



**World Day of Prayer**  
**Prepared by the WDP Committee of Taiwan**  
**March 3, 2023**

**“I Have Heard About Your Faith”**  
**Country Background Information**

Geographical Location, Climate, and Environment

Taiwan is an island country measuring approximately 36,000 square kilometers, located in the Western Pacific region and in the center of the East and Southeast Asia Island Arcs. It is composed of the main island and many offshore islands, including the Penghu Islands, Kinmen, the Matsu Islands, and over 100 other islands and skerries. The main island sits between Japan and the Philippines with the Tropic of Cancer crossing through its southern half. It runs from north to south, aligning with the convergent boundary of the Eurasian Plate and the Philippine Sea Plate. Two-thirds of the main island’s terrain is mountain forest. Taiwan’s tallest mountain—Yu Shan (also known as Jade Mountain)—approaches 4,000 meters in height and is the tallest summit in Northeast Asia. The western third of the island’s terrain consists of plains, basins, hills, and plateaus and is home to over 20 million people. The capital city—Taipei City—sits in northern Taiwan while other major cities run long the west coast. As for public transportation, railroads, highspeed rails, and highways conveniently connect the urban and rural areas, and mass rapid transit systems (MRT) continue to expand within major cities. The unique geographical characteristics and convenient transportation network give the people in Taiwan easy access to either the mountain woods or the ocean shores all within one to two hours of travel.

There are nine national parks in Taiwan. Among them, the Taroko National Park attracts the most tourists with its splendid gorge scenery. The South Penghu Marine National Park and the Dongsha Atoll National Park preserve the precious coasts and marine resources.

Because of its location in the Ring of Fire, Taiwan and its surrounding islands experience approximately 1,000 sensible earthquakes each year. Thankfully, they seldom lead to serious disasters. Over the past century, only 12 earthquakes reached a magnitude of 6.2 on the Richter scale. A major earthquake with a magnitude of 7.3 occurred on September 21, 1999, in Central Taiwan (also known as the 921 Earthquake) and was the most disastrous in recent history with more than 13,000 casualties and missing people. Since then, the government has focused on emergency alerts, training on earthquake disaster prevention, seismic specifications of buildings, and soil and water conservation, so that the people in Taiwan may coexist with nature. While causing damages, earthquakes in Taiwan have also brought about a valuable underground resource, namely geothermally heated groundwater. Hot and cold springs containing different levels of various minerals can be found throughout the country, even in rivers and oceans.

Taiwan lies where the tropical monsoon and the subtropical monsoon meet. The temperature in summertime, from May to October, may reach as high as 38 degrees Celsius. There is abundant rainfall brought in by typhoons, but, because of over development, mudslides often occur in certain mountain areas and cause great devastation. During wintertime, from December to February, the country is usually prone to droughts while the temperature may drop below 10 degrees Celsius. The climate also differs from plains to high mountains, ranging from the torrid zone, the subtropical zone, the temperate zone to the frigid zone respectively. However, the average annual temperature has been rising each year due to global warming.

The unique island geography and climate conditions have resulted in the considerable diversity of animal and plant species. The distribution of various types of trees, from broadleaved to needle-leaved, is also based on different climate conditions. The forests host over 250,000 species that make up 3.8% of all the species in the world. Furthermore, Taiwan has a high proportion of endemic species, with 64% of mammals and 13% of avian species. For example, Taiwan black bears, Taiwan serows, leopard cats, Formosan barbets, Taiwan blue pheasants, Mikado pheasants, Taiwan blue magpies, Formosan landlocked salmon, Taiwan broad-tailed swallowtail butterflies, Formosa lilies, Taiwan pleione, and Formosan Lady's Slipper are all endemic species found in Taiwan. Unfortunately, some are listed as endangered species.

### People

With an approximate population of 23.6 million people, Taiwan is a densely populated multi-ethnic country with a majority of its population made up by descendants of immigrants from China during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Prior to the influx of immigrants, Taiwan was home to the Austronesian people. The Austronesian people, who have lived on the island for at least 6,000 years, are generally categorized into two groups—the plains indigenous people<sup>1</sup> and the officially recognized indigenous people<sup>2</sup>. Because of colonization, the plains indigenous people who originally resided in northern and western Taiwan have been assimilated over the years. While there has been much effort made over the past three decades to revive the language and culture of the plains indigenous people, it has proven to be difficult to retrieve what has already been lost. The 16 officially recognized indigenous groups that still retain their languages and cultures amount to approximately 570,000 people, or 2% of the general population. The largest indigenous group with approximately 220,000 people is the Amis while the extremely small population of 356 people makes Kananavu the smallest. Just like the plains indigenous groups, the officially recognized indigenous groups also desperately need preservation of their languages and cultures.

The Minnan people and the Hakka who emigrated from the southeastern coastal areas of the Great Qing Empire in the 17th century make up the majority of the population in Taiwan. Moreover, there are also those who migrated from all over China after World War II.

Due to the shift in family structures since the 1990s, many Taiwanese men chose to marry women from other countries. These women—mostly from Southeast Asian countries—who immigrated to Taiwan by marriage have formed another significant group among immigrants. According to statistics, the number of new immigrants in 2020 is about 560,000.

The characteristic of Taiwan as a society of immigrants is also reflected in its language. With the 16 officially recognized indigenous languages, Hokkien, Hakka, and other dialects used by descendants of Chinese immigrants, and the mother languages spoken by the new immigrants from other countries, Taiwan is essentially a multilingual society. Mandarin, whose use was enforced by the government through a “National Language Movement” starting in 1946, is the

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<sup>1</sup> A list of plains indigenous groups in Taiwan: Kavalan, Ketagalan, Taokas, Pazeh, Papora, Babuza, Hoanya, Siraya, and Makatao.

<sup>2</sup> A list of 16 officially recognized indigenous groups: Pinuyumayan, Amis/Pangcah, Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, Tsou, Thao, Paiwan, Rukai, Tao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla'alua, and Kananavu. Specifically, Kavalan is one of the extreme few plains indigenous ethnic groups that still exist and the only one that is officially recognized by the Taiwanese government.

most commonly used language. The National Language Movement, which lasted for more than 40 years, prohibited the use of other languages and dialects at schools and made Mandarin the major language on public occasions and for the media. The movement has significantly hindered the inheritance of the other languages used by the various ethnic groups.

Although there were clashes among the different ethnic groups in Taiwan in the past, they have gradually gained mutual understanding and respect towards one another as a result of social changes and inter-ethnic marriages that have been occurring for over a century. As a whole, both indigenous groups and descendants of immigrants who came to live on the island at different times have been making great progress for their Taiwanese identity.

### History

Ancient ruins in eastern Taiwan dated approximately 50,000 years ago prove that there have been human activities since ancient times. The earliest human fossil found in Taiwan is that of Tso-chen Man dated about 20,000 years ago. Ancient ruins from different eras have been discovered throughout the country indicating that Taiwanese ancestors set foot on the island a long time ago. In the 16th century, a Portuguese commercial ship sailed by the then forest island. Out of excitement, the sailors on the ship exclaimed, “Ilha Formosa”, which means a beautiful island. Up to this day, Formosa remains a favorite name to the inhabitants on the island. It has become a popular theme for many beautiful poems, songs, paintings, and other art pieces.

Mercantilism rose to the mainstream during the Age of Discovery in the 17th century. Because of Taiwan’s advantageous location for maritime trade, the Dutch set foot on southern Taiwan in 1624. Shortly after that, the Spanish occupied northern Taiwan. The two factions competed against each other in commerce and colonization. After the Dutch drove away the Spanish, they used Taiwan as the distribution center for their international trade, exporting rice, sugar, deer leather, and spices to various regions in East Asia.

Subsequently, a Ming dynasty loyalist named Cheng Cheng-Kung—also known as Koxinga—from the Great Ming Empire drove away the Dutch in 1662. He and his descendants founded the Kingdom of Tungning in Taiwan. The Koxinga family’s regime in Taiwan lasted for a little over two decades before the Great Qing Empire took over the island.

In 1895, the Qing Empire ceded Taiwan to Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki, starting the 50-year period of Japanese rule. The Japanese initiated Taiwan’s modernization through infrastructure, setting up systems for water, electricity, public roads, and the railroad. They also introduced western education to Taiwan. As a result, Taiwanese’ living conditions and quality of life significantly improved. However, because the Japanese government adopted national assimilation as their colonization policy, the Taiwanese were discriminated against and received unfair treatment in many aspects. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church were allowed to continue their ministries. At the same time, with the immigration of Japanese nationals, other Christian denominations, such as the Japanese Christian Church, the Anglican Church in Japan, the Holiness Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Salvation Army also began their ministries in Taiwan.

The Japanese were defeated in the summer of 1945, effectively putting World War II and the Japanese rule in Taiwan to an end. Afterwards, Taiwan was placed under the administrative control of the government of the Republic of China (“ROC”) on behalf of the Allied forces. Because of cultural differences and the ruling government’s extreme political and economic

policies, the Taiwanese society fell into a state of conflict and unrest, which then led to the February 28 incident in 1947 where local Taiwanese clashed with ROC officials and military personnel. The incident itself and subsequent purging resulted in the wrongful arrests and government murders of over 20,000 Taiwanese elites. Broken families and the authoritarian rule that followed mutilated the hearts and souls of the people.

Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Chinese nationalist party (known as the Kuomintang, or KMT) and the ROC government lost the civil war in China to the Chinese Communist Party and fled to Taiwan in 1949 with over 1 million Chinese nationals. The postwar depression and the influx of immigrants caused unrest in the Taiwanese society. In response, the Chiang regime imposed martial law that lasted for as long as 38 years. During such time, with the help of the international community, including the United States' financial aid, the World Health Organization's medical aid, and the loans from World Bank, and with the implementation of sophisticated economic infrastructure plans, Taiwan's economy gradually thrived, earning it a place among the "Four Asian Tigers." However, in exchange for these economic achievements, Taiwan sacrificed its civil freedom, democracy, human rights, and environmental protection.

From 1949 to 1971, the world saw two governments competing diplomatically to be the legitimate Chinese government. The government of the *People's Republic of China* ("PRC") founded by the Chinese Communist Party had actual control over China while the government of the *Republic of China* controlled and ruled Taiwan. However, in 1971, the United Nations officially recognized the People's Republic of China as "the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations." Due to this recognition, the ROC government lost its seat in the United Nations. Since then, the ROC government has been unofficially referred to as the Taiwanese government. Since the Taiwanese government's expulsion from the United Nations, Chiang implemented arbitrary diplomatic strategies which caused Taiwan to lose many diplomatic allies. Over the years, most of Taiwan's remaining allies broke off their diplomatic relations with Taiwan after caving into the pressure from the PRC and established ties to it, leaving Taiwan as an international orphan. By 2021, only 15 nations in the world maintain diplomatic ties with the Taiwanese government. In spite of such a difficult international situation, Taiwan continues to maintain economic trade relations with many countries and engage in friendly interactions with NGOs and civil organizations, in hope of establishing international relations based on the principles of equality and mutual benefits. However, Taiwan's international activities have often been met with unreasonable undermining and oppression from China, who has tried its best to expel Taiwan from international organizations and put restrictions on Taiwan's participation in and contribution to the international society. This truly infringes on the rights and interests of Taiwan and its people.

### Politics

During Taiwan's years of martial law, Chiang imposed many restrictions, including bans on political parties and newspapers that pursue freedom of speech and thoughts. They also carried out mass surveillances on the people, which resulted in criminal injustice and indiscriminate arrests. During this period of white terror, the government limited the development of freedom, democracy, and human rights. In the 1960s, many individuals who were not part of the KMT party expressed their opposition against authoritarian rule and their desire for freedom and democracy through publishing journals and founding "illegal" political parties. In the 1970s, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) released three declarations regarding Taiwan's political

situation. The signatories of these three declarations all had their wills ready in anticipation of losing their lives because of their actions. Through anti-KMT activists' fearless efforts to fight for freedom, democracy, and human rights, the Taiwanese government finally lifted martial law in 1987 and moved towards a path to true freedom and democracy.

A constitutional amendment in 1991 eventually ended the KMT's illegitimate authoritarian rule. In 1996, Taiwan held its first presidential election with Lee Teng-hui, who was born and grew up in Taiwan, becoming the first elected president. In 2000, after the presidential candidate from the biggest opposition party—the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)—won the election, Taiwan observed its first peaceful transition of political power, which further matured Taiwan's democracy. The results of this election also drove the KMT into an opposition party after over 50 years of regime. In 2016, Tsai Ing-wen, a female candidate also of the DPP, was elected president. As the first female president in Taiwan, she started to work for women empowerment while hoping that her success as president would not be characterized by her gender alone. President Tsai's administration earned the people's approval through her successful reelection in 2020. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, she led her team in fighting against the virus with great success and donating medical supplies to many countries in need.

The key to the progress of democracy in Taiwan is the people's participation. In 1979, anti-KMT activists' actions of calling for freedom, democracy, and the lifting of political party bans and martial law led to violent suppression, mass arrests, and court martials of civilians. Known as the Kaohsiung incident, this event raised the people's awareness of and attention to political participation. In 1990, the Wild Lily student movement—the first ever student movement under the KMT regime—that called for a comprehensive reform of the government led to Taiwan's gradual departure from the KMT's authoritarian rule and entrance into democratization. Since then, to oppose unjust policies, the people have taken action through social movements, such as the indigenous rectification and land ownership movement, the labor movement, the gender equality movement, the environmental movement, and the legalization of same-sex marriage. In 2004, Taiwan held its first referendum. In 2014, several courageous college students and civil organizations occupied the Legislature's meeting hall in protest of the government's attempt to sign a trade agreement with China that would infringe upon Taiwan's sovereignty. The younger generation's concern about public affairs has become a crucial force in Taiwan's democratic progress in recent years. The first recall election of a mayor in 2020 further reminded those in power that the people are the true master of the state and have the right to remove governors that are unfit for their positions.

With the advocacy and promotion of civil groups, the government has increasingly focused on basic human rights, including the right to liberty, freedom of speech, freedom to participate in politics, gender equality, freedom of religion, indigenous rights, marriage equality, and judicial justice. Most recently, the government established specialized agencies, such as the Transitional Justice Commission and the National Human Rights Commission, to safeguard human rights, remove symbols of authoritarianism, preserve historical sites of injustice, and restore historical truths, with the hope to bring forth reconciliation in the Taiwanese society.

### Economy

The service industry possesses the largest portion of Taiwan's workforce. In 2020, Taiwan's GDP was worth over \$6690 billion U.S. dollars with the average income per capita at \$24,471 U.S. dollars. Taiwan's currency is the New Taiwan dollar. About 90% of its energy and

raw material supplies relies on mass imports, while different parts of electrical equipment are its primary export products. High-tech industries include core technologies such as Wafer Foundry, Integrated Circuits, the Internet of Things, and Artificial Intelligence. Taiwan is considered an agglomeration of economies with seven primary industrial parks throughout the country. Its agricultural products are comprised mainly of flowers, fruits, organic farming, and other products from quality agriculture. Taiwan's labor force relies heavily on migrant workers who mainly come from Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia and contribute to manufacturing, offshore fishing, and the home care industry. During the early years of its economic thrive, Taiwan ignored the importance of environmental protection as industrial factories replaced forestlands and produced polluted air and water into the environment. However, as Taiwan progressed, the prior exploitation of the natural environment and industrial pollution that came with the pursuit of economic development had to be addressed. Therefore, the Taiwanese society has since committed to recycling with the second highest recycle rate in the world. On average, each Taiwanese individual produces 0.4 kilos (less than 1 pound) of trash each day, which is significantly lower than the global average of 1.2 kilos (more than 2.5 pounds) per day.

### Religions

Being a society of immigrants with the Constitution protecting the basic human rights to freedom of religion, the diversity in religion in Taiwan ranks second in the world, and its religious freedom shares first place with Belgium and The Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Besides the popular folk religions, the Taiwanese also practice various religions, such as Buddhism (19.9%), Taoism (16.6%), Protestantism (5%), Catholicism (1.5%), Islam (0.2%), and a small number of Judaism and Greek Orthodox. Although religiously diversified, all religions coexist in harmony with very few conflicts. A common significant characteristic among various religious groups in Taiwan is their participation in public welfare like helping the poor, disaster relief, establishing social welfare institutes, and building schools, medical facilities, orphanages, and nursing homes. While Christianity is a minority religion in Taiwan, through its social welfare ministries, it has taken care of many marginalized groups including women in hardship, the homeless, migrant workers, and fishermen. For a religion that only makes up 6.5% of the general population, Christianity in Taiwan has contributed significantly to societal development, education, and medical care in recent history.

Many people seriously live around religious rituals that combine Taoism, Confucianism, and various folk religions. They worship in accordance with the religious seasons listed in the calendar, and, for peace of mind, abide by certain rituals when it comes to important events such as marriage, naming babies, moving, or traveling. Additionally, blessing rituals are also important forces that bring people together. For instance, the annual Matsu (Goddess of the sea) pilgrimage that attracts over one million believers and the Ghost Festival that honors the spirits of the deceased are at the center of many people's spiritual lives.

On the other hand, religions of the indigenous people and new immigrants differ from that of the mainstream Taiwanese population. Before their first interaction with Christianity, the indigenous people had already established their own faith system. Rituals, such as rainmaking,

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<sup>3</sup> According to a report published in 2014 by Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, Taiwan is second only to Singapore in the Religion Diversity Index. The reference to religious freedom is based on the Humanists International's Freedom of Thought Report in 2018.

prophesizing, and healing, were all closely related to everyday life, and were presided over by specific people like priests or sorcerers. However, a rapid conversion of indigenous people to Christianity, known as the 20th century miracle, took place in the 1960s. Since then, Christianity has become the primary religion among the indigenous people. Over 60% of its population became Christians. As for new immigrants, many of them are adherent to Islam. They not only live by the many Islamic rules in daily life but have also celebrated Ramadan in recent years.

Christianity was first introduced to Taiwan during the Dutch and the Spanish occupation. The Spanish built Catholic churches in northern Taiwan while the Dutch brought in the Protestant Reformed Church to the south. It is believed that there were 5,000 to 6,000 Christians in southern Taiwan at the time. They translated the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments into the indigenous Siraya language using the Romanization System. However, due to the merely 40 years of Dutch reign in Taiwan, only a small part of the Bible was translated.

After Koxinga drove away the Dutch, Christianity was banned in Taiwan until mid-19th century when it was once again brought to Taiwan as the Dominican Order from the Philippines started to evangelize in southern Taiwan. The Wanchin Basilica of the Immaculate Conception is an important landmark indicating the arrival of Catholicism in Taiwan. In the meantime, the English Presbyterian Mission and the Canadian Presbyterian Mission also sent missionaries who started their ministries in southern and northern Taiwan, respectively.

Due to persecution by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s, Christian churches such as Anglicans, Methodists, the Baptist Church, and the Lutheran Church in China fled to Taiwan and started their ministries. During the 1960s, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan initiated the Doubling Movement, aiming to double the number of believers within the decade. With its historic roots on the island, the movement was successful as many churches were founded in both urban and rural areas. The charismatic movement rose from the 1980s to the 1990s with many new denominations emerging.

Interactions among denominations grew increasingly and actively, leading to the establishment of the National Council of Churches in Taiwan ("NCCT") in 1963. With multiple subgroups including a women's subgroup, the NCCT helps maintain fellowship among the Christian churches and related organizations. With the Catholic Church joining the NCCT in 1967, Taiwan became one of the few countries that include the Catholic Church in an ecumenical organization at a national level. While each denomination takes different positions on various issues, all denominations coexist in harmony and continue to work on their own ministries.

### Culture

The three most important holidays in Taiwan are the Spring Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, and the Moon Festival.

The Spring Festival is commonly known as the Lunar New Year when people have approximately one week of holidays. Families come together on Lunar New Year's Eve to enjoy a feast, bid farewell to the old year, and welcome the new. On Lunar New Year's Day, people pay a visit to relatives and friends and congratulate one another for having lived through another year. The elderly gives out red envelopes with money enclosed to the young as a form of a blessing. The second day of the New Year is most significant for a married woman because it is the day when she and her husband and children return to her maiden family to spend time together. Some people visit temples during the Spring Festival to ask for divine blessings while

Christians attend the Lunar New Year worship service at church to give thanks to God for the past year and to pray for grace and peace in the coming year.

To celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival, the Taiwanese eat zongzi (rice dumplings) and compete in dragon boat races. At the Moon Festival, people eat mooncakes and pomelos while enjoying the sight of the mid-Autumn bright full moon.

Generally speaking, Taiwanese women go through 30 to 40 days of postpartum confinement (known as “sitting the month”) after giving birth. During this period, they receive special care and extra nutrients to regain their strength. At the same time, they are strongly encouraged to go by several restrictions. For example, they should avoid washing their hair, take a shower (only sponge bathing), or eat iced food, lest their health should be impaired in the future. However, modern women do not always abide by such traditions. Nowadays, working women have guaranteed benefits for pregnancy and giving birth, according to the law. They are given eight weeks of paid maternity leave while their husbands are given certain days of paid paternity leave.

The lives of indigenous people in Taiwan are inseparable from mother nature, so much so that a unique tribal culture that greatly differs from the mainstream culture has been cultivated. The Bununs and Atayals who make their living in the mountains, the Amis who live by the waters, and the Tao islanders have all developed very different hunting or fishing cultures. Although greatly affected by the economic development, the shifts of living styles, and the mainstream culture over the past century, the indigenous people have strived to preserve their cultures by celebrating seasonal festivals, including the Harvest Festival, the Inholawan Festival, the Maljeveq Festival, and other life rituals, such as the Mangamangayau ritual and Mapabosbos ritual. Furthermore, the fact that over 60% of the indigenous population are Christians helps the churches in tribal villages demonstrate unique images of combining the traditional culture with Christian faith. In recent years, the diversified cultures of the indigenous people have also become important elements in projecting the image of Taiwan to the international community.

The Taiwanese people are of warm nature. People often greet each other by asking, “Have you eaten yet?” Friendly hospitality is also one of the characteristics of the Taiwanese people. Whenever there is a visitor, the hosts offer them a glass of water or a cup of tea. If the visitor comes at mealtime, they are often invited to join the table even if the dishes served are very simple. This spirit of sharing is inherited from the agricultural society of the old days. It, of course, also meets the teaching of the Bible to show hospitality to strangers.

There is a rich and diversified diet culture in Taiwan, with rice as the staple food. Different ethnic cuisines from Taiwanese, Hakka, indigenous people, mainlanders and new immigrants can be found easily. Dishes that originated from other countries all over the world are also available. This gives the people opportunities to experience different cultures.

Night markets are very popular in Taiwan, mainly because Taiwan is practically a very safe place. At the night markets, you can find almost everything, from sorted snacks, frozen desserts, clothing to daily necessities. In recent years, the beverage known as bubble tea, which originated from Central Taiwan, has gained the liking of people around the world. It has become an internationally known refreshment.

Art works and performances, such as painting, sculpture, music, dramas, dancing, traditional operas, puppet shows, and Taiwanese operas, have been passed down by outstanding



artists and numerous enthusiasts. The general public has easy accesses to these performances through television, the internet, and local cultural centers. Recently, gospel Taiwanese operas and gospel puppet shows have become a channel for evangelism.

People who are enthusiastic about staying healthy are often seen jogging or practicing tai chi or Baduanjin qigong (eight-sectioned exercise) at parks near their homes. Praise dance, which was developed by Christians, is not only a fitness activity but also a way to attract people to Christianity. Karaoke is another popular recreational activity among people of all ages. Taiwan's Oolong tea is of high quality and widely popular among the people. Drinking tea while spending time with family and friends is considered a great pleasure.

### Medical Care

With economic growth and popularization of education, the Taiwanese society increasingly values the importance of healthcare. Through years of developing advanced medical equipment and training professional medical care workers, the average life expectancy of the Taiwanese population reached 80.7 years by 2018, with men expecting to live for 77.5 years and women 84 years. The National Health Insurance was established in 1995. The insurance welfare policy mandated that all nationals, including foreign nationals that possess legal working permits, must participate irrespective of age. The self-help, mutual-aid, risk diversifying social insurance greatly reduced the financial burden for people who seek medical care. It rid the fear of indebtedness due to illness, specifically exempting medical costs for those who suffer from debilitating illnesses, such as cancer, physical disabilities, or mental illnesses. The National Health Insurance and the reliable health system also provide partial or full coverage for the less privileged people. Cancer remains the leading cause of death in Taiwan. Breast cancer ranks first among women, and cervical cancer ranks second.

Because of China's interference in and infringement of Taiwan's participation in international organizations, Taiwan has long been excluded by WHO and isolated from the global public health system. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Taiwan implemented early deployment, border controls, and export bans on surgical masks. Through the requisition and allocation of surgical masks and the donation of over tens of millions of surgical masks to countries that were hit badly by COVID-19, the slogan "Taiwan Can Help" received acknowledgement from many foreign governments. Through bilateral and multilateral frameworks, Taiwan has battled this pandemic along with the international community.

### Education

Taiwan adopted modern western compulsory education at the turn of the 20th century, and numerous excellent talents in various fields were hence reared. Since the implementation of nine-year compulsory education in 1968, boys and girls between the age of seven and 15 had been required to attend school. As a result of universal education, the literacy rate among Taiwanese individuals above the age of 15 had reached 99% by 2019. Beginning in 2019, compulsory education was extended to 12 years. Attempting to neutralize the competitive nature in the education system, to lessen the students' pressure of getting into good high schools/colleges, and to break through the framework of traditional school subjects, the government shifted the focus of education to increasing individual students' abilities to solve problems and developing their own interests and aspirations. Vocational education provides quality manpower for Taiwan's development in economy and greatly contributes to the society's

progress and prosperity. Additionally, individuals who received higher education make up 45% of the general population. Taiwan's Constitution mandates that women have equal rights for education, and women's potentials in the workplace have increased thereafter. English is a mandatory subject for second language learning in Taiwan.

The enforcement of Mandarin-Chinese education policies during the early years of the KMT regime resulted in the diminishment of the languages of various ethnic groups. Most of the younger generation are unable to communicate in their own mother tongues. In recent years, the importance of preserving mother languages and protecting a culture with diverse languages has been recognized. Since 2001, elementary schools have made mother languages a mandatory subject, and students have had an opportunity to study their own mother languages. Furthermore, each ethnic group has been actively promoting its respective mother language through videoclips in the media and on the internet. It is expected that mother language teaching will be implemented in family settings, at schools, and in society, so that the language may be used in daily life and that the value of language culture may be passed down.

Because of the declining birthrate, the proportion of senior citizens reached 14% of the general population in 2018, officially making Taiwan qualified as an aging society. The government has been actively establishing learning centers throughout the country for senior citizens and providing them with an environment and pleasure of life-long learning. The intention is to slow down the development of dementia among senior citizens and to reduce the financial burden on families and the government.

### Women

With the development of Taiwan's civil society founded upon the values of democracy, equality, and freedom, Taiwanese women in the 21st century now have the same rights as men do in politics, economic participation, and education. Under the mainstream patriarchal society of the early years, women were only able to participate in politics through guaranteed seats in public office that provided limited opportunities. However, with the lifting of martial law in Taiwan and feminist advocacy, the proportion of women participating in politics have surpassed the guaranteed seats. Under consideration of gender equality, the discriminating "guarantee system" was changed into the "principles of gender proportion" in 1999 to encourage more women to take part in politics. At 42%, the proportion of women in legislature is the highest in Asia. In addition, women, with the aid of scholars and groups advocating for women's rights, have also made great contributions to the revision and legislation of relevant laws. Specifically, daughters nowadays have the right to inheritance and women may decide whether to take their husband's last name upon marriage. Moreover, children also have the freedom to choose between their mother's or father's last name as their own.

Aside from a relatively proportionate ratio of educated women compared to men, women in Taiwan also played a crucial role in the economic development. During the 1970s, women took part in economic activities in various ways, including family handcrafts (known as "living room factories") that led to a miracle in the economic growth. The employment rate of women in 2019 reached 64.5%. Through the participation and tireless advocacy of women, Taiwan's gender equality has reached the highest in Asia.

Young women may decide where to go to college or to pursue further education based on their own interests and aspirations, so that they may become financially independent when they

begin their professional career. Occasionally, due to lower salaries caused by the wage structure and economic levels, young women might be asked whether they want to enter marriage and become housewives instead. As a whole, there are still certain expectations of young women.

Women, regardless of age, remain somewhat oppressed by the idea of patriarchy and hence encounter many challenges in gender equality. Firstly, women's participation in politics is still limited by patriarchy and party politics. Secondly, the labor market continues to practice wage discrepancies based on gender. Even though over 60% of women have college degrees or higher education, 83% are still affected by stereotypes in the workplace and are limited to industries that require no expertise or leadership, such as service, production, skill, or labor. While double-income families have become the social norm, women are still bound by social expectations and have to live under the pressure of taking care of the family, raising children, and facing challenges from their workplace. This further indicates that the concept that "husband and wife should share household responsibility" has yet to be matured in the Taiwanese society. Finally, while seemingly independent, many Taiwanese women still suffer from the ordeals of domestic violence, sexual harassment/assault, and the internet and drug abuse. These are all indicators that the Taiwanese society still has much to improve on gender equality.

Taiwanese women enjoyed the right to vote as early as 1949. Through the efforts of women rights movements in the 1960s, the Taiwanese society came to understand and support gender equality and enacted relevant legislations. The Taiwanese government ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* ("CEDAW") in 2012, and its effort in implementing CEDAW has earned international recognition.

In the midst of patriarchy in early Taiwanese churches, it was almost impossible for women to preach. However, through years of education, learning, and growth, and because of the mutual encouragement among themselves, women's talents in thinking, planning, taking part in decision-making, and even executing those decisions have become increasingly visible. Over the past century, women's role in church have shifted from ushering, cleaning, flower arrangements, and cooking to being church leaders and clergies. Compared to those in neighboring countries, Taiwanese women started very early to have the opportunities to participate in decision-making in the church. The church started the ordination of female elders/deacons in the 1920s and of female pastors in 1949. In 2020, the first female moderator of Presbyterian Church Taiwan's general assembly was elected making her the first female church leader at the national level. Women's enthusiasm in church affairs and decision-making plays a crucial role in connecting and uniting the church and is a necessary element for the church revival.

### The History and Current State of WDP in Taiwan

The earliest record of Taiwan church women's participation in the World Day of Prayer dates back to March 1935 in the Taiwan Church Press. There was no national committee from the outset. Instead, the movement was promoted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT)'s Northern and Southern Women's Mission Societies. The Northern Women's Mission Society contacted other Christian denominations to assemble a WDP worship service in 1958, and since then, PCT women have overseen the invitations to other denominations.

In 1960, the Northern and Southern Women's Mission Societies merged into a national Women's Mission of General Assembly, and an official decision was made at its first board meeting to promote WDP. The PCT invited YWCA, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church,

and the Lutheran Church to hold a WDP worship service and to establish the “WDP Committee” as the taskforce under the Women’s Mission.

The PCT convened the “Taiwanese Christian Joint Committee for the WDP” in 1966. By 1967, the Committee’s members had included representatives from the Methodists, the Lutherans, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Quakers, YWCA, the Baptists, the Salvation Army, and the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group. The list was further expanded in 1968 to include representatives from the Assemblies of God, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, and the Church of the Nazarene. In 1969, Chen Chi-yi (Methodist) became the first non-PCT member to hold the position of Chairperson. The Committee was in charge of promoting WDP worship services from 1966 to 1978. The PCT has already been at work locally for a century by the 1960s, with its churches spreading across the country. With the women’s ministry departments of local presbyteries at work, the WDP blossomed in a short period of time.

In 1960, Taiwan received WDP donations from the Hong Kong and Kowloon Women’s Association, designated for disaster relief for the Floods of August 7, 1959. In 1963, Taiwan’s WDP worship service designated its collected offerings to Hong Kong’s refugee ministry, fulfilling the true meaning of WDP’s “*Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action*.” Hong Kong provided Mandarin-Chinese worship handbooks, which were then translated into Romanized Taiwanese and Japanese (Japanese Bibles were translated for indigenous groups as the majority of them had underwent Japanese education.) In 1970, the use of Hong Kong’s Mandarin-Chinese handbooks was stopped, and the PCT was charged with translating the English handbook into Mandarin-Chinese for all denominations to use in Taiwan. The Romanized Taiwanese and Japanese versions continued to be in use. Mrs. Ruth Kao from Taiwan served as the Regional Representative of Asia on the WDP’s Executive Committee from 1991 to 1995.

In the 1970s, the United States severed its diplomatic ties with Taiwan. In the midst of China’s military threats and the critical state of Taiwan’s international status, the PCT issued three declarations, one in 1971, another one in 1975, and the other one in 1977. However, the government at the time did not tolerate dissents, and the PCT suffered persecution in many ways. Many Romanized Taiwanese Bibles were confiscated, churches were surveilled, and a number of clergies were arrested. As a result, other denominations distanced themselves from the PCT, which also impacted the assembly of inter-denomination WDP worship services. By 1979, the national WDP committee in Taiwan had been operated solely by the PCT. In 1982, YWCA convened with a few denominations and church organizations to establish the WDP Taiwan National Committee, resulting in the current state of two WDP points of contact in Taiwan.

Since its inception in 1935, WDP has become an ecumenical prayer worship service that is familiar to the ears of Taiwanese Christian women. Each year, the worship handbook is translated into 13 languages including Mandarin-Chinese, Taiwanese, and indigenous languages that are used during worship services. Each January, women from different regions take turns in holding PCT’s demonstrative WDP worship service during the national women’s training. Afterwards, each representative returns to her respective region and carries out the worship service in March. There are approximately 7,000 women attending the service in different regions each year. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, indoor gatherings with more than 100 participants had been prohibited. Consequently, numerous WDP services in urban regions had to be cancelled.

The WDP committee is made up of members who are in charge of promoting WDP. Their ages range from 30 to 65. The cross-denomination national committee led by YWCA includes representatives from other denominations (including the Catholic church) and church organizations. It holds a few WDP worship services for adults and children each year.

In 2017, the WDPIC accepted Taiwan's proposal to write the worship service materials for 2023. This certainly opened up an opportunity for the two WDP committees in Taiwan to collaborate. In 2019, WDP's Executive Director Rev. Rosângela Oliveira visited Taiwan to lead a writing workshop, with both sides enjoying pleasant interactions. In 2020, the two committees formed four writing working groups, and the process of working in conjunction has brought the WDP movement in Taiwan an opportunity of mutual exchange and dialogue to seek a state of unity in faith and love between the two committees. While diverse opinions remain among the different denominations in terms of politics and social issues, the Christian faith has led us to go beyond the chasm of ethnicity, historical wounds, and disagreements in real life, so that we may work together for the gospel in which we so believe.

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