

“Through Love and Suffering”:

The Role of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan’s Democratization

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“Calvin’s teaching finally favours a form of government in which the sovereignty of God and the sovereignty of the people are joined. The joining manifests itself in the realm of human action.” (Hancock 1989:81)

“We the people of Taiwan love this island which, either by birth or chance, is our home. Some of us have roots here going back a thousand years, the majority count a residence of two or three centuries, while some have come since the Second World War. We are all well aware of our different backgrounds and even conflicts, but at present we are even more aware of a common certainly and shared conviction. We long to live here in peace, freedom and justice. And we do not wish to be governed by Peiping. ... We oppose any powerful nation disregarding the rights and wishes of fifteen million people and making unilateral decisions to their own advantage, because God has ordained, and the United Nations Charter has affirmed, that every people has the right to determine its own destiny.” (Statement on our national fate by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, 29 December 1971)

“We believe that the Church is the fellowship of God’s people, called to proclaim the salvation of Jesus Christ and to be an ambassador of reconciliation. It is both universal and rooted in this land, identifying with all its inhabitants and through love and suffering becoming a sign of hope” (Confession of Faith of the PCT, 1985)

On the second day after his election to the presidency of the Republic of China (ROC), Chen Shui-bian visited the offices of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) to thank people there for their support during his election. It is worth dwelling on this event, because Chen is not a Presbyterian, and the PCT did not officially support him. In contrast to the millions of adherents and mobilizing

ability of activist Buddhist organizations such as Fokuangshan or Tzu Chi Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation, the 225,000 fractious members of the PCT barely encompass one percent of Taiwan's population. So why was the first non-KMT president of the ROC visiting the PCT immediately after his election?

Taiwan's peaceful democratic transition is rightfully considered its political miracle. It was a miracle because Hoklo¹ Taiwanese ethnic nationalism pushed the process of democratization, yet the crowded island did not dissolve into warring ethno-linguistic political camps². It is my contention that one significant reason this did not happen is the role played by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (hereafter PCT). From 1971 the PCT remained an insistent and consistent voice for human rights and democracy. Calling for Taiwan to become "a new and independent nation", it also formulated an inclusive vision of a nation encompassing all the groups in Taiwan, "a new and independent country" achieved through non-violent struggle based on "love and suffering". This role derived from its strong contemporary Calvinist faith, and self-identity of the church as both "universal and rooted in this land".

To pursue this argument I shall first introduce the PCT emphasizing its relations with the state prior to 1971. Then I shall discuss Calvinism and its contemporary expression in the PCT. I shall then show how this was expressed in human action through specific initiatives of organizational and elocutionary challenges to KMT authoritarianism from 1971 to 1989. I shall conclude with my own reflections on what this has to say about identities and democracy.

1) The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan 台灣基督長老教會

“長老教會: A reactionary religious organization with the goal of splitting China. Its activities were especially outrageous from the 1970's on. In 1972 the acting president of it's theological college, Dan Beebe, advocated so-called 'Taiwan self-determination', and was immediately expelled by the people of Taiwan. N the same year in the US appeared a self-styled 'Taiwanese Christians for Self-Determination' continually advocating the idea of 'Taiwan self-determination'. In 1975 the PCT, along with the "World United Formosans for Independence" and other reactionary groups held a 'Taiwanese People's Congress in the US advocating Taiwan 'self-determination' and raving about Taiwan independence. In 1977 the PCT published a so-called 'Declaration on Human Rights' in

¹ Hoklo (福佬) Taiwanese are the Minnan speaking people who are generally considered to constitute about 70% of the island's population.

² Other presenters at this conference will discuss ethnic politics and Taiwan's democratic transition.

it's Taiwan Church News, once again calling for Taiwan to become a 'new and independent country'. Because of the long-standing plot of this reactionary organization to split China, it has long-since been rejected by all patriotic people in Taiwan.

(Dictionary of Taiwan Knowledge. Fujian Peoples Publishing House, 1987)

The PCT is the largest and oldest Protestant church in Taiwan, numbering some 225,000 members and adherents. About 2/3 of its members are Hoklo Taiwanese, just under 1/3 Aboriginal, and a small number are Hakka and Mainlander. It originated with an English Presbyterian mission centered on Tainan in the south (1865) and a Canadian Presbyterian³ mission centered on Tamsui in the north (1872). After 1945 the rapid conversion of the aboriginal "Mountain Tribes" added 10 more languages to the three Chinese tongues in which the PCT worships. In 1951 the southern and northern synods, already self-governing, were united in the General Assembly of the independent PCT.

The structure of the PCT⁴ is "Presbyterian" – or "rule by elders"⁵, a "democratic commonwealth" with three levels – 1200 local congregations (堂會) organized into 20 Presbyteries (中會) united in the General Assembly (總會). At each level decisions are made by numerous committees and officers, all elected annually by secret ballot, and including both clergy and elders. In addition there are elections at each level for numerous boards of institutions (schools and hospitals) and church social service projects (from kindergartens to fishermen and factory workers). To be involved in the PCT is to be involved in an endless round of meetings and fairly open politicking for election to decision-making bodies. There are factions at every level, and has even been vote buying for election as elders of local congregations. The largest factional divide is between the "south" and "north" Taiwanese factions, loosely associated with the two seminaries in Tainan and Taipei, institutionalized in a "gentleman's agreement" keeping peace in the church for many years, that the elected moderator of the General Assembly would be chosen alternately from each faction⁶.

³ George Leslie Mackay, the charismatic Scots Canadian founder of the Tamsui mission, is now a national hero in Taiwan, which is observing the centenary of his death (1901) with a commemorative stamp. Mackay's legacy in Taiwan and Canada was explored in a JCAPS conference in 1997.

⁴ This is a simplified account. For example, there are also several "Districts" (區會) for some small aboriginal groups which do not have enough congregations to form a Presbytery. The Northern Synod continued after the Southern Synod was dissolved in 1951, holding its property separate from the General Assembly – a constant source of factionalism in the church today.

⁵ An elder is not only a lay person, since the authority of the ordained clergy comes from the fact that he or she is first of all a teaching elder. Many younger clergy are unordained "evangelists" who do not have the status of an elder, so cannot vote in Presbytery or chair meetings of their congregation.

⁶ Aboriginal Presbyterians did not belong to either faction, and so the system has come under repeated challenge by aboriginal clergy as they began to play significant roles in the PCT from the 1980's on.

The political implications of this should be obvious – that the PCT was fiercely committed to democracy and its members well practiced in both its virtues and vices long before democracy came to Taiwan. One vice has been the role of the KMT, which involved itself in even congregational elections for elders, in an attempt to keep the church under control. Thus in factional struggles the shadow of the KMT was always present in both Taiwanese and Aboriginal churches. Accusations by Y of X being a KMT puppet were often heard. But why should the KMT care about the election of a few elders in a country church?

In the PCT clergy are ordained by the Presbytery and elected by the congregation. While an experienced minister can rule his congregation like a monarch, younger clergy often live under the heavy rod of the congregation's elders. Each congregation sends one elder to the meetings of Presbytery. In 1989 I attended a meeting of the smallest Taiwanese presbytery, only 36 congregations, in which rumors of a KMT coup in the election for presbytery moderator were flying. Sure enough, when the vote was counted, the popular vice-moderator, a supporter of the DPP, was defeated by a the rumored KMT chosen candidate, and on the first ballot⁷. When I naively asked why the KMT would care about the moderator of one small Presbytery, the explanation was immediate – and presented in a tone of this being so obvious that everyone would know. The moderator of the East Coast Presbytery is a member of the executive committee of the North Synod, which controlled most of the valuable property of the PCT, and chooses the board of Mackay Memorial Hospital, the wealthiest institution in the PCT. As Ron Haldeman said, “when you've got 'em by the balls their hearts and minds will follow”.

The case of PCT “withdrawal” from the World Council of Churches⁸ in 1970 illustrates several aspects of church-state dynamics in the Chiang era. The PCT joined the WCC in 1951. In 1958 the WCC called for membership of the Peoples Republic of China in the UN, and the KMT began to put intense pressure on churches in Taiwan to withdraw from the WCC. Along with other churches the PCT issued a statement expressing their anti-communist stand, supporting “recovery of the

There have only been two aboriginal moderators – in 1987 and 2000. The relation between Taiwanese and Aboriginal segments of the church is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷ This was an almost unheard of miracle. PCT practice is that the vice-moderator succeeds the retiring moderator, and is in turn succeeded by the elected secretary. These are pro-forma elections. The real election is for secretary – and this is by secret ballot without nominations. Such elections usually take several rounds until one candidate has developed sufficient momentum. So for an unknown to supplant the vice-moderator –on first ballot – is either a miracle or the result of careful KMT preparation and pressure.

⁸ This account drawn from Chen Nan-zhou 1996:90-91. 陳南州. 台灣基督長老教會的社會, 政治倫理. (Taipei:永望)

Mainland”, and protesting against the WCC statement. Gradually other churches (all having come from China after 1949) withdrew and the PCT stood alone. In 1969, still seeking to satisfy the KMT without withdrawing, the General Assembly set up an “Anti-Communism Committee” and distributed government anti-communist propaganda at church meetings. Nonetheless repeated resolutions from several Presbyteries continued to call for withdrawal, and eventually the General Assembly voted to withdraw in 1970. At the same time the PCT privately agreed with the WCC to disregard its withdrawal, so that apart from official membership, the PCT continued to participate in WCC programs.

These cases lead to several insights about the PCT:

1. The PCT is not a monolith, but has many members who identify more with the KMT state than with the national leadership of the church. In subsequent discussion characterization of “the PCT” should be read as statements about the General Assembly, teachers in its seminaries and national church leadership, rather than the entire body of Presbyterians.
2. In the 1950’s and 60’s the PCT was not an “activist” or “political” church, but sought to find a modus vivendi with the KMT state through compromise, insofar as this did not violate its faith.
3. Persistence in maintaining relations with the WCC after all other protestant churches on Taiwan had left suggests that the PCT had begun to see itself as a voice for Taiwanese people, and was beginning to practice unofficial diplomacy long before this became the “flexible diplomacy” so emphasized by President Lee Teng-hui.

Conflict with the KMT has roots in the history of the PCT, which shaped its “in Taiwan” nature. The modernizing mission of the English and Scots Canadian Presbyterians emphasized education, sobriety, diligence and mutual love among the often ostracized Christians – this latter an important social safety net. By the early 20th century a small but significant number of Presbyterians were doctors and educators and successful merchants. From their parents they knew the story of faith under persecution, and in the period of Japanese militarism had experienced it themselves, as the Japanese rulers attempted to enforce state Shinto and suppress Taiwanese nationalism. Welcoming the KMT in 1945, educated Presbyterians who took part in the “228” protests demanding government reform, constitutional rights, and respect for Taiwanese people pushed aside by Chiang Kai-shek’s carpetbaggers, were some of the most prominent victims of the “228” massacre of Taiwanese elite. Many

Taiwanese Presbyterian families can number some kin among the dead, missing or imprisoned of “228” and the “White Terror” of the early 1950’s.

The best known case of voices calling for human rights, democracy, and “one China one Taiwan” prior to the 1970’s was the 1964 “Formosan People’s National Salvation Declaration”⁹, drafted by Peng Ming-min, dean of the School of Law at National Taiwan University. Peng comes from a Presbyterian family, his uncle former principal of the seminary in Taipei and brother for many years a leading elder in the North Synod. Peng eventually represented the DPP in Taiwan’s first democratic election for president against another Presbyterian in 1996.

While political issues may be a concern only for the elite, the issue of language in Taiwan touches all Taiwanese, and the very life of local churches. Presbyterian practice, and indeed their faith commended it, was to use the mother tongue in worship. In Taiwanese churches this meant use of romanized Amoy dialect Bibles and hymnbooks, and in Aboriginal churches aboriginal languages, first put into written form by the Presbyterians. KMT policy was to ban the public use of all “dialects” (方言) in favour of Mandarin, the National Language (國語)¹⁰. This included worship in churches, and right up until the late 1980’s, the annual “National Language Promotion Week” would be marked by posters and letters sent to the churches forbidding the use of dialects. In January 1975 police raided churches in Tayal aboriginal areas during worship on Sunday morning and confiscated the Bibles and hymnbooks, illegal because they were not in Chinese characters. The same spring they raided the offices of Bible Society and confiscated the plates of the new romanized Hoklo Bible about to be printed¹¹. In response to this the PCT, in “Our Appeal concerning the Bible, the Church and the Nation” (18 November 1975), stated, “*The people in every nation in the free world enjoy full religious liberty. Every person should be able to enjoy the freedom to use his own language to worship God and express his own religious faith*”. The appeal was heard even in the halls of the US Congress, and through its ecumenical network the PCT created a worldwide scandal over these raids, which ensured that the KMT never again dared to try this.

While political cases or membership in the WCC may be of little concern to the “person in the pew”, her own mother tongue is. By making it the language of worship

⁹ Though not the first. Current legislator Trong Chai fled Taiwan in 1960, and Shi Ming-de, legislator and Chair of the DPP, was imprisoned in 1962. Both of these were students. Peng was already a member of the Taiwanese establishment.

¹⁰ The same term was used by the Japanese in their attempts to suppress Taiwanese.

¹¹ “The news, ironically, coincided with the announcement of the death of Christian President Chiang Kai-shek on 6th April of that year.” (John Jyigiokk Tin *Christianity in Taiwan* p. 111 in *Christianity in Asia* (1- North East Asia) T.K. Thomas, ed. Christian Conference of Asia, Singapore 1979

the PCT sacralized mother tongues, and made it an aspect of faith – religious identity combined with personal identity, all seen as an inheritance from God (as aboriginal churches would later frequently affirm). The use of Hoklo in worship had the important effect of raising it from the Hoklo of the street and market, a “方言” of the underclass, to a language of beauty and dignity. For aboriginal languages Bibles, hymnbooks and primers were the only things which ensured the persistence of these tongues, especially the more abstract vocabulary of traditional religious specialists. To meet the challenge of translation much vocabulary was invented or imported, making these dynamic living languages rather than simply preserving them as linguistic artifacts. So both literally and politically the PCT gave a voice to the people of Taiwan during the four decades of imposed silence of martial law.

In forbidding these languages the KMT state was putting itself in opposition to its own people at several levels – personal, ethnic, religious faith, religious practice, and divinely approved human rights. In a 1985 response to this policy the church explicitly raised the issue from one of religious freedom to the issue of colonialism:

“Dialects (方言) are a people’s longstanding culture, a part of the people’s lives, and have inseparable meaning in the expression of religious life. To forbid the use of dialects in the promotion of the national language, is something that has occurred in history only under the colonial rule of foreign nations (異族). Over 90% of the residents of Taiwan use dialects, and this usage of mother tongue has existed for centuries.” (Resolution of this Church concerning the letter from the Interior Ministry forbidding the use of dialects, January 7, 1985)

The Presbyterians were not the only people to protest against these policies¹², but that they were the only consistent, organized, institutional opposition, and the only place in which dialects were regularly, ritually, and officially used and taught as an inseparable part of life.

The PCT position can be understood at the level of ethnic resistance to colonialism. As the only Taiwanese church, isolated from the other churches in Taiwan¹³, it certainly shared in the general Taiwanese consciousness of being a minority in its own land (Huang Po-ho 1996:20ff) hoping for “*chhut thau ti*” (liberation – 出頭天). But any analysis which ignores the faith of the PCT and the meanings this gave to history would fall short. For the PCT, Taiwan’s history is a *heilsgeschichte*,

¹² The Academia Sinica suggested that teaching in dialects be allowed in elementary schools in aboriginal areas, as a way of helping aboriginal children adapt to the educational system.

¹³ With the exception of the small Holiness Church, brought by the Japanese, all other churches in Taiwan came from the mainland after 1949, and identified themselves strongly with the KMT.

experience to be interpreted through Biblical images.

“Over the past 130 years our church has been through rule by the different powers of the Qing, Japanese and KMT government, but throughout witnessed to the sovereignty (主權) of Christ in the spirit of “Burning but not Consumed” (焚而不燬). We experience the difficulties of mission under the Qing with its many incidents; the Japanese Emperor Cult movement and church state conflicts, and in the period of the KMT government the 228, Kaohsiung Incident and other political tragedies.”
(Translated from 1998 Directory of the PCT 教會一覽表 p. 171)

2. Calvinism and the Faith of the PCT

“Men may talk slightly today about that “stern old Calvinism”. They would do well to pause and ask about its fruits. What other creed has so swept the whole field of life with the dread artillery of truth, and made men unflinchingly loyal to conscience and tremorless save in the presence of God.”
(George Leslie Mackay, From Far Formosa, 1895)

“We believe that God has given human beings dignity, talents, and a homeland (鄉土), so that they may share in God’s creation, and have responsibility with Him for taking care of the world. Therefore they have social, political and economic systems, arts and sciences, and a spirit which seeks after the true God.” (Confession of Faith PCT 1985)

The Reform or Presbyterian branch of Protestantism deriving from John Calvin (1509-1564) and his student John Knox (d. 1572) has a long tradition of political use by minority groups in ethnic mobilization –the Scottish Reformation, Dutch war of independence, French Huguenots, English Civil War, Ulster, South Africa, and Taiwan. Leaving more comprehensive discussion¹⁴ to others, let us focus on “the central unifying theme that runs through all Calvin’s writings ... the overarching, all-pervading sovereignty of God” (Spykman 1976:186). This has direct political significance.

There are of course contradictory implications in this for conceptions of legitimate authority. On the one hand it implies that those in power rule by the will of God – the Divine Right of Kings. On the other hand, there are limits to the rights of the ruler to

¹⁴ Much of this section draws on my 1995 M.A. thesis “Return our Land: Counterhegemonic Presbyterian Aboriginality in Taiwan. York University 1995. See section 4.32 “Covenant and Chosen People” for a more complete account.

extend state authority into other spheres of life also under the direct sovereignty of God – notably the conscience, family, and church. Obedience is owed to the ruler because it is obedience to the will of God, not the ruler per se. This is a crucial point, from which another principle was derived, by Knox especially - the right of resistance: *“For earthly rulers lay aside all their glory when they rise up against God, and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. (Calvin’s Commentary on Daniel, in Spykman 1976:187).* By the 20th century this concept had become linked to the general idea of human rights as rights given by God, or inherent in humanity as the image of God. Thus the PCT prefaced its 1977 “declaration on Human Rights with *“Our church confesses that Jesus Christ is the lord of all mankind and believes that human rights and a land in which each one of us has a stake are gifts bestowed by God. Therefore we make this declaration, set in the context of the present crisis threatening the 17 million people of Taiwan.”*

“Context” is the all-important variable that activates and shapes the “iron of Calvinism” in different ways. For the PCT in the 1970’s, the lesson of Calvinism became encapsulated in the summarizing symbol of the burning bush:

“The motto of the PCT is “burning yet not consumed”. Tending his father-in-law’s flocks in the wilderness of Midian, Moses saw God appear in the midst of a burning bush, calling him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. “Nec tamen consumebatur” is a sign of the presence of God in suffering (苦難) and of victory. ... Calvin[ism] ... alone of all the reformation movements ... could produce ... a strong organization to oppose [government persecution] through training strong and unwavering people, because they firmly believed they were chosen by God as co-workers, to carry out his will ... Presbyterians in every country take this as their model”. (Translated from PCT General Assembly Evangelism Committee 1979: 台灣基督長老教會史暨長老教會的精神¹⁵)

There is a diachronic polysemy¹⁶ in the way that the Calvinistic themes are re-invented in new contexts, without losing their authenticity. For GL Mackay the burning bush was a personal empowerment, expressed in his maxim “better to burn out than rust away”. Other themes also are consciously reinvented, as in this example from PCT theologian Huang Po-ho¹⁷:

¹⁵ This 66 page booklet was issued as a study book for church members, originally in 1975. After each chapter it has “Questions for Reflection”. The question for the section from which this quote is taken is “Recount the history of persecution of our church”. Question for the preceding section, “Glorify God”, is “Reflect on the dangers of deifying great men”, and the subsequent section, “Democratic Commonwealth”, is “Reflect on the dangers of perverted (變態) democracy”.

¹⁶ Thanks to Judith Nagata for this term.

¹⁷ Huang is now the executive for the PCT General Assembly Research and Development Committee.

“Since ‘justice ‘ was one of the main themes in Scripture as well as in Christian tradition, this theme was quite prevalent in the preaching ... during the PCT’s early years. For instance, Thomas Barclay¹⁸, a great missionary from Scotland, used consistently the concept of Justice to describe the Godhead and Christ ... Due to the restraints of theological fashion at that time and the political pressures the church faced in mission lands, justice was interpreted by most churches as an ideal existing only in the next world. ... A liberative approach to Christian mission has emerged since the 1960’s. ... The liberative way of mission aims at eliminating the socio-political injustice that creates suffering, poverty and oppression. It is a mission not with a piece of bread but with a promise to shape a free and independent baker, a promise to confront the evil powers within demonic structures. This liberative style of mission can also be called, according to the biblical understanding, the prophetic way of mission. In the 1970’s the PCT moved away from its earlier priestly approach to mission and began to emphasize the prophetic role of mission. (A Theology of Self-Determination 1996:127-9)

Having briefly and inadequately sketched the historical, organizational and theological factors that shaped the faith practice of the PCT, I now proceed to the topic itself – how the PCT contributed to Taiwan’s democratization.

(3) The Statement on Our National Fate 1971

In 1971 the ROC lost its seat in the United Nations, and President Nixon announced that he would visit China in February 1972. A panic swept Taiwan, while hard line of Chiang Kai-shek to “recover the mainland” continued unchanged. There were fears that a deal between the US and China would sweep the people of Taiwan into the dustbin of history along with Chiang. The KMT controlled every avenue for public discussion, turning it into public propaganda. Civil society or academic organizations outside of KMT control were non-existent¹⁹. Martial law, the triple network of security organizations, with secret informers everywhere, kept Taiwan frozen in silence. James Scott (1990) once commented “If the expression speak truth to power still has a utopian ring to it, even in modern democracies, this is surely because it is so rarely practised”. How much more so in what was the most advanced Leninist state in the world – the ROC of 1971.

The quote is from A Theology of Self Determination 1996:127-9.

¹⁸ English Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan 1875-1935. Founder of Tainan Seminary, the Taiwan Church News (first western printing press in Taiwan), translator of the Bible into romanized Hoklo, and negotiator of the surrender of Tainan to the Japanese in 1895.

¹⁹ The Diaoyuai Movement of 1970 was a response to overseas Chinese, and fitted well with the KMT anti-Japanese sentiments. 大學 Magazine expressed liberal sentiments but not political critique.

Under the leadership of its soft-spoken new General Secretary, Gao Jun-ming²⁰, the General Assembly executive committee issued a Public Statement on Our National Fate on December 16, 1971. In doing so they were “*convinced that we speak not only for our church, but for all our compatriots.*” If the Statement²¹ seems mild and unremarkable now it is because it’s ideas are now “good sense” in Taiwan, a situation created in a 20- year process of political transformation which it began. *But in 1971 it was an act of courage.* With the reaction of the KMT, and even the rest of the church unknown, without the convenience of fax or e-mail to get it out to the rest of the world, it was in the full sense of the word a prophetic and kairoic act.

Looking at the text (part of which is quoted at the beginning of this paper) we can see a number of assertions and implications

1. The PCT is a voice for all Taiwanese
2. “People of Taiwan” includes all residents of the island, bound in a common fate
3. They claim the right of a “People” (人民)²² to determine their own destiny.
4. A people’s right to determine its own destiny is ordained by God.
5. They reject rule by Communist China.
6. There should be new elections for “all representatives to the highest government bodies, to succeed the present representatives”.
7. Democratization will enable Taiwan to “find an honourable place among the world nations” even without UN membership.
8. “Renewal and progress” will let “justice and harmony reign within Taiwan.

The statement gained a favourable response from the US State Department, and the Vatican, which sent a letter affirming human rights, freedom, and peace. While criticized in Taiwan, it did not provoke a strong reaction from the KMT, perhaps because fundamentally it supported the government and did not explicitly question the One China policy or the ROC.

In March 1972 Rev. Gao wrote an article in the Taiwan Church News explaining that

²⁰ 高俊明 is the grandson of one of the first Presbyterian converts in Tainan, and part Ping-pu (plains aborigine). The Gao clan is large, fairly well-off, and strong Presbyterians. A graduate of Taiwan Theological Seminary (1951), he was led by James Dickson to undertake evangelism in the aboriginal areas, he eventually became principal of the PCT seminary for aboriginal clergy, Yushan Theological College. Mrs. Gao (Li Li-zhen) lost her two brothers in the 228 massacre, then only high school students. So when he became General Secretary in 1970, Gao seemed indeed to encapsulate everything that the PCT was about. In June 2000 President Chen made him a national policy advisor.

²¹ The entire Statement is appended to the paper.

²² The December 16 Chinese text does not include the phrase “and the United Nations has affirmed” which appears in the English text (dated December 30).

the Statement “ an expression of Christian citizenship, not interference in politics, a confession of faith, not a political act”. In a perfect statement of the classic Calvin/Knox theory he explained that the corporate church must not keep silence on political issues when the following two situations occur:

“ (1) *When political power from without violates the nature of the church and the carrying out of her mission on earth, and*

(2) when, similarly, political power from without violates human rights, that is, the dignity of human existence ... for the origin of human rights lies in man’s having been created in the image of God.”

And a confession of Calvinist faith it was, but no less for this a political act. For the first time in KMT Taiwan some truth had been publicly spoken to power, and not resulted in immediate repression. Certainly the well-phrased statement said no more than it could legally, but the key words of peoplehood, elections, and self-determination had been uttered in a public document in Taiwan and the door to explore these was unlocked.

The PCT followed up on this statement with a number of initiatives (Chen Nan-zhou 1996:93-7). A “Faithful Servant” education movement was initiated within the church, “in the hope that the church should be a constant voice of conscience, calling for justice and truth to benefit all of society”. Clearly the leadership felt the need to educate its flock in contextualized Calvinist values. In the General Assembly a “Church and World Committee” (世界教會關係) research committee was set up. Through the 1970’s it sponsored seminars on human rights, political issues, and the future of Taiwan, as well as promoting practical involvement of the PCT in social issues. Overseas, Taiwanese in exile organized “Formosan Christians for Self-Determination” in 1972 to promote this cause internationally²³.

By avoiding the forbidden words “Taiwan Independence” (台獨) and seeking peaceful change through elections, rather than a revolutionary overthrow of the KMT, the PCT opened a door that lead to change within Taiwan. It was not until 1972 that Chiang Ching-kuo began his “Taiwanization” program of slowly bringing Taiwanese into high positions in party and government²⁴, and 1982 when he made his famous “I am a Taiwanese” speech. It would not be until 1975 that the Taiwanese oppositionists

²³ The Would United Formosans for Independence (WUFI 台獨聯盟) was founded in 1970, but had no voice in Taiwan. In the same year WUFI members attempted to assassinate Chiang Ching-kuo in New York. The important thing here is that the PCT served as a nexus linking Taiwanese movements in exile, people in Taiwan, and organizations and governments in the wider world.

²⁴ Among them Lee Teng-hui, made a minister without portfolio in Chiang’s cabinet of 1972.

led by Kang Ning-xiang , Huang Xin-jie, Zhang Jun-hong and Yao Jia-wen began to organize the *Tangwai* (黨外) around the short-lived journal Taiwan Political Review. It would be twenty years, 1991 and 1992, before the “re-election of all representatives to the highest government bodies” took place.

4) Our Appeal Concerning the Bible, the Church and the Nation

In 1975 the government seized Romanized Bibles, Chiang Kai-shek died in April, and in December the second supplementary election (for 37 legislative seats) was being held. On November 18 the PCT Executive Committee issued its second statement – Our Appeal Concerning the Bible, the Church and the Nation. This long document reaffirmed the 1971 Statement and then addressed the government, and the church, on a number of issues.

To the government it proposed:

1. Freedom to publish the Bible in any language
2. Allowing the PCT to participate in the WCC “to help overcome isolation in foreign relations”
3. To establish a relationship of trust and confidence between state and church
4. To “eliminate discrimination based on provincial origin or party membership” because “we are all brothers and sisters living together in Taiwan”.
5. To preserve human rights and be concerned for the welfare of the people

It called on the Presbyterian Church itself:

1. To be concerned for justice
2. To promote unity within the church and “understand our own doctrine”
3. To achieve financial self-support and become a giving church
4. To establish closer relationships with other churches
5. “To get involved in the actualities of modern society and through service seek to change the conditions of society”.

In the Appeal we see the church addressing some of the basic conditions of democratization – establishing a civil dialogue, guaranteeing basic liberties, and affirming universal equality of all citizens. The last item “to preserve human rights ...” was really calling on the carpetbagger regime focused on recovering the mainland to become a government of and for Taiwan. The appeal to its own congregations and members shows the PCT leadership’s efforts to shape Christian citizenship as well as hold the church together in the face of continued KMT pressures

to split or control it. Certainly the fact that the PCT was a large and internationally well-connected church was one reason it did not meet the repression that individual advocates of political change continued to meet until as late as 1991.

During the 1970's and 80's the PCT actively courted new relationships with overseas churches other than its traditional Presbyterian partners, and it featured them prominently as guests of honour at every annual General Assembly meeting. In the 1980's these visits often included meetings with opposition and government figures, so that political scientist Lu Ya-li could write "The church's international connections are very useful to the opposition movement" (Lu Ya-li in Cheng and Haggard 1992:134). I would like to plead the anthropologist's privilege and tell some tales from the field here.

One famous visitor was US Senator (and Presbyterian elder) John Glenn about 1982. The government had him most of the time, but as a Presbyterian he insisted on a meeting with the PCT and showing his concern for Rev. Gao, then in prison (see below). The PCT had arranged a dinner with several Tangwai politicians as well. Knowing this, the KMT held up his plane returning from Kinmen, pleading a terrible storm had closed the airport. Everybody waited and Glenn finally had that dinner at 10:30 at night.

One result of the expanded links with overseas churches was more missionaries, there in part to be witnesses and interpreters of the church's position to their home churches. Missionaries did most of the translating of PCT statements and reports into English, German, and Japanese. And sometimes smuggled them out of the country (there were no faxes or emails then and all mail was censored into the mid-80's). Canadian Presbyterian missionary Wilma Welsh carried the 1977 "Declaration on Human Rights" out to Hong Kong under newspapers in her cat box. English missionary John Beebee was expelled from Taiwan for doing the English translation of the same. The church made a more or less²⁵ systematic effort to educate missionaries in an annual orientation conference, where in 1984 I translated for opposition legislator (and Presbyterian elder) Zhang Jun-xiong (now Premier in Chen Shui-bian's government). He gave a 2 hour talk for them on Taiwan's political situation. Not all missionaries got the point, but I spent many happy days escorting foreign church visitors to visit various opposition politicians and church social projects. On the other side of the Pacific, it was often through the churches that visits of opposition figures to North

²⁵ The PCT was always better at making statements and holding committee meetings than organizing itself to do practical tasks.

America arranged itineraries, until the 1990's when the DPP and secular Taiwanese organizations were able to facilitate this task.

In the 1970's and 1980's increased financial and missionary resources both within and from outside of Taiwan made it possible for the PCT to undertake numerous social service and community development projects and develop university student work. The PCT also actively promoted credit unions and co-operatives. All of these became tiny points for the construction of civil society free of KMT Party control. University student centres especially became a free space for students²⁶. And in rural and aboriginal areas local churches, especially those served by younger clergy, became the only place where political views other than the KMT line were heard and debated. It must be said that this was never the case in many of the of the PCT's 1000 congregations²⁷. Many controlled by KMT elders or clergy did not even subscribe to the Taiwan Church News. But there were hundreds who did.

The Taiwan Church News (教會公報) was the first newspaper in Taiwan, and the official publication of the PCT. A monthly until the late 1970's, it then became a weekly. By the 1980's it expanded to 24 pages, and included much political and social commentary, often reporting news that no other paper would touch. While in the 1980's a flood of short-lived²⁸ opposition monthly magazines was available in the cities, only the Church News usually got to its readers in small villages and towns. Sometimes it did disappear in the mail, but it was only officially seized once – the “228” issue in 1987 – and this provoked the first official demonstration by the PCT qua church, in Tainan. In the end the Garrison Command had to apologize and reprint the whole issue.

Where the congregation was open, or the minister brave, the weekly sermon, announcements, and midweek Bible study and prayer meeting would also be spaces where the messages like the Appeal or the Faithful Servant movement would be

²⁶ Until Martial Law ended in 1987 it was illegal for students to organize associations uniting students from more than one school. All student groups were controlled by the China Youth Corps. The legal loophole of the church enabled them to organize inter-campus activities without CYC interference. My colleagues in aboriginal student work and I used this to organize the first all island aboriginal student organization in the early 1980's.

²⁷ In 1971 there were 927 congregations and about 160,000 members. By 1991 it was 1,126 congregations and some 210,000 members.

²⁸ Short lived because they were banned or seized by the police almost as fast as they could churn them out. In the late 1980's when I lived in the small eastern city of Taidong, where they were not available, my first stop on trips to Kaohsiung would be a magazines store where they would be kept, literally, under the counter and had to be asked for.

communicated. In these sacred spaces, critical thought informed by Biblical images was also given an important context – that suffering or injustice did not call for revenge or reversal, but transformation through forgiving love. This was fundamental to the success of Taiwan’s political transformation.

(5) The Declaration on Human Rights 1977

In August 1977 Jimmy Carter sent Secretary of State Vance to China to discuss normalization of relations. In Taiwan the government promoted a campaign of writing letters to Carter not to sell out Taiwan. In response to this, the executive of the General Assembly issued A Declaration on Human Rights “to the President of the United States, to all countries concerned, and to the Christian churches throughout the world”. The Declaration pushed the envelope, both theologically and politically, and still remains controversial on both counts.

Theologically it confessed that “our church ... believes that human rights and a land in which each of us has a stake (鄉土)²⁹ are gifts bestowed by God”. The Biblical basis of this second term is the promised land, but does God promise land to everyone – and if so what about twice promised lands? This does not come from Calvin but from the Taiwanese context, and so even in the PCT remains a controversial faith statement. It is, after all, sacralized nationalism. But we must leave this issue for another conference.

Politically, after reaffirming the 1971 Statement that “*the future of Taiwan shall be determined by the 17 million people who live there*” the Declaration utters the unspeakable word : “*In order to achieve our goal of independence and freedom for the people of Taiwan in this critical international situation, we urge our government to face reality and take effective measures whereby Taiwan may become a new and independent country (新而獨立的國家)*”. For the first time there it was in Taiwan, in writing, in public, and officially signed³⁰ by Rev. Weng, Deputy Moderator, and Rev.

²⁹ “A land in which each of us has a stake” is the translation given to “鄉土” (hiong-tho). The term is a code word, especially fulsome and emotion filled in Hoklo, much less so in Mandarin where it simply means “rural”. But its use in Taiwan is better translated as “homeland”, Taiwan specifically, as in the PCT “homeland theology” or the Taiwanese Hoklo literary movement of the 1970’s (鄉土文學).

³⁰ Unlike the other two statements, this one was literally signed in writing, and the signatures continue to be included in reprints of the statement even today. This was an act of great personal courage since the last person who had tried this was Peng Ming-min in 1964. In one of those divinely inspired twists of history, the moderator Rev Chao was out of the country and so it was signed by Rev. Weng (翁修恭), who in the late 1980’s became vice-president Lee Teng-hui’s pastor when Lee joined the PCT. Weng then held weekly private prayer with Lee at home, since Lee was rarely able to attend Sunday services.

Gao, General Secretary.

The Interior Ministry sent a letter to the church stating that a small group was abusing its position in the church, had harmed the country, and exceeded the sphere of religion. It demanded they be punished and the Declaration withdrawn. Many government officials left the PCT. One Mandarin-speaking congregation left. The Seven Star Presbytery³¹ met and publicly disassociated itself with the Declaration. Other churches in Taiwan gave various degrees of condemnation, with the Catholic Bishops Conference calling it “immature and contradictory” (Chen Nan-zhou 1996:114-118). But despite visits from police and security agents to ministers and church members around Taiwan, the visible presence of spies and police everywhere around the life of the General Assembly, and intensified efforts of the KMT to inconvenience, split or control the church, the PCT stood behind this “small group of people”. After tense and tumultuous sessions both the North Synod (which included Seven Star Presbytery) and the General Assembly the following spring voted overwhelmingly in support of the Declaration, and renewed Rev. Gao’s term as General Secretary.

The importance of the Declaration for Taiwan’s democratic transition should not be underestimated. It was here that the police state lost its nerve. Under martial law this was treason. Ten years later, in 1987, Presbyterian evangelist Tsai You-quan and layman Hsu Cao-de were sentenced to ten years for including “We advocate that Taiwan should be independent” in the charter of the Association of Political Prisoners they established. In 1990 Taiwanese Canadian Columbus Leo, a Presbyterian with an uncle serving as minister in the PCT, was arrested and served 8 months for shouting “Taiwan Independence” in a political rally. But here was this Declaration being published everywhere, reaffirmed in repeated church meetings over the years, and the KMT could not stop it. There was a big Presbyterian hole in the ROC dragnet. The police state was not all-powerful.

In more theoretical terms what the PCT’s Three Statements did was to create a narrative of Taiwan using both the Bible and history as texts. In the words of Prasenjit Duara (1995:235):

Through complex transactions between language and history, narratives acquire the power of historical persuasion even though they conceal, repress, and abstract from dispersed histories. Historical groups able to do so mobilize a narrative to transform the meanings of a culture and community have the power to produce history not only as

³¹ Covering the eastern half of Taipei and NE Taiwan. Ironically it is Rev. Weng’s own Presbytery.

the past but also for the future.

And 1977 was the year that the democratic opposition in Taiwan began to produce history as an identifiable historical group – the Tangwai.

(6) Through Love and Suffering

In the Provincial Assembly elections of 19 November 1977, the term “Tangwai” was first used of an identifiable Taiwanese opposition group, which “adopted a common platform emphasizing two themes: liberal democracy and self determination.” (Cheng and Haggard 1992:34). They did remarkably well, electing 22 members in the 77 member Provincial Assembly, and 4 of 20 county/city magistrates. Among these were future chairmen of the DPP Huang Xin-jie, Xu Xin-liang, and Lin Yi-xiong. The election is seen as the beginning of Taiwan’s political opposition movement. Although none of them are Christian, and the PCT did not involve itself in this or future elections, it is notable that their two common themes are exactly those of the Three Statements.

That election also saw the beginning of another trend – popular direct action against KMT rule. The Zhongli Incident was a spontaneous mass protest against KMT ballot box stuffing. A crowd rioted and burned down the police station in which the crime took place. This was the first time since 1947 that the street had spoken. Direct action of a more deliberate kind also bracketed the year, with Vice-President Xie receiving a letter bomb (January 1977) which took off his hand, and the arrest of a group of students who had formed the “Taiwan People’s Liberation Front” (January 1978). It seemed that Taiwan could go either way – peaceful transformation or violent resistance.

The cancellation of the December 1978 Legislative elections with the establishment of US-China diplomatic relations seemed to tilt the balance towards violence. In the spring of 1979 two political cases involving removal of Tangwai officeholders (Yu Teng-fa and Xu Xin-liang) signaled a political crackdown. The Tangwai began to divide into two lines – the more moderate faction represented by Kang Ning-xiang and his magazine The 80’s (八十年代 June 1979) and a more aggressive one centered around the magazine Formosa (美麗島 August 1979) led by Shi Ming-de and other members of the Provincial Assembly. These had organized the first political demonstration in a generation on January 22, 1979 – the Qiaotou protest of about 100 people against the arrest of Yu Teng-fa. In September the KMT returned the gesture

with a violent demonstration of Manlanders and “anti-Communist fighters” outside the reception marking the first issue of Formosa magazine. The KMT had brought politicized ethnicity onto the street. On December 10 a Formosa rally in Kaohsiung to mark Human Rights Day was surrounded and broken up by military police, provoking a riot. The KMT immediately arrested everyone associated with the Formosa group, calling it an armed rebellion (叛亂). Shi Ming-de escaped and was helped in hiding by a network of Presbyterians, including Rev. Gao. Shi was captured in late January.

The downward spiral to violence continued. On February 28, the anniversary of “228”, three men broke into the home of arrested Provincial Assemblyman Lin Yi-xiong and knifed his mother and three daughters. Only one daughter survived. The murderers have never been found, even though Lin’s home was under full-time surveillance by police spies at the time.

The events of that day are worth recounting in unusual detail³², because they show the role that the PCT played the rest of that decade as Taiwan went through the struggle for democracy. Mrs. Gao Li Li-zhen was at the Taipei Christian Women’s Association monthly meeting. About 2PM she received an urgent call asking her to come to the PCT General Assembly office immediately. “They’ve come for him” was her first thought, but Rev. Gao was still there and told her of the attack on the Lins, asking her to go to the hospital where the surviving daughter was in surgery, to comfort the family³³. About 10 pm Rev. Tin from Tainan Theological Seminary also arrived of his own initiative. Rev. Tin immediately gathered the friends and family and large crowd of journalists asking them to join him in prayer. After praying for the family he continued “*And we pray that you may protect all those who think differently from us and help us to understand their point of view. Grant O Lord that the 18 million inhabitants of Taiwan may live together in peace and harmony and unity*” (Tin 1982:82). Tin was warned by the police to stay away for his own safety.

A year later Mrs. Lin asked the PCT to hold a Christian memorial service for the three victims, as of then still unburied. Some three hundred people attended of whom nearly a third were security officers (1982:154). Rev. Tin preached the sermon, titled “the Cross of Reconciliation” on this text from Ephesians 2:14-16: “*Jesus Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and so reconcile us both*

³² All this drawn from Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, John Jyigiokk Tin, ed. Tainan, 1982

³³ It must be remembered that the Lins were not Christian.

to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.” After an explanation of the Christian doctrine of salvation he concluded: “ Let the 18 million people of Taiwan make a new beginning – that in Taiwan, from now on, such a terrible thing will never happen again; that everyone in Jesus will be at peace with one another, forgive one another, and repent before the face of God and ask for pardon. May Taiwan’s society become a loving society, a hopeful society, and a trusting society. I hope to God that the blood shed by the Lin family is not in vain.”

Political accounts³⁴ which, correctly, mention the role of the PCT in supporting the democratic opposition movement and the DPP in the decade that followed, miss the main story. Through the 1980’s the PCT did not issue any more Statements or actively involve itself in elections. But at every turn it emphasized the message of reconciliation and unity of all the people of Taiwan, forgiveness and non-violence, and love expressed through the acceptance of suffering. That message was expressed in its own life.

On April 24, 1980 Rev Gao was arrested and charged with assisting the escape of Shi Ming-de. Other Presbyterian clergy, laypeople, and a Lutheran minister³⁵, were also arrested. Gao was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment. It was the best thing that ever happened to the PCT. Vilified in the KMT media as a charlatan, ingrate, communist, criminal and traitor to the Chinese nation, Gao became a Presbyterian saint in prison. His letters were published in the Church News every week, and the General Assembly reaffirmed him as General Secretary in absentia. Pope John Paul II sent a special envoy to visit him in prison (much to the despair of the local Catholic hierarchy). In prison he ministered to other prisoners and won converts, coming to be called a modern apostle Paul. A steady trickle of foreign church leaders visited him in prison, and he received much better treatment than the other Kaohsiung Incident prisoners. His imprisonment gave a dramatic legitimacy to his leadership in formulating the Three Statements, and the reputation of the PCT in Taiwan and the world.

Outside of prison, the PCT began a long-term project of ministering to all the families of the imprisoned politicians. This included financial support. The most dramatic case was still the Lin family. Mrs. Lin left Taiwan and tried to sell the apartment. Cursed by this murder, it was unsaleable, both for traditional religious reasons and contemporary political ones. The PCT bought the house and made it into Gi-kong Presbyterian Church (義光 Light of Righteousness). Many opposition political

³⁴ Tien Hung-mao 1989:114, Tien Hung-mao and Lu Ya-li in Cheng and Haggard 1992:49, 52 and 134

³⁵ Rev. Wu Wen was subsequently defrocked by the Lutheran Church in Taiwan for his crimes, and accepted into the Presbyterian ministry. He now teaches at Tainan Seminary.

activists became members, and services were always attended by the not so secret police. The church always welcomed them warmly to hear the gospel preached.

The PCT continued to seek dialogue with the KMT, and in April 1984 successfully invited Vice-President Lee Teng-hui to address the General Assembly annual meeting. A devout Christian, Lee was not a Presbyterian, but a member of the Assembly Hall, an evangelical sect. Lee gave a significant address (Taiwan Church News #1678 April 29, 1984) on “faith and love” entitled “Faith is made perfect in practice: On religion and politics”. He spoke in Hoklo Taiwanese. Rev. Gao was released from prison that August. From this time on Lee established a close relationship with the PCT, and finally became a member of Rev. Weng’s congregation about 1986. To what extent “Mr. Democracy” was shaped by his Presbyterian pastors is a story yet to be told, but it seems clear that Lee expressed that faith in his commitment to democracy and an inclusive definition of Taiwanese, his patient waiting for the right kairos to make a move, his Calvinist stubbornness, even authoritarianism, towards those who opposed his vision of a new Taiwan, and his willingness to speak truth to power, saying things that infuriate China.

(7) Breaking the Final Taboo – 228 Peace Memorial Day

The February 28, 1947 protest and massacre was the ultimate symbol of hatred between Taiwanese and Mainlanders. It is the birthday of modern Taiwanese history. But for 40 years the very number “228” was banned in Taiwan – in addresses, bus numbers, and speech. No collective memory was considered more potently dangerous than 228. On the 40th anniversary of that incident the PCT held a memorial service for the victims of 228. Rev. Gao issued a statement: “As we remember this tragic historical incident of 228 which happened in our land (我們鄉土) and show our concern for the families of it’s victims, we rid ourselves of all notions of hatred and revenge. Through the love of the cross we must build a society of reconciliation. Mainlanders and Taiwanese (本省人與外省人) can rid themselves of prejudice, accept one another, and together build a homeland (鄉土) filled with truth, justice and peace”. The statement and articles on 228 were printed in the February 22 issue #1825 of Taiwan Church News, which was immediately seized by the Garrison Command.

Two years later, in 1989, an ecumenical 228 Reconciliation Day worship in Taipei brought together Presbyterian and other church leaders in a campaign to establish 228 as a national day of reconciliation (228 和平日) That August the first 228 monument

was erected in the city of Jiayi, with funds raised privately by Presbyterians. By this time “the great transition” (Tien 1989) had taken place. The Tangwai had become the DPP (September 28, 1986). Martial Law was ended (July 15, 1987). Lee Teng-hui had succeeded Chiang Ching-kuo as President (January 13, 1988). On February 11, 1992 the narrative of history was officially rewritten, with the Executive Yuan passing a report that the 228 was not rebellion but a result of improper government actions. On February 28, 1995, eight years after the PCT broke the silence of this hidden transcript, President Lee spoke at the dedication of the national 228 Monument in Taipei, calling it “*a lighthouse symbolizing our country’s democratic politics, free society, and people’s well-being. Its gentle light will shine in people’s hearts forever, leading us towards a future filled with hope*”. I don’t know if Rev. Gao was among the invited guests at that ceremony, but surely he must have recalled that desperate time in 1971 when he drafted a Statement that expressed the belief that internal renewal would bring “our people an assurance that justice and harmony reign within”.

(10) Lesson for the Day

There is much more that could be recounted and analysed, but I believe I have made the case that the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan did make a crucial and significant contribution to the democratization of Taiwan, and its peaceful transition into a multicultural society free from the ghosts of its past. I propose several lessons for discussion. First, that it is not enough to assume that political transformation comes mechanically as an entailment of economic globalization and institutional reform. These are only the stage upon which actors bring about change. Second, ideas, symbols, and in particular religious faith, are important elements in social change. Third, “History” is not a linear chain of cause and effect, but can be changed through the collective courageous action of human beings. In this action both elements must be joined – courageous individuals, and a supporting collectivity. Rev. Gao could not have been heard as an individual, for courageous individuals filled the prisons of Green Island. Yet the Presbyterian Church would not have played the role it did had it not been for the leadership of Rev. Gao and others. Without subscribing to the great man theory of history, we need to give the free actions of individuals their proper place in social analysis. Fourth, ethnic divisions and historic wrongs do not have to lead to a cycle of violence or settling of accounts in the name of “justice”. “No peace without justice” is a slogan, “no justice without peace” is the lesson. “Faith, hope and love” are not just sentiments but powerful political forces.

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