

## **The Effect of Religions on Civil Society and Democracy in Taiwan**

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My paper will present the debates on the role of religions in the process of democratization in Taiwan. I start with the realization that thanks to the interaction between Taiwanese scholars and their international peers non-Taiwanese scholars have not limited their observation of religion in Taiwan to Christian churches, and that a significant part of the scholarship on religion in Taiwan has paid due attention on Buddhism, Taoism and popular beliefs, as well as new religious movements. This has greatly helped to understand the lived experience of religion in people's social and economic life. However, besides Chiu, Song, Lin, Clart and Jones, Rubinstein and Katz, there is relatively little written about the political dimensions of religions in Taiwan, and even fewer texts in Chinese or Western languages about the impact of religious beliefs and actions on the process of democratization in Taiwan, a somewhat surprising fact in light of the salience of religion and religious identity in the politics of democratic transition and in the public debates within consolidated democracies. The paper will present the texts that did seek to address this issue. It will consider the literature on the impact of Taiwan's different religious institutions, beliefs, and practices, during two different historical periods: the transition to democracy, and the phase of democratic consolidation. It will present the early scholarship of Hsiao, Chiu, Lin, Gold, Katz, and Rubinstein, and note the particular emphasis on the key role of the I-kuan-tao and the Presbyterian Church in the extension of the democratic franchise and the affirmation of Taiwan's right to self-determination. The presentation of this period will also include the scholarship of Chang and Chu, Fetzer and Soper, Ham on the controversies about the views attributed to Confucianism on democratic values. Then it will discuss the more recent work of Weller, Schak, Cheng, Brown, Laliberté, Kuo, Madsen, and Shih, on the role of Buddhist organizations and new religious movements on the process of democratic consolidation. I will underline in this literature a meta-narrative according to which religion is a building block to the strengthening of civil society, and therefore that religious actors can act as positive agents for democratization. I will offer a critique of that argument by noting that some of these religious actors have been at best lukewarm supporters to the process of

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transition to democracy. In addition, I will note that the literature on the effects of religion on the growth of civil society and democracy needs to pay attention to two important dimensions of democratic life. First, more needs to be done about the variety of approaches adopted by different religions on the social and economic dimensions of democratization, namely the expansion of the welfare state, the extending of rights to domestic workers and immigrants, and other issues such as social inequalities and exclusion. Secondly, there should be more research about the attitude of religions in Taiwan in relation to gender issues, on a variety of issues ranging from gender roles and inequalities to same-sex marriage.