

Folk Religion: Basic Characteristics and Making Religious Offerings

In Taiwan, most people believe in folk religion. These religious beliefs are not only engraved in people's minds, but they also affect people's religious behaviors and values. The most common and overt behavior is that people make offerings to temples, which was, particularly, evident after the economic boom in Taiwan. This paper will discuss the characteristics of folk religion – its focus on the idea of efficacy, its unclear concepts of gods, its strong utilitarian nature, and the belief in the importance of relying not only gods but also one's own efforts. It will analyze the data from in-depth interviews, which were conducted in a town located in the middle of Taiwan – to which we gave the fictitious name, “Middle Town”. Furthermore, based on a short questionnaire completed by representatives of temples as well as governmental reports – in which religious organizations were praised for their commitment to charity– we will discuss, first, the contribution that families made to religious organizations, and, second, the charities events in which religious organizations participated. Religious expenses that families bore were not heavy, but they increased as the economy grew. In terms of charities, after religious organizations accumulated a large sum of resources from people, they spent it on charitable activities. However, these efforts tended to be passive, disorganized, amateurish, and focused on many different kinds of activities.

1. Introduction

In modern society, because of social changes, such as industrialization, urbanization and secularization, scientific knowledge can provide explanations for many phenomena. The role that religion used to play has become less important. However, these rational and scientific developments do not reduce people's psychological need for religion or eliminate their search for values in any given social or cultural circumstance. Thus, science cannot always replace

religion (Lukes, 1973: 476). In Taiwan, for instance, folk religious activities still remain lively. Because of the economic development in Taiwan, not only folk religious constructions flourished, but festivals and ceremonies also became ever more lively. Folk religion can be changed by economic and political reasons. For instance, during the Japanese colonization, folk religious activities were greatly suppressed. However, they grew quickly after these restrictions were lifted. After the Japanese colonization, folk religion continued to develop and it has become the religion that most people follow today. However, it is important to understand, first, whether folk religious teachings and rituals have changed or not, and, second, the relationship between a) religion and b) society and the economy. In particular, we will examine how temples relate to the economy as temples are supported by resources from people in society, and whether or not folk religion was affected by the influence of secularization and rationalization. In Taiwan, intellectuals and members of government have often criticized people for overspending on religious rituals and activities while neglecting education as well as other charity works. On the other hand, many people believe that whether they worship or not is their own business. Moreover, education should be the government's responsibility. Thus, they consider their religious prostration and worshipping activities to be reasonable and appropriate.

Based on the data from in-depth interviews, this research planned to discuss and understand the following two questions – first, the basic characteristics of believers of folk religion, their concepts of gods, their reasons for believing in and worshipping gods; second, the relationship between the economy and religion. We hope to analyze this complicated relationship through understanding the financial status of temples, people's expenses on religious prostration and other worshipping activities, and the change in the amount of offerings and sacrifices over time. The first set of data of this research was gathered through a series of in-depth interviews, which targeted people who lived in 'Middle Town', 'North Village', 'West Village', and four other 'Northeast Villages'. We selected 223 families from the family data provided by the town halls of the villages. The informants were the heads of the families. The interviews focused on the two aforementioned questions and collected relevant data. In this paper, we focus on the content analysis of the data by quantifying the interview results and carrying out a statistical analysis. This allowed us to get an overall picture of our findings.

First, we will briefly describe the 223 sets of interview results. With respect to different villages and towns, 57% of the respondents were dwellers of 'Middle Town', 13% were dwellers of 'North Village', 5.4% from 'West Village', and 24.7% from the Northeast Villages. With respect to the sexes, most of the respondents, 73.5%, were men, because our respondents were the heads of the families. For the same reasons, most respondents, about 67.2%, were middle-aged adults between the ages of 41 to 60. With respect to the educational levels of the family members, 35% of them had not received formal education; 56.5% had gone to elementary school and junior high school. Our interviewees tended to be similar in terms of their educational levels, which tended to be low. 90% of the respondents had never been to senior high school. Only a limited number of respondents had received higher levels of education, which included senior high school. If senior high school education was not considered a 'high level of education', then we observed that the number of informants who actually had received college education was very minimal. This figure, perhaps, had to do with the migration of well-educated people. In terms of careers, 27.3% of the respondents were farmers, 31.1% were housekeepers, unemployed or had retired. These two kinds of occupations were more common among the respondents.

In order to understand the organization of folk religious temples and their economic situations, a second dataset was collected from August 3 to August 5, 1989. After the seminar organized by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs in Chu Lin Shan, Lin Kou Village of Taipei County, researchers asked representatives of different temples who participated in the seminar to fill out a short questionnaire. A total of 52 representatives completed this questionnaire. By using each temple as a unit, we employed the statistical method to analyze the data for each organization.

In our study, 36.5% of the respondents were from Buddhist temples, while 57.7% were from Taoist temples. Ordinarily speaking, Taoist temples included not only Taoist temples, but also temples of folk religion, because Folk Religious temples often claimed to be Taoist temples. For this reason, 'Taoist temples' in our study referred to both Taoist and Folk Religious temples. In terms of the management of these organizations, 11.5% were managed by a corporate body under a chairman 67.3% were managed by committee members, and 21.2% were managed by one administrator. While most Buddhist temples were managed by one

administrator, about 56.2%, most Taoist temples, about 83.3%, were managed by a committee. In terms of their economic situations, 44% claimed that their financial situations were good; while 46% claimed that they had just enough resources to maintain the temples.

2. Some Characteristics of Folk Religion

1) One of the characteristics of folk religion is its focus on the idea of efficacy. The factors that affect the number of visitors to a temple include not only the status of the gods, but also whether the gods are efficacious or not. The religious prostration of the believers depends on whether the deities are efficacious or not, but not basic questions like the types and origins of the gods. If the efficacy of a deity is prominent, then people will go to visit the temple and worship the god, however far away the temples may be. For these reasons, people do not usually only worship a particular kind of god. This further results in a general tolerant attitude and a polytheistic set of beliefs. From the interview data, we discovered that most believers of folk religion, about 83.9%, claimed that they worshipped any kinds of gods. Such a high percentage is not surprising because this is an eminent characteristic of folk religion. Basically, believers burn incense whenever there is a temple and worship gods whenever they see one. They are not concerned about what a god it is. On the other hand, the varieties and traditions of gods can also affect worshipping behaviors. For example, about 81.6% of the respondents from 'Middle Town' and other surrounding villages reported worshipping Matsu, the goddess of the sea, while 74.9% of the respondents worshipped the god of the earth. When we inquired about temples, people mainly visited the Matsu Temple in 'Middle Town'. Another temple that believers frequently visited was the temple for the god of the earth. These indicated the popularity and the important status of Matsu and the god of the earth, as these gods were most frequently worshipped by the villagers. These trends were not confined to the area around 'Middle Town', but were considerably common in the rest of Taiwan. As we looked at the change in how frequently the gods were worshipped – as shown in surveys that were conducted in different periods – we discovered that the gods that focused on universal needs, such as Matsu, Kuan Yin, and Buddha, tended to maintain a stable proportion of worshippers, while the proportion of worshippers of the god of earth

tended to decrease. However, the number of Tu-di temples dedicated to the god of earth remained the greatest and they had the closest relationship with people (Yu Guang-hong 1982). The Matsu Temple in 'Middle Town' was one of the liveliest temples as well as the centre of 53 villages. Thus, Matsu was certainly the deity people most frequently visited. However, it is important to note that one-fifth of the people did not think that Matsu was the main deity they worshipped. This suggested the complexity of folk religious beliefs. The findings for this minority group needs to be discussed further.

2) Ordinary speaking, believers of folk religion do not possess a clear concept of god. Although believers know vaguely that gods have different statuses, but with respect with what a god actually is, people tend to feel perplexed and have different answers. Furthermore, many people could not say what a god actually was. Based on the present interviews, many respondents indicated that they followed others in the worshipping of gods and these practices were passed down from ancestors. These respondents basically could not give a straight-forward answer as to what a god was, but they only followed others in worship. About 12% of the people were this kind of believers. Furthermore, more respondents, about 19%, indicated that they did not know what a god was. The total percentage of people who followed others in worship and who did not know what a god was, was 31%. These kinds of worshippers tended to be more passive and unenthusiastic about their religious beliefs. Although these believers worshipped gods they did so only in following customs and traditions. However, it is important to note that these believers maintained that they believed in gods and had deference for gods.

Nevertheless, we cannot say that the most important and common pattern of worship was following traditions. In defining the concept of gods, followers of folk religion had a few concrete descriptions, which further indicated the confusion and discrepancies of their beliefs. About 29.2 % of the followers entrusted the gods to provide emotional comfort and reassurance. Although less than one-third of people held these beliefs, compared to other beliefs about gods, these beliefs were most frequently mentioned by people. Therefore, the most important characteristics of religion for these people were the sense of comfort and the reassurance that the religious beliefs offered. On the other hand, people often had another definition for gods, which was that deities were great, benevolent people who were respected and worshipped as gods after they died. About 18% of the followers defined gods

in this manner. In China, it is commonly believed that great, benevolent people or sages became gods or Buddhas after they died. Popular gods, such as Matsu and Kuan Ti (god of war and righteousness) and Buddha – which folk religion has taken from Buddhism – and Kuan Yin (goddess of mercy), were human beings who developed into gods and Buddha. Most followers of folk religion had considerable knowledge about the origin of these gods. The conceptual basis of gods was based on a subjective definition of gods. Furthermore, 16% of the people believed that gods were all-powerful and had supernatural powers that could save all beings. To define gods this way was evidently focused on the function of gods. Perhaps, many believers shared these kinds of beliefs. However, because the interview questions were open-ended, not many people chose to define gods in this way. The present problem seemed to be related to our way of asking questions. More specifically, the different understanding of gods as the respondents' answers suggested might not be mutually exclusive with one another, except answers relating to following others in the worship of gods and not knowing what a god was. In terms of identifying the characteristics of gods, because respondents had different levels of education, the characteristics of gods that they identified might also be of different levels. For instance, the effects of education could be observed in people who defined gods in terms of emotional comfort and reassurance. About 13.1% of respondents who said that gods provided emotional reassurance had no formal education. On the other hand, 48.2% of respondents who provided these answers had received formal education. The difference between these two groups was significant ($<.001$). With respect to the relationship between human and gods, 28.2% of the followers of folk religion believed that gods were protectors of human beings, while 14.1% pointed out that gods were figures that human beings respected. It is important to note that close to 40% of the respondents indicated that they did not know what the relationship between human beings and gods was.

Taken together, we generally see that, for believers of folk religion, the word 'deity' had different and complicated meanings. In terms of knowledge, many believers did not quite understand what gods were or they simply followed others in worship. They could not determine what a god really was. Furthermore, gods were defined in terms of their power, functions, and origins (i.e., great, benevolent people became gods after they died). Some also perceived gods as figures that provided emotional reassurance for people. These believers lacked a definite

understanding of gods. These kinds of ambiguities could also be seen in their understanding of the relationship between gods and human beings.

3) Folk religion is a religion that has a strong utilitarian focus. When ordinary believers pray to gods, they usually ask for safety, wellness, and good health for the old and young in their families. People often burn incense and bow to gods every morning, every night, and on the 1st and 15th of every month. They ask gods to keep their families well and in good health. 'Well and in good health' refers to a kind stability in daily living, including a routine that is uninterrupted by special, unexpected events. In the conceptual scheme of Taiwanese people, 'wellness and good health' has a broad meaning, which refers to familial harmony, good health, prosperous financial conditions, absence of mishaps and misfortune in the family and a kind of stability in daily living. Based on their religious beliefs, the most common thing that believers ask for is 'wellness and good health.' People who pray for these do not necessarily have problems.

On the other hand, praying has become habitual. 'Wellness and good health' are central to the religious beliefs. People need gods to protect them in their daily lives. When Han people migrated to Taiwan from China, they had to go through four stages – crossing the ocean, clearing the land, settling down, and development. In each stage, the early Chinese settlers used the power of gods as a symbol that they relied on in order to overcome hardships. In the past, people encountered many difficulties in their struggle to survival. They needed to face natural disaster as well as human evils. Early settlers relied on gods as their support. For them, 'good' meant stability in daily living; and 'wellness and in good health' meant free from interference of unexpected events. As the believers held the incense in their hands, they mumbled their prayers, and asked for 'wellness and good health' from gods.

According to the opinions of the 52 representatives of temples in our research, most people, who visited the temples, generally asked gods and Buddha for wellness and good health. This included asking for familial peace, harmony, good health, the prosperity of one's career, the success of going abroad, and safety in military service. (See Table 5)

Whether it is for a person or a family, 'wellness and good health' have always

been hoped for and prayed for by many people. In terms of the characteristics of folk religious beliefs, while they may contain the Buddhist idea of accumulating virtues and merits and the Confucian concepts of kindness, generosity and benevolence, folk religious thoughts usually did not have the notion of gods and Buddha possessing ultimate and absolute truth. On the other hand, the hope for ‘wellness and good health’ as well as stability and wealth had formed the basis for the utilitarian focus of folk religion. From Table 1, we can clearly see that visitors of temples most frequently prayed for good health (80.8%) and familial peace and harmony (80.8%). These two conditions were, the most basic things that people wanted to maintain. The next things they asked were for their career to prosper smoothly (75%) and success in going abroad to study (60%). Many people even asked for safety during military service. When one had ‘good health and wellness’ in family, smooth career development further provided overall reassurance for believers. In the opinions of the temple representatives, although the hope for ‘wellness and good health’ was the primary reason for people paying visits to temples, the representatives also pointed out that more than half of the believers visited the temples for other reasons. For instance, people wanted to seek emotional comfort (56%), to be free from worldly worries through the gaining of wisdom (48%), and building up of karmas (42%). Finally, the representatives judged that 54% of people visited the temples because they were accustomed to doing that. This supported an aforementioned point about their uncertain ideas about gods. Habit, indeed, had become the basis of beliefs and behaviors for quite a number of folk religious believers.

Table 1 Purposes of temple visitors judged by temple representatives

Physical Health	80.8%
Prosperity in Business	75.0%
Success In Study Or working in a different city or country	59.6%
Safety during Military Service	48.1%
Wellness and Good Health	80.8%
Building Good Karma	42.3%
Wisdom and Liberation	48.1%
Internal Reassurance	55.8%
Habit	53.8%

Even though believers often prayed for ‘wellness and good health’ and prosperity, they still held the attitude that one’s own efforts were key to success. When respondents were asked to find the reasons for success, they all stressed that, if people did not work hard, themselves, protection from gods would not be useful. Despite the importance of worshipping gods, a person’s own efforts were indispensable. 62% of the believers shared this view. This view was not influenced by factors such as age, education and sex. However, there were occupational and regional differences on this measure. The idea about the importance of one’s own effort was basically a kind of work ethic that many people shared. However, people of different occupations tended to differ significantly in this regard. For example, a great proportion of people who were in commerce, the service industry, and civil servants (76%) emphasized the importance of one’s own efforts. Since education had no influence on this measure, the difference between well-educated people in the aforementioned career fields and people in other fields was due to the special characteristics that were associated with the above mentioned occupations. Suppose we could assume the people in commerce, the service industry, and civil servants belonged to the middle class. These people had values like self-directedness. On the other hand, farmers and manual workers might not be as independent and autonomous. Basically, the regional differences between Middle Town and other areas were mostly due to the distribution of people with different occupations. Finally, according to many respondents, although success depended on one’s own efforts, it was still important to worship gods. When one burnt incense for gods, one could receive protection. More importantly, they could ask gods to guide them down the right path. Basically, this helped people alleviate their sense of doubt and insecurity. When there were many possible ways of doing something, gods could guide people to choose the right thing to do and give them the strength to do it. Thus, there was a greater chance of success under the guidance of gods.

3. Relationship between Economy and Religion

Weber clearly articulated how the Protestant ethic of ‘inner-worldly asceticism’ gave rise to capitalism. On the other hand, Chinese Confucius morality cannot bring about a kind of rational development because Chinese people

place strong orientation towards ‘this world’, hoping for well-being and fortune. However, because of the recent economic boom in East Asia, many sociologists have had no choice but to look back and examine the relationship between religion and the economy. If the economic development in East Asia is, indeed, related to secularism, we may be able to explain this phenomenon by examining the pragmatic thoughts in folk religion. Furthermore, we attempt to understand the interaction between the economy and religion in Taiwan, so that we can discover more about how they are related.

1) Financial situations of temples:

Our discussion begins from looking at the financial situations of the temples.

93.9% of the 52 temple representatives believed that the financial situations were related to the economy in Taiwan. Furthermore, 46.9% of these people believed that the two factors were closely related. 80.8% of the representatives believed that the financial situations of temples were related to the local economy of the villages or towns. 70.2% believed that when the local economy was prosperous, the financial situations of the temples would also improve. 10.6% reported that when the local economy underwent setbacks, the financial situations of the temples would also become worse. 17% of the representatives believed that the local economy basically did not relate to the financial situations of the temples. These findings about temples indicated a relationship between religion and the economy. The economy in Taiwan has certainly brought about widespread development in different areas, not only in religion. The interactions between economy and religion could also have some effects, especially on larger temples. For instance, temples often formed near a market and they organized activities that attracted lots of visitors. Economic activities were, subsequently, organized in the surrounding areas of the temples. Furthermore, economic prosperity, in turn, provided greater resources for the temples. The capital of a temple often came from donations made by the believers. Methods of donation included paying for incense, candles and oils, donating according to a fixed schedule or without such a schedule, donations based on the population of men in the town. The most common method of donation was for incense and oil, which was about 40.4%. When believers visited the temples, they often made a small contribution, which later

accumulated to a greater sum of money. Temples that were frequented by visitors tended to receive a greater income during special festivals each year. Another source of income was donations for activities that were organized by the temples, about 26.9%. In addition to collecting donations during special festivals, temples prepared a fixed set of special activities to encourage donation. Furthermore, when the temples planned public activities, believers would make donations to support them. In terms of the distribution of donors, many respondents believed that they came from all over Taiwan. The donations made by the locals tended to be small, while the donations made by foreign visitors from other counties, who were usually anonymous, were not small. Hearsay about the efficacy of a temple would attract more donors. According to the temple representatives, believers from other counties sometimes donated more than believers from neighbouring villages or towns, who also donated more than local believers.

The donation mostly came from believers in surrounding and bigger areas. (Cohen, 1988:89) when the temples were lively and gods were considered to be efficacious, visitors from other areas would come visit no matter how far away they were and they also tended to make greater contribution.

2) Relationship between economy and religion through religious believers

The most frequent expenses of religious believers of folk religion were related to rituals performed, i.e., bowing to statues of gods at home or in temples on the 1st and 15th of every month as well as during special festivals. Most believers mainly offered incense (52.5%) and fruit (64.6%) as gifts to the gods. 77.1% of believers went to kneel and bow at the temples. 56.5% of these believers offered livestock. People tended to make greater offerings when they visited the temples. The total expense was around \$100 NT dollars each time, which was not expensive, because these worshipping rituals were carried out daily. However, during special events and on special occasions, people would spend more on offerings, i.e., making a pledge before a god for a wish and going on a pilgrimage.

‘Making a pledge before a god for a wish’ was the practice in which believers made a wish in front of the gods and promised that if the wish came true, they would make religious prostration and make offerings to the gods again. This way of thanking gods for answering their prayers is called ‘redeeming a pledge’. When their wishes were fulfilled, the believers must place offerings in front of the statues

of the gods and thank the gods for answering their prayers. This was referred to as 'redeeming a vow' (Yang, 1970:87). Nonetheless, many respondents believed that even if their wishes did not come true, they would still need to bring offerings to thank the gods. It was believed that if people were too practical and realistic, the gods would ignore their subsequent prayers. 45.7% of the believers had made these kinds of pledges. Most believers would make pledges to gods when they had important problems. The most common request was for safety during military service. While some people made these requests for themselves, others made them for their family members. The expenses related to making a vow were about \$500 NT, which was higher than those for daily worship.

In fact, the most important ritual for folk religion was 'going on a pilgrimage' – an annual event of visiting temples and burning incense. Believers often made important pledges in front of gods for wishes, or they asked the gods for help, i.e., helping a person who suffered chronic illness. People held the belief that they needed to rely on the gods for help and to resolve emotional problems. They revealed their deep sorrows to the gods, asked the gods to guide them down the right path, in order to be relieved from life's painful burdens (Sung Lung-fei 1971: 125). These kinds of grand rituals cost approximately \$1000 NT to \$2000 NT. The present discussion provides a general understanding about the money spent on religious rituals.

3) Making religious offerings

Making religious offerings is a way people express their reverence for the gods. People make offerings because they want to ask for something from the gods or show their respect for the gods. Making offerings became a method of communicating with the gods (Ahern, 1981: 412). By looking at the methods of and expenses related to offerings, we could examine how economic factors play out in religious rituals. Among our respondents, 93.3% of them had made offerings. Almost all of the believers had participated in these activities. The most standard and commonly employed methods of making offerings, included offering a male pig as a sacrifice (46.2%), making a monetary donation for renovating temples (77.1%), and offering a dramatic performance (65.9%).

'A male pig' is often 'rented'. It costs about \$1000 to \$3000 NT. This method is most frequently employed when a daughter-in-law enters a household. This

practice not only shows off one's wealth but it also asserts one's social status. Moreover, it represents one's 'face' or pride. In other words, it shows that one's financial situation is good enough for maintaining their social status (ibid:412~415). However, this way of making an offering is different from other methods. It may be more meaningful if we look at the basic data for each individual believer. See Table 2.

In Table 2, we can see that the differences between all measures are significant. A notable finding is that the proportion of people over 50 was substantially greater on this measure, especially for people between 50 and 60 years of age. This is because most people offer a male pig as a sacrifice to thank the gods when a daughter in law enters the household. The head of a family is in charge of important events like marriage. Therefore, people between 51 and 80 years of age are most likely to employ this way of making an offering. Another difference is that the proportion of people who have not received formal education is greater. Offering a male pig as a sacrifice represents one's social status. People who are educated not only can use education, economy, and politics to increase their status, but they also accept new ideas easily. Thus, they are less likely to make this kind of offering. In terms of occupations, the proportion of farmers who adopt this method of offering tended to be higher. This shows that agricultural people tend to have more traditional thoughts. This method of offering also suggests community solidarity. People look askance at any new changes, like not sacrificing a male pig as an offering, which is a way to build social relationships (ibid: 421). In addition, a male pig is also a very common animal belonging to farmers.

Making monetary donations here refers to donating for the renovation of temples. The amount of money the believers donate ranged from about \$100 to \$500 NT, foreign believers tend to donate more. From small increments come abundance, the financial resources of the temples were, in fact, very rich. The economic growth in recent years can be seen from the donations the believers make to renovate the temples. When we examine the offerings that individuals make, it is important to consider the influence of other factors. See Table 3. Age and education have no significant influence on the amount of monetary donations. Although other factors are significant, the percentages of people donated were

generally high. In fact, these kinds of monetary offerings are based on the believers' desires. Yet, visitors to temples usually make some donation in order to show their respect for the gods.

Table 2 Have you used a male pig as a sacrificial offering

Areas		Education	
Middle Town	66.1%***	Have no formal education	62.9%***
Other Towns	19.8%	Have formal education	39.1%
Sex		Occupation	
Male	51.8%***	Agricultural	73.7%***
Female	30.5%	Industrial	48.8%
Age		Commercial, services, educational	21.7%
20~40	23.1%***	Unemployed	40.0%
41~50	36.2%		
51~60	61.1%		
61~80	58.1%		

*** indicate that there is a significant relationship between whether or not people have used a male pig as a sacrificial offering and independent variables (i.e., area of residence and age, etc) ($P < .001$) The figures indicate the percentage of people who have employed this methods. The remaining were people who have not employed this method.

The third way to make a religious offering is to organize dramatic performances, which are often used to repay the gods. Ordinarily, people have public performances during a god's birthday or other festivals; or believers may organize private performances when they want to repay the gods for responding to their pledges. People will build a stage outside the temples and hire a drama troupe to perform for the gods. The cost of the dramatic performance is shared by the male population of the village or come from donation for organizing the events. The donations are under \$50 NT a person. Table 4 show the basic data of organizing a performance as an offering.

The older the people, the more likely that they will offer a dramatic performance to the gods, especially people between 41 and 60 years of age. Ordinarily, this kind of donation is rarely made under the name of an individual person. They make this donation under the name of a family unit, or the name of

a male or the head of a family. For these reasons, the findings show that middle-aged people are more likely to employ this method of donation. Furthermore, the respondents are mostly the head of their family. This accounts for not only the difference in age but also why the proportion of unemployed people is smaller.

There are two kinds of dramatic performances – public and private. The expenditure for a public performance is shared equally by the dwellers. The most common method is to get donations from the males in the area. This highlights the bonds and shared responsibilities among people, community, and temple (Lin Mei-rong 1987: 62-63; Chen Wei-hsin 1988: 583). 89.3% of the respondents have made this kind of donation. These donations are collected in the Tu-di temples for the God of Earth in a village. These donations are less frequent in ‘Middle Town’ (30.7%) than other towns (52.1% ($P < 0.1$)). Perhaps, it is the influence of Matsu (the goddess of the sea) in ‘Middle Town’, which makes it more difficult for the Tu-di temples to develop. The Matsu temples suppress the need for Tu-di temples. For these reasons, the donations made by the population tend to be more frequent in the other villages’ and cities’ administrative centers, where the influence of the Matsu temple is lessened and where there are more Tu-di temples.

Table 3 The amount of monetary donation and personal background

Areas		Education	
Middle Town	87.4%	Have formal education	83.9%
Other Towns	63.5%	No formal education	77.4%
Sex		Occupation	
Male	81.1%	Agriculture	84.2%
Female	66.1%	Industry	92.7%
Age		Commerce, Service, Education	76.1%
20-40	69.2%	Unemployed	62.2%
41-50	73.9%		
51-60	84.7%		
61-80	83.7%		

From the findings for the donations given to refurbish the Matsu Temple in ‘Middle Town’ in 1986, we can see the influence of ‘Middle Town’ and its

surrounding areas. In this year, 25.3% of the respondents make donations, 45.3% of the respondents do not make donations. The reasons for not making donations are mostly related to the belief that the temple has enough money. The bigger the temple, the more rumors there are about corruption. As a consequence, local believers do not think it wise to donate too much money. From Table 5, we can see that the relationship between these kinds of donations and the different villages.

Table 4 Have you used a drama performance as a religious offering?

Areas		Education	
Middle Town	74.8%***	Have formal education	71.0%
Other Towns	54.2%	No formal education	68.7%
Sex		Occupation	
Male	74.4%***	Agriculture	82.5%***
Female	42.4%	Industry	75.6%
Age		Commerce, service	65.2%
20~40	38.5%**	Unemployed	49.2%
41~50	72.5%		
51~60	70.6%		
61~80	67.4%		

***P<.001 see Table 2, **P<.01.

Table 5 The relationship between different villages and the offerings for temple renovation in 1982

Offering \ Villages		The Middle Town	Other Towns
Yes		70.9%	26.8%
No		29.1%	73.2%

From table 5, we could see that in ‘Middle Town’, 70.9% of the respondents have made donations to the Matsu Temple. This is related to its geography. In this town, the Matsu Temple has more power than other temples. We can further infer that not only local believers supported this large-scale temple, but also visitors

who are from out of town also donate large sums of money. For this reason, locals say that they make moderate donations only. On the other hand, because foreign visitors live too far away from the Matsu Temple, the key supporters of the temple have no power to exert control over direction of these temples. This gives a lot of power to the temple authorities or local middle-class people, which is a notable phenomenon.

4. The Influence of Economic Changes on Religious Activities

Because of the economic development in Taiwan or the fact that people's average income increases, the standard of living have risen. Does an increase in income entail an increase in the amount spent on offerings? To this question, 54.0% of the respondents gave an affirmative answer; while 45.5% had a negative response. The difference was not substantial. Some of the respondents said that modern families had fewer family members and that they worried more about waste. Therefore, they would not prepare too many offerings. On the other hand, the effects of an income increase might be observed in the donations given for oil and incense. 43.0% of respondents made this type of donation. In 'Middle Town', 61.6% of the respondents said that they would increase the offerings when their income increased, while 43.7% of people in other towns said they would. The difference between 'Middle Town' and the other towns was significant ($p < .1$). With respect to donations for oil and incense, 48.6% of the respondents in 'Middle Town' would increase their donations, while 34.3% of the people in other towns would do so ($p = 0.325$). Although the difference is not significant, the fact that 'Middle Town' is its own economic center and has lots of commercial activities is also evident in religious events in the town. However, one can also say that religious beliefs are stronger in 'Middle Town' than that in other towns.

Furthermore, by comparing the offerings for the birthday of Matsu 20 years ago to the offerings today, we can assess whether the economic development have influenced religious belief. We can also examine if the economic growth is evident in whether the amount of offerings are abundant or not. See Table 6.

Table 6 The offerings for Matsu's birthday twenty years ago and today

Types of offerings Time	Livestock	Fruits	Red flour turtle	Crackers	Gold paper	cake	Canned food
20 Years Ago	87.9%	39.5%	26.5%	3.6%	17.0%	2.2%	0.9%
Today	90.6%	65.5%	21.5%	4.9%	19.7%	1.8%	1.3%
	Cake	Candie	Wine	Noodle	Rice with vegeta-ble	Soda	Others
20 Years Ago	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.9%	1.8%	0.0%	0.9%
Today	0.9%	0.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.4%	0.9%	0.4%

Table 6 shows that the biggest changes are in livestock and fruit, while other kinds of offerings remains the same. The percentage of offered livestock has risen from 87.9% to 90.6%, while the percentage of fruit offered has risen from 39.5% to 65.5%. Traditionally, livestock is an important offering, thus, it is not surprising that it has rose 3%. In contrast, the fact that fruit offering increases by 30% is related to the overall economic environment. First, families usually keep livestock. So for most people the cost of fruit is higher than livestock. When people's financial situation improves to a certain level, they can afford to buy fruit. Second, it has become more common to offer fruit because it is more convenient. Moreover, modern families are smaller. Unfinished fruit, unlike unfinished meat, is not usually wasted. Thus, the fact that fruit offerings have become more common is a phenomenon of modernization. 20 years ago, the percentage people who offer livestock in 'Middle Town' (92.9%) is higher than people who offer livestock in other towns (81.3%), ($P < 0.01$). At present, the percentage of people, who live in other towns and offer livestock, has increased (87.5%). The difference between people in 'Middle Town' and other towns is no longer significant. In terms of age, older people are more likely to offer livestock ($P < .001$). However, at present, the age difference in terms of offering livestock is not observed during the birthday of Matsu. The use of livestock 20 years ago represents the sacred nature of the offerings. However, as society has become modernized, people have become more concerned with the economic aspects of religious offerings. People have adopted a more convenient way of worshipping. In 'Middle Town', 78% of the respondents offered fruits, whereas 49.0% ($P < .001$) of the respondents in other towns offered fruits. This suggests that 'Middle Town' is more modernized. The actual difference

between the offerings for Matsu's birthday 20 years ago and the offerings made today is the offering of fruit, which has become an easier and a more convenient way of making an offering. This shows that both economic development and modernization can be observed in the offerings that believers of folk religion makes. This indicates that religion changes according to the environment. The process of secularization brought about by the economic development leads people to think that they can show their respect for the gods by using easy and simple kinds of offerings rather than superfluous, complicated gifts.

5. Religious Expenses of Families in 'Middle Town'

In the surroundings of the Matsu Temple, that is, 'Middle Town', 'Northeast Village', 'Eastern Village', and 'Western Village', we interviewed 223 dwellers. We selected the data for respondents, who were more cooperative and whose interviews had more research value, for further examination. We will discuss the religious expenses of the families, the expenses on 'redeeming a plea, and the relationship between religious belief and occupation.

1) Religious expenses of a family

In the four towns or villages, the number of people who believe mainly in Matsu is the highest. The gods that most people worship at home are Tu-di the god of the earth and Matsu. They also worship ancestors, 'House Gods',¹ and 'Good Brothers',². For these reasons, in an ordinary family, the religious expenses are related to worshipping the aforementioned gods or ghosts and ancestors. People not only burn incense every morning and night, but also they bow to gods the 1st and 15th of every month, or bow to the god of the earth and 'Good Brothers' on the 2nd and 16th of every month. According to the rough estimation that the respondents make, an agricultural family use livestock to make sacrificial offerings to the gods on the 1st and 15th of every month; they carry out these rituals twice a month, each time costs about \$300 NT, which make a sum of \$600 NT every

1 A 'House God' is the spirit of the earliest settlers on a piece of land. It is common for Taiwanese people to worship these spirits when they move into a new house.

2 'Good Brothers' are ghosts or spirits of people who do not have any offspring to worship them.

month. In agricultural families, housewives are economic and careful in managing money, and they usually do not use fruit as offerings, but livestock. This is because fruit is considered to be a kind of snack that cannot fill one's stomach and is also expensive. On the other hand, livestock can also serve as a proper meal for the family.

In addition to the expenses on the 1st and 15th of every month, people spend a few hundred NT dollars during annual festivals, such as Tomb Sweeping Day³, May Festival⁴, Pudu Festival⁵, Mid-Autumn Festival, and New Year. In total, these cost about \$2000 NT a year. The expenses on the birthday of Matsu on March 23 are considerably larger. On that day, people bow to the goddess and invite guests for dinner. At present, ordering from a restaurant for a table of 12 guests at home costs about \$2000 NT, while a table prepared by housewives at home cost about \$1500 NT. Ordinary, a family can invite more than one table of guests, because the usual expenses were above \$4000 NT (to eat out) and \$3000 NT (for dining at home). Ordinary families do not invite their employees to eat and worship together. Rather people invite their relatives and friends and they normally have two tables of guests. The numbers of tables depends on the size of the social circles of the heads of the families.

The above discussed the basic expenses of agricultural families have related to worshipping at home. It does not include burning incense at temples. Respondents reported that they did not visit temples and bow to the gods when there was no special event. When people walk by the temples, they buy and burn gold papers and bow, which costs about \$10 NT. The temples in the villages sometimes collect money based on the male population in the area. They collect these fees once or twice every year and it is around \$50 NT. Some local temples invite guests for dinner during religious festivals, like the birthdays of the gods and goddesses.

3 The Tomb Sweeping Day is an occasion for people to pay reverence to their ancestors. Families clean the tombs, bow and burn incense sticks, and they make offerings fruits or livestock to the ancestors. It is celebrated on April, 5 of the lunar calendar.

4 May Festival is celebrated in memory of a patriot and a great poet, Chu Yuan, in 221 BC. It is also an occasion for driving off evil spirits as well as diseases. It is celebrated on May 5 of the lunar calendar before the midst of summer in which diseases are most easily spread.

5 The Pudu Festival is for worshipping ghosts or spirits of people who do not have any offspring to worship them. This festival is on held on July or 'the ghost month' of the lunar calendar.

Examples were ‘Prince of Qi Zhuang’ in ‘Northeast Village’, ‘Goddess of San Zhuang’ in Jiu-li of the ‘Northern Middle Town’, ‘Wugu King’, and ‘Third Prince of San-fu’ in ‘West Village’. The amount of their expenses was similar to that on the birthday of Matsu as previously discussed.

With respect to the expenses on extending temples, some temples allow believers to make donations on a volunteer basis. However, if the budget for the temples falls short, the head of the district or the committee members of the temples may ask people to donate based on the unit of farmland that they possessed. These expenses tend to be higher, which range from a few thousand to over ten thousand NT dollars. This method of donation was employed in 1988 during the extension of San Zhuang Matsu Palace in Jiu-li of the ‘Northern Middle Town’. The respondents said that these amounts of religious expenses bore by families were not frequent. Furthermore, when temple members approach the families, the latter only need to tell them the amount of money they will donate, but they do not need to pay immediately. They are given a year and they give the money to the temples when their financial situations allow it. Besides, it often takes a few years to extend a temple, families can pay within those years. Therefore, the extension of temples does not create financial difficulties for ordinary families.

Is there an increase in the religious expenses normal families in 1988 compared to 10 or 20 years ago? The respondents ordinarily give a reserved answer – when there are no special events in their daily lives and when their family members are well and in good health, there is no change in religious expenditure. These families worship the gods on the first and fifteen of every month, on the gods’ birthdays, and on other special festivals. Their expenses are calculated in terms of the offerings they make. There are some factors that influence the offerings. First, the economic situation of the families can affect both the types and the amount of the offerings. Ordinarily speaking, respondents do not deny that their financial situation is better off than 10 or 20 years ago and that their offerings are more abundant. Second, people’s eating behaviors would affect the types and the amount of offerings. In the past, the main agricultural product was meat. Religious offerings usually consisted meat. However, nowadays, people generally consume more fruits and vegetables and eat less meat. Also, because there are many different types of fruits for sale and it is considerably easy to buy

them, people can use fruit, instead of meat, to worship the gods during the first and fifteen of every month. However, during special festivals, people tend to offer meat. Third, family cycle can also affect the amount of types of offerings. In terms of the amount and the types of food that people offer, families that have many children need to focus on feeding the family members. On the other hand, after young children grow up and they get married or move away, the families become smaller and the offerings become simpler and less substantial. The three factors discussed here more or less determine the types and the amount of the offerings. On the other hand, respondents maintain that when there are no special events, religious expenses are not greater than other daily expenses. The religious expenses are mainly concerned with making offerings. For these reasons, the religious expenses do not show the influence of economic growth in Taiwan or the 'Middle Town' area.

The religious expenditure of families, which are well and in good health and have no special events, tends to be small. In contrast, people who have to make pleas to the gods are different. For people who make pledges to the gods, when their wishes come true, they need to fulfil their pledges. For these reasons, the expenses related to making and redeeming pledges can be enormous.

2) Expenses on redeem pledges

Making and redeeming pledges are one of the main reasons for the growth of folk religion in Taiwan. When the temples are prosperous and are believed to have more 'divine power', the number of people who make pledges increases and the offerings they make for redeeming pledges also increases. Thus, the temples thrive. The major contribution to the income of the temples comes from redeeming pledges. In a family, the expenses on redeeming pledges also tends to be larger, which are related to the characteristics of folk religion. The gods of folk religion offer fortune and 'wellness and good health' to their believers in the present life. These gods were people who developed and became gods after they died. They have human characteristics. Therefore, believers can interact with the gods in the same way they interact with human beings. According to an old Chinese saying, "When you ask for a catty, you need to return tael."⁶ When believers make

⁶Catty and tael are units of measurement. One catty is equal to 12 taels.

pledges and ask for help from gods, they need to be thankful for the kindness of the gods. They have to make a repayment; hence, redeeming the pledges. People can make pledges to ask for big or small favors in their everyday lives. For big favors, people have to make a greater repayment; for small favors, people make a smaller repayment. Making and redeeming pledges is the most distinguished interaction between the gods and human beings, while burning sticks of incense, a ritual that believers perform daily is not as noticeable. Folk religion stands in contrast with religions that focus on salvation and redeeming sins. Believers of the latter religions normally pray and perform other spiritual practices more than they make or redeem pledges. Although it seems that many believers of folk religion also burn incense and worship everyday – as they believe that “the gods’ protection is derived from burning incense sticks”, and that “the presence of the gods’ protection is not noticeable to us” – because folk religion’s focus is on the present life and geared towards practical needs, believers normally worship to ask for daily fortune more than they worship without any special purposes. Moreover, when their wishes are granted, it is common for them to use material things to redeem their pledges

Another important reason why making pledges is common is that these kinds of pledges are ‘lips pledges’. Compared to contracts or formal conditions of exchange, religious pledges are not regulated legally. These pledges are one way and they are conditions that people propose to the gods. If their wishes are fulfilled, believers have to redeem their pledges by making a repayment. However, if their wishes are not granted, they do not have an obligation to repay the gods. From the start, believers have complete control over the exchange. These practices are considerably free, flexible, secretive and based on a person’s will. Believers do not have to take any risks and have nothing to lose. However, believers have – 1) confidence in acting, because they believe that the gods are on their side; 2) a belief that whether their wishes are realized or not, there are some outside factors to which they can attribute faults. They are not completely responsible for these incidents. In other words, they become braver and let external factors determine their wishes. For these reasons, people can make ‘lips pledges’ about their daily needs, which range from small favors like going to see a doctor, or important events like business investments or performing military service abroad. In addition to having complete control over their rights, the time of redeeming the pledges

also depends on the believers. They can delay their repayment for a while if they don't have sufficient time. In some cases, when other factors change and make it difficult for them to make a repayment, they can use other methods of repayment.

The idea that people can repay the gods through other methods is related to the concept of 'believer' in folk religion. Because of the influence of traditional family values, a 'believer' that the gods protect is not an individual person, but an entire family. Before family property is divided, family members live and eat together. They share living expenses and worship the same ancestral tablets. The gods protect the family as a whole. Furthermore, the gods' protection can be extended to three generations, which is shown by the following examples.

The story about the chair of the Matsu Temple, which was spread among the elders and ordinary people, is a classic example. During the Japanese Colonization, family W was a poor agricultural family. Mr. W was a pious believer in Matsu. He was committed to making donations for oil and incense and devoted all of his energy and effort in the yearly pilgrimage. Moreover, Mr. W pledged that if his offspring became prosperous in business, they would definitely devote their services to Matsu. At present, the offspring of Mr. W have an international business in both Taiwan and the United States. In order to redeem the pledges, the family W volunteered to donate a few million NT dollars to the Matsu Temple. Mr. R was chosen to be the chair of the temple in order to serve the goddess. When Mr. R was in office, he continued to make contributions for expanding the temple. Ordinary people believed that the success of Mr. W's offspring was due to the pledges that he had made some time ago. Thus, when the offspring had the means, they needed to redeem the pledges that their father made.

The names of some munificent donors are engraved on the wall of the Matsu Temple. According to our interview, Mr. P's story is also a classic example. Mr. P, himself, did not know that his name was engraved on the wall. He indicated that his wife was responsible for worshipping and donating. Mr. P's wife made contributions, because she hoped not only that their third son, who studied in the United States, would have a successful eye surgery but also that he would receive a PhD degree successfully. Because Mr. P was considered the head of the family, the donations were made under his name. The person who made the pledge was Mr. P's wife; the person the goddess protected was the third son; and it was Mr. P's

wife who redeemed the pledges.

In Tai Bai Li of ‘Middle Town’, Mrs. C said that, before dividing property with Mr. C’s younger brother, she made a pledge and asked the gods to protect three generations of the family that included not only her family – her husband (the informant), her children, and her husband’s parents – but also the family of Mr. C’s younger brother. After the family property was divided, Mr. C’s parents lived with her family, while the younger brother’s family moved out. When Mrs. C redeemed their pledges and made repayments, she only needed to do so for her family, not for the family of Mr. C’s younger brother. It used to be Mr. C’s mother who made the pledges, which required her to go on the pilgrimage for three years. However, because the elder Mrs. C had difficulty walking, the younger Mrs. C (the informant), whom she lived with, went on the pilgrimage in place of her mother-in-law.

The above examples show that the time frame for redeeming the pledges can be stretched to other generations, and the parties who are involved can be substituted by other family members. Furthermore, the ways of redeeming pledges are negotiable and changeable. Suppose a person pledges that she will go on a pilgrimage on foot if her wish is granted. However, when the time for redeeming the pledge comes, she has difficulties walking. She can negotiate with the gods and see if she can use a vehicle, insofar as the believer tries her best. When a believer is not able to fulfil a vow, she can communicate with the gods through the method of Zhi Bei.⁷ It is believed that the gods do not usually reject requests. When the results show that the gods refuse the requests, it is usually because people do not know how to put their question, thus the gods are confused. The believers can ask the question again using the method of Zhi Bei until gods understand and agree. The believers have the right to actively negotiate with the gods, but the believers must not omit the redemption of their pledges. The methods of redeeming pledges can be changed, but the bottom line is that pledges must not go unfulfilled, because

⁷This method involves the use of a tool, which is made of bamboo or wood. It comes in a pair and has two sides. One side is flat which represents yang; the other is convex representing yin. A believer casts the tool on the floor to produce a message. If the sides that face the believer are both of the same, it means that the gods refuse. However, if one side is yin and the other is yang, this indicates that the gods accept the request.

unpredictable catastrophes may befall on people who break their promises to gods.

The expenditure for redeeming pledges is related to the different methods of repayment. According to the interests and abilities of the believers, the repayment can be big or small. Or the believers can ask the temple about their needs. Small repayments include offering livestock, gold-plated pigs or lambs, red festoons, horizontal wooden tablets over the door of a temple, gold medals, dramas, tables, chairs, and other items in the temples. Larger repayments include dragon poles, clocks, or drums. The most common kind of repayment is donating money, which can be used for any kinds of needs in the temple. Repayments also include non-material things. For example, believers can perform volunteer services, i.e., cleaning and sweeping the temples. As the Matsu Temples organize a pilgrimage annually, people can make pledges relating to the needs for these events. There are numerous ways to make donations including competing to be the first to light an incense during the festival, carrying embroidered flags or sedan chairs, handing out useful daily items to pilgrims, providing cars or offer bicycle services, and setting off fire crackers in the road for celebration.

The psychology behind believers who redeem pledges is built on the voluntary 'contract' that they have with the gods. What bind them to redeem the pledges are not only belief and a clear conscience, but also pave the way for the subsequent pledges they may make. For these reasons, the psychology behind their trying to fulfil their promises as perfectly and meticulously as possible is completely different from the psychology behind their dealing with contracts in practical situations. From the making and redeeming of pledges, we can see that they possess what Weber called, 'substantive rationality' and 'instrumental rationality'. Religious belief and practicality are both important factors to consider. Whether one's future wishes will be fulfilled or not is unknowable and it depends on whether the gods take an interest in one's welfare or not, which depends on whether they are satisfied with one's performance in the past. Because of the unpredictability of the unknown, there is a kind of tension in the believer's mind. If the present way of redeeming pledges involves too much on money and material things, the believers can lose a lot of money. However, if their fulfilment is insufficient, the gods may not be satisfied. Where can people find the balance so that both gods and human beings will not suffer a loss? There is no objective and recognizable standard to determine where the balance lies; however, it depends on

the ‘contract’ with the gods that exists in a believer’s mind. The opinions of the gods are obscure and difficult to understand, and believers have no clear principles to follow in their speculation.

From the behaviors of the believers, who redeem their pledges by ‘going on pilgrimage on foot’, ‘providing food for other pilgrims, ‘setting off firecrackers to create a more lively atmosphere for celebration’, we can see that some believers force themselves to walk even when their skin is peeling off their tired feet. When some laggards are forced to get on the temple vehicles in order to catch up with the others, they evince annoyance and feel guilty and don’t want to get on the vehicles. Moreover, despite the troubles, believers, who provide food to others, wrap the food up in a bag, and force bags after bags to the pilgrims. Some even run after the other pilgrims. They do not leave until they have handed out all the food. When their food is refused by some pilgrims, they look embarrassed and anxious and immediately look for other pilgrims and beg them to take the food. Some believers place box after box of firecrackers along the route that the sedan chair will take and let them out one after another. The value of the firecrackers is not calculated in terms of their number, or whether they are ‘welcomed’ or not, but by the degree of enthusiasm that is triggered by the explosion of the firecrackers.

When some people are redeeming their pledges, there seems to be an unseen force that motivates them to devote all their energy and effort. This hidden force motivates the believers to pursue some invisible standards and does not stop until they achieve their goals, while ignoring external, objective needs and what the practical environment allows. These behaviours seem to contradict the ordinary morality of farmers, who tend to be thrifty, niggardly, and selfish. They ignore the fact that their legs are tired and lame, are not stingy about giving away food (even if they need to endure the treatment of some unappreciative or unfriendly pilgrims), and not niggardly about putting out stacks of firecrackers. They perform these actions not because they worry about neighbours’ discussions and judgements, nor the criticism of other pilgrims. However, it seems that they do so for themselves and the gods. However, is it that they can negotiate with the gods? Don’t they have the right to deliberate? Aren’t the gods in favour of practical moral ideas, like diligence, thrift, and willingness to go through hardships? Is it that the gods only want psychological repayment, as the old saying goes, “When one’s sincere, a plain glass of water is enough,” meaning that material offerings

can be very little when you are sincere.

The expenses on redeeming pledges can be enormous. These expenses may seem ‘extravagant and wasteful’ to other people. However, the reason that a believer worries that the repayment may not be sufficient is related to the psychology behind redeeming pledges. With respect to “substantive rationality,” extravagance that opposes ordinary morality not only can affirm one’s piety but also confirm the truth of the gods as well as their beliefs. The further believers go against their ordinary standard, the more it shows that the control that the gods have over human beings is greater than the control that human beings have over themselves. The power of the gods is greater than the ordinary power of human morality. Through extravagance, one takes pleasure in not only making offerings to external gods but also going beyond oneself and surrendering to a power greater than oneself. This further confirms the existence of such a power. These acts of devotion further pave the way for making pledges, religious prostration, and burning incense in the future. In addition, believers feel secure and confident about the fortune in their present lives because of they believe that there exists an external power that participates in their lives and looks after them.

With respect to ‘instrumental rationality’, the redemption of a pledge is a practice that is conducted after a believer’s wish is fulfilled. First, the fact that a person has achieved their goal provides a reason to make a repayment to the gods. Second, the value of the repayment is less than the value of the fulfilment of their wish according to the calculation of the believers. The believers can decide the method and object of repayment, both of which they consider to be within their ability and will not risk their happiness and fortune. Third, this practice operates on the principle that, “When one returns what one borrows, it is not difficult for one to borrow again.” It is important for a person to make a sufficient repayment to satisfy the gods, so that the gods will respond to the believer’s wishes in the future. Believers use money and other material means in exchange for fortune and good health. Contrary to fortune and health, money is something that people can afford to give away, although people spend their lives and work hard to earn money. Believers often used money and their bodies in exchange for other valuable things, as the second author pointed out in another paper, “The Charlatan of Money and Body.” These valuable things cannot be obtained by human power, but only by

gods' power. Money is reduced to a means to achieve what people believe to be more valuable targets.

Both the substantive and instrumental rationality imply that the object of repayment can be calculated and is exchangeable. Believers have greater needs in life than money. Examples of these needs are confidence in the future, the continuation of one's family, and harmonious interpersonal relations. However, these things are not only uncertain but also beyond one's control. They may go wrong at any given time. These are the things that human ability cannot guarantee and one's own efforts cannot achieve, but they are dependent upon many unknown factors. When there is disintegration in people's lives, and when people lose their balance and fail to restore it, they can only rely on the gods that are above themselves and beyond human power. The contract that people make with the gods when they make pledges suggests that there is something people can do about their situation. Moreover, people can see a powerless situation or broken reality from another angle, which encourages and inspires them to adopt a new course of action. An enlightening transformation, thus, occurs because of an external, wooden god statue. When believers' wishes are fulfilled and when their lives are complete and content, they feel indescribably touched as they look upon the courage and strength that they had during the difficult time. They think that must be the gods' pity that empowers them. To redeem the pledge is to pay tribute to that courage and strength and to keep in mind the enlightenment that they go through after the making of the pledge. It is also to fulfil a promise that they make with themselves (beyond the selves), which is expressed as the thankfulness they have for the gods. For these reasons, when people redeem pledges, they need to keep their original promise. Even if the repayment is enormous or impractical, it is an affirmation for oneself and for one's future.

The daily expenditure on religion for an average family is not great, however, the expenses on the redemption of pledges are different. Surely, not all redemptions involve a great sum of money. However, single, huge donations that the temples receive are from believers redeeming their pledges. Donations for the redemption of pledges are not necessary the main income of all religious organizations, however, it is true that the main source of income for a high percentage of temples comes from the redemptions of pledges.

3) The relationship between religion and economy

There is a two-way relationship between religion and economy, with each one influencing the other. Ordinary informants do not emphasize that religious expenses increase as their income increase; however, they admit that their standard of living is higher compared to 20 years ago and that the religious offerings as well as other food consumed at home are of a better quality. Believers also become more enthusiastic in their participation in religious activities, especially the pilgrimage. According to the informants, during the agricultural period, family members could not participate in the event every year because they lacked time and money. Nowadays, people have more free time, have their own vehicles, and are not short of money for transportation. For these reasons, more people can go on the yearly pilgrimage. As to whether the donations have increased or not, most informants say that the Matsu temples are wealthy and do not need their support. Therefore, their donations to the temples are not directly proportionate with their income. Although, on a societal level, religion in “Middle Town” has expanded compared to 20 years ago, as evidenced by the fact that both the extension of the Matsu Temple and the pilgrimage to this temple are the largest in the country. However, why don't the findings on the societal level agree with those on the personal level? On a personal level, the informants' answers do not completely support the present point. Further research is needed to investigate this period of time.

The religious influence on the economy can be divided into the following: providing confidence to individuals in making investments, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, and galvanizing consumers and production in a region. Taiwan adopts the free market economy. Its economic system lacks socialist elements and is closer to capitalism than socialism. In addition, the economy is supported by small and medium-sized businesses, but not monopolized by big corporations. This means that anyone can be the owner of a small or medium-size business, who has to take investment risks. These investors are quasi professionals and have limited information about investments. Their success is not 100% certain. However, when a business fails, people can have other kinds of businesses. The effects on the overall market are minimal. Under these circumstances, investments are not completely under people's control; nor does

possessing relevant information allow people to control the market completely. These kinds of investments involve a great deal of risks, which leaves some room for the intervention of religion. Respondents who are owners of small or medium-sized factories or wholesale companies, stress that when they lack confidence in buying goods or investing, they are more likely to seek help from the gods. In particular, when they buy new stocks that they have never bought before, or when they purchase a large number of stocks, they will consult the gods. Some even make pledges to the gods and promise to donate a certain percentage of their profits to the gods. After they make pledges or consult with the gods, the investors feel reassured about the step they have chosen to take. Whether they succeed or not, they already made a definite decision to do something.

In ‘Middle Town’, many dwellers move to other big cities in Taiwan or emigrate to Japan. The locals of the town indicate that, before people move to other places, they must bring with them the incense ash from Matsu Temple, or go make pledges in the temples. Farmers feel attached to their homeland and are reluctant to leave. For them, emigration is an important event. The question as to whether they will succeed or not is an unknown. Making pledges provides each emigrant some confidence. People often make pledges and promise to return for a pilgrimage or make donations as a repayment. Some even worship the deities after they move to a new place. An example of the spreading the power of Matsu from the “Middle Town” is that the Dian An Temple in Keelung is a branch of Matsu Temple.

In a community, activities organized by the community can narrow the gap between the rich and the poor and it functions to balance individual acquisition. During the pilgrimage, in order to enliven the event, some businesses and organizations spend ten thousand to a few million dollars to organize activities, i.e., the competition in which people fight to be put the first, second or third to burn a bundle of incense in front of the goddess. These groups are formed by people such as mushroom farmers who have a rich harvest that year or people who make profits from the glass industry. In order to pay tribute to a god’s kindness, people volunteer to compete for putting the first bundle of incense in front of the gods and goddesses. On the other hand, believers of the temples or neighbours may encourage owners of small factories, who have made a good profit that

year to form a team and join the competition. During the pilgrimage, wealthy people hire a team of performers and finance the setting up of the event, while impecunious people devote their effort and ‘volunteer’ to serve the deities. During the propitiatory rites, community leaders act as the people-in-charge or the chiefs of the altar. They give money to build the altar for the rites, hire Taoist priests, and prepare the offerings, in order to complete the propitiatory event that brought ‘wellness and good health’ to everyone in the area. The chief of the altar and the person-in-charge receive protection from the goddesses as well as envy from other villagers. The villagers also receive a share of the fortune that the gods bestowed on them. Participation in temples activities is one way that leaders of a community gain reputation and prestige. The community leaders not only sponsor the events as believers, but they also compete for the positions in the temple committee. People gain more power as they become in charge of the temple activities. In return, they certainly need to promote welfare services in the community. Examples the overseers of temples and chief organizers of sacrificial rites helped promote welfare services.

In the annual propitiatory rites, owners of small and medium-sized businesses foster good relations with their employees by inviting them for a feast. The owners might also invite other owners in order to exchange business information, while employees also compare themselves with one another as well as find information about other job opportunities. In his research on villages around the area of Lu Kang in Chang Hua, Professor Bernard Gallin also supported these views (Gallin, 1982, Arthur Kleinman, 1986).

Furthermore, religious activities can galvanize consumption and production in the community. During the annual propitiatory rites, meticulous people slaughter a male pig as a sacrifice to the gods. In the past, every family had to slaughter a male pig, whether the family had money or not. Ordinarily, people raise their own pigs. The pigs eat the family’s leftovers; therefore, the expenses on pigs are not considerable. Impecunious families can raise a pig with other people. Or they might get a pig on credit. During the ceremony, they slaughtered the pig. The person who kills the fattest pig has most pride or ‘face’ in the community, because this means that he is the most pious person who is committed to raising the pig. Gods also devote more effort to protect this person. The meat is divided

and given to relatives and friends. Some can even be sold, while the majority is cooked and served to guests. The yearly propitiatory event is a festival that people may not be thrifty about. People lose face for not worshipping, and others will view those who do not participate in the rites as uncooperative or as believers in other gods. People who invite guests for a feast on this occasion even compare the size of their party to the size of the others. Living in these communities, the questions of how to foster good relations with others and how to maintain one's own status are inseparable from the propitiatory ceremonies. People believe that lively, magnificent celebrations can appease the gods, who will in turn protect their harvest in the upcoming year. People's lives can be changed and the economy can be improved through the worship of the gods. For these reasons, people commit all their effort to this event. For instance, even those who borrow on credit in order to invite guests for a feast can galvanize production, which, subsequently, allows people to pay off the debts. In recent years, the trend of sacrificing pigs has diminished in "Middle Town". However, during the birthday of Matsu, the ceremonies that returned pilgrims organized and the invitation of guests for dinner was not any less colourful than the propitiatory rites in the past. In order to compete for 'face' and reputation, people do not want to lag behind in earning money, which they need in order to invite guests and worship the gods. Although the expenses for one night are not too much, the status and reputation that the hosts and hostesses gain allow them to show off and flaunt for the rest of the year. The practice of sacrificing a pig is common and prevalent in Taiwan. Emily Ahern in her research on San Xia Village in Taipei County also provided the same conclusion (Ahern, 1981: 397-426).

6. Religious Organizations Giving Back Economy and Charities and Cultural Events

Religion and clan are the two main sources of welfare in traditional Chinese society. For example, in the past, a clan would stock up food. During time of necessity, the clan would release the food and provide for the needy. The clan also shared the ownership of some farm. The harvest belonged to this group of families. Some clans organized school and provided free school for the boys in the clan. Religious organizations offered institutions for the poor, institutions of

recuperation, free wells, free boat services, free bridges, services to relieve victims of natural disasters, protection of the living and the buying of captive fish and turtles to stop their slaughter. Since the Republic of China was established, because the imperial system was replaced by modern political system, the views on welfare become different from traditions. In addition, the family structure in modern society has changed from extended to nuclear families; the power that religion had in the past has decreased in the modern society, which embraces diversity and different values. These factors lead the welfare in modern society to become part of the national policy and are planned out and managed by the government, or the government even encourages people to enthusiastically participate in social welfare. The passive characters that people have today is, in fact, a product of the political system in modern society, but not the original outlooks or attitudes of the people.

Religion emphasizes pity and compassion for humankind and serving and saving humankind universally. For these reasons, charities and welfare occupy an important place among all the activities that religions organize. Even during the decline of religion or during economic recessions, religions need to spend on welfare services according to their income. Because temples in Taiwan tend not to have their own modes of production, their income is dependent on the donations of the believers. For these reasons, the welfare activities that temples organize can more or less reflect the amount of money that the believers donate. Temples that spend a lot on welfare usually have no difficulties with their income. Temples that spend little on welfare do not necessary have small amount of income; however their income must not be too high. This is because the opinions of the believers have influence on the temples. Therefore, the expenses of temples tend to be directly proportionate with their income.

In order to examine the sources of expenses and the income of the temples, we designed a set of questionnaires and mailed them to 180 temples in Taiwan. We received 28 completed questionnaires. This part of our research failed because we failed to receive cooperation from each temple. Here, we will say that social welfare occupies the third largest expense for the temples. The major expenses are related to worshipping activities; the second highest expenses are for the extension and renovation of the temples. After the temples take care of their worshipping

and sacrificing responsibilities, they use the rest of their resources to organize welfare services based on their income. For these reasons, the amount of money spent on organizing charities and welfare can more or less reflect the economic development in society. We will look at how temples overall reflect the economy in Taiwan, but will not discuss the differences among temples.

From the report that gives public recognition to Taiwan religious organizations and people that enthusiastically participate in charities that the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs publishes, we can see that an increase of the amount of money that various religious organizations spent on charities and welfare over time. The number of temples that have received the praises also has increased over the years, and the investment on charities of those temples also has tended to increase. If we look at both of these sets of data and the number of temples that participate in charities and the amount of money that they spent, we can see that the number of temples and the amount of monetary expenses tend to increase yearly. In other words, the number of temples and the amount of money spent on charities in the whole of Taiwan increase yearly.

In addition, temples that have received public recognition (as shown in Table 7) are selected from all the temples that have participated in charity events. The criteria for selection also have changed and the standards have become increasingly high. In 1976, 1977 and 1978, the standard for the award certificates by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs was between 100 thousand and 2 million NT. The temples that contributed this amount of money to charity would receive different kinds of award certificates. Temples that donated more than 2 million NT would receive encouraging awards from the National Ministry of the Interior. The present research does not have the data for the years 1978, 1979, and 1980. It could be speculated that the award standards were the same. In 1981, the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs gave different levels of award certificates to temples that donated more than 10 thousand and less than 3 million NT dollars, while the National Ministry of the Interior bestowed awards to temples that donated more than 3 million NT dollars. From 1981 to 1985, the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs gave awards to temples who donated more than 50 thousand and less than 800 million NT dollars, while the National Ministry of the Interior praised those that donated more than 8 million dollars. The threshold of

giving public recognition rose every year while the number of praises that were bestowed on the temples – based on how well they organized charities – increased yearly. This confirms that religious organizations, indeed, have given back society and economy.

Surely, the above data coming from the report from the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs which gave public recognition to different temples in 1976 to 1985 – are not a direct measure for the expenses of religious organizations and the rates of economic development in Taiwan. Thus, the reasoning is not conclusive, it only provides a side view of the contribution of religion on the economy. Other factors that could have affected the above findings were – (1) the measures that a county government took to encourage temples to enthusiastically participate in charities may be different each year; and these also vary in different county and city governments; (2) whether the participation of temples was enthusiastic or not could be different in different years and could also be different based on characteristics of the temples; (3) the price index each year could affect the meaning of the data; (4) the county governments only considered temples that have registered to report the charity events. Those that have not registered are excluded. For these reason, from the data of public recognition given by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, we can infer that, to a certain extent, the temples' investment on charity increased yearly, although the data is not completely conclusive. Furthermore, to a certain extent, the temples' contributions to Taiwan's economy tended to increase yearly.

Earlier, we said that although the main task of religion is contributing and saving the world, because the role of religion is reduced in modern society, nowadays the government serves an important function in encouraging temples to enthusiastically participate in charities. The government awards are based on a national policy. Act 10 of the Rule on Regulating Temples states that, a temple should organize charity and welfare activities based on its financial status, and should design the activities according to the practical needs of Taiwan. The earliest related policy is 'Guidelines for Implementing the Policy for Awarding and Encouraging Temples that Sponsor and Organize Charity and Welfare Services', which was announced in Government Letter no. 77078 on August 24 1976. This policy consisted of 16 conditions, which pointed out the basis of the policy, the purpose and method of implementation, and the standard for bestowing awards (See

the Handbook for Giving Public Recognitions published by Provincial Department of Civil Affairs in 1976).

The guidelines that were implemented in 1976 were amended for the first time in 1981. The name was changed to ‘Guidelines for Implementing the Policy for Awarding and Encouraging Temples that Organize Charity and Welfare Services and Promoting Cultural Events’. This guideline had 13 criteria, which clearly laid out the purposes and methods of the awards. The standard of the assigning public recognition by the Internal Affairs had risen from 2 million to 3 million NT (see the *Handbook for Giving Public Recognitions* published by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs in 1981). Furthermore, the name of the *Series of Policies on Religions and Customs* (the First Issue in June, 1983) published by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs – Taiwan Provincial Government No. 103090 Letter, Fifth Issue, March 2, 1981 – was changed to “Guidelines for Reinforcing the Encouragement for Temples to Promote the Revival of Chinese Cultures in Taiwan”. This further showed that the policy was vigorous and that its purpose was to ‘reinforce the encouragement’ and ‘promote the revival of Chinese culture’.

Table 7 (1976-1987) The number of temples that organized charity events and received public recognition in Taiwan

Year	Number of Temples
1976	44
1977	111
1978	161
1979	248
1982	350
1983	178
1984	229
1985	265
1986	283
1987	302

Note: Missing Data for 1980 and 1981

Table 8 Temples that participated in charity events in Taiwan

Year	Number of temples that sponsored charitable activities	Value
1977	1,136	NT 60,396,661
1978	1,175	NT 112,620,449
1981	1,041	NT 418,601,537
1982	945	NT 539,345,756
1983	982	NT 589,349,861
1984	986	NT 865,868,961
1985	945	NT 1,025,747,093
1986	827	NT 889,209,979
1987	1,270	NT 1,102,383,779

Note: The data for 1979 and 1980 are missing.

The second amendment was made on June 8, 1983. The name of the policy was the same and the thirteen criteria were also the same. Only the standard of assigning public recognition had increased (See *the Handbook for Giving Public Recognitions* published by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs in 1984).

Table 9 Top ten activities organized by temples which received public recognition

Types	Frequency	Percentage
Donation for emergency relief	92	30.5
Donation for winter relief	74	24.5
Donation to the poor during Chinese New Year	70	23.2
Donation for social charities	59	19.5
Donation for scholarship for poor students	51	16.9
Donation for library books and facilities	46	15.2
Environmental protection	43	14.2
Donation for medical relief and free clinical services	43	14.2
Giving away rice	41	13.6
Donation for cultural fund	35	11.6

From the establishment and amendment of this policy, we can see that government efforts to encourage temples' participation in charities became increasingly evident, that the purpose was better defined, and that their intentions

were clear. Furthermore, the types of activities that the government promoted gradually developed into a joint venture between government and religion.

What is charity? What are considered charity activities? The Judicial Department's explanation of Act 10 Regarding Temple Regulations in '*Series of Policies on Religions and Customs*' (June 1983, P. 330) was as follows. "According to this rule, the charity events refer to helping the poor, relieving victims, supporting older people and orphans, and other activities that offer help and assistance. These activities cannot used to propagate the religion.

The organization of Buddhist schools, praying, and transcendence are not considered charities events." Concrete activities that are implemented can be further divided into ten kinds: (1) directly relieving victims, (2) social support activity; (3) subsidizing public or private units regularly or based on special plans, (4) helping older people, children, and disabled people, (5) education, (6) cultural events, (7) traditional, customary events, (8) leisure activities, (9) religious propagating activities, (10) worshipping rites, (11) public facilities; (12) purchasing or donating land; and (13) others. The number of subcategories within these 13 categories is as many as 399. There is a vast array of categories that covers all kinds of activities. This reflects that different temples can have different views about what charity is. The county government is flexible enough to provide a great deal of room for the development of charity. It leans more towards encouragement than counselling and regulating. Any activities that are related to public affairs are considered charitable activities and are recognized by the government. Many charitable activities had only been organized by one or two temples. Also, 92 temples organized the same activities. As a reference, in this paper we will outline the top 10 activities that most of the temples organized.

Within the 399 kinds of charity events, except for the above 10 kinds that were often organized by temples, other kinds were not very common. In order to further discuss the nature of charitable activities, we could look at the percentage of other activities that were organized.

From Table 10, we can see that, in 1987, 'the charitable activities', which were organized by temples and recognized by the government, in fact, had little in common. Of the 399 kinds of charitable activities, only ten kinds listed in Table 9 were organized by a high percentage of temples. The Table 10

Table 10 Commonalities of temples that organized charity events

Types of charities	Number of Temples that Organized Charity Events
1	34
1	33
1	30
1	27
1	23
1	20
2	19
3	18
1	17
2	16
4	15
2	13
3	12
2	11
1	10
4	9
4	8
4	7
10	6
13	5
24	4
27	3
66	2
206	1

showed that only one temple organized 206 kinds of activities, that two temples organized 66 kinds, and three temples organized 27 temples. In other words, what were considered as ‘charitable activities’ by different temples had very little in common. Ordinarily, these events were based on different circumstances of temples. Insofar as it is related to society, it is considered to be ‘charitable’.

If we examine the content of different kinds of charity, we will discover that they had very little in common. The reasons for their diversity were – (1) charities included activities that were organized by the temples or not organized by the

temples, and activities to broaden, propagate religious influence as well as building and renovating temples; (2) including ‘organizing cultural activities’ was the main reason for why there were so many categories; (3) charities and cultural events were combined and were dealt with together. Act 10 regarding the regulation of temples stated that a temple should organize charity events based on its financial situation, and the policy in 1981 stated that Taiwan awarded temples that organized charity events and promoted cultural events; therefore, donating, subsidizing, or sponsoring activities also were considered charitable. Furthermore, the 1976 policy stressed ‘rewarding and encouraging temples that enthusiastically sponsor and organize charity events’, and the policy in 1981 also emphasized, ‘rewarding and encouraging temples that enthusiastically organized charity events.’ For these reasons, organizing, sponsoring, and subsidizing the activities had legal basis. This led to the diverse kinds of charity activities. On the other hand, the question of whether the broadening and propagating of religions could be considered as a ‘charity’ needed further examination.

A broad definition of ‘promoting cultural development’ means that it can include moral ideas like ‘directing people to kindness and preventing evil’. The propagation of any religion – Buddhism, Taoism, or new religions, like ‘Ci Wei Temple’ and the like, can also meet this standard. If the promotion of culture was understood in terms of ‘reviving Confucian thoughts’, then new religions, such as I Kuan Dao, Hong Hua Center, Ruzong Shenjiao, which discusses the Four Books and the Five Classics⁸ can also meet this standard. Under this definition, propagation of temples or religions is eligible for receiving awards from government. Furthermore, in order for a religion to propagate, it needs to have a fine lecture hall, a simple house, or other solid structures. This means that the building and renovating of temples and purchasing of land can also meet the standard. However, can the money invested on cultivating and educating nuns and monks and lecturers be included in the requirement? This needs to be discussed further. However, the 395 activities that are included are activities such as “setting

⁸The Four Books: The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, (3) 論語 Confucian Analects, and (4) 孟子 The Works of Mencius—formerly, required reading in all elementary grades. 五經 [wu3jing1], n., the Five Classics: 詩, 書, 易, 禮, 春秋 the Book of Poetry, Book of History, Book of Changes, Book of Li (social forms and ceremonies) and the Annals.

up Buddhist institutes”, “subsidizing Buddhist research grounds”, “publishing religious pamphlets and books”, and “fellowship organization of Sage King, Kaichang.” For these reasons, there should be a more detailed and clear definition and limits on what can be considered cultural development.

A broad definition of charity means that it includes organizing public events for the community and the provision of venues. The organization of activities may fall within the executive control of the municipal office of the township or administrative department of a village or town. They can request that the temples contribute to these events, because temples have always been a gathering place. Furthermore, temples collect funds from the local people. Participation in these events provide temples with the opportunity to give back to society, as the Chinese saying goes, ‘What is taken from the citizens should in turn be given back to the citizens.’ However, the kinds of activities that are listed under the provision of public place – and are eligible for public recognition – include, “building a car park”, “building a small garden”, and “building a statue of a respectable person”. Activities that are listed under the category of recreation include “sponsoring sport activities for citizens”, “provision of exercise equipment”, and “provision of refreshments for athletes”. All these activities make people think that temples have some ulterior motives, namely that the temples’ own activities and expenses become charity and that they list more than they actually spend.

A broad meaning of “charity” means that it includes relief efforts in times of disasters as well as helping poor or older people and orphans. The charitable activities that are eligible for recognition from government include not only direct relief efforts that the temples offered but also many kinds of donations to other charities. The latter include “donations to family service centers”, “donations to deaf and mute associations”, and “donations to the Red Cross”. These kinds of donations are ‘indirect’ as they require temples to donate only, not to provide labor. They are relatively easier and more convenient to carry out. While the amount of money the temples donate may not be little, these acts of charity tend to be passive. The temples simply donate based on different needs of all the people. Furthermore, there are numerous kinds of donations, but the efforts are dispersed, not concentrated. Thus, this kind of participation in charities tends to be amateurish.

From the above, detailed analysis of the ‘charitable events and cultural activities’ which the temples organized, we can conclude that their participation in these activities tends to be passive, amateurish, and they participate in numerous kinds of activities. These efforts are dispersed, not concentrated. These efforts are passive, amateurish because most of them are based on the needs of all the people in community and because the heads of the temples lack ideas about servicing people in modern society.

We carried out a cross table analysis on the 13 types of charities and cultural activities and different religions to which the temples belong (i.e., Buddhism, folk religion, Chi-wei Temple). The differences are not significant. This shows that the expenses of different religions in organizing and subsidizing different activities do not differ significantly. This suggests that, in Taiwan, Buddhism, folk religion, and Chi-wei Temples have assimilated and their degree of integration is high. Charitable activities that temples of different religions organize are determined by the needs of the local community, which have greater influence on the temples than the religions that these temples belong to.

7. Conclusion

Overall, our study may have underestimated some monetary figures, because respondents generally refuse to be clear about whether they or their families are affluent. This mentality is common in Taiwan. After conducting a statistical analysis of individuals’ basic data, some trends are clear and worth considering. First, this trend relates to the differences observed in different villages and towns. While geographical factors can account for these differences, we cannot over-emphasize these differences, because of some sampling problems. Because the percentage of respondents in ‘Middle Town’ is greater than that of other towns, this can confound the statistical results by exaggerating the differences between the two areas. While we must consider this fact, we can still observe that some trends actually indicate the influence of geographical factors. In addition, as we examine the amount of religious offerings in different geographical religions, the factor of interpersonal relationship is important. When temples raise funds for special events, people often decide whether they will donate or not and how much

they will donate based on who the fundraiser is and how reputable the temple is. The identity of the fundraiser and the status of the temple are important variables. In terms of the difference between sexes, women usually have stronger religious beliefs than men. However, the analysis of this study shows that men tend to have stronger beliefs than women. This can be due to the fact that the respondents of these studies are mostly the heads of the families, which means that the number of men is greater than that of women. This can confound the results. In terms of age differences, older respondents, especially between the ages of 41 and 60– have stronger beliefs. While this indicates the influence of age on folk religious beliefs, because folk religious beliefs have entered people's daily lives, middle-aged people from 41 to 60 years old have to bear the responsibility of worshipping and making sacrifices for the gods. Moreover, most of the respondents are the heads of the families, who are between 41 to 60 years old. Middle-aged people had control over the economy and output of the family; therefore, their financial contributions to religions and the characteristics of their beliefs are more prominent compared to other age groups. In terms of the trend of occupations, people in agriculture and industry tend to have stronger beliefs, which indicate the influence of these occupations on folk religion.

In terms of the main topics of our research, the characteristics of folk religion can be summarized as the following three points. First, people assume that the realm of gods is comparable to human society, that the nature of the gods is the same as that of human beings, and that gods and humans share similar laws and social organizations. This is a kind of anthropomorphism. Second, folk religion emphasizes the idea of efficacy. Although the status of the gods determine the degree that people respect them, the number of people that visit a temple depends on whether the gods are efficacious in fulfilling wishes and answering prayers. Thus, believers cannot only worship a particular god, which is usually Matsu or Tu-di, the god of the earth. The third point is that the direction that folk religion takes is 'situational'. The function of folk religion changes in order to adapt to shifting social circumstances. It has changed from serving 'survival' needs to providing reassurance. For instance, Matsu was the goddess of sea whose original function was to 'protected' people at the sea. After settlers arrived to Taiwan, they engaged in farming and other industries. Matsu then does not offer only protection but also reassurance and psychological comfort to people. In terms of religious

offerings, because of modernization, many people simplify the ways of making offerings. The sacrificial rites that temples organize have, nonetheless, become more magnificent because of the economic development in Taiwan. This illustrates that folk religion is a belief system in gods that basically reflects the structural principles and lifestyle of traditional Chinese society. At the same time, it can help people to relieve stress, bring people from different strata of society together, and help to impose control on society through religious teachings and beliefs. (Hsu etc, 93). In addition, folk religion can change its activities to adapt to external changes. These are the reasons why it has staying power in modern Taiwanese society.

Ordinarily speaking, there is a mutual relationship between economic development and religion in Taiwan. As the economy improves, temples' sources of income also increase. Meanwhile, religion provides support for economy by providing a form of work ethics as well as creating some jobs and career fields related to religions. With the economic development and an improvement in the transportation system, many religious, sacrificial rites become magnificent. The financial sources for these events come from believers' donations. When people's incomes rise, the amount they donate will also be higher than in the past. For these reasons, the economic growth, on a personal or societal level alike, are directly or indirectly evidenced in religious rituals. Likewise, temples that receive more financial resources can maintain and renovate temples. The scale of the temples becomes larger in order to attract more tourists and pilgrims. These all represent economic growth. Social phenomena are revealed in the succession of the interaction between religion and economy.

From 1976 to 1985, there was a yearly increase in both the number of temples that received public recognition and their financial figures (See Table 5.7). From 1977 to 1985, there was also a yearly increase in both the number of temples that made donations and the amount of money donated (See Table 8). Although there were other related factors, such as the price index of the ten years, whether the county or city government put a great deal of effort on promoting this scheme or not, and the special characteristics of different temples, we still can conclude that the donations and support to public welfare activities that the temples offered increased yearly. In other words, the contributions that temples made to the society become more and more important, and the results are definite.

Furthermore, we reviewed the basis of the government policy that gives recognition from the government to religious organizations which have participated in social welfare activities enthusiastically. We observed that, from the first announcement of the policy in 1974 to the first amendment in 1979, and to the second amendment in 1981, the purposes and methods of the policy became more clear and detailed. The key points changed according to economic development – it has changed from rewarding temples which donate and sponsor charities to rewarding temples which organize charities; and it included not only charities and public welfare activities, but also cultural activities. The monetary threshold of assigning public recognition has increased from the range of 100 thousand to 2 million NT dollars at the beginning, to the range of 500 thousand to 8 million NT dollars in the later period.

We further considered the nature of ‘public welfare, charity, and cultural activities’. Based on the records of giving public recognition in 1986, we classified the 399 activities under 13 categories. These activities have been organized by 302 temples, which have received the recognition. As we examine the classification of the 399 activities, we discover some common characteristics of the temples in their participation of charities, public welfare, and cultural activities. Their involvement tends to passive, amateurish, and disorganized. It also has a broad focus on numerous activities. The temples have not broken off from the regional characteristics of traditional temples.

We suggest here that, in order to improve the quality the temples’ involvement in charity, public welfare, and culture activities, and in order to strengthen the force of their contribution, the temples should move towards establishing a fixed, sustainable plan. Their investment needs to have a central focus. Temple should be allowed to actively and enthusiastic cooperate with the government as well as community units; they should have their say in different charitable events, the right to donate and make contributions (invest) as well as veto power. Central, provincial, and county governmental departments that are concerned with social welfare, such as the Department, Bureau, and Section of Social Welfare can work with government units that are in charge with religious organizations, such as the Civil Affairs Department, Bureau, and Section. They can discuss how to make better use of the force of religious organizations in the Taiwanese economy. In

addition, Huang Wei-shein (1988) pointed out, “civil organizations can set up symposiums and workshops in towns and counties through Buddhist associations, in order to promote social welfare services...and motivate people into actions.” Huang further pointed out that, because the social welfare organizations have overlooked the greatest source of force in society – temples, their organization of social welfare is not able to achieve as much as people wish to. The social welfare services also cannot reach people in different strata of society. On the other hand, if we look at this from the perspective of the temples, because their efforts cannot meet the needs for social welfare in modern society, the social welfare activities of the temples are often neglected or being looked down upon. If the government can play an important role in bringing together social welfare and temples, the temples can sufficiently communicate and cooperate with social welfare organizations, then the sources of social welfare in society will become abundant. This also can endow new kinds of responsibilities for temples in modern society. They can use this opportunity to modernize their charity and welfare services.

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