

ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this thesis is in the relationship between popular religion and culture in Taiwan. The influences of major religions and schools of thought including ancestor worship, Confucian morality, Sinicized Buddhism, religious Taoism, and Animism, and the traditions and rituals associated with them have all contributed to the structure of popular religious practices in Taiwan today. This thesis therefore approaches popular religion in Taiwan from both historic and contemporary perspectives. First, a framework based on the historic development of philosophies and popular religious practices that began in the Shang dynasty and evolved through social turbulence and religious transformation will be established. Then, employing ethnographic research methods and analysis, field research conducted in four case study temples housing a selection of the most popular deities worshiped in Taiwan will be discussed. Including information from both surveys and key informant interviews, this thesis aims to show how popular religion in contemporary Taiwan is of a utilitarian nature. The historic framework will then be applied to contemporary religious practice in Taiwan, to explain how both historical factors and the evolution of popular religion has created a religiously tolerant and socially cohesive society. Of key interest to this thesis is religious divination, both due to its prevalence in popular religious culture, and its inherent utilitarian qualities. In the process of the aforementioned analysis, the dual phenomenon of finding deities from different traditions housed side by side in a single temple, and traditional aspects of popular religion being perceived as elements of cultural will be accounted for in both historic and current social contexts.

Key words: Ancestor worship, Family cult, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Popular Religion, Deities, Utilitarian, Divination