

The Development and Cultural Characteristics of Local Religious Organizations in Modern Taiwan

—An Its Main Distinction from Christianity

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Abstract: Two forms of religious expansion can be found in the field of local religious organizations in modern Taiwan: one is the expansion of a hierarchical pattern, and the other is the creation of sub – units from one mother – unit. This typology helps us to see two kinds of religiosity in Taiwanese local religions. In addition, this study explains that one common property can be found behind these two different types of organizational expansion, that is, symbolic institutionalization. This is essentially different from Christian institutional expansion in the Western world. This comparison with organizational expansion in the Christian world helps us to understand the cultural characteristics of local religions in modern Taiwan.

Key words: Religious Expansion, Religious Organization, Folk Religion, Religiosity, Taiwanese Religion

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I . Introduction

The expansion of Taiwanese religious organizations occurs in two different patterns: one is the expansion of a hierarchical pattern (such as organizations described as “humanistic Buddhism” and “new Zen”); the other one is the creation of sub – units from one mother – unit (such as Yiguan Dao and folk religions). Both of these patterns of expansion are well – known to religious scholars. But why is the first type characteristic of Buddhist organizations, while the second type is mainly found in folk religions? Is there any common denominator amongst religious groups of the same expansion pattern? If there is, is it significant? Does the expansion pattern of a religious organization have any relation to its belief system? This paper investigates these two expansion patterns of religious organizations by examining the cultural properties of each type.

Research on the development of an organization needs to focus not only on its internal decision – making mechanism, but also the influential factors in its external environment. The theoretical viewpoint of new institutionalism emphasizes the close relationship between organizational development and the environment, and when examining religious organizations it’s

especially important to take into account the impact of the cultural environment. An overview of the development of Taiwan's religious groups in recent decades shows that, in addition to the increasing diversification of religious activities and the emergence of new religious groups, religious groups are gradually taking the form of modern organizations,^① especially in terms of flexible management and active recruitment strategies. We would be ignoring substantial reasons if we were to ascribe such qualitative change solely to the influence of religious leaders on the management strategies employed by their organizations. The significance of the evolutionary trends of religious organizations should not be overlooked, and some of my empirical observations are, for example, hard to explain: the leaders of some religious organizations often have similar concepts and use similar strategies to promote their activities. However, if we begin with their institutional environment, some organizational development trends can easily be explained. Religious organizations are categorized as belonging to the third sector of modern society, different from both the for-profit sector (the market) and the public sector (the state). Thus their institutional environment is closely related to the special attributes of the third sector. This paper argues that we should not fall into the myths of "rationalization" and "modernization" by claiming that the changes in religious organizations in recent years are part and parcel of the rational development of the organization. The cultural characteristics exhibited by the expansion of religious organizations provide substantial clues as to the relationship between them and the institutional environment.

II. On the way to modern religious organization

In contrast to the modern model of organization, the institutional basis of Taiwanese popular religion consists of two different types of institutional resource; one consists of the local customs closely related to belief in a deity, and the other is religious professionalism. The former is public and part of community life shaped by common beliefs and ritual systems, while the latter refers to the realm of religious "expert groups", such as Daoist priests, Buddhist monks, and different groups of spirit mediums. The possibility to become a "religious expert" is not open to everyone, but only to those who can meet some essential qualifications. Their sacred status sets a clear boundary between them and the profane world. This boundary between religious experts and others does not, however, prohibit their interaction. Some customs and ritual traditions of folk religion need religious experts for executing formal acts, such as the role of the Daoist priest in the *jiao* ceremony (醮 *jiao*), the Daoist master in different *fa*-ceremonies (法會 *fahui*), as well as the spirit medium in folk medicine.^② The construction of traditional religious elements is closely

① Chen, Chi-Ming,《宗教組織的發展趨勢》*zong jiao zuzhi de fa zhan qushi* [The Developmental Trend of Religious Organizations], (台北 Taipei: 大元 Dayuan, 2005), 27-33.

② Lee, Fong-Mau,《台北市寺廟信仰習俗與社區文化》*Taipei shi di miao xin yang xi su yu she qu wen hua* [The Belief Custom and Community Culture of Temple in Taipei],《佛學研究論文集,當代臺灣社會與宗教》*fo xue yan jiu lun wen ji; dang dai tai wan she hui yu zong jiao* [Collections of Buddhist Studies; Society and Religion in Modern Taiwan], (台北 Taipei: 佛光山基金會 [Fo-Guang-Shan Foundation], 1996), 214

related to the knowledge and instructions of these religious experts. Traditionally, these religious experts would not appeal directly to the public, but instead saw themselves as service providers. They provided religious services for sacred acts, their credibility being mostly due to their self – recognized efficacy in the other-world. Their role was not the dissemination of a specific belief system.^③ The traditional mode of providing religious services takes the form of a “production/consumption” mechanism. The production/consumption mechanism of traditional religions should be examined on the basis of the local institutionalized customs. Figure 1 shows the production/consumption mode of providing traditional religious services.

Figure 1 shows that religious experts are basically passive in providing religious services. Local believers and their organizations learn their beliefs, logic, and symbols while participating in their religious services. All these are constructed in the community through long – term interaction between believers and religious experts. These religious elements are diffused in the public through traditional and institutionalized customs and habitus. In addition, some groups actively spread their religious ideas, and this has a substantial influence on their popularity. Examples include the traditional preaching associations and phoenix halls (鸞堂 *luan tang*) where “spirit – writing mediums” (鸞手 *luan shou*) produce “phoenix books” by channeling messages from certain deities. Some of these phoenix books are printed in mass and freely distributed.^④ However, the readers of these publications are free to interpret these writings in their own way, in accordance with their personal experiences and customs.

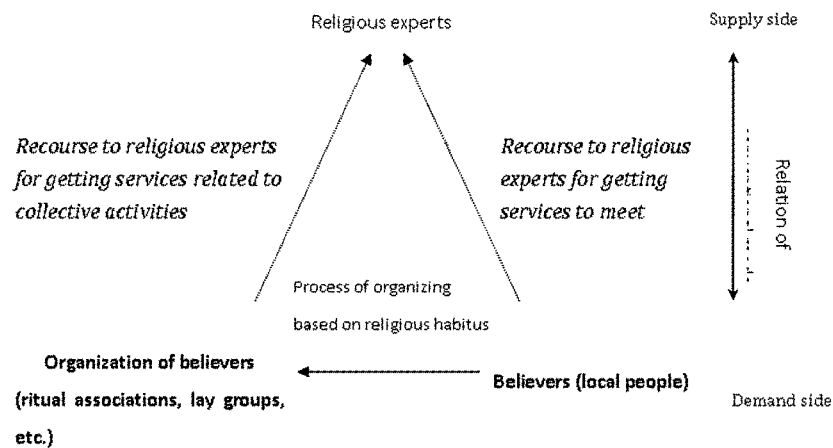


Figure 1. Conventional Mode of Religious Production and Consumption

Institutional change in the field of religion is closely related to political developments. The process of nation – building necessarily entails increased control over religious activities (see

③ Lee, Fong-Mau,《道教齋儀與喪葬禮俗複合的魂魄觀》*Daojiao zhai yi yu sang zang li su fu he de hun po guan* [Cosmology of Soul in the Combination of Daoistic Rituals and Funerals] 《儀式、廟會與社區：道教、民間信仰與民間文化》*Yi si, miao hui yu she qu: dao jiao, min jian xin yang yu min jian wen hua*[Ritual, Ceremony of Temple and Community: Daoism, Popular Belief and Folklore Culture], (台北 Taipei, 1996), 463

④ Lee, Shi – Wei,《日據時代臺灣儒教結社活動》*Riju shi dai tai wan ru jiao jie she huo dong* [Activities of Religious Associations Based on Confucianism in Taiwan under Japanese Regime], (台北 Taipei: 文津 Wenjin, 1999), 190 – 193

Figure 2). After Taiwan became a part of the Republic of China in 1945, the new government's attitude toward Taiwan's local religious affairs was characterized by both instructive guidance and strict prohibition, depending on different issues. There were even different standards for different religious groups due to certain political considerations. But overall, the religious policies at that time took the form of regulations which required existing religious organizations to make some changes to their management.^⑤ One of the most significant institutional regulations was the "Temple Management Act." This led to the transformation of the old regent system into a modern form of "committee" or "foundation" beginning in the 1980s.^⑥

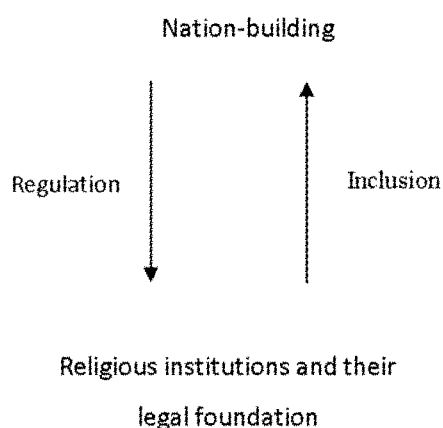


Figure 2. Political Ideology of Nation Building

Increased regulation made it easier for the government to manage and control religious organizations, and also helped to reduce financial disputes, but also contributed to an increased sense of "private property" amongst religious organizations. In the theoretical viewpoint of new institutionalism, each organization develops in interaction with its institutional environment, specifically, in interaction with other organizations. In these interactions, a religious organization comes to know its own position and authority in the specified religious field. In the process of taking on a modern form, religious organizations become legal persons under the regulation of the state, a process which entails increased awareness of property rights and the distinctions between owner/non-owner and members/non-members. This results in stricter membership criteria, as shown by the fact that relatively new religious organizations tend to make a clear classification regarding their members' role: donors, volunteers, etc. The religious organizations classified as humanistic Buddhism and new Zen are typical examples.^⑦ The use of such objective criteria strengthens the sense of organizational identity.

^⑤ Chen, Chi-Ming,《當代新興佛教—禪教篇》*Dangdai xinxing fojiao: chan jiao pian* [New Buddhism in Modern Time: Zen]。(嘉義 Jiayi:南華宗教文化研究所[Research Centre of Religious Culture of Nanhua], 1998), 62, 87.

^⑥ Ibid.

^⑦ Lu, Hui-Shin,“佛教慈濟功德會「非寺廟中心」的現代佛教特性 *Fojiao Ciji gongdehui 'fei shi miao zhong xing' de xiandai fojiao texing*”[Modern Buddhistic Characteristics of “non-Temple Centre” in Ciji Foundation],《寺廟與民間文化研討會論文集,下》*Fo shi miao yu min jian wen hua yan tao hui luen wen ji* [Collections of Temple and Folk Culture]。(台北 Taipei, 1995), 736-741

Similarly, traditional religious groups, such as temples and ritual associations, are experiencing internal qualitative change due to the changing institutional environment. For example, Li and Wu found that the object of traditional religious services is gradually changing from community and village to individuals.^⑧ Temple tourism and public religious rituals (especially traditional village processions) are two examples.^⑨ The meaning of “religious tourism” is manifested in two ways: for the religious tourist, tourism represents the construction of a viewpoint of “the other” who identifies himself as a participating “outsider.” For the practicing believer, tourism represents the construction of self – awareness of religious particularity. This religio – cultural construction of “insiders and outsiders” has developed in conjunction with the “religious tourism” trend which began in the 1990s. And this construction of religious identity comes along with the emerging conception of “property,” because the believers and their organizations are more aware of the cultural value of their own rituals and activities. All this shows how organizational boundaries become clearer in the process of modernization. As a result, there comes an increasing awareness of the rights and duties of being a member, and the rules of membership are regulated much more strictly. Figure 3 shows this modern mode of religious consumption.

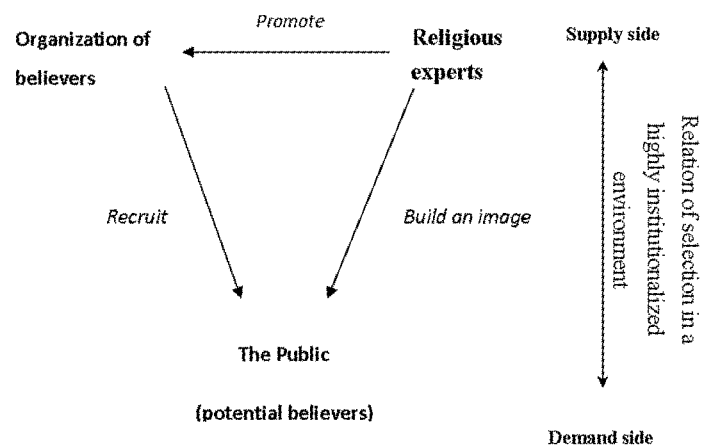


Figure 3. Modern Mode of Institutionalized Religious Consumption

Lin points out that the social network of people with religious inclinations functions differently than that of people with no specific religious inclination.^⑩ This means that religious inclination and the social network have become two independent variables. In the past, religious knowledge

⑧ Lee, Ding – Tsan and Je – Ming Wu, “現代性、宗教、與巫術：一個地方公廟的治理技術 Xiandaixing, zongjiao, yu wushu: yige difang gongmiao de zhili jishu” [Modernity, Religion, and Magic: Governmentality of Local Temple], 《臺灣社會研究季刊》*Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* [Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies], No. 59, (2005), 160.

⑨ Song, Kuan – Yu 1995, “當前臺灣民間信仰的發展趨勢 Dangqian Taiwan minjian xinyang de fazhan qushi” [The Development of Folk Beliefs in Modern Taiwan], 《宗教與社會》*Zongjiao yu shehui* [Religion and Society], (台北 Taipei: 東大 dong da, 1995), 233 – 246.

⑩ Lin, Ben – Shuen, “社會網絡在個人宗教信仰變遷中的作用 Shehui wangluo zai geren zongjiao xinyang bianqian zhong de zuoyong” [The Role of Social Networks in the Development of Individual Religious Beliefs], 《思與言》*Si yu yan* [Thought and Words; Journal of the Humanities and Social Science], No. 37, (1999), 204.

and religious habitus were learned and cultivated in community life. Therefore, the religious inclination and social network were not separate from each other. The possibility of free participation nowadays brings with it the concepts of rights and duties, and represents the emergence of a new type of organization as well as a new institutional environment. When believers become resources for developing religious organizations, expanding the number of believers means increasing the organizational capital of a religious organization and increased legitimization. Religious leaders can recruit more followers by active management of public relations and by actively organizing their followers for achieving generally acknowledged goals. Contemporary religious organizations also make use of their own “think tank” of religious experts. In this mode of religious consumption, the religious experts belong to the supply side. This kind of active role did not exist in the past. This evolutionary change of religious institutionalization represents the development from the conventional mode to the institutionalized – selective mode. This paradigm shift is an important feature of the development of religious organization in recent decades in Taiwan.

III. Two Types of Religious Expansion

In the traditional religious consumption pattern, religious expansion often went hand – in – hand with the growth of the community or cross – regional expansion. The geopolitical social network is a major factor in this kind of expansion. For example, devotees of Mazu often built a new Mazu temple after migrating to a new location, an undertaking accomplished by “dividing incense” (分香 *fenxiang*) from a mother temple. In other words, changes of community size and social network have long been one of the main reasons for religious expansion.

The modern organization of Taiwanese religious organizations can be ascribed to the changing infrastructure of social communication, as well as to qualitative changes in the institutional environment due to political influence. When cross – regional communication becomes widespread, social networks are no longer subject to geographical constraints, and the expansion of organizations can develop cross – regionally, and the target group of potential believers is greatly expanded. The various forms of organizational expansion in the religious field can be categorized into two different expansion patterns: (a) Expansion by division: A new religious unit can be established by “dividing incense” from an ancestor unit (as in Yiguan Dao and traditional folk religions), in which the genealogical relation doesn’t interfere with the autonomy of the descended unit; and (b) Hierarchical expansion (as in humanistic Buddhism and new Zen – sects): In this kind of expansion a branch unit is set up and remains under the control of the “headquarters.”

As expansion by division continues, there needs to be some mechanism that keeps certain key religious symbols (such as Mazu, Ur – Mother, or the Three Treasures) open to each religious unit, such that no single organizational unit can lay exclusive claim on their ownership.

The genealogical sub – line structure of Yiguan Dao and the traditional descent system are based on this same logic of sharing. Shared symbols represent shared spiritual power, and the sharing ceremony conveys legitimacy by relating the sub – line to the original source. Shared religious symbols become the medium for each unit to construct its self – identity. Each sub – line or descendent temple constructs its own understanding of and relationship with the transcendental power which inheres in its shared symbols. It is important for believers to be able to “prove” and to confirm the presence of this authentic source in their own way. This kind of “spiritual confirmation” is, however, not totally personal, because such a spiritual confirmation relies heavily on common experiences, shared memories, and mutual communication. In other words, the collective life is the basis of constructing the transcendent world view of believers. The transcendent meaning cannot be understood without considering the daily life of believers. Besides, their religious expansion is based on the common religious symbols interpreted in different ways under various community circumstances. These common religious symbols can be interpreted and understood as a meaning structure. This kind of expansion with its sharing – mechanism spreads the common symbols (“significant”) to different social groups and individuals. The meaning structures, however, are not the same. This is why there is no one “authentic” meaning structure which is spread cross – regionally and cross – organizationally when a religious organization expands.

In hierarchical expansion the organization diffuses specific doctrines or self – cultivation practices. All activities of this kind of organization focus on these transcendental elements. The specific self – cultivation practices of this kind of organization are principally created by the founder (often referred to as the “master”), who often also serves as the leader of the organization. Because the transcendental elements are closely related to the founder, and the charisma of the master can have a strong influence, the charismatic effect is thus the essential source of legitimation of the transcendental discourse. Due to the close link between the transcendental discourse and the charismatic master, the specific transcendental elements cannot be used by other organizations without permission from the master. The establishment of an organizational sub – unit is only possible if it has a link with the same master. That is to say, the sub – unit can only exist as a branch. This type of expansion can thus only take a hierarchical form.

IV. The Cultural Character of Religious Expansion

In the expansion of Christianity in the West, we also find two similar expansion patterns.

The hierarchical pattern of organizational expansion can be found in Catholicism. But the difference is that there is a mechanism of “routinized charisma” (*das verallt ? glichte charisma*), that is, the huge Catholic system has developed a routinization mechanism in substitution of the

true charisma (*das genuine charisma*, i. e., *charisma Jesus*) which once existed, but is now only a memory.^⑪ The function of a routinized mechanism is to “relive” the genuine charisma. The Catholic Church maintains itself by way of “*supplément*”,^⑫ wherein all the institutional agencies are endowed with certain transcendent authority. But in Taiwan, hierarchical religious organizations, at least currently, rely on the charisma of the present master. This is why the difference between genuine charisma and routinized charisma doesn’t appear in this type of organization in Taiwan. Although the leader of Ciji (Tzu Chi) tries to routinize her charisma by highlighting the “Ciji spirit” while preaching, her real-life charismatic qualities, which are “live” to her believers, still have an irreplaceable priority in the operation of the organization.^⑬ Purely objective doctrines (dogma), without any relation to the “person” of the master, could not, therefore, characterize this kind of organization.

On the other hand, the expansion of Western evangelical movements is characterized by independent units splitting off from existing ones. Finke and Stark have pointed out in their study on American church history that the expansion of evangelical churches takes the form of church – sect – process.^⑭ This church – sect – process refers to the development of new sects by splitting from existing churches, typically when some members think the existing church’s orientation deviates from its “original position.” These members thus attempt to set up a new sect which holds to the “fundamental position” that means a lot to them. Finke and Stark point out that a new sect normally has more tension with its environment due to its “fundamental position.” When the sect grows up and gains more followers, its orientation changes and it has less tension with its social environment. This is the way a sect turns into a church. Then the same process starts again; internal voices call for a return to the former “original position.” This continually re – interpreted “original position” is what Troeltsch says about “the basic teachings of Christ” (*Christusdogma*).^⑮ This controversial process of searching for the “original position” represents the ontological characteristic of *Christusdogma* and expresses its identity. The evangelical church emphasizes personal “salvation” by resorting to the belief of each individual. The church is just “mutually aiding” groups for personal salvation, and the organization of fellowship is thus secondary. Therefore, there is no inherent link between the particularity of the organization of fellowship and the transcendent existence. The “universality” of the transcendental existence assures the universality of the concept of the “individual.” In this kind of transcendental

⑪ Ebertz, Michael N., “Herrschaft in der Kirche. Hierarchie, Tradition und Charisma im 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Franz-Xaver Kaufmann & Karl Gabriel, eds., *Zur Soziologie des Katholizismus*, (1980), 110 – 112.

⑫ Derrida, Jacques, *De la grammatologie*, (Paris: De minuit, 1967), 379 – 382.

⑬ Ting, Ren – Je, “現代社會中佛教組織的制度化及其有關問題之探討 – 以台灣佛教慈濟功德會的發展為例 *Xiandai shehui zhong fojiao zuzhi de zhiduhua jiqi youguan wenti zhi tantao: yi Taiwan fojiao Ciji gongdehui de fazhan wei li*” [Problematics of Institutionalization in the Buddhist Organizations of Modern Society: A Case Study on the Development of Ciji Foundation in Taiwan] 《佛學研究論文集 1. 當代台灣的社會與宗教》*Foxue yanjiu lunwe ji: Dangdai Taiwan shehui yu zongjiao* [Collections of Buddhist Studies: Society and Religion in Modern Taiwan], (台北 Taipei: 佛光山基金會 [Fo – Guang – Shan Foundation], 1996), 98.

⑭ Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776 – 1990*, (New Jersey: 1992), 42.

⑮ Troeltsch, Ernst, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, (Aalen: Scientia, 1965[1922]), 968.

discourse, the existence of transcendence is independent of personal experience.

The expansion mode of evangelical churches appears to be similar to that of the sharing mechanism in Taiwan. But the evangelical split – up pattern is promoted by the internal tension by interpreting *Christusdogma*. The identity of an evangelical church is associated with the particularity of its transcendental discourse. The inherent tension is, however, not found in the pattern of descendent split – up in Taiwan. The organizational expansion of descendent split – up is not due to the discursive search for authenticity of the transcendental power. The identity of this kind of religious organization in Taiwan is not associated with the particularity of its transcendental discourse, but the particularity of the organization. When a secular problem of social relations, framed by the organization, can be solved in a transcendental way, the transcendental power is thus identified with this group of people. This kind of transcendental effect needs to be relived constantly to revive the link with the transcendental power. Because the transcendental effect is particular to certain social groups, it is thus hard to transfer or translate to other groups.

In the foregoing description, we found similarities in the appearance of organizational expansion in different cultures, but the dynamics behind the expansion are totally different. Both patterns can be found in Taiwan as well as in Western Christianity. However, the inherent dynamics are not the same. The expansion of Catholic or evangelical organizations has centered on the *Christusdogma* which is traced back to the absence of Christ and needs to be interpreted in a way that assures Christ's position as "the one and only." This ontological existence of the *Christusdogma* is a cultural "imprint," similar to Derrida's "trace" that constantly needs *supplément* to justify its existence, and it becomes the "center" of the Christian discursive structure, no matter if the expansion is of the hierarchical or split – up form. In Taiwan these two forms of expansion have in common the transcendental power that links with the secular sociality, i. e. , with the particularity of collective experience of a social group (in the case of the temples of popular religion) or with the particularity of the master as the leader of the organization (as in case of Ciji). Religious expansion in Taiwan is a process of creating a socially inherent transcendence. They share some of the same symbols which are free to be interpreted without any preconditioned meaning structure, but in the context of social life. ⑩

V. Is the religious field a contentious field of an economic type?

Is there a type of economic competition between Taiwan's diverse religious organizations? In terms of the characteristics of a perfectly competitive market, the most important criterion of the market is that there should be symbolic generalized mediums, such as different forms of capital.

⑩ Chi, Wei – hsian, "符號關聯分析在宗教研究方法上的探討:臺灣宗教的建構觀察 Fuhao guanlian fenxi zai zongjiao yanjiu fangfa shang de tantao; Taiwan zongjiao de jiangou guancha" [Semantic Analysis as Methodology of Religious Study: An Examination of the Constructive Process of Taiwanese Religion],《政治與社會哲學評論》*Zhengzhi yu shehui zhexue pinglun* [Societas: A Journal for Philosophical Study of Public Affairs], No. 10, (2004), 215 – 230.

Does there exist this kind of capital throughout religious groups in Taiwan? Due to geographical and juridical constraints, competition between religious organizations has been rare. The religious organizations were too busy with local affairs. However, when religious groups begin to take on the characteristics of a modern organization, as mentioned above, the boundary between members and non – members becomes clearer, and the concept of “property” gains importance. Organizational expansion is thus regarded as the expansion of the organization’s “private property.” Especially in the discussions of the religious economists, “believers” have become one kind of “capital” (Iannaccone, Olson, and Stark 1995: 726).^⑰ Further observation shows, however, that “religious goods” are very different. Thus the objective basis cannot be found in the content of “religious goods,” such as certain religious activities, transcendental power, and transcendental discourses. What could this be? This question can be traced back to the institutional environment that characterizes the relationship between competing religious organizations.

The development of an organization cannot be discussed without considering its institutional environment, just as the development of a religion cannot be talked about without considering the social expectations and perceptions of the public about religious organizations in the context of the whole society. The social expectations about religion are the basis for a religious organization’s legitimation in society. The efforts to strengthen their legitimation follow the logic of “negation” (*la dénégation*) in Bourdieu’s terms.^⑱ That is, they must disavow their interest in the management of economic capital to build their social capital in society. The social expectations take the form of symbolic capital. Like other non – profit organizations (the third sector), they disavow their interest in economic capital to gain social recognition. That is to say, if there is any generalized symbol shared in the religious field, it would not be a particular doctrine (dogma), nor any ritual, nor any transcendental element, but the symbolic capital constructed in a social context. Religion is a socially constructed field in terms of social expectations (including governance of the national discourse) where symbolic capital is competed for by different religious organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1991: 41).

The emergence of these symbolic elements is different from the process of “standardization” of the Frankfurt school.^⑲ It is the process of establishing a field where different organizations share some set of symbolic capital in order to legitimate their positions in the field. In contrast to “rational institutional myths,” religious groups are not located in the field of a national government’s official bureaucracy, nor in a market, both of which could be characterized as a field of instrumental rationality. Instead, they are located outside the field of instrumental rationality, in the realm of the third sector, an environment derogating the value of for – profit instrumental rationality. Thus, the emergence of a religious field comes along with the fact that the

^⑰ Iannaccone, L. R., Olson, Daniel V. A. and Rodney Stark, “Religious Resources and Church Growth”, in *Social Forces*, No. 74, (1995), 726.

^⑱ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Le sens pratique*, (Paris: De minuit, 1980), 216.

^⑲ Adorno, Theodor, “On Popular Music,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, No 9. (1941), 17 – 18.

symbolized term “religion” is legitimated in the social environment. Religion itself also becomes a legitimated symbol in society and represents a medium through which three categories—religious field, religious organization, and religious self—emerge. If the Western Christian religion is constructed depending on the Christian doctrine (dogma), Taiwan’s social construction of the religious field is based on the social discourses about religion and in the process of symbolization of religion. Unlike the “rational institutional myth”,^② Taiwan’s religious institutional environment seems closer to the myth of the “symbolic system (symbolic institutional myths).”

VI. Conclusion

The main trends in Taiwanese religion are the legal registration of religious organizations under the governance of the state, and, more importantly, religious organizations (as organizational agents) constructing a field with objective symbolic capital. Many religious groups committed to philanthropy have emerged in recent years. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, the Taiwanese government has encouraged religious organizations to promote charity and public welfare by giving awards to those who donate a certain amount of money. These awards may not directly affect the religious organizations very much, but they do strengthen the social expectations of religious organizations. For those organizations which are eager to attract more people, the awards could help to build a good public image. Religious organizations may not really care about the award itself, but receiving the award does help to legitimate their position and strengthen their identity in the religious field. The trend of engaging in charity can thus be seen as an example of homogenization (isomorphism).^②

Each religious organization, whether in transition or newly established, learns to find a “position” in modern society for constructing its organizational autonomy. Any institutional environment should not be understood as “rational” just because it fits in with the political institutionalization of nation – building.^② The third sector is a distinctive alternative “field” between the for-profit market and the state, both of which are characterized by instrumental rationality. In the viewpoint of social exchange, the operation of the third sector follows the logic of the denegation of instrumental rationality. Religious organizations seek their own identity in the institutional environment by way of denegation of instrumental rationality. Therefore, their field should not be viewed as equivalent to the market.

In addition, an analysis of organizational expansion shows that the construction of religious symbols in the religious field in Taiwan is basically different from that of Western Christianity.

^② Meyer, John and Brian Rowan, “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony,” in: Powell, W. and Paul DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, (Chicago: 1991), 47 – 48.

^② Powell, W. and Paul DiMaggio, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” in *ibid.*, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, (Chicago: 1991), 67 – 69.

^② Meyer, John W., “Rationalized Environments,” in Scott/Meyer, ed., *Institutional Environments and Organizations*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage 1994), 38 – 39.

This difference in the operation of religious construction cannot be judged by the expansion pattern, but by the production of symbols which are shared by the agents of the same field. The characteristics of symbolic creation in the Taiwanese religious field are not only evident in the organizational expansion pattern, but also in the inclusion of symbolic capital in the institutional environment. Because of the characteristics of this cultural construction, there is no “center” like that found in the structure of Western Christianity. Therefore, the degree of stability and autonomy of the religious field seems to be not so high in the Christian field. This is related not to organizational management, but to the characteristics of cultural operation embedded in the institutional environment.

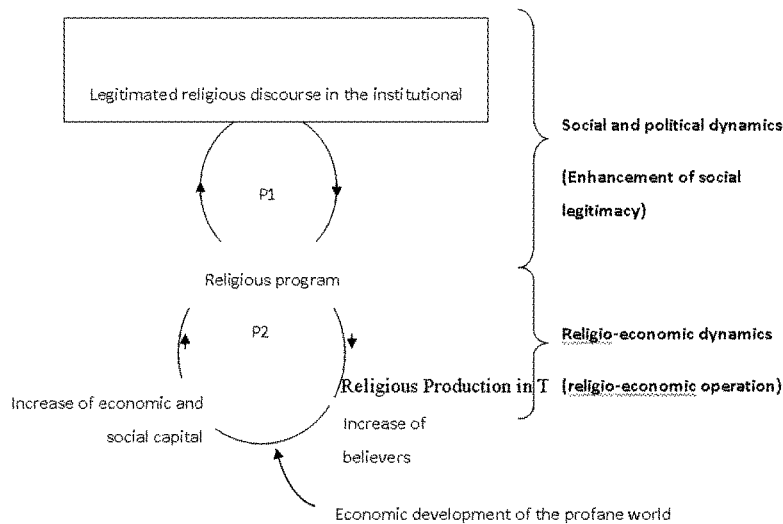


Figure 4. Dynamics of Religious Production in Taiwan

中文题目：

现代台湾民间宗教组织的发展和文化特点
——及其与西方基督教的关键差异

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摘要：台湾宗教团体展现出两种不同的组织扩张模式：一种是科层式的扩张模式，另一种是分香、分庙的扩张模式。本研究试图说明，台湾本土宗教团体所展现的这两类扩张模式，分别代表台湾本土宗教场域中存在着两种不同宗教性。此外，本研究也阐明了在这两种不同宗教性的团体背后，其实体现出一共通特质，亦即符号性的制度化过程。就这点上，台湾本土宗教展现出了有别于西方基督教组织的不同之处。藉由与西方基督教组织扩张的比较，让我们可以清楚看到台湾本土宗教的宗教性与西方基督教的关键差异。

关键词：宗教扩张、宗教组织、民间宗教、宗教性、台湾宗教