alcohol or addictive drugs. The Mahayana form of Buddhism in Taiwan has as its religious ideal the Bodhisattva, who embodies Buddhist wisdom and compassion. Buddhists who take the Bodhisattva vows seek full enlightenment through the cultivation of wisdom and moral perfection and at the same time endeavor to lead all other living beings out of ignorance into enlightenment. The Bodhisattva is both a high moral ideal and an object of devotion to those less advanced on the Buddhist path.

Most Taiwanese Buddhism emphasizes the teachings of two Chinese Buddhist traditions: the Chan (meditation) and the Pure Land traditions. Pure Land teachings focus on the compassion of Amitabha Buddha, whose compassionate power will cause his followers to be reborn in his pure buddhahood after death and to be assured of enlightenment. People chant Amitabha's name as individuals or in groups to call on his compassion and as a form of meditation to calm and concentrate the mind.

The practice of the Chan tradition is primarily sitting meditation (*zhuo chan*), more popularly known in the West by the Japanese terms of Zen and *zazen*. The Chan schools teach that all living beings contain the potential to become buddhas; one merely needs to see into one's own true buddha-nature. Although serious practitioners of Chan are few, the general influence of Chan on Chinese painting, poetry, and other arts is generally appreciated by the Taiwanese.

Buddhist monks and nuns have become popular and influential figures in Taiwan since the early 1980s. Although some Taiwanese believe Buddhist monks are primarily ritual specialists for funerals and death anniversaries, the presence of highly educated and socially engaged monks and nuns has changed that image in the minds of many Taiwanese. This can be seen from the great popularity of the published teachings, biographies, and tapes of leading Buddhist figures.

The most influential Buddhist teachers are still those monks who came to Taiwan with the Guomindang after the Chinese Civil War. Master Hsin Yun is one of the most influential of monks both within Taiwan and internationally. Born in Jiangsu, he came to Taiwan after the communists' victory over the Guomindang in China. He founded the Fo-kuang shan temple and educational institution in order to spread knowledge of Buddhist teachings. Another internationally known monk, Master Sheng Yen, was born near Shanghai and became a monk at the young age of thirteen. Educated in Buddhism first in China, he received a doctorate in Buddhist literature from Ritssho University, a Buddhist university in Tokyo. He heads a Chan

meditation center in New York and monasteries in Taiwan. His organizations have encouraged the study of meditation and the engagement with social issues such as environmental protection.⁹

Master Cheng Yen is the best known of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan and one of the most charismatic leaders of Buddhist social action.¹⁰ Unlike most of the leading monks, she was born in Taiwan—in 1937 near Taichung. She is founder and leader of the Compassionate Relief Society, whose members work in social welfare, healthcare for the poor, assistance for the aged, and disaster relief. This organization's efforts in soliciting bone marrow and blood donations have been very effective. Recently her teachings and the organization's efforts have expanded to include environmental issues. The Compassionate Relief Society is based in Taiwan but has groups in the United States, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere.

Tantric Buddhism has become popular in Taiwan only recently. Exiled Tibetan monks have come to Taiwan and attracted attention. In spring 1997 the leader of Tibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama, visited Taiwan and met with government leaders as well as with members of the Buddhist community. Taiwanese Buddhism has become greatly internationalized. Not only does it have organizations throughout the world; it is also influenced by Buddhists from other traditions.

Among organized religions, the third most popular is the new religion of Yiguandao, with a membership of about 4–5 percent of the total population. This religion teaches a universal truth encompassing the plurality of religious expression. Related to the White Lotus Sect that sought the overthrow of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), Yiguandao worships a Universal God who encompasses all the gods and buddhas of Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. Although Yiguandao emphasizes the unity behind all religions, the language and rituals it uses are distinctively Chinese.¹¹ It promotes personal moral development and places importance on family relationships. Ancestor worship is emphasized and carried out at family shrines. Yiguandao followers are vegetarians and run 90 percent of Taiwan's vegetarian restaurants.

There are other, smaller organized sects in Taiwan. Many of them share with Yiguandao a concern for bringing together pluralistic religious images under one umbrella. Zhajiao, brought to Taiwan in the seventeenth century, is a syncretic school that focuses on the worship of the Buddha and Guanyin Bodhisattva, but also includes aspects of Taoism, Confucianism, and folk traditions. Li-ism, founded by Yang Lainu in the seventeenth century and brought to Taiwan by mainland priests, is another syncretic religion that focuses on worship of Guanyin.

decorations. Christmas in Taiwan has become part of the winter celebrations embracing the winter solstice, New Year's, and the Lantern festival, in all a great boon to commerce.

Other religious groups in Taiwan are somewhat apart from both Taiwanese folk religiosity and Christianity. The Muslim population, around 52,000 in 1994, supports five mosques, two in Taipei and one each in Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Lungkang. The first Muslims in Taiwan were soldiers who arrived with Koxinga, whose descendants became assimilated by non-Muslim Chinese. In 1949 about 20,000 Muslim soldiers and government workers accompanied the Guomindang government to Taiwan. The small Jewish population in Taiwan consists mainly of expatriate families from the United States, Europe, and Israel. Government statistics identify the presence of other religions from foreign countries: Baha'i, first brought to Taiwan in 1954 by an Iranian couple, has about 15,000 members; Mormonism, whose missionaries arrived in Taiwan in 1954 and now have about 22,000 followers; Tenrikyo, introduced to Taiwan during the Japanese occupation, has about 29,000 believers.

Organized religion, community-based popular religion, individualistic self-help traditions, all are going strong in Taiwan. This widespread interest in and support of religion may surprise those who know Taiwan primarily through its high-tech industries and capitalist successes. But the technological and economic successes have in common with much of Taiwanese religion a certain pragmatism and this-worldly orientation. The religious practices in fact celebrate and express hope for the physical and financial well-being of families and communities.

NOTES

1. Statistical information about religious membership and registered religious groups is from the government publication *Republic of China Yearbook, 1997* (Taipei: Kwang Hwa Publishing, 1997).
2. Information on government commemorative days and lunar festivals is found in the *Republic of China Yearbook, 1997*.
3. For a discussion of *fengshui* see Ronald G. Knapp, *China's Traditional Rural Architecture: A Cultural Geography of the Common House* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 108–21. On page 97 he notes the ways in which the practice of *fengshui* in Taiwan differs from the canonical tradition formalized in northern China.
4. Information about the culture of Taiwan's indigenous peoples is included in Chapter 4, "Music and Dance."
5. For a good introduction to Chinese gods and spirits, see Arthur P. Wolf,

Xiaojiao, brought to Taiwan during the Japanese period, focuses on the worship of Confucius, Laozi, the Buddha, and the sixteenth-century founder of Xiaojiao, Lin Zhaoen. Tiandejiao, founded by Xiao Zhangming in China in 1923, was introduced to Taiwan in 1953 but recognized by the government only in 1989. Tiandejiao masters guide followers in meditation and healing in a tradition that brings together elements of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

Although Christianity's influence is obvious in the syncretic sects of Taiwanese religion, only a small number of Taiwanese are Christian. Approximately 6 percent of Taiwanese are Christian, but their influence is significant both religiously and politically. Politically, the influence of Christianity is felt within the ruling Guomindang Party and within the political opposition. The last three presidents and a disproportionate percentage of government officials have been Christian. Yet the Presbyterian Church is seen as having significant political force within opposition politics, especially the Taiwanese independence movement.¹²

Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity first arrived in Taiwan in the early seventeenth century. When the Dutch arrived, around 1624, missionaries from the Reformed Church began to evangelize among the indigenous people in southern Taiwan. Dominican missionaries arrived in northern Taiwan with the Spaniards in 1626 and converted aborigines as well. The Dutch drove the Spanish out of Taiwan; then the Dutch themselves were driven out by Cheng Ch'eng-kung (Koxinga). When Jesuits arrived in Taiwan in 1714, they found few of these Dutch and Spanish converts remaining. In 1860 British missionaries arrived in the Taipei area, and in 1864 the Presbyterian Dr. James L. Maxwell began preaching in southern Taiwan. Then in 1872 the influential Canadian Presbyterian George L. Mackay arrived in northern Taiwan to continue the most successful missionary work—that of the Presbyterians.¹³

During the Japanese occupation Roman Catholicism grew slowly, Protestantism somewhat more rapidly. With the influx of mainlanders with the Guomindang government in 1949, the number of Christian denominations grew from three to about forty in 1955. Today there are fifty-seven Protestant denominations, with the Presbyterian Church by far the largest. An advocate of opposition politics, the Presbyterian Church has been an important participant in Taiwanese independence movements.

In addition to the presence of Christian denominations in Taiwan is the presence of secularized Western Christian rituals and imagery. Like much of East Asia, Taiwan celebrates Christmas with department store sales, Christmas parties, and holiday decorations. Large hotels have joined the retail industry in encouraging the celebration of Christmas with parties and

"Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974). This volume includes other articles concerning Taiwanese folk religion.

6. Paul Katz has studied the *wangye* cults of Taiwan and Zhejiang. His most accessible study of the cult in Taiwan is "Demons or Deities?—The *Wangye* of Taiwan," in *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1987), pp. 197–215.

7. An excellent study of government control of temples in Taiwan is found in Stephan Feuchtwang, "City Temples in Taipei under Three Regimes," in Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, eds. *The Chinese City between Two Worlds* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 263–301.

8. For an interesting study of divination by these crescent-shaped blocks, see David K. Jordan, "Taiwanese *Poe* Divination: Statistical Awareness and Religious Belief," in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1982), pp. 114–18.

9. Because he has an organization in the United States, Master Sheng Yen's teachings are more available in English than those of many Buddhist teachers. A good introduction to Chan Buddhism is Sheng Yen, *Dharma Drum: The Life and Heart of Chan Practice* (Elmhurst, NY: Dharma Drum Publications, 1996).

10. A biography of Master Cheng Yen has been published: See Yu-ling Ching, *Master of Love and Mercy: Cheng Yen* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1995).

11. For a study of Yiguandao, see David K. Jordan, "The Recent History of the Celestial Way: A Chinese Pietistic Association," *Modern China*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1982), pp. 45–62. See also Joseph Bosco, "Yiguan Dao: 'Heterodoxy' and Popular Religion in Taiwan," in Murray A. Rubenstein, ed., *The Other Taiwan: 1945 to the Present* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).

12. See James Tyson, "Christians and the Taiwanese Independence Movement: A Commentary," *Asian Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1987), pp. 163–70.

13. For a thorough but somewhat outdated study of Christianity, see Hollington K. Tong, *Christianity in Taiwan: A History* (Taipei: China Post, 1961). For a more recent study focusing on Protestant churches, see Murray A. Rubenstein, *The Protestant Community of Modern Taiwan: Mission, Seminary, and Church* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991).

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Festivals and Entertainment

HOLIDAYS AND COMMUNITY festivals have long provided a celebratory break in the busy lives of the hardworking Taiwanese. On such occasions the traditionally frugal Taiwanese feast and party while reinforcing family structures and community ties. Calendrical and temple festivals have also supported many of Taiwan's folk arts, namely, Taiwanese opera and puppet theater, specialty foods, and crafts. In recent years the popularity of movies and television has threatened the survival of Taiwan's performing traditions, but operas and puppet theaters have learned that if you can't fight television, you can be on television.

The Taiwanese celebrate three kinds of festivals. First are the official government commemorative holidays based on the modern solar calendar. These mainly honor important events and leaders of the Republic of China. Second are the major lunar festivals known and celebrated by most Taiwanese. Third are the community-based or temple-based celebrations of the birth of regional goddesses or gods, the ascension of temple deities, or other regional or ethnic religious events.

COMMEMORATIVE DAYS

The Republic of China's commemorative days are honored by closing of schools and government offices and by often extravagant government parades and decorations.¹ These days honor the founding fathers and historical events