

New Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies

Cheng-tian Kuo

Thursday 31.3.2016, 14:10

FF UK, Náměstí Jana Palacha 2, II. patro, místnost 225V

Cheng-tian Kuo is Taiwanese Chair of Chinese Studies, International Institute for Asian Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands. He is also Distinguished Professor of Political Science Department and Professor of Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University, Taiwan. His major expertise includes Christian theology and Asian religious politics. He is the author of *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (State University of New York Press, 2008) and *Democratization of Nationalist Theologies in Taiwan and Mainland China* (National Chengchi University, 2014, in Chinese). He can be reached at ctkuo@nccu.edu.tw.

Abstract

Since the beginning of the 21st century, three models of state-religion relations have taken shape in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, each would have important implications for both its internal political stability and external political relations. The “rise of China” has been fanatically propelled by a quasi-state religion called “Chinese patriotism.” In Taiwan, a civic religion that promotes checks-and-balances between the state and religion have gradually replaced the state’s dominance over religion. By contrast, state-religion relations in Hong Kong are moving precariously between the Chinese model and the Taiwanese model.

In the past three decades, although “revisionist” scholars have successfully challenged the hitherto dominant school of “modernity” to explain state-religion relations in Chinese societies, they fall short on the prescription of a proper model of state-religion relations. This paper draws from the recent findings of

neurotheology to compliment the revisionist interpretations with a normative assessment of proper state-religion relations in Chinese societies.

Taking this revisionist/neurotheological view, the roots of these three models of state-religion relations can be traced to common psychological responses of Chinese intellectuals and politicians to threats of modernity from the late Qing dynasty to the Republican era. After 1949, threats of modernity and, hence, state-religion relations evolved differently in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong due to idiosyncratic domestic and external political relations. In China, the United Fronts strategy of state-religion cooperation was soon replaced by a radical Marxist strategy to eliminate religion from 1957 to 1979. Although liberal reforms since 1979 brought back the United Fronts strategy, a new quasi-state religion of Chinese patriotism has been under construction. In Taiwan, a similar United Fronts strategy of state-religion relations provided political stability to the KMT party-state from 1949 to 1987. However, the initiation and consolidation of democracy after 1987 have contributed to the rise of a civic religion which provides for healthy checks-and-balances relations between the state and religion. In Hong Kong, a strict separation of state and religion was maintained by the British colonial government from 1949 to 1997. But the turnover of sovereignty to the Chinese government after 1997 saw increasing confrontations between the state and religion.

This paper systematically compares these three models of state-religion relations in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, in terms of their treatments of five critical issues in state-religion relations: (1) state religion, (2) the separation of state and religion, (3) the conflict between national sovereignty and religious sovereignty, (4) the “anti-modernity” of Chinese traditional religions, and (5) the applicability of Western democracy to state-religion relations in Chinese societies.