

Church and State in Spanish Formosa

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When an authoritarian government links up with a similarly minded religion, the results for those shut out of power (e.g., women or colonized peoples) are often suboptimal. At the beginning of Taiwan's experience with Christianity, Dutch and Spanish missionaries largely supported their governments' imperial enterprise. Part of a larger book project on the history of church-state relations in Taiwan and Hong Kong, this paper explores how an absence of political and religious competition led Western Christians to seize parts of Taiwan from the island's rightful, indigenous owners. Although the Spanish Crown and Catholic clergy enjoyed a mostly symbiotic relationship in northern Formosa during the 1600s, later portions of this volume will document periods of tension or even outright hostility between church and state in Taiwan.

Theoretically, the book tests the economic approach to religion-state interactions in an understudied cultural, political, and social setting: East Asia. The two pioneering works (Gill 1998; 2008) applying rational-choice models to religion and politics have together focused on the Americas and Eastern Europe rather than Asia or Africa. A couple of later scholars have adopted this perspective when analyzing China (Yang 2006; Xie 2011), yet even the PRC deserves much more academic attention. And no one appears to have used self-interest to explain church-state relations in East Asia over

centuries of Christian presence in the region (Moffett 1992; 1998). This book thus contributes to the political-science, religious-studies, and historical literatures by using this viewpoint for the two politically similar, culturally Chinese territories of Taiwan and Hong Kong since the arrival of Christianity. Buffeted by the competing forces of Chinese nationalism and foreign colonialism, native Christians in these two locales have faced considerable challenges in remaining loyal to their faith while continuing to exist in their largely non-Christian societies. Western believers living in Taiwan and Hong Kong, meanwhile, have often found it easier to reconcile (at least in their own minds) Christianity with the political aims of their countries of birth.

Theories of Church-State Relations

According to Anthony Gill's (2008:26-59) rational-choice theory of religious liberty, governments primarily treat religious minorities as well as devotees of the dominant religion in a way that will strengthen the rulers' grip on political power and maximize tax revenues and national economic prosperity. In contrast to advocates of secularization theory, he claims that states restrict or "regulate the religious marketplace" based on the self-interest of the political leaders, not because society is inexorably becoming less religious. When repressing a religious minority poses more "opportunity costs" than benefits among these three criteria, governments will tend to allow freedom of conscience.

Conversely, if one looks at how a religious group decides to interact with the state, one key sociological theory belongs to Max Weber (1952 [1921], 1963 [1922]). In his terms, a religion may play a "prophetic" or "priestly" role. In the first, a church or

other religious entity opposes and criticizes the state for its deviations from justice and appeals to the government to return to God's laws. In the second, clergy give religiously based advice and comfort to the king or other political leaders, support the government's policies, at least in public, and try to get the masses to obey the state by convincing them that God is on the side of the status quo.

Although Weber thoroughly describes believers' two principal approaches to the government, he does not explicate in detail why groups follow one pattern or another (other than pointing to believers' socio-economic background and fundamental theological beliefs). This paper therefore turns once again to Gill's (1998:47-78) economic model to explain why a church opts to oppose or support the political status quo.¹ Based largely on Latin American cases, his first major work argued that national Catholic churches adopted a pro- or anti-government policy based on which would maximize their support from the largely poor populace. Before they faced competition from socialists, spiritists, or evangelical Protestants working among the economically marginalized, in contrast, the Catholic hierarchy had been content to ally with authoritarian leaders and their upper-class backers. In a broader context, then, Gill's theory suggests that a religious group would support or oppose the political authorities based on which option will maximize its number of adherents and amount of resources. Money and other "goodies" from the government are nice, he implies. But a rational group of believers will not seek such political capital at the cost of popular rejection of their religion—at least when ideological competitors are also seeking converts among the same people.

¹ Although this paper focusses on Roman Catholics, a possible alternative theory for Protestants' political behavior is Woodberry's (2012) claim that evangelical missionaries fostered democratization by teaching indigenous Christians skills useful for forming a civil society opposed to authoritarianism.

Applied to Spanish Formosa, Gill's first theory suggests that the Crown would be motivated to support the Catholic missionaries financially and militarily because the Dominican and Franciscan priests helped Spanish officials and the military work more efficiently. The clerics might, for example, preach against drunkenness and adultery, persuade soldiers that they are on a Christianizing mission from God, and provide medical care to the sick and injured. By learning the local aboriginal languages, converting the natives to Christianity, and negotiating for Spanish officials, Western religious leaders in Taiwan could also help Spain colonize the area and "pacify" local Yuanzhumin who might otherwise want to resist European imperialism violently. The Crown would have no interest in fostering religious pluralism in the region however, whether such diversity were to come from Protestant Dutch "heretics" on the southwestern coast of the island or "superstitious" indigenous Taiwanese groups. If Gills' state-related interpretation is false, however, one would expect the Spanish government to restrict Catholic religious practice on the island, impede missionaries' efforts at evangelism, support traditional indigenous religious practices, and refuse to give the Spanish clergy salaries or military protection. Or at a minimum, the state would have to show complete indifference to the missionary endeavor.

For the church in Spanish Formosa, rational-choice theory would posit that the Catholic missionaries would do their best to enhance colonial rule in Taiwan. The priests should try to convince dubious or rebellious Yuanzhumin of the moral superiority of Western culture and the rightness of Spanish conquest of northern Formosa. They should provide secular, linguistic and medical services to the government since without its presence they would never be able to continue to proselytize local villagers. If the

colonial experiment were to fail, the Dominicans would no longer have state-supported access to potential converts and would have needed to leave Taiwan and abandon evangelization of the natives. Should the economic model prove inaccurate, however, these priests would take a principled, prophetic stand against the European state's exploitation of Taiwanese aboriginals and attempt to undermine Spain's military and commercial operations in the region.

Christians in Spanish Formosa

The first recorded presence of Christians in Taiwan probably occurred in July of 1582, when a vessel travelling from Macau to Japan was shipwrecked on the island. After about three months living on a small amount of rice they had carried with them and defending themselves against local headhunters, most of the almost 300 passengers and crew succeeded in reconstructing a new boat from the remains of the old one and traveling back to Macau. While still stranded on Formosa, however, the Spanish Jesuit priest Pedro Gómez and his colleagues helped improvise a church for the refugees and said up to four masses a day (Lee 2008:239-270; Borao Mateo 2009:174).

A permanent Spanish settlement on the island would have to wait until 1626, when the authorities in Manila launched a successful naval attack on Formosa. The Spaniards soon established two major forts and population centers in northern Taiwan: one on an island in today's Keelung [originally 雞籠, now 基隆] harbor, named "San Salvador," and a second in the current Tamsui [淡水], called "San Domingo" (Álvarez 1930:56; Tong 1972:5; Lee 2001:33-34). In theory, this new territory would facilitate trade with the rest of Asia, expand the reach of the Spanish empire against its colonial

enemies (e.g., the Dutch), and accelerate the spread of Christianity to mainland China (Nakamura 1970; Tong 1972:5-6; Borao Mateo 2009:175-176). At its peak in the early 1630s, the Spanish colony amounted to around 500 soldiers, missionaries, functionaries, servants, and family members (Knapp 2007; Wills 2007).

Besides these at least culturally Catholic Spanish settlers, Formosa's Christian community eventually include hundreds of aborigine converts. Sources vary greatly on the number of indigenous Taiwanese Christians in Spanish Formosa, but the most optimistic estimate is around 2,000 (Borao Mateo 2001a:xxxiii; 2001b:514, 518 & 573), some of whose descendents on Keelung's Palm/Peace Island [棕櫚島, today 和平島] appear to have remained in the faith as late as 1872 (Lin 2006). On Taiwan, this aboriginal flock resulted from assiduous proselytization by the 37 Dominican and 9 Franciscan priests who would serve in the colony (Borao Mateo 2001a:xxxiv-xxxv). Especially prominent clerics include Jacinto Esquivel, Francisco Vázquez, and Luis Muro, all of whom were eventually martyred in or near Formosa (Borao Mateo 2009:176 & 184-185).

By the late 1630s, the Spanish colonial administration in Manila was facing an increasing demand for troops and supplies because of its long-running conflict with Muslim rebels in what is today the southern Philippines (the so-called "Jolo Wars"; Borao Mateo 2001b:572; Andrade 2008:199). Many influential Spanish observers no longer viewed Formosa as advantageous for trade and had concluded that sending missionaries to China or Japan from the island was hopeless (Lee 2001:39). The Philippines was suffering from a poor economy during the period, moreover, and could ill afford to continue subsidizing Spanish Formosa. Governor Sebastián Hurtado de

Corcuera therefore ordered many of the armed forces in Taiwan to return to the Philippines (Shepherd 1993:58; Andrade 2008:195 & 201-203). This withdrawal left Spanish Formosa vulnerable to attacks by the military of the Dutch Republic, which was simultaneously fighting in Europe for its definitive international recognition as a country independent of the Spanish Empire (Israel 1995). After a failed effort to take over the Spanish colony in 1641, the Netherlanders succeeded in overrunning the area in 1642 and deported most of the survivors to Jakarta (Borao Mateo 2001b:514 & 572; Lee 2001:39; Wills 2007).

State Treatment of Foreign and Native Christians

Overall, the Spanish state and the Catholic missionaries on the island exhibited a mutually supportive relationship. From the government's side, Spanish authorities sent members of the army to protect Catholic missionaries against attacks from hostile forces, covered the clergy's travel costs, and paid priests salaries for serving as military chaplains (Borao Mateo 2001a:187-188; Andrade 2008:183 & 192; Borao Mateo 2009:180 & 192). Individual soldiers sometimes served as godparents at Catholic baptisms, religious celebrations occasionally included secular embellishments such as artillery salutes or sword, and the military would even help transport sacred objects such as a statue of the Virgin Mary dances (Borao Mateo 2001a:86 & 222-223; Andrade 2008:182 & 187-188). Once the Catholic priests had established their social-service agency, they appointed the Captain General as one of the officers (Borao Mateo 2001a:209). At Tamsui, the Spanish commander likewise lent the Dominicans workers and carpenters to construct a Catholic chapel (Borao Mateo 2001a:207 & 225). As

Esquivel summed up his relations with the local government, “the General is very good and agrees to whatever the Father says” (Borao Mateo 2009:183).

The state also helped maintain a Catholic religious monopoly in the colony. Taiwan Governor Pedro Palomino boasted in a 1638 letter to his superior in the Philippines that if the Spanish soldiers under his command in Formosa wanted “freedom of conscience,” they would have to move to Holland since “they are not going to enjoy that here” (Borao Mateo 2001a:xxvii & 291). We thus found no historical evidence to suggest that the government encouraged religions other than Roman Catholicism by, for example, tolerating Protestantism or aiding traditional Yuanzhumin religious practices.

About the only time the state significantly opposed Spanish Christians was during the last few years of Spanish occupation of Taiwan, when Manila was withdrawing from Formosa over the vehement objections of the Catholic missionaries (Andrade 2008:201 & 205). In the closing days of the colony, for example, the governor forbade the priests from building a stone house in Kimaurri because he was afraid it would fall into Dutch hands. The Dominicans nonetheless defiantly completed the structure and accused him of hindering the spread of the “Holy Gospel” (Borao Mateo 2001a:291). Of course, officials took at best a paternalistic approach to native Christians, not hesitating to whip or even kill them if they appeared or actually were “rebellious” (Borao Mateo 2001a:182; Andrade 2008:192-193).

Christians’ Support or Opposition to the State

By and large, Spanish Christians in the colony returned the favor. Indeed, even as early as 1617, Catholic leaders such as Bartolomé Martínez had tried to persuade the government

in Manila and Madrid to conquer Formosa. Supposedly, the new colony would help the Empire trade with China and defend itself against the Dutch, but the Dominican Provincial and his colleagues were probably much more interested in the converts missionaries could make in Taiwan and, especially, China and Japan (Lee 2001:35 & 38; Andrade 2008:180; Lee 2008:467-479). Once the Crown had decided to take part of the island, Martínez himself accompanied the Spanish naval flotilla as it first reconnoitered and then landed near today's Keelung. As the soldiers built a fort on an island in the bay, the religious constructed a small church and prepared to hear confessions from, preach to, and otherwise provide religious and secular assistance to the state's local employees (Álvarez 1930:55-56; Borao Mateo 2001a:85).

In many ways, the Dominicans attempted to reconcile local aboriginals to the Spanish conquest of their island (a.k.a. "pacify the natives"). After most of the inhabitants of Senar had fled their homes upon the arrival of the Conquistadores, the Catholic priest Jacinto Esquivel sought them out in the mountains and tried to persuade many of them to return to their first settlement near the Spanish fort in Tamsui (Álvarez 1930:56-59; Borao Mateo 2001a:86 & 225; 2009:179). From both the missionaries' and soldiers' perspective, a consolidated indigenous village next to the Spanish encampment would reduce the effort needed to "administer" them (Borao Mateo 2001a:181 & 225).

One of the most important Catholic institutions in Spanish Formosa was the *Hermandad de la Misericordia* [Brotherhood of Mercy], planned as a kind of religiously based medical and social welfare agency for both Spanish functionaries and indigenous Taiwanese. The organization received funding both from both the church and government and may have founded the first and only hospital in the colony. Eventually, the

Misericordia morphed into a de facto bank, loaning relatively large sums to even the local governor (Borao Mateo 2001a:xxix; Borao Mateo 2009:180-182).

Sometimes local priests even facilitated the Spaniards' military efforts by spying on potential enemies and reporting back to commanders or providing recommendations on strategy. In 1629 Bartolomé Martínez, for example, drowned while attempting to warn Spanish forces in Keelung that the Dutch were preparing to attack Tamsui (Lee 2001:35). Esquivel, perhaps the most prominent religious in Spanish Formosa, likewise urged in a report to the colonial government that officials send special boats to Taiwan to help "reconnoiter the enemy post" and "burn the villages of our native enemies." Later in the same document, he forwarded intelligence collected by an ethnic Chinese spy and concluded that "there is no better time to drive" the Dutch out of Taiwan (Borao Mateo 2001a:175-177).

Examples of a counterbalancing prophetic role are hard to find. At the margins, priests sometimes tried to soften the blow of direct military rule of aboriginal Taiwanese without fundamentally challenging imperialism. True, Esquivel once got Spanish authorities to release a few indigenous prisoners from Taparri and return their corn to them. Yet this gesture allowed him to ingratiate himself even more with other local villagers, who also asked for a priest for their settlements (Borao Mateo 2001a:182). Sometimes Taiwanese natives viewed the priests as providing a kind of protection from Spanish soldiers, which partly explains why many villages began asking for a resident Catholic cleric. But aborigines seemed equally concerned about boosting their status vis-à-vis other "priestless" indigenous Taiwanese and defending themselves against violent attacks from rival headhunting natives (Andrade 2008:183-185). The Dominican martyr

Luis Muro had attempted to restrain Spanish soldiers from cheating when trading with the local inhabitants of what is today Tamsui. Yet he seems to have done so more because he wanted to convert them, not because he was concerned about fairness per se (Borao Mateo 2001a:243).

One might reasonably look for Yuanzhumin opposition to the Spanish state, yet even such anti-colonial resistance appears largely absent among native Christians. Instead, most Yuanzhumin seem to have become docile and even fawning once they converted to the newcomers' faith. The most important act of indigenous opposition to the Spaniards is probably the killing of the Dominicans Francisco Vázquez and Luis Muro. Here again, however, the (mainly Christian) inhabitants of Senar appear to have murdered the first priest because they perceived him as disloyal to their own village, not because he was siding with the colonizers. And Muro died at the hands of possibly Catholic aborigines under confused circumstances; at the time of his death, he was helping to guard a shipment of rice and may have been targeted because his killers wished to seize the food (Nakamura 1970; Kang 2006; Borao Mateo 2009:184-185).

Once the Spanish governor of the Philippines announced the withdrawal of forces from Tamsui and the destruction of its fort, Catholic leaders in Taiwan voiced their great displeasure at Hurtado de Corcuera's apparent abandonment of the island and its many converts to Christianity. Missionary resistance became so strong in Formosa that one local priest claimed to have excommunicated the governor (Andrade 2008:205). Yet the church's final resistance to the Manila government ultimately failed and was hardly typical behavior for these otherwise stalwart religious supporters of Spanish colonialism

in Taiwan. In general, the Catholic missionaries seemed to believe, the state was still in a position to help them convert “unreached peoples” and incorporate them the church.

Discussion

Under the circumstances of 17th-century Spanish Formosa, it was almost inconceivable that the Spanish priests active in Taiwan would significantly oppose the Crown’s conquest and colonization of local indigenous peoples or that the King would interfere with or even fail to aid the church’s religious activities on the island. Within Spanish Formosa itself, the Dominicans faced little or no Western competition for native souls, and the military authorities were indisputably the political masters within the colony between 1626 and about 1640. In the end, the lack of both religious and political alternatives appears to have accentuated the priestly role of the church and the Christianizing function of the state. The losers in at least one these enterprises were the indigenous Formosans, who for the first of many times lost their land to foreign invaders.

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