

**Governance Inspired by Taboos or God:
Religion and Indigenous Common-Pool Resources Governance in Taiwan**

Ching-Ping Tang

Professor, Department of Political Science

Director, Survey Research Center

National Chung-Cheng University

886-5-2428110 (O)

886-5-2721195 (F)

Based on research in the last two decades, it is now widely recognized among scholars that local self-governing arrangements play an important role in governing such local common-pool resources as in-shore fisheries, forests, and water systems. In many aboriginal, tribal societies, these self-governing arrangements take the form of informal norms and values supported by religious beliefs. Taboos, for example, may play an important role in maintaining a local common-pool resource by motivating appropriators to refrain from overuse and to work with each other to develop conservation plans. Yet as many of these aboriginal, tribal societies are increasingly coming into contact with the outside world, their traditional religious beliefs are fast losing ground among the tribal population. What are the consequences of these religious changes on the governance of local common-pool resources in these societies? What kinds of institutional and social adjustments are needed to maintain the viability of the resource governance regime?

In this paper, we examine three cases in Taiwan illustrating divergent patterns of development. In one case, the Dawu people on Orchard Island had traditionally maintained religious rituals that governed how boats were built, fish were caught, and seafood was cooked. These rituals contributed to the maintenance of a sustainable stock in its coastal fishery. Yet in recent years, with the advent of tourism and other social transformations, traditional religious beliefs have begun to lose their influence among the local population. As a result the traditional governing regime of the coastal fishery began to crumble, leading to fast depletion of the fish stock.

In the other two cases, the Tsou and Yamei people in the mountainous areas of Taiwan, aboriginal tribes initially were faced with a similar challenge as traditional religious practices began to lose their effectiveness as a tool for governing their local fisheries. These two tribal communities underwent key social transformations as Christianity began to replace traditional religious practices as the dominant religion. Leaders in the Christian churches in the two communities were able play an essential role in blending their new Christian values with some traditional practices for

governing their local fisheries, leading to the re-establishment of viable governing arrangements for the local commons. The Tsou people successfully built and operated a nature park, which contributed to the preservation of a native endangered fish species, Kooye Minnow. The Yamei people successfully guarded the entrance of a primitive forest, protecting it from illegal appropriation by lumber companies.

A common feature in both of these cases is that the Presbyterian Church has replaced the aboriginal religion as the dominant religious belief in the community. We speculate that some doctrinal elements of this particular branch of Christianity are especially compatible with some of the traditional tribal practices such as communal ownership of natural resources and seasonal restrictions on resource appropriation. In both cases, church leaders were able to help adapt these traditional practices to the context of a modern capitalist economy.

We have made several field trips to the three locations in the past few years. In these trips, face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect information about their religious transformations, problems they experienced in governing their local commons, and how appropriation rules and practices have evolved in recent decades.