

Studies on Contemporary China



# CHINESE POLITICAL CULTURE

1989-2000

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An East Gate Book

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## Religion and Society in China and Taiwan

*Wenfang Tang*

This chapter addresses two questions. The first concerns religiosity in China and Taiwan; that is, who believes in what religion. The second concerns the manner in which religion affects one's political and economic attitudes. To answer the first question, I will examine the number of followers of each religion, the religious values associated with each religion, and the geographic, social, and economic characteristics of the followers of each religion. For the second question, I will discuss the impact of religion and religious values on political obedience, economic efficacy, and attitudes toward money. By comparing China and Taiwan, one can gain insights into the development of religions and their role under different political and economic systems with a common cultural tradition.

### Data

I will use survey questions from both Taiwan and the mainland in this study. Questions for Taiwan are from the 1990 Taiwan Social Change Survey, conducted by Professor Chiu Hei-yuan at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica.<sup>1</sup> This was a probability sample of the whole society drawn from household registers, both urban and rural, but dominated by the largely urban population of Taiwan. The survey includes

2,531 respondents and over 240 questions. It was managed by social scientists with Ph.D.s from leading universities in Taiwan and the U.S. The interviewers were social science students with formal training in social science and research methods.

Questions for the mainland are from the 1992 China Urban Social Survey, conducted by Yang Guansan of the Economic System Reform Institute of China (ESRIC). This survey was based on a probability sample of 2,395 respondents in 44 cities, ranging in population from a low of 93,800 (Zhangshu) to a high of seven million for Shanghai. Within cities, there was random selection first of neighborhood districts and then, within neighborhoods, of individual respondents as drawn from the household registration system. To assure accurate comparison, this survey repeated all the key questions and background questions used in the above-mentioned 1990 Taiwan survey. The survey methods utilized by ESRIC helped insure response validity. In the self-administered questionnaires (in the presence of an interviewer), respondents were asked not to give their names and were assured that their answers would not be identified. After Deng Xiaoping's southern tour advocating further reform, the generally open political atmosphere on the mainland in 1992 encouraged the respondents to speak out even on the more sensitive political questions.

In addition to detailed information on the respondent's background (education, age, party identification, gender, income, occupation, etc.), both surveys included questions on the respondent's religion, attitudes toward various religious values, the role of religion in society, and religious activities. They also included questions on political compliance, economic efficacy, and attitudes toward money. These parallel questions provide an excellent opportunity to compare the role of religion in the two societies.

One possible source of sample bias is that the mainland survey addresses the urban population only while the Taiwan sample takes in both urban and rural populations. This difference leads to a higher level of education and higher percentages of professionals and administrators on the mainland than in Taiwan. Another possible source of sample bias is that essential information for the mainland study was drawn from the household registration system, which did not include the large urban "floating" population, consisting mostly of rural surplus laborers of less education and in lower occupational groups. A comparison of education levels between the sample and the population indicates the upward bias