

# RELIGION AND POLITICS IN CHINA

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## Introduction

The state of religious freedom in China could be compared to a glass of water. It was completely empty thirty years ago. Now, it is partially filled. The trouble lies in government restrictions rather than social hostilities. In a report by the PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, China ranked 4<sup>th</sup> after Saudi Arabia, Iran and Uzbekistan on the list of countries with very high government restrictions on religion, with an index of 7.7. This high index was given 'primarily because of its restrictions on Buddhism in Tibet, its ban on the Falun Gong movement throughout the country, its strict controls of the practice of religion among Uighur Muslims and its pressure on religious groups that are not registered by the government, including Christians who worship in private homes'.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the suppression of religion, however, there are other versions of the story: recognition and tolerance, containment and guidance. In the reform era, the government has come to recognize that religion will neither fade out as a result of modernization nor can it be eliminated by the state. What remains to be done is to tolerate, contain and guide it. Religious practices are tolerated as long as they are not perceived as posing a threat to the ruling regime and established institutions such as education system. Therefore, the state's grip on popular, diffuse religions<sup>2</sup> – those categorized as superstitions – has been relatively loose, as compared to its firm control of the five recognized religions. The five recognized religions have organized institutions that could conceivably compete with the ruling party for authority over the people. Thus, the government spares no efforts to invent legislative and administrative means to contain their development within a specified mode and domain of operation.<sup>3</sup> Religion is expected to operate largely in the private

<sup>1</sup> <http://pewforum.org/Government/Global-Restrictions-on-Religion.aspx>, 'Global Restrictions on Religion', Full report of 7 December 2009, accessed on 10 May 2011. Quoted from page 13 of 72.

<sup>2</sup> Falun Gong is a popular religion but very well organized. Therefore, the present statement does not apply to it.

<sup>3</sup> Since 1982, the National People's Congress and the State Council respectively have promulgated close to a hundred laws and regulations on religion. In addition, there are policy documents and guidelines enacted by the People's Congresses and governments

sphere. If it is to be drawn into the public realm, religion is required to act under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party in relation to defined objectives, such as making a contribution to the country's economic development, charitable projects and poverty alleviation works.

In short, the state of religion-state relations in China today is complex. Its specific manifestations cannot be fully understood without reference to various contexts and levels of analysis. In the following pages, we will look at those contexts, past and present policies, and the responses of selected religious bodies<sup>4</sup> to the changing environment.

### The contextual framework of analysis

Social outcomes are shaped by contexts, actors and actions. Among the contexts relevant to our concern, three are most important: historical, political and social.<sup>5</sup>

Taking the historical perspective,<sup>6</sup> today's state of religion-politics relations can be regarded as repressive of deep-seated traditions,<sup>7</sup> where faiths and beliefs were subjected to patronage, restriction or suppression, depending on the circumstances. In ancient China, the concept of religion as defined today – an institutionalized domain of thinking and practice concerned with the sacred or the supernatural – did not exist. Rather, a traditional idea of the cosmos encompassed all kinds of faiths and beliefs. When Buddhism as the first major religion was imported,<sup>8</sup> it brought into China the institution of a celibate priesthood with a system of doctrines,

at the sub-national levels. For a general picture and major problems, please consult Zhuo Xinping, 'Religion and rule of Law in China Today', *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Vol. 2009, Issue 3 (2009), pp. 519-527.

<sup>4</sup> Uighur Islam and Tibetan Buddhism are excluded from this analysis due to the complexity of issues involved and the limitation of space here to do justice to them.

<sup>5</sup> I choose to treat 'the cultural' implicitly in these three contexts.

<sup>6</sup> Important contributions to this perspective are provided by Anthony C. Yu, 'On State and Religion in China: A Brief Historical Reflection', *Religion East and West*, Vol. 3 (June 2003), pp. 1-20. A response to this article by Henry Rosemount Jr. follows on pp. 21-26; C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

<sup>7</sup> For such an interpretation, see for instance Richard Madsen, 'The Upsurge of Religion in China', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (October 2010), pp. 64-66.

<sup>8</sup> Buddhism was imported two thousand years ago, Islam introduced in the seventh century, Catholic Christianity too but intermittently at first until the Opium War in 1840, and Protestant Christianity in the early nineteenth century.

something very alien to the tradition of popular beliefs which were diffuse. As more religions were imported or emerged domestically, all religions co-existed peacefully and in general, none of them played any significant role in public life.<sup>9</sup> The state of China was secular and had no consistent policy of religion. Modes of state action ranged from patronage, through control/regulation, to prohibition from time to time, and even within the tenure of the same administration. There were times when an emperor or empress became a believer in or sympathizer with a particular religion. The result was imperial patronage, with a grant of land and/or title. At other times, when a religion was taken as a threat to the state's interest or to the social/cultural order, it was outlawed. More often, the state controlled or regulated the practice of religions by restricting activities in terms of sites and target audiences. These different modes of action can be evident within the same administration. For instance, the Kangxi emperor of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) was initially tolerant of the spread of Catholicism by the Jesuit missionaries in return for the latter's contributions to China in astronomy, machinery for gun manufacture, and diplomacy (the Jesuits even ran the Imperial Observatory). However, the policy of tolerance, which was officially anchored in the Edict of 1692, could not survive the Chinese rites controversy within the Church. Pope Clement XI issued the 19 March 1715 *Ex illa Die* to officially condemn the Chinese rites, which was reiterated in 1742 by Benedict's *Ex quo singulari*. In 1721, the Kangxi emperor responded with a decree to ban Christian missions in China. With this small example, we can conclude that the main characteristic of imperial policy towards religions was pragmatic with an ideological residue of monarchical tutelage over cultural/spiritual matters in society. Pragmatism was oriented towards functional goals, as defined by the ruler. The ideological residue was based on the idea of the 'Mandate of Heaven'. The emperor had the responsibility to mediate between Heaven and Earth, the authority to distinguish between 'true teaching' and 'deviant teaching' and the obligation to keep social activities in a harmonious order.

If this historical-cultural legacy matters, it suggests that 'the state' today remains the master of all human affairs whereas 'religion' can only follow.

<sup>9</sup> If we regard Confucianism as a religion, the statement here must be radically changed. Confucianism had become a kind of official ideology of China since the Han dynasty and later institutionalized into the state examination system as a vehicle to recruit the ruling elite. In recent years, the revival of Confucianism and efforts to promote it as a religion were encouraged by the government, perhaps as an indigenous contender to Christianity in the service of the people's spiritual needs.

This seems incontestable because the political regime is still authoritarian as in the past. There are however important differences in the political regime between the past and the present. While emperors in old China were absolutists, the reach of imperial power was limited in scope and exercised in a laissez-faire manner. Communist rulers in modern China were once totalitarian reaching deep into the people's daily life with an anti-theist zeal of social revolution. The Chinese regime today is authoritarian but more interventionist than with its predecessors. All in all, the changing nature of the political regime goes a long way to explain for the different patterns of religion-politics relations since 1949. Today, the vogue of explanation knows different but related versions. The first understands the current context as one of pragmatism. Religious policy is no longer shaped by Marxism-Leninism, but by the practical objectives of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. The primary goal is indeed maintenance of political power. Wang Zuo'an, Deputy Director-General of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, was quoted to have said it clearly. 'If the Chinese Communist Party were to impose its atheism on everyone and persecute religious believers, that would only serve to drive 100 million people to an antagonistic position. Such hypothetical practice, which would virtually undermine its very own foundation of governance, is unimaginable'.<sup>10</sup> Apart from the power motive, pragmatism towards religion is necessitated by the grand political strategy of 'development above all' as once advocated by the supreme leader Deng Xiaoping. Deng had argued that 'a cat, be it white or black, is a good one so long as it catches mice'. Such a 'White Cat, Black Cat' strategy underlines the political exchange between religion and politics in present-day China where religious bodies support government projects in infrastructural development, social services, charities etc. in return for officials' favour with respect to religious activities, in particular officially un-sanctioned ones. In such an exchange, the political authority does not truly embrace religious freedom out of conviction. It is just that religion has become 'useful opium' for officials to score in political performance.<sup>11</sup> For better or for worse, religions are now accepted by the rulers as representing positive values and contributing to the development of the economy and

<sup>10</sup> Kim-Kwong Chan and Eric R. Carlson, *Religious Freedom in China: Policy, Administration, and Regulation. A Research Handbook*, Santa Barbara, California: Institute for the Study of American Religion 2005, p. ix.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Religion in China: When opium can be benign', *The Economist*, 1 Feb. 2007; also Fredrik Fällman, 'Useful Opium? "Adapted religion" and "harmony" in contemporary China', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, Issue 67 (2010), pp. 949-969.

to maintaining a ‘harmonious society’ (*hexie shehui*). As a result, religions have acquired a relatively-speaking freer space for autonomous development and presence in public life.

In interpreting religion–politics relations, one could look to an even broader context, that is China’s historic drive to achieve modernity and modernization since more than a century ago. The basic arguments run as follows. Both religion and the state are interested in modernity. They get entangled with each other in a complicated process of ‘making’ the modern state and modern religion.<sup>12</sup> The different patterns of religion–politics relations thus represent the results of hard bargaining that has taken place over time between religious and political actors over the ideational as well as practical issues relating modernization. More elaboration is in order.

The pursuit of modernity in fact predated the Communist seizure of power. In the imperial days of the nineteenth century, young reformist elites were attracted to Western ideas – nationalism, Enlightenment, scientism, evolutionism, and Marxism – as intellectual resources for their modernization projects. They ended up with atheist or anti-theist attitudes towards religion, taking it as a barrier to China’s pursuit of modernity. Already in the 1920s, the Republican government initiated radical measures to reform religions as an integrated part of building a modern nation-state. Zealous reformists of local Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang) branches launched the ‘smashing superstition movement’ and the ‘convert temples to schools movement’.<sup>13</sup>

The Communist rulers are no less zealous in anti-theist modernization projects, attempting initially to eradicate religion altogether. After the founding of the People’s Republic, religious freedom as a fundamental human right had no space at all on the political agenda, given the revolutionary ethos of the regime and the anti-Communist climate of the Cold War.

While the Communist state-building project had worked to almost completely eliminate space for religion in the first three decades, the same

<sup>12</sup> This line of interpretation is best represented by *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, eds. Yoshiko Ashiwa & David L. Wank, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009. Daoism is not sufficiently represented in this book. For a supplement, see Jennifer Lemche, *The Greening of Chinese Daoism: Modernity, Bureaucracy and Ecology in Contemporary Chinese Religion*, M.A. Thesis, Queen’s University, Canada, June 2010. Download from the following site on 19 February 2011: <http://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/1974/6035/1/The%20Greening%20of%20Chinese%20Daoism.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> For details please consult Yoshiko Ashiwa, ‘Positioning Religion in Modernity: State and Buddhism in China’, in Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, eds., *Making Religion, Making the State...*, *ibid.* pp. 43–73.

project recently took a radical turn to accommodate a more pragmatic and functionally-oriented strategy in dealing with religion, as a result of an erosion of the official ideology and changes in the state-society relations. In other words, one can speak of two phases in this modern-state building project. It has involved a remarkable transition from a period characterized by an ideology-laden and zero-tolerance stance towards religion to a period of pragmatic and accommodation, albeit with significant exceptions. In looking at the history of religion-politics relations, we can see how modernization and modernity have been malleable terms. In the socialist era, modernity referred to a Communist utopia while in the reform era, modernity is measured in terms of China's status as a 'Rising Power'. Modernization, which would deliver China to modernity, initially involved a radical social revolution. Now, the state simultaneously promotes capitalism, socialism, developmentalism, Neo-Confucianism, religion, in short, 'anything goes'. With regard to religion-politics relations, what remains still constant is the power asymmetry in favour of the state, more precisely speaking the ruling Party. Hence, the two interpretations of the political context, unambiguous primacy of ruling power and malleable modernity for China, are actually inter-related.

While the first two contextual interpretations focus on the influence of the state over religion, the project of modernity implicitly assigns an increasingly significant role to society as an actor in weaving religion-politics relations. This brings us to the last plausible framework for explaining the relationship between religion and politics, i.e. the social context or a context of civil society.

There are rather constant social features that have inhibited the capacity of religion to withstand the state's intervention with religious practices. First is the atheist nature of the Chinese society. Specifically, the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people does not have or believe in any religion (please see Table 1 below).<sup>14</sup> As a result, no religion can be dominant and by implication influential in shaping national policies on religious matters.

Secondly however, the strength of religion varies from one locality to another, in terms of critical mass of concentration, degree of integration

<sup>14</sup> Findings from Study on *Political Culture and Participation in Three Chinese Societies 1991-1993* and *Asian (Democracy) Barometer, Wave I and Wave II*. The Barometer's official website is [www.asianbarometer.org](http://www.asianbarometer.org). The population of post-1949 China is 582 million in 1953 and 1.008 billion for 1982, 1.200 billion for 1990, and 1.3 billion for 2009 respectively.

	1993	2002	2007-8
None	88.4	87.9	82.1
Buddhism	7.8	8.0	11.1
Protestantism	1.0	1.6	2.7
Islam	1.0	1.0	0.4
Daoism	.4	.4	1.0
Catholics	.5	.5	.3
Others	.3	.2	.4
No Answer	.7	.3	2.0
Total	100.1	99.9	100.0
Sample N	2945	3183	5098

**Table 1.** Survey Question: ‘What is your faith?’.

with the local culture, role in the organization of community life, and ties with other social groups and organizations. Such variations partly explain why the same religion has different experiences with the state in different localities. The more important point is that concentration of religious influence in a certain locality can affect the rules of the game such that the local government concerned may have to be more accommodating. In spite of the atheist nature of the Chinese society in general, the local context is of immediate relevance and critically important for understanding the realities of religious freedom on the ground. A local perspective thus enables scholars to better understand state policy in practice, a perspective that reveals how policy is not at all unified. At least, there are local legislations on religion that may differ from each other and deviate from their national counterpart.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor reported last year that some local governments had legalized certain reli-

<sup>15</sup> See United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *China's national and local regulations on religion: recent developments in legislation and implementation: roundtable before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, One Hundred Ninth Congress, second session, November*, Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2007.

gions and practices in addition to the five nationally recognized religions.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, some religions are inseparable from issues of ethnic minorities, such as Buddhism in Tibet and Islam in Xinjiang. Ethnicity in turn may be bound up with problems of national self-determination that furthermore generates implications of international politics.

The societal context is the result of a dynamic process. It is in a constant state of flux. In the first three decades under Communist rule, the Chinese society was wrecked by totalitarian practices, as in the case of the barrack-styled People's Communes, or by anarchist practices, as seen during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a jungle war of all against all. After the third plenum of the eleventh Party Congress in 1978, the state started to gradually retreat from its control of society. Chinese society has since gradually regained its autonomy as a result of this retreat and more indirectly, as a result of the liberalization of the economy and exposures to global flows of information. In 1989, the outburst of student protests in Beijing even led outside observers to ponder whether a civil society had come to China. After several decades of debate, it seems fair to say that no civil society of the American society-oriented view exists in China, as most civic organizations are dependent on the political authorities.<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that some civic organizations cannot be more autonomous than others. In the same vein, there is no denying that nowadays governments at different levels have to heed the views of civic bodies, and 'state actions' are consequently modified or dropped. Against this general picture, the ability of religion to effectively deal with the state in managing their relationship is more limited. As reported below (the 'Responses from Religions' Section), the Wenzhou Protestant church has so far successfully engaged the local state in constructing a coop-

<sup>16</sup> Examples include Orthodox Christianity in some provinces, including Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong. Some ethnic minorities have retained or re-claimed traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan and Buluo-tuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi. The worship of the folk deity Mazu reportedly has been reclassified as 'cultural heritage' rather than religious practice. See *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Right, and Labor, 17 November 2010. [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148863.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148863.htm) accessed on 3 April 2011.

<sup>17</sup> There is hardly any literature on faith-based associations as actors of civil society, which perform an intermediary role between religion and politics. More prominent are studies on whether churches constitute or contribute to the formation of China's civil society. See Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; and He Xiangping, 'Zongjiao yu zhongguo gongmin shehui jianshe' (Religion and Construction of China's Civil Society), *shehuixue yanjiu* (Sociological Studies), Issue 50 (#2, 2010), pp. 69–75.

erative relationship, to give a specific example. Generally speaking, organizations of faith-based charities as constituents of China's incipient civil society do reveal their growing assertiveness vis-à-vis the government.<sup>18</sup> But whether civil society can truly shape the religion-politics relations remains to be seen, because the government is still the stronger partner in the game and its preferences and policies matter more. It is on changes of its policy that we now turn ourselves to.

### The policy in change

The government's policy towards religion has been changing over the past years. We can roughly differentiate four major phases: 1949-1982, 1982-1989, 1989-2000 and 2000-present. The overall pattern is towards greater liberalization.

#### 1949-1982

The first period of the state's policy of religion is the most hostile and radical. In line with Marxism, religion was regarded as the opium of the people and a hurdle to modernization. The ultimate goal of the government was to eradicate religion. The consolidation of the new regime was more immediate. Hence, cooperation of all available social forces including religious ones was needed. Therefore, the government was at first restrained in coming to grips with religions. The first constitution of 1954 even guaranteed the freedom to believe in any religion for every citizen (Article 89).<sup>19</sup> The move however did not square with the actual advance of a 'movement regime'. A movement regime is a political system that negates the primacy of the human person and society. It not only monopolizes all sorts of power but also tolerates no check and balance even within the political leadership itself. It typically uses political movements to mobilize the people for rev-

<sup>18</sup> Benoit Vermander, 'Religion and Charities in China', *E-Renlai* (magazine), 25 April 2011. [www.erenlai.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4208&itemid=339&lang=en](http://www.erenlai.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4208&itemid=339&lang=en) accessed on 8 May 2011.

<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that in China, law often receives lip service. Citizenship does not entail equal and fair treatment with universal application. For instance, a particular group of citizens, i.e. Party members, are not allowed to adopt a religious faith. Laws on religious rights are ambiguously formulated and interpreted. The explicit expectation of peaceful withering away of religion renders any regulations on religious rights a dishonest tool of convenience. Official interpretations often contend that those rights include not only the freedom to believe in any religion but also the freedom of not to adopt any religious faith. An additional freedom refers to a change from believers to non-believers.

olutionary projects. The first three decades of the new Republic was replete with radical political movements (the Three Antis, the Five Antis, the Hundred Flowers campaign etc.), accompanied by short periods of retrenchment. Correspondently, the state of religious freedom followed a cycle of harshness and repose. At the time of the promulgation of the constitution, a 'socialist reconstruction movement' had been underway for some time. Religion was subjected to reconstruction too. Missionaries were expelled and foreign ties were forbidden. Many clergy and believers were intimidated. The early phase of socialist reconstruction was of slow tempo and low depth as the regime did not attempt to control what the people thought. The picture changed completely almost overnight when the regime introduced a new cycle: the Anti-Rightist and the Great Leap Forward movements. The overriding goal was a massive cleansing of thought. Clergy and laypeople were mobilized into study sessions, self-reflection and criticism campaign sessions, and forced to change occupations. Those who were classified as intransigent rightists were imprisoned, sent to labour camps or driven to commit suicide. The merging, closure or conversion (to other uses) of places of worship, already a practice in the first cycle, were now intensified, largely because religious leaders and believers were forced to live and labour in the People's Communes. Religious activities were discouraged or simply made impossible. The following tables concerning Jiangsu Province offer a picture of the severe damage to religious development in this period.<sup>20</sup>

	1952	1957	1959
Catholic	659	180	41
Protestant	586	321	83
Buddhist	43750	2428	467
Muslim	82	75	39
Daoist	535	182	42
Total	45612	3186	672

**Table 2.** Number of Churches and Temples in Jiangsu (9 cities, 24 counties).

<sup>20</sup>The Tables are taken from Ren Jiantao, 'fanyou yu jiangsu de zongjiao gaizao' (Anti-rightist [movement] and Religious Reconstruction in Jiangsu) (in Chinese), *Twenty-First Century* (Bi-monthly), No. 92 (Dec. 2005), pp. 116-122. Downloadable from the 'Archives' of the journal's website: [www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c).

	Right after 1949	Pre-Big Leap Forward'	Now	Frequent church-goers
Catholic	170,000	120,000	80,000	1,800
Protestant	41,500	64,100	41,000	3,000
Monks	17,000	8,000	6,000	750
Nuns	8,000	3,000	2,000	250
Daoist <i>jushi</i>	5,000	1,500	500	
Total	241,500	196,600	130,400	5,800

**Table 3.** Number of believers and churchgoers in Jiangsu, 1960.

When the Great Leap Forward movement failed and the Great Famine approached, the regime had to give up its harsh measures against Chinese society. Religion quickly took advantage of the breathing space to enjoy a revival starting late 1959 and early 1960. The cycle of relaxation was soon replaced by another policy thunderstorm, i.e. the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Compared to all past movements, the Cultural Revolution ushered in the darkest age for all religions in China. The anti-religious excesses have been succinctly captured by Donald MacInnis as follows.

China's ultra-leftist leaders during that period, bent on eliminating religion, prohibited all public religious activities and incarcerated thousands of clergy and laypeople from the five officially recognized religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestant and Catholic Christianity. Thousands of celibate monks, nuns, and priests, especially among the Tibetans, were forcibly laicized, and many were reportedly forced to marry. Graveyards were dug up and converted to farmland. Shrines and temples linked to local folk religions, once ubiquitous throughout the countryside, disappeared. Pilgrimages to holy places were banned.<sup>21</sup>

The Cultural Revolution, dubbed as 'the holocaust of a decade', knows no precedent in all of Chinese history. It was a blatant degradation of humanity with millions of victims, including ranks of political leadership. It smashed the

<sup>21</sup> Donald E. MacInnis, 'From Suppression to Repression: Religion in China Today', *Current History*, Vol. 95.602 (Sept. 1996), p. 285.

Party's organization, ruined the economy, disrupted the public order, broke down social relations, and intoxicated the people with a fervor that transformed them into warring barbarians without any regard to others. Worst of all, the animal instinct of fighting for self-survival nurtured during the Cultural Revolution left a strong legacy of social mistrust and amoral utilitarianism, which has until today contributed to many social ills and malpractices.

### **1982-1989**

Religious policy in this period is characterized by normalization shaped by a new recognition of the nature of religion, a move away from extremes, redresses of past wrongs and reliance on legislation for the control of religion.

When the holocaust of a decade was put to an end, the third plenum of the eleventh Party congress was convened in 1978 to reflect and draw bitter lessons from the past. A resolution was passed promising that class struggle had to be ended and the priority of the state should be replaced by the four modernizations instead, i.e. industrial, agricultural, national defense and science and technology. The fundamental shift in ideological emphasis from utopia to development signals the start of a new phase of state-building that is characterized by 'reform and opening'. The omnipotent state had chosen to retreat from its leftist excesses and allowed the economy and society greater space for development. This period of liberalization created opportunities for religion to revive and prosper. At the institutional level, the fourth (and current) constitution that represents a normalization of social life was promulgated in 1982. As far as religion is concerned, the 1982 constitution differs from those of 1975 and 1978 in omitting the anti-religious phrase about 'the freedom ... to propagate atheism'. It differs from that of 1954 in providing more details and a stronger normative tone about freedom of religion. It is worthy to quote in full the Article 35 on religions below:

Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief.

No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.

The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state.

Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.

While these provisions, especially the non-discrimination clause, signify great (conceptual) progress as compared to past laws, the qualifier of 'normal' to the state's protection of religious activities, on the other hand leaves ample room for administrative manipulation at the time of implementation.

An important instrument called Document #19, 'The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period', was internally circulated within the Party and later issued in the year of 1982. It has been and continues to be the most authoritative and definitive document that guides the state's policy towards religion. The basic understanding of religion by the government now refers to the complex, mass-based, long-lasting nature with implications for relations with ethnic nationalities and foreign nations. The new overall policy priority is to 'bring all religious believers together for the common goal of building a modernized, powerful Socialist state'. Practical tasks then involve redress of past injustices perpetrated against religious professionals, restoration of places of worship to normal use, clarifying the limitations for religious activities, differentiating between the 'administrative' control of the Religious Affairs Bureau and the strictly religious functions of religious organizations, help in setting up seminaries for the training of young clergy, and development of friendly relationships with foreign religious groups while maintaining a policy of independence. All in all, it is a comprehensive programme of normalization and pragmatic-functional policy guidelines.

Against the background of the new constitution, Document #19 and the period of general political liberalization in the 1980s, religion was quickly revitalized and freedom for religious activities expanded. There were however still significant limitations. As summarized by Donald E. MacInnis, 'there are no foreign missionaries, no schools, hospitals, or other institutions under religious management, nor are there organizations or activities ... for young people under eighteen. Religious activities are restricted to the formal places of worship, and radio broadcasting and other forms of public evangelism are forbidden ... there have been situations in which house meetings or similar activities have been forcefully stopped by local officials'.<sup>22</sup>

### 1989-2000

The previous decade of normalization was short-lived. Strict control was renewed after the 1989 student movement in Beijing and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

<sup>22</sup> Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy & Practice*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989.

These events and especially the case of Poland raised the Chinese rulers' sense of insecurity. These events triggered a backlash in the state's relations with religion, in which the new policy emphasis was put on severe containment of religion's influence in society and actively guiding religion to adapt to socialism. Thus, new rules and restrictions, for instance Document #6, were issued in 1991. From this point on, not only do religious venues have to be registered, but religious professionals too. Moreover, all religious activities have to be presided over by a government-authorized professional. On 7 November 1993 President Jiang Zemin elucidated in a speech at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Conference on United Front Work the new emphasizes of religious policy, i.e. law-based management of religious affairs and guidance of religion. The latter requires religious believers to be patriotic, support the leadership of the Communist Party and 'adapt to the socialist society'. More importantly, religious systems and teachings, which are not adaptable to socialism, must be revised in accordance with the government's policy. Needless to say, religious elements that resist state control would be suppressed. The most severe suppression of religion since the reform and open policy happened on 22 July 1999, the case of Falun Gong. It was declared as a heretical organization and to be relentlessly banned. On 23 March 2000, Amnesty International reported that '(T)ens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been arbitrarily detained by police, some of them repeatedly for short periods, and put under pressure to renounce their beliefs. Many of them are reported to have been tortured or ill-treated in detention'.<sup>23</sup>

At about the same time, Jiang Zemin first introduced his theory of the 'Three Represents'. The 'Three Represents' refer to political representation of the advanced productive forces (*xianjin shengchanli*), advanced culture (*xianjin wenhua*), and the interests of the overwhelming majority (*zui guangda renmin de genben liyi*). The theory is at worst just another cult of personality or at best a justification of the pragmatic decision to admit members of the business class into the Party. The claim to represent the overwhelming majority did not signal the dawn of a consensus politics, let alone democracy with fair and competitive elections. More realistically, the purpose is to legitimate the right of the Party to continuously rule the country by striving to make itself more representative.

<sup>23</sup> See [www.amnesty.org/en/olibrary/info/ASA17/011/2000](http://www.amnesty.org/en/olibrary/info/ASA17/011/2000). Accessed on 18 February 2011.

### *2000-present*

In this new period, the legacy of religious policy under the Jiang Zemin administration lingers on, with a greater pragmatism and tactical twists of refined controls.

The sixteenth Party Congress in 2002 elected a more pragmatic, technocratic political leadership under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. The ideology of the 'Three Represents' gradually lost ground to a new one introduced by Hu on 26 June 2005, i.e. 'Scientific Development Concept and Harmonious Society'. The first concept suggests a more empirical, evidence-based approach to policy formation and execution. But what is meant by a harmonious society? The answer is, according to Hu, that it 'should feature democracy, the rule of law, equity, justice, sincerity, amity, vitality, stability and order, man and nature live in harmony'.<sup>24</sup> The core implications of the new ideology include a redefinition of the Chinese Communist Party as a ruling party rather than a revolutionary party, and a shift in developmental priority from GDP growth to overall human development and social harmony. The concept of harmonious society might offer some hope for a policy of accommodation with religion. But one should not expect too much from an abstract ideology when it comes to issues of religious freedom. Hu-Wen's policy towards religion does not represent any significant departure from the previous two decades. It is still based on the realistic recognition of the nature of religion as articulated in Document #19 and on Jiang's advocacy of law-based management and adaptation of religions to socialism under the guidance of the Party. What is new is probably an even greater priority assigned to economic development and the awareness that rising social contradictions and conflicts have to be adequately addressed. In this light, religion is increasingly perceived to have a positive role to play. The new sense of engaging religion in this period of state-building can best be illustrated by the following speech of Jia Qinglin, Chairman of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference with top responsibility for religious affairs.

I hope that every religious group sturdily establishes a sense of calling, responsibility and urgency for promoting harmony [*hexie*] as the important content in the work of religious groups, and that it is merged organically with the adaptation of religion to socialist society, one step further exploring the ways and means that religion can serve so-

<sup>24</sup> The full text in Chinese is downloadable via [www.china.com.cn/chinese/news/899546.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/news/899546.htm)

ciety and the masses, and that in the process of serving the promotion of social harmony also will promote other aspects of harmony in religion and society. Serving development should be made the important task in the work of religious groups, from beginning to end consciously merging one's own work closely with the general situation of national economic development, maximally uniting the great believing masses and within one's power share the burdens of the nation, going all out to exert oneself for development.<sup>25</sup>

All else remain more or less the same, with some important tactical twists. The policy baseline remains unchanged. First, religion has to be sanctioned. Secondly, sanctioned religion must be subordinated to the interests of the state. Thirdly, non-sanctioned religions such as evil cults must be repressed. The differences from the past are as follows. First, religious affairs should be less arbitrarily regulated. Secondly, sanctioned religion should be more adequately guided by the party. Thirdly, the method of control is much more refined, i.e. 'Control II'. While restriction of religious activities has been the norm, the talk of more proper administration is something new. A key indicator of the new trend is the intensified use of legislation to anchor a normative framework. A significant step was undertaken when, in 2004, the State Council issued the Religious Affairs Provisions which took effect on 1 March, 2005. These regulations are the first to clarify the rights and obligations of registered religious organizations *as well as* the duties and responsibilities of the State Administration for Religious Affairs and Religious Affairs Bureau. Note that there had been provincial and municipal regulations on the management of religious affairs before this national legislation. Thus, the 2005 Provisions were obviously enacted as the national standard for religious affairs administration at all levels of government.

The practical implication of the Party guiding religion to adapt to socialism<sup>26</sup> can mean a different kind of interference with religion practices. 'Guidance' can confine religion within new parameters and to officially assigned roles in the public life, i.e. primarily to serve economic growth and social order, and not to meet the spiritual needs of the people. While the execution of such a policy can be more tactical, law-based and practical purpose oriented, it is still a kind of control. More details about it will be discussed later when we look at the policy in practice.

<sup>25</sup> As quoted from Fredrik Fällman, 'Useful Opium? ...', *ibid*, p. 966.

<sup>26</sup> In practice, it means adaptation to 'post-socialist' development of capitalist market economy.

## Why policy change?

Policy change has been a response to a combination of macro-, mezzo- and micro-levels of factors in interaction with each other. They can be summarized into three major forces: globalization, including China's Re-entry into the world, the pragmatic turn of the regime, and awakening citizens and society.

### *The macro-level: globalization and China's re-entry into the world*

The impact of globalization is powerful, albeit mostly indirect for religion-politics relations. The replacement of central planning by the market as China exposed herself to the forces of economic globalization has led to changes in the state-society relationship and to empowered human agents who have benefited from marketization. Increasing multi-dimensional integration of China into the world brings along greater pressure for her to also adopt universal standards in other areas beyond commercial transactions, for example human rights. Exposure to global flows of information has opened up the eyes of the Chinese people to alternative views, practices and value systems, thereby leading to rising expectations of reforms.

It all started with the secret mission of Henry Kissinger to China in July 1971 to prepare for a visit by President Nixon from 21 to 28 February the following year. The historic event ended twenty-five years of hostilities between the two countries and facilitated China's entry into the United Nations as a replacement of Taiwan. The reform and opening policy announced in 1978 formally ended China's foreign policy of self-isolation from the Western world. By the 1980s, China also joined most UN-affiliated agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and started to give up its previous stand on self-reliance by receiving economic and technical assistance from agencies like the UN Development Programme. China's integration into the world system was further consolidated with its accession to the WTO in November 2001, after fifteen years of hard negotiations. Closer integration entails greater exposure to the forces of globalization, in particular its economic and information-technological aspects, with unintended effects for the freedom of religious activities. Suffice to mention here three impacts as reported in the above. In the process of changes, individuals are able to accumulate independent resources and thereby enhance their autonomy vis-à-vis the government. Globalization of information technology has offered them not only alternative information, but new vehicles to form and mobilize social ties. Globalization of legal norms has provided the Chinese people with reference points in their demands of the government. The external pressure for legal conformity

started first with international market transactions. Spillover effects slowly ensue in other functional areas.

### *The mezzo-level: pragmatic turn of the regime*

By 'pragmatic turn' I mean four different transformations in the nature of the regime. The first involves a shift from utopia to development in the interpretation of modernity and practice of modernizing the state. The other important regime transformation concerns a transition away from totalitarianism to soft authoritarianism. The third has to do with the change in the political leadership from revolutionaries to technocrats and bureaucrats. The last and not the least involves the growth of sub-national political jurisdiction as the central government devolves power to lower levels of authority.

The political regime of China today is radically different from the old one thirty years ago. The state is no longer totalitarian in the sense of exerting an encompassing control of society. The national elite are no longer revolutionaries, but technocrats and bureaucrats, with neither charisma nor superior authority like Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping. Their style of governance is much less ideology-driven, more empirical and pragmatic. The goal of the state-building project has also moved from utopia to development. As a result, communism as an ideology has lost ground to the capitalist spirit of getting rich by all means. Erosion of the official ideology bears significant implications for a growing market of religion in an unsettling China, especially for Christianity.<sup>27</sup> The system of government is no longer as centralized as before but compartmentalized and fragmented. In fact the central government has devolved considerable powers to the sub-national levels of government. On the other hand, entrepreneurial local states that have emerged from the economic miracle<sup>28</sup> have become more self-centered and assertive in pushing through their own interests. They often distort policies or frustrate directives from the above. The divergent agenda and interests of governmental units at the same jurisdictional level also lead to great variations, if not confusion, in the execution of the state's policy towards religion. Thus, the end of the unitary state has provided religious groups with more veto points in the political system for support or appeal. In a nutshell,

<sup>27</sup> Jiexia Elisa Zhai, 'Contrasting Trends of Religious Markets in Contemporary Mainland China and in Taiwan', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 2010), pp. 94-111.

<sup>28</sup> As a phenomenon characterized as (local) state corporatism by Jean Oi, see her *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundation of Economic Reform*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

the state's retreat and the growth of a market economy foster an ever-enlarging space for individual autonomy and for a social life independent of the dictates of governments at different levels. One could thus speak of a blooming civil society and market for religious activities, although their exact nature is still undetermined. Alternatively, one may argue that given the breakdown of morality as a result of the Cultural Revolution and the onslaught of primitive capitalism, China right now has an uncivil society where counterfeit, cheating and bribery are prevalent. The government has recognized the existence of a spiritual vacuum, but its efforts to uplift social morality have failed. In the final analysis, the state has failed to attend to the spiritual needs of the people and that is why religions of all kinds have been prospering to the chagrin of the rulers and despite their control of religion.

### *The micro-level: human agency*

As alluded to before, the state-society relationship has been changing. The overall pattern is characterized by the key words 'the state retreats and society advances'. Society is becoming more complex, pluralistic, resourceful and independent vis-à-vis the government. Concomitantly, the human agents in society cease to be compliant subjects. Instead, they are becoming citizens with a rising awareness of their rights, growing expectation of governmental accountability, readiness for political participation, and skills in organizing collective actions and using laws to defend their rights.

Individuals have many options in dealing with the macro- and mezzo-level forces of change. If we view religion-politics relations as an open process of mutual construction by the government and the believers, then we could attribute the eventual outcome to human agency. Whether the human agent exerts an influence on religion-politics relations depends on whether the human agent is a subject or a citizen, on the agent's resources for action, and on his or her determination to use it individually or in cooperation with others. Since the late 1970s, the nature of human agency in China has been changing. Individual Chinese nowadays are no longer the dependent, therefore helpless victims imprisoned in the institution of *danwei*. It is not just that they no longer depend on the state's allocation of resources to sustain their survival, but also that those who have successfully profited from the market have accumulated valuable resources to 'induce' an exchange with the relevant level of government. Last but not least, social ties and networks are proliferating, thereby providing ever better organizational support for collective actions to defend rights when infringed. As these trends continue, it becomes increasingly difficult for the government to ignore the collective voice of organized citizens without regard to its legitimacy to govern.

In sum, multiple levels of influences from globalization, to the changing political regime and to the human agency in local social contexts have all combined to weave the complex relationship between religion and politics. In the next two Sections, we shall discuss policy practices at the grass-root level and responses of selected religious groups to the limitations and opportunities offered by the government's policy in practice.

### **Current policy in practice**

As said, the current policy is characterized by a coexistence of toleration, control/containment and guidance. Activities of popular religions are largely tolerated as long as they do not pose a threat to the ruling regime or to public order. Unsanctioned religions that are threatening are relentlessly suppressed or watchfully contained. Actual control of the five sanctioned religions is focused on selected targets, dressed under the cloak of administrative regulations and generally with tact. Various government authorities also take pain to instrumentalize religious organizations for preferred political or economic objectives. Most importantly of all, toleration, control/containment and guidance of religions vary greatly depending on circumstances.

Specifically, the situations on the ground are complex, with uneven practices under different contexts. The national level of policy implementation can be extremely harsh with respect to certain religions, such as the countrywide campaign against the well-organized and assertive Falun Gong. Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims remain frequent targets of suppression. During certain national dates, the atmosphere used to be tense. For example, stricter limitations and harsher suppression of religious activities recur on regular events like National Day, June 4, and the plenary sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Special occasions also call for heightened control, as seen during the visits of overseas dignitaries, the 2008 Olympic Games and Shanghai 2010 World Expo.

It is fair to say that most practices of the state's religious policy are played out at the local levels, leading to a great variation in treatment. For instance, 'Hebei province contains at least one-quarter of China's Catholic population, most of them living in predominantly Catholic villages where there have been frequent reports of official crackdowns on religious activities. In some inland provinces such as Hunan, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia, unregistered Catholic churches are built in the middle of the villages, market towns, and cities and operate publicly...'.<sup>29</sup> While the working interaction

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Tse, 'Christianity in Contemporary China: An Update', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Spring 2007), p. 279.

between the national and sub-national governments still counts from time to time, the outcome can be largely determined by local levels of government. There is however an important exception to this general rule. As found by Joseph Tse, '...the underground Christian communities in Beijing and on the North China Plain are constantly involved in disputes with the Communist state because of their proximity to the political center of government. By comparison, various dialect-speaking Christian communities along the southeast coast have long been an integral part of the Overseas Chinese networks across the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, which transcends national boundaries and exists beyond the state's control'.<sup>30</sup> Within the same level, different government departments may have different agendas and interests, and different cadres involved in dealing with religious activities may carry with them different personal views about religions and have different priorities with respect to their 'political responsibility' in following policies from the above. Practices also vary from region to region. Religious groups and believers in the northern parts of China experience more hard times than their counterparts in southern coastal areas.

Last but not least, foreign/external relations can also be a factor for the variations in treatment. Catholicism has had difficulties in its development partly because of the factor of Vatican's status as a state as well as a universal church. Buddhism in general has been favoured more often than not, as the central government once used it to play a bridging role in a strategy to improve the cross-Taiwan-Straits relationship. It seems that Buddhism is favoured partly for its perceived potentials to become a universal religion in competition with Christianity. In a more general sense, having strong external ties along with other resources such as economic influence and cultural integration with the local society can put a certain religion in a much better bargaining position vis-à-vis the local government. In such a situation, religion can receive a better treatment from the authorities by making contributions to the improvement of local socio-economic life. This special situation will be presently revisited when we deal with the different responses of religions to the governments' practices.

### **Responses from religions**

Different religions have experienced varying degrees of freedom in their activities, partly depending on how they and the government weave their working relationship with each other. To risk some degree of simplification,

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Tse, *ibid.*

responses of religions to the government policy of Control II and guidance can be placed between confrontation and cooperation.<sup>31</sup> Falun Gong occupies the confrontational end and Shaolin (Buddhist) the other extreme. Placed in between are Dalü in Baoding (Catholic), Sheshan in Shanghai (Catholic), 'China's Jerusalem' (Wanzhou Protestant), Nanputuo in Fujian (reformed Buddhist) Heilongdawang in Shaanbei (Popular religion/Daoist). In the following pages, Falun Gong, 'China's Jerusalem' and Shaolin will be elaborated as examples (see Figure 1, p. 697).

Falun Gong is a controversial system of beliefs and practices founded in 1992. It has been characterized differently as *qigong*, a spiritual movement, cultivation system in the Confucian tradition, heretical teaching (*xiejiao*), (an evil) cult, radical religious movement, new religious movement, or a popular religion based on Daoism and Buddhism. Beatrice Leung has characterized it as a 'quasi-religion' that 'poses a greater challenge to the government and the CCP than any state-recognized religion in China'.<sup>32</sup>

For the first year and a half since Falun Gong's foundation, its leader, Li Hongzhi, ran popular classes by invitation of official *qigong* associations in many localities. On 13 March, he was invited by the cultural unit of the French Embassy in Beijing to deliver a briefing, to be followed by the first Falun Gong class in Paris on 13–19 March and a month later in Sweden the same year. Falun Gong registered the fastest growth of religious organization in post-1949 China,<sup>33</sup> drawing followers from all walks of life including high-ranking cadres and organizing mass-scale public exercises. Li Hongzhi was even presented with a number of prizes and awards by government authorities for his contribution to the promotion of Chinese culture and public health. The turn of its fate might have been triggered by its

<sup>31</sup> Fredrik Fällman offers a lengthy analysis of different religions' responses to the official policy in his article 'Useful Opium? 'Adapted religion' and 'harmony' in contemporary China', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, Issue 67 (2010), p. 966.

<sup>32</sup> Leung, Beatrice 'China and Falun Gong: Party and society relations in the modern era', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, Issue 33 (2002), pp. 761–784; For a book-length treatment of the issues see Østergaard, Clemens Stubbe and Jude Howell eds. *Governance and the Political Challenge of Falun Gong*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Kahn cites an official tally of 70 million Falun Gong practitioners in his article, 'Notoriety Now for Movement's Leader', *New York Times*, April 27, 1999. [www.nytimes.com/1999/04/27/world/notoriety-now-for-movement-s-leader.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/27/world/notoriety-now-for-movement-s-leader.html) accessed on 20 April 2011. Falun Gong has by now spread to about 114 countries with over seventy exercise centres.

alarming growth and peaceful albeit aggressive protests against its critiques in mid-1990s. On 17 June 1996, *Guangming Daily* published an editorial denouncing the pseudo-science of Falun Gong, which attracted hundreds of protest letters by its believers. A month later, the News and Publications Bureau banned five publications of Falun Gong. In December, the Falun Gong Association was removed from membership of the National *Qigong* Association. Overnight, Falun Gong thus lost the protection of a registered organization and many connections. Furthermore, all of its activities have become illegal since then. Li Hongzhi was alert enough to timely immigrate to the United States in the same year. Falun Gong's relationship with the authorities continued to worsen. In May 1998, TV Station Beijing featured a programme with specialists and academics on issues of how to manage *qigong*. A remark made there by Professor He Zuoxiu that certain Falun Gong practitioners 'had been possessed by the devil' led to weeks-long, illegal protests by over a thousand practitioners in front of the station. In April 1999 another illegal protest in Tianjin ended with beatings and arrests. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month, this state-society conflict escalated to a peak in an unprecedented manner. Some 10,000 practitioners staged a silent protest at *Zhongnanhai*, the residence compound of China's leaders, requesting the central authority to assure a proper and lawful environment for Falun Gong to cultivate their beliefs. In effect, Falun Gong woke up the central leadership to its alarming organizational muscle. Jiang Zemin swiftly responded by ordering a nation-wide crackdown.<sup>34</sup> On 10 June 1999, the '610 Office' responsible for cracking down on Falun Gong was established under the Central Committee of the Party, with sweeping powers and branches all over China. As a poor example of law-based management of religion and religious activities, the pertinent law in fact was enacted *post facto* to legitimize the policy decisions by the Party and the government. In addition, government ministries issued regulations before the National People's Congress legislated (in October) to outlaw 'heterodox religions' with retroactive effect to Falun Gong.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Xu Jiatao, 'Cultural Revolution Revisited in Crackdown', *Taipei Times*, 8 Sept. 1999. [www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/1999/09/08/1308/2](http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/1999/09/08/1308/2). Accessed on 20 April 2011. Xu is the former director of China's Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong.

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of the validity of the legal base for the crackdown, see Bryan Edelman; James T. Richardson, 'Imposed Limitations on Freedom of Religion in China and the Margin of Appreciation Doctrine', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 243-267.

Specifically, on July 22 1999, the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a Decision banning ‘the Research Society of Falun Dafa and the Falun Gong organization under its control’ for its engagement in illegal activities, advocating superstition and spreading fallacies, hoodwinking people, inciting and creating disturbances, and jeopardizing social stability. On the same day, the Ministry of Public Security also announced sweeping prohibitions on Falun Gong, as follows:

1. Everyone is prohibited from displaying in any public place scrolls, pictures and other marks or symbols promoting Falun Dafa (Falun Gong);
2. Everyone is prohibited from distributing in any public place books, cassettes and other materials promoting Falun Dafa (Falun Gong);
3. Everyone is prohibited from gathering a crowd to perform ‘group exercises’ and other activities promoting Falun Dafa (Falun Gong);
4. It is prohibited to use sit-ins, petitions and other means to hold assemblies, marches or demonstrations in defense and promotion of Falun Dafa (Falun Gong);
5. It is prohibited to fabricate or distort facts, to spread rumours on purpose or use other means to incite [people] and disturb social order;
6. Everyone is prohibited from organising or taking part in activities opposing the government’s relevant decision, or from establishing contacts [with other people] for this purpose.<sup>36</sup>

Today, the ‘strike hard’ campaign against Falun Gong still goes on unabated.

Over the years, there were credible reports<sup>37</sup> of arrest, detention, and imprisonment of practitioners; harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps for those who refused to recant their beliefs; deaths due to torture and abuse; and harassment and intimidation of lawyers who defended Falun Gong clients.

To summarize, the case of Falun Gong represents the worst example of religion-politics relations in which a religion took a confrontational ap-

<sup>36</sup> Source: Amnesty International, ‘Crackdown on Falungong’, 17 November 2000, p. 16. [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/011/2000/en/77562be8-df70-11dd-aaaa-7d9091d4638f/asa170112000en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/011/2000/en/77562be8-df70-11dd-aaaa-7d9091d4638f/asa170112000en.pdf), accessed on 20 April 2011.

<sup>37</sup> See Human Rights Watch, ‘Dangerous Meditation: China’s Campaign Against Falungong’, Report published on 7 February 2002; Thomas Lum, ‘China and Falun gong’, (updated) CRS Report for Congress, 11 August 2006. *Congressional Research Report #RL33437*. Accessed on 20 April, 2011; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, Nov. 17, 2010. [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148863.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148863.htm). Accessed on 20 April 2011.

proach to defend its right to freely and openly practice its faith, while the government was equally determined to wipe it out as a heretical organization. There is no prospect for any compromise in the foreseeable future (see Figure 2, p. 698).

Unlike Falun Gong, Protestantism in Wenzhou, a once isolated rural town in coastal Zhejiang province, has excelled in adapting to the market transition during the era of reform and opening to the world, engaging state power and expanding the space for religious development.<sup>38</sup> The resultant religion-politics relations can be described as a cooperative process based on ‘exchange’ as advocated by Professor Reverend Lap-yan Kung below:

... the elite politics of the government aims to make the state-church relationship a give-and-take relationship rather than simply a manipulative one. This new phase creates new possibilities for Protestantism in society ... that in the context of the ideology of a harmonious society, Protestantism seen in this way has a more explicit role to play in public life. ... We should note, nevertheless, that this new phase brings with it no implication that the Chinese authorities have given up the control of religion, for religion can potentially threaten their legitimacy. However, I do not think that state-church relations in China today are appropriately understood in terms of curbing the growth of religion as this used to be practiced, for faced with challenges to their legitimacy, the Chinese authorities have had to choose between retreat, retrenchment or adaptation; they have chosen the latter, and it is the nature of this adaptation that the model of exchange relationship intends to explain and articulate.<sup>39</sup>

Wenzhou is now the most Christianized Chinese city<sup>40</sup> and a pioneer in China’s development of a market economy. It has earned the reputation as ‘China’s Jerusalem’ or otherwise served as a model of astounding Christian revival. Compared to the case of Falun Gong where radical confrontation ended with a total crackdown, this model serves as an example of how the skilful engagement of resilient believers can transform religion-politics re-

<sup>38</sup> For a comparison with another successful Catholic case of adaptation in a Hakka village in Guangdong province, see Eriberto P. Lozada, *God Aboveground: Catholic Church, Postsocialist State, and Transnational Processes in a Chinese Village*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Lap-Yan Kung, ‘The Emergence of Exchange Politics in China and its Implications for Church-State Relations’, *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2010), pp. 9–28, here p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Wenzhou has more than 1,000 churches and at least 12 percent of the population is Christian, compared to 3 percent of Christians in the total population of China.

lations from one characterized by dominance and resistance to one characterized by negotiable boundaries and dynamic interchange.<sup>41</sup> Wenzhou believers are powerful and tactful. They, in registered or unregistered churches alike, have been trying to push back the boundaries and have succeeded many times.

Why has the Protestant church in Wenzhou grown so fast? How could it overcome extreme odds in the past and lingering limitations in the present? The best introductory answer is provided by Aikman's book chapter 'China's Jerusalem',<sup>42</sup> from which four key factors can be extracted. First is the factor of leaders. Wenzhou was fortunate to have zealous and visionary evangelists. In 1867, a one-legged Scotsman named George Stott of the China Inland Mission brought Christianity to the town. He persisted in his missionary work despite all odds and succeeded in converting the locals thanks to sheer courage, his invalidity, and the fact that he preached in the local dialect, normally incomprehensible to the non-local. In 1878, he built the city's first Christian church on Chengxi Street, a historic landmark. Stott must have laid a solid foundation<sup>43</sup> well integrated into the local culture,<sup>44</sup> as Christianity in this locale survived anti-foreignism in the late Qing dynasty, political turbulence in the Republican era and the revolutionary movements in the late 1950s. There was already a critical mass of fervent and perseverant Christians in Wenzhou before Miao Zhitong, the 'greatly beloved leader of the main Wenzhou house church network', started to work his magic. Miao, as an orphan, was brought up by Christian relatives

<sup>41</sup> Nanlai Cao, 'Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State: An Ethnographic Account of Church-State Relations in China's Economic Transition', *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 68, No.1 (2007), pp. 45-66.

<sup>42</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Aikman briefly introduced the intense Christian work of another leader during the Cultural Revolution, Zhen Datong. According to Aikman, Zhen had the following to say during an interview: 'The church in Wenzhou was very good during the Cultural Revolution. We never stopped meeting. The China Inland Mission had laid a good foundation here'. David Aikman, *ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>44</sup> According to Miss Yu-jing Zhu, earlier Christians were conscious of the foreign nature of their faith and endeavoured to shed that image by setting up independent local organizations, such as Independent Jesus Association of China (*zhonghua yesu zili hui*) in 1907, Protestant Local Association of China (*zhonghua jidujiao neidi hui*) in 1918 and Self-reliant Association of Protestants in China (*zhonghua jidujiao zili hui*) in 1920. Miss Zhu is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Anthropology, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is working on an ethnographic project on 'the state-church relations in Wenzhou'.

and had his wayward teenage years. In 1967, right at the height of the Cultural Revolution, he took up the call to be a full-time preacher. Needless to say, he was charged as a ‘counterrevolutionary head of superstition’ and suffered from recurrent arrests, beatings and sessions of tortures. He was once almost beaten to death and saved by a large group of Christians who showed up to bravely clamor for his release. By all means possible, Miao stubbornly refused to admit any crimes during ‘struggle sessions’ but instead turned his ‘confession’ into a sermon about the Judgment. The authorities eventually gave up and released him. The moment he was free, he began again to mobilize Christian churches. By 1976 when the Cultural Revolution came to an end, Aikman wrote, the Zhejiang house churches were probably more active than those in any other part of China.<sup>45</sup> In Aikman’s description, Miao and his fellow Christian leaders were not only brave but visionary too. They dreamt of moving beyond ‘China’s Jerusalem’ or ‘China’s Antioch’. ‘Back to Jerusalem’ is the preferred idea, i.e. they will ‘take the Gospel back to the Middle East’.

This does not mean that Wenzhou is now free of government control of religion, however. Limiting regulations still lingers abound and the repression of ‘illegitimate’ religious activities continued.<sup>46</sup> The ‘successful’ model of Wenzhou is the contingent result of what happens when a religious community and the government are on good terms. How is such a relationship achieved? How do Wenzhou’s Protestants negotiate the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate activities and gain not only recognition but also ‘cooperation’ from government officials? A quick answer is that they make it not by subservience, but tactful defiance and social influence based on wealth<sup>47</sup> and philanthropy.

<sup>45</sup> According to Miss Zhu’s findings, there were about 330,000 Christians (Protestants and Catholics) in 1976 as compared to 140,000 just before the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, it is reported with reference to Wenzhou that ‘Religious activities that are not under state control are considered illegal in China, and are often categorized as “illegitimate religious activities” and “cultic groups” in order to facilitate shutdown. Independent house churches face the brunt of this legislation. Bob Fu, the leader of China Aid, said that one of the newest developments is a strategy that labels Protestant movements as “cults”, allowing the government to justify repression. And yet, despite persistent and often violent persecution, the underground church in China is growing stronger every day’. Refugee Review Tribunal Australia, *RRT Research Response Number CHN32722*, 17 December 2007. [www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4b6fe19c0.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4b6fe19c0.pdf). Accessed on 14 April 2011.

<sup>47</sup> A rich and powerful Wenzhou Christian is Zheng Shengtao, head of the Shenli (literally God’s Power) Group, who has been ranked by *Forbes* magazine as the 395<sup>th</sup>

A few examples of tactful defiance suffice here. Religious organizations have to be registered to be legitimate. Some Wenzhou house churches registered with the Industrial and Commerce Bureau rather than the Religious Affairs Bureau. There is also a law banning the conduct of religious activities in public. For example, religious procession and public display of religious symbols are forbidden. Wenzhou Protestants are however ingenious enough to turn funerals and weddings into evangelist occasions. In a public funeral's hall, the center stage is flanked by a portrait of the deceased placed on one side and a banner ten times bigger than the portrait on the other. On the banner is the inscription 'God loves us' and dancers perform in the middle of the stage to the tune of religious music. Government officials apparently know about such occasions but they turn a blind eye to them, for one reason or another. A plausible reason has to do with the fighting spirit of Wenzhou Protestants and their resourcefulness. In 2002, Wenzhou pastors resisted an edict to halt all Sunday-school teaching by 'banging on bureaucratic doors all the way to Beijing', on the legal ground that there was no law prohibiting the teaching of religion to children under the age of eighteen. They had won the backing of Bishop Ding Guanxun, president of the Nanjing Seminary and leader of the Three-Self and the China Christian Council, as well as the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce. At the end, they won the case.

The success of the Wenzhou model could be attributed not only to the resourcefulness, perseverance, and social capital of Wenzhou Christians, but also to their economic power as well. In China, there is a correlation between economic growth and religious revival, with Wenzhou as a prime example. This city claims the highest number of merchants per capita in China. They trade all over in China and in major markets overseas too. Many of them are religious believers who spread their faith along with their trade. It is indeed amazing to note that 'Wenzhou merchants established perhaps the only government-sanctioned Christian gathering point in Lhasa, Tibet'.<sup>48</sup>

richest man in China, with assets estimated at more than \$400 million. He is a member of the provincial Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body to the government, and director of the Wenzhou General Chamber of Commerce. See Louisa Lim, 'In the Land of Mao, a Rising Tide of Christianity', NPR (Public Radio Station), 19 July 2010, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128546334](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128546334). Accessed on 15 April 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Kam-Kwong Chan, 'China's Socioeconomic Changes and the Implications for the Religion-State Dynamic in China', *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Vol. 2004, Issue 2 (summer 2004), pp. 325-356, here p. 344.

This is the success story of ‘boss Christians’ as told by Nanlai Cao.<sup>49</sup> ‘Boss Christians’ refer to the prosperous entrepreneurs of Wenzhou who ‘have adopted their modern capitalist cultural logic in the production, management and consumption of religious activities’. They are recognized and respected for their rising economic power and for the social services they provide to the community. They have no fear of publicly displaying their faith and they name their enterprises after personalities in the Bible. Many of them act as local church leaders and preachers, and convert the economic capital, social knowledge, and civic skills they have acquired in the modern marketplace into capacities that are channeled towards church development, especially aggressive church property acquisition. They have thereby refashioned Chinese Christianity, a marginalized rural social institution in the popular imagination, into a modern urban institution with an entrepreneurial outlook. Also unlike their rural counterparts, they seek to be integrated into the current socioeconomic mainstream and to play a greater role in the public arena. They actively and creatively seek to integrate their religious and entrepreneurial identities, thus depoliticizing Christianity in the state-authorized context of business development. Cao argues that ‘Christian entrepreneurs and the post-Mao state actually share many important concepts, aspirations, and interests – particularly in the common pursuit of stability and development’. Christian revival can therefore be conceived as a dynamic process in which emerging socioeconomic groups embedded in local histories and memories try to claim their own space to practice a long established faith in changing political and economic conditions. Christian entrepreneurs are, while producing, managing and consuming God’s plan in the ongoing market transition, helping to transform religion-politics relations and the overlapping domains of religious and secular practice (see Figure 3, p. 699).

Compared to the two cases above, Shaolin Monastery represents a model of close cooperation between state and church in which the former wholeheartedly embraces the advanced-capitalist way of development, as a response to the official call for religious adaptation to socialism. Shaolin Monastery has a long tradition of close cooperation with the government. The present case is even more complicated and controversial than the past pattern. One may call it a version with Chinese-socialist characteristics.

<sup>49</sup>The following analysis is largely based on two articles by Nanlai Cao, i.e. ‘Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State...’, *ibid.*; and ‘Boss Christians: The Business of Religion in the “Wenzhou Model” of Christian Revival’, *The China Journal*, Vol. 59 (January 2008), pp. 63-86.

Shaolin Monastery, the global face of Chinese Buddhism, has been and continues to be a brand. Like many other religious organizations, it has had its ups and downs. Generally speaking however, Shaolin Monastery has been on better terms with political authorities of the day. Its glorious history started when its martial monks assisted Li Shimin, the founder of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), in his military campaign. Li granted the Monastery with imperial patronage and a large amount of land. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Shaolin monk soldiers helped the imperial army in its border defense campaigns three times, for which the temple was rewarded with a flag post and two stone lions placed in front of the temple and guaranteed institutional prominence over the centuries. However, the Monastery was destroyed and its monks dispersed upon the foundation of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) as a punishment for its continued loyalty to the Ming emperor. Relations were later improved after emperor Kangxi (1654-1722) honoured it with a horizontal tablet with his own calligraphy 'Treasure Tree and Fragrant Lotus' (*baoshu fanglian*) and 'Shaolin Temple'. The Temple was rebuilt twice with permissions from Emperors Yongzheng (1723-1735) and Qianlong (1736-1795). In the Northern expedition (1926-1928) of the Republican era, Shaolin Monks sided with the Zhi army (under Wu Peifu) in its battle in March 1928 against the Northwestern Army (under the command of Shi Yousan) but failed. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the Northwestern army set fire to the Monastery and the next day a unit of the National army stationed in Dengfeng (under the command of Su Mingqi) came to completely burn down the entire temple. It was not restored until the 1950s with the help of the Communist government, only to be destroyed again during the Cultural Revolution. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the shattered temple was guarded by no more than a dozen monks with 28 *mu* (1 *mu* = 0.0667 acre) of poor land.

It was in this difficult period that Shaolin Monastery experienced another turn of its fate, when Liao Chengzhi made an offer. Liao was Deputy Director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the State Council in charge of overseas Chinese affairs and Sino-Japanese relations, and was a victim of the Cultural Revolution. In 1972, he was rehabilitated by specific permission of Mao Zedong and assigned to assist Zhou Enlai in his diplomatic responsibilities. In 1978, he was again entrusted with the directorship of the Commission on Overseas Chinese Affairs. On 31 January of that year, with the goal of improving Sino-Japanese relations on his agenda, he invited Hong Kong movie producers to Beijing suggesting to them the production of a movie that would be both healthy and appealing to the public. In 1979, he talked to producer Liao Yiyuan again, proposing the production of a

movie about Shaolin Monastery. Liao believed that a movie about the Monastery would be attractive to the Japanese audience and could thereby help normalize diplomatic relations between China and Japan. One reason was that there was a Shaolin temple in Japan, established by Oyama Matsu-tatsu who had learned *kung fu* in Shaolin Monastery in 1939. Under his influence, Shaolin *kung fu* became a popular martial art in Japan. So, this is the story behind the 1982 *kung fu* movie about the Shaolin Temple, featuring Jet Lian Li, which broke box office records when it debuted in Japan, Mainland China, and many overseas markets. A long Shaolin series of movies was subsequently produced.

Shaolin Monastery not only mediated Sino-Japanese diplomacy, its *kung fu* reputation has complicated its economic relations with the local government. For the new 30<sup>th</sup> Abbot of the Monastery, Shi Yongxin, who is the first ever monk with an MBA degree, *kung fu* economy is one way of going out to the world. At the same time, the local government views the Monastery, a multiple billion *yuan* (RMB) business, as a lucrative source for boosting local government revenue. This is not to say that Shaolin Monastery could not have other ways to engage the outside world. Since 1986, it has established a number of charitable institutions such as Learned Society of Shaolin *kung fu*, Shaolin Red Cross, Academy of Shaolin Calligraphy and Painting, All-China Research Society on *Zen* Poetry, and Shaolin Monastery Foundation for Charity and Welfare. They are however overshadowed by Shaolin's business projects, like domestic and overseas *kung fu* performances, *kung fu* School and courses, and Shaolin Temple Enterprise Development Company Limited. The latter has, apart from petty businesses like Shaolin delicatessens, registered over one hundred patent businesses and granted licenses for other enterprises to use its name 'Shaolin Temple'. The government too lost no time to rezone a huge area with Shaolin Temple as its centre to become a Gao Mountain Resort Area for the development of tourism and cultural activities. The government has also set up its own enterprises and companies 'infringing' the brand name of 'Shaolin Temple'.<sup>50</sup>

The commercialization of Shaolin Monastery has attracted a lot of controversies. In recent years, business conflicts have adversely affected the Temple's relations with the local government. To give a small example, the number

<sup>50</sup> The Shaolin Monastery has three companies named after it, whereas seven companies established under the name of the Vice Director of the Finance Bureau of the local government are named 'Dengfeng Gao Mountain Shaolin' (dengfeng gaoshan shaolin).

of tourists attracted to the temple has grown from two hundred thousand in 1978 to over 150 million in the 1990s. Annual revenue from Shaolin tourism alone, reaching RMB 100 million in 2010, amounts to one-third of the total income of the local government, Dengfeng. The entrance charge to the temple costs RMB 100, of which only RMB 30 goes to Shaolin Monastery. The Monastery does not want to charge for entrance, since usually Buddhist temples rely on donations from believers. Negotiation with the local government to abolish the charge has so far been in vain. Local people know that in front of a side door to the West of the temple, there is a donation box for a sum of RMB 30 to gain admission into the temple.

What has transpired is that the (local) religion-politics relationship as exemplified by Shaolin Monastery is one of asymmetrical power and unequal exchange. Fortunately, its freedom to practice faith seems unaffected. In an interview with the *Guangzhou Shangbao* (Canton Commercial Daily) on 2 December 2010,<sup>51</sup> the Abbot insisted that the commercialization of Shaolin Monastery will not stop but should be accelerated, for the sake of Shaolin's next 1,500 years. He defended it as follows. First he referred to the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism saying that the church must not withdraw itself from the world but deal with secular society. As the landscape outside the church has changed, the church should also change. 'We have two hundred resident monks to feed', he said, 'and we do not want to depend on government's subsidies. By means of commercialization, we let modern technology work to facilitate people's understanding of Buddhism. In exporting *kung fu* for example, we are in fact spreading the culture of Zen. Mahayana Buddhism speaks of sharing, not self-cultivation. To share implies to broadcast, or to communicate. Practice of faith does not mean just to burn incense and kowtow, but also to upgrade cultural communication. Going out into the world also entails broadening the horizons of the monks'. 'What I have done', the Abbot continued, 'is to promote an excellent cultural legacy of humankind and to consolidate the leadership of the Shaolin Monastery in Buddhism. Whether the commercial approach is right depends on whether the products are derived from the essence of Shaolin culture. If the products are authentic, then their sale is conducive to the development of the temple and the Buddhist way. If we do not do it, many others will exploit Shaolin's brand name for the pure sake of making profit. Therefore, Shaolin must conduct business in order to protect its brand name

<sup>51</sup> [www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2010-12/02/content\\_21462583.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2010-12/02/content_21462583.htm). Accessed on 23 March 2011.

and its associated spiritual niceties'. 'Businesses conducted by Shaolin, such as drugstore, vegetarian restaurant, *kung fu* star contest, movies', so argued the Abbot, 'all have to do with faith and income thereby generated has been plowed back into charities and cultural preservation projects'. 'The biggest challenges are', the Abbot admitted, 'whether they can insist on the cultural quality of these products and to avoid from being "overcome" by commerce, instead of commanding it. It is imperative to incessantly enhance the quality and depth of faith as monks'. He emphasized that they all strictly maintain daily routines such as sutra chanting and *Zen* meditation and they also observe the retreat '*Zen 7*' annually.<sup>52</sup>

This is indeed an eloquent and powerful defense. Yet, it remains to be seen whether Abbot Shi can get what he truly wishes to get, such that Shaolin Monastery remains more of a religious centre than a *kung fu* Disneyland.

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced the considerable changes to the religion-politics relationship since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Generally speaking, the space for religion's autonomy has been expanding, thanks to a number of domestic and external factors. Currently, the boundaries between religion and politics are still being negotiated and ongoing changes, sometimes chaotic, are likely. It is expected that globalization, regime transformation and the formation of civil society will continue to have an impact on the changing contour of religious freedom in the future.

There is no denying the fact that the state remains a crucial factor. It is the state that defines what amounts to religion or superstition, designs policies to deal with them, and backs up their implementation with coercive force when necessary. Having come to a better understanding of the nature of religion, the government acting in the name of the state has been learning new ways to control and guide religion in the service of defined interests. Instead of abolition and suppression, its current motto of religious governance is guided adaptation of religion to socialism. The policy of guided adaptation is by nature lop-sided, given religion's more dependent status in the power game.

This does not mean that religious groups and believers are entirely helpless or powerless, depending on the influence of other factors and the will of the human agent. Among the factors, the local context stands out. The general pattern here is that conflicts between the ruling authorities and religion are of a more pragmatic nature. Thus, execution of the religious policy

<sup>52</sup> That is meditation for 7 multiplied by 7 days.

from the above varies greatly from one locality to another. Religion that is well integrated within the local culture and with rich resources of one kind or another is likely to enjoy more room for manoeuvre. Even house churches not officially 'approved' or 'registered' can still maintain a delicate working relation with the government. Sanctioned churches fare better and their activities conducted even in 'illegal' ways are often tolerated. Believers who are entrepreneurial and skilful enough are often co-opted by the state, thereby signaling to other fellow believers that their practice of faith is safe from intervention. A Christian with Party membership or in government office can even help 'make' the local state. Nanlai Cao reports such a case in her article about the Christian entrepreneurs of Wenzhou and comments that 'the local government preferred a cadre who follows the Christian ethic and seeks to promote local development rather than a greedy, rent-seeking, but ideologically trustworthy atheist official'.<sup>53</sup>

Looking ahead, one cannot, despite the breakthroughs described above, expect that the government will fully relinquish its control of religion. Instead, tightening up of control is more likely in the short term, in light of the forthcoming 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012. The religion-politics relationship beyond the immediate term is likely to move away from the state-manipulative mode to a give-and-take mode, as the interests of the state and those of church increasingly converge and as the relationship between the two parties becomes mutually determined. As for longer-term predictions, Dr. Kim-Kwong Chan has offered four scenarios based on two variants: religious policy (restrictive vs. reform) and social development (smooth vs. rough transition).<sup>54</sup> They can be succinctly stated as follows.

***Scenario one – victim model (under restrictive policy and smooth social transition)***

Restrictive policy will persist, while religion will grow in kinds as well as in quantity, especially in terms of more well-to-do believers. Society will

<sup>53</sup> As the story goes, there was a successful entrepreneur-cum-local party secretary. He refused to offer bribes in a road construction project. When an opponent reported his Christian faith to his party superior, 'he even took the opportunity to attack the internal conflicts and problems within the local government and stressed that a Christian-predominated government would be much more efficient, since Christians treat each other as brothers and sisters and value truth'. Nanlai Cao, 'Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State...' *ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>54</sup> Kim-Kwong Chan, 'Religion in China in the Twenty-First Century: Some Scenarios', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2005), pp. 87-119.

become more open-minded and individuals more concerned about the meaning of existence in the context of material well-being. The government will discover the wealth that can be generated from their authority over religious believers, especially from those from religions not officially approved or registered. As a result thereof, a new dynamic will develop: victimized religious groups cohabiting with corrupt government officials. Religion in China will thus mostly be playing the role of a victim constantly at the mercy of the ever-stronger Chinese government. Mid-Ming Dynasty offers an analogy here.

***Scenario two – revolutionary model (under restrictive policy with rough transition)***

A rough transition during the modernization process will involve (A) economic difficulties in areas such as agriculture when domestic crops are outcompeted on the global market and (B) social injustice e.g. a widening gap between rich and poor. Chaos will ensue and people will seek to transcend reality and turn to faith. Restrictive religious policy and decline of social stability will cause religious groups to focus on millennialist teachings that in turn may mobilize believers who are disappointed with the current regime into action. Religion will thus become a force of revolution. Here, the history of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) repeats itself.

***Scenario three – philanthropist model (under reform policy and rough transition)***

Religious policy will be reformed to approximate those typically found in the developed nations. Social development however will experience a rough transition (see Scenario two above). Hence, religious organizations will focus all their energy on setting up social services and relief efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the people as well as to bring hope to those in despair. This model mirrors the experiences of Mother Teresa in India, faith-based charity programmes in refugee camps in South East Asia or in the former Yugoslavia.

***Scenario four – teacher model (under reform policy and smooth transition)***

As reformist China will rise to become a world power with an increasingly comfortable standard of living at home, the Chinese will focus on art, culture and leisure. Religion will become popular. Chinese Christians along with their American counterparts will form the largest and most powerful bloc of Christian believers in the world. Cultural and religious study centres will develop and attract increasing international attention. Christian and

Buddhist businessmen and entrepreneurs will establish a benchmark for ethical behaviour, as will religious believers in various professional groups. When Chinese religious organizations establish ever more ties with international religious communities, the Chinese will exert significant influence over international religious bodies. Chinese missionaries will eventually be sent out all over the world and will replace Korea as the largest missionary exporting country in the world, thereby shaping its future religious landscape.

Dr. Chan's scheme is perceptive and grand. It is however hard to predict which model will eventually emerge as the dominant pattern in future China. The present situation is already complex enough and large-scale developmental processes are indeterminate. Today, the religious policy of the government is reformist in some aspects and restrictive in others. Social-economic transition is smooth in some sectors and rough in others. How might these variations add up or cancel each other into a dominant pattern? As to the behaviour of religious bodies and believers, bits and pieces of the four scenarios are discernible. For instance, we may find the seeds of the Teacher Model in the 'back to Jerusalem' vision and in the projects of the Boss Christians from Wenzhou. Most religious bodies have for quite some time focused their energy on social welfare and charity, in conformity to the Philanthropy Model. Harsh treatments experienced by certain Catholics, Uighur Islamists and Tibetan Buddhists fit the description of the Victim Model. Lastly, although there is no revolution in sight, religion-related protests and uprisings are actually on the rise<sup>55</sup> and the case of Falun Gong is just a few steps away from a revolution.

The scenarios scheme is informed by a religious perspective, as Dr. Chan is a believer himself. In the present book, the chapter by F. Russell Hittinger has contributed a different, legal-political perspective. He uses four figures adapted from a chart by W. Cole Durham<sup>56</sup> to map the teaching of *Dignitatis Humanae* onto a spectrum of religion-state regime. I submit that we can also

<sup>55</sup> So much so that Wang Zuo'an, the new chief of the Religious Affairs Bureau, called the attention of his fellow cadres to recent religious developments and urging them to 'fully and correctly carry out the religious policy of the Party'. Wang Zuo'an, 'zengqiang zuohao zhongjiao gongzuo de nengli' (Strengthen the Capacity to Do Well Religious Work), *Qishi* (Journal), 9 January 2010. [www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2010/201003/201001/t20100126\\_19764.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2010/201003/201001/t20100126_19764.htm) accessed on 20 March 2011.

<sup>56</sup> W. Cole Durham, Jr., 'Perspectives on Religious Liberty: A Comparative Framework', *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Legal Perspectives*, eds. Johan D. van der Vyver and John Witte, Jr., The Hague, Boston and London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996, here p. 23.

use them to speculate about the future development of religion–state relations in China. On the basis of Hittinger’s Figures 1 and 2 (see pp. 667–8), one can argue that the religion–state regime in China has been traversing a history from ‘persecution’ by a totalitarian state, through ‘hostility’ towards ‘threatening’ religions and an authoritarian government’s ‘enjoinment, direction and forbiddance’ of practices of recognized religions, to ‘some identification of Church and State’ as promoted by a pragmatic, technocratic government. This seems to be the direction at the moment, but further development remains open, as the path may be interrupted, reversed, and changed in different directions depending on competing factors of influence.

The future is uncertain as there have been many contending forces at work. There is no easy solution, neither in theory nor in practice. In theory, both politics and religion are concerned with authority and its exercise. Each of them claims primacy of their authority over human affairs. Delineation of scope for the authority claim, for example, to confine religion to ‘the private’ sphere and politics to ‘the public’ sector is theoretically untenable and practically difficult to arrange. In China, it is hard to imagine that the state and the church can accept the dictum that the secular and the spiritual or the public and the private can truly be distinctively separated. The government would hardly stop intervening into the teaching of children by religious bodies since the formers’ education and socialization are perceived as responsibilities of the state. The religious bodies on the other hand could hardly abandon their role as prophets to fight injustices in the secular world, or to realize the Kingdom on earth.

It seems therefore better to acknowledge the innate connection between religion and politics.<sup>57</sup> If we can further assume a possibility that both religion and politics share an aspiration and obligation to bring China to ‘modernity’ (or even ‘post-modernity’) in a rapidly changing but still pluralistic world, then religion–politics relations can be conceived as a joint project in which they respect each other as legitimate institutions, engage each other, and check and balance each other in a *modus vivendi* conducive to the development of ‘the common good’ for all. In such a project, the

<sup>57</sup> This author is indebted for the following thought to two books. Ivan Strenski, *Why Politics Can’t Be Separated From Religion*, Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010. Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank eds., *ibid.* In their introduction to the latter book, the co-editors argue that ‘the situation of religion is not simply a history of conflict between state and religion but rather processes of interactions among multiple actors that comprise the making of modern religion and the modern state over the course of the past century’.

minimal requirement to build up mutual trust would be the abandonment of *potestas* (coercive power) in their mutual engagement, to be initiated especially by the government, since religion is at present the more dependent partner in the game. In other words, such a project could only be promoted by *auctoritas* (moral power) of which religion enjoys an advantage whereas politics, when more increasingly civilized, could also afford. This is the future for China. It seems lofty. Let me leave it just at that.



Figure 1. Falun Gong – The confrontational approach.



Figure 2. China's Jerusalem (Wenzhou) — The engagement approach.



Figure 3. Shaolin Monastery — The *kung fu* economy approach.