

## ABSTRACT

Beyond the West:  
Religion, Conformity, and Subjective Well-Being in Contemporary Chinese Society

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Ongoing revival of religion in Chinese society provides a rare opportunity for testing controversial sociological theories in a non-Western, non-Christian context. The goal of my dissertation is to examine the complex links between religion, social conformity, and subjective well-being, using nationally representative data sets from mainland China and Taiwan.

This dissertation divides into six chapters. Chapter 1 reviews the core theoretical debates in the sociology of religion and religious trends in Chinese society. Chapter 2 investigates whether Chinese persons with greater risk-taking tendency are less religious relative to others. Chapter 3 focuses on the relationships between religiosity and personal feelings of mastery. Chapter 4 analyzes the associations between multidimensional religious involvement and personal happiness. Chapter 5 examines the linkages of fatalistic voluntarism, a core component of theological fatalism, and life satisfaction. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings, discusses their implications, and suggests a future research agenda.

As will be shown, my findings generally support the rational choice perspectives, the new paradigm in the sociology. In Taiwan's overwhelmingly religious atmosphere, for instance, risk preference seems to be a significant correlate of active religiousness. Moreover, religious beliefs and practices are generally beneficial for personal mastery and subjective well-being among the Chinese. This dissertation speaks directly to the central theoretical issues in the sociology of religion, fills the void in previous research, and stimulates future cross-cultural studies on religion, social conformity, and mental health.

Beyond the West:  
Religion, Conformity, and Subjective Well-Being in Contemporary Chinese Society

by

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A Dissertation

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## DEDICATION

To liberty

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Background*

Over the past several decades, the sociology of religion has experienced a major shift in paradigm from secularization theories to rational choice theories (Warner, 1993; Young, 1997). Amid this transition, scholarly debates have been focused on four crucial themes: (1) whether religion is doomed to decline and perish; (2) whether religion is viewed as fundamentally psychological rather than as a property of groups or collectivities; (3) whether religion is merely an epiphenomenon that reflects more fundamental social phenomena; and (4) whether religion is false or harmful because it impedes rationality and sanctifies tyrants (Stark & Finke, 2000, pp.28-30). Secularization theorists hold positive perspectives regarding each of these themes; in contrast, rational choice theorists propose the precise opposite of each (for a comprehensive review see Stark & Finke, 2000). For instance, while proponents of secularization theories argue that science and modernization cause irreversible declines in individual piety (Wallace, 1966; Wilson, 1975; Voye & Dobbelaere, 1994), advocates of rational choice theories dispute this claim by showing ample facts that religious and/or spiritual vitality persists in modern times (Stark, 1999). Whereas there is little doubt that rational choice theories have been increasingly popular among sociologists of religion (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999), unfortunately, the battle between the old and new paradigms seems to be far from over, as diehard secularizationists arm themselves with revisionist versions of the doctrine (e.g.,

Chaves, 1994; Yamane, 1997; Dobbelaere, 1999), refusing to face destined demise and appreciate the whisper of “requiescat in pace.”

Recently, a farewell message to secularizationists has been sent from Chinese society. In both mainland China and Taiwan, religion has been reviving and its influence has been ascending in almost all of the major societal domains, from culture and education to economy and politics, and from individual and family life to domestic affairs and international relations. Since the late 1970s, when the communist state began to carry out the “reform and open door” policy, mainland China has been rapidly progressing towards modernization. During this period of time, religion has gained tremendous growth both in size and diversity; in sharp contrast, there has been a general loss of confidence in the secular authority of Marxism-Maoism among the Chinese masses (Chan, 2005). Thus, as religion has begun to fill the ideological vacuum, its social consequences cannot be overestimated (Chan, 2005; Overmyer, 2003). Chan (2005), for example, notes the following:

All these areas [religious and nonreligious sectors] of religious influence are not part of the programme of the official religious institutions, yet their influence can be far-reaching especially in terms of social values and ideas. Every sign suggests that such influence is beginning to gain momentum. (p.102)

In Taiwan too, religions have been flourishing over time, especially since the ending of martial law in 1987 (Katz, 2003; Stark, 1999; Chiu, 2006; Chao, 2006; Tamney & Chiang, 2002; Jones, 1999; Weller, 2000; Kuo, 2008; Madsen, 2007; Pas, 1979, 1996; Novotney, 1978). In fact, there has been little empirical evidence in Taiwan that modernization has led to declines in religion or declining spheres of influence of religious authority structures. Quite to the contrary, religion has remained a powerful social force in modern

Taiwan (Katz, 2003; Madsen, 2007; Lu, Johnson, & Stark, 2008; Tamney & Chiang, 2002; Kuo, 2008). Katz (2003) puts it so clearly:

[A] striking facet of religion in Taiwan is that economic growth and technological development have not resulted in the decline of religious practice; on the contrary...Religion continues to play an integral role in individual, family and community life, and temple cults in particular have retained their importance as sites for daily worship, community service and massive festivals. (p. 395)

Despite the rapidly growing body of literature on the revitalization of religion on the two sides of the Taiwan straits, the religious influence in many domains of Chinese society has yet to be systematically studied. In particular, previous theory and research on the effects of religious beliefs and behavior on conformity and mental health outcomes in Chinese society has been appallingly meager. This is largely because that (1) the overall importance of research on religious phenomenon in Asia has been underestimated (Lang 2004); (2) previous theories built on the Western tradition may not be readily applied to Chinese religions, unless they are refined or customized as appropriate for cross-cultural comparison; and (3) the lack of nationally representative data sample or the lack of capacity of discovering existing data and analyzing them with sophisticated quantitative methods has postponed the research agenda and hindered academic development. The purpose of this dissertation is to fill in the blank in previous literature on the religion-conformity-health connections in mainland China and Taiwan by directly addressing the issues discussed above.

My dissertation is the first empirical study examining the associations between religion, conformity, and mental health in the context of Chinese society based on nationally representative data samples. This dissertation may contribute to the previous literature in several ways: (1) it adds to the general knowledge about Chinese religions by advancing new evidence on the effects of Chinese religious beliefs and practices on

conformity and mental health outcomes; (2) facilitates comparative studies of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic and non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions, offering insights into variations in the religious effects across cultures and societies; (3) deepens our understanding of rational choice theories; (4) capitalizes on innovative, high-quality data samples of Chinese residents from mainland China and Taiwan, which have been rarely examined. Human rights observers around the world, government officials and policy-makers in mainland China and Taiwan, and religious leaders and organizations from different denominational backgrounds may also take advantage of this dissertation to promote dialogues and collaboration for social problem solving.

### *Religions in Chinese Society*

Due to changes in levels of strictness of the state regulation, the contour of mainland China's religious landscape has changed dramatically since 1949 when the communists took power in the nation. In the post-Mao era (1976-present), China's constitution has admitted the freedom of religious belief and the governmental control of religion has been relaxed as the state has shifted the focus from political campaigns to economic reforms (Potter 2003). Consequently, religion has been on rise in the country (Overmyer, 2003). Currently, the religious domain of mainland China comprises the following traditions: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese popular religions, Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, and a wide array of nontraditional religions such as Russian Orthodox, Judaism, Mormonism, Baha'i and new religious movements such as Qigong and Falun Gong. Among them, only Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism have been officially recognized by the Chinese government. While Buddhism has remained the largest tradition, it is Christianity in general and Protestantism in particular that represents

the fastest growing religious group in the nation (Chan, 2005). By the mid-1990s, the number of Chinese Protestants had already reached fifty million, without “underground church” members being counted; this number is about 50-70 times that in 1949 (Bays, 2003; Yang, 2005). “Today, on any given Sunday there are almost certainly more Protestants in church in China than in all of Europe” (Bay, 2003, p.488). Overall, it has been estimated that in mainland China one hundred million Chinese belong to the state-sanctioned religions, two hundred million engage in illegitimate religious beliefs and practices, and around eighty percent of the total Chinese population remain open to the supernatural (Yang, 2006, pp.113-114).

By contrast, Taiwan has been characterized by higher levels of religious freedom, diversity, and vitality in the post-war period (Katz, 2003). As of 2007, twenty six religions were registered with the government, including Baha’i (巴哈伊教), Buddhism, Catholicism, Chinese Heritage and Moral Sources (玄門真宗), The Chinese Holy Religion (中華聖教), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (耶穌基督後期聖徒教會), The Church of Scientology (山達基教會), The Confucianism, Hai Tze Tao (亥子道), Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (世界基督教統一神靈協會), The Huang Chung (黃中), I-Kuan Tao (一貫道), Islam, Ism (大易教), Li-ism (理教), Maitreya Great Tao (彌勒大道), Pre-cosmic Salvationism (先天救教), Protestantism, Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyodan (世界真光文明教團), Xuan Yuan Jiao (軒轅教), Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism, Tiender (天德教), Tienti Teachings (天帝教), The Tenrikyo (天理教), and Universe Mealler Faith (宇宙彌勒皇教) (The Republic of China Yearbook, 2008). Religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution and laws not only contributes to the diversity but also to the prosperity of religious groups in Taiwan. The number of Buddhist and Taoist temples

grew steadily from 3,661 in 1930 to 9,707 (registered) in 2001 (Katz, 2003, p.90); they, together with folk religion temples, have attracted a huge following that represents about 75-80 percent of the Taiwanese population (Chiu, 1997). According to Department of Statistics of Ministry of Interior in Republic of China (Taiwan), the number of registered religious organizations soared from 78 in 1986 to 1,062 in 2004. In addition to traditional Chinese religions, approximately five percent of the Taiwanese belong to Christian groups, and four percent claim as members of new religious movements (Chiu, 1997). The phenomenal growth of religious organizations has resulted in only ten percent of the Taiwanese reporting no religious affiliation (Chiu, 1997). Even among the unaffiliated, many remain active in spiritual seeking (see Chiu, 2006; Vermander S.J., 1997).

Religions in Chinese society differ widely in the conception of the supernatural. Orthodox Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism each hold that the truth is discerned within the “natural” order, rather than revealed by supernatural beings (Weber, 1951; Yang, 1961). The core concept in orthodox Buddhism (e.g., Zen Buddhism) is “karma”, which teaches that deeds by all forms of sentient beings create life circles and consistently influence past, present and future experiences. “Tao” in orthodox Taoism and “Heaven” in orthodox Confucianism refer to the paramount force behind the natural order that keeps the universe ordered and balanced (Weber, 1951). Because the supernatural essences and forces—when perceived as impersonal, remote, and unconscious—are not suitable partners of human relationship of exchange, these non-theistic, orthodox beliefs only inspire meditation, ritual, and magic (Stark, 2001). Nevertheless, during the course of cultural evolution in the Chinese history, popular beliefs in a pantheon of gods and deities have been incorporated into and mutually shared among Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (Yang, 1961; Shahar & Weller, 1996; Weber, 1951). For example, the Pureland

School of Chinese Buddhism centers upon the conviction of faith in Amitahba Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and its followers believe that chanting Buddha names will evoke divine responses to requests for life-problem solving and spiritual liberation upon death (Perry, 1982). Similarly, the gods and deities in popular Taoism and Confucianism constitute part of a heavenly hierarchy which mirrors the political bureaucracy of Imperial China (Weber, 1951; Dean, 1993, 1998; Shahar & Weller, 1996), and many of them indeed are historical figures (Pas, 1996). However, compared with the all-power Allah and Yehova in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, the Chinese gods and deities are merely functional, being limited in their own spheres of jurisdiction and competence (e.g. the money god, the stove god, and the door gods) (Eberhard, 1966; Shahar & Weller, 1996). Chinese gods and deities often fail to perform a task (Eberhard, 1966); even when they succeed, Chinese gods and deities do not offer rewards so valuable as to justify a demand for an exclusive relationship of exchange with human beings (Stark, 2001). Moreover, since many Chinese gods and deities lack moral concerns, those who worship, pray and make sacrifices to them are interested primarily in the worldly benefits and rewards rather than morality and salvation (Shahar & Weller, 1996; Chiu, 2006; Stark, 2004; Yang, 1961).

While religion is a powerful socialization force and social institution across cultures and societies (Sharot, 2001), there is a great deal of variation in their organizational characters (Stark, 2004). Stark, Hamberg, and Miller (2005) argue that by structural characteristics, religions break into two broad categories: churchd religions and unchurchd religions. Churchd religions refer to religions with a relatively stable, organized congregation of lay members who acknowledge a specific set of religious beliefs (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Unchurchd religions refer to religions that lack a congregational life, being based only on loose social networks of like-minded

people who are *not* required to assent to a specific religious creed. Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese folk religions fall into the second category, because they seldom require exclusive membership or regular group participation (Stark, 2004; Iannaccone, 1995). Indeed, Chinese temples exist primarily as physical places for individual religious services rather than as communities for congregating fellow believers (see Liu, 2006). Without congregations, Chinese temples lack the ability to generate a strong sense of religious identity and form close bonds of trust and friendship among irregular visitors; for the same reason, Chinese temples cannot exert social pressure to observe the moral order, even if they maintain a creed (Stark, 2004).

### *Research Questions*

According to the discussion above, religious beliefs, practices, and organizations in Chinese society are highly diverse in terms of purpose, content, method, structure, and context. Thus, important questions come into view: What is the role of religion in Chinese society? Does religion influence Chinese individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and well-being in the society, and if so, how? More specifically, do individuals exhibit certain levels of conformity in Chinese society dominated by Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese folk religions? Do Chinese religious beliefs and practices boost personal mastery? Are there any differences in levels of mastery among the religious, depending on specific aspects of beliefs and practices? Are religious Chinese persons more likely to be happy and satisfied with life in general than other Chinese? If so, what would be the underlying mechanisms at work? By answering these questions in Chinese society where religious vitality has been renewed, my dissertation speaks directly to the central debates between the old and new paradigms in the sociology of religion.

### *Dissertation Overview*

The main body of this dissertation includes four chapters (Chapter 2-5). Each chapter makes a unique contribution to the previous literature on the religion-conformity-health connections. Since each of these chapters is written as a separate paper for publication purposes, some overlapping and redundancy is unavoidable.

In Chapter 2, I use data from the 2007 Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS) to replicate Miller's (2000) analysis of the connection between risk preference and religiosity for Taiwanese society. From the World Values Survey, Miller (2000) found little significant relationship between risk preference and religiosity in Japan and India, because it is believed that in the Eastern societies predominated with Asian religions, being irreligious is not perceived as a form of risk-taking behavior (Miller, 2000; Miller & Stark, 2002). As will be shown, however, my analyses produce mixed support for the risk-preference thesis, based on the Taiwan data. On the one hand, consistent with Miller's findings, the association of risk preference and religious affiliation is statistically insignificant in Taiwan. On the other hand, however, I find a negative and statistically significant linkage between risk preference and frequency of religious participation among Taiwanese. This latter result seems contradicting the prediction of the risk-preference thesis. I proceed to discuss what might account for the significant association of risk preference and religious participation in Taiwan. My discussion suggests that risk preference may be a general mechanism that applies to Taiwanese society, in which most people perceive non-practice as a form of risk-taking.

Chapter 3 investigates the associations between Chinese religious beliefs and practices and the sense of mastery. In this chapter, I extend previous theories on religiosity and personal mastery beyond the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition to include

Eastern faiths. I derive several specific research hypotheses from the enlarged theoretical frameworks and test them with data from the 2004 TSCS. I employ domain-specific measures of religious beliefs and practices rather than combining them into a single index. Results show that: 1) supernatural beliefs (i.e., laws of karma and one God) and prayer are associated negatively with personal mastery; 2) while most Chinese religious practices are not significantly correlated with mastery, meditation practice displays a robust, significant estimated net effect on mastery; and 3) the positive effect of meditation on mastery increases appreciably when belief in karma is included in the analyses. Taken together, my findings indicate that certain aspects of Chinese religiosity benefit self-perception.

Chapter 4 examines the relationships between multidimensional religious involvement and personal happiness among Taiwanese. Happiness is a positive mood indicating of good mental health (Koenig, 2008). Recent research has shown that personal happiness taps basic sentiment that should not be simply dismissed as reflecting momentary matters (Stark & Maier, 2008). Unfortunately, little if any research on this topic has been conducted in Chinese context. Based on the same data as in Chapter 3, I find that: (1) some devotional activities (e.g., reading religious texts and praying) and frequency of religious attendance are associated positively with personal feelings of happiness; (2) chanting Buddha names displays a negative relationship to happiness; and (3) belief in a supreme God is more effective in buffering the harmful influence of health stressor. Clearly, religion is a significant factor that influences personal assessment of life quality.

Chapter 5 analyzes the linkage between fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction, drawing on data from the 2007 Empirical Survey of Values in China (ESVIC). As the

first predominant cultural value of Chinese society (Chu & Hsu, 1979), fatalism has been little examined in previous literature. While the Weberian tradition proposes that theological fatalism leads to individuals' pessimistic feelings and submission to the supernatural powers, which in turn, decrease self-perceived life quality, the rational choice approach views theological fatalism as containing positive components such as personal freedom and voluntarism, thus enhancing subjective well-being. Results from my analyses support the rational choice perspective by showing that among those who believe in fate control, greater fatalistic voluntarism is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction among Chinese.

Chapter 6, the last chapter of my dissertation, summarizes the findings from the previous chapters and envisions several important directions for future cross-cultural research.

### *Description of Data*

Data come from the 2007 Empirical Studies of Values in China (ESVIC) and the 2004 and 2007 Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS). Detailed description of the data samples and method has been integrated in to the ensuing dissertation chapters. ESVIC is a nationally representative survey of 7,021 Chinese in mainland China. After two pre-tests, the formal survey (rendered in Chinese) was administered in 2007 in 56 geographic locales in the country, including 3 metropolitan cities, 6 province-level capital cities, 11 region-level (*diji*) cities, 16 small towns, and 20 administrative villages. The multi-stage probability sampling method was employed to select metropolitan cities and towns, yielding a sample size of 5,283. The KISH grid randomly selected one respondent from each household for a face-to-face in-home interview. In rural areas, 1-2

administrative villages for each town, and 1-2 “natural units” for each village were sampled. The interviewers had received professional training by the time the survey was carried out and a post-survey team double checked via telephone over 20 percent of the interviews.

The TSCS is believed to be the largest survey series among all of the general social surveys in the world. It is a cross-sectional representative survey that tracks the long-term trend of social changes in Taiwan since 1985. The survey series have followed 5-year cycles that rotate selective modules for various topics, such as religion, family, politics, stratification, lifestyle, and mass communication. As of 2006, the TSCS had already accumulated 37 surveys. Recently, the richness and high quality of the TSCS data have become appealing to Western scholars and been made accessible for the public use through the Association of Religion Data Archives. The sampling procedures of the TSCS first decided the number of target respondents for each of ten strata of cities and townships, proportionate to the size of the populations in those strata. Then, precincts (the smallest administrative unit in cities) or villages (the smallest administrative unit in rural areas) were randomly selected both for Taipei City and Kaoshiung City and for other randomly sampled townships from the strata. In each of the sampled precinct or village, about twenty registered non-institutional adults, aged over 18 or 20, were randomly selected for a face-to-face interview.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Risk Preference and Religious Affiliation and Participation

It is a controversial notion in the sociology of religion that risk preference is a strong correlate of individual religiosity (Miller, 2000). Unfortunately, little empirical research has tested this claim in Eastern societies, with only a very few exceptions (Miller, 2000; Miller & Stark, 2002). The goal of this study is to replicate Miller's (2000) study in the context of Taiwanese society (Note 1).

In the past several decades, especially since 1987 when the martial law was lifted, religious vitality and pluralism have retained high levels in Taiwan (Chiu, 2006; Madsen, 2007). The rapid religious growth has resulted in the vast majority of the Taiwanese self-claiming as religious (Chiu, 2006). In particular, Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese popular cults have attracted a huge following that represents 75-80 percent of the population (Chiu, 1997). The Chinese traditions are "low-risk" religions (Miller, 2000; Miller & Stark, 2002), because they do not place a central emphasis on doctrines and do not impose strict requirements on group membership, denominational loyalty, and collective participation in religious activities on a regular basis (Stark, 2004; Jochim, 1986; Overmyer, 1986; Yang, 1961; Fuechtwang, 2001).

In this chapter I begin by revisiting the general risk-preference thesis and previous empirical research that includes Asian nations. I then examine religious affiliation and frequency of religious participation in a nationally representative data sample of Taiwanese adults for evidence that risk preference and individual religiosity are unrelated for societies dominated by "low-risk" religions.

### *The Risk Preference Thesis*

The “risk-preference” thesis argues that under some circumstances, being irreligious constitutes a form of risk-taking behavior, which can be analogous to criminal or deviant acts (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995). The idea of irreligiousness as a form of risk-taking rests upon the fact that in Western societies, the dominant religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Orthodox Judaism clearly define that non-affiliation and non-participation lead to high risks of divine punishment in an afterlife (Miller, 2000; Miller & Stark, 2002). This line of thinking remains consistent with the classic studies suggesting that religion is a risk-averse strategy for reducing uncertainty in life and avoiding otherworldly punishment (e.g., Yates, 1992; Malinowski, 1925; Homans, 1941) and rational choice theory arguing that religious beliefs and behavior are outcomes of rational calculations of perceived costs and benefits (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, 1987).

### *Risk Preference and Religiosity in Asia*

More recently, the risk-preference perspective of religion has been refined and extended to non-Western societies, particularly Asian nations (Miller, 2000; Miller & Stark, 2002). Unlike the West, however, the link between risk and religiosity tends to be absent in the East, because the dominant Asian religions do not perceive irreligiousness as an unambiguous form of risk-taking (Miller, 2000). Thus, while individual religiosity for Christians, Muslims, and Orthodox Jews may be attributable to the fear of hell-fire in an afterlife, the motive power that causes Buddhists, Hindus, and Shintos to profess their faiths may have little to do with the apprehension of a perceived risk of otherworldly punishment. Miller and Stark (2002), for example, note that “[p]rospects of posthumous punishment are central to Christianity and Islam, as well as Orthodox Judaism. But...such

notions are at most very peripheral to the major Eastern faiths” (p.1412). In addition, given that many Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and folk beliefs remain non-exclusive, seldom require membership, and consider religious activities mainly as irregular individual performance rather than frequent collective action (Stark, 2004; Iannaccone, 1995; Liu, 2006), Miller (2000) asserts: “...in such a cultural setting, not joining a specific religious denomination and not participating in specific religious behaviors does not necessarily constitute risk-taking behavior” (pp.7-8).

Empirical tests of the model of risk preference theory have been slim, and existing findings are mostly supportive. Based on data from the 1990-1993 World Values Survey, for instance, Miller (2000) examined the relationship between risk preference and aspects of religiosity (i.e., religious affiliation, finding comfort in religion, religious importance, and frequency of church attendance) for five nations: the U.S., Italy, Turkey, Japan, and India. The U.S., Italy, and Turkey are dominated by religions that attach a high risk to irreligiosity (i.e., Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam), and Japan and India are dominated by the so-called “low-risk” religions: Buddhism, Shinto, and Hinduism. Miller (2000) reported a statistically significant association between risk preference and the religiosity measures only for the U.S., Italy, and Turkey, but not for Japan and India.

### *Data and Method*

#### *Data*

Data come from the Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS), 2007, Wave 3 of Phase 5. As one of the largest general social survey series in the world, the TSCS joined the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in 2002. The 2007 TSCS includes the core ISSP questions and topics for Taiwan. The sampling procedures of the TSCS first decided

the number of target respondents for each of ten strata of cities and townships in Taiwan. Then the smallest administrative units in cities and villages were randomly selected for randomly sampled cities and townships from the strata. In each of the sampled unit, about twenty registered adult individuals (18 and above) were randomly selected for a face-to-face interview. The total sample size is 2,147.

*Dependent Variables: Religious Affiliation & Participation*

*Religious affiliation* Respondents were asked: “Which of the following religious denominations do you identify with?” (1= Buddhism, 2= Taoism, 3= Popular cults, 4= Yiguan Dao, 5= Islam, 6= Catholicism, 7= Protestantism, 8= none, 9= others). Table 2.1 presents a breakdown of religious affiliation in Taiwan. Following Miller (2000), I recoded the responses into a dichotomous variable of religious affiliation (1= affiliation, 0= non-affiliation).

Table 2.1 Breakdown of Religious Affiliation in Taiwan

Variables	Percent	N
Buddhism	23.20	498
Taoism	10.95	235
Popular cults	42.90	921
Yiguan Dao	1.49	32
Christianity	4.61	99
Other	.33	7
No Religion	16.53	355
Total N=2,147		

*Frequency of religious participation* Respondents were asked: “In the past year, how frequently have you participated in activities at churches or other religious groups?” (1=

at least once a week, 2= at least once a month, 3= several times, 4= once or twice only, 5= never). Responses were reversely coded (0= never, 4= at least once a week).

*Independent Variable: Risk Preference*

The 2007 TSCS includes an item asking respondents to rate on the following statement: “Sometimes I like to take a risk” (1= very true, 5= not true at all) (Note 2). Responses were recoded in the reversed order so that higher scores indicate greater risk-taking tendency.

Table 2.2 Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Used in the Study

Variables	Range	Mean	S.D.
Risk preference	1-5	3.47	1.40
Age	18-94	44.71	17.17
Female	0-1	.49	.50
Married	0-1	.63	.48
Education (year)	1-27	11.55	3.95
Household Income	1-26	8.55	4.86
Missing Income	0-1	.07	.26
Social Contact	1-5	2.64	.98
Religious Affiliation	0-1	.83	.37
Religious Participation	1-5	1.55	1.04

*N* ranges from 1,977 to 2,147

*Socio-Demographic Controls*

Following Miller (2000), I control for age, gender, education, and family income. I imputed the median household income category for missing values and created a “missing income” category (1= missing, 0= non-missing) to identify the missing values. Because marriage (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992) and social networks (Stark, 1996; Lofland & Stark, 1965) are important secular predictors of religious behavior, I also control for

marriage (1= married) and frequency of contact with friends (recoded as 1=never, 5=daily). Table 2.2 provides descriptive statistics for the variables.

### *Results*

I employ ordered logistic regression to estimate the models for religious affiliation (Model 1) and frequency of religious participation (Model 2) for Taiwanese. Logistic regression is an intuitive and appropriate statistical method for analyzing categorical variables (Mouw & Sobel, 2001). Table 2.3 presents the logistic regression results.

Table 2.3 Logistic Regression Analysis for Effects of Risk Preference on Religious Affiliation and Frequency of Religious Participation in Taiwan (a)

Variables	Affiliation		Participation	
	<i>B</i>	Odds Ratios	<i>B</i>	Odds Ratios
Risk preference	-.05 (.05)	.95	-.13 (.04)	.87**
Age	.01 (.00)	1.01*	.01 (.00)	1.01**
Female	.21 (.12)	1.23	.44 (.09)	1.55**
Married	.54 (.14)	1.72**	-.11 (.11)	.89
Education	-.15 (.02)	.85**	.03 (.01)	1.03
Household Income	.00 (.01)	1.00	-.00 (.01)	.99
Missing Income	-.16 (.25)	.84	-.23 (.21)	.78
Social Contact	.08 (.07)	1.09	.25 (.05)	1.29**
Religious Affiliation	--	--	1.40 (.17)	4.06**
-2 log likelihood	1,784.33		3,867.55	
R-square	.07		.07	
<i>N</i> =1,969				

a. Taiwan Social Change Survey, 2007, Wave 3 of Phase 5.

NOTES:

\* Unstandardized coefficients and standard errors in parentheses

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

According to Model 1 of Table 2.3, risk preference is negatively correlated with religious affiliation but its estimated net effect is statistically insignificant, when other explanatory factors are held constant. Taiwanese individuals with greater risk-taking tendency are not more likely than others to report a religious affiliation. This finding seems to be consistent with the prediction of risk preference theory that risk preference is unassociated with religious affiliation in societies dominated by low-risk religions.

Model 2 displays the estimated net effect of risk preference on frequency of religious participation. It is interesting that the coefficient for the measure of risk preference is negative *and* statistically significant (coefficient= -.13,  $p < .01$ ), after adjusting for religious affiliation and other explanatory factors (Note 3). This suggests that Taiwanese persons who like to take a risk also less frequently participate in religious activities (Note 4). Thus, my analysis fails to replicate Miller's (2000) study for Taiwan, which shows a lack of relationship between risk preference and religious attendance in other Asian nations such as Japan and India.

### *Conclusion and Discussion*

Miller (2000) argues that risk preference and religiousness are not necessarily linked for the Eastern societies where the dominant religions do not perceive non-affiliation and non-participation as a form of risk-taking behavior. Using the 2007 TSCS data, my study has produced mixed evidence for the "risk-preference" thesis. On the one hand, the results support the perspective by showing that the measure of risk preference has little statistically significant estimated net effect on religious affiliation for Taiwanese. Because Chinese religion represents a syncretic system of diffused beliefs and practices (Yang,

1961), as noted earlier, it is conceivable that not belonging to a religious denomination does not violate norms of the mainstream religious culture of Taiwan.

On the other hand, however, I have identified a negative, significant relationship between risk preference and frequency of religious participation among Taiwanese. What might account for this finding that contradicts the prediction of risk preference theory? In order to answer the question, one must first take a careful look at the definition of “low-risk” religion. As is self-evident, a low-risk religion should not be misrepresented as a non-risk religion. For instance, when Miller (2000) accounts that the risk of non-participation is perceived as more ambiguous in the Eastern societies dominated by Asian religions, he never explicitly states that there is no perceived risk of non-participation in the societies. Similarly, when Miller and Stark (2002) describe perceived otherworldly punishment as being peripheral to the major Asian religions, they never claim that these religions completely reject a perceived risk of divine punishment.

In fact, as with the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, there is always a certain amount of uncertainty and risk inherent in Asian religions (Jochim, 1986; Overmyer, 1986; Goodrich, 1981; Gombrich, 1975). Buddhism here serves as a ready example. Buddhist belief in karma and rebirth defines that bad deeds will be punished and good deeds will be rewarded. Sentient beings who have committed criminal and deviant acts will be sent to hot or cold Narakas (usually translated as hells or purgatories) to be punished for their sins. All sentient beings, even with virtues and good deeds, will eventually suffer a grievous life, so long as they remain in the endless life-cycle, being enslaved by cravings and ignorance. The way, indeed the only way, to escape from life’s tortures and misery in rebirths is to practice Buddha’s eightfold noble path (Ch’en, 1964). Thus, those who do not practice or delay the practices put themselves at risk. Moreover, although the notion

of laws of karma and rebirth is not prominent in the basic Buddhist doctrines, it allows Buddhism to be legitimized as a moral agent of the reward and punishment in societies where it flourishes (Gombrich, 1975). Thus, while the idea of karma and rebirth can be easily dispensed within the Buddhist texts, it may still lead to social consequences when the majority of members of a society believe it (Gombrich, 1975). In the sociological sense, Buddhism provides a means of social control of individuals' behaviors (Gombrich, 1975).

When it comes to the specific cultural context of Chinese society, thoughts and behaviors contrary to the Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist teachings are perceived as sins and crimes, thus being subject to severe punishments in life after death (Ching, 1993; Goodrich, 1981; Fowler & Fowler, 2008; Berling, 1997). Along with killers, liars, drunkards, meat-eaters, cheaters, prostitutes, thieves, and other convicts, “[t]hose who have omitted to pray, who do not perform the rituals, who do not distribute printed prayers, who do not repent, non-worshippers, and skeptics, all go to Hell” (Goodrich, 1981, p. 106). “In these hells, justice is impartially meted out and punishments are usually described as corporal, dealt out with the assistance of torture instruments” (Ching, 1993, p. 216). Upon arrival, according to specific sentences, the sinners will end up being burned in flames, butchered and hunted, boiled in oil or water, find themselves in burning hot iron beds, have molten metal poured down their throats, their backs plowed, tongues torn out with hot iron pincers, their skin stripped off, or face other kinds of cruel punishment (Goodrich, 1981). Not only non-participation but also improper practices will result in harsh penalties—for instance, if a priest omits a few words in chanting a religious scripture, he will be thrown into Hell and forced to read all that he left out in a light that flickers during his prison life (Goodrich, 1981). Although Chinese hells are not

final, they “bear more resemblance to the Catholic purgatory. Like Catholic beliefs, offerings, and prayers for the dead can mitigate punishments” (Ching, 1993). Ultimately, there seems to be no question as to whether irreligiousness is perceived as a form of risk-taking in Chinese society; rather, it becomes a matter of to what degree conforming to Chinese religious norms constitutes risk-taking behavior.

While the central goal of this chapter is to test Miller’s (2000) theory in the context of Taiwanese society, my findings imply important religious group differences. Therefore, I conducted supplementary analyses of the risk preference effect on religious participation for Buddhism, Taoism, Chinese popular cults, Yiguan Dao, Christianity, and other religions, respectively. Generally, results were substantively similar to those presented in Table 2 (more details are available upon request). The only exceptions that may deserve a bit discussion are Christianity and Chinese popular cults. The p-values of the risk-preference effect on frequency of religious participation for these two religious groups did not reach statistical significance ( $\alpha=.05$ ), which might be either due to the small Christian N, or due to the fact that Chinese popular cults lack a formalized set of religious beliefs and practices (Weber, 1951; Stark, 2004, 2007; Yang, 1961).

Because the data are cross-sectional, my study cannot definitely rule out the possibility of the reversed causal ordering of risk preference and religiosity among Taiwanese. Moreover, due to data limitations, I was only able to examine the active aspects of religiosity (i.e., religious affiliation and frequency of religious participation). Future research on this topic should include measures of affective religiosity when data are available. In addition, Miller (2000) conceptualized risk in terms of investment strategy to avoid future loss (see also Iannaccone, 1995). In my view, this line of reasoning seems to somewhat deviate from the original “risk-preference” thesis that being

irreligious is analogous to criminal and deviant behaviors (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995). The measure of risk preference employed in my analysis better operationalizes Miller and Hoffmann's (1995) idea of irreligiousness as a form of risk-taking. Future studies should develop a more desirable index of risk preference to measure the concept of risk-taking in the Asian context. Further, the scope of the present study is restricted to Taiwan's overwhelmingly religious atmosphere. Caution must be exercised when the findings are generalized to other social settings. More research is needed for testing the "risk-preference" thesis in other Asian nations. Mainland China, in particular, should be made a priority in the research agenda. Is risk preference associated with individual religiosity in China's Marxist-atheist monopoly? By investigating this research problem, scholars may provide valuable insights into the debate on whether religion influences social conformity at the collective/national level vs. the individual level.

In summary, Miller's (2000) claim seems to be a bit over general if it means that there is a null correlation between risk-taking and individual religiosity for Eastern societies. Based on the 2007 TSCS data, this study establishes the linkage of risk preference and some aspects of active religiosity for Taiwanese society, suggesting that the general "risk-preference" thesis has a broader application—it may transcend cultures and societies so long as irreligiousness is defined as a form of risk-taking behavior, even though the size of the risk-preference effect may vary across religious traditions.

### *Notes*

1. Although the data and models in Miller's (2000) study have been replicated by Freese (2004) to test the idea that risk-averse women are more religious than risk-taking men, it should be noted that the heart of Miller's (2000) study was not gender differences in religiousness. Rather, its focus was on cross-cultural contingency of the risk-preference effect.

2. The Chinese wording of the risk-preference item in the 2007 TSCS is “有時候我喜歡去做有點冒險的事。”

3. In auxiliary analyses, the measures of risk preference and frequency of religious participation were introduced as a series of dummy variables for each response category. Results were substantively similar to those presented in the text.

4. The variance in frequency of religious participation explained in the logistic regression model increased by about 7% when the risk preference variable was included.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Religiosity and the Sense of Mastery

The impact of religion on individuals' inner lives has long been noted by sociologists since the founding fathers (Weber, [1922] 1963; Durkheim, 1951; Marx, [1852] 1983). Symbolic interactionists, for instance, suggest that the sense of mastery—individuals' self-perceived ability to control life events and outcomes (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), which represents an important aspect of self-concept—is shaped and influenced by religious beliefs and action (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1902; James, [1890] 1981). Since humans are capable of conceiving themselves as “spiritual or moral being[s]” (Gecas, 1982, p.3), religiosity is crucial for personal functioning (Stark, 2001, 2007; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Greeley, 1995; Ellison, 1993). Higher mastery fosters a sense of feeling among individuals that they are the “Captain of the boat,” while lower mastery leads them to deny their own control over life circumstances (Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003). Mastery is essential to individuals' good mental and physical health which is important for many forms of worldly accomplishments (Pearlin, 1999).

Despite that increasing scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between religiosity and mastery (e.g., Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Jacobson, 1999; Ellison, 1993; Jackson & Coursey, 1988; Pargament et al., 1988; Tebbi et al., 1987; Friedberg & Friedberg, 1985), it has remained unclear in prior literature about whether religious beliefs and practices may influence mastery (for a comprehensive review, see in Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott 2003). This is partly because

the importance of the topic has been underestimated and prior research has continuously suffered from various methodological issues (Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott 2003). In this study, however, I highlight another constraining factor that may have also seriously hampered the current scholarship. That is, the scope of prior theory and research has been limited mainly to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition in the Western context, while non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions in the Eastern societies have been largely neglected (for a few exceptions see in Shek, 2001, 2004, 2005 and Shek et al., 2003).

This chapter contributes to the existing literature in four ways: (1) it concentrates on one specific aspect of self-concept: personal mastery; (2) examines the associations between multidimensional religiosity and the sense of mastery; (3) extends the research scope beyond the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition to include traditional Chinese religions; and (4) draws on an innovative data set from a nationally representative survey in Taiwan, an Eastern society dominated by traditional Chinese religions. In the remainder of this chapter, I will present my findings and discuss their implications for future research.

### *Theoretical Background*

With regard to the effect of religiosity on personal mastery, Schieman, Pudrovskaya, and Milkie (2005) have recently formulated two competing theses: the *relinquished control* thesis and the *personal empowerment* thesis. The relinquished control thesis expects religiosity to diminish the sense of mastery. The reason religion may undermine mastery is due partly to the belief that divine beings take over the role in dictating individuals' life events and outcomes (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983; Jackson & Coursey, 1988; Schieman, Pudrovskaya, & Milkie, 2005). Jackson and Coursey (1988), for example, note

that “a common secular perspective on religion assumes that believing God is an active agent in one’s life requires relinquishing a sense of personal or internal control” (p.399). Moreover, individuals’ dependence on divine intervention may detract from personal efforts at problem solving, thus leading to declines in personal mastery (Ellison, 1993; Jacobson, 1999; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Ellison et al., 2001; Ferraro & Kelley-Moore, 2000). When encountered with stress, religious copings may weaken self-efficacy by ascribing the causes and effects of stress to god (Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Pargament et al., 1988). The relinquished control thesis keeps in line with Sigmund Freud’s ([1900] 1976) psychological diagnosis of religion as “self-protective fiction” and “institutionalized mass neurosis” that entices believers into a state of reliance, and Karl Marx’s ([1844] 1970) famous statement that religion is “the opium of the people,” a sigh of “the oppressed creature”, and “a heart of a heartless world” (see Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003).

The personal empowerment thesis, on the contrary, proposes a positive relationship between religiosity and mastery. The belief in an omnipotent supernatural being may enhance feelings of personal potency and reduce uncertainty, as individuals involve in collaboratioin with God for problem solving (Pargament, 1997; Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Ellison, 1993; Pargament et al., 1988). Pargament (1997), for instance, states that believers “can call on God for help and knowing that God is on their side would not diminish their sense of efficacy and mastery. It would enhance it” (p.468). In fact, belief in divine others may be the ultimate enabler for personal feelings of mastery, and therefore individuals, particularly the powerless, need not rely on alternative sources for self-efficacy (Jackson & Coursey, 1988; Koenig, 1994; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005). In addition, religion may emphasize role-taking activities in which the pious

participants identify life problems by referencing to the God role or biblical figures (Ellison, 1991; Sharot, 2001; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005). Thus, religious precepts and practices enable individuals to find meanings about what God would expect of them in times of adversity (Wikstrom, 1987), and to acquire positive outcomes of inner feeling of control (Maton, 1984; Pargament et al., 1990).

### *Chinese Religion and Personal Mastery*

Religions divide into two broad categories: the theistic (godly) and nontheistic (godless) traditions. Theistic religions are based on conscious divine beings, who serve as objects of human worship, sacrifices, or supplications for blessings and rewards (Stark, 2001). By comparison, nontheistic religions are based on unconscious, inactive supernatural essences or forces, which govern human life but are not regarded as suitable partners of human relationship of exchange and therefore can only inspire meditation, ritual, and magic (Stark, 2001). In traditional Chinese culture, orthodox Buddhism and Taoism are typical of godless faiths, which teach that the truth is discerned within the “natural” order, rather than revealed by supernatural beings (Weber, 1951; Yang, 1961) (see Note 1).

For instance, karma is the basic concept of orthodox Chinese Buddhism and defines that deeds by all forms of sentient beings create life circles and consistently influence past, present, and future experiences (Ch'en, 1964). Because “karma” functions as a chain of causes and effects, orthodox Chinese Buddhism places a central emphasis on personal responsibility for life outcomes, without theological references to god or gods (Eberhard, 1966). In his analyses of Chinese Buddhism, Eberhard aptly notes: “If a person is reborn in human shape, fate determines only the social starting point and his physical and mental

endowment, not his whole life. Man has a chance to change his fate through morally good or, for that matter, bad actions...even as a prostitute, the person can strive to improve her fate” (Eberhard, 1966, pp.152-53). Meditation and precept practices are major means by which Chinese Buddhists hope to improve life quality in this world and an “other” world.

Similarly, Tao represents the central concept in orthodox Taoism that refers to the eternal order of the cosmos and the paramount force behind the cosmic order that keeps the universe and life ordered and balanced (Weber, 1951). “Tao is the one unchangeable element and therefore it is the absolute value...it is the divine All-One of which one can partake” (Weber, 1951, pp.181-82). Chinese Taoists believe that instead of being created and dictated by divine others, things in the universe behave as they do on the basis of their intrinsic interdependent relationship with the existential pattern of all life (Needham, 1956). Thus, the life goal of Taoists is not to carry out plans laid out for them by god(s), but rather, to live in harmony with Tao through cultivating *qi* and thereby avoid falling into the extremes of *yin* and *yang* (Coward, 1996).

### *Previous Research*

Previous literature on religiosity and personal mastery in Chinese societies has been surprisingly meager. From a cross-sectional study of 1,519 Hong Kong youths, Shek (2004) reported that the adolescents with stronger parental endorsement of positive Buddhist, Taoist, as well as Confucian beliefs about life adversity showed greater personal mastery as well as better school adjustment and less delinquent behavior. The religious effect was stronger for adolescents with economic disadvantages than for others. In subsequent smaller studies, similar patterns were identified among Hong Kong adolescents from economically disadvantaged families: positive religious beliefs about

life adversity enhanced internal feelings of mastery (Shek, 2001; Shek et al., 2003), and such influences persisted over time periods (Shek, 2005).

### *Hypothesis*

Whereas the supernatural occupies a central place in the theoretical explanations of personal mastery, beliefs in supernatural essences or forces have been largely ignored in previous theories and research. Of course, the empirical research in Hong Kong has examined the influence of Chinese cultural beliefs specifically about adversity (Shek, 2001, 2004, 2005; Shek et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the religious origin of many of these beliefs seems vague (e.g., the sayings “hardship increases stature” “diligence is an important factor to overcome poverty” and “man is not born to greatness, he achieves it by his own effort”). Although some of the beliefs were explicitly said being shaped by theology (e.g., the Buddhist/Taoist belief “poverty stifles ambition”), they are concerned primarily with secular achievements, not the core ideas of karma or Tao. Moreover, past studies have said little about mastery’s relationships to Chinese religious activities. Last but not the least, given the restricted focus on Hong Kong adolescents, prior findings may be not representative of the general Chinese population.

To address these and other shortcomings in previous literature, I investigate whether and to what extent the sense of mastery is related to religiosity among the Chinese. As noted earlier, it is the supernatural both in theistic and nontheistic traditions that dictate individuals’ life events and outcomes. For example, although orthodox Chinese Buddhism rejects the notion of divine creation, it never asserts that humans have total control over their life circumstances; rather, just like Christian teachings about God’s omnipotence, orthodox Chinese Buddhism claims that persons must accept what happens

to their lives as a result of being dictated by the laws of karma (Weber, 1951, [1958] 1996; Ch'en, 1964). Therefore, I submit the relinquished control hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *Beliefs in karma and one God will be associated negatively with the sense of mastery, other things being equal.*

On the other hand, orthodox Buddhists and Taoists all underscore personal responsibility for life events and outcomes and believe that self-potency is attainable via voluntary religious and moral actions. After all, man can plan and do his utmost to change life course and solve life problems through religious activities such as meditation, reading sacred texts, practicing *qi*, and performing temple rituals (e.g., Eberhard, 1966; Yang, 1961; Coward, 1996; Needham, 1956). This line of thinking concurs with the personal empowerment contention in the Western tradition that man will acquire greater mastery by remaining pious via praying to God, fasting, reading scriptures, and regular religious attendance (Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Ellison, 1993, 1991; Pargament et al., 1988, 1990; Jackson & Coursey 1988; Koenig, 1994; Sharot, 2001; Wikstrom, 1987; Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Maton, 1984). Thus, one from the personal empowerment perspective would expect that Chinese religious practices will lead to higher levels of mastery. Let us state it as a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Chinese religious practices will be associated positively with the sense of mastery, other things being equal.*

## *Data and Method*

### *Data*

Data come from the 2004 “Taiwan Social Change Survey” (TSCS), with a focus on religious trends in Taiwan. The TSCS is believed to be the largest among all of the general social survey series in the world. It is a cross-sectional representative survey that tracks the long-term trend of social changes in Taiwan since 1985. The survey series have followed 5-year cycles that rotate selective modules for various topics, such as religion, family, politics, stratification, lifestyle, and mass communication. As of 2006, the TSCS had already accumulated 37 surveys. Recently, the richness and high quality of the TSCS data have become appealing to Western scholars and been made accessible for the public use through the Association of Religion Data Archives. The sampling procedures of the 2004 TSCS first decided the number of target respondents for each of ten strata of cities and townships, proportionate to the size of the populations in those strata. Then, precincts (the smallest administrative unit in cities) or villages (the smallest administrative unit in rural areas) were randomly selected both for Taipei City and Kaoshiung City and for other randomly sampled townships from the strata. In each of the sampled precinct or village, about twenty registered non-institutional adults, aged over 18 or 20, were randomly selected for a face-to-face interview. Data were collected through these interviews, yielding a response rate of 47.6% and a sample size of 1,881.

### *Dependent Variable: The Sense of Mastery*

In the 2004 TSCS, Question 73 includes six items designed to tap personal mastery. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with the

following statements (1) “You control your own life”; (2) “You get everything which you have now by yourself”; (3) “Your life is controlled by rich and powerful persons”; (4) “Your life is influenced mostly by coincidences”; (5) “Whether you can achieve your goal depends mainly on luck”; and (6) “You can achieve your goal mainly because some key persons help you”. Responses for choice range from “Strongly agree” (coded 1) to “Strongly disagree” (coded 4). I recode “You control your own life” and “You get everything which you have now by yourself” in the reversed order and sum all of the six items so that higher scores indicate higher levels of personal mastery. These items are similar with Pearlin and Schooler’s (1978) popular seven-item instrument (Note 2). The Cronbach alpha is .55 (Table 3.1), which tends to be marginally acceptable (see Schnittker, 2001; Schieman, 2008; Mirowsky & Ross, 2007).

Table 3.1 Weighted Percentage Distribution & Factor Loadings of the Mastery Items

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Means (SD)	Factor Loading
You control your own life	53.65% (n=962)	36.27% (n=657)	8.91% (n=158)	1.17% (n=21)	3.42 (.71)	.39
You get everything that you have now by yourself	62.43% (n=1,129)	27.97% (n=500)	8.71% (n=153)	.89% (n=16)	3.51 (.69)	.33
Your life is controlled by rich and powerful persons	3.58% (n=68)	12.12% (n=218)	49.51% (n=893)	34.80% (n=619)	3.16 (.77)	.56
Your life is influenced mostly by coincidences	12.53% (n=221)	39.58% (n=710)	37.54% (n=677)	10.35% (n=190)	2.46 (.84)	.60
Whether you can achieve your goal depends mainly on luck	5.30% (n=100)	28.28% (n=504)	51.00% (n=919)	15.42% (n=275)	2.77 (.77)	.71
You can achieve your goal mainly because some key persons help you	10.17% (n=181)	43.07% (n=766)	35.35% (n=636)	11.41% (n=215)	2.48 (.83)	.65

N=1,798

*Independent Variable: Religiosity*

*Religious beliefs* Respondents are asked about the extent to which they believe “an supreme God in the universe” and “the laws of karma”. Responses for these two items are recoded on an ascending scale (1= not at all, 4= very much), respectively (Note 3).

*Personal piety* Respondents are asked “Would you view yourself as a devout adherent” (see Note 4). Responses are recoded as appropriate (1= yes, 0= no). Missing in the 2004 TSCS is an item on religious salience, a frequently used measure of subjective religiosity (Ellison, 1993; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003). I use personal piety as a substitution for religious salience, since it is the best single measure of personal religiosity (Stark, 2002; Stark & Glock, 1968), with an emphasis on the affective aspect of religiousness (Sullins, 2006).

*Frequency of religious participation* Respondents are asked “How often do you go to temple, the altar, or church?” Response choices include “Every day”, “Twice or more every week”, “Once a week”, “Once every two weeks”, “Once every month”, “Several times a year”, “Seldom”, and “Never”. Based on the responses, I create a measure of frequency of religious participation on a 7-point ascending scale (1= seldom, 7= everyday), with “never” as the reference category.

*Private religious practices* Several items in the TSCS list a variety of private religious practices including praying, sitting meditation, chanting Buddha names, reciting mantras, cultivating *qi*, and reading religious texts. Respondents are asked whether they have engaged in any of these religious activities. Positive responses for these items are coded 1 and negative responses coded 0, respectively.

### *Sociodemographic Controls*

Socioeconomic status variables are *education* (0= none/self-study, 1= elementary school, 2= junior high school and vocational junior high school, 3= high school, vocational high school, and cadet school, 4= five-year junior college and 2-year/3-year/military/police junior college, 5= military/police college, college of technology, and college, 6= graduate school), *household income* (Note 5), and employment status (1= employed). Following Schieman, Nguyen, and Elliott (2003), I impute the median household income category for missing values on this item, and create a “missing income” category (1= missing, 0= non-missing) to adjust potential bias for missing values in the analyses. Household income was logged for normalization in order to achieve better model fit. The religious effect on mastery may vary across socioeconomic status groups (Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Shek, 2001, 2004, 2005; Shek et al., 2003).

Demographic variables used in my analyses include *age* (measured in years), *gender* (1= female), and *marital status* (1= married). The justification for the use of these demographic background variables has been well documented in prior research (e.g., Ellison, 1993; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003).

This study also controls for *religious affiliation* by creating a set of dummy variables (1= specific religious tradition, 0= other) to represent the following groups: (1) Buddhist, (2) Taoist, (3) Christian, and (4) other religions (e.g., Muslim, popular faiths, and others). Since Christianity displays the lowest mastery by a considerable factor, I use Christians as the reference group, which allows the reader to see both the effect of no religion and the effect of Buddhist and/or Taoist relative to Christian. Moreover, this control variable

Table 3.2 Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics of Religion Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Mastery	-															
2. God	-.17*	-														
3. Karma	-.14*	.31*	-													
4. Piety	.02	.23*	.13*	-												
5. Attend	.01	.19*	.10*	.27*	-											
6. Pray	-.05	.17*	-.06	.09	.20*	-										
7. Meditation	.05	.02	.15*	.06	.12*	.09*	-									
8. Qi	.01	-.01	.06	.02	.06	.03	.23*	-								
9. Religious text	-.02	.13*	.09*	.12*	.22*	.26*	.19*	.15*	-							
10. Buddha name	.01	.09	.20*	.16*	.20*	.11	.24*	.16*	.40*	-						
11. Mantra	-.02	.02	.10*	.11	.10*	.08	.25*	.12*	.25*	.36*	-					
12. Buddhist	.00	.03	.16*	.04	.05	.01	.13*	.03	.13*	.28*	.17*	-				
13. Tao	-.02	.02	.06	.05	.06	-.04	-.02	-.04	-.05	-.07	-.05	-.25*	-			
14. Christian	-.02	.20*	-.21*	.03	.18*	.48*	-.04	.02	.19*	-.06	-.03	-.11*	-.08*	-		
15. Other	.01	.08	.09	-.09	.03	-.08	-.03	.01	-.04	-.06	-.05	-.42*	-.31*	-.14*	-	
16. No religion	.01	-.22*	-.23*	.	-.25*	-.10*	-.07	-.02	-.14*	-.14*	-.07	-.30*	-.22*	-.10*	-.37*	-
Mean or Proportion	17.80	2.59	3.06	.61	2.25	.04	.05	.01	.08	.09	.02	.25	.15	.04	.35	.21
Standard Deviation	2.56	.87	.86	.49	1.35	.19	.21	.12	.27	.29	.13	.43	.36	.19	.48	.41

\*  $p < .001$

N ranges from 1,248 to 1,881

would be useful for investigating whether the religious effect on mastery is a potential artifact of religious affiliation.

Finally, I include controls for life stressors: *divorced* (1= yes), *widowed* (1= yes), and *poor health* (1= unable to live a normal life for more than a month due to injuries or sickness). Past studies indicate that stressful life events and chronic illness are strong negative predictors of the perceived ability to control one's affairs (Ellison, 1993). Table 3. 2 reports a correlation matrix with descriptive statistics of the religion variables used in this study.

#### *Missing Data*

I employ multiple imputation techniques to handle missing data which are not missing-at-random in the sample. Multiple imputation provides adequate results in the presence of low sample size and high rates of missing data and presents more accurate and powerful statistical models by restoring the natural variability in the missing data and incorporating the uncertainty caused by estimating missing data (Allison, 2002). Multiple imputation procedures repeat  $m$  times to create  $m$  separate samples from the original dataset. In this study, missing data are imputed 5 times to ensure greater efficiency. In each of the imputed samples, a predictive model generates imputes to substitute for the missing values, resulting a full dataset. The standard method of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis is applied to each of the imputed datasets. The analysis results are then combined to produce one overall analysis, by averaging across the individual analyses (see Note 6).

### *Analytic Strategy*

My analyses proceed in four steps. Model 1 of Table 3.3 regresses mastery on the measures of supernatural beliefs (i.e., a supreme God and karma). Model 2 regresses mastery on personal piety, frequency of attendance, and other devotional activities. Model 3, the full model, regresses mastery on the religiosity measures simultaneously to assess potential suppression effects. Each of the models adjusts for the socio-demographics and basic control variables to rule out potential spuriousness among the focal associations.

### *Results*

Table 3.3 presents a series of imputed OLS regression models estimating the net effects of religiosity on personal mastery, controlling for the socio-demographics and other background variables. The religious measures and covariates altogether explain about 11% variance in the sense of mastery among the Taiwanese. Model 1 of Table 3.3 begins to assess the estimated net effects of religious beliefs on mastery. The negative, significant coefficients for belief in one God and belief in karma indicate that both the theistic and non-theistic faiths tend to diminish a person's feeling of self-control over life events and outcomes. The stronger one's commitment to the beliefs, the lower personal mastery he or she tends to report. This result appears to be favorable to the prediction of the relinquished control hypothesis that supernatural beliefs are associated negatively with personal mastery.

In Model 2, personal mastery's relationships to religious activities and subjective religiosity are examined without religious beliefs in the analyses. Among the religious variables, only the coefficients for praying and meditation are statistically significant, net of the socio-demographics and religious denomination. Individuals who pray to the

supernatural tend to report less perceived personal control over life circumstances than others do. In contrast, individuals who practice meditation are more likely to feel a greater sense of mastery than others are. The observed positive influence of meditation lends partial support to the personal empowerment hypothesis that Chinese religious practices and mastery are associated positively with each other.

Table 3.3 The Effects of Religiosity and Covariates on the Sense of Mastery in Taiwan

Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III
<b>Religious Belief</b>			
God	-.41/.08**	--	-.41/.08**
Karma	-.30/.07**	--	-.35/.08**
<b>Religious commitment</b>			
Personal piety	--	-.07/.17	.14/.17
Religious attendance	--	-.04/.05	-.01/.05
Prayer	--	-.87/.35*	-.79/.35*
Meditation	--	.91/.30**	1.05/.29**
Cultivating Qi	--	-.08/.52	-.10/.51
Reading religious texts	--	-.14/.26	-.08/.26
Chanting Buddha names	--	.15/.26	.27/.25
Reciting mantras	--	-.37/.48	-.48/.47
<b>Religious denomination</b>			
Buddhist	.07/.32	-.47/.35	-.34/.36
Taoist	.07/.33	-.41/.36	-.30/.37
Other religion	.16/.31	-.35/.35	-.20/.35
No religion	.16/.32	-.02/.36	-.20/.37
<b>Socio-demographics</b>			
Age	.02/.01**	.02/.01**	.01/.01**
Female	-.18/.13	-.27/.13*	-.17/.13
Married	-.28/.40	-.16/.41	-.29/.40
Divorced	-1.08/.41**	-.99/.42*	-1.10/.41*
Widowed	-.48/.49	-.49/.50	-.46/.49
Education	-.10/.05	-.09/.05	-.10/.05
Household income (logged)	.31/.13*	.27/.13*	.30/.13*
Missing income	-.19/.14	-.19/.14	-.19/.14
Employed	.04/.15	.04/.15	.07/.15
Poor health	-.36/.14**	-.42/.14**	-.40/.14**
Intercept	19.37/.69**	17.82/.70**	19.84/.73**
N	1,881	1,881	1,881
R <sup>2</sup>	.10	.07	.11

*NOTES:*

\*Unstandardized coefficients/standard errors

\*P <.05. \*\*P< .01.

Model 3 includes the religiosity measures simultaneously. The estimated net effects of religious beliefs, prayer, and meditation remain statistically significant (Note 7). In addition, my analyses identify an appreciable suppression effect: the size of the coefficient for meditation rises by about 15%, compared with that in Model 2. Several conditions may contribute to this suppression effect: (1) persons who practice meditation report higher commitment to the belief in karma (Table 3.2) and (2) Model 3 indicates that the belief in karma is associated negatively with personal mastery. With the positive association of meditation and the belief in karma being controlled for, the link between meditation and mastery remains positive, robust, and statistically significant.

Finally, consistent with prior research, old age, poor health, and life stressors such as divorce each have negative, significant relationships to personal mastery, while income has a positive estimated net effect (e.g., Mirowsky & Ross, 2007; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Ellison, 1993; Schieman & Turner, 1998; Mirowsky, 1995). Inconsistent with previous findings, however, is that education displays little significant association with mastery among the Taiwanese (e.g., Mirowsky & Ross, 2007; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliot, 2003).

### *Discussion*

While scholarly debates on the positive and negative implications of religiosity for personal mastery have continued (e.g., Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Jacobson, 1999; Ellison, 1993; Jackson & Coursey, 1988; Pargament et al., 1988; Tebbi et al., 1987; Friedberg & Friedberg, 1985), one important theme has been largely ignored in previous literature: the influence of non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions on the sense of mastery. Using an innovative

dataset from Taiwan, this study aimed to fill this gap in past theories and research. I began with two major hypotheses. One draws on the relinquished control thesis to predict lower mastery for the more religious. The other is derived from the personal empowerment thesis with a contradicting prediction that religiosity and mastery are positively related with one another.

Both hypotheses found some empirical support. For instance, consistent with the prediction of the relinquished control hypothesis, the results indicated that those who held stronger faith convictions (e.g., beliefs in one God and karma) tended to report a lower sense of mastery. In my view, this finding in itself is important, given that the belief dimension in the religion-health literature has been little studied (see Ellison et al., 2001; Schieman, 2008). Although the relinquished control explanation has originally failed to theorize about the role of nontheistic beliefs in shaping personal mastery, my findings showed that like divine beings, supernatural essences and forces such as karmic laws may erode the general sense of self-potency as well. Whereas the data sample only included limited information on nontheistic beliefs (i.e., karma), future research into the effects of other godless faiths such as Tao and heavenly fate seems warranted.

In contrast with religious beliefs, the measure of certain religious activities such as meditation showed a positive, statistically significant estimated net effect on mastery, a result confirming the personal empowerment hypothesis. This suggests that the personal empowerment thesis that role-taking activities increase levels of mastery may apply to a wider range of religious activities that are based not only on theistic faiths but also on nontheistic faiths. During meditation, for instance, a religious role is activated by the symbolic meanings associated with body posture, respiration rhythm, and objects of concentration, thus leading to enhanced personal mastery (Lans, 1987). In addition, the

personal empowerment perspective may be further enriched by taking into consideration not only attitudinal but also cognitive components. A rapidly growing body of neurological research shows that meditation benefits psychophysiological well-being by cultivating the art of concentration that causes the brain to experience gradual development in cognitive sensitivity (Austin, 1999). Nevertheless, while meditation provides an effective technique for disciplining mind and body so that one can better respond to changes in life circumstances (Austin, 2006), some researchers speculate that various meditation styles may lead to different mental health outcomes (Zhu, 2005; Austin, 1999; Gethin, 1997; Griffiths, 1981; Gregory, 1986; Lu, 1964). A better understanding of the salutary effects of different types of meditation on mastery should be a priority for future research.

Whereas I have found the positive estimated net effect of meditation on mastery, my analyses have also revealed that prayer was associated negatively with the sense of mastery. This finding tends to confirm the relinquished control perspective rather than the personal empowerment perspective. Due to data limitations, however, I could not distinguish prayer to a supreme God from prayer to smaller Chinese gods and deities. According to Schieman, Nguyen, and Elliott (2003), both content and context of prayer matter for personal mastery. A neglect of dissimilarities in the content and context of prayer may obscure the relationships between prayer and psychological functioning (Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003). A closer look at the TSCS data sample shows that nearly half of the prayers do not believe in a supreme God. Thus, it is very likely that the prayers without the belief in a supreme God prayed to Chinese gods and deities. Compared with the all-power Allah and Jehovah, however, the Chinese gods and deities are merely functional, being limited scope, virtue, and competence (Weber, 1951; Shahar

& Weller, 1996), and thus often fail to answer prayers (Eberhard, 1966). Since failed prayers to Chinese gods and deities may result in negative feelings and emotions (see Stark, 2004), it is conceivable that prayer to the smaller Chinese gods and deities may aggravate the inner feeling of diminished control over life circumstances. Future research should be sensitive to the subtle differences between various types of prayers and examine whether praying to different supernatural beings will lead to different psychological consequences.

Moreover, my analyses have shown that frequency of religious attendance had little significant relationship to mastery among the Taiwanese. This finding seems to be inconsistent with the previous literature suggesting that regular religious participation not only reinforces religious beliefs and foments positive, affective emotions, but it also possesses the capacity to generate a sense of mastery among adherents (Durkheim, [1912] 1995). What might account for this variation in the link of religious attendance and mastery in the Chinese context? One thing should be noted is that unlike Christian churches or Jewish Synagogues, most Chinese religions are based on loose social networks of like-minded people who are not required to assent to a specific religious creed or participate religious services on a regular basis (Stark, 2004). Chinese ritual practices are mostly individual performances rather than collective actions (see Liu, 2006). Thus, it is conceivable that the lack of congregational life and a religious creed in the Chinese temples may enervate the ability of religious participation to empower the individual.

My findings further suggest that the relinquished control and personal empowerment theses are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather tend to complement one another. It is conceivable that while most religious traditions insist that the supernatural dictate

man's life events and outcomes, they simultaneously promise a hopeful future and permit man's freedom of choice and action. This way of integrating the relinquished control and personal empowerment perspectives actually parallels with another line of research on fatalistic voluntarism (Lee, 1985; Acevedo, 2008 a). As Douglass and Terrill (1970) account, religion "in spite of its deterministic character—no, *because of it*—did not fall into simple fatalism but rather 'gave an enthusiastic faith to the masses'" (p.193). The Chinese religions, which combine "acceptance of fate with strong antifatalism and well-developed notions of strategy or maneuvering room within its decrees" (Schaberg, 2005, pp. 2-3), here serve as an exemplary case. Indeed, the observed suppression pattern may signify such a possibility. My analyses indicated that the negative association between the belief in karma and mastery suppressed a positive association between meditation and mastery. More explicitly, the belief in karma was more likely to be related to the action of meditation; thus, the initially low levels of mastery among karma believers were compensated for by the positive effect of meditation. Collectively, my study suggests that the relinquished control and personal empowerment explanations have much potential for accounting for the connections between aspects of religiosity and mastery in societies dominated by non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions.

My findings discussed above also suggest that whether to use individual, multidimensional measures of religiosity or a unidimensional index depends much on the nature of religiosity and specific religious content and context under examination. Thus far, researchers have not reached a consensus about the measurement of religiosity. Some pay attention to the links between mastery and individual dimensions of religiosity, while others prefer a unidimensional index of religiosity (see Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003). In this study, I employed individual, separate measures of religiosity rather than a

universal index, because religious beliefs, values, and practices differ widely and dramatically within and across Chinese traditions (Weber, 1951; Yang, 1961), and, as noted above, religiosity may influence mastery via differential pathways, some social-psychological while others physiological. Additional analyses (not shown) also indicated that the religiosity measures used in this study loaded on multiple dimensions and displayed generally low intercorrelations. The coefficients and p-values of the religiosity measures did not change substantively before and after being included simultaneously in the analyses. Moreover, collinearity diagnostics showed low variance inflation factors (VIF) among the religiosity variables, reflecting little collinearity or related problems. At any rate, when studying Chinese as well as other many Asian religions, it would be misleading if the conceptually discrete and empirically distinct aspects of religiosity are subsumed in a single index which tends to disguise individual characters and obscure overall complexity.

In addition, the lack of association between education and the sense of mastery merits a bit more discussion. Results showed little significant net effect on mastery of education for Taiwanese. Auxiliary analyses also ruled out the possibility of nonlinear associations between the mastery items and education at different education levels (Note 8). At first glance, this finding seems counterintuitive, given previous research reporting that education directly speaks to mastery in the Western context (see Mirowsky & Ross, 2007; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliot, 2003). On second thought, however, the result is hardly surprising on the ground that it may reflect the fundamental cultural differences between Western and Asian societies. According to Hui and Triandis, individualistic Western cultures value personal autonomy and encourage the development of the individual, while collectivist Asian cultures stress the mutual obligations of family and friends (Hui, 1988;

Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1989). In view of this, Sastry and Ross (1998, p. 103) argue that “[b]ecause they are encouraged to subordinate their personal needs to the demands of the family or the traditional communities, Asians may perceive less freedom, less autonomy to further their own goals, and less ability to determine outcomes in their own lives.” Following Sastry and Ross’ leads, Waterman (1984) even goes so far as to contend that mastery is related to individualism and unrelated to collectivism.

Indeed, my findings about education seem to be aligned with this line of argument in the context of Taiwan, a Chinese enclave that is characterized by high levels of collectivism (Ali et al., 2005). For instance, unlike in the West where school education focuses on individualism (e.g., the United States), it is traditional Chinese cultures with an emphasis on collectivism that have laid the philosophical foundation for education in Taiwan (Jose, Huntsinger, & Liaw, 2000; Yuan & Chen, 1998; Matthews, 2000). As the main carrier of the Chinese collectivist culture, schooling shapes filial piety and submissive attitudes toward groups, instead of self-exaltation and personal pride (Matthews, 2000). In such cultural setting, although the more educated may acquire greater cognitive sophistication than the less educated (see Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003), it is conceivable that the education advantage may translate into reflective awareness that personal success and failure depends more on the power of groups than on individual efforts. A popular Chinese saying that the bird that sticks its head out gets shot vividly describes this Chinese mentality shaped by collectivism. At any rate, the lack of association between education and mastery among Taiwanese might be a partial product of the collectivist Chinese culture that dominates Taiwan’s education domain.

Moreover, one may suspect that the reliability alpha of the mastery index ( $\alpha = .55$ ) is not ideally high and thus undermines the explanatory power of the predictive models.

Due to this consideration, I performed supplementary analyses checking the relationships between the mastery items and the religiosity measures individually. Generally, results were substantively similar with those based on the index, and there seemed to be only one exception deserving particular attention: the negative coefficient of belief in karma changed into a positive sign when two positively stated mastery items were examined individually (i.e., “Your control your own life” and “You get everything which you have now by yourself”). According to Mirowsky and Ross (1991), positively stated items tap the internal locus of control, while negatively stated items measure the external source of control. Since belief in karma generates fatalistic voluntarism, as discussed earlier, it is conceivable that karma believers would give affirmative responses to the items associated with the internal locus of control. Indeed, factor analyses showed that the positively stated items loaded relatively low with the negatively stated items on one dimension (Table 3.1). For the following reasons, nevertheless, I decided to keep both in the mastery index: (1) dropping them from the analyses merely caused a negligible increase of .02 in the Cronbach’s reliability; (2) unbiased measurement of the sense of control requires both the negatively and positively stated items (see Mirowsky & Ross, 1991); and (3) the items appear to have face validity that contributes to the formation of a desirable scale (Pearline & Schooler, 1978). In any event, given previous research in the Chinese or Asian context has been based only on one single or very few mastery items (Sastry & Ross, 1998; Shek, 2001, 2004, 2005; Shek et al., 2003), this study makes one small step toward developing a comprehensive and desirable index. Future research design should progress to advance a more reliable scale to measure the concept of mastery in Asian societies in general and in Chinese societies in particular.

Like prior research, this study was based on a cross-sectional sample and thus could not rule out alternative explanations of the observed relationships between religiosity and mastery. For example, it is possible that individuals with low mastery may tend to seek help from the supernatural and engage in religious activities, hoping for better life outcomes. After all, humans have very limited control over certain aspects of life (e.g., birth and death), and, for this reason, religion exists to meet the basic human needs and desires (Stark, 2004). Whereas this way of reasoning seems plausible, it should not be used as an excuse for underrating religion's tremendous social consequences widely recognized by social scientists (Stark, 2001, 2007; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie, 2005; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Greeley, 1995; Ellison, 1993). One could also argue from the other side that those with higher mastery will be inclined to be more religiously active, but there seems to be little rationale for justifying this direction of the relationship. Another glaring limitation associated with the cross-sectional data is that there is no way of knowing longitudinal influences. Previous literature has reported convincing evidence that mastery changes over time, depending on levels of religiosity and SES (Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003; Shek, 2005). Future surveys should collect longitudinal data to further research on mastery in Chinese as well as other Asian societies.

This study envisions other several important directions for future research. First, it is crucial for studies to continue to incorporate a broader range of non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions that may influence personal feelings of mastery, in order to provide a fuller picture of the religion-health connections. For instance, in addition to Chinese religions, Indian Hinduism and Japanese Shinto may be of interest to subsequent research projects. This line of investigation should develop more comprehensive, culture-specific measures of mastery and multifaceted religiosity, given

that within and across-group variations in beliefs and action lead to different psychosocial consequences (e.g., Greeley, 2003; Bader & Froese, 2005). Second, comparative studies are urgently needed to examine whether and how the effects of religiosity on mastery and other health outcomes may differ across cultures and societies. In particular, the different roles of religion in shaping mastery in collectivist Asian societies and individualist Western societies ought to be made a priority in the research agenda. Although this research domain potentially bears on a number of significant scholarly debates (see Sastry & Ross, 1998), it has yet to be systematically studied. In addition, future studies should give more attention to the links between religion, psychosocial resources, and health among underrepresented social groups such as adolescents, older people, and low-SES persons in Chinese and other Asian societies. Ethnographic studies based on in-depth interviews may facilitate such inquiries.

### *Conclusion*

Despite rapidly growing scholarly interest in the associations between religion and personal functioning during the past several decades, the religious impact on mastery of non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions has been overlooked almost in its entirety. This study contributes to the literature by focusing on the complex linkages between nontheistic beliefs, activities, and the sense of mastery in the Chinese context. Collectively, my findings suggest that the relinquished control and personal empowerment explanations both have much potential for accounting for the connections between aspects of religiosity and personal mastery in non-Western societies dominated by non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions. With the theoretical and empirical contributions outlined above, this study offers a turning point from which further research

should continue to deepen our understanding of the relevance of religions for self-concept across cultures and societies.

## *Notes*

1. Of course, popular forms of Buddhism and Taoism embrace a pantheon of gods and deities. However, these functional gods and deities are only peripheral in the doctrines, being subordinated to karma and Tao (Weber, 1951).

2. Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) instrument includes: "I have little control over the things that happen to me," "I can do anything I set mind to do," "What happens in the future mostly depends on me," "Sometime I feel being pushed around," "I feel helpless when in trouble," "There is really no way I can solve problems," and "There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life."

3. Unfortunately, these items do not distinguish those who were uncertain about the existence of God from nonbelievers.

4. In Chinese culture, a devout adherent generally means a sincere or earnest follower of one or several religious traditions.

5.

- 0= No income
- 1= NT\$ 10,000 or less
- 2= NT\$ 10,001-20,000
- 3= NT\$ 20,001-30,000
- 4= NT\$ 30,001-40,000
- 5= NT\$ 40,001-50,000
- 6= NT\$ 50,001-60,000
- 7= NT\$ 60,001-70,000
- 8= NT\$ 70,001-80,000
- 9= NT\$ 80,001-90,000
- 10= NT\$ 90,001-100,000
- 11= NT\$ 100,001-110,000
- 12= NT\$ 110,001-120,000
- 13= NT\$ 120,001-130,000
- 14= NT\$ 130,001-140,000
- 15= NT\$ 140,001-150,000
- 16= NT\$ 150,001-160,000
- 17= NT\$ 160,001-170,000
- 18= NT\$ 170,001-180,000
- 19= NT\$ 180,001-190,000
- 20= NT\$ 190,001-200,000
- 21= More than NT\$ 200,000

6. I also used list-wise deletions in my analyses for comparison. Results were substantively similar to those presented in the text.

7. I also ran a model that only included the religious beliefs, prayer, and meditation, controlling for the socio-demographics and other control variables. Results were substantively similar.

8. Mindful that the education measure was ordinal in the text, I constructed dummy variables for each education levels to check potential nonlinear associations between them and the mastery index, respectively. The findings were substantively similar to those reported in the text. For instance, the difference in personal mastery between individuals with higher education attainment (i.e., college and graduate degrees) and individuals with lower education attainment (i.e., below college degrees) was statistically insignificant. These patterns persist even when the associations of the mastery items with the measures of education levels were examined individually.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Religious Involvement and Personal Happiness

Sociologists since the founding fathers have long been interested in studying the complex linkages between aspects of religious involvement and various mental health outcomes (Durkheim, [1897] 1951). More recently, since the late 1980s, a growing body of empirical research has shown salutary effects of religious involvement on not only physical but also mental health (for a review see George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002). Indeed, nearly all of the previous religion-health literature has suggested that religious involvement is positively associated with subjective well-being, even with a wide array of socio-demographic and health-related statistical control variables (Ellison et al., 2001, pp. 216-17). This is particularly true when it comes to personal happiness, a positive emotion that makes life truly worth living (Koenig, 2008) (Note 1).

Despite the systematic reviews that have consistently related religious involvement to desirable mental health benefits (Ellison, 1998; Larson et al., 1992; Levin & Chatters, 1998), several issues have become sources of continuing scholarly debates on the topic. First, researchers have not reached an agreement over which dimensions of religious involvement are most relevant for mental health (Idler et al., 1999; Krause, 1993; Williams, 1994; Ellison et al., 2001). Although religious involvement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1995), some scholars still preferred a single religiosity item or scale (see Ellison et al., 2001). Second, most of the previous research has stressed the importance of religious behaviors for subjective well-being, but the influence of religious beliefs and values on subjective well-being has

been “oddly” understudied (Ellison et al., 2001, p. 237; for a very few exceptions see Ellison et al., 2001 and Ellison, 1991).

Third, from the cross-cultural perspective, I have pointed out in Chapter 3 that while previous literature has been restricted primarily to Western societies dominated by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, it is a surprise that far less scholarly attention has been paid to the Eastern societies where non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions flourish. This is especially the case for Taiwan, a Chinese enclave, despite the fact that it has experienced a vigorous religious revival in the past several decades, especially since the late 1980s (Katz, 2003; Stark, 1999; Chiu, 2006; Jones, 1999; Madsen, 2007). However, because Chinese religions differ from their Western counterparts in terms of purpose, content, means, and context, the impact on mental health of multifaceted Chinese religious beliefs and practices deserves serious research.

This chapter contributes to the religion-health literature in several ways. First, it focuses on the complex linkages between multifaceted religious involvement and the affective dimension of subjective well-being, namely, personal happiness (Andrews & McKennell, 1980). Second, it highlights the important role of supernatural belief in shaping and influencing individual assessment of life quality. Third, this research extends the scope of previous literature beyond the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition in Western societies to incorporate a wide variety of Chinese religious beliefs and practices. Moreover, I base my analyses on a nationally representative data sample of residents in Taiwan. In the remainder of this chapter, I present findings and discuss their implications for future research.

### *Background*

According to Ellison, Gay, and Glass (1989), religious beliefs and values and/or devotional activities sustain a sense of ideational coherence and order, thus bolstering subjective well-being (Antonovsky, 1987; Berger, 1970; Pollner, 1989; Ellison, 1991; Petersen & Roy, 1985). Prayer and personal encounters with the sacred may provide a comprehensive interpretive framework via which the individual can interpret and ascribe meaning to daily life affairs and events (Chalfant, Beckley & Palmer, 1981). Moreover, individuals may draw on spiritual resources to cope with the “self-concept” issue (Witter et al., 1985; Capps, 1985; Peck, 1968) and life stressors (Pollner, 1989; Foley, 1988; Ellison et al., 2001). For instance, religious faith and devotional activities such as prayer and meditation may enhance self-esteem and personal mastery and diminish self-blame and guilt (Ellison & Gay, 1990; Ellison, 1991; Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983).

In addition to personal devotion, the participatory dimension of religious involvement may influence self-evaluated well-being as well. First, participants of religious activities may enjoy opportunities offered regularly by churches and synagogues for developing friendships and social networks among like-minded persons (Witter et al., 1985). The interpersonal ties developed in the religious context may well extend into the secular world (McIntosh & Alston, 1982). Thus, when faced with adversities, members of religious groups may receive emotional, material, and social support both from the informal social networks (Stark & Maire, 2008; Maton, 1987; Maton & Rappaport, 1984; Taylor & Chatters 1988) and from official church programs and personnel (Eng, Hatch, & Callan, 1985; Maton, 1989). Second, religious groups may promote religious norms regarding healthy personal lifestyles (Levin & Vanderpool, 1987) and punish deviant

behaviors (Umberson, 1987; Ellison, 1991). Moreover, collective participation in ritual activities may reinforce the importance of personal faith in daily life (Ellison, 1991; Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989) and accord significant meanings, the so-called “plausibility structure” (Berger, 1967), to these ritual events (Petersen & Roy, 1985; Roof & Hoge, 1980).

A third aspect of religious involvement is that religious affiliation shapes individual assessments of life quality. Religious affiliation concerns the type of religious community into which an individual is integrated and personal identification with that community (Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989, p.103). Kelley (1972), for instance, suggests that strong religious groups exceed weaker counterparts in the following aspects: (1) demanding higher levels of social solidarity and organizational loyalty; (2) imposing stricter requirements on distinctive lifestyles and behavioral conformity; (3) emphasizing personal spirituality over collective campaigns for social justice; (4) favoring absolutism and ideological closure rather than pluralism and tolerance; and thus, (5) sustaining coherent systems of religious meaning in a more effective way (Ellison, 1991). For these reasons, conservative and stronger religious denominations may better foster mental health benefits than liberal and weaker religious denominations (Ellison et al., 2001).

Last but not the least, the dynamics and distinct ways of interaction among religious involvement, stress, and subjective well-being deserve particular attention (Wheaton, 1985; Ellison et al., 2001). On the one hand, previous research has suggested that individual coping resources may mitigate the harmful effects of stress (Wheaton, 1985; Ellison, 1991). First, religious involvement may reduce or eliminate unhealthy effects of life stressors (see Ellison et al., 2001). Second, as stress increases, individuals are more likely to be motivated to rely on religious copings to compensate for the negative effects

on mental health (Krause & Tran, 1989). Third, the stress-buffering model implies that the salutary effects of religious involvement may differ across levels of stress (e.g., Wheaton, 1985). Religious copings may exert the strongest buffering influence among individuals with higher levels of stress (Krause & Tran, 1989). On the other hand, some aspects of religious involvement may exacerbate the deleterious effects of certain types of stressors, even though there has been meager evidence supporting such perspective (Ellison et al., 2001).

### *Chinese Religion and Subjective Well-Being in Taiwan*

Religion and daily life are inextricably intertwined in Taiwanese society (Weller, 2000). In particular, religion is socially important for Chinese because it makes for “a smooth functioning of human relationships as much as it is a method to obtain divine favours to increase the effectiveness of human efforts toward the realization of a happy life” (Pas 1979, p.190). According to Weber ([1958]1996), Asian theologies and supernatural beliefs are crucial for individual assessment of life quality. For example, the karma doctrines of Hinduism are the “most consistent theodicy ever produced by history” that places a person “within a clear circle of duties and offer him a well-rounded, metaphysically-satisfying conception of the world” (Weber, [1958]1996, pp. 121-132). Similarly, the idea of karma and reincarnation is central to the Buddhist theology, which provides Chinese persons with a cosmological explanation of life existence (Ch'en, 1964). Further, Chinese religion places a central emphasis on ritual activities (Overmyer, 1986; Jochim, 1986). In order to manipulate the supernatural to meet situational needs and desires, Chinese persons perform a wide array of ritual activities (e.g., praying to and worshiping gods and ancestor spirits, chanting Buddha names, burning incense or food

offerings, pilgrimages, reading religious scriptures, reciting mantras, practicing meditation, cultivating Qi, and others) (Overmyer, 1986; Yang, 1961; Jochim, 1986).

Taken together, these arguments suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *Chinese devotion (e.g., beliefs and private religious activities) will be associated positively with personal happiness among Taiwanese.*

While many people choose to perform rituals in front of altars at home, it is temples that serve as the life centers for the local Chinese community, providing not only ritual services but also enormous amount of social support (Weller, 2000; Pas, 1979; Katz, 2003). Pas (1979) indicates that “each neighborhood, hamlet or village has its own temple, and this temple is the focal point of the whole group, around which social life is organized” (p.183). “Without religion there could be no villages, towns, or markets [in Taiwan]” (Skoggard, 1996, p. 36). Since the early 1980s, temples from different denominational backgrounds have evolved into more organized forms by establishing permanent congregations to strengthen local social networks (Lin, 2000; Lin, 2003; Madsen, 2007; Schipper, 1993; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; Jones, 1999; Nagata, 1999). Nagata (1999), for instance, observes that in order to adapt to the democratized environment and compete for membership and success, many Buddhist groups emulated Christian churches to create “Christian-type social service”. As temples have served as gateways of “declaring community membership and asserting the right to future social and supernatural support” (Weller, 2000, p.487), participation in religious activities in Chinese temples is important for the well-being of the whole community and individual families in Taiwan (Pas, 1979). This leads to an additional hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Frequency of religious attendance will be associated positively with personal happiness among Taiwanese.*

Like the Western religions, Chinese religious traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and some sectarian groups have ethical codes and forbid unhealthy life habits. For instance, Chinese Buddhism demands that adherents refrain from killing, stealing, lying, committing sexual misconducts, and being intoxicated to alcohol and substance. Similarly, Taoist discipline requires moral uprightness, formal procedures, physical restrictions, and examinations (Kohn, 1993). Kohn (1993) claims that “The most fundamental form of discipline is found in precepts and prescriptions, the basic rules that regulate the moral conscience and community behavior of Taoist practitioners” (p. 95). Since Taoist precepts are modeled after Buddhism, they always address the basic five: don’t kill, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t misbehave sexually, and don’t get intoxicated (Kohn, 1993). As noted earlier, religious denominations plays an important role in shaping and influencing individual subjective well-being (e.g., Ellison, 1991; Ellison & Gay, 1990; Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989; Ellison et al., 2001), therefore, I submit a third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: *Religious affiliation will be associated positively with personal happiness among Taiwanese.*

In addition to the direct effects of religious involvement on subjective well-being, my proceeding discussion of previous literature includes at least other four dynamics and mechanisms of religious involvement and subjective well-being: the stress-reducing, stress-suppressing, stress-buffering, and stress-exacerbating models (see Ellison et al., 2001). Accordingly, I formulate a series of testable hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: *The salutary effects of religious involvement will be reduced or eliminated with statistical controls for exposure to health stressor.*

Hypothesis 5: *The positive net impact of religious involvement on personal happiness will increase when the negative net effect of health stressor is held constant.*

Hypothesis 6: *Religious involvement will be more effective in buffering the harmful impact of health stressor on personal happiness.*

Hypothesis 7: *The effect of health stressor on happiness will be more negative among the religious than others.*

### *Data and Method*

#### *Sample*

Like Chapter 3, this chapter is based on data from the 2004 “Taiwan Social Change Survey” (TSCS), a cross-sectional representative survey that tracks the long-term trend of social changes in Taiwan since 1985. Multi-stage probability sampling procedures yield a sample size of 1,881.

#### *Focal Measures*

*Personal happiness* Respondents were asked “Generally speaking, do you feel happy in your daily life?” This single question is a sufficient and valid measure of personal happiness (Bradburn & Caplovitz, 1960). Responses to the question are recoded from low to high, ranging between 1 (very unhappy) and 4 (very happy).

*Religious beliefs* Respondents were asked about the extent to which they believe “a supreme God in the universe” and “the laws of karma”. Responses for these two items are recoded on an ascending scale (1= not at all, 4= very much), respectively.

*Private religious practices* the TSCS lists a variety of items on private religious practices that include praying, practicing meditation, chanting Buddha names, reciting mantras, cultivating *qi*, burning incense, worshiping gods and ancestor spirits, and

reading religious texts. Respondents were asked whether they had engaged in any of these activities. Positive responses for these items are dummy-coded 1 and negative responses dummy-coded 0, respectively.

*Frequency of religious attendance* Participants were asked: “How often do you go to temple, the altar, or church?” Response choices are coded (1) “never,” (2) “seldom,” (3) “several times a year,” (4) “once every month,” (5) “once every two weeks,” (6) “once a week,” (7) “twice or more every week,” and (8) “every day.”

*Religious affiliation* I constructed a set of dummy variables (1= specific religious denomination, 0= other) to represent (1) Buddhist, (2) Taoist, (3) folk religions, (4) Christian, and (5) others. Those who self-claimed “no religion” serve as the contrast group.

### *Control Measures*

Demographic variables used in my analyses include *age* (measured in years), *gender* (1= female), *employment status* (1= unemployed), *marital status* (1= married), *education*, and *family income*. The median household income category is imputed for the missing income values, with a “missing income” category (1= missing) being created. *Health stressor* is measured by two items: “Has your daily life been affected because of any physical discomfort or injury in the past two weeks?” (1= no, 2= yes, slightly, 3= yes, quite a bit, 4= yes, very much) and “How has your physical health been for the past two weeks?” (1=very good, 2=fair, 3=poor, 4=very poor). I sum these two items to create an index of health stressor, with higher scores indicating greater health stress. Table 4.1 provides a description of the variables used in this study.

*Analytic Plan*

I employ ordered logistic regression to assess the focal relationships between multidimensional religious involvement and personal happiness. Model 1 regresses happiness on religious beliefs and devotional activities. Model 2 regresses happiness on frequency of religious attendance. Model 3 regresses happiness on religious affiliations. Model 4 regresses happiness on all of the religious variables simultaneously. Model 5 assesses whether the religious effects will be reduced or suppressed by health stressor. In Model 6, I test for the hypothesized stress-buffering and stress-exacerbating effects. Each of these models controls for the socio-demographics to rule out potential spuriousness among the focal associations.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analyses

Variables	Range	Mean	S.D.
Personal happiness	1-4	3.14	.62
A supreme God	1-4	2.59	.86
Karma	1-4	3.06	.86
Practicing meditation	1= Yes	.04	.20
Cultivating <i>Qi</i>	1= Yes	.01	.11
Reading religious texts	1= Yes	.07	.26
Praying	1= Yes	.03	.18
Chanting Buddha names	1= Yes	.09	.29
Reciting mantras	1= Yes	.01	.13
Burning incense	1= Yes	.16	.36
Worshiping gods/ancestor spirits	1= Yes	.84	.35
Frequency of attendance	1-5	2.25	1.34
Buddhist	1= Yes	.24	.43
Taoist	1= Yes	.15	.36
Folk religion	1= Yes	.29	.45
Christian	1= Yes	.03	.19
Other	1= Yes	.05	.22
Age	18-93	42.2	16.50
Female	1= Yes	.49	.50
Married	1= Yes	.63	.48
Education	0-6	2.83	1.48
Household income	1-22	7.51	3.74
Missing income	1= Yes	.27	.44
Employed	1= Yes	.77	.41
Poor health	2-8	3.20	1.10

NOTE: Ns range from 1,714-1,881

## *Results*

Table 4.2 presents a series of ordered logistic regression models estimating the net effects of religious involvement and covariates in changing the likelihood of reporting personal happiness among Taiwanese. As can be seen from Model 1 of Table 4.2, those who believe in a supreme God are significantly less likely than nonbelievers to feel happy about life (odds ratio= .80). Indeed, stronger faith conviction increases the likelihood of saying unhappy. Those who chant Buddha names are also significantly less happy relative to others (odds ratio=.62). These findings appear to contradict the prediction of Hypothesis 1 that personal devotion always enhances subjective well-being. However, the analysis also reveals that certain devotional activities such as reading religious texts (odds ratio= 1.66) and praying (odds ratio= 2.13) significantly increase the likelihood of reporting happiness, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Model 2 estimates the independent effect of frequency of religious attendance in predicting the likelihood of saying happy about life among Taiwanese. Result confirms Hypothesis 2, showing that those who more frequently participate in religious activities are also significantly more likely to feel happy about life relative to others (odds ratio=1.08). Nevertheless, Hypothesis 3 is not confirmed, since I find little significant predicting power of religious affiliation for personal happiness in Model 3. Model 4 estimates the net effects of all of the religious variables simultaneously. The effects of belief in a supreme God, reading religious texts, praying, and chanting Buddha names remains fairly stable across the models. The only exception to this pattern is the measure of frequency of religious attendance and here I find it loses statistical significance when other religious variables are included in Model 4.

Table 4.2 Odds Ratios on Personal Happiness in Taiwan

Variables	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
<b>Private Devotion</b>						
God	.80**	--	--	.78**	.82**	.83**
Karma	1.02	--	--	1.03	1.05	1.06
Practicing meditation	1.43	--	--	1.42	1.03	1.05
Cultivating <i>Qi</i>	1.20	--	--	1.17	1.18	1.23
Reading religious texts	1.66*	--	--	1.58*	1.59*	1.60*
Praying	2.13**	--	--	1.91*	1.93*	2.01*
Chanting Buddha names	.62*	--	--	.62*	.58*	.58*
Reciting mantras	.50	--	--	.49	.59	.55
Burning incense	1.30	--	--	1.27	1.22	1.22
Worshipping gods/ancestor spirits	1.21	--	--	1.28	1.34	1.31
<b>Participation and Affiliation</b>						
Frequency of attendance	--	1.08*	--	1.07	1.08	1.09*
Buddhist	--	--	.92	.88	.98	.98
Taoist	--	--	.93	.82	.93	.93
Folk religion	--	--	1.08	.99	1.09	1.09
Christian	--	--	1.42	1.11	1.31	1.25
Other	--	--	1.17	1.03	.91	.92
<b>Health Stressor</b>						
Poor health	--	--	--	--	.40**	.39**
Poor health X God	--	--	--	--	--	1.12*
<b>Demographics</b>						
Age	.99	.99	.99	.99	.99	.99
Female	.96	.90	.89	.96	1.13	1.13
Married	1.45**	1.44**	1.48**	1.45**	1.28*	1.29*
Education	.94	.93	.92	.94	.92	.92
Household income	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.01
Missing income	1.06	1.08	1.08	1.06	.97	.96
Employed	1.03	1.00	.99	1.05	.97	.98
-2 log likelihood	2918.04	2950.52	2950.52	2912.46	2617.39	2612.81
$R^2$	.03	.01	.01	.03	.19	.20
N=1,597						

NOTES:

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

In order to examine whether the effects of the religious variables in influencing the likelihood of reporting subjective well-being will be reduced (Hypothesis 4) or suppressed by health stressor (Hypothesis 5), Model 5 incorporates the index of self-reported health condition. It seems that the inclusion of the measure of health stressor does not lead to substantive changes in the likelihood of saying happy for the religious, when compared with the proceeding model (Model 4). Thus, neither of the two hypotheses is strongly supported.

Finally, Model 6 tests for the stress-buffering and stress-exacerbating effects on happiness of multidimensional religious involvement. A variety of interaction terms were added in the model; to conserve space, only statistically significant findings are presented in Model 6 of Table 4.2. In any event, while the testing does not empirically validate the stress-exacerbating hypothesis (Hypothesis 7), it uncovers some supporting evidence for Hypothesis 6, by showing that belief in a supreme God is more effective in buffering the deleterious influence of health stressor. The likelihood of reporting greater happiness increases for persons with a combination of stronger faith in a supreme God and a poorer health condition relative to others (odds ratio= 1.12). Interesting, the measure of frequency of religious attendance again gains statistical significance.

### *Conclusion and Discussion*

Despite the rapidly growing body of research linking religious involvement with positive mental health outcomes, the scope of previous literature has been limited primarily to the Western, Christian context. This study in Taiwanese society provides a rare opportunity for examining the connections between multidimensional religious involvement and subjective well-being in a non-Western, non-Christian setting. Overall,

my findings show diverse patterns of the relationships between religious involvement and personal happiness. First, I have found that some aspects of active religious involvement have a salutary effect for Taiwanese. Consistent with previous findings, for instance, private religious activities such as praying and reading religious scriptures each enhance subjective well-being (e.g., Koenig, 2008; Stark & Maier, 2008). In particular, praying has the largest independent positive effect on personal happiness. The positive relationships between these devotional practices and happiness remain robust and statistically significant even when the socio-demographics, health stressor, and other background variables are adjusted for.

Moreover, my analyses have identified a positive, though marginally significant, estimated net effect of frequency of religious attendance. This pattern parallels prior studies in the West indicating that collective participation in rituals and other religious activities benefits mental health by reinforcing ideational coherence, accumulating social capital, providing emotional, spiritual and material support (e.g., Stark & Maier, 2008; Ellison et al., 2001; Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989). As noted in the beginning, many religious groups in Taiwan's relatively free environment have been transformed from temples into congregations (Lin, 2000; Lin, 2003; Madsen, 2007; Schipper, 1993; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; Jones, 1999; Nagata, 1999). Some religious groups have even gone so far as to shift the focus from conducting rituals onto pursuing secular social achievements (Nagata, 1999; Jones, 1999). Whereas the data sample did not include information about congregation-based social support, future research into its mediating effect on subjective well-being seems warranted. However, because Asian religions in general (Iannaccone, 1995; Miller & Stark, 2002; Miller, 2000), and Chinese religions in particular (Stark, 2004; Liu, 2006), do not require exclusive denominational loyalty, it is conceivable that

religious affiliation may still lack power to form a strong sense of community and thereby contribute to good mental health outcomes.

In addition, the complex mechanism of the relationship between belief in a supreme God and happiness merits a bit discussion. Results show that although belief in a supreme God decreases the likelihood of reporting happiness, its influence is positive and greater for persons with higher levels of health stress. This stress-contingent effect seems to be congruent with a long-held belief among sociologists that religion, especially belief in supernatural beings, is a form of compensator and levels of religious commitment depend on the types and strengths of the needs and desires a person has (Glock & Stark, 1965; Niebuhr, 1929). Religious faith makes traumatic events easier to bear (Ellison et al., 2001), because religious meanings and values may shape (1) the assessment of potentially stressful life events which occur as less threatening and (2) the evaluation of individual capacities to cope effectively (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Religious believers may reconceptualize potentially negative life events in religious perspectives as opportunities for spiritual maturity or as part of a larger divine plan (Foley, 1988; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983).

Contrary to one of the early expectations, I failed to find a significant correlation between belief in laws of karma and personal happiness. Why does belief in a supreme God have a significant effect, but belief in karma do not? According to Stark (2004, 2001), belief in karma is a belief in supernatural forces or essences, which are perceived merely as impersonal, remote, and unconscious. From this perspective, although karma may inspire meditation practices, ritual activities, or even magic, it is simply not a suitable candidate for human relationship of exchange. Nevertheless, happiness is a positive mood that is based much on social relationship. Thus, when religious belief

serves as a social relationship for people, it may enhance personal feelings of happiness (Stark & Maier, 2008). For example, Stark and Maier (2008) find that closeness to God displays a positive correlation with happiness, and my discussion of the stress-buffering effect of belief in a supreme God concurs with this line of thinking. In contrast, when the supernatural are not perceived as being able to sustain an intimate social relationship, it is conceivable that these supernatural beliefs such as karma will have little impact on subjective well-being.

Up to this point, much of my discussion has been focused on the positive effects of religious variables such as prayer, reading religious scriptures, belief in a supreme God, and religious attendance. However, results also showed a negative influence of chanting Buddha names. What might account for this finding? Because my study is based on cross-sectional data, it seems impossible to determine whether chanting Buddha names actually causes or deteriorates negative emotion or whether unhappy people seek comfort in chanting Buddha names. Nevertheless, it is widely believed that chanting Buddha names will evoke divine responses to requests for life-problem solving and spiritual liberation upon death (Baker, 2005; Perry, 1982). The hope for comfort and salvation from Buddhas may be appealing to unhappy people. Less problematic is the positive relationship between religious activity and happiness as discussed above. While individuals may gain emotional benefits from religious practices, it is still possible that unhappy persons are inclined to withdraw from those religious activities (Koenig, 2008). Thus, Koenig (2008) concludes that both of these mechanisms are likely to be true. At any rate, any definite conclusions about the causal ordering of the positive and negative relationships between religious involvement and personal happiness should be avoided for analyses based on cross-sectional data.

Despite mounting evidence that multidimensional religious involvement leads to desirable mental health outcomes in Western societies, the implications of religious beliefs and behavior for subjective well-being in Eastern societies have been largely overlooked. Theoretically, this research enlarges the scope of scholarship to include non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions by hypothesizing the complex relationships between Chinese religious beliefs, behaviors, and personal feelings of happiness. Empirically, my study draws on innovative data from the 2004 TSCS to establish the connections between multifaceted religious involvement and mental health in the specific cultural context of Taiwanese society. Overall, results parallel the Western experience that religious involvement is generally associated with good mental health outcomes (Ellison et al., 2001).

## *Notes*

1. A recent study shows that personal happiness taps a basic sentiment that should not be simply dismissed as reflecting momentary matters (Stark & Maier, 2008)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Fatalistic Voluntarism and Life Satisfaction

Fatalism has long been recognized by the founders of the contemporary sociology, such as Durkheim and Weber, as a basic type of cognitive state of mind (Durkheim, [1897] 1968; Weber, 1951, 1958). According to Durkheim, fatalism refers to an individual's feeling of powerlessness, hopelessness, and vulnerability due to his social experience of oppressive regulation (Durkheim, [1897] 1968). For Weber, however, fatalism is but a psychological consequence of theology—that the cosmological forces control man's life outcomes and events (Weber, 1951, 1958). Whether fatalism results from empirical regulation by society or from the theological imagination of control by the supernatural (see Elder, 1966; Lockwood, 1992), scholars generally agree that fatalism is a central concept in social psychology as well as anthropology (Acevedo, 2005; Goodwin & Allen, 2000; see Note 1).

Recent debates on fatalism revolve around the way theological fatalism influences individual and social well-being. Proponents of the Weberian tradition assume that individuals are passive and argue that theological fatalism perpetuates misery among the unprivileged in a society by making them so submissive as to unconditionally accept whatever social status and duties that society assigns to them (Weber, 1951, 1958). On the contrary, advocates of the rational choice perspectives, the new paradigm in the sociology of religion (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, 1987; Stark & Finke, 2000; Warner, 1993), disagree, disputing that individuals are rational actors in pursuit of secular and

otherworldly benefits and that belief in fate control produces voluntary experience in achieving these benefits (Acevedo, 2008 a, b).

While the notion of empirical fatalism provides a powerful tool for understanding oppressed social groups in communist and post-communist societies (Goodwin & Allen, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2002; Goodwin et al., 1999; see Note 2), the sociological implications of theological fatalism in these authoritarian societies characterized by excessive regulation have been little studied (for a rare exception, see Chen et al., 2006). Nevertheless, there is some evidence showing that voluntarism which is based on belief in fate control cushions the adverse influences of social constraints and helps individuals develop active, positive, and optimistic orientations towards life and society, thus leading to increased levels of life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2006). My study seeks to address this largely overlooked research topic in previous literature by examining the relationship between fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction in People's Republic of China (P.R. China).

Fatalism is "the very essence" of Chinese mentality and temperament (Abbott, 1970), and the first predominant value of Chinese culture (Chu & Hsu, 1979). As Arthur Smith, an early Christian missionary to Empire China, once observed, "Nothing is more common than to hear an especially unfortunate Chinese man or women remark, 'It is my fate'" (Smith, [1894] 2008, p.164). Prior to the economic reform of mainland China, which began in the late 1970s, the communist state had broken down fatalism of traditional Chinese society (Terrill, 1979). After thirty years of economic reform, however, fatalism has been reawakened by the rapid religious revival in China (Humphrey, 1983), which has accompanied a revival of religion and general loss of confidence in the secular authority of Marxism-Maoism (Overmyer, 2003; Yang, 2006; Chan, 2005).

My study contributes to prior literature in four ways: 1) it focuses on the theological dimension of fatalism; 2) examines the relationship between fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction; 3) analyzes the effects on life satisfaction of other religion factors such as religious belief, subjective religiosity, and religious behavior and affiliation; and 4) draws on data from a nationally representative sample of Chinese citizens, the 2007 Empirical Study of Values in China (ESVIC), to look into the general Chinese population, rather than particularized social groups in the country.

### *Fatalism as a Sociological Concept*

In his well-known analyses of slavery prior to the Civil War of the United States, Durkheim argues that fatalism results from the social experience of a person's actions being subjected to an intense and oppressive regulation. For fatalists, "futures [are] pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline" (Durkheim, [1897] 1968, p. 276). Grounded in Durkheim's works, Frank Pearce indicates that "it is likely that in the period prior to the Civil War the outlook of many slaves was fatalistic—the condition under which they lived seemed to be 'unavoidable facts of life' and no alternative seemed conceived" (Pearce, 1989, p.129). Thus, sociologists generally agree that fatalism refers to an individual's feeling of powerlessness (or helplessness), hopelessness, and vulnerability caused by undue regulation from a source of external authority that has a total control over the individual (Acevedo, 2005; Lockwood, 1992; Dohrenwend, 1959).

Another line of sociological inquiry on fatalism has transcended the boundaries of Durkheim's structural regulation theory to incorporate Weber's theological explanation of fatalism (see Acevedo, 2008a). In *The Religion of India*, Weber ascribes fatalism to

theology—that, for instance, beliefs in cosmological forces such as karma and reincarnation shape individuals’ fatalistic attitudes and orientations (Weber, [1958] 1996, p. 132). Put in a different way, belief in the supernatural injects a fatalistic, submissive feeling among the adherents that fate and destiny are not dictated by themselves but by the supernatural forces and essences. As with Durkheim, Weber conceptualizes fatalism as a type of inner feeling associated with an external source of authority. Unlike Durkheim, however, Weber considers the external authority as being otherworldly oriented, rather than based on materials in this world (Lockwood, 1992). Moreover, fatalistic worldviews provide a person with comprehensive otherworldly explanations of why circumstances are beyond his control (Lockwood, 1992, p. 44). Weber ([1958] 1996), for instance, regards the karma doctrines in Indian society as the “most consistent theodicy ever produced by history” that places an Indian person “within a clear circle of duties and offer him a well-rounded, metaphysically- satisfying conception of the world” (Weber, [1958]1996, pp. 121-132).

Summing up Durkheim and Weber’s viewpoints, Elder (1966) suggests that fatalism be understood as a multidimensional mental construct that includes both “empirical fatalism” identified by Durkheim as a result of structural regulation, and “theological fatalism” attributed by Weber to supernatural beliefs. Specifically, the empirical aspect of fatalism means “a belief that empirical phenomena occur for no comprehensible reason, and they cannot be controlled”, and the theological dimension of fatalism is based on “the belief that God or some moral order such as karma controls man’s destiny and the outcome of his actions” (Elder, 1966, p. 229). Elder’s systematic typology of fatalism permits separate analyses of the two conceptually discrete types of fatalism, without one negating the other. In addition, the clearly defined category of “theological fatalism”

extends Weber's account of Eastern faiths to include monotheism that teaches about God's omnipotence.

### *The Submission Thesis vs. the Voluntarism Thesis*

More recently, a rational choice approach to theological fatalism has emerged in the sociology of religion (see Stark & Finke, 2000; Acevedo, 2008 a, b; Lockwood, 1992). This approach diverges from the Weberian tradition that belongs to the "old paradigm" in the sociology of religion (Warner, 1993), which insists that religion is harmful because it hinders voluntarism and sanctifies tyrants. Weber ([1958]1996), for example, regards karma doctrines—that life condition is an effect of deeds committed in past lives—as the core spirit of the caste system of Indian society, which divides into unequal status groups. The very reason the caste system has survived for many centuries is because belief in karma persistently produce subservient characters of the Indian masses (Weber, [1958]1996). Likewise, Weber points out that in Empire China, Buddhism—a religion imported from India which also relies on beliefs in karma and reincarnation—was taken advantage of by the ruling class as a means to "tame" the Chinese masses (Weber, 1951).

On the contrary, proponents of rational choice theories, the new paradigm that has gained growing popularity among sociologists (Warner, 1993; Stark & Finke, 2000), not only reject Weber's argument on the nature of theological fatalism but they also propose the precise opposite of it. While admitting that the supernatural's control of fate and life outcomes and events is fundamental to religious beliefs, researchers dispute that theological fatalism by no means connotes complete submission or irrationality (Acevedo, 2008 a). Instead, fatalistic worldviews empower active motivations for inducing desirable changes in life condition and stimulate voluntary actions to achieve secular and

otherworldly benefits (Elder, 1966; Acevedo, 2008a). An excellent example is the Calvinist idea of predestination and free will: “man may be powerless in terms of the outcome of any specific action...over a longer time span man *can* shape his identity by being virtuous, carrying out God’s will, or accumulating merit” (Elder, 1966, p.228). Like Christianity, rational mentality and voluntarism is intrinsic to Islam too (Stark & Finke, 2000; Belo, 2006; Esposito, 1997, 2002; Acevedo, 2008a).

### *Chinese Religion and Fatalistic Voluntarism*

Chinese fatalism is a *direct* development from the ancient theocratic concepts in traditional Chinese religions, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (Cheng, 1952; Rees, 1906; Hjellum, 1998). As with Hindus, Chinese Buddhists believe that karma is a chain of causes and effects in the endless life cycle that determines life outcomes and events in this world (Ch’en, 1964). For Confucians, *Tian* (usually translated as “Heaven”) is a supernatural authority who intervenes the secular world and gives commands to humans, and fate (*ming*) is determined by the heavenly commands (Hansen, 1999; Munro, 1969). When it comes to Taoism, *Tao* is “the divine All-One of which one can partake” (Weber, 1951, pp.181-82). Since *Tao* is the unchangeable force that keeps the universe ordered (Weber, 1951), the goal of Taoists is to live in harmony with the nature in which living beings are interdependent on one another (Coward, 1996; Needham, 1956).

What is most notable about Chinese religion is its characteristic of “fatalistic voluntarism” (Lee, 1985; Lee & Cheung, 1995). Fatalistic voluntarism is a combination of efforts to change the situation and fatalistic acceptance of the way things are (Lee, 1985). Just like the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, Chinese belief in the supernatural “in spite of its deterministic character—no, *because of it*—did not fall into simple fatalism

but rather ‘gave an enthusiastic faith to the masses’ (Douglass & Terrill, 1970, p. 193). Schaberg (2005) argues that Chinese religions combine acceptance of fate with strong anti-fatalism and well-developed notions of strategy or maneuvering room within its decrees.

For example, Buddhist believers in karma advocate that “If a person is reborn in human shape, fate determines *only* the social starting point and his physical and mental endowment, not his whole life. Man has a chance to change his fate through morally good or, for that matter, bad actions...” (Eberhard, 1966, pp.152-53; italics added) Similarly, belief in Tao is “not resignation, but a desire for a different kind of freedom. Laozi focuses on how we free ourselves from social control or distortion of our natural action impulses” (Hansen, 1999, p.30). The same comes to be true of Confucianism too. Confucians exalt the high position of man in the cosmic order and believe that man, albeit subordinate to Heaven, has power to ward off evil spirits and avoid life adversities so long as he remains morally qualified (Yang, 1961). Yang (1961) notes the following:

While relying on the concept of fate to steel themselves in the face of momentous crises or to help them resolve conflict in life situations, the Confucians reserved for an important role in the shaping of fate. In this reservation lay the realism and positive spirit of Confucian mentality toward life... (p.272)

### *Previous Research*

Recent empirical research has confirmed that theological fatalism promotes voluntarism, boosts self-control, and generates high levels of religious commitment that mitigate the jeopardizing effect on individual well-being of structural regulation (Acevedo, 2008 a, b). Moreover, there is evidence that intimate collaboration with supernatural beings enhances feelings of personal mastery and reduces life uncertainty (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Ellison, 1993; Pargament et al., 1988). In the proceeding

chapters, I find that some forms of religious devotion bolster the sense of mastery among Chinese. This line of research is clearly in odds with the old paradigm, such as Marx's ([1844] 1970) claim that religion is "the opium of the people" and a sigh of "the oppressed creature", Weber's (1951, 1958) contention that religion perpetuates social inequality and represses the masses, and Freud's ([1900] 1976) psychological diagnosis of religion as "self-protective fiction" and "institutionalized mass neurosis" that entices believers into a state of reliance.

Moreover, scholars generally agree that perceived control has a positive effect on life satisfaction (Diener, 1996). The feeling of control over life enables individuals to cope effectively with life affairs and adversities and thereby enhances life satisfaction (Lefcourt, 1991). Further, locus of control of reinforcement is closely tied to religious belief in fate control (Leung et al., 2002). According to Leung et al. (2002), locus of control means "the belief whether one can control the events happening to oneself" and belief in fate control taps an "additional theme that events are both predetermined and predictable" (p. 295). Thus, religious belief in fate combines three elements: locus of control, predictability, and fatedness (Chen et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, previous empirical research on the relationship between theological fatalism and life satisfaction among the Chinese has been scant. To the best of my knowledge, the only study on this topic was based on a small sample of 359 Chinese college students in a city of Central China (Chen et al., 2006). The respondents were asked to what extent they believe "all things in the universe have been determined." Results were supportive, showing that the more the respondents believed in fate control, the more satisfied they were with life in general. Moreover, it is the components of

predictability and predeterminability within the belief in fate control that account for the positive, significant relationship to life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2006, p. 32).

Whereas prior literature contributes to our understanding of the association between theological fatalism and life satisfaction among Chinese, it has at least four weaknesses. First, the importance of theological fatalism for life satisfaction has been somewhat understated in prior literature. Second, past research has been limited to particularized social groups (i.e., college students). The findings may not be generalized to the general population. Third, the non-random sample may lead to biases in previous findings. Fourth, little has been said about the effect that fatalistic voluntarism, one of the core elements in belief in fate control, has on life satisfaction. The goal of this study is to address these limitations.

### *Hypothesis*

According to my earlier discussion on fatalistic voluntarism and its relationship to life satisfaction, I submit a hypothesis—*fatalistic voluntarism will be associated positively with levels of life satisfaction among those who believe in fate control*. The theoretical expectation here will more closely side with previously cited literature that adopts the rational choice approach to theological fatalism, suggesting that fatalistic voluntarism is a spiritual enhancer of life satisfaction. For this hypothesis to be verified by the Chinese data, fatalistic voluntarism should display a positive correlation with the life satisfaction measure and its effect remain statistically significant when holding constant the relevant covariates that are commonly used to predict life satisfaction. Moreover, while using the data sample to evaluate the merits of the fatalistic voluntarism perspective, I expect that the empirical evidence from the present study will not only

confirm the fatalistic voluntarism thesis but that this investigation can be viewed as a further contribution to a more comprehensive reappraisal of the religious effect on subjective well-being.

### *Data and Method*

#### *Data*

Data come from the Empirical Studies of Values in China (ESVIC, 2007), a national representative survey of 7,021 Chinese in mainland China. To the best of my knowledge, the ESVIC is the most recent national survey on religiosity and spirituality for P.R. China. After two pre-tests, the formal survey (rendered in Chinese) was administered in 2007 in 56 geographic locales in the country, including 3 metropolitan cities, 6 province-level capital cities, 11 region-level (*diji*) cities, 16 small towns, and 20 administrative villages. The multi-stage probability sampling method was employed to select metropolitan cities and towns. The KISH grid randomly selected one respondent from each household for a face-to-face in-home interview. In rural areas, 1-2 administrative villages for each town, and 1-2 “natural units” for each village were sampled. The interviewers had received professional training before the survey was conducted and a post-survey team double checked via telephone over 20 percent of the interviews. I chose a subsample of 1,354 respondents who reported belief in fate control (1=yes, 2=no) from the rural sample. The percentage of Chinese believers in fate control is 25.68%.

### *Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction*

Life satisfaction is assessed by a 4-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked “In general, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very satisfied?” I use this single global measure of life satisfaction, because when there is no item on domain-specific life satisfaction in the ESVIC, it is a standard practice in previous literature to focus on global life satisfaction (Ellison & Gay, 1990).

### *Independent Variable: Fatalistic Voluntarism*

Participants in the ESVIC were asked “Some people think that they have a total control over their own fate and fortune, while others believe that it is impossible to change or escape from predetermined fate and fortune. What is your view on your own fate and fortune?” Responses were rated on an ascending 10-point scale to indicate the extent to which the respondents felt they had freedom of choice and control over their fate and fortune (1= “none at all”, 10= “a great deal”) (Note 3).

### *Measures of Religious Commitment*

According to Christopher G. Ellison and his associates (Ellison & Gay, 1990; Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989), religion contributes to subjective well-being in at least four ways: (1) religious beliefs and values provide a source of ideational coherence and meaning; (2) devotional activity (e.g., prayer, meditation, and religious salience) bolsters self-esteem and personal efficacy and enables individuals to better cope with routine daily affairs, life problems, and stressors; (3) religious participation (e.g., church attendance) forms friendships, increases social support, and reinforces individuals’ private beliefs and religiosity; and (4) affiliation unifies individual members into an integrated religious

community by emphasizing dogmatic homogeneity, shaping distinctive lifestyles, and influencing individual assessments of life quality.

*Supernatural beliefs* A set of survey items asked respondents if they believed in God, Heaven/God of Heaven (*Tian*), laws of Karma, and Chinese gods and deities (1= yes, 2= no). I recoded the responses and created separate dummy variables for each of these belief items, respectively. Nonbelievers serve as the contrast group.

*Frequency of prayer* Respondents were asked whether they had prayed to the supernatural in the past year (1= yes, 2= no) and if so, how frequently they had prayed (1= once or twice a year, 2= once or twice per month, 3= once a week, 4= several times per week, 5= everyday, 6= occasionally). Since most respondents indicated that they had never prayed, two dummy variables were included to measure frequency of prayer: more frequent prayer (“once a week”, “several times per week”, and “everyday”) and less frequent prayer (“once or twice a year” and “once or twice per month”). Persons who never pray are coded as the contrast category.

*Other type of private religious practice* Besides the measure of frequency of prayer, an additional dummy variable is constructed to assess the effect of religious devotion. The ESVIC includes a series of items tapping a wide variety of religious practices such as reading religious texts, worshiping Buddha, chanting Buddha names, sitting meditation, burning incense, worshiping ancestral spirits, having vegetarian meals, and other activities of such kind. Responses indicating that the respondents had involved in any of these religious practices in the last twelve months were recoded 1, and negative responses 0.

*Subjective religiosity* The ESVIC instructed participants to self-evaluate the importance of religion in their lives on a 4-Likert scale (1= very important, 4= not important at all). Most of the responses fall into the “not important” and “not important at all” categories. In order to allow for the emergence of curvilinear effects of the affective dimension of devotion, I created two dummy variables that gauge subjective religiosity: “religion is very important” and “religion is somewhat important” (1= yes, 0= no). Those who claim that religion is “not important” or “not important at all” serve as the comparison group.

*Religious participation* Respondents were asked if they had attended church/mosque activities or visited temples in the past year (1= yes, 2= no) and if so how frequently they had done so. Since the vast majority of the participants reported nonparticipation (66.1%), it seems less meaningful to quantitatively differentiate participants by frequency of attendance. Conceptually, social ties are usually denser and stronger in churches and mosques than in temples, since the former require regular group participation while the latter do not (Stark, 2004). For these reasons, I constructed two dummy variables using them to qualitatively measure religious participation: church/mosque attendance and temple visit. Nonparticipants are used as the contrast category.

*Religious affiliation* In the ESVIC, an item asked participants: “Which of the following religions do you identify with?” (1= Buddhism, 2= Daoism, 3= Confucianism, 4= Protestantism, 5= Catholicism, 6= Islam, 7= others, 8= no affiliation). Among the respondents, Buddhists (16.5 %) and Protestant Christians (2.2%) represent the two largest religious groups, while other religious groups together stand only for around one percent of the sample. Finally, I dummy-coded the responses to identify four major categories:

Buddhism, Protestantism, other religions (Catholicism, Islam, Taoism, and others), and non-affiliation. Respondents who failed to identify with any of the four categories serve as the comparison group.

### *Control Variables*

Socio-demographics variables used in my analyses included *age* (coded in years), *age squared*, *gender* (1= female), *ethnic minority* (1= ethnic minority), *marital status* (1= married), *party membership* (1= communist), *rural migrant* (1= migrant), and duration of current residence (coded in years). Moreover, A set of dummy variables controlled for life stressors, such as *divorce* (1= divorced), *widowhood* (1= widowed), *poor health* (1= yes), and *unemployment* (1= unemployed). I also control for *sociability*. Respondents were asked if they had participated in any social activities in the past year such as others' weddings, volunteering activities, community services, community-level entertainment and other activities, group travel with family members, friends, or coworkers, political activities held by the Party, and going to cinema (1= yes, 0= no). The justification of the use of the socio-demographic, life stressor, and sociability variables has been well documented in previous literature (e.g., Ellison & Gay, 1990; Cheung & Leung, 2007; Appleton & Song, 2008).

Socioeconomic status measures were education and household income. *Education* was measured using a 7-point scale. Responses were recoded as “less than elementary school degree” (0), “elementary school degree” (1), “middle school degree” (2), “high school or secondary professional school degree” (3), “Associate’s Degree (2-3 years)” (4), “Bachelor’s Degree” (5), and “post graduate-advanced degree (MA, Ph.D.)”(6) The percentages in the SLSOCR are as follows: 2.52 percent have less than an elementary degree, 7.15 percent have

an elementary school degree, 29.83 percent have a middle school degree, 37.18 percent are high school or secondary professional school graduates, 14.81 percent have a Associate's degree, 8 percent are college graduates, and 0.51 percent have a graduate degree.

*Household income* was measured in a 16-point summary scale. Respondents were asked "By your best estimate, what was your total household income (in Renminbi) last month?" Household income categories were recoded as: 0) "no income or stable income," 1) "500 or less," 2) "501–1,000," 3) "1,001–2,000," 4) "2,001–3,000," 5) "3,001–4,000," 6) "4,001–5,000," 7) "5,001–6,000," 8) "6,001–7,000," 9) "7,001–8,000," 10) "8,001–9,000," 11) "9,001–10,000," 12) "10,001–12,000," 13) "12,001– 5,000," 14) "15,001–16,000," and 15) "20,001 or above." The median income falls in the "1,001 – 2,000" range. I imputed the median household income category for the respondents who reported missing values on this item, and created a "missing income" category (1= missing, 0= non-missing) to adjust potential bias for missing values in the analyses. Household income was logged for normalization. Preliminary analyses showed that the log income model appeared to be the better fitting model. Table 5.1 presents the variables used in this study.

### *Analytic Plan*

Following standard practice in previous literature on life satisfaction (e.g., Ellison & Gay, 1990), I employ ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to assess the focal relationship between fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction. I analyze whether levels of life satisfaction increase as the sense of fatalistic voluntarism grows among the Chinese believers in fate control. My analyses include three steps. Model 1 of Table 5.2 regresses life satisfaction on the measure of fatalistic voluntarism. Model 2 adds the

measures of religious beliefs, devotion, participation, and affiliation in order to estimate the effect of fatalistic voluntarism on life satisfaction, net of these religious factors.

Model 3 adjusts for socio-demographic and background variables for a stricter examination of the associations among fatalistic voluntarism, religious commitment, and life satisfaction.

Table 5.1 Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analyses

Variables	Coded variables	%	Mean	S.D.
Life Satisfaction	<i>Range: 1-4</i>		3.04	.80
Fatalistic Voluntarism	<i>Range: 1-10</i>		6.90	2.17
Belief in Christian God	1= Yes	18.92		.39
Belief in Heaven	1= Yes	22.38		.42
Belief in Karma	1= Yes	47.97		.50
Belief in Chinese Deities	1= Yes	36.19		.48
Church Attendance	1= Yes	1.18		.11
Temple Visit	1= Yes	29.17		.45
More Frequent Prayer	1= Yes	5.76		.23
Less Frequent Prayer	1= Yes	15.81		.36
Chinese Religious Practice	1= Yes	48.67		.50
Religion is Very Important	1= Yes	4.21		.20
Religion is Some Important	1= Yes	14.84		.36
Protestant	1= Yes	2.90		.17
Buddhist	1= Yes	30.65		.46
Other Religions	1= Yes	.52		.07
No Religion	1= Yes	71.57		.45
Female	1= Yes	55.54		.50
Age	<i>Range: 16-75</i>		38.74	13.07
Ethnic Minority	1= Yes	4.21		.20
Married	1= Yes	76.22		.43
Widowed	1= Yes	2.14		.14
Divorced	1= Yes	1.99		.14
Poor Health	1= Yes	3.84		.19
Communist	1= Yes	8.29		.28
Education	<i>Range: 0-6</i>		2.80	1.10
Logged Household Income	<i>Range: 0-2.83</i>		1.33	.44
Missing Income	1= Yes	1.40		.12
Unemployed	1= Yes	6.50		.25
Rural Migrant	1= Yes	32.64		.47
Sociability	1= Yes	74.67		.44
Duration of Current Residence	<i>Range: less than 1 year -74</i>		13.16	13.51

NOTE: Ns range from 1,310-1,354

## *Results*

As can be seen in Model 1 of Table 5.2, the measure of fatalistic voluntarism displays a statistically significant estimated net effect on life satisfaction. Among the believers in fate control, those who report more freedom of choice and self-control seem to be more satisfied with life in general (standardized coefficient= .17,  $p < .001$ ). The size of the coefficient of fatalistic voluntarism declines only slightly in Model 2 and 3, when holding constant the measures of religious commitment, socio-demographics and background variables. The coefficient of fatalistic voluntarism remains statistically significant, demonstrating the largest influence in these models (standardized coefficient in Model 2 = .14, standardized coefficient in Model 3= .14,  $p < .001$ ), adjusting for the religion factors and other relevant covariates. Thus, these findings provide strong support for my hypothesis that fatalistic voluntarism leads to increased levels of life satisfaction.

Model 2 incorporates a variety of measures of religious commitment such as beliefs in the supernatural, religious devotion, religious participation, and religious affiliation. Among these variables, only belief in karma, belief in Chinese gods and deities, temple visit, and Chinese religious practice each show a significant estimated net effect on life satisfaction, while the coefficients of other religion measures are statistically nonsignificant. For instance, individuals who believe in laws of karma (standardized coefficient= .08,  $p < .01$ ), attend religious services at temples (standardized coefficient = .06,  $p < .05$ ), and engage in varied traditional Chinese religious practices including sitting meditation, worshiping Buddha, reading religious texts and other devotional activities of such kind (standardized coefficient= .09,  $p < .01$ ) appear to be more satisfied with life than others. By contrast, those who believe in Chinese gods and deities (standardized coefficient= -.08,  $p < .05$ ) seem less satisfied with life than others.

Table 5.2 OLS Regression Estimates\*  
The Effect of Fatalistic Voluntarism and Covariates on Life Satisfaction in Rural China

Variables	I	II	III
Fatalistic Voluntarism	0.06/0.01**	0.06/0.01**	0.05/0.01**
Religious Beliefs			
Belief in Christian God		-0.01/0.06	-0.01/0.06
Belief in Heaven		-0.03/0.06	-0.04/0.06
Belief in Karma		0.13/0.04**	0.11/0.04
Belief in Chinese gods and deities		-0.13/0.06*	-0.09/0.06*
Private Religiosity			
More Frequent Prayer		0.10/0.10	0.19/0.10
Less Frequent Prayer		-0.01/0.06	-0.02/0.06
Chinese Religious Practice		0.14/0.05**	0.13/0.05**
Subjective Religiosity			
Religion is very important		0.01/0.11	-0.00/0.11
Religion is somewhat important		-0.13/0.07	-0.10/0.06
Religious Participation			
Church Attendance		-0.11/0.23	-0.11/0.24
Temple Visit		0.11/0.05*	0.07/0.05
Religious Denomination			
Protestant		-0.05/0.15	-0.12/0.15
Buddhist		0.06/0.08	0.08/0.08
Other Religion		0.07/0.26	0.11/0.25
No Religion		-0.08/0.08	-0.05/0.08
Socio-Demographic Variables			
Female			0.06/0.04
Age			-0.04/0.01**
Age Squared			0.00/0.00**
Ethnic Minority			0.16/0.16
Married			0.18/0.08*
Widowed			0.02/0.22
Divorced			-0.41/0.18*
Poor Health			-0.37/0.12**
Communist			0.33/0.09**
Education			-0.00/0.02
Logged Household Income			0.17/0.05**
Missing Income			0.21/0.25
Unemployed			-0.06/0.09
Rural Migrant			0.01/0.05
Socialization			0.06/0.05**
Duration of Current Residence			-0.00/0.00**
Intercept	2.53/0.07**	2.53/0.12**	3.12/0.28**
N	1,340	1,186	1,145
Adjusted $R^2$	0.02	0.03	0.11

NOTES:

\*Unstandardized coefficients/standard errors.

\*P < .05. \*\*P < .01.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the religious affiliation variables as a block do not significantly enhance levels of life satisfaction.

Model 3, the full model of my analyses, includes the socio-demographics and background variables. Of these control factors, age, marital status, divorce, poor health, party membership, household income, and duration of current address are associated significantly with the life satisfaction scale. Married persons (standardized coefficient = .09,  $p < .05$ ) who are also members of the Chinese Communist Party (standardized coefficient = .10,  $p < .001$ ) and report higher household income (standardized coefficient = .09,  $p < .01$ ) seem more likely to be satisfied with life than others. Divorced individuals (standardized coefficient = -.06,  $p < .05$ ) with older age (standardized coefficient = -.71,  $p < .001$ ), poor health condition (standardized coefficient = -.08,  $p < .05$ ), and longer duration of current residence (standardized coefficient = -.10,  $p < .001$ ) tend to report lower levels of life satisfaction than other respondents in the sample. Finally, the coefficients of belief in karma and temple visit decline in size and lose statistical significance in the full model, controlling for the socio-demographics and other relevant covariates of life satisfaction.

### *Conclusion and Discussion*

Ongoing, vigorous religious revival of post-socialist China has attracted increasing scholarly attention (for a more comprehensive review see in Yang, 2006). In view of this phenomenal religious change, one cannot underestimate its social consequences in China. Just as Chan (2005) aptly notes, “All these [religious and nonreligious] areas of religious influence are not part of the programme of the official religious institutions, yet their influence can be far-reaching especially in terms of social values and ideas. Every sign

suggests that such influence is beginning to gain momentum” (Chan, 2005, p.102). The central purpose of this study is to address the largely neglected relationship between fatalistic voluntarism and general life satisfaction in previous literature, using a nationally representative sample of Chinese residents. Moreover, I reassess the associations of multi-faceted religiosity and subjective well-being in the context of China’s Marxist-atheist monopoly. The results presented in this chapter bear on several current debates.

First, my findings confirm the significant, strong, and positive influence of fatalistic voluntarism on life satisfaction. Indeed, the measure of fatalistic voluntarism accounts for more variation in general life satisfaction among the Chinese than the entire block of variables tapping religious commitment. Evidence here suggests the critical importance of fatalistic voluntarism for subjective well-being. It challenges the Weberian contention that religions, particularly Eastern religions, form pessimistic attitudes and cause negative psychological experience that lead to individuals’ docile acceptance of social inequality. In fact, my observations remain consistent with the new paradigmatic perspective on theological fatalism (e.g., Acevedo, 2008 a, b; Lee, 1985; Douglass & Terrill, 1970; Munro, 1969; Eberhard, 1966; Yang, 1961; Hansen, 1999; Chen et al., 2006). In all, the findings of this investigation highlight that voluntarism is a core component of the religious belief in fate control and that individuals with higher levels of fatalistic voluntarism, tend to display positive subjective well-being.

Moreover, this study shows different patterns of the associations between the measures of religious commitment and life satisfaction. First, I identify a negative estimated net effect on life satisfaction of belief in Chinese gods and deities, where other explanatory variables are equal in the full model. It is common that Chinese popular

religions and heterodox forms of Chinese Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism embrace a pantheon of gods, deities, and spirits (Weber, 1951, 1958). However, compared with the all-power Jehovah or Allah in the Judeo-Christian-Islam tradition, the smaller Chinese gods and deities are merely functional, each being limited in its own sphere of jurisdiction and competence (Eberhard, 1966; Weber, 1951; Shahar & Weller, 1996), thus lacking power to shape the individual (Stark, 2001). As a result, when a Chinese person counts little on the help of gods and deities, he or she tends to bargain with, offend, or even fight against them for better life chances (Eberhard, 1966). In addition, most popular Chinese religions lack a specific creed, being unable to grant adherents a strong sense of internal order and logic to everyday life (Stark, 2004). For these reasons, belief in Chinese gods and deities may diminish subjective well-being.

I was unable to find any significant relationship among religious participation, religious affiliation, and life satisfaction, while controlling for the socio-demographic and secular factors. This outcome is largely consistent with previous literature from China, suggesting that the failure of religious participation and affiliation to have a positive impact on subjective well-being is either due to religion's deviant, nonconventional cultural status in China's Marxist-atheist monopoly (Cheung & Leung, 2004; Yamaoka, 2008) and/or because of the state persecution or control of religion (Brown & Tierney, 2008; Cheung & Leung, 2007). Nevertheless, I do uncover a strong, positive influence that private religiosity has on life satisfaction. Individuals who engaged in meditation, reading religious texts, chanting Buddha names, having vegetarian meals, and other kinds of devotional activities reported higher levels of life satisfaction than others. This is perhaps because the restrictive state regulation of the religious market in post-socialist China has been focused mainly on religious suppliers rather than individual consumers

and religious activities in private sphere are especially difficult to control (Yang, 2006; Potter, 2003). At any rate, the way that religious commitment influences subjective well-being of the Chinese masses maybe contingent heavily on the strictness of the state regulation against religion in China.

Finally, let us turn briefly to the socio-demographic and other secular predictors of life satisfaction. Consistent with prior research, my study confirms that: (1) life satisfaction is associated positively with income, marriage, and party membership (Appleton & Song, 2008), but negatively with age, duration of residence (Cheung & Leung, 2007, 2004), poor health condition, and divorce (Appleton & Song, 2008); (2) life satisfaction's relationship to education, unemployment (Cheung & Leung, 2007, 2004; see Note 4) and sociability (Chen et al., 2006) are statistically insignificant. In addition, I note that ethnic minority and rural migrants are no less likely to be satisfied with life in general than others. In post-socialist China, equal rights to ethnic groups are guaranteed by Constitution, and laws have been passed to promote economic growth and cultural development of ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority persons are not only exempt from the One-Child Policy and they also enjoy relative religious freedom, compared with their Han majority counterparts. Although rural migrants to urban cities have been encountered with many life difficulties, they have formed self-sustained migrant communities to improve living conditions and increase life chances (Garcia, 2004).

Cross-sectional data do now allow us to draw a definite conclusion about the causal order of the relationship between fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction, despite that previous literature has underscored the important role of fatalistic voluntarism in predicting subjective well-being (e.g., Lee, 1985; Lee & Cheung, 1995; Chen et al., 2006) and that, more generally, it is dissatisfied persons who are more inclined to be religious

than others (Stark, 2004, pp.57-59). Thus, well-formed theoretical frameworks and sophisticated methodologies are required to effectively examine the reversed causal ordering.

This study is among the first to evaluate the theological dimension of fatalism in communist and post-communist societies, using nationally representative data from P. R. China. Recent research, however, has also shown religious revitalization in the former Soviet Union (Froese, 2001, 2004). Future studies should further investigate the patterns and dynamics of the associations between empirical and theological fatalism and individual/social well-being in societies that have been affected by communism. In terms of post-socialist China, longitudinal studies are needed to analyze how and to what extent religious influence permeates into the everyday life of Chinese people over time periods.

## *Notes*

1. In many instances, fatalism is conceptualized as contrasting with the sense of mastery, self-efficacy, and locus of control (see Wade, 1996; Jacobson, 1999; Acevedo, 2008 b; Goodwin et al., 2002).

2. A growing body of research in the former Soviet Union, for example, shows that high levels of empirical fatalism—which were originated in the communist oppression of the individual agency (European Commission, 1997; Markova et al., 1998; Schwartz & Bardi, 1997)—have had harmful and enduring social influences in the post-communist era (Goodwin & Allen, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2002). In Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine, and Georgia, fatalism has diminished emotional support, deteriorated (indirectly) mental health (Goodwin et al., 2002), dampened political activism (Goodwin & Allen, 2000), and weakened the willingness to participate in reciprocal social exchanges (Goodwin et al., 1999).

3. Since the 2007 ESVIC did not include an item that directly measures the concept of fatalistic voluntarism, I had to choose a subsample of respondents who believed in fate control for my analysis. This approach is acceptable when a more desirable measure is absent. After all, fatalistic voluntarism is understood as “limited fatalism” (Munro 1969). By limited fatalism, Munro (1969) means:

[A]lthough certain specific events, qualities, and things are caused by supernatural intervention in human and natural affairs, not all are. The actual number of predetermined events is relatively small. Therefore, man is usually able to use his evaluating mind and to act in accordance with its dictates; and when men in general act this way, there is usually nothing to prevent the formation of a well-ordered society. (p.85)

4. Cheung and Leung (2007, 2004) find a significant, negative effect of unemployment on life satisfaction only for ownership class, not for middle and working class. In my subsample, I identify few who belong to the ownership class.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion and Discussion

I began this dissertation by highlighting four theoretical issues central to the current scholarly debates in the sociology of religion: Do modernization and the development of science lead to declines in or disappearance of religion? Is religion a causal factor of religious and social phenomena? Does religion influence individuals and society as groups or collectivities? Is religion false or deleterious? Debates revolving around such critical issues have been intense and increasingly favorable to rational choice theories over secularization theories.

Recently, some secularizationists have schemed to fight back against criticisms by producing revisionist versions of their doctrine. From its inception, however, this self-rescue of secularizationists from being buried in the graveyard of the sociology of religion has been thwarted by a stark condemnation from the camp of rational choice theorists. Such a condemnation is not just wishful thinking. Testimonies for rational choice theories and against secularization theories have abounded all over the world. In particular, the ongoing religious revival in Chinese society has made a powerful case for the validity of rational choice perspectives. Scholars have witnessed that religion has been rapidly growing in size, power, and scope of influence in mainland China, Taiwan, as well as other overseas Chinese societies.

As is well recognized, the Chinese religious system has remained innately diverse, complex, and integral to the everyday life of the Chinese people. Compared with the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, Chinese religion presents a jumble of non-theistic and

polytheistic beliefs, assorted religious and spiritual practices, and various combinations of individual and group actors. The continuing revival and unique characteristics of Chinese religion jointly provide a rare opportunity for sociologists to further inquire about the ascending social role and functions of religion in modern times.

Unfortunately, thus far scholarly attention has been limited primarily to the religious revival itself and the church-state relationship in Chinese society, while other aspects of religious and social consequences of religion in the society have been largely understudied. Moreover, most of the prior literature has been based on ethnographic studies in the absence of rigorous quantitative research. For these reasons, my dissertation examines the largely neglected religious influence in Chinese society, with a focus on two specialty areas: social conformity and subjective well-being. I pursue these topics by analyzing most recent nationally representative data samples from mainland China and Taiwan. My research questions include: Why are some persons less religious relative to others in Chinese society? Will Chinese religious beliefs and practices contribute to personal mastery and happiness? Will theological fatalism have a positive, salutary effect on life satisfaction?

My dissertation has analyzed the religion-conformity-health connections in Chinese society, a non-Christian and non-Western setting. This dissertation is important in and of itself, because it fills the void in the previous literature in Chinese society and offers a turning point—in my opinion—for future comparative research to draw on the rational choice approach to study the relationships between religion, conformity, and health in Asia and elsewhere.

### *Summary of Findings*

Chapter 2 examines the relationship between risk preference and religiosity among Chinese. In this chapter I have replicated analyses of Miller (2000)—who found little significant association of risk preference and religiosity in Japan and India—through an examination of religious affiliation and participation in the 2007 TSCS data sample. From the analyses, I have uncovered supporting evidence that the linkage between risk preference and religious affiliation is statistically insignificant; however, I have also reported an anomalous case that risk preference displays a negative and statistically significant estimated net effect on religious participation. This result—that in the overwhelmingly religious atmosphere of Taiwanese society, individuals’ religious conformity is associated negatively with preference for risk-taking—may suggest that risk preference is a general mechanism that transcends cultures and societies to the extent that they define irreligiousness as a form of risk-taking behavior and/or are overwhelmingly religious.

Chapter 3 examines the associations between aspects of religiosity and the sense of mastery among Chinese. Based on data from the 2004 TSCS, I find that: 1) belief in karma and belief in a supreme God are both associated negatively with the sense of mastery; 2) the estimated net effect of religious practices such as meditation on mastery is strong, positive, and statistically significant; and 3) the positive influence of meditation increases when belief in laws of karma is added into the analyses. These findings lend partial support to the “personal empowerment” thesis, by showing that the enhanced personal mastery is a direct outcome of religious behaviors which are based on corresponding religious beliefs.

Chapter 4 reports different patterns of the relationship between multidimensional religious involvement and personal happiness for Taiwanese. Generally speaking, religious involvement is beneficial for subjective well-being. First, it seems that the extent to which supernatural beliefs influence subjective well-being depends on whether they are able to sustain an intimate social relationship with divine others. For instance, belief in a supreme God buffers the deleterious impact of health stress on the affective aspect of subjective well-being; in contrast, belief in laws of karma displays little such effect for Taiwanese persons. Second, religious activities such as praying, reading scriptures, and frequency of religious attendance contribute more or less to better mental health outcomes. Third, although chanting Buddha names is negatively correlated with happiness, it remains possible that it is unhappy people who are more likely to seek comfort from this devotional activity.

Chapter 5 examines the association between fatalistic voluntarism and self-perceived life satisfaction among Chinese. Fatalism has been long recognized by sociologists since the founders as a key concept in sociology. Recent debates on fatalism have revolved around the way that theological fatalism influences individuals' well-being. Moreover, fatalism is the first predominant cultural value of Chinese society (Chu & Hsu, 1979), but has been little studied. Using recent data from the 2007 ESVIC, I investigate the linkage of fatalistic voluntarism—the core characteristic of Chinese religions—and life satisfaction in China's Marxist-atheist monopoly. Results show that fatalistic voluntarism has a significant and positive estimated net effect on life satisfaction among Chinese persons.

## *Contributions and Limitations*

### *Religion and Social Conformity*

My dissertation makes several important theoretical and empirical contributions to the sociology of religion. First, it refines and extends risk preference theory of religion to Chinese society and, possibly, other Asian nations. My study confirms that like in the West, risk preference is a strong correlate of individuals' active religiosity in the Taiwanese society dominated by traditional Chinese religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religions. With that said, I am not arguing that the risk preference-religiosity relationship is as strong in the East as in the West. Possibly, and even likely, this relationship is still somewhat weaker in the East than in the West. As Miller and Stark (2002) have asserted, irreligiousness in the Western societies dominated by monotheism is perceived as being subject to immediate and eternal damnation in an afterlife, while irreligiousness in the Chinese society dominated by non-theism and polytheism is usually subject to non-immediate and/or temporary otherworldly punishment in hells or lower life realms. The point I reiterate here, importantly, is that traditional Chinese religions *are* "risk" religions, regardless of the degree to which being irreligious is perceived as a form of risk-taking by these religions. This modest theoretical refinement about Chinese or Eastern religions has been supported by the Taiwan data as reported in Chapter 2.

Of course, to show that perceived uncertainty and risks of divine punishment are inherent components of the traditional Chinese religious belief system does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that in Chinese society risk preference must have a significant, negative correlation with individual religiosity. Such a claim fails to note diversity within Chinese societies. The most important theoretical dispute between the

new and old paradigms concerns whether religion affects conformity through the individual-level psychological mechanism or through the group/collective-level social force (Stark & Finke, 2000). There seem to be at least two possibilities in the case of Taiwanese society, based on my findings. The first possibility is that while the vast majority of Taiwanese, above 70 percent according to the 2004 TSCS, believe in laws of karma and reincarnation, this may form an ecological effect that warrants a strong, negative relationship between a Chinese individual's preference for risk-taking and his or her religious behaviors. This possibility is in line with the new paradigmatic perspective. Alternatively, one could argue for another possibility that there exists a significant association of an individual's risk preference and active religiosity, independent of the overall religious atmosphere. This speculation, obviously, keeps with the old paradigmatic perspective in which religion is viewed as individual psychology.

Ideally, cross-cultural comparisons between mainland China and Taiwan may help clarify this issue by ruling out either of the possibilities. For instance, unlike in the overwhelmingly religious ecology of Taiwanese society, in China's Marxist-atheist monopoly the religious belief is not a dominant ideology that good deeds will be rewarded and bad deeds will be penalized in an afterlife. The ESVIC data reveal that in today's mainland China, more than half of the population still prefers communism and science over religion. Thus, in such a cultural setting, if I observe there is a lack of relationship between the individual's preference for risk-taking and religiosity, then the rational choice argument that "the effect of individual religious commitment is smothered by group irreligiousness and tends to become a very compartmentalized component of the lives of its adherents" (Stark, 1984, p.275). will be empirically verified, when compared with the findings from Taiwan based on same or similar measures. On the other hand,

however, if risk preference's relationship to individual religiosity persists both in China's Marxist-atheist monopoly and Taiwan's mainstream religious culture, collective religiousness may not always play a major role in shaping and influencing conformity.

Unfortunately, data limitations in the ESVIC do not permit such a comparative examination of the ecological effect of religion on the connection between risk preference and religious conformity between mainland China and Taiwan. In order to address this weakness, future religious surveys in Chinese society should include sufficient items tapping into risk preference and religious conformity. Future research projects should also perform systematic cross-cultural research to examine variations in the strength of the relationship between risk-taking and religiosity across Western and Eastern societies. In spite of the data limitations, it is one of the most notable contributions of my dissertation that it has proven risk preference to have strong explanatory power to account for individual religiosity in the overwhelmingly religious Taiwanese society. In a broader sense, my dissertation opens up new research opportunities for investigating potential effects of Asian religions on a wide range of deviant attitudes and behaviors in the Eastern and Western contexts.

### *Religion and Subjective Well-Being*

The second major contribution of this dissertation lies in the fact that it has theorized about and successfully identified positive and negative linkages between aspects of Chinese beliefs and practices and subjective well-being. As discussed earlier, most of the previous literature on the connection between religion and subjective well-being has failed to take religious traditions other than monotheism into consideration. My dissertation closes this gap by extending the current theoretical frameworks to include

Chinese beliefs in supernatural forces or essences and related practices. As a result, the existing theories built in the Western tradition have gained more power for explaining Asian mystical experiences. Methodologically, a variety of new measures of Chinese religious beliefs and practices have been carefully analyzed with sophisticated statistical techniques such as multiple imputations for missing data. Most of these measures are innovative and culture-specific in relative to those routinely employed in research from the West such as belief in God, church membership and attendance, subjective religiosity, Bible reading, and frequency of prayer. The inclusion of Chinese culture-specific religion measures in my analyses avoids Western biases in measurement.

My findings suggest that the belief and practice dimensions of Chinese religion independently and/or collectively influence individuals' subjective well-being. First, I find that Chinese religious beliefs display different patterns of relationships to individuals' subjective well-being. For instance, beliefs in supernatural essences or forces such as laws of karma diminish the sense of personal mastery in Taiwan, but have little positive, significant influence on self-reported happiness and life satisfaction. Moreover, folk beliefs in Chinese gods and deities are associated negatively with life satisfaction among Chinese mainlanders. As already noted, Chinese gods and deities have limited power, scope, and virtue. Thus, it is conceivable that human relationships of exchange with Chinese gods and deities are fragile and thus unlikely to make a substantial contribution to subjective well-being among the individual prayers, worshippers, and sacrificers.

Furthermore, I have identified fatalistic voluntarism—a central characteristic of Chinese religion—as a beneficial factor for bolstering subjective well-being. This suggests that certain elements or aspects of Chinese religious beliefs are particularly

capable of generating desirable mental health outcomes and thus deserve being investigated carefully. Even though some religious beliefs appear to reduce subjective well-being, net of other factors, it does not necessarily mean that they are essentially harmful. As I have shown earlier, belief in a supreme God buffers the negative effects of life stressors. Moreover, religious beliefs provide cosmological explanations of life existence and motivate individuals' rational pursuits for secular and sacred benefits and rewards, which in turn, lead to higher levels of subjective well-being. For example, the observed reductions in subjective well-being associated with supernatural beliefs (e.g., belief in karma) are compensated for and even exceeded by the healthy outcomes of religious practices (e.g., meditation) which are necessarily sustained by the faiths.

In addition, devotional activities contribute to individuals' subjective well-being in Chinese society. Meditation, for instance, directly increases personal mastery for Taiwanese individuals. Devotional activities, collectively or individually, are associated with greater levels of subjective for Chinese persons. In contrast with private religiosity, frequency of religious attendance has a marginal effect on individuals' subjective well-being in Chinese society. The lack of a strong positive effect of public religious participation could be related to at least two contextual factors. The first contextual factor, at the organizational level, is that most Chinese religions are temple-based religions. The temple structure seldom sustains regular congregations that function to increase subjective well-being by enhancing social integration and promoting emotional and social support for congregants (Ellison, 1991; Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989).

The second factor could be that, at the national level, restrictive state regulation discourages public religious activities, such as in mainland China. Recall that in the Marxist-atheist monopoly, China's constitution only admits freedom of religious beliefs,

not the freedom of religious behaviors. Indeed, it is not unusual that public religious expressions are perceived as a form of non-conventional, deviant behaviors by the mainstream culture of communist China. For example, ancestor worship and ritual services for the dead still carry the label of “feudal superstition” and proselytizing outside the prescribed places is considered as an illegal activity, being subject to social sanctions and/or state suppression. Under such circumstances, individuals may not gain psychological benefits from participating in religious activities in the public sphere.

In sum, my dissertation has garnered strong support from Chinese society for rational choice theories. Chinese religious beliefs and practices are based on rational calculations of benefits and costs. The outcomes of these beliefs and practices are generally innocuous and in certain instances are salutary for individuals’ self-concept and subjective well-being.

### *Future Research Agenda*

#### *Longitudinal Survey Data*

Whereas my dissertation concerns the key debates in the sociology of religion, due to the nature of religion and cross-sectional data this dissertation was unable to speak directly to certain specific issues such as: Is religion false? Is religion a causal factor of religious and social phenomena? Because religious claims about the supernatural and an afterlife are not open to empirical verification (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, 1987) and because religion and science are unrelated (Stark & Finke, 2000), social scientists will find it to be a vain attempt to prove religious faiths true or false. Moreover, my analyses are based on cross-sectional data from the TSCS and ESVIC. Cross-sectional data can hardly help scientists determine the direction of the cause-effect relationship, and only

longitudinal data may allow sociologists to solve the problem by observing religious and social trends throughout lifetimes and generations.

In the future, my research will pay special attention to the effect of religion on conformity and health outcomes over time periods. As such, I will be able to further discuss the important role of religion in Chinese society and why it should not be dismissed merely as a passive and dependent variable in social scientific research. To this end, I will first take advantage of the repeated cross-sectional TSCS data to perform trend analyses of the religion-conformity-health connections in Taiwan. Moreover, the repeated cross-sectional TSCS data from 1984 to 2009 can be pooled together to facilitate comparative research with a focus on certain minority religious groups such as Christians, Muslims, and members of various sectarian groups and New Religious Movements. These small-N minority religious groups deserve research because of their distinct social positions and unique religious characteristics in Taiwan. After pooling the TSCS data, I will be able to base my research on the large data sample sufficient for strict statistical analyses of variations in the relationships among religion, conformity, and health across different religious traditions and denominations in Taiwanese society.

In addition, my future research will continue to track religious trends in mainland China as well. Compared with the TSCS, one of the world's largest general social survey series that has existed since 1984, the ESVIC just completed its first wave in 2007- 2008 and thus has much potential for improvement. For instance, the ESVIC may devise and include more survey items about family, health, social stratification, culture, politics, gender, ethnicity, and lifestyle. If these data are collected, researchers will be able to perform quantitative analyses of social consequences of religion in mainland China where religion has been gaining power in many societal domains. Moreover, since mainland

China and Taiwan have much commonality in the religious and cultural traditions, I hope scholars and survey experts will consider long-term collaboration on administering longitudinal religious surveys across the Taiwan straits. Such collaboration will be particularly beneficial to the ESVIC team, because the TSCS has developed Chinese culture-specific religious items over the past several decades and already included standard survey items widely used in general social surveys since it joined the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in 2002. On the other hand, the TSCS may also benefit from borrowing some innovative, culture-specific religious items from the ESVIC. This reciprocal work-relationship between the TSCS and ESVIC, once institutionalized, will result in rich longitudinal data that support comparative research between mainland China and Taiwan.

My dissertation is a part of the ESVIC project funded by the John Templeton Foundation. As mentioned, the ESVIC data have just been collected, and much can be done by using these new data. Nevertheless, a careful comparison of the TSCS and ESVIC still reveals that both surveys have neglected some important measures. For instance, one may not find the standard measure of personal piety, the best measure of individual religiousness (Stark & Glock, 1968), from these surveys. Moreover, the TSCS and ESVIC have failed to include regular items on deviant attitudes and behaviors. The lack of these and other important measures will likely limit future research. Therefore, I intend to apply for research grants from major funding sources such as the John Templeton Foundation, National Science Foundation, Religious Research Association, and Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. With new research funding, I will be able to design and administer longitudinal and cross-sectional surveys on religion, health,

and deviance in Chinese society, drawing on the TSCS, ESVIC, and other standard survey models in the fields of criminology and medical sociology.

### *Religion and/as Deviance*

*Gender differences in religiosity.* While in this dissertation I have found a significant, negative relationship between risk preference and religiosity in Taiwan, an overwhelmingly religious Chinese society, my analyses have also shown that Taiwanese women exhibited higher frequencies of religious participation than Taiwanese men. This finding seems to be inconsistent with prior research on gender differences in active religiosity. According to Sullins (2006), active religiousness (e.g., church attendance and membership) and affective religiousness (e.g., self-rated piety and frequency of prayer) are two distinct dimensions. The “universal” gender difference in religiousness applies *only* to affective religiousness, because women tend to exaggerate their affective religiousness relative to active measures more than do men, and because the gender disparity is highest among the least religious persons (Sullins, 2006, p.858). In his extensive study of gender differences in religiosity, Sullins (2006) claims that the female advantage in religiousness is not a universal phenomenon. This claim is based partly on his finding from the World Values Survey that in 20 nations women do not attend church weekly at a higher rate than men (Sullins, 2006, p.853). Of these 20 nations some are Asian countries, including Taiwan as well as Japan and South Korea.

What might account for the gender difference in religiousness among Taiwanese? Some argue that greater risk-taking tendency motivates men to be less religious than women and that differential gender socialization explanations fail to account for this universal phenomenon (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995; Stark, 2002; Miller & Stark, 2002),

while others maintain that risk preference is less powerful than social factors for explaining the gender gaps in religiosity (Sullins, 2006), and still others assert that risk preference is not a compelling theory at all (Roth & Kroll, 2007; see also Freese, 2004). Since risk preference theory of the gender difference in religiousness has been highly controversial, my next research project will test risk preference and differential gender socialization explanations in Taiwanese society. I will replicate some of Sullin's (2006) measures of gender socialization factors in my study, based on the 2007 TSCS data. Because of data limitations, I probably can only create a few measures of differential gender socialization. However, the data limitations will not make my analyses invalid. So long as the measures of differential gender socialization reduce the difference in religious participation between men and women substantially in the presence of non-socialization factors such as risk preference and personality traits, it would be fair to say that socialization factors are more or less responsible for women's greater active religiosity in Taiwan. With that said, I also expect risk preference to be strongly correlated with reductions in the gender difference in active religiousness in Taiwan. As I have already suggested earlier, Taiwan is a highly religious society in which individuals' non-practice is generally perceived as a form of risk-taking behavior. In addition, my empirical analyses have shown that risk preference is a strong correlate of religious participation in Taiwan. Thus, if the level of average risk-taking tendency is higher among Taiwanese men than among Taiwanese women, it is reasonable to expect that this gender-linked risk preference will be associated negatively with frequency of religious participation in Taiwan.

*Religion as deviance.* In addition to Taiwanese society, I also plan to analyze active religiousness in China's Marxist-atheist monopoly. It should be noted that irreligiousness is not always perceived as a form of risk-taking or deviant behavior. What constitutes risk-taking or deviant behavior is determined largely by the mainstream culture of a society (Miller 2000). Most sociologists decide to conceptualize deviance as a social product, instead of merely as growth out of certain built-in biophysical traits or conditions (e.g., Cohen, 1955; Becker, 1963; Merton, 1938; Hirschi, 1969; Akers, 1985; Sutherland, 1939). In certain circumstances, religion becomes deviant *mainly* because certain types of religious groups such as sects and cults reject the dominant, conventional culture of the larger society and attempt to replace it with an exotic or drastically altered one (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, 1996; Miller, 1992). Ultimately, religion is defined as a form of deviance so long as this property is successfully conferred or labeled by the larger society upon religious groups, even though their beliefs and practices can be essentially innocuous (Barker, 1995; Erikson, 1962).

In China's Marxist-atheist monopoly, it is religiousness rather than irreligiousness that has been perceived as a form of non-conventional, deviant behavior by the larger society. Chinese government and popular media continually launch anti-religion campaigns to discourage religious beliefs or practices among the Chinese masses. Moreover, the Party Constitution explicitly forbids party members to be religious. Therefore, engaging in religious beliefs and activities violates the party ideology and constitutes a form of deviant behavior at least among Chinese communists. In view of this, my next study will examine what may cause communists to be religious in mainland China. A preliminary analysis reveals that a substantial proportion of Chinese communists have been involved in various forms of religious beliefs and activities. One

potential sociological explanation of this phenomenon could be that these “deviant” party members have weaker social ties to other party members. The preliminary analysis also shows that most of the “religious” communists are male rather than female. Thus, risk preference would help account partly for the gender difference in religiosity among Chinese communists. That is, among Chinese communists, risk-taking men will be more likely to be religious than risk-averse women, other things being equal.

*New religious movements.* The most successful new religious movement in post-Mao China, Protestant Christianity, has recently attracted increasing scholarly attention. Being perceived of as a “foreign” cult that acts on behalf of Western imperialism (Yang, 2005; Cao, 2006), Christian groups have endured the most severe repression under the communist regime (Gernet, 1985; Uhalley & Wu, 2001; Whyte, 1988; Goldman, 1986; Yang, 2006; Kindopp, 2004; MacInnis, 1989). Despite this unfavorable and even hostile environment, Protestantism has gained the fastest growth in contrast to other traditions in China (Yang, 2005, 2006; Bays, 2003; Hunter & Chan, 1993; Dunch, 2001; Aikman, 2003). Indeed, it came as a surprise to China observers that by the late 1990s the number of Chinese converts to Protestantism had already reached fifty million (Lambert, 1999). More surprisingly, four out of every five converts took the risk of governmental persecution to join an illegal underground church, instead of the “patriotic” churches with state endorsement (Yang, 2006).

Who are Chinese Christians? What makes them join Protestant groups? Thus far, only a few prior studies have been focused on the extraordinary rise of Protestant Christianity in mainland China (e.g., Yang, 2005; Vala & O’Brien, 2007; Hunter & Chan, 1993; Leung, 1999; Dunch, 2001). However, nearly all of them have followed the

perspectives of the “old” paradigm, which views religion mainly as an individual-level psychology that reflects more fundamental social processes (Stark & Finke, 2000). Some scholars, for example, suggest that Protestantism’s great appeal to Chinese has been rooted in proletarian suffering of lower status social groups such as women, the uneducated, the elderly, and the rural population (Hunter & Chan, 1993; Leung, 1999; Dunch, 2001). Although others note that well-educated young professionals in metropolitan cities have been fascinated by Protestantism as well (Yang, 2005), they accentuate that Chinese convert to Protestantism mainly because of the growing need for psychological solace and emotional support, as market reforms and political repression have led to the collapse of the old value systems and cultural norms of Chinese society (Yang, 2005; Vala & O’Brien, 2007).

My next study will adopt the rational choice approach, the new paradigm in the sociology of religion (Warner, 1993), to predict Protestant affiliation in the context of China’s Marxist-atheist monopoly. As noted, the most important feature of the new paradigm lies in its stress on the social as against the psychological (Stark & Finke, 2000, p. 35). In addition, rational choice theorists explicitly reject the idea that secular social facts such as economic, cultural, and population changes and crises must underlie religious phenomena, while insisting that religious factors *per se* are important causal factors (e.g., doctrines and belief in God (Stark & Finke, 2000). Thus, following the rational choice perspective of religious deviance and cult affiliation (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, 1996; Miller, 1992; Bader & Demaris, 1996), my future research will challenge previous psychological explanations of China’s Protestant phenomenon by arguing that the lack of strong social ties to the conventional Chinese society accounts for affiliation with the Protestant movement in mainland China.

*Chinese moral communities.* The well-known “moral communities” thesis argues that religion effectively promotes conformity and inhibits deviance only in societies where most people are religious (Stark, 1984; Stark & Bainbridge, 1996). It is important to note that the “moral communities” thesis has been strictly confined to the societies dominated by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, which places a central emphasis on the importance of the concept of sin and sustains a relatively stable and organized congregation so as to exert social pressure to observe the moral order (Stark, 2004, pp. 15-18). Religions without a specific creed or congregation lack both moral and intellectual authority (e.g., Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, and Chinese folk religions), in that individuals become their own philosophers or theologians and the concept of sin is either very vague or entirely absent (Stark, 2004, p. 133). Thus, where creedless or unchurched religions predominate, religion only assumes, at most, a very peripheral role in the culture of that society, having little or no social consequences (Stark, 2004).

In this dissertation, nevertheless, I have come across some prior literature suggesting that Asian religions such as Buddhism can be legitimized as a moral agent of social control under certain circumstances. Scholars claim that in Chinese society, thoughts and behaviors contrary to the Confucian, Buddhist, or Taoist teachings are perceived as being subject to severe punishments in life after death (Ching, 1993; Goodrich, 1981; Fowler & Fowler, 2008; Berling, 1997). Further, several religious trends in Taiwanese society are worth noting. First, it is family, not religious organizations, that serves as the center of religious life among Chinese (Overmyer, 1986). Second, many religious groups in Taiwan have been transformed into congregations in the past several decades (e.g., Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; Madsen, 2007; Jordan & Overmyer, 1986). Third, the vast majority of Taiwanese belong to traditional Chinese religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and folk

religions (Chiu, 1997). Collectively, these religious changes in Taiwan might suggest that the “moral communities” thesis developed in the Western context can be applied to Taiwanese society.

Thus far, a few prior studies have examined the religion-deviance connection in the Eastern context. Using data from the World Values Survey, for instance, Stark (2004) has investigated the correlations between moral attitudes toward stealing goods, hitting and running, and smoking dope and several religious measures: belief in God/importance of God, temple visit, and prayer or meditation in Japan and China, respectively. He found that all the three correlations seemed trivial for Japan and prayer and meditation were even associated positively and significantly with the deviant attitudes for China (Stark, 2004). Unfortunately, however, very little empirical research on the relationship between religiosity and deviance has been conducted in Taiwan. Thus, in the near future, my research will address this research gap by examining the associations between religiosity and ascetic deviance such alcohol use, cigarettes smoking, and betel quid chewing in Taiwan. For example, abstaining from alcohol drinking is one of the five basic Buddhist precepts. If Taiwan is a “moral community,” one would expect the ascetic deviance will be negatively correlated with individual religiosity among Buddhists and the general population.

### *Religion and Health*

*Religion and life satisfaction.* Fatalism derived from Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism is the first predominant value of traditional Chinese culture (Chu & Hsu, 1979). Compared with mainland China, Taiwan has better preserved traditional Chinese culture. Thus, it would be meaningful to use the TSCS data to replicate my

dissertation research on fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction in Taiwan. One of the limitations of this dissertation is that it has been based on a global measure of life satisfaction. The global measure of life satisfaction is less desirable than a combination of measures of domain-specific life satisfaction with marriage, family, work, standard of living, friendship, leisure activities, and community (George, 1981). Domain-specific life satisfaction may better capture cognitive or evaluative concerns (Ellison & Gay, 1990). Fortunately, the TSCS data include the measures of domain-specific life satisfaction. Thus, my research will examine the associations of domain-specific life satisfaction, fatalistic voluntarism, and religiosity.

*Religion and psychological distress.* I'd like to continue to study religion's linkages with other indicators of mental health. Currently, I have begun collaborating with several well-established scholars such as Dr. Scott Schieman and Dr. Sung Joon Jang on two research projects on religion and psychological distress. The first study examines the relationships between religious beliefs, practices, and psychological distress in Taiwan. Despite increasing scholarly attention being paid to the religion-distress connection in the Western context, relatively little has been said about Asian nations. This is especially true of Chinese society, with a very few exceptions being limited to particularized groups such as elder persons and clinical nurses and patients (e.g., Lo, Chan, & Ho, 2008; Hahn et al., 2004; Tsai & Crockett, 1993; Yeager et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2008; Kao et al., 2003; Yang et al., 2008). In this paper, using data from the nationally representative survey of 2004 TSCS, Dr. Scott Schieman, Dr. Sung Joon Jang, and I will explore the psychometric properties of Chinese religious beliefs and practices and analyze their relationships to

distress. I also examine the mediating role of mastery in the link between religiosity and psychological distress among Taiwanese.

Moreover, past studies have proposed that social support is one of the most prominent mediators for explaining social patterns of psychological distress (Aneshensel, 1992; Mirowsky & Ross, 1986, 1989; Pearlin, 1989). Recently, church-based social networks have been identified as an important source of social support (Ellison, Musick, & Henderson, 2008). Unfortunately, thus far only one prior study has empirically tested the theoretical claim that social support is a mediator between religious participation and psychological distress (Jang & Johnson, 2004). The goal of the second research project is to replicate Jang and Johnson's (2004) study in Taiwan, a non-Western, non-Christian setting, drawing on the newest TSCS (2007) data. Numerous prior investigations have shown that religious groups play a crucial role in community life in Chinese society (Pas, 1979). Since 1987 when the martial law was lifted, in order to compete for market shares many religious groups have shifted their focus from performing ritual services to providing social support (e.g., Madsen, 2007; Jones, 1999; Jordan & Overmyer, 1986; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). Thus, Dr. Jang and I expect that the negative effect of religious participation on psychological distress will be mediated by church or temple-based social support in Taiwan.

*Religion and physical well-being.* In addition to psychological well-being, I will also investigate the connection between religiosity and physical well-being using the TSCS and ESVIC data. In fact, the religious effect on physical health has been less examined than on psychological health in Chinese society. In a recent review of previous research on the connection between religion and physical health, Musick et al. (2000) indicate that

in many instances multidimensional religiosity is associated positively with self-rated health status and correlated negatively with mortality and chronic and functional health problems. Moreover, Musick et al. (2000) suggest that religion contributes to physical well-being in at least four ways: (1) certain doctrines, practices, and denominations proscribe bad life habits and encourage healthy lifestyles; (2) some religious communities provide sources of emotional attachment and social support for physical well-being; (3) religious beliefs and coping are comforting; and (4) theodicy guides individuals to understand and manage adverse situations, and thereby reduce the negative effects of stress on physical health or encourage active coping strategies for overcoming stress-inducing circumstances. Finally, Musick et al. (2000) emphasize the need for research on non-Christian samples, because fundamental assumptions about the meaning of religious activity and its connection to perceptions about physical health problems may be very different between Eastern and Western societies. Understanding these subtle differences presents one of the major challenges for cross-cultural research on the religion-health connection (Musick et al., 2000). My future research on this topic has much potential to contribute to the current scholarship.

#### *Extension of Current Research Interests*

While my future research agenda focuses on religion, deviance, and health, I wish to extend my research interests into other areas such as social stratification, civic engagement, community studies, family life, ethnicity, politics, education, and other important domains of research. Recently, I have been collaborating with Dr. F. Carson Mencken as well as other scholar(s) on a research project examining religion and social trust in mainland China. Trust is one of the most important forms of social exchange

(Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000). However, it has remained unclear whether and under what conditions there is a significant relationship between religion and trust (Welch, Sikkink, & Loveland, 2007). In this study, I investigate whether and to what extent religion generates generalized or particularized trust across social groups in mainland China. Since the governmental control of religion varies across religious groups and traditions, I expect that different religious beliefs, practices, and organizational structures may display various patterns of relationships to generalized and particularized trust in the context of China's Marxist-atheist monopoly.

In addition, it would be interesting to compare the roles of religion in generating social trust between mainland China and Taiwan, given the fact that generally religion has enjoyed greater religious and political freedom in Taiwan than in mainland China in the past several decades. Thus, in this additional study on religion and trust I will seek to answer several important questions: Will religion generate higher levels of general and particularized trust in Taiwan than in mainland China? Whether and to what extent patterns of the relationship between religion and trust found in mainland China will change across different social and religious groups in Taiwan? Particularly, I expect that evangelical Christian groups more heavily regulated by the state government than other traditional Chinese religious groups in mainland China will assume a more active and important role in fostering social trust in Taiwanese society. By comparison, Chinese folk temples may contribute to social trust to a lesser extent because most of them lack a uniform religious creed and a strict organizational structure.

*Beyond Chinese Society: Doing Comparative Research in Big Asia and the World*

Throughout this dissertation I have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of doing cross-cultural research on religion among Chinese societies. For instance, religion may lead to different social consequences in mainland China and Taiwan due to variations in the strictness of state regulation between these two culturally connected but politically divided societies. While the importance of comparative research among Chinese societies is self-evident, there is an urgent need for more cross-cultural analyses *beyond* the Chinese context, because the goal of the social sciences is to achieve valid universal theories, rather than being content with an explanation only valid in a particular time and space (Stark, 2008). A comparative perspective will prevent a universal phenomenon from being mistaken for something specific to a certain environment, a culture-specific phenomenon from being exaggerated as a universal trend, and more profound social dynamics and mechanisms from being buried undetected under superficial facts (Stark, 2008).

Quantitative comparative research, especially when it uses ecological or collective units of analysis such as nations or cities, requires a sophisticated analytic mind and sufficient, deft skills to deal with pitfalls (Stark, 2008). As Stark (2008) has aptly suggested, researchers of comparative religion must first consider whether the cases under examinations are potentially incomparable, in terms of population size and diversity, quality of data samples, and culture-specific variations in key religion variables. Responsible researchers should also strive not to make invalid inferences about individual-level correlations from correlations based on ecological or collective units, not to make biased choices of particular cases and variables for the desired results, and not to ignore diversity within and among units of analysis to produce spurious findings (Stark,

2008). Below, I shall name several pitfalls in quantitative comparative research on religion between Chinese/Asian and Western societies. Researchers should deal with them with great care in future studies.

The first pitfall in comparative research concerns the use of the definition of religion. While the term “religion”, originally derived from the Latin *religio*, draws a clear boundary between the mundane and the divine in the Western context, it never existed in traditional Chinese culture until the late nineteenth century, when it was imported from Japan where the coining of “religion” in Japanese language was a result of translations of European works and terminology (Ching, 1993; Paper, 1995). Thus, although Chinese and Japanese societies abound in supernatural beliefs and practices that are inextricable from everyday life of the ordinary people, when asked “Do you have a religion?”, most Chinese and Japanese respondents, especially the elderly, would answer “no”, either because they simply do not recognize this alien term or because they are not sure about what religion specifically refers to (Stark, 2004; Ching, 1993; Paper, 1995). Therefore, it would be absurd to say that Chinese and Japanese are irreligious just because they claim no religion. Often this is a problem of the survey designers and researchers, not that of the respondents. Future comparative research involving Chinese and Asian religions should first substitute measures of specific supernatural beliefs and practices for the general items on “religion” and “religiousness.”

The second pitfall is associated with a series of assumptions about religion that are based entirely on the Western experience. In the West, it is usually assumed that monotheism is a moral value, God is omnipotent, priority should be given to sacred texts, faith must remain the focus, the mundane and the sacred are clearly divided, religious traditions have founders, the goal of religion is transcendence, the church should separate

from the state, denominational affiliation is exclusive, religion and magic are opposed to one other, and so on (Paper, 1995; Pas, 1979; Ching, 1993). However, most of these assumptions about Western religions are violently violated in the Chinese context as well as many other Asian nations. According to China specialists (e.g., Overmyer, 1986; Shahar & Weller, 1996; Weber, 1951; Chiu, 2006; Ching, 1993; Jochim, 1986; Yang, 1961), for example, orthodox Chinese beliefs are non-theistic, the universe is governed by metaphysical laws such as karma, Tao, and Heaven, Chinese gods and deities like humans are subordinated to karma, Tao, and Heaven, some Chinese religions are creedless and have not ethical codes, religion is concerned primarily with secular affairs and benefits, practice is emphasized over doctrine, many religious groups such as popular cults do not have a founder, neither exclusive membership nor regular group participation is required, religion is diffused into virtually all social institutions from family to the state, and magic and “religion” are inseparable. The differences in the assumptions about religion between the West and the East can make cross-cultural comparisons highly difficult or challenging.

To illustrate this, here I offer one example of comparative research on religion and morality. Before I proceed, keep in mind that I concur with Stark (2004, 2008) that smaller Chinese gods and deities lack the moral authority to deter individuals’ immoral attitudes and behaviors. Because some Chinese gods and deities are not concerned with human morality (Chiu, 2006; Shahar & Weller, 1996), Stark (2004, 2008) rejects the taken-for-granted claim that *religion functions to sustain the moral order* and alters it into a more nuanced version of the axiom: *Religions will function to sustain the moral order if (and only if) they conceive of conscious, morally concerned gods. Lacking such a conception of gods, religious rites and rituals will have little or no effect on morality*

(Stark, 2008, p.5). This theoretical revision has been empirically supported by the cross-cultural data, showing that importance of God in 26 Christian nations is inversely correlated with three measures of immoral behaviors, while importance of God in China had little effect on those measures (Stark, 2004). This is not a surprise, however, considering the fact that in Western societies omnipotent God is conceived as the ultimate moral judge.

Nevertheless, an additional axiom needs to be tested in Chinese society, a non-Western, non-Christian setting: *Religions will function to sustain the moral order if supernatural essences or forces are conceived as moral agents*. Recall one of the unique characteristics (or assumptions) of the Chinese religious system: it is the metaphysical laws (e.g., karma, Tao, and Heaven) rather than gods and deities that are the highest supernatural powers in the universe (Weber, 1951; Yang, 1961). The inability of Chinese gods to reduce immorality does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that religion is unrelated to immorality in Chinese society, unless a null correlation between the supernatural essences and forces and immorality will be identified as well. Thus, if both of the axioms discussed above are verified, researchers will arrive at a more general one: *Religions will function to sustain the moral order if (and only if) the supernatural are conceived as moral agents. Lacking such a conception of the supernatural, religious rites and rituals will have little or no effect on morality*. The point is that in order to avoid the second pitfall and make a contribution to the current scholarship, cross-cultural research on religion must be sensitive to the subtle differences in the assumptions about religion between the Western and Eastern cultures.

The third pitfall in the comparative research on religion between Chinese/Asian and Western societies is the biased selection and use of religion variables. For example,

conventional measures of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition include denominational affiliation, church membership, frequency of church attendance, frequency of prayer, reading sacred texts, self-evaluated religiousness, religious salience, and the like.

However, these religion measures have a strong Western bias for Chinese religions. As already discussed, most Chinese traditions do not require exclusive affiliation or sustain a membership system, and “religion,” “religious,” and “religiousness” are ambiguous terms in the Chinese culture. While prayer and scripture reading are also regular Chinese ritual activities, they by no means fully capture the notion of Chinese “religiosity”, because in addition to prayer and reading sacred texts, there are a variety of other religious activities such as food offering, burning incense, reciting Buddha names and mantras, meditation, ancestor worship, exorcism, geomancy, spirit-medium and so on (Overmyer, 1986).

These Chinese culture-specific religion variables seem to be lack of comparable counterparts in the Western tradition. Although researchers still can choose to conduct cross-cultural analyses based on a few religion items that are common among different traditions (e.g., prayer and reading scriptures), the contents and purposes of such religious activities could be quite different. Apples should not be compared with oranges, even though both are fruits. Thus, caution must be exercised when analyzing data and interpreting the results, which at best paint a partial picture of the truth. The matter of incomparability may be less problematic for cross-culture studies within the same cultural blocs (e.g., China, South Korea, and Japan).

### *Concluding Remarks*

This dissertation reveals robust religion-conformity-health connections in Chinese society. My findings generally support the rational choice perspectives, suggesting that

the new theoretical paradigm in the sociology of religion is applicable to the non-Western and non-Christian settings. Moreover, the results add to our knowledge about religion in contemporary Chinese society and help form a comprehensive view of religion-conformity-health connections. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when these findings are generalized to other cultures and societies. On the one hand, it would be fruitful to extend this research to study religion in other Asian nations and elsewhere that share the same or similar religious and cultural elements with Chinese society. On the other hand, it would be misleading to force the use of arbitrary religious measures and methods in cross-cultural research, without taking into account culture-specific variations. As discussed, it is urgent for future open-minded researchers to continue to explore religious differences between Eastern and Western societies. Thus, I think it is utterly appropriate to conclude my dissertation here by quoting John Templeton Foundation's motto "how little we know, how eager to learn."

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