

Survey Project Watch

Constructing a Public Realm in Taiwan*

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This project attempts to discover the relationships between socially engaged Buddhist groups (人間或入世佛團體：慈濟、佛光山、法鼓山、中台禪寺、靈鷲山、複智) and social capital, civil society, and citizen participation in democratic processes. A questionnaire was designed to test indicators relevant to the above areas, when possible using wording the same as or similar to that used in the values and social change projects carried out by Professors Chiu, Chang, Fu (瞿海源、章英華、傅仰止) and others. An interview schedule was also drawn up to obtain qualitative data from members and cadre of the above groups on questions similar or supplemental to those in the survey.

The Survey Research Centre carried out the survey in July, 2004, a time chosen to be long enough after the Presidential election not to

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be tainted by it, and although the events in the months following kept electoral politics very much in the news, nothing in the initial perusal of sample results or in interviews shows contamination.

The initial aim of the survey was to obtain a random, stratified sample of persons over 25 years of age (with some experience in society), 100 members of each of the above Buddhist groups and 250 from the 'general public,' i.e. persons with no affiliation with or participation in those groups. A telephone sampling procedure was used. However, because some of the groups are quite small, although interviewers made over 18,000 phone calls, the target number was reached only for 慈濟 and the general public. Adequate numbers for analytical purposes were obtained, however, for 佛光山 and 法鼓山. A total sample of 649 was obtained, sufficient to compare Buddhists with the general public and the three just-mentioned groups with each other.

At this point, only preliminary analysis has been done of the survey material, but I have found some results which indicate that Buddhists are more likely than members of the general public to (1) have richer social capital networks, (2) be more active in social groups (excluding the Buddhist group with which they are affiliated), (3) be more active in environmental groups, and (4) be more likely to vote. Interview data, though of far fewer informants (50) tends to substantiate these findings and also links Buddhist attitudes to their religious outlooks.