Introduction

Conservative policy-makers and like-minded scholars in the United States have argued that religious organizations can offer an alternative to the state in the provision of social services. These claims were bound to resonate in Taiwan, where many scholars have exchanged views with their colleagues over the Pacific Ocean for decades. Some Taiwanese scholars who have written scientific surveys on its social policies, or some who have made ethnographies about the volunteer sector and religious organizations on the island, have made the case for the delivery of social services by religious institutions. They have thereby joined a wider chorus of conservative Asian epistemic communities that manipulate a discourse with a strong emphasis on local ethical and religious values to promote an Asian model of residual welfare regime, with little state intervention in redistributive policies. These views have received some support among politicians and some positive echo in the media.

The reconstruction effort that has followed the September 21, 1999 earthquake in central Taiwan (a.k.a. the 921 earthquake) offers us with a rare opportunity to test the validity of the arguments about the benefits that can accrue from a reliance on religious organizations for the provision of social services. The present paper builds on previous fieldwork on the largest philanthropic society on the island, the Buddhist Ciji Foundation, and uses interviews with legislators, officials in local
and central governments, academics from think tanks, secular and religiously-funded research institutions, and volunteers from different religious organizations, as well as reports from independent commissions on the post-921 reconstruction effort, to assess the claim that religious philanthropic societies can perform better than the state in the delivery of social services.

The paper is organized as follows: first, it presents the main claims about the advantages of religious philanthropy in the United States. Then, it will present the way these propositions resonate with the “East Asian welfare model” proposed by conservative actors in East Asia, and underline the limited support this position receives on the part of politicians, civil servants, media, academics, and some religious adherents themselves. Then, it will briefly present the major organizations involved in the reconstruction effort following the 921 earthquake, singling out religious associations and the Ciji Foundation in particular. Finally, it will provide a brief analysis of their efforts to provide emergency disaster relief and sustain the reconstruction of residential housing and schools, before concluding on the effectiveness of their approach and the limits they face.

**Religious organizations and welfare regimes**

Conservative policy-makers and like-minded scholars in the United States have argued that philanthropy can represent an alternative to the provision of social services by the government. In particular, “faith-based organizations”, or associations with a religious identity, are viewed as a major source of social capital that can strengthen civil society, through their charities and philanthropic activities. (Wuthnow 2004, Nemeth and Luidens 2003, Puttnam 2000) Proponents of that approach advance two arguments to support that claim: first, they believe the state should not get involved in wealth redistribution, and second, that non governmental organizations whose members have strong religious convictions are more qualified to deliver public goods because they are closer to their community and have a vested interest in the delivery of social services. (Wuthnow 2004: 310) This opinion is grounded in an ideological world-view that is inherently hostile to state interference in the economy, that wishes to let market forces determine welfare outcomes, and that hopes community associations and grass root organizations can look after the worse off. Although this view has found limited acceptance in Western Europe because of the high degree of states’ secularization, it has received some support in China, even to the point where some intellectuals and officials look positively at the provision of social services by religious
institutions when the state fails to deliver. (Ye 2000) This should surprise only if one believes that China is one of the most secularized society on the planet. (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 54) However, for reasons that will need to be exposed elsewhere, but that can be already inferred from a burgeoning literature on religious resilience in China (Palmer 2005, Madsen 1998, Dean 1998, Feuchtwang 1992), this assertion is wrong on empirical grounds.

After decades of exchanges between Taiwanese and North American epistemic communities, it was almost inevitable that the claims about the desirability of religious institutions to deliver social services would find some echo in Taiwan. A few Taiwanese scholars who have written scientific surveys on its social policies, or who have made ethnographies about the volunteer sector and religious organizations on the island, have reiterated the argument that religious philanthropy can support the state in offering health care, some measure of social security, and disaster relief. (Wang 1999, Feng 1993) In doing so, they have joined an Asian, primarily Chinese-speaking, epistemic community that promotes an Asian model of welfare regime with a strong emphasis on Confucian ethical values of deference to authority, and which rests on low investment in welfare and social policies, and a more activist state in the provision of public goods, such as investments in infrastructure and education, that favour economic growth. The concepts of ‘oikonomic welfare states’ (Jones 1990), ‘Confucian welfare states’ (Jones 1993), ‘productivist welfare capitalism’ (Holliday 2000), ‘productivist welfare regimes’ (Gough 2004), and ‘developmental welfare states’ (Kwon 2005) have been used to describe these social policies adopted by East Asian states.

There is a near consensus that Taiwan is a productivist welfare regime, with the following characteristics typical of that type of regime: fast rising incomes and private financing of welfare; enterprise social benefits, employment protection and seniority wages; and a reliance on the family-household for some measure of social security. (Gough 2004: 184) This view, however, is not unchallenged: some recent studies have questioned this definition of Taiwan as a productivist regime on the grounds that its welfare regime has experienced expansion, rather than retrenchment, during the 1990s, and prefer to describe it as a developmental welfare state. Hence, Aspalter has argued that the process of democratization has significantly contributed to the expansion of the welfare state in Taiwan, as political parties had to promise more social services to win votes. (2002) Wong has emphasized the contrast between the welfare state retrenchment advocated, if not implemented, in the West, and the expansion of the welfare estate in South Korea and Taiwan.
Regardless of the validity of these latter arguments about the dynamics that can contribute to an expansion of the welfare state in East Asia, however, pressures to limit its expansion remain. Powerful conservative factions in power in Japan, and the influence of conservative parties in South Korea and Taiwan insure that arguments for state retrenchment and greater involvement by religious philanthropy will continue to be heard.

**Religious organizations and social policy: the views from Taiwan**

The publicity of the Government Information Office, the window that Taiwan projects to the international community, approvingly notes that religious institutions provide social services to the community. (GIO 2007) Its publisher has invited representatives of most major religions to write on their educational achievements and their social services for issues ranging from poverty alleviation to social work. (NZB 1994; 1995) There is little doubt that the forthcoming attitude of the Taiwanese government towards the involvement of religious organizations in all aspects of social policies, including education, health care, and care for the elderly, serves the objectives of the Taiwanese government: it contrasts considerably with the numerous restrictions imposed on religious institutions in the PRC. Yet, interviews with officials in the Department of Health, in the Ministry of Interior’s Bureau for Religious Affairs, in the Bureau for welfare at the County level, did not reveal any particular enthusiasm for the contribution of religious organizations in the provision of social services. In particular, they admitted that many religious institutions do not trust government officials, and fear too much intervention in their affairs. This fear is not entirely unwarranted: representatives of government agencies promoting international cooperation complained that some large religious organizations should be more supportive of Taibei’s goal of achieving a more visible presence in the international arena.

In addition, a closer look at the legislation pertaining to religion reveals that the positive attitude of the state towards religion that is expressed in the documents produced by the bureau for religious affairs of the Interior ministry does not proceed from a liberal attitude. In fact, the provision of social services by religious institutions is not a voluntary act, but an obligation imposed by the state. According to the legislation relevant to religious organizations, the latter were required by the government to devote some of their resources to charitable activities. (Lianhebao 1997) In the early years of KMT rule in China, the government often resorted to coercion to extract resources from
religious institutions to provide social welfare: between 1912 and 1916 and again after the Northern Expedition of 1926-1927, local administrators sought to appropriate the temples and temple property of popular religions for conversion into schools. (Duara 1991; Welch 1968) After the KMT lost control of China and relocated its government in Taipei, the party intermittently tried to extract resources from religious institutions for the financing of its limited social policy. In 1969, the provincial government issued a regulation that ordered temples to give 20% of the revenue raised by the sale of religious paraphernalia to charity organizations. Called “Procedure for Handling of Funds Raised by the Public Work and Charity Undertakings of Temples in Taiwan [Taiwan Sheng Simiao Jizi Banli Gongyi Cishan Shiye Banfa ],” the proposed law required local governments to supervise the administration of temple finances. (Jones 1999) Since the Chiang Ching-kuo presidency (1978-1988), the government has adopted a different approach by giving up on coercion and by providing incentives to specific religious institutions that wanted to get involved in the provision of health care. This policy targeted the resources of religious institutions that the government recognized as legitimate, more willing to respond to its directives, and more capable of providing diverse services.

Under the presidencies of Lee Teng-hui (1988-2000) and Chen Shui-bian (2000-), politicians have disagreed among themselves on the extent to which religious institutions should get involved in public affairs. These differences, however, have transcended the political divide between the pan-Blue camp (led by the KMT) and the pan-Green camp (led by the DPP): no party is identified closely with a specific religious tradition, with, perhaps, the exception of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, which has traditionally been more supportive of Taiwan’s right for self-determination, and therefore, more inclined to support politicians from the pan-Green camp. In this relaxed attitude towards religion Taiwan differs from other secularized societies. There are no debates about the separation between Church and State raging in intensity like in the United States. The attitude of state officials differs even more from France’s, and the presence of religious symbols or religious references in public life is not seen as an issue. At most elections, politicians make sure they go to the local temple to burn incense and meet with Buddhist monks or Taoist masters. Regardless of their personal religious beliefs or values, when pressed on the issue of religious organizations in welfare provision during interviews, politicians from the KMT, the DPP or the TSU who were interviewed on the specific issue of religious organizations’ contribution to social policy expressed indifference rather than advocating a greater role for them. At best, they applauded the good-will of
religious organizations that get involved, but none contemplated the possibility of making this compulsory, lest they would be accused of encouraging a return to an authoritarian regime.

The mass media have at times been critical of too much intervention of religious actors in society, especially during the 1996 presidential election, when one of the contenders, Chen Li-an, received a vocal support from the leader of the Foguangshan monastic order. (GSZ 1995a, 1995b; LHB 1995; MR 1995; XXW 1995) Some Buddhist leaders were even more severely criticized by the media in the 2004 presidential electoral campaign, when they warned voters about the adverse consequences the island would face if it elected Chen Shuibian. (TT 2004) The media do not hesitate to criticize this form of political involvement, and is prompt to chastise entrepreneurs who use religion to fraud people (XXW 1996, XTXW 1996), but it is also rather supportive of the social services provided by religious organizations. (YZ 1996) In some cases, the latter own their own media: the Ciji Foundation and Foguangshan’s lay affiliate, the Buddha Light International Association, among others, produce and distribute their own magazines, newspapers, and books, manage their own publishing house, and operate their own television broadcasting stations (da ai TV for Ciji, and Beautiful Life TV for the BLIA). When interviewed on the issue of their organizations’ social work or charities, journalists, writers and television personalities working for these two organizations expressed various degrees of commitment: they are first professionals and not all of them are devout Buddhists.

Academics also vary in their views. Many of the textbooks on social policy and the welfare state simply ignore the topic of faith-based organizations.(Qu, Gu and Qian 2002; Zhan and Ku 2001, 1998; Lin 1999; Zhang 1996; Zhan 1991) Yet, this is not because they are unaware of North American trends. Quite the contrary. Taiwanese scholars are familiar with intellectual trends in North America as well as Western Europe and have done a number of comparative works on Western welfare regimes. (Wang et al 2002; Wu 2001; Lin 1994) Rather, as many Western scholars have admitted, it is the other way around: few outsiders are familiar with Taiwanese and East Asian social policies. (Croissant 2004) Scholars working within the major research institutes such as Academia Sinica or the National Science Council are familiar with North American quantitative methods in the analysis of public policy. Those who prefer to look for Europe as a source of inspiration share a rationalist outlook and do not consider religion to be a relevant topic to address in the study of public policy.
A few social scientists have written favourably on the social welfare provided by religious organizations. (Wang et al 2002; Wang 2001a, 1999) Some of them are attached to the institutions of higher education established by religious institutions, which are thereby providing a form of social service along with moral and spiritual formation. Buddhist organizations have emerged in the 1990s as major players in the field of higher education: the Nanhua College of Administration and the Ciji University are running programmes in the humanities, medicine, social science, etc., and their curriculum has been recognized by the Ministry of Education during the Chen Shui-bian presidency. Some of the academics from these institutions have written on various aspects of social policy, ranging from religious organizations’ participation to welfare policy to the management of non-profit organizations. (Zheng 2000) However, some other scholars who write favourably about the provision of social services by religious organizations, such as Wang Shunmin, are not attached to denominational institutions. (2001b)

Finally, devotees of religious institutions disagree among themselves about the desirability of offering social services. During the martial law period, representatives of the Buddhist and Daoist Associations of China were upset that the legislation would compel them to offer social services (Faguang 1996). They considered this as a discriminatory measure for smaller temples. On the other hand, for the devotees of large organizations such as Ciji, charity is a central part of their raison d’être, and their members would be even more upset if the state would prevent them from being involved in social service provisions. Yet, some of these organizations are too large to enforce a unified thinking on important issues, and contrasting sets of attitude can be found. As mentioned above, employees involved in the media owned by Ciji and Foguangshan are proud of their work but they do not have strong opinions on the social relief provided by their organization. The same can be said of the professionals employed by the schools and the universities, as well as the health care institutions. They may literally embody their organizations’ commitment to the delivery of social service, but the organizations that hire them are too big and the needs are too pressing to afford hiring only true believers who may lack competence. For the commissioners and nuns of the Ciji Foundation, as well as the monastics of Foguangshan, however, the situation is different. Their personal commitment in the provision of social services represents a central part of their lives, as bodhisattvas, i.e., as moral exemplars of selflessness.
The importance of the religious-based volunteer sector in Taiwan: the 921 case

The involvement of Christians in the management of hospitals and institutions for higher education has a long history in Taiwan. Christian organizations of various denominations, often helped by sister churches in North America, have significantly contributed to education and social work for many decades. As the economy took off in the 1970s, however, other religious institutions more closely related to the Chinese religious tradition, such as the Way of Unity (Yiguandao), took up social work as part of their religious duties. (Bosco 1994) The most visible of the Chinese traditions since the 1990s is the movement of ‘humanistic Buddhism,’ [renjian fojiao] which emphasizes charity and the provision of relief to the needy as a path to enlightenment. One particular dimension that strikes most visitors in Taiwan is the increasing visibility of Buddhist lay organizations on the delivery of some services. The importance of these organizations in Taiwanese society in terms of their membership, influence, and reach can hardly be underestimated. Their membership number millions of people, they own their own media, and they are sought after personalities in Taiwan and abroad.

Among the most noteworthy, the Buddha Light mountain (Foguangshan) provides welfare services through its mobile clinics, the Dharma Drum mountain (Fagushan) manages a social welfare and charity foundation. The most important of these Buddhist charities is the Ciji Foundation. This major philanthropic society was already known in Taiwan for providing disaster relief in the aftermath of typhoons on the island, and for its controversial overseas operations, which include provision of relief in the People’s Republic. Ciji, as it is known all over Taiwan, has established its reputation in the 1980s by building a hospital in the impoverished county of Hualian. Officials at all levels of government have always heaped praise on Ciji in public. Many of them have even sponsored the candidacy of the organizations’s founder to the Nobel Prize. The Ciji foundation has been active in the realms of health care, disaster relief, and since 1999, it has emerged as a major actor in reconstruction efforts.

The 921 earthquake has offered an opportunity to measure the involvement of all these religious charities and to set a comparison between their contribution and that of corporate philanthropy and other associations from civil society. The September 21, 1999, earthquake that hit central Taiwan was one of the deadliest in decades, killing 2,347 people and injuring thousands more, and left
100,000 people homeless. It has affected nine counties (xian), and three have been more severely affected: Nantou, Taizhong and Jiayi. As mentioned before, many stories in local and foreign papers did not fail to notice that the private sector was quicker to respond than the government, which had appeared than to be disorganized and ill-prepared. The delivery of help required a colossal effort of coordination between a great number of government organs and non-governmental organizations. Some of these organizations were grassroot, others were national, and a few were transnational. In a report published by the Nantou county authorities, 241 organizations have been identified for their involvement in the rescue effort in the area under their jurisdiction.

Data available on the funds raised by religious organizations for relief operation may not do justice to the qualitative dimension of any of these associations’ contribution, but it stands out as a relatively robust measure of the trust people have invested in such type of organizations. The report provided by the National Alliance for the Post-Disaster Reconstruction (Quanguo minjian zaihou zhongjian lianmeng) helps provide perspective in that regard. It details the fund-raising and the expenditures of the organizations that were involved, and divides them in several categories. Of the 215 organizations it registered, there were 92 non-profit mutual help associations (huhuixing feiyouli tuanti), 36 business organizations (yingli shiye jigou), 35 media organizations, 31 religious associations (zongjiao tuanti), 12 welfare organizations (shehui fuli jigou), 6 political organizations, and 3 that belonged to an undefined category. (Xie and Ma 2000: 23-24) Although they represented a fraction of the total number of organizations that provided help, religious organizations, altogether, managed to raise half of the funds earmarked for relief. (Xie and Ma 2000: 140-149) This clearly demonstrated the thrust Taiwanese have bestowed on them. Of the more than 14 billion NT$ that have been raised to offer help, the Ciji Foundation has raised more than one third of the whole sum. (Xie and Ma 2000: 30) The next two most important fund-raisers were the Taiwan’s Red Cross Society and the TVBS network in Taipei, which each raised one fifth of the funds that the Buddhist foundation had attracted. (Xie and Ma 2000: 26, 31)

Other indicators are also telling: although the religious organizations did not provide the largest number of volunteer, they were present in the ground on a level that rivals with the government’s presence. By far, the most important source of manpower in the relief effort came from the county reservists: 4,900 of them were mobilized. However, only one out of six of the organizations involved in the rescue effort were state institutions, and most of the government’s relief effort came
from local administrations. In many cases, some of these local governments who helped in the
delivery of relief administered regions that were far removed from the earthquake epicentre. Hence,
health bureaus in 15 out of the 21 county and county-level cities, as well as in the special
municipalities of Taibei and Gaoxiong, sent 300 people to help; the Gaoxiong County’s bureau
alone sending a third of that number. (NXZ 2000: 7.6-7.12) Many organs of the central government
were left with important responsibilities but did not sent personnel: the Ministry of Education, was
put in charge of the rehabilitation effort and dispatched 86 people from its department of military
instruction (junxunchu), the Ministry of the Interior was mandated to look after the relocation of
elderly displaced people, and the Ministry of information was charged to assess the situation. The
purpose of the personnel sent to the quake area by the central government was not always clear:
here, 27 of the 36 people sent by the DOH worked for the Commission on Chinese
medicine.(zhongyiliao weiyuanhui) Considering the marginal status of Chinese medicine in Taiwan,
in relation to the more popular and more widely used Western medicine (xiyiliao), this number is
perplexing, and may have contributed to the negative perceptions of the population with respect to
its delivery of disaster relief.

Among the non government organizations that provided support, the larger proportion of them were
institutions involved in health care. 82 hospitals from all over the island contributed support, by
sending over 950 personnel in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. Among them, the Ciji
Foundation’s own hospital in Hualian was the most important contributor, by sending 81 people. In
addition, 15 clinics (weishengsuo, zhensuo) and 9 professional associations of physicians and
pharmacists joined the relief effort. Along with these health care associations, 17 volunteer
associations (yigong fendui) established at the community level (li) in townships (zhen) were also
set up to provide help. The figures provided by Nantou County claimed 180 volunteers altogether in
these grass-root associations. Corporate philanthropy did not emerge as a major player in the rescue
effort. Although funding came from firms, few of them organized rescue teams.

Altogether, the 21 organizations with an overt religious identity have provided the greatest number
of volunteers after the health care providers. Even if one excludes the number of volunteers for the
Ciji Foundation, religious associations altogether have provided over 450 volunteers in the relief
effort. Nine of these associations claim an affiliation to Buddhism, nine of them have a Protestant
identity, and three belong to the Catholic Church, the Way of Unity (yiguandao), and a movement
identified with the qigong (*taimenji*). However, these numbers must be treated with caution. Many of the religious-based associations are hospitals, and members of the personnel of these institutions are not necessarily all believers or adherents. Four of the Protestant organizations that have sent volunteers to help in relief provision are health providers rather than religious institutions per se: the Mackay Memorial Hospital, two Christian Hospitals in Changhua, and a third one in Jiayi. The Saint-Martin Hospital is the Catholic organization that has sent volunteers in Nantou County. Yet, an even though some people in these institutions are uncomfortable with the admission of a too obvious religious affiliation, lest it opens the way to accusation of discrimination, many people are willing to assume their religious identity. In those cases where religious-based organizations are working well, the argument that such organizations can help the state provide relief may appear compelling. Yet, a closer look invites qualifications.

Many Buddhist institutions were present in Nantou County but the evidence of their help shows mixed results. Along with volunteers from the Ciji Foundation, five other Buddhist organizations have offered some form of support, ranging from providing hot meals to offering psychological comfort: the Fuguangshan monastic order, the Zhongtai Chan Temple, the Lingyanshan Buddhist Foundation, the Qianfoshan, and the Tiande temple. Most of these organizations, however, have not offered specific numbers for the number of people they have sent to Nantou County. This is the case as well with the Ciji Foundation. As we have seen above, some of its hospital personnel have been sent to deliver care. However, the report on 921 does not divulgate how many volunteers were active in the disaster area. It only notes that “hundreds” volunteers from undisclosed chapters or branches, have provided meals (*huoshi*) to the victims of the disaster, and “hundreds” of volunteers (*yigong*) from the Taizhong chapter (*fenhui*) alone have been sent for unspecified activities. This lack of clarity leaves open many questions about the effectiveness of religious actors in the coordination of social services delivery. In addition, the actions of some religious believers can have un-welcomed consequences. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, some Buddhist leaders have made statements which have generated considerable amount of psychological suffering: they asserted that if some temples or statues have fallen, this may have been caused because their bodhisattvas were “not working” (“simiao de busa ‘bu ling’”) or that the dharma practitioners were “not good.” (“simiao de shifu xiuxing ‘bu xing’”) (Ye 2004)
Despite these regrettable faux-pas, the help provided by some of the religious organizations was remarkable. Of the 4,067 households that were destroyed in Nantou County alone, Ciji took charge of 1,075, spread in 5 of the twelve townships that were receiving relief. This contribution represented the largest number among the projects sponsored by civil societies organizations (minjian zanzhu) in the county. The county government itself contributed to the reconstruction effort of 961 households. The immediate relief provided by the Ciji Foundation surpassed in scope that which was offered by other organizations. Ciji provided relief to 6 elementary schools and 8 high schools, and the second largest provider, the Red Cross helped 7 elementary schools and 1 high schools. The other contributors helped between one and three schools each. They came from various sectors of society: corporate (Xinguang Insurance; Taiwan TV; TVBS; Liberty Times, Eva Air, Taiwan Petroleum, Taiwan Power, United Daily News, China Times), as well as other religious organizations (the Foguangshan Foundation for Culture, the Yiguandao Foundation for Virtue, the Lingyanshan Foundation), one from non-religious philanthropy (International Lion’s Club, Fubon Charity, the Alliance of Gaoxiong’ charity associations), and the Gaoxiong County Government. (TSWW 2000: 546-548) In Taizhong County, the situation was similar, with the Ciji Foundation taking charge of 12 schools, the Red Cross 5, and 14 other actors each looking after three or less schools. In Jiayi, the situation was different, this time entrepreneurs from the Taiwang guanxi took the lead in providing relief to 9 schools, while the Ciji Foundation helped 2.

The effort of some of the religious organizations was also remarkable because of the long-term commitment it materialized. Of the 51 schools that were completely rebuild after the earthquake, the Ciji Foundation offered support to the reconstruction of 352 classes in 13 schools, spending a total of over 1,550,000,000 NT$ distributed to 11,770 students.(NXZ 2000: 1-1) The foundation was also involved in the partial reconstruction of another 320 classes in 16 schools. (NXZ 2000: 1-2, 1-4) The relief effort by the Ciji Foundation, however, was done without coordination with other organizations. Hence, the work report produced by the National Alliance for Post-Earthquake Reconstruction claims to offers a comprehensive review of a number of organizations that were involved in rehabilitation efforts. The report presents the result of auditing two years after the disaster, but there is no mention of the Ciji Foundation’s activities. (QGZHJJH 2001) This is a remarkable gap, in light of the enormous amount of money that the organization has received. Reports on the rehabilitation of the schools published five years after the earthquake suggests this was not an oversight, nor that Ciji’s efforts never materialized. They disclose that Ciji, alone or in
cooperation with other organizations, was in charge of reconstruction for 46 of the 293 schools that were rebuild. (Luo 2004) This compares with the 110 schools that were rebuild under the responsibilities of local governments and the schools’ own resources, the 50 that were rebuild under the supervision of the Ministry of Education’s Committee on behalf of the Interior Ministry’s Bureau for Reconstruction. (jiaoyubu weitu neizhengbu yingjianshu daiban)

These discrepancies between the different auditing organizations reveal one problem that has been acknowledged over the years, ever since the Ciji Foundation has emerged as the largest charity on the island: the widespread perception that it is too imposing. Interviews over the years with many actors involved in the philanthropic sector, in public policy or in the media, have all confirmed that there exists some unease about the extent to which the Ciji Foundation managed to raise more resources than all other charities. Volunteers from the association themselves are aware of this problem, but even if they deplore it, they don’t know how they can find a resolution. These muted tensions show that although the state has failed to deliver in a timely fashion some major services in the immediate aftermath, the lack of coordination between the various philanthropic societies has represented an additional hurdle to overcome. Future research should explore the mechanisms that prevented such coordination, and investigate the factors that have prevented the state from mobilizing more efficiently the enormous resources from civil society that were so obviously displayed after the 921 earthquake.

Conclusion

Wuthnow had high hopes for the ability of religious organizations to provide welfare services in the United States, but he was also aware that people should not expect them to achieve too much. He has noted that congregations are often too small to be effective in the delivery of specialized services, that enthusiasm in the provision of social services does not always target the needy; and finally, that these organizations do not necessarily perform better than non-religious institutions.(2004: 310) His views about the merits of religious organizations have found an echo among some intellectuals in Taiwan, but the reliance on religious organizations for the provision of social services has found few advocates, despite the existence of visible and respected organizations, charities and philanthropic societies with strong religious identities that have established a remarkable record of good deeds.
The state remains the biggest actor in the provision of social services. Despite fiscal problems and rapid growth on the demand side, the electoral dynamics between the political parties have ensured that the State will remain committed to the expansion of a welfare expansion for the foreseeable future, in particular in the universal access to health care and compulsory education. In the realm of pensions and long-term care, where the state has yet to offer a complete coverage, philanthropic societies are not delivering any services. According to local and foreign media, however, religious organizations, and in particular Buddhist philanthropic societies, have demonstrated their ability to stand above political disputes and to deliver services in one particular domain of social policy where the state has proven deficient, namely disaster relief provision. Although these religious organizations have proven their ability to offer moral support and contribute to rehabilitation, however, an investigation into the reconstruction that has followed the 921 earthquake of 1999 has revealed that their contribution has been exaggerated. The “welfare orientalist” vision of a welfare regime where the state can rely on philanthropic organizations to provide social services along with the family, the corporate sector, and community-based actors, in the end, does not represent the reality of the emerging welfare state in Taiwan.

Sources


Schmetzer, Uli. 1999. ChicagoTribune. (October 4)


Xie Guoxing and Ma Yan, ed. 2000. 921 Zhenzi juankuan jidu baogao chu. Quanguo minjian zaihou zhongjian lianmeng.


   *Tripod* No. 118.