

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It was in the chilly morning of 3 March 2004, hundreds of men and women nervously waited in a magnificent ballroom. Outside the building, more than ten thousand men and women patiently lined up in preparation to welcome their distinguished guests. When presidential candidate Lian Zhang and vice presidential candidate James Song arrived, the crowd's emotion exploded with thundering applause and repeated shouts of: "*Lian-Song, Dongswan!*" (which means "winning the election" in Taiwanese dialect.) Joyful tears ran down on their faces like waterfalls. The solemn host rose and made an inspiring welcome speech. He vehemently accused President Chen Shui-bian for his miserable economic performance, disasterous social policies, acrimonious ethnic maneuvers, violations of religious rights, sabotage of democracy, and provocation of war in the Taiwan Straits. Fists clenched, he spoke loudly and with exaggerated body language. Bitterness, anger, and frustration permeated the air and the crowd's mind. "Only Lian Zhang can save us from these political, social, and economic disasters," he emphatically concluded. During his speech, the crowd echoed every sentence the host said with deafening applause and "*Lian-Song, Dongswan.*"¹

This might have been any of the ordinary campaign gatherings during an ordinary election in an ordinary democracy. But this campaign was anything but ordinary. The hall was not at the headquarters of any political party but at the center of a newly constructed Buddhist temple worth US\$ 300 million. The emotional men and women were not devoted party workers or representatives, but monks, nuns, and sincere believers of the otherwise tranquil temple. And the host was certainly not an ordinary convention organizer, but the abbot of the largest Buddhist organization in central Taiwan, proclaiming a membership of over five-hundred thousand.

The scene is changed to a different place and a different time. On 25 May 2006, President Chen Shui-bian attended the Sixth National Prayer Breakfast, hosted by the major Christian denominations in Taiwan. He seemed a little bit disoriented when he stood among the jubilant pastors on the platform. He had reason to be disoriented, because his son-in-law was just arrested for insider trading, his wife was implicated in a bribery case, and he himself was involved in a looming case of corruption.

The convention host, Presbyterian pastor Gao Jun-ming, walked to the podium to deliver a sermon and pray for the president. President Chen squeezed a comforting smile on his face. After all, Pastor Gao was a long-time and ardent supporter of him. Their relationship was as cozy as those of American evangelist Billy Graham and President Richard Nixon—at least before the Watergate scandal broke out. The president expected to hear something cheerful in the pastor's prayer and sermon. To the president's great dismay, however, Pastor Gao looked straight into the president's eyes when he sternly quoted, word by word, from I Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The smile on the president's face suddenly vaporized as Pastor Gao went on elaborating upon the verse. After the sermon, the president emotionlessly delivered a short speech without responding to Pastor Gao's comments and left the convention in a hurry.²

When religions resurface elsewhere in national politics and world politics of the twenty-first century, we might want to ask as well: does religion matter in Taiwan's democracy? The two aforementioned scenes seem to provide an affirmative answer to this question. However, despite voluminous research on Taiwanese religions in both Chinese and English literature, little of that research deals with the subject of the relationship between religion and state; even less discusses the transformation of this relationship during and after the political democratization of the 1980s. No study has yet compared the relationships between democracy and all major Taiwanese religions. Therefore, we have not been able to answer the following important empirical and theoretical questions about the relationship between religion and democracy in general and in Taiwan in particular: If religions matter at all in Taiwanese democracy, do Taiwanese religions contribute to or hinder the establishment and consolidation of democracy? Do different religions and religious groups support different political parties? Do various religions and religious groups have varying support for democratic values and behavior? And are Christians more democratic than believers of traditional Chinese religions?

In the process of answering these questions, this book will make three original contributions to the study of the relationship between religion and democracy in general and in Taiwan in particular. First, it provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of these relationships by examining the democratic theology and democratic ecclesiology of religions as well as their interaction with the state. Second, in contrast to the lack of comparative studies in current literature, it compares nearly all major religions and religious

groups in Taiwan. Finally, it utilizes both case studies and statistical methods in order to verify theoretical hypotheses and to correct misperceptions in the current literature based solely on case studies.

THEORIES OF RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

Many scholars regard democracy as incompatible with religious revivalism.³ The incompatibility thesis is built on one or more of the following elements: democracy cherishes pluralism, accountable leadership, tolerance, compromise, separation of state and religion, peace, gender equality, and respect for human rights, while religious revivalism, particularly religious fundamentalism, espouses a dominant value system, charismatic leadership, intolerance, dogmatism, unity of state and religion, violence, male chauvinism, and disrespect for human rights (Marty and Appleby 1991: 817–835).

Major historical and contemporary events seem to support the incompatibility thesis. St. Augustine's "correction of heresy" was used to justify the burning of witches and sorcerers in the Middle Ages. The "Holy War" was used by Crusaders to justify the slaughter of Muslims, heretics, and pagans. Six million Jews were massacred by the Nazis because of their ancestors' alleged religious crime of crucifying Jesus, although Hitler had planned to abolish all religions including Christianity (Steigmann-Gall 2003). The "White Man's Burden" was regarded as a sacred mission to save the people of the Third World through military, cultural, and/or economic means. In Asia, the integration of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism with politics prevented the birth of democratic ideas in China for 2,500 years (Zhang Hao 1990). In prewar Japan, state Shintoism helped deify the emperor and sanctify the military's attempt to create an Asian coprosperity zone (Hardacre 1989). But it has been the global ascendance of religious fundamentalism since the 1980s that has elevated the incompatibility thesis to the academic altar.

In 1993, Samuel P. Huntington warned of a "clash of civilizations" in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*. Although Islamic fundamentalism seemed to be his major concern, Huntington also cited evidence of severe conflicts among and within the eight major civilizations (Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African) sponsored by religious fundamentalists (Huntington 1993: 26). The September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States seem to give credence to his thesis and contributed to worldwide sales of the book version of "The Clash of Civilizations" (Huntington 1996). In the meantime, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences along with the McArthur Foundation provided generous funding to the Fundamentalism Project (Marty and Appleby 1991; 1993a; 1993b; 1994; 1995), documenting the history, environment, strategies, and development of various fundamentalist movements. In general, the conclusion of the Fundamentalism Project seems to reconfirm the incompatibility thesis.

Borrowing heavily from the findings and conclusions of the Fundamentalism Project, Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan define religious fundamentalists as “militant and highly focused antagonists of secularization. They call a halt to the centuries-long retreat of religious establishments before secular power. They follow the rule of offense being better than defense, and they often include the extreme option of violence and death.” Furthermore, “a fundamentalist ‘family trait’ is “the defense and consolidation of patriarchy as the divine plan for the moral ordering of society” (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003: 2, 11).

However, the incompatibility thesis has encountered theoretical, empirical, and philosophical criticisms. Many theoretical and empirical works have suggested important linkages between democracy and religion in general. In the early nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber explained the establishment and consolidation of American democracy in terms of Protestant theology and practices (Tocqueville 1969; Weber 1978). The establishment of democracy further led to the “democratization of American Christianity” in the first fifty years of the new country (Hatch 1989).

The connection between democracy and religion attracted renewed interest from academia in the 1970s when Catholic democracies in Latin America and Southern Europe fell like dominoes. From these and other cases, scholars concluded that democracy seems to prosper better in Protestant countries than in Catholic, Confucian, or Muslim countries. Nevertheless, in the “Third Wave of Democratization,” religion, especially the Catholic Church, played a critical role in establishing democracy in Poland, South Korea, the Philippines, and Latin American countries, while some Confucian countries and most Muslim countries continued to resist democratization (Huntington 1991; Ostrom 1997; Jelen and Wilcox 2002; Gill 1998; Monsma and Soper 1997; Diamond and Plattner 2001; Tamadonfar 2002). Rejecting the secularization thesis he championed in the 1960s, Peter L. Berger (1967; 1999: 14) has recently been impressed by the compatibility of Evangelism and democracy in many Third World countries and now argues that “the Evangelical resurgence is positively modernizing in most places where it occurs. . . . [It serves] as schools for democracy and for social mobility.”

Even regarding Muslim countries, Abdou Filali-Ansary (2001: 40–41) points out that Islam has several features that are compatible with modern democratic values, such as utilitarianism, individualism, egalitarianism, republicanism, and rule-based governance. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll (1996) argue that Islamic fundamentalism is not necessarily incompatible with democracy; it depends more on strategic calculations of major political and religious groups than on theological doctrines or values. Mark Tessler (2002) has found statistical evidence that, contrary to American academic perceptions, there is strong popular support for democracy in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria, where fundamentalist movements are significant political forces. Steven Ryan Hofmann (2004) surveys Muslims in eight

other countries and reaches a similar conclusion that Islam and democracy are compatible at the micro level.

Philosophical challenges to the incompatibility thesis are represented by the research of social philosopher José Casanova (1994) and political philosopher Peter Berkowitz (1999). Casanova argues that the “deprivatization of religion” can contribute to democracy when religion gets involved in politics to protect all modern freedoms and rights, to question and contest the absolute lawful autonomy of the secular spheres, to protect the traditional lifeworld from administrative or juridical state penetration, and to open up modern discursive ethics (Casanova 1994: 57–58). After reexamining the works of Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Mill, Berkowitz (1999) argues that these political philosophers regarded liberal institutions and virtues as inseparable, and that religion, among other private institutions such as family, school, and social organizations, could play a critical role in promoting those virtues that facilitate the smooth functioning of democracy.

The question remains, however, how does religion actually influence democracy or vice versa? Most literature tends to focus on the theological side of religion. Protestant theology emphasizes “covenant,” “the priesthood of all believers,” and “the freedom of conscience,” based on which government accountability, individual freedom, and political equality in modern democracy are built (Locke 1683, 1993; Morgan 1965; Shields 1958; Paine 1776, 1995; Witte 2000; Eidsmoe 1987). By further mixing Catholic teaching with Marxism, the progressive Catholicism that emerged after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) advocated human rights and launched the Latin American liberation theology (Sigmund 1990; Gutiérrez 1988). These Protestant and progressive Catholic theologies have provided religious legitimacy to democratic movements in various countries.

Important as it is, theology alone does not necessarily lead to behavioral change on the part of believers (Gill 2001: 128). There may be limits to the political influence of the clergy’s public speech (Greenberg 1999; Djupe and Gilbert 2000). Furthermore, even if liberal theology may explain the establishment of democracy, it still needs to find expression in concrete institutional forms in order to explain the consolidation of democracy. After all, democracy is not just a system of ideas but also a way of life.

When Max Weber and Alexis de Tocqueville analyzed Protestantism, they discussed not only the theological component but also the institutions that translated abstract democratic theology into concrete democratic practices. For instance, in America, abstract democratic theological arguments like the idea of a covenant with God, freedom of conscience, the priesthood of all believers, and original sin all found concrete expression in institutional forms within many Protestant churches. These include the protection of the freedom of speech, congregationalism, and checks and balances between the clergy and the laity (Clark 1994; Nettels 1963; Schlesinger 1968). In this book, I call a theology that includes key components of democratic theories a

democratic theology, and a religious institution that resembles key institutions of democracy a *democratic ecclesiology*. The exact criteria for what constitutes a democracy will be elaborated further on.

The differentiation between the ideational level (democratic theology) and the institutional level (democratic ecclesiology) is useful in explaining the relationship between religion and democracy in Taiwan. Fundamental to a democratic theology are the promotion of human rights, the theological transformation from spiritual equality to political equality, and an assertive attitude toward the relationship between religion and state. Key elements of a democratic ecclesiology include the rules and norms that provide institutional checks on religious leaders, relatively equal power between clergy and laity, and the autonomy of local religious organizations.

Theories of social capital have advocated the importance of civic organizations to the development of democracy. Civic organizations cultivate values of trust, duty, norms, and social networks, which are essential to the functioning of democracy (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993; Wuthnow 2002). However, both logical and empirical gaps seem to exist between social capital theories and theories of democracy. Logically speaking, do the values of trust, duty, norms, and social networks necessarily lead to the democratic values of checks and balances, regular leadership turnover, voter sovereignty, fair election, freedom of speech, and other democratic values? Empirically speaking, the proliferation of civic organizations in modern authoritarian societies, such as prewar Japan and contemporary Singapore, not only failed to contribute to democracy but, on the contrary, helped to consolidate their authoritarian regimes. Therefore, in addition to the provision of social capital, civic organizations (including religious ones) must also cultivate norms and rules that are directly related to the functioning of a democracy.

According to the aforementioned criteria, one would suspect that most Taiwanese religions—folk religions, Daoism, and Buddhism—lack either a democratic theology or a democratic ecclesiology to exhort their believers to respect democratic values and to learn democratic behavior. To varying degrees, they are all affected by the traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism. Many scholars have suggested that certain characteristics of Confucianism are inimical to the functioning of democracy: dependence on authority and hierarchy; reliance on a benevolent ruler rather than on governing institutions; fear of chaos; loyalty to collectivity over individual rights; emphasis on consensus over open conflicts to resolve disagreements; low social trust toward out-groups; and governance based on particularism instead of universalism (Pye 1985; Ling and Shih 1998; T. Shi 2000; Hwang 1988; Rozman 2002; Solomon 1971).⁴ Most Taiwanese Christians, with the exception of Presbyterians, are also weak in democratic theology and ecclesiology, although they might have a head start in these two analytical dimensions because they have been less affected by traditional authoritarian culture. All of these aspects might explain the low level of commitment

to democratic values shown by Taiwanese elites and by the general public almost two decades after the lifting of martial law (T. Shi 2001).

A few scholars have noted the connection between religion and democracy in Taiwan. But most of them have either concentrated on one particular religion or a few sects of a religion, or have not fully captured the significant transformation of the relationship between religion and state after the Democratic Progressive Party took over the government in 2000. In particular, they have focused more on the external relations between religion and democracy than on the interaction between democratization and the internal institution/theology of religion, which this book will systematically examine and compare.⁵

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of this book consists of both “between-systems” (religions) and “within-system” (religious groups) comparisons.⁶ The between-systems design allows us to find systemic similarities or differences among different religions. The within-system design enables us not only to find variation among religious groups but also to make comparisons across religions. Therefore, a combination of between-systems and within-system research designs may verify general theoretical arguments across both religions and religious groups without the deficiencies that arise when each design is employed alone (Przeworski and Teune 1970).

Following the between-systems design, I select Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and folk religions for comparison. Buddhists constitute about 28.3% of the Taiwanese population; folk religion believers, 25.5%; Daoists, 21.3%; and Christians (including Catholics), 5%; together they constitute 78.1% of the population.⁷ For within-system design, I choose the largest and/or the most representative sects of each religion. In Buddhism, I include the Buddhist Compassion Relief Ciji Foundation (about 4,000,000 members), Buddha Light Mountain (*Foguangshan*, about 1,000,000 members), Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagushan*, about 1,000,000 members), and Zhongtai Zen (Chan) Monastery (about 400,000 members). The representative cases in Christianity include the Presbyterians (about 227,000 members), Baptists (about 24,000 members), and Local Church (*Jiaohui Juhuisuo*, about 91,000 members). Within Daoism and folk religions, Way of Unity (Yiguandao, about 1,200,000 members) is chosen as a representative case, although it is a syncretic religion of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam. The Mazu belief (about 6,000,000 worshippers) is a syncretic folk religion of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism with a strong Daoist flavor. Other smaller sects of each religion are also briefly discussed for illustration.

As other scholars have found, the aforementioned numbers of believers and worshippers are usually exaggerated and can be best treated as references only. The Buddhist numbers are estimates based on my interviews with these

Buddhist organizations and cross-checked by other sources. The Buddhist Association of the Republic of China reported the total number of Taiwanese Buddhist believers to be 4,485,000 in 1999 (Ministry of the Interior 2001: 3–4, 13). The basic qualification of Buddhist membership, which the Ministry of the Interior adopts, is to have completed the initiation ceremony of “taking refuge in the three gems” (*guiyi sanbao*)—Buddha, Buddhist law, and the clergy. Age qualification varies across Buddhist sects. In 1999, the Ministry of the Interior reported a much smaller number (187,260) of Taiwanese Buddhists who had completed the three-gem ceremony (Ministry of the Interior 2000: 28).⁸ Apparently, most Buddhist organizations include not only initiated members but also volunteers, worshippers, or family members in their membership rosters.

Like the Buddhist figures, the numbers for Christian believers are not very reliable either. The Presbyterians, the Local Church, and the Bread of Life Church (*Lingliangtang*) all accept teenagers or young children for baptism, while the Baptists set a higher age for baptism. But since these Christian denominations belong to “strict religions” in the sense that they impose a certain level of discipline on their members, the Christian numbers are more reliable than the Buddhist ones. They could be more influential politically than their Buddhist counterparts (Campbell 2000). In 1999, the Ministry of the Interior reported the number of baptized Christians to be 378,025 (Ministry of the Interior 2003: 28).

Members of Yiguandao usually require believers to complete the initiation rite of “transmitting the three treasures” (*chuan sanbao*)—pointing to the mystic portal, the hand seal, and the true sutra.⁹ Some local branches also include visitors and family members in the membership rosters that they report to the Yiguandao headquarters. The Mazu belief has no initiation rite at all. Therefore, most believers are considered worshippers. Some believers join the affiliated but independent organizations of Mazu temples.

The research methodology of this book consists of two parts: case studies and statistical analyses.¹⁰ For case studies, in addition to secondary sources, we conducted more than seventy interviews with the clergy, theologians, senior lay believers, and ordinary lay believers of these religions and religious groups. Interview questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions divided into three categories: democratic theology, democratic ecclesiology, and interaction with the state. These three categories of questions overlap substantially with Robert Dahl’s criteria of democracy and Robert D. Putnam’s criteria of a civic community. These criteria include: elected major officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and associated autonomy (Dahl 1989; Putnam 1993). Questions posed to respondents were almost the same, differing only in terms of respective religious jargons. Each interview usually took about one hour. Many of the names of respondents and their branch organizations have been modified in this book in order to protect their anonymity.

In addition to the case study method, this book also employs statistical methods to verify the observations and arguments raised in these case studies. The statistical results not only confirm some qualitative arguments, and reject others; they also generate some surprising findings of their own. These methodological advantages confirm Evan S. Lieberman's (2005: 435) promulgation of his "nested analysis" for comparative research by combining case studies with statistical analysis. The merit of this methodological combination is that "not only are the advantages of each approach combined, but also there is a synergistic value to the nested research design." The details of the statistical methodology are explained in chapter 5.

CHANGING POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

In order to analyze the relationships between religion and the state in Taiwan, it is useful to understand the political and religious environment in which these relations are embedded. This section briefly compares the political and religious environment of the martial law period (1949–1987) and the post-martial law period (1987–present).¹¹ The comparative criteria are: political regime, religious community structure, state control of religion, religious response, and cohesion within a religious group. The major differences are summarized in table 1.1.

Before explaining the differences, a few caveats about the division of the two periods are in order. First, the change in the political and religious environment in Taiwan was a progressive process that culminated in the lifting of martial law in 1987. The lifting of martial law brought about dramatic legal and normative changes in the relationships between the state and religious organizations as well as within religious organizations. Second, there are substantial variations among religions as well as among sects of the same religion with respect to these criteria. But the political regimes do set broad constraints on the behavior of the state and religious organizations.

TABLE 1.1 Changing Political and Religious Environment

	MARTIAL LAW PERIOD (1949–1987)	POST-MARTIAL LAW PERIOD (1987–PRESENT)
Political Regime	Leninist state	liberal democracy
Religious Community	semi-corporatist	pluralistic
State Control of Religion	strong	weak
Religious Response	submissive or isolationist	multiple choices
Religious Cohesion	strong	weakening

After being defeated by the Chinese communists in China in 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT, the Nationalist Party) government found sanctuary in Taiwan. Upon arriving in Taiwan, the KMT government declared martial law on the island in order to stop the communist advance. The martial law government was not an ordinary authoritarian government, as seen in other developing countries. It was a Leninist state in the sense that the political party (KMT) and the state formed a symbiosis with an overlapping leadership at the top of both bureaucracies.¹² Once the party-state was established in 1950, it began to penetrate the society by setting up corporatist associations and implanting party cells in all large social organizations.¹³

However, there were substantial variations of party-state control across social organizations and within each category of social organization.¹⁴ The KMT state's control of the religious community reveals similarities and differences. Under corporatist law, only one national umbrella religious association was allowed to exist for each religion to represent the interests of its clergy and believers. For instance, at the national level, there were the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (*Zhongguo Fojiashui*), the Daoist Association of the Republic of China (*Zhonghuaminguo Daojiashui*), the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (*Tianzhujiao Zhongguo Zhujiaotuan*), and the Confucian Association of the Republic of China (*Zhongguo Rujiaohui*). No other similar associations of the same religion were allowed to challenge these state-sponsored associations. Although most Christian denominations had their own national associations, such as the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the Chinese Baptist Convention, and the Local Church, there was no national umbrella association for all Christian denominations. This was probably due to the decentralized nature of Protestantism and the foreign connections of most Taiwanese denominations. The KMT government probably did not want to upset these Western Christian denominations, whose missionaries were powerful lobbying groups in the United States, by imposing a state-controlled umbrella organization on them.

Under the KMT regime, the state was able to control religious groups through both formal and informal means. In addition to general martial law regulations restricting free movement, information, and speech, the major formal instrument was the Law Regulating Temples and Shrines (LRTS, *jiandu simiao tiaoli*) enacted in 1929 in China. The LRTS enabled the state to regulate religious activities and punish religious leaders if they broke the law. Strangely enough, the LRTS did not apply to Christians, Catholics, and practitioners of folk religions. Possible explanations include the fact that the first two presidents of the nation were Christians, that Taiwan relied heavily on American military support, and that Taiwan needed the symbolic support from the Vatican in the international community. In contrast, folk religions were too small and numerous to attract the eyes of the bureaucrats.

The KMT government tried several times to tighten its control over religion through attempted revisions of the LRTS. However, all attempts failed

due to strong opposition from the major religious organizations. The major controversy was less about the external political relationship between religion and the state but more concerned with the state's attempt to put lay believers above the clergy in the governing structure of religious organizations. Since these changes would seriously undermine religious freedom and the vested interest of the clergy, religious groups vehemently opposed these revisions (Y. Ye 2000: 188–199).

More effective forms of state control over religion came from various state intelligence-gathering agencies, such as the local police, the Garrison Command, the Investigation Bureau, the military intelligence office, and the National Security Bureau. They often paid surprise visits to religious leaders involved in controversial political activities. Some religious leaders were barred from traveling abroad, including President Jiang Jie-shi's court pastor, Rev. Zhou Lian-hua, who was involved with the Presbyterian political movement in the early 1970s. The more serious offenders were put in jail without the protection of due process of law.

In addition to the supervision of state bureaucracy over religious organizations, the KMT also implanted party cells in large religious organizations. These party cells assumed at least three functions: to recruit party members from within the religion, to monitor religious organizations' political activities, and to elect party members to lead national religious organizations. The KMT central coordination center was the First Office of the Social Works Department.¹⁵ In general, party members in religious organizations were not very active in recruiting other believers or clergy to join the KMT. It just seemed awkward to implement such a secular task in a spiritual environment. Thus, political monitoring seemed to be the major function of the KMT cells in religious organizations, which individual party members usually did in secret. Unlike in other social groups, the KMT did not set up tight and active party organizations in religious groups. There was a loose party caucus (*dangtuan*) set up in the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China, but no smaller party cells existed in the monasteries or temples. No evidence shows that formal party organizations existed within Christian denominations. Individual party members performed only the function of political monitoring, not of recruitment or of election campaigning.¹⁶

Because of the dual supervision of the state and party machinery, most religious organizations during the martial law period had no choice but to adopt either a submissive position or a strictly isolationist attitude toward the state. During national holiday celebrations and in national representative bodies, patriotic priests and believers dressed in different religious garb were routinely put on display. When the opposition movement questioned the government's legitimacy, some religious groups would openly defend martial law and eulogize the supreme political leaders as being bestowed with a heavenly mandate. Most of the religious groups, however, decided to uphold the principle of absolute separation of state and religion. Their teaching and

learning concentrated on spiritual aspects and they rarely commented on political issues, particularly those related to democracy. Even where their religious activities involved social welfare, they refrained from interacting with the state as much as possible.

Finally, due to the authoritarian cultural and political environment, most religious organizations were able to maintain internal cohesion through authoritarian norms and structures. Religious leaders with charismatic personalities or perceived magic powers governed their religious groups in a way similar to the methods by which the supreme political leaders led the Taiwanese.

Taiwan's political and religious environment transformed in the early 1980s when the supreme political leader's health was deteriorating. The opposition movement made great progress in attracting supporters by combining democratic ideals with Taiwanese nationalism. Under pressure both from a formidable opposition movement and from the Democrat-controlled American Congress, which repeatedly put pressure on the KMT government to improve its human rights record or face the termination of arms sales, the KMT government lifted martial law in 1987.¹⁷ Subsequently, most laws and regulations violating human rights were rescinded, and new laws promoting human rights were instituted. Most important among these new laws were the revised Law on the Organization of Civic Groups (*renmin tuanti zuzhifa*) and the Law on Assembly and Parade (*jihui youxingfa*), which guaranteed Taiwanese the same freedom of association and movement as citizens in other democratic countries. This meant that the increasing pluralism of religious organizations that began in the early 1980s was finally legally endorsed by the state. The corporatist structure of religious groups soon yielded to the mushrooming of all kinds of national religious association independent from the old religious associations.

In the post-martial law regime, the state bureaucracy has tried to maintain its close supervision of religious groups, but its intentions and methods are very different from those of the martial state. The increased freedom of association brought about the burgeoning of "new religions" (*xinxing zongjiao*), which combine the traditional religious practices with the personal ideologies of new religious leaders. At the same time, however, sexual and financial scandals in these unregulated new religions have been exposed from time to time. Partly due to the concern over their collective image and partly due to strong competition for membership and financial donations from these new religions, most religious groups support the government's effort to regulate all religions.¹⁸ But the content of the proposed law aroused heated debate not only between the state and religious organizations but also among the principal religions concerning accounting procedures, property management, building construction, and internal governing structures. After decades of negotiation, the bill has been watered down to keep state intervention at a minimum while allowing maximum religious freedom.

Nevertheless, the bill has still not been approved by the legislature due to the conflicting and ever-changing demands of various religious groups. Meanwhile, the state has been very reluctant to intervene in religious affairs unless serious crimes are committed.

With the lifting of martial law, party cells in religious organizations lost their political legitimacy and political monitoring function. Even the campaigning function has now become counterproductive as most religious groups assert their political autonomy and are resentful of an interventionist state.

The increased political autonomy of religious groups is evidenced in several ways. With the help of economic prosperity, new religious groups have mushroomed outside the state-controlled religious associations (Katz 2003: 395; Paper 1996: 105). Religious support of the KMT government and politicians has declined. Many religious leaders now receive politicians from various political parties. State and local elites compete for votes by supporting local religious traditions (Katz 2003: 412). In turn, religious organizations solicit support from different political parties in order to maximize government funding for religious affairs. More and more religious organizations support candidates to run against KMT candidates. Furthermore, some clergy run for public offices under different party banners. However, many religious organizations decide to maintain their isolationist position or maintain equal distance from all different political forces.

It was not clear whether or not the religious belief of different political leaders had a significant impact on these changes of state-religion relationships. Jiang Jie-shi was a regular churchgoer but kept all religions on a tight leash. No religion or religious denomination received privileged treatment from the government.¹⁹ Although his son, Jiang Jing-guo, was also a Christian, there was very little evidence revealing his religiosity. Li Deng-hui was a devoted Presbyterian, but he did not forget his duty as the national leader to pay regular visits to holy places of various religions and participate in their religious ceremonies. Chen Shui-bian was an initiated member of Yiguandao. Nevertheless, he never publicly acknowledged his religious belief. Probably because of the syncretistic nature of Yiguandao, Chen has paid his respects to all religions on their important holidays. In sum, there were complaints about the interventionist state by various religious groups over the decades, but there were few grudges about religious discrimination in Taiwan.

Finally, the increased pluralism in the political and religious environment challenges the cohesion of religious groups. Lay believers have more choices of religious groups to join. Differing political preferences among lay believers have prompted religious leaders to refrain from strongly endorsing a particular political party or candidate. Otherwise, they would face a great loss of membership and financial donation. Furthermore, democratic ideas and reforms are introduced gradually from the bottom

up. More decision-making power is delegated to or shared by lay believers or junior clergy.

Having said this, however, it is important to notice that large variations remain not only among religions but also among sects of a single religion. Sometimes the variations between sects can be larger than those between religions. This is the focus of the following chapters of this book.