

Barend J. ter Haar (Leiden University)

The present situation of religious culture in China

A report on religious culture, state control of religion, and recent changes, followed by some policy recommendations

1. Introduction	4
1.1. The region under investigation	5
1.2. Scholarship.....	6
1.3. The historical baseline	7
2. History of persecution	11
2.1. The imperial period.....	11
2.1.1. Control, but no systematic persecution.....	11
2.1.2. Christianity.....	12
2.1.3. Tibetan Buddhism.....	14
2.1.4. Islam.....	16
2.2. The birth of modern intolerance	17
2.3. The Nationalists and religious culture	20
2.4. Some early twentieth-century changes	21
2.5. A century of destruction.....	23
2.5.1. The vicissitudes of war and famine	23
2.5.2. The impact of communist rule	24
3. Communist control and repression.....	28
3.1. The ideological background.....	28
3.2. The political background	30
3.3. Legal rules and political control	33
3.3.1. Rules and regulations.....	33
3.3.2. The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA)	36
3.3.3. The patriotic organizations	39
3.4. Compliance, resistance and persecution	43
4. Restoration and change.....	49
4.1. The restoration of religious practice	49
4.1.1. The restoration of traditional religious institutions.....	50
4.1.2. The return and growth of Christianity	56
Roman Catholicism.....	56
The Protestant movement	57
4.1.3. Old-style and new-style new religious groups.....	61
4.1.4. Tibetan Buddhism in and outside Tibet.....	66
4.1.5. The role of Overseas Chinese, Tibetan monks and foreign missionaries	69
Overseas Chinese	69
Tibetan Buddhism.....	71
Christian missionaries and foreign aid.....	72
4.1.6. The position of Islam	74
4.2. The reinvention of tradition and religion	75
4.3. Some recent developments	78
4.3.1. Non-institutional religious beliefs.....	78
4.3.2. Protecting local culture and religion.....	79
4.3.3. Social issues	82
4.3.4. A harmonious society	83
4.4. Academic studies	87
4.4.1. The academic organization of religious studies.....	87
4.4.2. The contribution of international scholarship.....	90
5. Analytical sensitivities.....	93

5.1. Western criticism	93
5.1.1. Bias and limited efficacy of Western criticism.....	93
Bias	93
Efficacy	95
5.1.2. Are we balanced in our criticism	98
Problems of balance	98
Why we cannot look at China in a balanced way	101
The Chinese response	102
5.2. Complications around religious freedom.....	104
6. Recommendations.....	109
(internal document).....	109
Selective bibliography	110
Appendix: The Regulations of Religious Affairs	119

1. Introduction

This is an academic report on the religious situation in China, including its historical and political background, as the basis for an evaluation of the possibilities for positive intervention. The report has been written for an audience with very little background on China and its religious history. It is not a piece of academic research, but it is still based on the most recent scholarly work by the author and his colleagues. Bibliographical references at the back indicate the main published studies that were consulted, in addition to talks and the author's personal field experience.

This is emphatically not a report on human rights issues as such, although we will of course touch upon these when relevant. Instead, I first discuss the religious situation before 1949 and developments between 1949 and 1976 in order to understand and contextualize developments after that date until now. After that I discuss the general framework, both legal and paralegal, of control and repression of religious culture, its restoration following 1976—sometimes against great odds—and important changes taking place during the last few years. I will conclude with an evaluation of the possibilities, difficulties and impossibilities of helping the free practice and expression of religion in China today. In my opinion looking at the religious situation independent of human rights agendas allows for a clearer view than the common approach of restricting it to violations of a hypothetical standard that even rich Western countries often find difficult to maintain.

This report will also touch upon long trends of the twentieth century, because we believe that such trends have more validity for understanding past and future courses of action. We also need to understand that the Chinese religious situation of the present is not the result of recent or even post-1949 developments, but has its roots in developments since 1895. In other words, many developments are not the result of communist ideology, but of modernization attempts of Chinese politics and culture since the late imperial period.

The concluding section with recommendations is an attempt to suggest different avenues for creating more room for religious activity. Given the immense sensitivity of the topic

to the perceived legitimacy of the communist system and deeply rooted suspicions of religious culture in general among the educated strata of communist China, I recommend mostly indirect ways as well as a diversification of the human rights agenda into separate issues that are no longer labeled part of this specific agenda.

1.1.The region under investigation

In this report we concentrate on the People's Republic of China (PRC), and mention Hong Kong and Taiwan only briefly. Taiwan is a separate political entity, in which complete religious freedom has been realized. We will only refer to Taiwan in its important role contributing to religious revival and change in the PRC after 1976, and as an important partner for mainland scholars of religious culture. Hong Kong is part of the PRC, but as a Special Administrative Region it falls under separate rules. Essentially, there exists complete religious freedom in Hong Kong today, although the PRC controls foreign policy and other supra-Hong Kong issues. Like Taiwan, Hong Kong is an important partner for mainland scholars of religious culture. Groups that are forbidden in the PRC have often continued to exist, and even flourish, in Hong Kong and/or Taiwan. To what extent these groups are in contact with underground counterparts in China is not clear, although the similar case of Christian groups suggests that they are. There is an ongoing apprehension that the situation in Hong Kong might change, but to date no fundamental turn for the worse has taken place.

We will treat the People's Republic of China as a single relevant political unit, including regions such as Tibet (both as an Autonomous Region and as a cultural space), Xinjiang and other larger or smaller regions with a special ethnic and religious situation. We will also pay explicit attention to Islam and Tibetan Buddhism, but not to other local religious cultures, for practical reasons and not out of principle. The religious situation in China Proper (generally congruent with the provinces inhabited by a large Han-Chinese majority) is different from the various levels of autonomous regions in which other cultures (ethnic groups or minorities) dominate or historically dominated. We will also not discuss Confucianism or Neoconfucianism in any systematic way, although some

references will be made to it. This is not a statement on its secular or religious nature, but stems from the sheer size and complexity of the topic.

China is still the most populous country of the world, even though it will most likely be overtaken in absolute numbers by India in the coming decades. Even small and rare phenomena easily seem very numerous, simply because the absolute number of people is so big. We tend to treat China as a homogenous country, which it is both legally and politically, but not in terms of cultural and ethnic variety, social and economic practices, and even in the concrete forms that local politics and legal practice may take. A simple example is that of the local court in the Haidian District in Beijing, which is manned by much higher quality legal staff than in many higher administrative units, simply because legal specialists prefer to live in Beijing. All of this makes counting data and drawing general inferences from it a very hazardous activity. Statistics may be improving, but are by no means always reliable and quality will differ considerably on a regional basis. This is even truer for human rights and religious issues. When relevant and feasible, regional differences will be explicitly addressed, but many historical, regional, gender and social differences will still have to be ignored.

1.2. Scholarship

Scholarly attention to the fate of religious culture in the twentieth century has been extremely limited. Partly this lack of attention can be blamed on the common assumption by social scientists, who still dominate the modern China field, that the natural tendency of modernizing societies is to secularize. The fallacy that traditional societies might be religious, while modern societies are bound to become secular still determines the way we look at China. By contrast, scholars of religious culture tend to focus on historical origins and doctrine, rather than later developments and actual socio-religious practice. As a result, we know scandalously little on religious culture in the last few centuries and still less about the present. In the post-1949 period, anthropologists have concentrated on Taiwan and Hong Kong, producing many valuable community studies, revealing the central role of religious culture in those regions. When they were permitted again to do some form of fieldwork on the mainland in the course of the 1980s, they also shifted

away from religious culture since it long appeared to have been persecuted largely out of existence. Only recently have more scholars of religious culture and anthropologists again begun to devote their attention to religious culture.

1.3. The historical baseline

In this report we will use the general term religious culture in order to avoid the impression that “religion” is neatly divided into separate and separable institutions and activities, as was the case increasingly in Christian Western Europe since the Reformation. Traditional Chinese religious culture is better understood as a dimension of political, social, cultural and even economic activities, than a separate activity. We will still use other general terms such as Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and Tibetan Buddhism, although these terms too have their problems. The main caveat that we need to make at this point is that none of these traditions is or was controlled or represented by a single institutional center, although evidently there have been institutions such as the Heavenly Masters (sometimes called the Daoist Pope) or the Dalai Lamas who did claim such authority.

The Chinese empire was structured around the claim that a ruler and his representatives possessed the Mandate of Heaven. This was in essence a religious claim and not surprisingly it was expressed in a wide variety of seasonal and incidental rituals. Leading religious figures, such as the Daoist Heavenly Master or Buddhist abbots would be called upon to perform rituals for the benefit of the state. The Neoconfucian traditions since the twelfth century (and even more actively since the seventeenth century) would try to create alternative ritual practices, but these also contained a religious dimension and never succeeded in truly replacing state, Buddhist and Daoist rituals. Finally, both the emperor himself and his representatives were often worshipped by the burning of incense, which is also the most basic act of religious devotion in traditional China. High nationwide deities and prominent figures in the Daoist pantheon carried the title Emperor (*di* or a variety thereof), closely related to the official title of the human August Emperor

(*huangdi*). The traditional state was not a secular state, although modern historians often make that claim in order to make China look more modern.

Until 1949 almost all local communities in China Proper would be organized around territorial cults centered on one or more deities and based in temples, with regular festivals (characterized by communal meals, extensive sacrificial activities with meat and alcoholic beverages, processions to mark territory, theatrical performances) and financed through contributions by all who had a historical right to live in its territory, as well as some landed property. The natural territorial unit (village, street, township and city) might be larger, but only mattered in administrative terms. Mutual help and control took place first and foremost along the lines of cult organizations. Territorial cults were communal and abstention was not an option. Many conflicts with Christians in the late nineteenth century were caused by the refusal of Christian to continue to participate in these festivals, whilst still profiting from its benefits (such as good weather). Individuals and groups invoked the punitive authority of these deities as keepers of rules and agreements during conflicts or when concluding contracts. Thus the overall cohesion of traditional society until 1949 was created through institutions and practices with a religious core.

Next to these territorial cults would usually be charismatic cults, devoted to deities who helped individuals or single families. These deities were characterized by role-breaking behavior, which was essential to their ability to help specific individuals instead of the community as a whole. They communicated with their followers or clients by descending into mediums. These cults existed all over China, with fox-immortals important in the north and demonic spirits or divine generals more prominent in the south. Their male and increasingly female mediums played a crucial role in healing along the entire spectrum of psychological to somatic complaints (to use a Western distinction), as well as communal and family mediation, and exorcism. None of these categories were mutually exclusive in traditional China.

A wide variety of ritual specialists was available who were tied to other religious institutions or functioned independently and lived at home. Calling in the help of such specialists was not determined by one's religious affiliation, but by one's expectations of success, possibly by the economic, social or gender context in which someone lived, and by sheer coincidence (such as knowing someone who knows someone....). These specialists included people who were capable of traveling to the worlds of the dead or the unborn child (whom we might consider shamans, since they travelled as themselves while mediums would actually become the divinities themselves), Daoist and Buddhist monks and priests, members of lay religious traditions, and a variety of individuals with exorcist and healing abilities. A doctor with training in the old written medical traditions (referred to by the same term, *ru* or classicist, as the Confucian tradition was) might at times have recourse to simple exorcism using spells. A Buddhist monk or nun would be able to use Buddhist spells and scriptures, but might also have access to one or more medical recipes. There was a wide regional variety in the presence of Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and the kind of specialists that would be available to someone.

There also existed new religious groups ("sects") in continuous traditions since the late sixteenth century, some of which have survived until today despite ongoing persecution. Especially the periods around 1600 and again the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have seen the founding of important religious movements in response to crucial social, economic and cultural changes of their times. In these groups we sometimes find signs of exclusive membership, especially when they prescribed the total rejection of meat or alcoholic beverages in food and sacrifice. Since participation in local territorial and charismatic cults required such sacrifice, not being able to eat and sacrifice meat or alcoholic beverages meant excluding oneself at least to a certain degree from local communities and networks.

Even the traditional family was a religious unit in its very foundations. Biological kinship certainly mattered, as is shown by the continued ties between daughters and their parents after marriage, despite the overriding importance of the patrilineage. The fundamental kinship units of the three-generation family and larger lineages were structured around

the shared worship of male ancestors. The conclusion of a marriage always required paying one's respect (*bai*) to the parents, the ancestors and to Heaven and Earth. Deaths would be reported to the local earth god. The worship of an earlier ancestor allowed the creation of even larger groups which could engage in the opening up of large tracts of land and commercial activities without complicated bookkeeping. As long as the money stayed in the family, mutual obligations could be regulated and enforced by kinship. Especially in southern China larger kinship groups were created in large numbers since the sixteenth century which bound together people worshipping a male ancestor more than three generations back. We call these lineages, which were organized around a clan hall in which the ancestor tablets were kept, lineage records and rules, common property such as land and schools, and the like. We still see this phenomenon outside China, in Hong Kong and in overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. No matter whether one was biological kin, if one did not share in ancestor worship, one would be excluded from the network.

Against this background, it becomes apparent just how immense the destruction of religious culture in the modern era has been and how limited its return after 1976 really is. The strength of the connection between religious culture and traditional society also explains why first the Nationalist Party (*guomindang*) and later the Chinese Communist Party had little choice to attack local religious institutions if they wanted to attain the kind of complete local control that modern political systems strive for.

2. History of persecution

We give here a very general survey of some crucial developments in the recent past, as well as a summing up of the overall religious background against which these developments took place. My aim is to show the historical depth of religious control by the state, as well as the new nature of this control in the 20th century. We will see how crucial developments after 1949 continued earlier policies and are therefore deeply rooted in the mindset of the Chinese political, cultural and intellectual elites. They are not merely an outer skin or layer that has been introduced first by the “communist” system. It also means that changing it will be difficult and efforts to do so should not be solely directed at the contingent expression of these attitudes in the present political system.

Nonetheless, the situation for religious culture is not hopeless, as is shown by the case of Taiwan, since the latter shows how other approaches to issues of religious freedom are possible in Chinese culture and do not necessarily lead to the destabilization of the political system. The Taiwan case is also relevant because China nowadays maintains intensive contacts on a political level (such as visits by higher level leaders on religious affairs) and even more so of a scholarly nature. Taiwan’s religious policies (or, in one sense, the absence thereof) might well become and partly already are a source of inspiration for China as well.

2.1. The imperial period

2.1.1. Control, but no systematic persecution

Since the traditional Chinese political system was fundamentally religious, those in charge never questioned the nature of people’s beliefs. Instead they might classify them as inappropriate or licentious, but never as superstition or untrue. The emperor and his representatives claimed the right to determine which forms of religious activity were thought fit for support and which the government would tolerate, as well as which activities it would prohibit. They would bestow high titles on deities who had

distinguished themselves in the service of the state against rebels, barbarian threats, or even droughts and flooding. Sometimes, zealous officials clamped down on licentious local cults or they might advise that the state should no longer engage in sacrifice for particular cults, but this never resulted in any systematic persecution. Buddhist and Daoist traditions were controlled, but not usually persecuted during the dynasties. Shamanic and medium cults were disapproved of, but socially marginalized rather than systematically persecuted. Elites had their own type of medium cults in the form of spirit writing in which Daoist immortals featured, rather than unruly demonic deities.

The only exception are new religious groups (“sects”), which were all collapsed under one label, of the White Lotus Teachings, which came into common usage in the late sixteenth century. Groups which were labeled as such were for instance close-knit groups such as the lay-Buddhist Non-Action Teachings who rejected ancestor worship and burning paper money, whilst stressing a properly vegetarian lifestyle. But also loose networks with Maitreyan teachings or stressing the life-force (*qi*) stemming from the cosmos might be labeled as such. Christian groups were tarred with the same brush as these indigenous groups. In the course of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century the persecution of all of these groups became increasingly severe, but with the legalization of Christianity in 1860 after the Second Opium War, all new religious groups became more or less free to practice their beliefs and rituals.

2.1.2. Christianity

The introduction of Christianity to China has taken place in at least two different phases. Leaving aside earlier introductions which left no lasting trace in the form of converts after 1400, the first phase was the introduction of Roman Catholic Christianity by Jesuit, Dominican and Franciscan missionaries from the late sixteenth century until the late eighteenth century. This came largely to a halt due to the prohibition of Christianity in the early eighteenth century, which was followed by an increasingly harsh climate towards new religious groups in general after 1768 that lasted until the 1850s. The missionary efforts by the Jesuits have received the most historiographical attention, not in the least because they used the transmission of what they saw as superior Western science,

technology and cultural knowledge as a means to win the allegiance of the Chinese cultural and political elites. This policy was not successful, but all missionary orders did succeed in converting local Chinese who remained loyal to their beliefs over the following centuries. These early Christian communities survived the virtual disappearance of missionaries in the late eighteenth century, but would play no role of importance in the nineteenth century when Christian missionary activities restarted.

The second phase is more important to understanding the present situation. In the early nineteenth century Protestant missionaries ventured back in, first illegally and with mixed results. The introduction of their texts to Hong Xiuquan, and his reworking of these texts in a vision, formed the basis of the largest uprising of the nineteenth century, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. It would be known as a Christian rebellion and was responsible for some 30 million deaths and unequalled destruction, also of religious institutions. In 1839-1842 and 1856-1860 China faced England in two wars which came to be known as the Opium Wars. The first was fought to get trade access on equal terms and the second to improve these conditions. The result was the Unequal Treaties which were only abolished after the end of the Second World War, even though China was considered a Western ally. An important part of the treaties that concluded the 1856-1860 war was the freedom to spread the Christian teachings all over China. This means that the spread of Christianity became strongly tainted with the brush of Western imperialism. This was not lessened by subsequent events until 1949, when Western Christianity generally chose sides against communism. This history is also an important reason for the prohibition on missionary activities after 1949 and for the stress on the patriotic nature of the officially recognized churches in China.

The events of the nineteenth century have served to inscribe Christianity into the Chinese historical memory as a Western and highly intrusive force. In the same way that the large Western powers competed for access to the mythical Chinese market, their missionary societies competed for the religious market. Many violent incidents and protests took place directed against missionaries and their converts. Western observers have traditionally seen these as protests against or attacks on Christian beliefs and/or Western

imperialism, but this interpretation is now outdated. In the larger riots, a crucial role was played by traditional collective fears of outsiders and magicians, which were now projected on foreign missionaries. Most of the time, the causes of a conflict are strictly local and the situation was worsened by meddling on the part of the missionaries and their converts, with the support of foreign governments who had little idea of what was really going on the ground. Christianity was a much more constructive presence in the twentieth century. On a local level the situation normalized and the kind of violent conflicts that we see in the nineteenth century became rare; instead we get another type of politically inspired anti-Christian movement. Nonetheless, the Chinese historiography of the Christian presence stresses the nineteenth century and is reproduced in the history books with which every educated person grows up. The more someone has been educated, the stronger his or her nationalist feelings against foreign religious influence will be. This makes supporting Christian churches and groups in China a highly sensitive issue today, especially when it is perceived to be an activity of foreign governments. This is true not only of government circles, but of intellectuals in general.

2.1.3. Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism originated in the greater Tibetan cultural zone, but spread to Manchuria and Mongolia on a large scale in the sixteenth century. After the early ninth century CE the Tibetan cultural zone was never exclusively under Tibetan control, but power was shared between a variety of institutions, including monasteries and Tibetan and Mongol aristocracy. In the late sixteenth century, the third Dalai Lama (1543-1588) established himself as a powerful leader with the aid of the Mongol leader Altan Khan, and used this support to establish his newly reformed Yellow Hat tradition (Gelug-pa) as the dominant religious and political power in Tibet. The Mongol leader in his turn used his patronage of the Dalai Lama and his tradition to increase his legitimacy among the Mongol groups to the north of then Ming-China. His grandson became the fourth Dalai Lama. The fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) then established definitive control of Tibet in 1642 with the military aid of the Mongols. However, successive Dalai Lamas were always first and foremost the highest incarnation of this tradition and only secondly the leader of a rather loose political entity Tibet. Most of them never became old enough to

become effective rulers, and instead the abbots of the great monasteries and aristocratic families held most power.

The older traditions which had been defeated by the Mongol armies still survived, but in much smaller numbers and with much less political and economic power. There were also charismatic traditions, in which charisma was more personal and less institutionalized than in the Yellow Hat tradition. Some of these latter traditions still exist (such as the Nyingma tradition) and they flourish because they have suffered less from the repression than the monastic Yellow Hat tradition of the Dalai Lama.

Monks with a Tibetan Buddhist background, most likely from the Sichuan border regions (Kham) than central Tibet, have been coming to China Proper to teach and practise rituals since at least the fourteenth century. The Manchus were also adherents of Tibetan Buddhism to varying degrees. In the early eighteenth century, the recently established Manchu rulers decided that they needed to control the religious transmission of the Dalai Lamas in order to defeat their remaining Mongol competitors in the west. This led to several expeditions to Lhasa in the eighteenth century and a form of distant patronage, similar to earlier traditions of patronage (not to be equaled with control) by the Mongol khans of the Yuan-dynasty or the Han-Chinese rulers of the Ming-dynasty. While the direct contact with the central tradition in Lhasa was not very limited and indirect, high Mongol lamas on Mount Wutai and in the capital Beijing remained important until the end of the Qing-dynasty and received substantial imperial patronage. In the late nineteenth century some ethnically Chinese officials and writers started to see Tibet as part of the larger Chinese empire as well.

The thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933) fled Lhasa for the British armies in 1904 and stayed in Mongolia until 1909. He did not receive the support from the declining Qing dynasty that he wanted against Great Britain. Soon after returning, he would flee again in 1910, now for invading Chinese armies. This time he went to India, and put himself under British protection. He returned in 1912, after Tibetans who had risen against the Chinese invaders had restored control and thrown them out. In the following decades, he

and his supporters tried to build a nation-state in Tibet for the first time. These efforts more or less ended with his death in 1933, since the Tibetan elites (whether monastic leaders or aristocracy) had much power to lose and had little interest in a centralized state.

2.1.4. Islam

When considering the role of Islam in the People's Republic of China, we should separate this to some extent from ethnic considerations. Historically, Chinese Islam is an ethnic religion, with few direct Han-Chinese converts. Adherents of this religion entered China Proper on a larger scale relatively late, first as coastal traders and then in large numbers in the thirteenth century as the soldiers and advisors of Persian and Uyghur stock. Their descendants intermarried with local people and many of them became Han-Chinese over the following centuries. They are now called Hui (or Huihui), and while they live in China Proper they still practice Islam. Other groups became inhabitants of China due to the military expansion of the Qing empire in the eighteenth century, in the same way that the American Indians became Americans, Canadians or otherwise in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among them the Uyghurs are now the best known. The total number of the Islamic population is open to debate, since ethnic and religious categories are usually conflated. We can safely assume that the total number of believers will be over 20 million, divided over several ethnic groups (among which the Hui with roughly nine million, Uyghurs with some eight million and Kazakh also exceeding one million) and different denominations. The Hui are well-adapted to living within the Chinese political and cultural system, whereas the Uyghurs are much less so. The rise of a Uyghur nationalist movement, however small, makes the human rights situation more complicated, since like the Chinese state it creates its own historical narratives.

In political terms, Islam is an important and difficult topic from the perspective of control of religion. Rebellions on the periphery of imperial China in the mid-nineteenth century took Islamic forms and caused a tremendous loss of life. They were eventually suppressed at great expense and human cost. There is continuing fear for Uyghur separatism, although it is not at all clear that the majority of the Uyghurs would want to go that far, given the important economic links with China Proper and their role as

middlemen between Central Asia, the Middle East and China. Tensions in Tibet are in part between the traditional Hui traders (from Gansu, i.e. not Uyghurs, but rather Tibetan or Mongol speakers) and local Tibetans. On the other hand, China desperately needs good relations with Islamic countries, since they control oil and other mineral resources that are essential for China's economic growth. Since growth is deemed essential (and probably rightly so) in order to keep social harmony, China cannot afford to be seen as treating Islam as a whole too badly. Like religious culture in general, Islam has suffered greatly in the Maoist decades of 1949-1976, but after 1976 revival was much quicker than for Buddhism, Daoism or Christianity. At the moment, however, control seems to be stricter, in part because of Chinese fears of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

Very briefly, we can say that the original Hui were ethnic Persians (Khwarazm) or Uyghurs of a Sunni background. It is these groups that we find in China Proper as well. Then in the late 17th century Sufism arrived along the trade routes through the deserts between Persia and China Proper. The Central Asian networks that were created by Sufi teachers and tradesmen were instrumental during the 19th century rebellions. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries a Wahhabi-inspired reform movement arose in Xinjiang, which reacted against traditional Sunni Islam as overly acculturated and against Sufism as too attached to the veneration of their saints. Thus, as is the case elsewhere, Islam in China is not a unified religious field.

2.2. The birth of modern intolerance

Modern, systematic intolerance of religious culture can be dated back quite precisely to the years 1895-1898 and is closely tied to the proponents of different forms of modernization. At first this did not yet result in systematic persecution, but in order to create modern schools many of the larger religious buildings (both temples and monasteries) and their landholdings were expropriated from local communities and turned into schools. Religious buildings had always been used for other local purposes as well, especially when they had been left by their original communities. This exclusive and enforced use of buildings for a single purpose was a radical break with the past.

People who advocated this policy could be found among the late imperial radical reformers who wanted to change the entire political system, as well as more moderate reformers who wanted change whilst staying within the traditional system. The confiscation of buildings and property meant a first systematic attack on the cohesion of local communities, since more or less communal activities and assets were now put into the hands of local elites or governments.

The radical reformers saw the foundation of such schools as part of a larger enterprise in which the state would also take on a more dominant religious role. This naturally included certain goals of economic, social and political modernization (including a constitutional monarchy), as well as new national symbols instead of the old Mandate of Heaven as the basis for imperial legitimatization. In other words, from a personalized rule supported by Heaven and a host of more or less abstract deities, a transformation should take place towards rule by representatives of the abstract Chinese nation. Traditional imperial legitimatization had always been reinforced by homologous systems on a local level, in which very similar forms of legitimatization served to empower many local cults and Daoist ritual practice. The new political system left no room for this kind of connection, since local deities or Daoist priests could never be representatives of the abstract Chinese nation. In the short run, all of this weakened the links between the centre and the regions, but it also weakened the long-term integrity of local religious culture.

In 1911 the old system of legitimatization of personal rule was definitively rejected for rule through institutions. These institutions became the keepers of a message of modernity, which fundamentally collided with traditional religious institutions. At the same time, a new and very limiting category of “religion” (*zongjiao*) was introduced from Japan (and ultimately from the West) into Chinese discourse, which entailed additional limiting categories, such as “superstition” (*mixin*) and “(popular) customs” (*fengsu, xiguan*). From 1912 onwards, laws were created that guaranteed the freedom of religion, but not every form of religious expression as we would see it today was actually accepted as “religion”. Only religion that fitted the modernizing aims of the state could be tolerated and from this moment onwards we see the beginning of a string of campaigns to

combat “superstition” and bad “customs”. We can see this as the birth of modern intolerance, with the help of foreign concepts that ultimately stemmed from the West.

Because successive governments were unable to effectively carry out these campaigns or to maintain their initial momentum, their results differed widely. Much depended on the ability of local communities and leaders to resist, and on the precise interpretation of a concrete practice or institution. While Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity and Islam had the potential to organize themselves, or **be** organized (as in the communist period!), as institutional religions, local religious culture was fundamentally unable to do so. Temples and shrines were linked to localities and to local communities, even if the deity in them might be much more widespread. Even on contemporary Taiwan, very few temple cults (such as Emperor Guan and Mazu) have been organized in an island-wide structure. The result was that most local religious culture was now excluded from the official category of “religion” and therefore received no legal protection.

In 1928 the Nationalist government reunited the country, although its control in the north remained tenuous. It started large-scale campaigns against so-called superstitions, which included divination practices, astrology, physiognomy, geomancy (*fengshui*), medium practices, religious healing, paper money and other objects used in religious practice, and so forth. There were also attacks on Christianity and Buddhism, but these were better placed to defend themselves. The heat of the movement against superstition and bad customs, and towards expropriating religious buildings and landholdings, seems to have become less after 1930. One reason will have been the fierce resistance by old-style religious and local communities. It has also been suggested that Tibetan Buddhist proselytization in China Proper during the Republican period created a Chinese audience, which then brought pressure to bear on the Nationalist regime to keep Buddhist leaders in general happy. It was hoped that through certain Tibetan leaders living in exile in China Proper, Tibet might be brought within the fold of the new Chinese nation. This did not happen, but that is another matter. Finally, Christianity got more room, since important Nationalist leaders had a Christian background. Later in the 1930s the civil war escalated, followed by the Japanese invasion. After the war ended, the civil war flared up again and

was concluded by the communist victory in 1949, followed by local mopping up operations in 1950.

2.3. The Nationalists and religious culture

When the Nationalist Party was defeated in 1949 by the armies of the Chinese communists, they retired to Taiwan which had been returned to China by Japan in 1945 after 50 years of occupation. Initially they continued their politics of partial control and even suppression of religious culture, including groups such as the Unity Teachings which had been founded in the early 20th century. The latter survived, although it had been tinged by local collaboration with the Japanese occupational forces around Tianjin. Nowadays it is one of the powerful groups that support reunification, since it has a strong nationalist dimension as well.

In 1949 the Nationalists brought with them representatives of the Buddhist revival of the preceding decades. These Buddhist leaders successfully took control of Buddhism on Taiwan, competing older lay Buddhist traditions on the island largely out of existence although these had once been a powerful force on the island. Monastic Buddhism is nowadays a strong force on the island, next to the Unity Tradition from the mainland and indigenous groups such as the Compassion Salvation Hall (Tz'u-chi t'ang or Cijitang). The Daoist Heavenly Master also crossed over, but he and his successors on Taiwan always remained marginal figures. They were and still are largely ignored by the Taiwanese Daoist priests as they had largely done before 1949 as well. The other main Daoist tradition of the Republican period, the Complete Perfection tradition, never established itself strongly on the island, although it did go through a successful revival in Hong Kong.

The Nationalist repression of local religious culture on Taiwan was partially the continuation of the repression and control of traditional culture that had already begun in the Republican period. Local temples and shrines, shamans and mediums, and other types of religious specialists residing outside of the Buddhist monasteries were seen as forces of tradition that hampered the Nationalist version of modernity. A very specific reason for the Nationalist repression was that religious culture served as the organizational and

cultural focus of communal identities, which could be the predominantly Minnan (Southern Fujian) or Hakka in origin. As such they became the focus of an island-based identity that was already strong due to five decades of Japanese occupation and went directly against the Nationalist aim of regaining control over the mainland. The cult of Mazu with its huge annual pilgrimage to Beigang even acquired island-wide significance as an expression of Taiwanese identity.

After a while the Nationalist suppression changed into *de facto* recognition in the course of the 1960s and active meddling with religious culture stopped. In 1987 martial law was rescinded and political as well as religious freedom restored. Because of its intimate connection to the expression of a Taiwanese (quasi-independent) identity, local religious culture on Taiwan has boomed even more after 1987. Interestingly, the transition towards democracy and religious freedom took place largely motivated by internal developments, with an important role being played by a detailed report on the status-quo abiding nature of new religious groups that was written by an American-trained Taiwanese historian. Taiwanese people played an important role in the revival of local religious culture in Southern China after 1976, since their own cults had once originated there. It is an essential element of religious culture in this region to revisit the ancestral cult on a regular basis and renew the cult's incense.

Taiwan is an excellent example of the way in which internal changes produce a radical new approach to religious culture, that differs fundamentally from past approaches in its broad-minded tolerance. Local communities have played a crucial role in this transformation. Originally, the nationalists were equally intolerant of religious culture as their victors, the communists. Nowadays it is quite normal for politicians on Taiwan to engage themselves publicly during religious festivals and important ritual events. At the same time, religious leaders sometimes meddle in island politics as well, in very similar ways as in the West.

2.4. Some early twentieth-century changes

Especially in the twentieth century the Christian mission was able to connect to political figures, allowing it to become a force in the service of modernity. Christian missionaries had been directly involved in the modernizing effort of the late nineteenth century by serving as translators of Western scientific and technical texts, as well as founding schools. In the twentieth century they even founded universities and other schools of higher education. This also served to plant the idea that Christianity, unlike traditional religion, could fruitfully assist and coexist with modernity. This was of course still a Western modernity, suspicious in the eyes of some, such as the growing communist movement. On the mainland the persecution of Christianity after 1949 may have served to strengthen its acceptability as an alternative to communism, but on Taiwan this was not the case. There, the religion remained strongly tied to the Nationalist state and its mainland ideals, causing it to lose considerably in influence and following after martial law was lifted in 1987 and the state no longer privileged Christianity. Only the Taiwanese Presbyterian church has been able to maintain itself, probably because it joined the Taiwanese cause early on.

In Buddhist circles individual monks started to reorganize themselves around journals and societies after 1911, with some leading monks attempting to reinvigorate Buddhist tradition in the service of the modern age. We do not find a parallel attempt in Daoist circles, which had suffered greatly from the mid-nineteenth century partially Christian-inspired rebellions. Even the once-prominent White Cloud Belvedere of the Complete Perfection Tradition in Beijing went into a steep decline during the 1930s and 1940s.

An important long-term development was the beginning of a high-level Tibetan Buddhist presence followed by proselytization in China Proper. Two important figures fled Tibet as the result of the centralizing efforts of the 13th Dalai Lama, of whom the ninth Panchen Lama (1883-1937) was the most important. The enormous landed property of his monastery was targeted in order to obtain resources for the new nation and his circle was excluded from the new administration. He fled in late 1923. Another high incarnation of Mongol descent, Norlha Qutughtu (1865–1936), was even imprisoned and survived several poisoning attempts, before he was able to flee in 1924. These figures were

instrumental in building a Chinese following for their religion and in creating political support for Tibetan Buddhism in the following years. Inversely, their activities contributed to a new view in which Chinese politicians started to see Tibet as an integral part of China with Buddhism as the overall connecting religious tradition. In a sense this approach to Buddhism stands in a long tradition, because all empires which ruled a larger territory than China Proper adopted a similar approach of using Buddhism as an international religion for the legitimatization of their overlordship. Tibetan leading monks shared this view and thought that the new communist Chinese rulers after 1949 would continue to treat Tibet in the same tolerant (or at least distant) way as preceding dynasties had done. Joining China was seen as acceptable in 1949, as long as their religious tradition would be safe. They could not have foreseen that things would change rapidly within only a few years.

2.5. A century of destruction

2.5.1. The vicissitudes of war and famine

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not merely times of tremendous political, social and economic transformation, but also of destruction due to wars, famines, droughts and other natural disasters. These combined to weaken the religious infrastructure, after which the incessant campaigning from 1949 until 1976 provided the final death blow for many religious institutions and personal networks for transmitting religious lore. We already mentioned the rebellion of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace from 1851-1864, which was inspired by a Protestant brand of Christianity and caused an estimated 30 million deaths, but also the systematic destruction of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian and ordinary local religious institutions all over southern China. Not all of these institutions were rebuilt in the following decades. Northern China in its turn was plagued by devastating droughts and famines, which caused great loss of life. Floods of the Yellow River caused tremendous destruction by simply washing away buildings made of stamped loess earth. Other regions, again mostly in the north, would be plagued by rampant banditry and warlord fighting, followed by the Japanese invasions during the

1930s and 1940s, and finally civil war between the Nationalist and the Communist armed forces.

Natural disasters as well as warfare meant the destruction of infrastructure, but also the death of people who would be carrying all kinds of local cultural knowledge, including religious expertise. On the scale of the twentieth century, the ongoing disasters and warfare often cut short the transmission of tradition. They caused the dwindling of resources for local festivals and any form of costly religious expression. When revival became possible in the 1980s, many traditions had been discontinued for too long since the 1920s or 1930s and could no longer be restored due to a lack of people with the requisite knowledge. This type of destruction was made worse by the impact of political campaigns, which was worse in northern China because local communities also were weaker here. Several detailed ethnographical reports indicate that for instance Buddhist and Daoist monasteries were increasingly in abeyance, again especially in the north, while many institutions in the south were still intact as late as the 1940s. The religious infrastructure took a severe beating, but its basic structure was still intact and had 1945 brought true peace and political stability, then much of traditional religious culture would probably have been able to recover again.

2.5.2. The impact of communist rule

After the communist power takeover in 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, however, there followed almost three decades of political campaigns that changed and often destroyed all forms of local culture, including religious tradition. The religious freedom that was nominally guaranteed in the legal provisions of the communist constitution and related laws or regulations was often moot, even where recognized religious traditions were concerned.

The Land Reforms of the 1950s destroyed the financial basis of most religious institutions to the extent that they depended on income from landed property. More narrowly focused ideological campaigns against religious specialists and almost all

religious movements outside the patriotic churches further weakened religious infrastructure. Instead of traditional religious specialists, shamans and mediums, all of whom often performed medical and social services, the state now offered a public medical package, campaigns to further hygiene and later the famous barefoot doctors. In a sense these replaced, or were intended to replace, the medical role of the (semi-) religious specialists who were now removed. The psycho-social role of these specialists, however, could not be recognized by a system, which believed in science and technology as a panacea for all problems. The continued (and due to the political campaigns even increased) psycho-social needs of local people were simply denied, since the perfect communist state in which people would no longer have such problems was claimed to be near. The medical and hygiene advances of these years were in themselves certainly significant, since China was highly successful in reducing the impact of the plague (*Yersinia pestis*, not the medieval disease by that name), cholera and other diseases. The psycho-social stress of this period has only recently received some academic attention, but we know that it contributed massively to local dissatisfaction with the Maoist approach of those years and threatened the legitimacy of the Communist Party. This was a crucial factor in turning the communist system around after 1976.

Political campaigns after 1949 followed a wave-like pattern of destruction, acceleration, followed by attempts from the centre to control the excesses. Radicalization was always a good strategy to avoid being targeted for political criticism. Nonetheless, religious practice and even proselytization did not just stop overnight and in some regions substantial religious practice continued locally into the 1960s. During the 1950s, there was also active socio-political resistance, of which was expressed in religious terms. It was not on the scale of the religious movements of the 1920s and 1930s, but mainly organized by people who had recently lost their privileged status or local power. This resistance was quickly repressed, but contributed further to the negative view of religious culture among the political leadership. After collectivization in the late 1950s we hear less about this type of resistance, but we see a resurgence of conflicts along the lines of the new social (“communist”) units. It is unclear how much the disappearance of

religious culture, including protest in a religious shape, from the public eye is real, or merely an artifact of the extremely uninformative sources of those days.

During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, almost no public religious life was possible. Especially in the first years of the Cultural Revolution bands of revolutionary youths (the Red Guards) ran amok in the cities and the surrounding countryside, in an iconoclastic movement on a scale which had not been seen since the rebellion of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace one century before. Recovery after 1976 was slow and partial, as will be discussed below. Most temples were destroyed and the remainder was taken over for public or private usage; some buildings in the latter category were recovered in the decades following 1976 if there were sufficient funds and public pressure. The imprisonment and killing of religious specialists was probably of more significance, in addition to the dying out of expertise without younger people taking over since the Republican period and even more severely in the 1950s and 1960s. The precise damage is unknown, since very few Chinese, Japanese or Western scholars have occupied themselves with the fate of religious culture during the twentieth century.

A rough impression of the scale of destruction can be gauged from the simple fact that traditionally at least one temple and several smaller shrines would have been available in each village and every group of urban streets. In the temple might have been a temple-keeper, who might be an older man or a religious specialist. Connected to shrines might be local mediums that served as the vehicle for the deity, but did not live in the shrine itself. A village would have shamans who travelled to the underworld or the world of the unborn child. Larger market communities would have a Daoist priest, and depending on the economic surplus there might be Buddhist and sometimes Daoist monasteries nearby. It appears that the Yangzi River region had more Buddhist monasteries than the rest of China, possibly due to the larger economic surplus of the region. Monasteries varied considerably in size, but the larger institutions might have hundreds or even thousands of inhabitants. Much depended on their landed property, since by begging and/or payments for ritual services alone a monastery could not survive.

The weakening of the financial basis of religious institutions has been permanent and the disappearance of a variety of ritual specialists is irreversible. In some regions certain more complicated religious festivals and ritual practices had already been discontinued long before 1949 due to natural disasters, wars and civil strife, which means that the people carrying the requisite cultural and religious expertise had already died by the time that religious practice was becoming possible again in the years after 1976. Several large scholarly projects have been carried out since the late 1980s to recover and describe local festivals and important ritual practices, but only too often these were a form of almost archaeological recovery of a recent past, rather than descriptions of a vibrant present. These projects did provide more legitimacy to the recovery and they have played a positive role in establishing contacts between Chinese mainland researchers in the field and their Hong Kong, Taiwan, Western, and sometimes also Japanese colleagues.

After 1976 there have been more campaigns that also targeted religious activity, but by and large their impact was rather limited—even when some of these campaigns were quite destructive of religious property and sometimes resulted in incidental executions and arrests. The only exception is the highly organized and systematic repression of the Falun Gong and other Qigong movements from the summer of 1999 onwards. Hundreds of deaths in the suppression of the Falun Gong is hundreds too many, but this number cannot be compared with the numbers of victims in preceding decades or the number of deaths caused by an imperfect Chinese legal system in the best of times.

3. Communist control and repression

3.1. *The ideological background*

In 1949 the communist takeover meant a further strengthening of the state as the sole custodian of modernity. The Chinese Communist Party claimed (and claims) to possess the **scientific** truth of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, which has been expanded since 1978 with the ideas of successive party leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping. In imitating the Soviet Union model of development, technological education was prioritized, more so even than natural sciences. The academic fields of legal studies, social sciences and economics were almost completely given up and had very little status until after 1976. The dogma was that adopting the scientific truth of Marxism-Leninism meant that there was no need anymore for any of these fields. For improving industrial production, strengthening the nation militarily, controlling the environment (especially waterworks), and agricultural development, technological education was paramount. Ironically, the nineteenth-century conviction that China can modernize by adopting Western science and technology, while retaining its own cultural values is still valid today. The only difference is that the old Confucian values and the examination system as a means for inculcating everybody with these values through prescribed Confucian texts have now been replaced by communist values and reinvented Confucian values, and a system of higher education that is still filled with examinations at every level.

Since the 1950s in particular, with antecedents going back to the late nineteenth century, there is a strong belief that science (including Marxism-Leninism, which is denoted with the same Chinese term for science or *kexue*) can be the solution for all of the nation's problems. Scholars call this approach scientism. In the heyday of Maoist-inspired political campaigns only military science was more or less protected from their impact, but after 1976 scientific* culture has returned with a vengeance. The successful development of the hydrogen bomb and missile technology has been a major

* The use of the term scientific is on purpose, since we are dealing with quasi-science, rather than science (which would be scientific).

technological achievement of the 1960s, one of the few accomplishments of those years which provided the communist leadership with international status. Parallel to scienticism is technicism, which values instrumental reasoning and technical efficiency above all. Most party leaders and high cadres have a background in engineering, meaning that scienticism and technicism exert an extraordinarily strong influence on policy-making from the highest level downwards. This influence is very clear for instance in the case of the One Child policy that was developed in 1979 on the basis of this approach, with a crucial role for specialists from the military apparatus (such as a prominent specialist on missile statistics). Other examples are the Three Gorges project, the South-North Water Transfer Project, and so forth.

This approach is not limited to the highest party leadership, but deeply ingrained in Chinese society, especially among more educated people, which include the higher and middle levels of the Chinese Communist Party, managers, intellectuals and cultural leaders. We should not assume that people who do not wholeheartedly support, or even privately dislike and oppose the present political system, are therefore in favor of total religious freedom. Most intellectuals tend to share the view that modernity and religious culture are fundamentally contradictory forces. The fight for more religious freedom is presently largely a grassroots struggle, by local communities against the state as well as against the cultural and intellectual elites.

Some new religious developments are indebted to the same belief in the power of science and technology, such as the rise of the Falun Gong in the 1990s. Li Hongzhi has compiled his approach from various sources, which include Buddhist and Daoist texts (or summaries thereof), and maybe even Christian sources. It would seem that living practice played no role, since he specifically rejects the most central acts of Chinese religious culture, the burning of incense and other forms of sacrifice. Instead, he emphatically claimed that his approach was not religious (whether in the specific Chinese sense, or in the wider Western sense, is unclear), but scientific (*kexuede*). The first lecture of his book *The Turning of the Dharma Wheel* therefore makes an elaborate point of arguing for the

scientific basis of Buddhist beliefs, in a way which is reminiscent of the writings of Erich von Däniken on visitors from outer space.

Curiously, the scientific and technicist approach of the Chinese Communist Party bears close resemblance to a religious faith, even if this is definitely not how its adherents would describe it. Like the religious belief in an outside agency (whether divine or otherwise, such as Yin and Yang) responsible for the creation and/or structure of the cosmos, the belief in the superiority of science and technology does not allow for any form of falsification or even discussion. Much in the same way that during the 1949-1976 period Maoism showed many characteristics of religious (especially messianic) beliefs this has now been replaced by the belief in science and technology under the leadership of the party. Once a group can declare something to be the ideal scientific or technological solution, no discussion is allowed anymore and dissenting voices are smothered. This applies not only to religious issues, but to any issue for which the regime thinks a scientific or technological approach is possible.

3.2. The political background

Religious institutions were the basis of traditional society until 1949. After the civil war ended people will have expected that they could begin restoring the religious infrastructure, but never-ending political campaigns put the lie to this expectation. Besides ideological reasons, there were also political reasons for combating religious culture.

For one, the very fact that traditional society was largely organized around religious worship, meant that the Chinese Communist Party had little choice but to attack religious culture in order to establish its own direct and absolute control over local communities. It is no coincidence that the growing space for religious freedom in the countryside since the 1980s comes with larger political freedom on a local level and a retreat of the communist party.

Secondly, it is not sufficiently realized by foreign observers that the traditional state always saw a direct relationship between all kinds of social unrest, rebellions and religious traditions. More specifically, temple and calendar festivals were a source of unrest, which is both true (comparable to carnival, weddings, birthdays of saints, and the like in the West) and banal (since virtually all social activities had a religious dimension). We can recognize this interpretative mode also in contemporary Chinese stereotypes of people who supposedly use religious activities to stir up trouble. Similar to claims that we find in the West on the relationship between music, television, or internet on the one hand and youth violence on the other, there is a strong tendency in China to mistake the language chosen for protest and violence as their main cause. Only a strong sociological tradition can put the lie to such claims, something that is already difficult in many Western countries and largely absent in China.

Thirdly, some of the most important rebellions in Chinese history were definitely inspired by religious traditions, often messianic or millenarian in nature. The historiographical flaws here are twofold, namely the confusion between inspiration and causation, as well as the tendency to see all messianic or millenarian traditions as inherently rebellious. It has been demonstrated that the causes of rebellions are always much more complex than the reduction to one single religious message. Inversely, it is quite clear that most messianic and millenarian traditions never led to unrest or rebellion. Finally, there is inheritance of the traditional label of the White Lotus Teachings which further systematized the perception of new religious groups and charismatic teachers, because all groups or teachers labeled as such were associated with the few exceptional incidents in which a religious message was indeed connected to a violent event or rebellion. This type of labeling is still common in China today, although no longer under the label White Lotus teachings, but under the label “evil cults”. Western stereotyping on so-called “sects” contributes to this approach as well.

After the 1949 change of power, the basic analytical thrust of this historiography was continued, except that until 1976 the role of rebellious groups was considered in a much more positive light. They were seen as a vanguard of the peasant population which

wanted to fight against feudalistic or barbarian elites. Such religious rebellions were seen in a positive light, but the incorrect assumption that they were caused by religious ideas was still retained. It is still very difficult to escape this analytical paradigm, so instead scholars since the 1980s have simply stopped researching this type of phenomenon. As a result the notion that rebellion and certain religious ideas are closely linked is still extremely influential on people with a high-school education or upward, who have not continued in historical studies, in other words almost all of the Chinese political elite.

Fourthly, some of the post-1949 resistance to collectivization and other communist mass-campaigns was expressed through religious means. By confusing form with causation, this type of religious resistance will have strengthened the perception among the political elites of those days that religion is backward and even dangerous. This perception was then inscribed in the collective institutional memory of the police apparatus and is still an important motivation for controlling religious cults today.

Until the early 1990s, policies towards religious culture were still shaped in part by communist leaders whose mindset was shaped by their pre-1949 experiences, when religious culture was still very much alive. For them religious culture was a direct enemy. The party leaders of today have very little personal experience with any form of religious culture and know it only from books and maybe some visual information. For them it must be really difficult to comprehend its ongoing attractiveness. The younger generation who has been trained after 1978 and is now in its early fifties may have had more exposure, directly or through relatives and acquaintances. They will be aware of the economic successes of Taiwan, South Korea and Japan since the 1960s, despite (or thanks to?) the strength of their religious traditions. Some among them will have studied abroad, although the actual party leadership until now has very little of that kind of international experience. Maybe they or the generation that comes after them can develop a more nuanced view of religious culture than their predecessors.

3.3. Legal rules and political control

3.3.1. Rules and regulations

After 1949, the Chinese communist system has put in place an elaborate structure of rules and regulation, in combination with various organizations, in order to control and regulate religion and religious culture broadly defined. In evaluating the contents and impact of Chinese laws and regulations, we are easily misled by several preconceptions. First of all, North-Western Europeans and Northern American observers (who make up the large majority of Western research on China) come from political systems where laws and regulations are extraordinarily enforceable and enforced through expensive, but effective judiciary and police systems. We take laws and regulations very seriously. Secondly, while we routinely accept that the legal system in China is still underdeveloped (although much improved since 1978) and take this into account in our dealings with China, we take legal restrictions on religious groups and activities much more seriously. And third, we tend to stress cases of excessive judicial and police intervention (of which there are indeed a lot), rather than looking at the overall process of change in the nature of control. In all of this we forget that there is considerable agency on the part of Chinese local communities, who create their own rules and are quite adept at bending or ignoring them for their own interests. The weakness of the legal system also has its advantages. In this section we will take a top-down and more formalistic perspective for clarity's sake, while in the later sections on the local situation and on possibilities for positive intervention we will take a more realistic and bottom-up perspective. In sections 4.3.2. and 4.3.4., I discuss recent developments such as the creation of new legal (or semi-legal) categories for religious culture outside the old and much more limiting category of "religion" (*zongjiao*), and the new socio-political slogan of "harmonious society". These changes took place after the present Rules and Regulations had been promulgated (see Appendix).

In 1949 religious freedom in a formal sense was incorporated in the Constitution and this is still the case today. The absence of incessant political campaigns means that this law and the associated apparatus of control organizations have become more relevant than

before. For reference purposes, we quote the most relevant article of the 1982 constitution in the Appendix to this report, accompanied by the latest version of the “Regulation for Religious Affairs” (in the official translation), effective as of March 1, 2005. It is not difficult to see that the point of departure is still political control over religious activities, rather than guaranteeing freedom within certain parameters. Religion is still defined in terms of institutions, doctrine and specialists. Thus, the definitions of religion and superstition that were first created in the 1920s and 1930s are continued into the present.

Chapter I allows freedom of religious practice as long as it does not interfere with the state or non-religious believers. It is stressed that religious organizations should be self-governing and not be subject to outside control or interference, a provision that is especially relevant to the Roman Catholic church and Tibetan Buddhism. Foreign donations are forbidden.

Chapter II regulates the founding of religious bodies, always remaining subject to state supervision and approval. Internal management is delegated by the state to the national organization, which is of course tightly watched and subject to ongoing indoctrination. Chapter III regulates the maintenance or new establishment of religious sites, again subject to state approval. Religious sites will set up a management structure to take care of internal affairs.

Chapter IV regulates the training of religious personnel, with a stress on supervision by the Religious Affairs Bureau (nowadays the Special Administration for Religious Affairs or SARA) in vetting the selection of incarnations in Tibetan Buddhism or the selection of bishops in Roman Catholicism.

Chapter V guarantees the ownership of property by religious bodies.

Chapter VI stipulates the legal liability of a religious body or site, making them responsible for those activities that are deemed to be criminal, whether due to mismanagement or the organization of activities that have not been vetted beforehand.

The explicit prohibition of “activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state” in the Constitution as well

as the Regulations for Religious Affairs is highly traditional and goes back to many centuries of Chinese laws on religious activities. It reflects the deeply seeded suspicion of religious activities as a source of social disorder (*luan*) among political leaders, bureaucrats and intellectuals.

It is absolutely crucial to note here that by defining religious bodies, sites and personnel as specialized institutions engaged full time in religious activities, a host of traditional social groups which focus around incidental religious worship of a local deity, patron god or the like, is excluded. As a result most of people's traditional religious activities are *de facto* excluded from the sphere of religious freedom, but also from religious control. In the years between 1949-1976 this meant that they had no redress against persecution and repression, but in practice neither did those traditions which were included. On the other hand, after 1976 the remarkable revival of local religion has depended more on local policy, because there simply existed no consistent central policy.

The Regulations for Religious Affairs themselves are not very clear about the role of foreign missionaries, but they do stress that religious leaders such as the incarnations of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism (who are not necessarily Tibetan, but could also be Mongols) and Roman Catholic bishops are to be vetted by the state. The regulations speak a lot about foreign intervention which is forbidden, which Westerners tend to interpret as a fossilized memory of the past and very real imperialist missionary presence (and concomitant Western interference) in China. Actually, there is not much Western intervention, apart from the issue of Vatican control over appointing bishops, and the import of Bibles, limited financial support and some covert missionaries. Not all religious contact with the West is hidden, as SARA in particular also regularly receives foreign religious delegations, from Western countries but also by Islamic and other Asian countries, such as Buddhist delegations from Japan. By and large, however, the Chinese churches, whether they are official, unofficial or actually underground, operate on their own. Seemingly, then, there is little Western interference.

From a Chinese state perspective, however, the fear of intervention also includes Western human rights interventions. We need not agree with this point of view, but it is to be taken seriously, especially when combined with the historical “memory” (even if artificially produced through secondary school education) of 19th and early 20th century Western imperialism. The issue of foreign intervention also holds for the Tibetan case. There is a well-documented history of CIA support for the exile Tibetan community and low-scale guerrilla activities, while nowadays Western believers also predominantly support the Dalai Lama’s Gelugpa tradition and the exile community in India, rather than Tibetan Buddhism in general. From a Chinese point of view this is foreign intervention on behalf of one single tradition. We can compare the emotions involved to the Dutch irritation when the Vatican radio pronounces its views on Dutch abortion or euthanasia policies.

3.3.2. The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA)

The primary organization in charge of supervision over religious affairs, according to the Regulations for Religious Affairs, is the religious affairs department (the term used in the English translation below). The more common English term is Bureau for Religious Affairs, which was recently renamed State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). It falls under the State Council and is therefore formally part of the government structure. As is often the case in important government institutions, all of its leaders are high-ranking members of the Chinese Communist Party. Ye Xiaowen headed the office since 1995, serving concurrently as the head of the Religious Affairs office of the United Front Department since 1991 (a post which he apparently still occupies). Ye was trained in Philosophy. In the absence of a university discipline of religious studies until very recently, this field was the closest relevant education possible for managers of religious affairs. It obviously includes extensive training in Marxist-Leninist Philosophy and Maoist Thinking and is therefore an appropriate schooling ground for managers of the state orthodoxy. This kind of background also guarantees the continuation of seeing religion largely in institutional and doctrinal terms, an approach that is traditionally also very common in the Christian West. In September 2009 Ye was succeeded by his former deputy Wang Zuonan, who had also graduated in Philosophy. Ye is conventionally seen as

the *auctor intellectualis* of religious repression (including the Falun Gong), resistance against the Vatican as the sole authority for appointing bishops, and the Chinese rejection of recognizing the Dalai Lama as supreme authority over Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. He has a high position in the Chinese Communist Party (as an alternate member of the present 17th as well as the preceding 16th Central Committee), which indicates that whoever is the instigator of these policies is closely connected to the centre of political and ideological power.

Within the Chinese Communist Party itself there is also the United Front Work Department, an organization that is much-maligned in foreign writing. Essentially, the doctrine of the united front means that although the leadership of the Chinese political system on all of its levels should remain firmly in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, other sources of authority can also be recognized. Historically, this department was intended to incorporate pre-1949 political parties into the new communist system, but it nowadays plays an important role in formulating policies on ethnic minority issues (including Tibet) and religious affairs. Actual management of these policies is in the hands of government agencies, especially SARA and its local divisions. Not surprisingly, people who work in the latter institution also pass through the United Front Work Department at different stages in their careers.

High level officials of SARA and the United Front Work Department also travel internationally. Ye Xiaowen has attended many conferences inside and outside China which were devoted to Chinese religion, and on May 12, 2010 his successor Wang Zuohan even visited a major Taiwanese centre for propagating Buddhism across the world, Dharma Light Mountain (Faguangshan) with a large SARA delegation. This was the culmination of a series of efforts by this monastery to be positively involved in mainland China, for instance by conferences or donations to the victims of the 2008 earthquake. For mainland China, all of these contacts are also part of attempts to built cross-strait relationships. More generally, the participation by high officials of SARA and by leading academic advisors on religious policy from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing in conferences on religious culture all serve the political aims of

making Chinese policy acceptable to the outside world and of maintaining third party contacts with Taiwan. Sometimes these activities of CASS scholars also lead to academic cooperation, the more so since especially Western generalists on religious culture (usually working on Christian traditions) are blissfully unaware of the political context in which these CASS colleagues operate. At the same time, such visits and cooperative efforts serve the purpose of gathering information on and improving understanding of religious policy elsewhere.

Regular interaction with foreign religious institutions gives SARA further legitimacy, as is quite visible on its website, which prominently notes meetings by its head with foreign delegations as well as visits of its head and vice-heads to religious meetings outside China. This also suggests an additional role of this institution next to control and (on a local level especially) repression, which is maintaining the public face of religious tolerance. Again: this is only tolerance of religion in the narrow definition pointed out above and within the confines of the rules, but rules which do change over time and have become much more lenient of late.

Finally, a dimension of control which is not easy to document is that by people who have infiltrated in the religious organizations in various ways. These might be believers or non-believers and it is nigh impossible to ascertain their identity. It is commonly assumed that such people exist, but given the lack of information it is not clear how much is fear and how much reality. The Eastern European experience indicates that there will certainly be informants and infiltrants in the recognized churches as well as in the unofficial churches and even in underground religious groups.

The central structures of SARA and the United Front Work Department are repeated on local bureaucratic levels. It is easy to overlook these lower levels, but they are actually quite crucial in the implementation of central policies and regulations. It is lower-level officials who carry out arrests, close down religious sites or cause other forms of interference with religious activities. There is, in my opinion, a crucial difference between the centre and the lower levels, which is that the closer an official is to the local

community the more so he or she will be incorporated into local networks. Here the well-attested weakness of the Chinese political and legal system actually becomes an advantage for local communities, or at least a point of entry. Inversely, the increased use of laws and regulations to “control” religion is not always a sign of increased control or persecution, but may also be the result of an increased awareness for the fact that rules and laws are there to be used. Since we lack reliable statistics on religious control, it is very difficult to know for certain which of these possibilities apply at which point in time. The only thing that does seem certain is that the regime attempts to make more use of formal laws and regulations, even if—as in the case of the Falun Gong—this may seem to us to be rather *ad hoc* and a persecution legitimized by laws and trials remains a persecution.

The fact that there is considerable difference between different regions and locales, but also from year to year, confirms that local communities and individuals can make a difference. Local people with sufficient clout and/or money can create room for their religious activities by maintaining relationships with these officials, incorporating them or their close kin into local networks, and so forth. This procedure is not that different from obtaining permission for opening up a hotel on a good location or starting any other business enterprise. Generally speaking, control in the north and in urban centres is more strict. In the south and in the countryside much more is possible. Poorer regions also tend to have more room, but here it may be the case that the situation was already less tense in the past, since repression costs money as well. Hence, we see extreme local divergence, with near-total religious freedom in parts of Fujian—as eloquently demonstrated by the important fieldwork of Ken Dean and Zheng Zhenman c.s. in Putian Prefecture—to ongoing control and repression in much of northern China. To the average tourist the existence of some ten large monasteries in the Beijing area may seem like a lot, because we treat Beijing as a city, but given the fact that its population size equals or exceeds that of the Netherlands (when we include migrants and foreigners), this number is rather small.

3.3.3. The patriotic organizations

The new definition of “religion” which was created in the 1920s and 1930s meant that after 1949 religious freedom was limited in the Chinese Constitution to five institutionalized traditions, namely Buddhism, Daoism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Buddhism includes the Mahayana traditions of China Proper, the Tibetan Buddhism of the Tibetan as well as Mongolian regions, and the Theravada traditions of the former Thai polities in Yunnan. Daoism includes both ritual practitioners in the Heavenly Master tradition who live at home and the monastic tradition of Complete Perfection. Roman Catholicism was accepted, but the final authority of the Vatican and the Pope was denied. The Russian Orthodox church was also accepted, but has always remained confined to specific, small ethnic groups and never missionized beyond them. For minorities more religious freedom was also allowed, basically to keep the social peace. New religious groups and networks of all kinds have been invariably forbidden, with extremely violent suppression in the 1950s and 1960s and ongoing persecution after that.

Even for the institutionalized religions mentioned above, the situation rapidly became very difficult in the decades following 1949. For each tradition special organizations were set up to control it, which still exist today. Because of the fear of foreign intervention and the strong nationalist imprint of the communist political system, these organizations are all explicitly supposed to be patriotic in nature. This is also intended to counter the inherently international tendencies of what are after all world religions. The organizations are as follows:

- the Committee of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement of China (*zhongguo jidujiao sanzi aiguo yundong weiyuanhui* 中国基督教三自爱国运动委员会), namely of 'self-governance, self-support, self-propagation' (1954);
- the Protestant (“Christian”) Association of China (*zhongguo jidujiao xiehui* 中国基督教协会) (1980);
- the Catholic Patriotic Association of China (*zhongguo tianzhujiao aiguoahui* 中国天主教爱国会) (1957);

- the Buddhist Association of China (*zhongguo fojiao xiehui* 中国佛教协会), in which the Tibetan Buddhism of the Mongols and Tibetans also occupies a strong position (1953);
- the Daoist Association of China (*zhongguo daojiao xiehui* 中国道教协会) (1957);
- the Islamic Association of China (*zhongguo isilanjiao xiehui* 中国伊斯兰教协会) (1953).

The Chinese names of these churches are sometimes translated differently, but these are the main organizations through which the state controls and cooperates with the organized religious traditions recognized by the constitution. Although foreign observers may feel that these organizations are merely a cover-up for control and this is undoubtedly partially true, they also provide an avenue for influencing the state and the communist party. By participating in the political system, but also by the abetting of persecution of non-recognized religious groups (such as that of the Falun Gong) these organizations have attained legitimacy and thereby some influence. During the Cultural Revolution these organizations were inactive, but they after 1976 they were reactivated.

There can be little doubt that the patriotic churches in China show insufficient awareness of what went wrong between the communist state and all religious culture from 1949-1976 and after. The incessant persecution of religion and the complicity of the patriotic churches especially in the 1950s have created much bad blood, but almost all people involved in this period have now died or reached a very high age. In the long run, all of these institutions are extremely vulnerable, since their legitimacy depends largely on the state and will disappear with the state as well. Since the patriotic churches are forbidden from active missionary work, they are weak with respect to their unofficial counterparts, since in evangelical Protestant, lay Buddhist, Islamic and other traditions carrying out active missionary work has always been an important way of testifying to one's faith. Hence, these other groups will spread the word irrespective of all efforts at religious control or repression. Therefore, I think that with the growth of religious freedom (or at least with the growing room for unofficial churches) the patriotic churches cannot avoid compromising with their unofficial counterparts, since otherwise even believers inside

these churches will vote with their feet and leave them entirely. Thus, the Catholic Patriotic Association of China has been forced to compromise with the Vatican over the appointment of new bishops in such a way that both sides can agree.

The patriotic churches were originally supported and financed by the state, but in the 1990s they have been privatized economically, in the same way that most companies and factories were cut loose from the state as well. They need income, which they generate by controlling local religious institutions, such as famous temples, shrines, mosques, churches and monasteries, or networks of believers with only tenuous connections. The Daoist Association, for instance, can nowadays provide recognition of local temples, but this comes in exchange for a financial contribution. Because incorporation into the Daoist association also requires a new, “modern” form of management, not every communal temple is eager to join. Local mediums also used membership as a cover for their real activities. In all patriotic churches recognition means control, and control means limits on local power sharing and less say in religious contents. This is true of local temples as much as of Protestant house churches.

Western observers tend to look at these patriotic churches askance and stress that religious groups outside them do not trust these churches. They focus on the very real tensions between the patriotic Christian churches and the many groups outside them, including the attempts by local church leaders and preachers to control or even combat competing groups outside their fold. All of this is certainly true and undoubtedly the close link of the patriotic churches to the state and its interests drives (and keeps) many people away. On the other hand, many people still accept these churches and oftentimes the local difference between a patriotic church and an underground or unofficial church is not that big. Furthermore, especially in the case of the Christian churches on which most of the human rights discourse is focusing, we are not talking about a majority institutional religion which is being repressed, but about a new religion (in common Western parlance: a cult or sect) which is spreading. Hence the psychology of joining a local group is quite different from that of belonging originally to the mainstream church and then leaving it. To us Christian missionary activities may seem quite unproblematic, since this is after all

our own or at least a very familiar religious culture. To many Chinese the advent of Christianity triggers a similar emotional response to that caused by the spread of Islam in present-day Europe (and summoned up by the spread of Bhagwan, Scientology and other new religious groups in the 1970s and 1980s). The successful spread of a foreign religion directly affects their sense of cultural identity.

The Chinese stress on state control and cooperation often seems foreign to us, since we believe strongly in a separation between the state and religious traditions (the church). We should first note, however, that this separation is only relatively recent in many Western countries and is enabled largely by the fact that until recently Western European countries (America is another matter) had a fairly homogenous Christian basis, since even secularized people usually came from Christian backgrounds. With the rise of Islam in Western Europe due to migration there is an increased tendency for the state to interfere again with religion, most commonly with Islamic practices which are believed not to fit in our secularized world. On the other hand, in Chinese history there is a centuries-old tradition among political and cultural elites to be suspicious of the loyalty of international religions (especially Buddhism and nowadays Christianity and Islam) to the imperial state, and to be dismissive of the usefulness of what we would nowadays call religious culture. An important defense of religious leaders was always to stress the usefulness of religious practices in maintaining the moral order and bringing good fortune to the state. There is no shame in cooperating with the state. Even as late as the Nationalist period, Tibetan Buddhist leaders such as the Panchen Lama (who had fled Tibet for the Dalai Lama) successfully used the possibility of doing good for the Chinese state to improve their standing. Although the communist state is not interested in traditional forms of good fortune, it does need legitimacy and recognizing religious traditions is one means of obtaining it.

3.4. Compliance, resistance and persecution

By and large the dominant approach today is one of enforced compliance and control, rather than any form of systematic and ultimately violent persecution. There is a strong fear among the Chinese leadership that religious culture is a potent force that needs to be

watched and controlled. The particular approach which is chosen stems from the wish to create a legal framework and rule China through laws and rules, with compromises where necessary to maintain the ultimate power of the Party. The approach also fits in with traditional Chinese values of normative enforcement through societal pressure (mutual control), not as an outgrowth of the communist system, but as something located much more deeply in Chinese culture. The present trend to stress China as a harmonious society takes up this traditional and no less real value, and then tries to exploit it for the benefit of maintaining social and political stability under a single party leadership.

Inversely, this development also provides religious practitioners with tools to create a better image and even an improved institutional context for religious practice. There is a centuries-old tradition in Buddhism and Daoism to stress the positive contribution of their beliefs and practices in maintaining social stability. Buddhist writers of today, but also people of other faiths, therefore have a long cultural tradition on which they can draw to point out the positive functions of religion. The risk of this for the state is that religion can just as well be the language of protest and resistance, so here they will have to learn that there is a big difference between the language and inspiration of protest, and its deeper causes on the other hand. Otherwise loosening the reins will automatically be followed by religiously inspired incidents and then a backlash to religious culture in general.

As in other societies, including our own, there is also a fair amount of protest in China at every moment in time. Usually this protest is expressed on a local level, with some people eventually reaching the larger political centers, and even Beijing. When this involves religious protest, it is noted quicker by the state and repressed accordingly. On the other hand, Chinese culture has a very strong of protesting against wrongs as a good thing, even when this means that one must suffer the consequences. In addition, in many religious cultures keeping the faith suffering (*chiku* 吃苦) can be an expression of one's religious strength. The Falun Gong is quite explicit in its teachings that one can imbue the Qi (气, which they understand as an energy) of one's persecutor. Buddhism has always had a strong sense of suffering (*ku* 苦 or *xinku* 辛苦) as an integral part of one's existence,

and in fact the cycle of life and death itself is defined as suffering. Communist propaganda after 1949, and general writing since that time as well, continuously stressed the need for suffering (*chiku jingshen* 吃苦精神) now, in order to obtain a better nation in the future. Chinese communists have also always valued the ability of speaking one's mind, at considerable risk to one's career and even one's life. Historical depictions of the early communist movement stress the independence of mind of the early revolutionaries. There is a well-established model for this throughout Chinese history, in which righteous figures—often intellectuals—with the courage to criticize the leaders of their days are always depicted positively. The early dissidents, who had been imbued with this tradition and first enacted it as Red Guards in the late 1960s, but maybe also their latter day successors, stand in this tradition. The Chinese bureaucratic system tries to prevent this from actually happening, but only with limited success.

Hence, there is considerable ideological and religious room for not complying with state control and suppression of religious culture in order to demonstrate one's convictions against all odds, as we have seen most clearly in the cases of the Falun Gong and Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, but in my opinion also in the underground Roman Catholic church and the Protestant house churches. Several observers have pointed out that keeping to one's faith is an important cultural value and this is confirmed by the blossoming of all kinds of religious culture despite decades of repression, harassment or even outright persecution.

The creation of a patriotic Roman Catholic church which does not treat the Pope in Rome as its leader has led to the rise of an underground church which continues to accept his leadership and divine grace, which is at the basis of the power of its sacraments. Both churches are hierarchically led and therefore relatively visible and easy to control. Older leaders of the underground (or unofficial) church have a long history of being imprisoned, but the last few years the situation has begun to shift significantly. The Chinese authorities and the Vatican have come to a *modus vivendi* in which both sides try to agree on the appointments of new bishops. Underground churches still have many problems with the new situation, since they do not always trust new candidates and do not like the

idea of giving up their semi-independent status and the legitimacy that they acquired in decades of persecution and repression. How the new situation will work when the older bishops have all died and only the new appointments are left behind, who are more vulnerable to pressure and indoctrination, is another issue.

Protestant groups are much more difficult to control for the Chinese state. They originate in more than a century of Anglo-Saxon (Great Britain and the USA) and some German missionary work. Dutch churches today, like many Western counterparts, support the training of Chinese cadres to strengthen the quality of religious practice. New missionary activities come especially from the USA and South Korea.[†]

Besides the older, more official traditions which are at least in part covered by the patriotic churches, there are many local Protestant churches which are home-grown. They are known as house churches because they gather in private homes, much as indigenous new (non-Christian) religious groups have been used to doing for centuries and also still do today. This is not necessarily because they are actively persecuted, but can also be connected to the lack of permission to build one's own church. Much of the negative human rights record vis-à-vis religion comes from the suppression of these traditions.

We should not forget that in the end there is an inbuilt limit to the amount of repression and control that the Chinese political system can afford itself. The communist ideology itself no longer provides legitimacy and violent forms of power are never very effective in the long run. The Chinese Communist Party therefore needs economic and political success to retain its power and maintain social stability. It has decided long ago that in order to attain economic growth it has to devolve more decision-making and entrepreneurial power to the people. Especially since the 1990s we are seeing a relaxation of local control, and not merely because maintaining strict control is expensive and often counterproductive, or because decollectivization has meant less power for cadres (and therefore less risk in protesting against them). There is a conscious policy on the part of

[†] *The New York Times* (January 2, 2006; http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/02/world/asia/02iht-korea.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2) mentions 1500 South Korean missionaries in China as of 2006; also see *Time* (July 27, 2007; <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1647646,00.html>).

the centre to leave more room to local communities, in the expectation that protest will remain local (which is the case) and will therefore focus on local excesses, rather than letting dissatisfaction accumulate and spill over to a regional or even national level. At the same time, there is an ongoing development of local identity in the political sphere, of which the local demand for more room for religious and cultural agency is an important part. We may not yet want to call this true freedom, but in terms of process this is still the overall long-term trend.

Everything after 1976 indicates that the long-term trend with respect to religious culture is one of increased acceptance on the part of the largely atheist leadership that some (in fact maybe even many) people want a religious life. Political leaders on various levels before the 1990s had great difficulty making sense of this, whether because of attitudes predating 1949 in which religion was a relic of the past that could only be an obstruction, or the new version of these attitudes from 1949-1976 in which scientism and technicism formed a new religion. After 1976 (especially after 1978, when the university entrance examinations were revived) a new generation has been trained, which is now coming into power and has a more nuanced view of religious culture. There have been many moments that the situation was more tense, such as the first backlash against cultural change and religious revival in the early 1980s, after the suppression of the student and laborer protests of the early summer of 1989, and finally with the suppression of the Falun Gong and Qigong movements since 1999. In each instance, and notwithstanding ongoing harassment and persecution of many forms of religious practice, the overall trend has remained towards more tolerance.

There do remain important conflict lines. Rural society gets much more freedom than urban society—or maybe we should call it benign neglect, rather than freedom. As one researcher puts it, the state reacts much more strongly when groups or networks occupy public spaces that are seen as secular and/or are maintained by the state (such as public parks, squares and the like). There is only private and state (which equals public in the Chinese case) space in an urban environment, with very little in between (unlike the abundance of civil space which is neither private nor state in Western countries) after the

near-total destruction of temples in the cities in the pre-1976 period. Restoring religious culture in the cities is much more likely to conflict with the state because of the sheer lack of room for non-private, non-state space.

The same is true when groups like the Falun Gong, but potentially also mediums, intrude on segments of health care that the state sees as essential to its scientist and technicist approach. The claim that the Falun Gong is bad for public health is partly stressed in order to clamp down on the movement, but it is not entirely void either. The movement did actively reject medical care as useless in the light of the karmic origin of all disease—in itself a perfectly legitimate Buddhist point of view. The perceived encroachment on public space (the role of the state to take care of its citizens) by private beliefs is significant here as well. We have very similar discussions in Western countries, for instance the orthodox Protestant rejection of disease prevention or the more recent secular resistance against inoculation. Here the fault line is particularly worrisome, since in China too it is precisely these kinds of new religious movements based on charisma and promising alternative forms of healing which also attract the most followers and are spreading very fast. They include a wide variety of Protestant groups.

On the other hand, relaxing religious control offers political advantages as well. One advantage that is very clearly on the mind of the leaders in Beijing is improving ties with Taiwan. Originally, the involvement of Overseas Chinese from Taiwan and Southeast Asia in local religious life in Fujian was a grassroots activity, although much applauded by local leaders in Fujian as well. Nowadays, it is actively supported by the central state. SARA frequently receives visits from Buddhist leaders on Taiwan, scholarly exchange on religious culture is booming (up to the highest level of advisors to the Central Committee), and the religiously based charitable organization of the Taiwanese Compassion Salvation Hall (Tz'u-chi T'ang or Ciji tang) is very welcome in China itself as well. We will discuss below the slowly growing and politically supported involvement of religious organizations in charity on the mainland as well.

4. Restoration and change

4.1. The restoration of religious practice

The restoration of religious practice in general shows the great resilience of local society, since most of it has started bottom up. Simplistic views of China as a centrally-led dictatorship overlook the fact that crucial social and economic developments during the last four decades often started as local initiatives, such as the household responsibility system in Chinese agriculture in the early 1970s. After a try-out period, some developments are then stopped and others are continued. The restoration and change of religious practice, despite ongoing control, harassment and repression, and sometimes active persecution (most notably in the case of the Falun Gong), show that local people can and do take power in their own hands.

By concentrating on the cases in which people's rights (as defined by international agreements on Human Rights) are violated, we overlook the many more cases in which local people have been able to organize a religious event or institution. By concentrating on state persecution, we repeat the same mistake of ignoring local agency that is also made by the state apparatus itself. Precisely because control focuses on institutional religious traditions, this arena is also where we find the most problems, or at least the most reporting of problems. Fieldwork by anthropological colleagues shows that there are indeed also problems in the case of attempts to restore local temples, monasteries or ancestor halls, and of mediums trying to build up a clientele. Local communities then try to find way to strike a deal with local cadres and increasingly often succeed—even when not always. Mediums now present themselves as active lay believers, for instance registering as lay Daoists in the official Daoist Association. They again provide leadership to local followers, for instance when going on a pilgrimage.

One question we cannot answer is how many people in China today should be considered religious. There have been recent reports in which extrapolations for China as a whole are made on the basis of samples of only a few thousand people from large urban centers.

They are based on rather superficial inquiries and only indicative. The most interesting fact is that one such survey from 2007 carried out by a Chinese university sociologist of religion suggests as much as 31.4% of people aged 16 years or older were religious in one sense or another. Other surveys come up with a similar figure, but classify roughly 12% of the population as Buddhist, 1% as Protestant and 1% as Roman Catholic, with less than 1% Daoist and again less than 1% adhering to Islam. This raises the question as to what “religious” means to the remaining 15% of the “religious” population. The data also confirm that the legal definition of “religion” in terms of institutionalized traditions no longer works, even for the urban Chinese population. Furthermore, the figure for the Protestants is not at all in line with other estimates, which is anywhere between 25 and 50 million. Other statistics claim 16,000 Buddhist institutions and some 200,000 monks or nuns, as well as 1,700 reincarnated Tibetan Buddhist lamas. The number of followers is not documented, but would be some 120,000,000 million people following the above statistic. There would be 1,500 Daoist institutions and some 250,000 monks and nuns. Since these monks and nuns usually do not have a circle of believers, such numbers cannot be used to extrapolate to the total number of Buddhist or Daoist believers. Given the enormous methodological problems in defining “religion” or “religious”, it is probably not very useful to spend much energy on such statistics. What it does indicate is that religion is not at all dead. Furthermore, some of these figures have been widely reported in China itself, meaning that they will influence the decisions of policymakers in one way or another.

4.1.1. The restoration of traditional religious institutions

After 1976 the worst repression and political campaigning was over, but the results of the destruction that had been wrought on Chinese religious culture remained and the ongoing fetters of political control were not let down immediately. Since the destruction of religious institutions in urban society has been near total after 1949, culminating in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, restoration of traditional religious institutions near the cities has been extremely difficult. This means that in urban society there is ample room

for new forms of Chinese or foreign religion. In the countryside the picture is far more mixed. There is of course a lot of ongoing restoration, but in the process much is changed and reinvented. Restoration has been most thorough in rural Fujian province, thanks to support by Taiwanese and Overseas Chinese people. In Putian (Fujian province), 1,639 temples were located in a recent survey or 2.7 per village, with an average village population of circa 1,200 people. Connected with the temples are some 6,960 statues of some 1,200 different deities, 123 ritual alliances (which bind communities together for a common purpose, for instance maintaining irrigation works), and festivities such as opera and processions. The same region also has several types of Buddhist (celibate as well as married monks) and Daoist specialists, shamans and mediums. Even in this particular region, the lineage organization has not been revived and this seems to be the case as well elsewhere in southern China. The restoration process was particularly intense in the 1980s, but is still continuing. Elsewhere the restoration is much more haphazard.

Everywhere in China we also see the recovery of older big temples, but now serving a much larger area than before 1949. Depending on local circumstances, regaining control over temples is always an uphill battle against uninterested or unsympathetic cadres. A tourist angle to a temple always helps, but also means that entry fees will be required even from religious worshippers. In regions with many Overseas Chinese the restoration of local religious institutions has usually proceeded smoothly, or only with temporary setbacks. In regions without such a presence, especially when they have a strong revolutionary (or Maoist) history such as Jiangxi province or the northern provinces of Shaanxi and Shanxi, it has proven more difficult to restore local temples. Fieldwork carried out in Hebei and more marginal parts of the northern provinces shows that restoration does nonetheless take place. Maybe an additional reason is that temples cost money and could until recently not be funded with permanent property.

Some phenomena are still illegal or merely tolerated, such as shamanism and medium cults, making it very difficult for us to determine whether these practices are still going on underground or have been restored only partially. Isolated fieldwork (such as in the neighborhood of Tianjin and Hebei province, but also in Fujian) suggests that there are

still or again medium cults, but by no means in the same quantities as in the past. The biggest controversies arise when medium cults practice forms of healing in competition with Western or Chinese medical traditions. There exists in China today the same conflict as in the West between modern medical traditions (with a reinvented form of “traditional Chinese medicine” on the side of indigenous modernity) and quasi-healing or quacks. Mediums and various new religious groups are deemed to stand on the side of the quacks. This came to the fore very clearly in the suppression of the Falun Gong. This movement had propagated the Buddhist view that disease and other forms of un-wholeness are the result of bad karma, which needs to be dissipated through suffering, and healing through Western or Chinese medicine robs people of this opportunity of decreasing one’s karma. This view gave rise to much criticism by Chinese intellectuals and religious figures that led to bad press, which then triggered the Falun Gong protests of early 1999 and subsequently the prohibition and persecution of the Falun Gong and other Qigong movements.

Still, it would seem that religious treatments with a strong psycho-somatic dimension or non-intrusive forms of religious medical healing are left alone as long as they do not acquire an organized following. One example has been documented for instance in Hebei province, where a local female medium has built a very extensive circle of adherents. At the same time this case illustrates the differences, for she has no pupils and she draws from a much larger geographical circle than traditional mediums would have done. This may be because public transport is much better than in the past, but also because there are simply far fewer mediums around than in the past. Elsewhere we also see the return of mediums who provide treatment for afflictions of a more physical and/or social nature. One observer has noted that the local authorities and village leaders seem to remain aloof from them, leaving it to the local community to deal with smaller incidents. Since mediums depend on their oral reputation, this is an effective method to prevent most excesses.

Potentially, a medium can be a threat to the authority of the Chinese Communist Party, certainly on a local level, because he or she is the vessel of deities that cannot be easily

reproached. Usually mediums are active for individual purposes of advice, healing, and exorcism, but they also play an important role in old-style new religious groups such as the Unity Teachings. Traditionally, they would also serve as an intermediary with the divine world in order to transmit heavenly texts, which might then serve as the basis for moral and even political action. In the 1980s several Christian-inspired incidents took place, in which people claimed to be incarnations of God or Jesus, which is a similar approach to the belief in mediums.

In the restoration of Daoism and Buddhism we can also clearly see the ongoing interest of the state in controlling these traditions. Traditionally, the imperial state has always tried to control the quality of the monks (nuns were a small and insignificant group). This included exams and prescribing their contents. The communist state does much the same thing, furthering centralized monastic traditions at the expense of local Daoist or lay Buddhist traditions. The number of restored Daoist institutions is quite unclear, since even official sources give varying accounts. The same is true for Buddhist institutions. In both instances the education of monks has become much more centralized than before 1949. The final ritual of ordination was always restricted to a small number of monasteries, so here there is little change.

The freeing up of religious practice after 1976 came only just in time, since the ordination of new monks and priests had suffered greatly since the 1950s and Daoist as well as Buddhist institutions were ageing rapidly. There was a gap in the age distribution in 1976, since nobody had been ordained for over two decades and many monks and priests had died or become too old. The need to rebuild was also a chance for the state to put its stamp on the institutions all over the country, by controlling the schooling process. Nonetheless, we see everywhere that even under these circumstances religious leaders are never simply the mouthpieces of local political leaders. Intellectually, the Buddhist leaders of today are the pupils of monks who were trained and initiated in the Republican period, providing both religious and intellectual continuity with reform efforts of those days. Thus the break with the past is not total.

One type of religious leader, however, has not yet been fully restored, to wit the position of Heavenly Master, a tradition of Daoist leaders that goes back many centuries and received the highest state recognition from the twelfth century until the nineteenth century. This was a hereditary position within a family named Zhang, claiming to go back to the second century C.E., but only well-attested as a more or less continuous lineage since the twelfth century. With their headquarters on a mountain in the south of Zhejiang, the Heavenly Masters were the highest functionaries of the non-celibate Daoist tradition, with a rank equal to the highest civilian officials in the empire until the late eighteenth century. A distant descendant of the family now seats in Taiwan (actually two competing descendants), and yet another in Beijing, all of them claiming to be the ruling Heavenly Master. Since priests in this tradition are hard to distinguish from local mediums or shamans, at least in the eyes of regular officials, and equally hard to control due to the absence of a centralized form of organization, they have not yet been formally restored. Local priests in this tradition function as liturgical specialists, who perform rituals for the community or individuals. Besides them is a variety of other ritual specialists, who are equally hard to get to grips with for the state but are generally tolerated.

One final observation on the topic of the restoration of religious culture after 1976 is in place. Given the enormous destruction of religion in the twentieth century and the enforced secularization of the Chinese people in the Maoist decades, it is easy to overlook that there are also more or less natural processes of secularization going on. This is not the place to discuss these in great detail, but especially in the urban world we see secular forms of charity, medical and even psychosocial care has improved considerably, and other forms of socio-religious organizations are coming into being. In so far as religious institutions played an important role in this respect, it is not strange that regular secularization or shifts in religious activities also take place. Not all change after 1949 is the result of outright repression.

Because of the increased stress on education and the limited funds of Buddhist or Daoist institutions, it has become more difficult for youngsters from straightened circumstances

to enter the monastic world. The custom of leaving a child with the local monastery, out of poverty or because of a promise by the devout mother, seems to have been discontinued. Instead there are more orphanages. Most rural households would not relinquish their sons easily with the present birth control policy and there are not nearly enough monasteries for nuns that all orphan daughters could find their way there. This is yet another example of change that is not directly related to repression.

A change that is related to repression is the pressing need to perform rituals or other activities that bring in money. In traditional China the big monasteries with famous abbots, who were essential in recognizing someone's religious advances, could perform this role thanks to their wealth in land and property. Here, the new rule that religious institutions may own property (whether land or immobile property) might be an important change. With the increased wealth circulating in Chinese society, there will also be more donors able to give substantial amounts of wealth for religious purposes.

Importantly, the restoration of religious culture is not exclusively the result of the conservative nature of rural society, for it is in the economically advanced regions such as Fujian that restoration has been the earliest and the most thorough. The economic boom town Shenzhen is full of all sorts of religious activities, as has been demonstrated in recent fieldwork by a Chinese specialist. Here its closeness to Hong Kong may have helped, but the example puts the lie to the possible hypothesis that religion is merely a remnant of the past—an approach to traditional culture that is often taken by secular communist cadres.

All in all, a lot is happening on a local level. Local cadres leave local religion alone because they need economic growth and they require the cooperation of local communities. This means that these communities are increasingly in charge of their own culture and their own religious needs. The only criterion remains whether an activity might threaten state control, but as long as they stay local they are usually tolerated. One caveat is that we should not mistake this for religious freedom in the absolute sense of the word. As in the Western countryside, there is considerable pressure to conform and

individual freedom is probably still limited, but this is not the result of central state pressure.

The same specialist who has studied Shenzhen suggests a crucial difference between urban and rural areas, namely the privatization or individualization of religion in the urban areas and the restoration of communal religion in the rural areas. This means that with the increased urbanization of the last two decades we should see more private religious practice. This would fit very well with another observation, to be discussed below, that Protestantism and various new religious groups are on the rise, since they cater more to networks based on private belief, than to local communities in which everybody has to take part by virtue of being born and resident in a given locality.

4.1.2. The return and growth of Christianity

I treat Christianity here as a separate religious phenomenon, because it is an important Western religion and therefore understandably of great interest to Westerners. We should note however that in analytical terms it is a foreign religion on the same level as new religious groups. In fact, it is as much as “sect” (or rather “sects”) as these other groups, hence feared, misunderstood and frequently persecuted. Since I reject the terminology of sect, cult and likewise as overly pejorative, I propose analyzing Christian groups in the Chinese context as new religious groups. Furthermore, since the majority of the Christian groups has adapted to, and is still changing today, in according with Chinese needs and forms, we do better to understand them as a local Chinese Christianity.

Roman Catholicism

Credible figures for the patriotic Roman Catholic church in China put the official church at roughly five million, and more speculatively for the underground church at eight million as of 2010. It seems that this reflects natural growth since the three million of 1949, in line with the increase of the overall Chinese population over the same period, rather than the result of ongoing proselytization. I already discussed the old conflict over the leadership of the church, between the Vatican and the Chinese government, and the

way in which this is now being addressed, thanks to a compromise. On a local level tensions between the official patriotic churches and underground unofficial churches still remain and are not so easily resolved after many decades of infighting and persecution. The much-avowed independence from Chinese state control on the part of the underground church means that the Vatican risks alienating or even losing many faithful in the process. Therefore, the process of bringing the patriotic churches and the underground churches closer to each other is by no means completed merely by finding bishops who are acceptable to the Chinese state (more specifically SARA) and the Vatican, since it is local believers who have to live and work with them. Nonetheless, both the Vatican and the Chinese state have an interest in improving relationships, for both of them are very aware of the rapid growth of the Protestant movement, which is much more difficult to control and competes for the same religious market—admittedly a term that they will not quickly use. Furthermore, both are hierarchical (some would say authoritarian) systems and neither has much appreciation for autonomous religious groups in society at large (~civil society).

This is the political level of state-Roman Catholic relationships. There are also other dimensions. For one, there is the tendency of rural communities to compromise between their Catholic beliefs and local customs and beliefs. Thus, there is a much higher frequency of sightings of apparitions and interest in miracles, much as in the case of the Protestant house churches. More and better training for the priests also means alienating them from their less educated rural communities of origin. And finally there is the threat of secularization as the result of increased contact of migrants with the outer world, independent of their family and communities, and therefore also outside of social control.

The Protestant movement

The situation around the Protestant movement is much more complicated. This begins with the questions of how many people can be considered Protestant believers and which criteria to use. The issue is further aggravated by the fact that unlike the Catholic church, which grows mainly through natural reproduction by its adherents, the Protestant movement expands through proselytization as well, most of it indigenous and not due to

foreign missionary activities. In 1949 there were an estimated one million believers, whereas now numbers vary from some 15 million believers in the patriotic movement alone to a total that could be anywhere between a minimum of 25 to maybe 50 or even 100 million believers. Ironically, in the patriotic movement the pre-1949 liturgy and doctrinal beliefs have been preserved most completely, as the result of constant supervision by the state. Nonetheless, if the number of one million believers as the result of missionary activity before 1949 is correct, even the figure of 15 million believers in the patriotic movement implies a growth figure far beyond that of natural population growth.

Apart from the old Protestant churches, which have been largely incorporated into the patriotic movement, there are both home-grown traditions predating 1949 and many more which have come into being since 1976. The pre-1949 traditions are characterized by a return to primitive Christianity and stress a direct spiritual experience of conversion or supernatural healing and prophecy. They are highly charismatic in origin, but even after their founders died they have continued to flourish. Similar tendencies can be seen in the new groups founded after 1976. Researchers have suggested that these new groups reflect the coming to terms of Christian beliefs with elements of local religious culture, including charismatic cults involving mediums (with the Holy Ghost descending in people), shamanism (i.e. spirit travelling), healing and the like. They even show millenarian tendencies, which were once popular among indigenous new religious groups as well. These groups have no respect for established traditions, leave alone the patriotic church.

It is this author's impression that much that is still prohibited or repressed by the religious policies of the communist state has now taken on a new Christian coloring. What was pushed down in terms of Chinese local religious practices comes up again in a Christian shape. This is not merely opportunism, but seems to have happened quite organically thanks to the weakening of traditional and potentially competing forms of religion during decades of political campaigns. When we think of Protestant house churches, we should therefore not too easily think of the same Protestantism that we know from Western

Europe or Northern America, but rather of the evangelical or Pentecostal movements that we find represented in Asia by South Korean Christianity. This new Christianity is very hard to understand for the Chinese state apparatus, but also for Christian intellectuals and leaders in the old style traditions.

Because the house churches spread through networks, rather than formal organizations, they are not well documented. For the same reason, they are very difficult to control or repress, and can be founded very easily. They derive their legitimacy vis-à-vis the state and the patriotic movement from their suffering in imitation of Jesus Christ, so repression strengthens rather than weakens them. Christian tradition, but also communist propaganda of the past decades, has always put great value on the significance of suffering and this therefore exerts a very strong emotional appeal. These house churches rely on their own interpretations of the Bible and the Christian message, which makes them fairly autonomous and enables them to develop according to the charisma of the teachers and the spiritual and emotional needs of local communities. Especially in the countryside, these needs are very large and cannot be filled easily by non-religious means, since psycho-social and even medical care are often difficult to obtain.

Protestant groups can be founded more easily than formalistic and hierarchical Roman Catholic churches, whether official or unofficial. Since a group only requires a few people who agree among themselves, they also spread more easily than local temple cults which require a fixed location and the consent of an entire community. The groups profit from an association with the successful West, but this does not explain why Roman Catholicism does not do profit in the same way. Both receive financial help from outside. It might be assumed that the underground Roman Catholic church or the Protestant house churches profit to some extent from the pressure that is exerted by human rights activists on their respective governments to keep a close watch over Chinese violations of human rights, but in fact there are few signs of a direct relationship between western human rights activities and an easing of Protestant activities. Furthermore, this does not explain the remarkable difference between the spread of Protestant and Roman Catholic groups,

nor why Protestantism seems to spread at the expense of indigenous traditions, for instance Buddhist lay groups or monastic institutions.

Instead, we want to look at the fact that so many women take part in Protestant groups. Traditionally, they would be followers of specific temple cults (such as the Lady of Mount Tai in the north who helps women who want to get children) or become lay Buddhists, since for them conflicts between Buddhist rules (such as avoidance of meat and spirits) conflicted less with their ritual obligations (which entail sharing meat and alcoholic drinks, during festivals or social banquets). Since Buddhist institutions have been severely damaged over the last century, Protestantism is a ready alternative. Furthermore, unlike Roman Catholicism, Protestantism is a diffuse movement without central leadership in which much room exists for local adaptation and interpretation. Setting up a new group is cheap, since one only requires a Bible and some help with interpretation to get started.

From an international perspective, the rise of Protestantism in China should be analyzed in a similar way to its growth in other regions, such as Latin America, Africa or South Korea, where we find the same spread of an inspired and charismatic Christianity. This new Protestantism not only fits old needs which can no longer be filled by traditional cults, in part due to repression and persecution, but also new needs of personal self-development due to patterns of economic change and globalization that create new uncertainties (as the result of being influenced by distant, yet invisible markets) and the lessening importance of local communal ties.

The importance of revelations of all sorts and healing miracles in the evangelical churches makes reconnecting to the patriotic churches difficult, since these are based on an older Christianity with a much more formalized theology and ritual. Indeed, it would be like asking evangelical churches in the USA to reunite with the Anglican church in Great Britain. Not surprisingly, it is evangelical groups from the USA and South-Korea which are particularly active among the house churches. Yet these same groups, especially evangelical groups from the USA, also contribute to the ongoing schism, since

this separation fits their perception of the American situation as well. These groups reproduce pre-1976 facts on the situation in China (e.g. the need for Bibles, despite the large number of Bibles now printed much cheaper in China itself) since these fit their apocalyptic view better than the fuzzy and more nuanced picture that outside observers would give.

The Protestant case also demonstrates more than any other religious group that however much repression takes place, local people will express themselves. The interpretations of the Bible diverge considerably from what Westerners might see as the “correct” interpretative parameters, for some groups have actually gone so far as claiming that their leaders were incarnations of God or Jesus. The earlier point that focusing on state repression and persecution makes us overlook local agency becomes especially relevant here. An absolute minority religion is gradually becoming one of the main religious forces in China. The Protestant focus on the life of Jesus Christ as told in the Gospels, with its frequent miracles and healing, fits popular needs. Protestant tradition allows much local agency of interpretation and acting, but at the same time it still draws on one single book that is seen as the final word of God. This last dimension should also not be underestimated, since it must seem relatively close to the way in which people before 1976 had to rely on a limited canon as well, in the form of the quotations of Mao Zedong and/or the editorials of the People’s Daily. A movement like the Falun Gong also profited from the fact that especially the urban population is nowadays quite used to the idea that truth comes from one single book, by producing a religious canon of their own.

4.1.3. Old-style and new-style new religious groups

China has a rich tradition of new religious groups, some of them going back to the late sixteenth century and still existing today. They have been intensely persecuted and I have already mentioned that the traditional perception of these groups as rebellious and a threat to public order still exists today—however unjustly and unfounded in historical fact. It is important to note that this type of misunderstanding is not unique to China. We only need to remember our own past, whether more distant times of religious dissent and repression, and ongoing discussions in Western countries today about the perceived

dangers of “sects” (which I prefer to call new religious groups or movements). In the Netherlands we have had the influential report by T.A.M. Witteveen, entitled *Overheid en nieuwe religieuze bewegingen* on behalf of the Dutch parliament (The Hague: SDU, 1984) and more recently a similar report was produced by the German parliament, entitled “Final Report of the Enquete Commission on 'So-called Sects and Psychogroups' - New Religious Communities and Psychogroups in the Federal Republic of Germany" (authorized translation, published by the German Parliament, <http://www.AGPF.de/Bundestag-Enquete-Report.pdf>). These and many other reports, easily found in the Internet, testify to the unease with which Western governments and certainly the general populations of their different countries approach new religious groups.

We will not list the old-style new religious groups here for the simple reason that so little is known on their present situation. We do know that they were seriously persecuted, whatever their religious views, in the 1950s. Experts agree that some of these movements, including the Unity Teachings (*yiguandao*), are still harassed or even persecuted today, but there is very little concrete evidence. Anecdotal information hidden in footnotes or transmitted on conferences indicates that these groups still exist. The Unity Teachings is very active on Taiwan and in Hong Kong, as well as in Overseas Chinese communities all over the world. It is very unlikely that they have not used their contacts to reconnect with mainland groups. After being legalized in Taiwan in 1987, the Unity Teachings became a crucial support group of the Nationalist Party and they are still considered a major force in favor of eventual unification of Taiwan and mainland China. In this role, it has been rumored that representatives have also met with Chinese cadres in Beijing, but I have found no confirmation. A group of which we know for certain that it is now completely tolerated and on its way to being legalized, is the Three-in-One Teachings in Putian (Fujian). Extensive fieldwork by Ken Dean in particular has demonstrated that this movement of over four centuries old has not only come back to life, but is one of the most powerful religious and social forces in the prosperous prefecture of Putian in coastal Fujian today. It has some 1000 temples and several hundreds of ritual specialists. Other older movements, apart from the Unity Teachings, have also been restored in this region.

Research in the rural region near Tianjin suggests that many former new religious groups are still underground or have simply disappeared. However, some networks have returned and are now performing important roles, such as the performance of funerary rituals.

During the last decades, much attention has gone to new-style groups founded or started after 1976. They build on developments since 1949, usually do not worship Buddhist, Daoist or Confucian figures, and seem to have little interest in traditional scriptures in the Classical Chinese writing language. Here we will concentrate on the Qigong movement, including the Falun Gong. Qigong as an approach was legalized again in 1979 with the support of high level political leaders—among whom individuals who had profited from using Qigong for their private health. It was an outgrowth of attempts during the 1950s to use elements of meditation and healing traditions in a way that was no longer religious but scientific (*kexuede*). During the 1980s highly publicized experiments were carried out to demonstrate that *qi* was not a spiritual concept, but something that could be physically attested. The propagation of Taijiquan (also called somewhat confusingly “shadowboxing”) stands in the same tradition of continuing the health dimensions of meditation practices, while removing or at least ignoring its religious dimensions. Nonetheless, the purpose of Taijiquan exercises is still to obtain unity with the cosmos (through enacting Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth, and drawing in cosmic energy or *qi*), which I would classify as a religious aim.

The Qigong teachers of the 1980s and 1990s provided individuals health and comfort by linking them into the larger whole of the cosmos and its continuous circulation of energy (*qi*). Although their teachings lack a reference to some kind of divine force, the way in which they explain the world (~microcosm) inside them and link it to the world (~macrocosm) outside them has strong religious connotations. Much depends on one’s judgment of the attempts to provide a scientific basis for Qigong, since adherents will have felt (and still feel) convinced by these attempts, while outside observers often do not. For the adherents Qigong **is** scientific without a doubt, somewhat similar to the way in which near-death experiences with their visions of another world are real (and scientifically proven) to those people who have gone through them. It is not open to

debate whether these scientific claims are true, hence they qualify as scientific at best. I prefer the term religious, since this opens the way for tolerating these beliefs and activities, as long as they do not harm people. The label “religious” also explains much better what people look for in these movements.

Qigong typically appealed to people with more or less somaticized psychic problems and chronic diseases. We also find people among the adherents with conventional diseases, which could be easily treated by modern medicine. In traditional China, they might have drawn on religious resources, including mediums and shamans, or have adopted a more intensive lay Buddhist lifestyle to cope with their personal problems. These options are much less accessible and were classed as “superstitious”, certainly in the urban environment. A type of approach which could present itself as non-religious and even scientific was therefore bound to have a strong appeal. This was especially true among the urban population in age groups which have grown up in the 1950s and 1960s, when anti-religious and scientific propaganda was at its height. The appeal of Qigong-teachers was not merely for intrinsic reasons having to do with their scientific message. They also profited from the fact that the state health care system had never been completely accessible to everybody and now became straightforward entrepreneurial. People with low budgets turned increasingly to self-medication through Chinese medicine and Qigong. Hence, Qigong can be considered the largest mass-movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

The state was uneasy about these developments. On the one hand it was caught up in the discourse which presented Qigong as scientific, undoubtedly because many in the state apparatus and the party actually believed it. Furthermore Qigong really helped people. On the other hand, charismatic teachers are always seen as a threat to party and state control. Not surprisingly it has proven impossible to develop a criterion to distinguish between good and bad Qigong teachers. A specific apparatus for controlling Qigong masters was built up and every teacher had to be a member. One of them was Li Hongzhi, who had started his own movement in 1992. He (and his inner circle) expanded the Qigong approach of exercises and charismatic healing, adding a more elaborate set of moral values, instructions for self-help, and networking techniques. As a result the movement

expanded rapidly and came under heavy fire within a few years after its founding. His movement was then thrown out of the government-controlled Qigong Association. Now, the movement showed a characteristic which distinguished it from other Qigong teachers, because it would always respond quite vehemently to such criticisms. This goes back to 1994, only two years after they came into being. Since one can draw *qi* from those who persecute one, it is not surprising that being persecuted was a good thing. Furthermore, as in other religious traditions, being persecuted is the surest evidence of one's true belief. As in the Christian house churches and some Buddhist religious groups, but also in some forms of dissident behavior, suffering can provide a strong source of legitimacy and inner strength. The combination of a self-help strategy for dealing with life's problems and networking techniques enabled an enormous expansion, with the Falun Gong movement with anywhere between 2 and 100 million (both figures ultimately going back to government sources and inherently unreliable) as one of several successful Qigong groups.

On 26 April 1999, the silent protest of Falun Gong adherents in Beijing, surrounding the compound where the party and state leaders live, triggered a large-scale persecution of the movement. The following events are well-known and do not need repeating here. The suppression effort was probably the largest mass-campaign that China has known since the Cultural Revolution. Earlier campaigns were massive, but not sustained over time (such as the Spiritual Pollution campaigns), while the suppression of the student and laborer democratic movement of the early summer 1989 was not really a campaign and did not last that long. In 1989 repression was at its most violent with respect to laborers, rather than students. There are also other differences. While during the Spiritual Pollution campaign summary executions took place, this time the repression was carried out in a legal context and on a nationwide systematic basis. Most deaths are the result of the torture and maltreatment, or suicides as a result of the persecution. They cover a broad spectrum of urban society. Also important is the way in which the persecution was legitimated. Outside observers have noted the fact that this and other Qigong movements had acquired a strong following among party members and the security apparatus, and tend to see this as an important reason for suppression. While this may well be true, the

construction of the Falun Gong as a danger to popular health is not just empty propaganda. They do claim that their religious healing is better and this may prevent people from seeking more appropriate medical care. On the other hand, the medical system is expensive and hard to access, while traditional forms of psycho-social care have been destroyed and secular forms are not widely available or affordable.

Remarkably, of all mainland groups prohibited after 1949, the Falun Gong movement is the only group which has succeeded in sustained resistance against its persecution, even though is now largely limited to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Western countries. Resistance in China itself has dwindled, due to the severity of the ongoing repression, but every now and then money imprinted with a Falun Gong slogan will turn up. Outside China, the battle is fierce. The students and labor activists of 1989 never succeeded in keeping an organized opposition alive and many have since gone into business or scholarship. The Falun Gong has been alone in keeping up its protest, almost as a ritual act that affirms one's true faith. It maintains websites, publishes a newspaper (the Epoch Times), sends out emails, and puts up placards, flyers and other materials wherever Chinese visitors are likely to come. Outside the ferries and at other points in Hong Kong (formally part of China, but with religious practice virtually free), these placards are on a permanent exposition, with an additional presence of a few adherents during weekends. The texts, photos and newspapers not only protest against the persecution, but fiercely attack the Chinese Communist Party itself as well.

4.1.4. Tibetan Buddhism in and outside Tibet

When Tibet became part of the People's Republic of China it was agreed that Tibetan Buddhism would be protected and respected. This promise was kept to a certain extent until the Great Leap Forward of 1958, when the communist leadership under Mao Zedong decided on an accelerated program for economic growth that entailed mass collectivization and depended on the mobilization of the masses on a millenarian scale. In China Proper the religious infrastructure had already been considerably weakened by the land reforms since 1949 and by campaigns against all kinds of religious specialists. Now

all of this arrived in Tibet as well and an uprising broke out, which was violently suppressed. In 1959 the Dalai Lama and his close circle fled to northern India, initially supported by the CIA and now mostly by their own economic activities and Western devotees. Part of the reason for the conflict was no doubt the enforced socio-economic and religious revolution that the communist centre forced upon Tibet, with the people fleeing in large part aristocratic families. An approach sympathetic to China might argue that they were former exploiters and no doubt they were, although as in China Proper the verdict is open on just how exploitative they really were. As all over China, removing these elites from economic, social and political power may have served a communist agenda, but it also removed people with considerable managerial experience and economic funds. The Tibetan elites were partly able to take these funds with them and became successful outside Tibet, much like former Shanghai and Ningbo business leaders left China in 1949 to become successful in Hong Kong, or the Nationalist leadership and many top scholars fled to Taiwan,

The story of destruction in Tibet that lasted from 1959 until long after 1976 is well-known. In it Han ethnic prejudice played an important role, but it should not be forgotten that much the same happened in China Proper as well, both among Han-Chinese and local ethnic cultures. Political motives were as important as ethnic considerations and still are today. Behind much destruction in the past and obstruction in the present was and still is a specific Chinese vision of modernity and the best way of getting there which sees religious culture as a relic of the past that incites people to act against perceived modernity and against their supposed self-interests. This is not fundamentally different from the way Western countries have behaved or still behave in their own (former) colonies or in those parts of the world where European migrants have taken over power in the past centuries (the American and Australian continents). Somewhat ironically, Tibetan Buddhism would never have spread outside of the Chinese world without the exile of so many prominent monks. Both the thirteenth and fourteenth Dalai Lamas owe a lot to their respective banishments, which enlarged their world beyond China and the Mongol world and which made them much more essential to Tibetan elites than before.

Therefore, Tibetan Buddhism's position in the world would have been very different without the events of 1959 and after.

In the 1960s the fourteenth Dalai Lama slowly came into his own, and with other Tibetan Buddhist leaders he has succeeded in drawing much attention to the Tibetan case. Since his Gelugpa or Yellow Hat tradition depends so strongly on the feudal system of big monasteries with large landholdings and tenant farmers tied to the land, it is in fact quite impossible that the tradition of the Dalai Lama himself could ever return in the same way as before. Large landownership has been destroyed and it is unlikely that the monks would again receive the old unswerving loyalty of their believers. For this reason the Gelugpa tradition now has an interest in acting as the forerunners of a Tibetan nationalism, in order to create a new role for itself. Other traditions without this traditional monastic tie can now compete much more easily and have profited from the political and social room that is offered to them by the relative absence of the Gelugpa.

It is very difficult to support the Tibetan case in a nuanced way, due to the strength of pro-Tibet pressure groups outside of China/Tibet on the one hand and the heavy hand of political control of China in Tibet itself. Western researchers find it very difficult to escape a specific political agenda and they are severely hampered by insufficient information. First of all, the agenda of the Tibetan government in exile is just that, an agenda of exiles elected by a fairly coherent social and religious group. They have no more (or less) legitimacy than the Han-Chinese, since neither is based on democratic elections in Tibet itself. Since the exile community to a large extent descends from the former aristocratic landholding elites of Tibet, they have no historical claims to descending from a democratically elected government in Tibet either. Even in the highly hypothetical case that the exiles (or their descendants) might return, it is not to be expected that this would yield a harmonious solution to Tibetan issues. Furthermore, Tibetan religion is utilized by these exiles in the same way as by the Chinese, i.e. to claim political links where historically there were first of all religious links. Thus, the claim that Amdo (now Qinghai) is Tibetan is based on a shared religious culture, but ignores historical control by Mongols princes and the fact that in the north of Amdo (now

Qinghai) there were and still are severe tensions with other ethnic *cum* religious groups (especially Hui, not Uyghurs). One might argue (and I have heard experts argue as much in closed circles) that in fact all of the attention to the Tibetan exile community outside Tibet damages Tibetans inside the country, who are controlled more severely as a result. The same phenomenon is known from other contexts, such as the case of a medium which received CNN coverage and ended up in prison immediately afterwards, despite many years of semi-public practice before the media-event.

The state of Tibetan Buddhism and issues surrounding more autonomy for Tibetans are not the same issue. Tibetan Buddhism has been a multi-ethnic religion ever since the Mongols actively involved themselves with Tibet since the sixteenth century and helped the Dalai Lama line of incarnation to political and religious power. It is an important religion among the Mongols in larger Mongolia (despite the severe decline of the religion in the Mongolian Republic since the 1920s), among Tibetans in Qinghai (Amdo) and Kham (eastern Sichuan), but outside central Tibet it is nowhere the only religion. Tibetan Buddhism itself is also quite diverse. Its expansion among Han-Chinese will further change it in the near future, loosening the links between the religious tradition and ethnic nationalism.

4.1.5. The role of Overseas Chinese, Tibetan monks and foreign missionaries

Overseas Chinese

Contrary to a widespread historical fallacy, Chinese society and economy have long been part of the larger world. In fact, the rise of the new world economy in the sixteenth century was the result of the combination of the Northwestern European economy and the booming Chinese economy through its export of tea, silk and porcelain in exchange for American and Japanese silver. The Chinese economy thrived as the result of these exports from the late sixteenth century until the late nineteenth century, with a brief but important intermission in the period from 1820-1855 when the balance of trade was negative due to the British and American smuggling of opium (as well as a climatological

dip). Today, again, international trade is booming and this means intensive contacts with the outer world, whether or not the central government Beijing likes all of its consequences. One of those consequences is that religious institutions and leaders in China are in touch with their coreligionists outside China, and may receive organizational as well as some financial help. Furthermore, these coreligionists exert pressure on their respective Western governments. As a result there is far more political attention for some traditions (Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism in particular) than for others.

The role of Overseas Chinese in the restoration of religion, and in fact in the entire reestablishment of the market economy after 1978, has been extremely important. When we look at those regions where the religious recovery has been strongest, we find that these are not only Fujian, but also Chaozhou in Northeastern Guangdong and Wenzhou in Zhejiang province. All of these are traditional migration regions. Wenzhou is also important for its large Christian presence and its subsequent spread through China. Strangely, Guangdong has not seen an equally strong recovery of religious institutions, perhaps because here lineage cults were more important in the last centuries than local cults and lineage cults have not recovered.

The provincial governments of the regions from which Overseas Chinese originate have allowed the investment of outside resources in religious institutions for several reasons. For one, they are well-aware of the fact that in order to draw economic investment in general, they have to be conciliatory in the religious sphere as well. This has resulted in a rapid restoration after 1976 of local temples, as well as Buddhist and Daoist institutions. Secondly, putting up a tolerant face towards religion in Fujian in particular is absolutely crucial to the long-term aim of reclaiming Taiwan as part of China. Thirdly, local cults with a strong appeal to Taiwanese communities can be used to create a cross-straits appeal. The prime example of this approach is the cult of Mazu, of which the cultic centre is on the small isle of Meizhou before the Fujian coast. For decades after 1949 Taiwanese worshippers could not return to this temple for the crucial ritual of renewing their incense, but nowadays the pilgrimage is actively furthered by the mainland.

Chinese authors are quite explicit about the immense influence of returnees on their communities of origin, both financially and politically. Intriguingly, while foreign influence is always singled out as a bad thing, the Overseas Chinese influence is always singled out in a positive way. This is the more remarkable, since Overseas Chinese are not only investors and people who may (or may not!) share Chinese ideals of working in harmony, but also actively engage in dissident and missionary activities.

Not surprisingly, Chinese people who migrate overseas take their religion with them, creating transnational religious networks. In fact, when we talk about the restoration of religious life after 1976 in southern China, this was strongly supported financially, organizationally and spiritually by precisely such transnational networks on Taiwan, but also the rest of Southeast Asia. There are however also transnational networks that extend much further, to northern America, Europe (both eastern and western) and Central Asia, and even to the Middle East, Cuba and North Korea. In fact, wherever Chinese go they will take their religious practices with them. When they take their Buddhism or older new religious groups with them, there is little evidence of proselytization and we see only transnational religion, but when they are Christian they also start to spread their beliefs more actively, at least among their own ethnic groups. In addition, we should not overlook the fact that many Chinese are converted while there are abroad and may take their beliefs back home again.

Tibetan Buddhism

Not surprisingly, Tibetan Buddhism is an object of concern for the control and repression apparatus and an important object of study in religious studies departments in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing and various universities across the country. Besides this, there now also is a growing exchange taking place between various traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and Han-Chinese lay believers, monks and nuns. Tibetan Buddhism is quite different from Chinese traditions, for instance in its acceptance of meat in a monastic diet. The weakening of indigenous Buddhist traditions makes Tibetan Buddhism attractive to many Han-Chinese as a new source of religious legitimacy and power. For this reason, the Han-Chinese following of different traditions in Tibetan

Buddhism is growing fast. At the same time, this creates a new glue between different ethnic groups.

The growing Han-Chinese fascination for Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism is part of a much more widespread interest in the supposedly exotic cultures of so-called ethnic minorities (often majorities in their regions of origin, but officially considered minorities vis-à-vis the Han-Chinese). In fact, this interest is quite similar to our own Western interest in far-away countries, including Tibet and Tibetan religion. It extends beyond Tibetan religious culture, including tourism to Tibetan regions (not necessarily in central Tibet) and a growing interest in Tibetan traditional medicine. This clearly strengthens the Han-Chinese belief that Tibet is now (and always was) part of China, but also means that the Chinese political system cannot move entirely freely with respect to the control or repression of Tibetan religious culture. We already see that the figure of the Dalai Lama appeals to fellow Buddhists in other Asian regions and countries as well, such as Taiwan, South Korea and even Japan—otherwise notoriously absent in discussions about religious freedom and human rights.

Christian missionaries and foreign aid

Christian churches and communities receive foreign financial aid, as well as organizational and moral support, especially the underground Roman Catholic church and the Protestant house churches. Support consists for instance of supporting seminaries inside China and providing training outside China, in order to allow the churches to improve the theological and liturgical quality of their leaders and preachers, and to escape from state control. The agendas of some of these support groups are not exclusively religious in nature, for especially in the United States there are also groups which see supporting local Chinese Christianity as a means of subverting the communist regime. The role of Western missionaries is not very important, but they are certainly present, though illegal from a Chinese point of view. They may enter as teachers and business people, or on tourist visa. This should not be taken to mean that Christianity or other foreign beliefs only spread and survive in China with foreign help, although hardliners within the communist party might still feel (and fear) as much. A good example is the

very active mission by Asia Harvest (represented by missionary writings by Paul Hattaway, see their website <http://www.asiaharvest.org/index.php>), which supports Protestant house churches.

With the increasing presence of foreigners (including Westerners, but also South Koreans, Japanese, Nigerians, Russians and so forth) in China, there will be a growing need for pastoral help from many different denominations as well. They will found their own groups or take part in local Chinese groups, or inversely local people as well as their families want to take part in foreign groups. Since these foreigners also include people who have come to trade or invest directly in the Chinese economy (the Mormon investor J.W. Marriott and his hotel chain are an interesting example), this puts the Chinese system of control and repression increasingly to the test.

A group on which there exists no academic research to date is that of the South Korean Protestant missionaries. It is estimated that in South Korea Christian believers now occupy roughly one quarter of the population (i.e. some ten or more million) of whom some two thirds are Protestant believers. This is in sharp contrast with Taiwan and Japan, where Christianity has always remained a marginal presence despite many decades of Western missionary work. The Korean rise of Christianity, and Protestantism in particular, in the 1980s and afterwards is a relatively recent phenomenon that has not yet stopped. The ability of the Protestant tradition to accommodate the widespread Korean belief in charismatic medium cults is an important factor in this success. The South Korean case is relevant as a parallel to possible future developments in China, but also more directly due to the missionary fervour of South Korean evangelical churches. South Korean laypeople have made attempts to spread their beliefs in the Middle East (Afghanistan and Iraq were well-publicized cases in which this fervour led to the death of several missionaries and international incidents), but they are also very active in China. They disguise as teachers, students and businesspeople. They are of course active in the assistance to North-Korean refugees through China across the border to South-Korea, but also in spreading Christian beliefs.[‡] We can expect incidents to take place around these

[‡] See <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/IJ12Dg01.html>.

missionaries, since they are extremely zealous irrespective of any personal consequences to themselves.

4.1.6. The position of Islam

During the Maoist period, especially during the decade of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, Islam suffered greatly. After 1976 the restoration of Islamic religious practice has been quicker than other traditions. In those regions where Islamic believers traditionally work as merchants, they often profit from the economic boom in China, since they can easily build up national and transnational networks. In Xinjiang itself poverty among the Uyghur is rife, though not due to religious repression. There is certainly mutual suspicion and racism, as illustrated by many incidents, of which the June 2009 riot in Guangdong province about Uyghur workers suspected (wrongly) of rape, followed by heavy protesting and rioting in Urumchi, was but one example. Sadly, this is not the result of state control or repression, but of popular sentiments. In Tibet, too, the Tibetan riots of 2008 against outsiders were directed very prominently against Hui from Gansu, including the burning down of their mosque. What outside observers have often missed is that Hui trade on central Tibet has a long tradition and that Tibetan-Hui tensions (especially in the north of modern Qinghai, old Amdo) are quite old. The new railway into Tibet is accelerating the process of opening up and is causing a larger inflow of Han-Chinese as well.

As in the case of religious culture in general, and quite similarly to developments in Western Europe, there is a tendency to blame Islam for problems that have much more complicated causes. Since Islam is a major focus of social organization, any form of extended organized protest would also have a religious dimension, but this is quite different from it being the cause of this protest.

An important aspect of the Islam equation is the renewed transnationalism of China's Uyghur Muslims across the trade routes of Central Asia. These routes bring enormous economic benefits to China and the contacts with the neighboring Islamic states are also important to China as sources of energy. To this is nowadays added the increased practice

of the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj. Chinese Muslims, whether Uyghur from Xinjiang, Hui from China Proper, or other groups, are becoming increasingly aware of the larger world, and bring back new ideas about proper Islam. This means a reshaping of Islamic identities (I am using the plural here consciously) and a renegotiation of the relationship between Han and Hui culture.

At the same the central government is repressing the Uyghur in Xinjiang through their religious activities. Since they are organized through their mosques and worship, controlling and repressing them also takes place through religion. One reason for this is the very small number of, usually quite ineffective, opposition groups with an ethno-nationalist agenda and not with a religious agenda. A second reason is a lack of understanding of Islam among China's leadership. The result is increased repression after 2001. In this respect the fear of terrorism and separatism works in very similar ways to the fear of new religious groups. Events that are very rare and usually have complicated causes are ascribed to a hypothetical group (anonymous terrorists, Al Qaeda, etc.) and are then generalized to a much wider group as the result of labeling and stereotyping. Still, the control and sometimes repression of Islam in Xinjiang is part of a policy to keep ethnic groups here in check. Islam as such possibly enjoys more freedom or at least room for manoeuvring than the other patriotic churches.

4.2. The reinvention of tradition and religion

It is important to realize that revival does not mean that the practices or beliefs that revived are really the same as in the past. As in any culture with a long written record, the notion of returning to the past is an ideological tool in itself. Protestantism in the West is an excellent example of such a movement, which claims to return to the supposed original meaning of a text (in this case the Bible, usually in selective readings) as if this were the original form of its beliefs ("Christianity"). Although believers may be convinced that they have returned to a pristine Christianity, they adhere to something that is really quite new and innovative. Fundamentalist Islam today belongs to this same category.

Similar patterns also occur in China. It is absolutely crucial that we Westerners do not fall into the trap of accepting the claim of Chinese groups and individuals (or their Western admirers) that they are restoring something in its original state. The revival of Confucianism today is codetermined by contemporary fears and needs, and is by definition selective. The Confucianisms (!) of today and of different periods in the past are not the same thing. In fact, much that is being claimed by self-proclaimed Confucians is better understood as generally Chinese. The moral values of filial piety and social harmony are good examples, since widely practiced Buddhist rituals and festivals have always been much more important socio-religious traditions in maintaining these values than the “Confucianism” of a small male social elite. We can find similar interpretative moves among Tibetan exiles and Tibetan Buddhists (and their followers), Buddhists in general, Christians and so forth.

Restoration is always also change, with the claim of a return to the past or a precise revival of the past as an ideological move, rather than an academically reliable statement. In itself this is nothing to worry about, except when we as outside observers and political agents interfere to support one interpretation at the expense of another. The balance of the different religious traditions is also completely different from the past. Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism are much stronger than before, while indigenous institutional religions have been weakened.

The kind of Christianity that we see arising in China, especially outside the patriotic churches, is a new religion in several senses. Sociologically, it operates in China much as new religious groups (“sects”, “cults”) do in Europe as well. Much in the same way that new religious groups such as Transcendental Meditation (founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi) or the Bhagwan movement (founded by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh) from India, or the Sōka Gakkai (a lay Buddhist group) from Japan have come from Asia to the West, Western groups have moved to the east. The sociological slot filled by Christianity in China is quite similar to that occupied by new religious groups from Asia in the West. The way in which the Chinese state looks at the house churches is also surprisingly

similar to the way in which Western states look at Islam or Christianity. Religiously, the different Christian churches in China are also not a mere transplant from the supposed regions of origin of true Christianity. In the same way that European Christianity once was a reinvention of Middle Eastern beliefs, in China too this tradition is now being reinvented and reconstituted. The main difference is that in the West new religious groups operate within an environment where mainstream religious traditions are still strong enough to meet the challenge, while new religious groups, including Christianity, in China operate in an environment where indigenous religious culture (Buddhist and Daoist traditions, local temples and shrines, shamans and mediums) have been severely weakened.

It would be impossible anyhow to return to the past for many reasons. The nature of communication today is totally different from the pre-1949 past, including faster and more intense information streams thanks to the internet, telephone and texting, television and radio, and so forth. Religious institutions have lost most of their landed property and other fixed sources of income. This is true of Tibet as well as China proper. Hence, large financially autonomous institutions are no longer possible.

At the same time, there are many emotional, social and psychic needs that require some form of solution or at least recognition. This is a field that is covered by a breadth of fields in the West, such as psychology, psychiatry, and other forms of psycho-social and charitable work. The popularity of new religious groups such as the Falun Gong and Protestantism, but also wellness trends, yoga and the like, indicates that these needs still wait to be addressed. Different religious practices and beliefs or lifestyle trends will fill the needs of different groups, in which respect we need to keep in mind that the People's Republic of China is home to a huge ethnic and socio-economic variety. All of these groups have internal and external tensions. More freedom will not necessarily lead to more tolerance among religious groups either and should come with more mechanisms for solving social conflicts as well.

Finally, China as a whole may be booming economically, but not everybody is profiting and this alone creates considerable tensions. Thanks to modern means of communication and the enormous size of the migrating population everybody is aware of economic progress, whether one takes part or not. In the Falun Gong there was a strong sense of insiders and outsiders, and of an end of times in which only the chosen ones would remain behind. In many smaller Protestant groups in the poor countryside we also see strong millenarian tendencies. These do not necessarily stem from the story of Jesus Christ and the Resurrection, but also from a more basic sense of us and them—of those who do not profit, but are pure of belief and practice versus the others who do profit, but lead immoral lives. Usually, the deliverance that is sought stays on the level of healing and improving one's individual lot, but there is definitely a fear that a charismatic leader might stand up and unite such groups. Here the old stereotype that messianic or millenarian groups lead to unrest and rebellions feeds into the state's fear and intolerance of religion. Hence, much of the control effort is directing at weeding out the leaders and keeping groups small, rather than removing entire groups altogether.

4.3. Some recent developments

Recently several developments have begun which may change the religious situation quite fundamentally. Even though they take place in different ways and at different speeds in each province, they reflect an ongoing concern with religious culture as well as an attempt to liberalize the situation, even though this is not motivated by Western criticism nor by any deeply felt need for more religious tolerance.

4.3.1. Non-institutional religious beliefs

We already referred to recent surveys on religious beliefs in China. These indicate some 30 % religious believers, most likely in urban China where the surveys have been carried out. The fact that almost half of this percentage was not explicitly affiliated with a major religious tradition suggests that there is nowadays a large urban group which considers itself religious, without institutional affiliation. Some of these people might still join a group when political control lessens, but it is more likely that we are looking at a new kind of diffuse urban religiosity that we also see in many Western countries.

This interest in religious culture is also a youth phenomenon, in other words of people who have grown up after the Cultural Revolution without much prior exposure to religion. The youngsters themselves indicate that their parents do not play an important role in stimulating their interest in religion. Instead, it seems that it is the overall exposure to all kinds of religious symbols in a variety of contexts that is crucial. Western religious or semi-religious festivals such as Christmas are being celebrated, Buddhist and Daoist monks appear on television and feature in movies, religious locations are popular tourist attractions, astrology (even the Book of Nostradamus), and these are only a few sources of religious inspiration. Students who go abroad to Western or Asian countries for longer or shorter periods of time get in touch with all kinds of religious practices and beliefs, and some of them actually get converted. There is a rich religious literature and writings on religion available in the original language or in translation. In fact, it is my suspicion that Li Hongzhi, the founder of the Falun Gong, got much of his original knowledge from that type of source. Because it is not institutionalized, it is hard to control or prohibit.

4.3.2. Protecting local culture and religion

Above we have noted that local religious culture falls outside the purview of the regulatory efforts of the Chinese state, because it is not institutionalized and lacks a clear body of rituals and beliefs. Traditionally, it is dismissed with labels such as feudal superstition or mere customs. Here two important developments have taken place which recognize the strength of local communities and which will contribute to their sense of identity. One development is the formal ratification of the Unesco treaty on Intangible Cultural Heritage by China in 2004,[§] the other is the addition of a positive legal category for talking about religious that falls outside the official definition of “religion” (*zongjiao*), namely as Popular Beliefs (*minjian xinyang*).

Intangible Cultural Heritage (*feiwuzhi wenhua*) can be defined very simply as a unique cultural activity that is seen to represent the quintessence of Chinese culture. This is always a circular definition, and it is hard to see one’s way out of it. We usually do not

[§] <http://erc.unesco.org/cp/convention.asp?KO=17116>

note the circularity, because in the end it is Western elites with similar educational, cultural and even social backgrounds who take the decisions. Only when other cultures with strong indigenous elites are involved, do we suddenly notice the political nature of the selection process. In the Chinese case, the selection process is actually quite revealing on local politicking. Activities that can be recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage include all traditional regional or local performance arts, handicrafts and the like, but also local festivals and rituals. Strictly religious activities are limited in number, but many of the cultural activities historically take place in religious surroundings.

Having a local activity recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage strengthens local pride and identity. As such it strengthens the region vis-à-vis the centre, without putting the two in opposition against each other, since it is also the centre (see also the central website <http://www.ihchina.cn/main.jsp>) which does the ultimate recognizing. As such, it somewhat resembles the imperial practice of recognizing local deities and temples by bestowing noble titles, in this way creating a link between the locality and the imperial centre. Interestingly, none of these activities are seen as religious by the Chinese political system, or they would not have been included. Instead they fall into the category of “custom” (*fengsu xiguan*) that falls outside the purview of the Regulation on Religious Affairs supervised by SARA. Furthermore, the notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage considerably strengthens the status of local customs, which have long been looked at askance. That one ulterior motive of many of the politicians involved may be to use cultural treasures for touristic purposes and that this will also change the intrinsic nature of these treasures, does not invalidate the greater attention that the notion of Intangible Cultural treasure brings for local culture and custom.

The notion of Popular Beliefs (*minjian xinyang*) can be easily dismissed as mere semantics, but online writings (see bibliography) suggest otherwise. The concept explicitly targets religious phenomena that are not included in the Regulation on Religious Affairs (religion or *zongjiao*). The texts specifically mention Popular Beliefs, including temples, in urban environments which cannot protect themselves easily against the ongoing expansion of cities. At the same time, it is noted that temples are important

source of income for local governments through entrance fees. The rules are also intended to prevent many local religious activities from ending up in the atmosphere of semi-legality. The revealing example is given of the practice whereby immensely popular yearly festivals for instances have to pretend to serve unrelated events such as the Olympics (in 2008) or the 60th anniversary of the PRC (in 2009), all in order to avoid problems with local cadres. In other words, the new rules on Popular Beliefs intend to create an additional legal space for religious activity to prevent it from usurping inappropriate niches.

The new concept wants to enable a more nuanced approach to what we have termed above local religious culture as something valuable in itself, rather than mere superstition. It is a response to and recognition of the evident fact of an ongoing blossoming of local religious culture, in order to provide it with the legal means for self-protection. Since big gatherings, such as temple festivals, also have issues of public order much like our fairs (“kermis” in Dutch), some form of non-repressive regulation is always necessary. Control and supervision are still central aims, but at the same time legal room for religious activities is increasing slowly.

Whether this new terminology will also be extended to new religious groups is not entirely clear. Several colleagues have reported to me of a conference in Beijing, at which it was observed that the Falun Gong had been particularly unsuccessful in one specific location, which was Fujian. This is also the province where the restoration of religious life after 1976 has been the most thorough going. At the conference it was concluded from this interesting fact that one way of blocking the spread of Protestantism or the return of the Falun Gong could be legalizing more new religious groups. As far as I know this has not yet taken place, but we can see a growing tolerance of such groups.** There can be little doubt that the new approach of actively legalizing indigenous local religious institutions, rather than suppressing or merely tolerating them, is inspired as much by

** Very likely this was the December 2007 conference on New Religious Groups. Lap reports on this conference in his 2010 article in *Religion, State and Society*, but does not mention this aspect. David Palmer in a 2010 article mentions a conference in 2008 with the very similar objective of developing an approach to local religious institutions, whether by ignoring them, registering them as Daoist or placing them within the new category of “popular beliefs”.

realism with respect to their growing strength, as by the hope that these homegrown institutions can be used to counter the growth of Protestantism or other unwanted new religious groups.

The concept of Intangible Cultural Treasures also points to a sphere of competition and sometimes conflict that is easily overlooked, namely that of tourism. Many of the best-known sites in China originally had a strong religious dimension and attempts to win these institutions back brings religious leaders or groups into conflict with local governments (including local Religious Affairs Bureaus) intent on expanding their income from tourism. This income is not necessarily used for strengthening the religious institution. Furthermore, local governments and business people may want to alter the nature of a site, by adding giant statues or even an amusement park.

4.3.3. Social issues

People will always organize themselves and the Chinese communist system has given up on controlling every form of organization. We have already pointed out the importance of local agency in founding or re-establishing religious institutions. On the one hand, the Chinese state wishes to tap into this local strength since they need these communities to support economic growth. There are also risks involved, at least from a state perspective.

The huge population of internal migrants and transients (the floating population) are one potential source of social unrest. In the Guangdong riots of 2009 a Han mob suspected local Uyghurs of having raped Chinese women, and they killed two men whom they thought were guilty. We already treated the subsequent events above. In this case, religion played no prominent role, although religious institutions and groups did suffer in the repression that followed. The same was true the year before during the riots in Lhasa, when a mosque was burned down, many Hui were attacked, and Tibetan Buddhist institutions then suffered in the repression.

Very likely this floating population already is and otherwise will soon become the object of Christian missionary activity. Well-known is the case of Wenzhou business people,

who are predominantly Christians. It is estimated that this region now has some 700,000 to 1,000,000 Christians. The only official Christian institution in Lhasa today has been established by Wenzhou businessmen. For them, their adoption of Christianity is not necessarily the result of a spiritual vacuum, but rather a conscious choice to show that they are much more than merely interested in making a profit. Therefore, the expansion of their religion in terms of new and bigger buildings is an expression of faith. At the same time, it provides these businessmen with respect and prestige, and with networks that reinforce their economic activities. Local Christianity has profited from its links to overseas communities in Europe after religious practice became possible again after 1976 in a similar way like Fujianese local culture profited from its links to Taiwan and Southeast Asia in the restoration of its local religious culture. Wenzhou churches are also established in Europe itself and form a connection between overseas communities and their region of origin. Before we think that this type of missionary activity will be frowned upon by the state, we should note that the businessmen and entrepreneurs from Wenzhou, who require their workforce to become Christians, not only want to project themselves as patrons of a modern belief, but also use this belief to control their workers.

4.3.4. A harmonious society

In 2004 the Chinese Communist Party introduced a new slogan for Chinese society, which has been at the root of several changes in the state management of religious culture. This new slogan of the “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) was consciously derived from traditional Chinese society. Clearly, it is an ideological instrument with the maintenance of the political status quo as its main goal. The slogan is inspired by the earlier debates on Asian values of the 1990s. In a sense, we can compare it to the attempt by former Dutch prime minister J.P. Balkenende to refocus on “norms and values” (*normen en waarden*) and ongoing attempts in the United States of America to refocus on Christian values based on a literal reading of the Bible. Our own discourse on human rights is strongly indebted to very similar ideals. These debates on Asian values have been highly controversial, since Asia (or even China itself) is so large and so diverse that it is difficult to identify typical values. One such value was that Asian cultures put group interests, harmony and social hierarchy over individual right and interests. The claim is

that these values then justify a specific, authoritarian and paternalistic political system in which collective rights and duties are central, instead of the Western democratic political system with its focus on individual rights. The notion of “harmonious society” can be made to serve the same goal of defending the present political system in China from Western criticism and value judgments.

Nonetheless, we should take such a slogan seriously. Not only is this slogan intended to legitimate a particular political approach, but similar to such slogans in the past it is a resource which non-party organizations and local communities can utilize creatively in their own ways as well. The new Regulations on Religious Affairs and the new approach to local religious culture set out above reflect this slogan, but we also see it return in arguments about the positive role of religious culture. The patriotic churches, but also their counterparts in East-Asia use this ideal to support the victims of natural disasters, such as the earthquake of 2008 in Sichuan or the victims of the typhoon of 2009 in Taiwan. This happens on an international scale, partly outside direct state control, but also nationwide. There is a growing, though still small, number of registered charitable foundations and even more foundations which are not registered. By doing good for others a religious group can organize itself legally, build up positive karma, and attain some form of legal recognition. For the discourse on “harmonious society” the same is true as in the case of other terminology, especially the more broad and tolerant vocabulary that has recently been developed, namely that these are tools used for control as much as for cover. Cover means that people outside or even inside the system for control can use these concepts in order to legitimate their own, sometimes divergent or at least more liberal views. And “harmonious society” or not, people will still complain, submit petitions and organize strikes, or otherwise defend their interests.

Stressing the utilitarian aspects of religious culture in support of a harmonious society is an old way of defending religious culture, Buddhism in particular. There is even a specific Buddhist sutra which has been written to this effect, entitle the *Transcendent Wisdom Scripture for Human Kings who Wish to Protect their States* (various Chinese editions since the fifth century). Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions have always

stressed their positive contribution to social harmony. Both contemporary religious leaders and researchers of religious culture have recently contributed essays and books on this topic. In the long run, this new discourse can be expected to have a long-term influence on Chinese thinkers and managers that will transcend the narrow political aims of the present-day rulers.

The Chinese Communist Party has finally recognized that religion (in the old definition of institutionalized traditions epitomized in the patriotic churches) and religious culture (originally captured with the terms “feudal custom” and “superstition”, nowadays referred to as “popular beliefs”) are bound to stay for a long time to come. This opens up the road to making them serve the ideal of a “harmonious society”, in ways that religious traditions in China used to do in the past and/or modeled on the cases of Taiwan (such as the Tz’u-chi T’ang (*pinyin* Cijitang 慈济堂), Europe and Northern America. At the same time, religious culture is still seen (and feared) as a powerful force that needs to be controlled. Here we see no fundamental change in policy, although on a ground level changes are substantial. More so than in the past, the political system has come to accept that religious culture is complex and cannot be reduced to a relic of the feudal past. There is still fear of foreign influence and missionary activities by foreigners are still forbidden (though they do take place), but international contact of religious traditions is less problematic than in the past. Here the role of Christian churches in charitable work and in strengthening social organization is both a model to emulate for China, and a risk since nothing is feared more by the communist leadership than independent social organizations, which would create what Jürgen Habermas has called civil society—i.e. an intermediate sphere of voluntary social organizations outside of the state and independent of the market. Notwithstanding these perceived risks, we do see that such organizations are slowly becoming tolerated.

The growing international traffic of Chinese abroad and of foreigners inside China presents enormous challenges to the framework of state control. However successfully movements such as the Falun Gong are being repressed in China itself, there still is communication of the remaining believers with the religious centre of the movement

abroad. As soon as the central impetus for repression lessens, local officials may no longer see the need for active supervision. Less well-known is the fact that the Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints) and Bahai'i movements are now also spreading. The Mormon movement has long been active in Hong Kong and has made missionary work obligatory for all of their young men. Chinese Mormons may have converted in the USA or in Hong Kong, but preventing them from spreading the faith in China is nigh impossible. The Bahai'i movement, too, seems to spread from Hong Kong and Macau. Although the Chinese control apparatus is aware of meetings by these groups, which often mix Chinese and people with foreign passports (who maybe be Overseas Chinese or otherwise), they seem to be left alone.

Finally, the discourse on “harmonious society” is not specifically intended to address religious issues, but rather to use religious traditions in the interest of social and political stability. A democratic system ideally uses elections, as well as the entire politicking process that surrounds it, to involve people in the political system and to address a variety of issues—some “real” from an analytical point of view, and others maybe just imagined. Even then, groups are always left out, such as migrants (hence the right for resident migrants to participate in communal elections in some European countries) and marginal(ized) social groups. These will look for other ways to assert themselves. In the Chinese political system the main channel for socio-political involvement is through the communist party, although village elections are increasingly important on the village level and pressure groups (or rather networks) also exist.

We have mentioned several times that much change that has taken place in the overall context of religious activities has been the result of local activism. The net result has been a freer context, albeit with large regional differences, for practicing religious activities. Given that there are few alternative legal or non-legal, ways of organizing oneself on a local level, religious practice might be one of the few ways of doing so. At any rate, there is a high level of contentiousness in Chinese society which gets voiced in violent ways. This does not necessarily mean revolution, but it does mean that people gather to protest their rights and grievances through violent demonstrations and riots. Sometimes they get

their way and sometimes they do not, but this does not seem to lessen the use of this form of protest. Social science researchers seem to think that this is a new phenomenon, but intra- and inter-village conflict and rioting against the local state actually has a long tradition. The real change is that it is becoming visible again.

The concept of a “harmonious society” is also an attempt to address these larger social issues. Of course, merely introducing the concept is not enough and therefore a conscious attempt is made to enlist religious groups and movements as well. The example of Taiwan is especially pertinent here, since a very similar attempt was made by the Nationalist government in the 1980s to use religious movements, especially those with a Buddhist background, to create indigenous charitable activities which would not need to be funded directly by the state. This attempt has been highly successful, without these movements developing into any kind of revolutionary force. As is well-known, Taiwan has made a fairly successful transition to a modern economy and a democratic system since the 1970s and 1980s, without the extreme violent upheaval that often accompanies such a transition.

4.4. Academic studies

4.4.1. The academic organization of religious studies

The strictly scientist and technicist approach of the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party to ruling China has in the meantime broadened to a wide use of academics to advise it, for instance, on foreign or religious policy. These academics are located primarily in the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences and the big national universities. With state support, and therefore directly relevant for this report, several new specialized departments have recently been set up. As a result, the field of religious studies is expanding from the Academies of Social Sciences and the sphere of local folklore enthusiasts (in departments of Chinese Literature and History) to specialized departments. In the long run it is likely that these religious studies departments will replace the much larger departments of philosophy as a source of staff for controlling and supervising religious culture. This development is extremely important because the

Chinese political system lacks a balanced view of and empirical data on religious developments, in part because they have driven important segments of it underground. This development is also important because a number of the younger specialists have studied abroad. This does not necessarily make them advocates of Western values, but does create a more nuanced approach to religious issues which we see expressed in policies since circa 2000. A good example of this trend is the figure of Zhuo Xinping (1987 PhD in Munich), who may well be the highest placed figure advising on religious policy as the head of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. At the same time he is still active as a researcher on Protestant Christianity and frequently invited to international academic meetings (including the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam in 2009). Recently, he provided an alternative academic context for inviting a small delegation from the conference of German Roman Catholic bishops.

A list of major institutions for religious studies.

Academies	rough coverage	foundation date
Chinese Academy for Social Sciences (Beijing)	World Religions	departments for Buddhism, Christianity, and Islamic Studies (1964); religious ethics (1978); Daoism and popular religion, and Confucianism (1979); contemporary religious studies (1992)
Shanghai Academy for Social Sciences	religious studies, including a sociological approach	1980
Universities		
People's (Beijing)	Buddhism and theoretical studies	1991 with expansion in 1996 and 1999

Central Minorities (Beijing)	the rich religious culture of “ethnic minorities”	unclear, probably since the early 1950s
Peking (Beijing)	Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity and other religions	1996
Shaanxi Normal (Xi’an)	broad, but strong focus on religions of the northeast	2004
Shandong (Ji’nan)	full width of the field	2002 (expanded in 2003 with a Centre for Judaic and Interreligious studies)
Zhejiang (Hangzhou)	Greek culture, Protestantism, Japanese Shinto and Buddhism	2006
Nanjing	Centre for Buddhist studies, with a large grant by a Hong Kong businessman	2000 (general), 2009 (Buddhism)
Xiamen (Fujian)	full width, including popular religion and Taiwanese religion	1998
Sichuan (Chengdu)	Daoist studies	1980
Overall		
Chinese Association of Religious Studies		1979 (nowadays circa 500 members, i.e. not a large group)

(source: <http://www.sinoss.com/jigou/yanjjg/zjx/>, websites of the institutions mentioned)

These institutions are places for academic research, but also for training religious cadres. Both Peking University and People’s University in Beijing, for instance, teach courses on

Christianity for money which are then eagerly followed by Wenzhou church preachers in order to improve the quality of their educational level (using the fashionable term “quality” or *suzhi* 素質). Once they have completed these two year long courses, which take place during school breaks, they receive certificates enabling them to obtain better jobs in their own churches or even pursue graduate studies abroad. Foreign theological departments are part of this same route. In the same way as the much more centralized training of Buddhist and Daoist monks and priests today, this type of training does create a new type of religious elite. This elite is much more literate, urban oriented and supportive of certain state ideals than before. If and when they return to their local communities, they will represent the centre in an indirect, but no less relevant way. At the same time, their new background estranges them from their social origins and lessens their ability to influence rural believers. To what extent the communist state is aware of all of these ramifications is another matter, but the attempt to raise the “quality” of the Chinese people is a very conscious one. It is but one solution to the problem of creating an ordered, “harmonious” society.

4.4.2. The contribution of international scholarship

Increasing amounts of international scholarship are translated into Chinese, enabling a wide audience of scholars and policymakers to become cognizant of Western approaches. Ironically, although there is a fair amount of nationalism permeating the field of Chinese studies in China itself, there is also a growing interest in Japanese, Western and even Taiwanese approaches, similarly to the older interest in science and technology. The field of religious groups, traditions, sites, and practices in China has been influenced by the existence of international research several times. Already before, during and after the Second World War, local colonial or imperialist regimes (Western and Japanese) recognized the importance of understanding local religious and social life for the efficacy of their rule of Overseas Chinese communities as well as their colonies and/or conquests in larger China (whether Hong Kong, Taiwan, Manchuria or other regions). The report on new religious groups by a Taiwanese historian in the mid-1980s played a crucial role in complete liberalization of the religious world on Taiwan with the abolishing of martial law in 1987.

Exchange between Taiwan and Hong Kong based scholars, followed by Chinese and Western scholars based in Europe and Northern America, nowadays plays a remarkable role in the increased legitimacy of religious culture in mainland China. There have been large scale descriptive projects led by Wang Qiugui (Oxford PhD, at the time based at Tsinghua University, Taiwan) to chart extant exorcist ritual theatrical traditions all over China, and by John Lagerwey (at the time based in Paris and Chinese University of Hong Kong or CUHK) to study all forms of Hakka culture and society (including the crucial role of religion). These projects yielded near to one hundred monographs and specialist journal issues. Important for this discussion is the fact that they were funded wholly or partly with Taiwanese money (including the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, named after the son and successor of Chiang Kai-shek!). Daniel Overmyer (formerly of the University of British Columbia, Canada) carried out a similar collaborative project for northern China. Since the 1980s Ken Dean (McGill, Canada) has been engaged in a recently completed cooperative project to chart all local religious life in Putian (Fujian). These projects played a seminal role in joining together the field of contemporary religious studies outside and the beginning field of religious studies (usual in the form of local studies) inside mainland China.

These projects are now being succeeded by new ones, which are easier to carry out than in the past, because the interest in and tolerance of local religious culture is still growing. In a similar tradition as the above projects is a new project funded with Hong Kong money (after all a part of the People's Republic of China since 1997) and led by historian David Faure (now at CUHK), entitled "The historical anthropology of Chinese society". The historical angle allows a much easier access to local society than a strictly contemporary focus, where local governments and party agencies would be much more sensitive. True fieldwork, after all, remains difficult.

The most important project of them all promises to be the one led by American-trained sociologist of religion Yang Fenggang (Purdue University, <http://www.purdue.edu/crcs/index.html>), entitled "Chinese Spirituality and Society

Program” and funded by the strongly pro-Christian John Templeton Foundation. It aims to support research projects on Chinese spirituality and society, organize training workshops for the grantees to carry out social scientific research on religion in Chinese society, and sponsor summer courses for teaching the sociology of religion at Chinese universities. In other words, it wants to support the study of Chinese religion in China itself, creating a local core of specialists. Given Yang Fenggang’s background as a follower of the approach of Rodney Stark, it is not surprising that the central research question is to examine religion as the independent variable in its relationship with society, or the impact of religion and spirituality on individuals, groups, communities, organizations, and institutions. This project already organized its first conference in Beijing and is bound to have an influence on high-level Chinese perceptions of the relationship between religious culture and society. Not surprisingly given the way in which religion is defined in China (and to a certain extent also in the sociological approach to religion in the West), institutionalized traditions get the most attention. This is not necessarily due to the instigators or referees of the project, but also to the fact that the institutional view of religion is still so ingrained in Chinese religious studies—certainly in mainland China itself. Interestingly, this is no longer the case in Hong Kong and especially Taiwan, where the study of local religious culture in all of its manifestations has flourished in tandem with political liberalization after 1987.

All of the above projects took or still take place in collaboration with Chinese colleagues in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China. In December 2007, a conference was organized on new religious groups, by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Foreign specialists on new religious groups in general were also invited. Clearly, the intent of maintaining control and close watch about religious phenomena is not relinquished, but control is nowadays accompanied by an increasing urge to understand as well. The old approach of a purely scientist and technicist understanding of society has been replaced with a much more in-depth understanding that also includes the academic study of religious culture.

5. Analytical sensitivities

5.1. *Western criticism*

5.1.1. Bias and limited efficacy of Western criticism

Bias

In this report I have not discussed human rights issues separately, nor have I attempted a systematic investigation of the efficacy of our human rights approach. In fact, I fear that this is not even possible, since we lack reliable statistics on the total number of transgressions and the relationship of our information to this total number. To use a fashionable term in management courses, activities to improve the human rights situation in China are not very SMART, since without proper measurement being possible it is also impossible to measure their results or impact.^{††} As a result we rarely know whether an increase in registration is the result of more information or more incidents. It is safe to say that more information is also often the result of more access to China, rather than merely more incidents, which makes any quantitative statements over long-term developments hazardous. When I make some remarks in this context about a human rights approach, I therefore do so with some trepidation. For a long-term perspective I will base myself on recent work by Randall Peerenboom, a China and legal specialist based in the USA. He has made a valiant and in my eyes convincing attempt to provide more quantification in a field that is shaped more by ideologies than empirical research.

Regular monitoring on human rights issues in China is done by the United States Department of State, Human rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (in its annual China Human rights Report), and others. In addition, the treatment of different religious traditions in China is followed by corresponding groups in the West. When we inspect their regular and irregular reports, it becomes immediately clear that there is a severe bias in the reporting. For one, it is

^{††} Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound (other terms yielding the same acronym are also used).

extremely easy to argue the point that China has the most of anything, for instance of Christian prisoners or of a specific type of religious persecution, since China also happens to have a very large population. Absolute numbers are therefore easily manipulated rhetorically. In fact, most of Chinese religious life is largely excluded (such as non-Tibetan Buddhist and Daoist traditions, non-Christian new religious groups, and even Islam, since the focus is on Uyghurs, rather than Islam in general). The presentation of events is highly selective. When the riots of 2008 are discussed most attention goes to the Tibetan side, while attention to other dimensions (Islamic Hui as a primary victim, rather than Han) is lacking. Tensions and conflicts in the larger Tibetan cultural region partly predate 1949; present-day tensions and conflicts also involve much more than a hypothetical monolithic Tibetan side which wants the Dalai Lama back and the Chinese Communist Party, dominated by Han. All in all, the human rights discourse is more about ourselves than about China, more about what we would like an ideal world to be like, than about helping China to change. We need more structural analysis next to the listing of transgressions.

In addition, the religious groups or institutions covered by human rights reports are largely Christian or Tibetan Buddhist. Sociologically, incidents involving intellectuals (a minority in any country) are much better covered than other social groups. This may be understandable for the mainly Western-based human rights discourse, since Christianity happens to be the not always overly tolerant religious culture from which most Westerners originate. Nonetheless, such a biased discourse is still not right. Curiously, we seem to accept the same limiting view of religious culture that is used by the Chinese communist political system.

When we look at the reporting overall, we find that the focus is on listing incidents and translating or analyzing regulations. Since China is not (yet, I should add, for there is change and improvement) ruled by law, these regulations are of course not at all the entire story. Regional differences are enormous and we should in fact not even try to look at China as whole in this respect. We do know that most laws and regulations cannot be enforced locally, whether because of a lack of interest on the part of local authorities or

because local communities are too strong in resisting. This may work to the disadvantage, but also to the advantage of local groups. Even state sources stress the—sometimes—unwanted strength of local communities when they are united and/or have sufficient outside funds. Thus a one-sided focus on laws and regulations is insufficient in judging the state local religious culture in China today.

Efficacy

In the course of my investigation I have found little reflection on the efficacy of our human rights approach, except for the mantric reiteration that China is deficient in this respect. Yes, now and then we can record successes in helping people to escape (temporarily or more permanently, through a form of banishment), but that is all. When we are effective (or interested) this is more commonly related to civil rights abuses of high level intellectuals, than labor activists (when we notice these to begin with) or prisoners for religious beliefs. There are good reasons for this on the Chinese side, since intellectuals are easily isolated and treating them better (or less bad) does not affect their exercise of power. Labor activists and religious leaders may pull along much larger groups and therefore treating them too leniently is risky. Our tendency of focusing on intellectual figures such as Wei Jingsheng in the past or Liu Xiaobo more recently may therefore even play into the hands of the Chinese state, since it is much easier to control these figures than social leaders. Here there are no easy solutions, but stressing positive developments as well might be a more efficacious approach than merely criticizing what we happen to see and not like.

Is the relative success of Christianity in China perhaps due to the linkage with the human rights policy of the West, which might serve as a kind of protection? I have found no evidence for this view, nor for the opposite view that the past association of Christianity with imperialism is a disadvantage. In either case, most ordinary believers are unaware of it and if anything connections with the West outside a business or academic context spell trouble, rather than bringing immediate benefits. Instead, other reasons have been suggested above for the success of Christianity, more specifically of Protestantism, which are connected to the specific local context. We tend to overlook the role of local

communities and believers in shaping their world, much in the same way that we do so for other issues. While China is hardly a complete democracy, on grassroots level local communities can settle a lot of issues among themselves. Sound human rights policy would be to assist these communities in becoming stronger.

Western approaches to human rights tend to isolate the issue of religious freedom and political rights from the level of economic development of a state. There is however a strong relationship between the wealth and organizational strength of a state and human rights in general. This relationship does not mean that countries that become wealthier automatically become more democratic, but at the very least wealth is a crucial enabler since rights cost money. Furthermore, in order to maintain and expand wealth, more institutions are necessary and central power needs to be delegated, since the system simply becomes too complex to be run from the centre. While this does not yet yield democracy, it does mean more power sharing and involving more people through networks inside and outside the party. An advanced economy is simply too complex to be run entirely from the centre. China has only barely reached the minimum average income per head of the population that seems to be the minimal requirement for long-term democracy, but regional disparities are still huge. We need to adjust our expectations of China to what is economically realistic.

On the specific issue of political rights, I should add that the Chinese leaders are well-aware of the world around them. They not only see Northwestern Europe with well-developed democratic political systems and high economic wealth, but also Southern Europe with much less successful democratic systems in which patronage is still paramount (Italy, Greece) and less economic wealth (even more so today). They see still instable democracies in Eastern Europe; democratic states such as India that have tremendous differences in wealth and social problems that sometimes dwarf those of China; and quasi-democratic state such as the Philippines. They see a United States with extreme disparities in income and huge religious, social and racial tensions. They are not convinced that their goals of economic growth and social stability are best-served by a democratic system. An additional question would be what kind of system, since the

democratic systems of large countries (USA, Brazil, India and so forth), and Asian countries function quite differently from those in North-western Europe (+Canada+Australia+New Zealand).

The Chinese establishment is especially afraid of the social functions of religious traditions, including its potential to galvanize people in a single direction. Especially the older generation which was in its thirties or forties in the 1970s and 1980s will be aware of the leading role of labor activists (Lech Walesa and Solidarnosc are the prime example) and believers (East-Germany as well as Poland). For them the Pope in the Vatican is not solely a religious leader, as indeed he is not. He is also a political leader, not merely of the Vatican, but also someone whose predecessor played an active role in—in their eyes—subverting USSR power in Poland. This analysis will only be supported by their understanding of religiously inspired movements in Chinese history as rebellious and dangerous, as pointed out above. That this understanding of traditional religious movements is based on a flawed analysis of the past does not invalidate its contemporary political relevance, although we can try to work on correcting this analysis.

Another issue that we need to consider is the Western assumption that more human rights, including democracy, are good for economic development. From a historical perspective, most Western countries which are both wealthy and have a long-established democratic system (Northwestern Europe, France and Italy, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, maybe including Japan, South-Korea and Taiwan) until recently excluded substantial groups from political participation, including women and indigenous minorities (for instance the Maoris, Aborigines and Inuit into the 1960s). The maltreatment of the Indian and the Afro-American population in the USA throughout most of the twentieth century in the USA is well-attested. Southern America and Southern Europe have a rather chequered record in terms of democracy, minority rights and economic growth. There is a clear link between the recent debt crisis and the past tendency of governments in the worst hit political systems to buy economic support and labor peace with the help of various kinds of state subsidies. Incidentally, China needs economic growth for very similar reasons of subsidizing poorer regions and marginal

groups. We can extend the list of issues even further, but Randall Peerenboom and others have convincingly argued that there is no evidence that an economic take-off is improved or supported by a democratic political system. All successful economies have built up most of their strength under very restricted democratic systems, often helped by exploiting their colonies for resources and cheap manpower. Recent transfers to a democratic system have often resulted in populist systems in which large segments of the population are excluded from economic success and political participation. The history-conscious leaders of China and their advisors will therefore not be impressed by Western claims of a direct positive link between political reform, religious freedom and economic growth.

5.1.2. Are we balanced in our criticism

Problems of balance

The Western approach to human rights in China largely consists of reports by pressure groups, followed by government activity that is to a large extent directed by the need to respond to these reports and to questions in parliament or in the media. The result is a vacillating approach which consists mostly of warnings and criticism directed at China, rather than any analysis of where the different problems are, whether they are the result of the political system and/or differences in economic wealth or even culture, and what would be the most effective approach to remedy any problems. In fact, we still try to teach countries with the same pedagogy which we have long since left behind us in educating children and adults, namely punishment and abstract warnings, rather than positive reinforcement of what goes right. As a result Western countries, themselves a rather varied bunch of political and legal systems to begin with, can be easily criticized for being hypocritical, since we often fail our own norms.

This means that we need to reconsider what way or most likely ways we can think of to address the issue of religious freedom, and the related human rights issues, more satisfactorily. At the moment, we are witnessing a debate of the deaf and the dumb, in which both sides repeat their points of view. The USA publish their reports, China

produces its own reports (which are generally ignored, although in themselves by no means invalid). Fairly predictably, the Chinese patriotic churches will protest by claiming that they have total freedom. Although this is untrue in its strong form, they do have considerable freedom in their liturgical practices.

Does this mean that criticism is not possible or not allowed? There has been much debate on this topic that I do not intend to reiterate here in too much detail. It is safe to say that the issue is highly contentious. Key terms in the discourse have been the criticism of orientalism and the discussion around Asian Values. Originally, the criticism of orientalism by Edward Said was directed at Western writing on the Orient, in particular the Middle East, which essentialized its society and culture as an unchanging, homogenous entity. The same tendency was also found in Western writing about Asia, the Far East and China in particular. Characteristics that are frequently referred to are corruption, backwardness, strange morals, and so forth. The orientalizing discourse has by no means disappeared today, although by and large Western academic discourse has become much more reflexive in this respect. In the political and managerial arena simplistic ideas about the Middle East or Islam (which is mistakenly seen as a Middle Eastern religion, although by far more believers live in Asia, including India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and China) and about Asia or the Far East are still very common. China, too, with a huge territory and an ethnic, social and cultural variety that far exceeds the European Community, is being treated as a homogenous country.

More or less independent of Said's critique of Orientalism has been the debate about cultural relativism: whether one can actually make absolute moral statements about another culture without imposing one's own, usually Western Christian, values on that culture. The debate stems from the field of cultural anthropology, but has spread to other academic fields as well. Extreme cultural relativism leads to the disabling of any human rights critique, but the absence of any relativism leads to cultural imperialism. It is not easy to find one's way out, even more so in the present day and age when cultural relativism has gone out of fashion politically.

The idea of a single homogenous Asia has been turned against the West in the debates about Asian Values in the 1990s. These debates were a kind of reverse Orientalism, in which it was claimed that there is indeed one coherent set of Asian values which are not bad, but better. These values are then upheld as a model for the rest of the world. Some leaders and intellectuals from those countries felt that they did not need to make the kind of political adaptations that Western leaders and intellectuals expected of them. This claim derived much of its strength from the fact that some Asian countries (or regions, depending on one's political view), such as Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, did very well economically in that period. After the economic crisis in Asia in the late 1990s, the debate rapidly lost its impetus. Nowadays, the situation is different yet again. South Korea and Taiwan have democratized further, while Japan has long been a democracy, although less energetic than the other two. Singapore is formally a democracy, but still ruled as an authoritarian state.

China has long expressed the point of view that social and economic rights are more important than political rights. Yet, since the 1990s at least it has also entered the human rights discourse, through signing various agreements and publishing its own reports on human rights in the West (especially the United States). Furthermore, it is now using its indigenous cultural resources to support the ideal of a harmonious society based on its reinterpretation of Confucianism, building on an older philosophical school of New Confucianism with roots in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States! In a sense this is worrying, because traditional interpretations of Confucianism have little sympathy for or interest in most forms of religious practice.

More generally, counting human rights incidents and measuring the state of affairs is difficult. Thus, averaging various indicators over the country as a whole, which is larger than Europe, is misleading. Much that is presented in quantitative tables really goes back to highly qualitative and subjective criteria. On the one hand, some regions (each of them the size of the largest European nations) in China are doing much better, but other regions much worse. The same is true no doubt with respect to religious freedom or human rights.

A recent attempt to put the issue of rule of law in China, including its connection to various human rights issues, in a quantitative perspective has been carried out by Randall Peerenboom. As he has pointed out, other countries have at least an equally bad or worse human rights record in many ways, such as India, Sri Lanka or Pakistan, but are not the object of the kind of systematic criticism that China is. In these countries the religious situation is actually much more violent, partly in the form of ongoing violent conflict (largely absent in China) and partly in the form of all kinds of less conspicuous repression. We can seriously doubt that these three countries know true religious freedom. In many other issues, such as woman's rights or social and economic progress, China has been doing much better over the last three decades. One obvious reason for this kind of difference in attention is that the other three countries are nominally democratic countries, although voting is often rigged and the overall system is highly populist. Apparently, this aspect alone can serve in our Western eyes as a sufficient redeeming factor, even when all other factors are far more problematic than the Chinese case.

Why we cannot look at China in a balanced way

One may wonder why have such difficulties in looking at China in a more balanced way. For one, we cannot expect that China will take our concerns seriously under these circumstances. Furthermore, one wonders why we are so concerned with refashioning China in our image. Our lopsided interest in Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism (because these religions are also influential in the West), and our ignorance of almost all other forms of religious culture in China, further confirm the need to ask this question. The peculiar nature of our concern with China has much to do with century-old perceptions and images. Since the times of Marco Polo "China" (in his words still Cathay) has been a promised land of unlimited wealth; the Jesuits and other Roman Catholic missionary orders since the seventeenth century followed by the Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century, added to this the hope of converting all Chinese to Christianity. The Jesuits in particular created a highly popular, rational image of imperial China, which was actually seminal in the Enlightenment movement. To this a new, much more negative image was added in the course of the nineteenth century, caused by much closer contact and frictions. China came to be seen as the sick man of Asia, hampered in its

natural development by corruption, nepotism and so on. The loss of China to the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 further confirmed this negative image, especially in the USA.

Historians have in the meantime unpacked many of these preconceptions, but they are still very much alive in the popular discourse that codetermines foreign policy in Western parliaments (and maybe also foreign ministries). Nowadays, there is again the positive image of China as a land of unlimited economic potential, sometimes even as a fear of the social and political consequences of its economic growth. Yet, there is also still the negative image of a country that is politically backward and incapable of understanding the “blessings” of democracy and free religious culture. Thus, it is important that we get rid of our traditional images of China, which are rarely based on systematic knowledge and usually on old stereotypes. Neither the positive nor the negative imagery surrounding the People’s Republic of China are conducive to effective foreign policy, but changing these must start in popular discourse and our basic representative institutions.

The Chinese response

A full discussion of the Chinese response to our human rights approach cannot be carried out here, but some aspects are relevant to a more effective approach on our part towards improving the context of religious culture in China. Even if we reject any protests on the part of China—as we tend to do—we should bear in mind that many elements of these protests are widely shared among Chinese intellectuals and cannot be done away as the kneejerk reflex of an antiquated political leadership. Thus, not taking such protests into account merely makes our own policies ineffective over the long-term, even if a different political regime should come into being (which is not likely in the short term). This is even truer, since these protests are not always without basis in fact—even facts as Western observers might see them. The fact that someone’s else wrong does not make right one’s own wrong may be true for us, but does not invalidate the Chinese response—certainly not in the eyes of Chinese intellectuals and managers inside or outside the Chinese Communist Party.

Part of the Chinese response consists of taking Western countries and religious institutions up on their own claims of religious freedom, both in meetings with Western observers and among themselves. Chinese counterparts point out that the West (even though in varying degrees) is not as consistent in its religious policy as it expects China to be, with their Western treatment of Islam (but new religious groups could be added as well in many Western countries) as the most obvious example. By and large Chinese knowledge about the West, both academically and popularly, is much larger than the other way round. We need to take this knowledge and the Chinese point of view into account.

A second Chinese response, which I see as justified, is pointing out the inconsistent nature of Western discourse, in which China is singled out much more frequently and strictly than other countries. It is claimed that Western allies and/or countries with “democratic” systems (itself a rather vague concept given their enormous variety) are treated substantially differently from China. I already referred to this argument in the preceding section.

A third response consists of stressing different aspects of the larger scale of human rights, in which they are helped by the increasingly broad definition of human rights current today. There are two dimensions here, one of empirical fact and one of a more ideological nature. For one, there can be little doubt that China does better in a number of rights related to socio-economic progress and political stability than most countries on the same level of economic wealth. Since political stability is crucial to many human rights, even on an individual level, this is in fact an important aspect. The other dimension is the claim that different value systems emphasize different rights. And indeed, we would be fools not to recognize that there are cultural differences. In Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, where democratic systems are in place, we find a similar stress on stability, social harmony, social hierarchy and the like as in China today. Here it is imperative that our own discourse is based on a thorough knowledge of other cultures.

5.2. Complications around religious freedom

Fears of Western intervention are real and historically not unfounded. Sadly, the international discourses on human rights and religious tolerance strengthen these fears, since these discourses come from the West and favor those Chinese groups that have their own lobbying groups in the West (mainly Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism). Hence, the discourse is not all unpartisan. On the other hand since the late 1970s there is a clear awareness within the Chinese leadership that merely repressing religious culture will be counterproductive and, more recently, that religious culture can be made to serve wider social and even political agendas. There is also an awareness that foreign governments (at least in the West) have a stake here and the very fact that China nowadays publishes its own report on human rights (especially in the USA) can be taken as an implicit recognition of their relevance.

Since the Chinese state on an organizational level is much weaker than we tend to assume and a full rule of law is still lacking, liberalization will not necessarily have the positive effects that Western observers might expect from it on the basis of their own political structures. Liberalization without effective rule of law might just as well mean more social unrest and less tolerance. Furthermore, some religious groups thrive on the sense of legitimacy and the feeling of forming a strong in-group that is provided by a degree of persecution or repression. Being repressed provides a very strong sense of agency and receiving more freedom would actually fundamentally change the group.

While social problems and unrest are not necessarily caused by religious culture in a simple, monocausal way, it would be naive to think that religion is always a positive force. In fact, who decides what is “positive”? In the West, too, we have our discussions, violent protest and sometimes outright murder by people of different viewpoints about abortion, euthanasia, organ donations, the right of women to represent themselves or others in politics, animal rights, and so on. Especially among the house churches in China, religious culture can be a resource to cope with modernity in its various forms, sometimes by rejecting it in part or whole. But also apart from religion as a tool to cope

with modernity, there simply are different ideas on when life starts (influencing people's views about abortion, but also about stem cell research and cloning) or when it stops (influencing people's views about organ donation in general or the right moment after death for it).

Different religious institutions, groups and traditions in China today do not necessarily have much respect for each other below the leadership level of the patriotic churches. Both the Christian and Islamic traditions are accustomed to seeing themselves as the only true religion; especially in the case of the Christian house churches which operate amidst a variety of other religious practitioners this is bound to create tensions. Mainstream Daoist priests and monks also traditionally despise local cults and mediums, even if the latter now identify themselves as Buddhist or Daoist lay believers in order to avoid persecution. Among Buddhist priest and monks we can assume a similar attitude, although this is not attested in the secondary literature on contemporary China. Representatives of the patriotic churches are expected to take part in campaigns against religious phenomena that are not allowed by the state, of which the campaign against the Falun Gong during the past decade is only the most egregious example. These attitudes are actually quite similar to the derogatory attitude of educated elites, both traditional and contemporary, to the rural population and their religious culture (which they do not even see as relevant culture to begin with). Long-established indigenous new religious groups are likely to have come to terms with the surrounding religious environment, but there is no reason to assume that more recent groups would be equally tolerant. There are few or no mechanisms for interaction between different religious groups and traditions beyond the patriotic churches and the state control apparatus. The conflict lines are therefore not merely between the state and religion, but also between different forms of religious culture among themselves.

Religious leaders, believers and institutions in China today are not passive objects of state control, nor are they continually engaged in resistance against the state. The Falun Gong is one of the very few movements which has developed in this direction, after the persecution started in the summer of 1999 and as a part of its defensive strategy. More

commonly, most teachers or groups simply stick to their own devices and try to keep themselves out of sight of the state, or at least of the state on higher administrative levels. On a purely local level, they might still be known to local officials or party cadres, but be deemed sufficiently small and unthreatening to be left alone. Other figures or groups actively enlist local communities to create room for them. In doing so, they may use a variety of means made available by the state itself.

The laudable Western interest in minorities and marginal groups leads to further tensions as well. We are accustomed to all participants in a dialogue playing by the rules, which is hardly the case in our own culture and even less so in the Chinese situation. Nobody will be surprised that the Chinese political and cultural system (i.e. not merely the communist leadership) constructs its own partisan histories of Tibet, Uyghur regions and so forth. But Western audiences, bureaucrats and politicians should not forget that the Tibetan and Uyghur exiles (to mention only two examples out of many) do so as well. It is important to build independent sociological, historical and religious expertise on these cultures and groups, which is difficult in a university environment in which tenured positions are largely based on numbers of students. We simply lack expertise in Europe (and even more so in the Netherlands with China Studies concentrated in a single university and one department), although some countries do better than others (Germany, for instance, is actively building regional studies again with strong central funding). Most policy-makers are only trained in Western-oriented disciplines.

Western and Overseas Chinese observers often talk about a crisis in legitimacy that the Chinese communist system presently is in. They then link the recent changes in religious policy and the movement towards a “harmonious society” to this purported crisis, describing the former as a solution for the latter. Such observers also refer to corruption as an important manifestation of this crisis. I find this view biased, with a very serious risk of wishful thinking, since we as outsiders tend to think (and often hope) that the communist system (in fact any non-democratic system) has no legitimacy. In the absence of reliable polls on Chinese public opinion I do not see how we can know or measure whether or not the communist system is in a legitimacy crisis. In any political system,

including our own democratic system, there are always substantial groups of people—especially intellectuals and marginal groups who feel left out of power—who think that the system is in crisis. In a way, a perpetual sense of crisis might be a very fruitful way of updating a political system and this seems to be what is taking place at present in China as well. This might well end in a form of democracy, although not likely the same kind of democratic system as in Western Europe or Northern America (where we have different varieties as well).

The obvious and undisputed fact that there are people who think there is such a crisis only proves that some people disagree with the present political system in China, as indeed does the author of this report. The fact that there is and has been corruption for a long time, according to outside and inside definitions, does not necessarily prove there is a legitimacy crisis. That the top leadership tries to combat this corruption does not necessarily mean that leaders see it as a threat to their legitimacy, but rather to the effective exercise of central power. Corruption is a manifestation of weak leadership and weak rules, in which the only or quickest way to get or keep something is outside the regular channels. The reason for this is often a scarcity of resources and/or unclear formal rules, which makes it difficult to access goods or services otherwise. A different political system (for instance some form of democracy) does not necessarily banish corruption, as many successful democracies (such as Japan, the USA and numerous Western European countries) illustrate on a daily basis. Furthermore, corruption per se does not automatically lead to a crisis in legitimacy and is not by definition a fundamental hindrance to economic progress.

The reverse of the above might still be true, however, that is to say that more religious freedom and visibly granting such freedom would improve the legitimacy of the present political system, whether we as outsiders wish to continue calling it communist or not. This happened for instance in Taiwan after the lifting of martial law in 1987, which was followed by the political liberalization of all religious culture. At that point the Unity Teachings, for instance, became strong supporters of the Nationalist Party, both as their patrons and as advocates of a unified China (to which the Unity Teachings might

eventually return). A very strong and convincing argument has been made recently by Richard Madsen, a foremost expert on the fate of Roman Catholicism in China, that the rise of Buddhist and Daoist movements in Taiwan with a strong social agenda has been a major factor in its peaceful and to date successful transition to democracy.

6. Recommendations

(internal document)

Selective bibliography

For this report I have made extensive use of the existing secondary and primary literature. Below I quote those publications which I found particularly useful and insightful. Therefore, the list is not at all exhaustive. Some of them have also served as the basis for my analytical views and opinions, but since this is not a scholarly report, I have not annotated each and every statement above. In addition to consulting the secondary literature, I am basing my summaries and recommendations on talks with colleagues over the last few months in Hong Kong, Seoul, Bonn and Leiden. Without this research by my colleagues and without ongoing scholarly contact with them, this report could certainly not have been written.

General works

China Heute: Informationen über Religion und Christentum im chinesischen Raum. It is published by the China-Zentrum (Sankt Augustin; <http://www.china-zentrum.de>). This is the best journal for keeping up-to-date. Although with a strong focus on Christianity (especially the Roman Catholic church), it strives for an impartial view and provides much up-to-date information (also on rules and regulations) and bibliographical information.

Among several general introductions to Chinese religions, I recommend:

Goossaert, Vincent, *Dans les temples de la Chine* (Albin Michel: Paris, 2000)

Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions* (Routledge: London, 2009)

For people interested in my own perspective on Chinese history:

Barend J. ter Haar, *Het Hemels Mandaat: de Geschiedenis van het Chinese keizerrijk* (AUP: Amsterdam, 2009, 2010). Here I carry out a non-nationalist reading of Chinese history based on recent research.

pre-1949

Timothy Brook, “The Politics of Religion: Late Imperial Origins of the Regulatory State”,
in: Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, *Making Religion, Making the State: The
Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), pp. 22-42

Vincent Goossaert, “Le Destin de la Religion Chinoise au 20ème Siècle”, *Social
Compass* 50 (2003), pp. 429-440

Barend J. ter Haar, "Local religious culture in late imperial China (circa 1644-1850)"
(book manuscript)

Nedostup, Rebecca, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese
Modernity* (Cambridge, MA [etc.] : Harvard University Press, 2009)

Yoshiko Ashiwa, “Positioning Religion in Modernity: State and Buddhism in China”, in:
Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, *Making Religion, Making the State: The
Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), pp. 43-73.

English-language translations of and introductions to crucial laws and regulations:

Chan Kim-kwong and Eric Carlson eds., *Religious Freedom in China: Policy,
Administration and Regulation* (Santa Barbara: Institute for the Study of
American Religion/ Hong Kong: HK Institute for Culture, Commerce and
Religion, 2005). This book serves as an excellent introduction replacing earlier
work by D. McInnes.

Chinese Law and Government 36: 2 (2003) 3-105 translates a number of documents,
including rules and regulations, as well as actual instances of religious
suppression.

Human rights websites (with links to published reports etc.):

- Human Rights Watch (independent): <http://www.hrw.org/> (successive reports)
- Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (independent): <http://www.tfd.org.tw/>
- USA State Department (government): <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt>

- Amnesty International (independent): <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Ying Fuk Tsang, “New Wine in Old Wineskins: an Appraisal of Religious Legislation in China and the Regulations on Religious Affairs of 2005,” *Religion, State and Society* 34:4 (2006), pp.343-373

Studies of the formal apparatus and formal rules:

Pitman Potter, “Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China”, in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 11-31

On Ye Xiaowen: <http://www.chinavivae.com/biography/2071>

On Wang Zuonan: <http://www.sara.gov.cn> (no other info available on the web)

David A. Palmer, “China’s Religious *Danwei*: Institutionalising Religion in the People’s Republic”, *China Perspectives* 2009:4, pp. 17-30

Traditional views of new religious groups etc.

Haar, B.J. ter, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992)

Religion 1949-1976

Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, Mark Selden; with Kay Ann Johnson, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven [etc.]: Yale University Press, 1991) gives a sense of the ongoing repression after 1949 in the absence of a systematic history of this period from a religious perspective.

Elizabeth J. Perry, “Rural Violence in Socialist China”, in her *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, 2002), pp. 275-308.

Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1972) is still one of the few works on religious life in this period.

Religion after 1976

Articles

- Raoul Birnbaum, “Buddhist China at the Century's Turn”, in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 122-144
- Chan Kim-kwong “Religion in China in the Twenty-first Century: Some Scenarios”, in: *Religion, State and Society* 33:2 (2005), pp. 87 – 119
- Kenneth Dean, “Local Communal Religion in Contemporary South-east China”, in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 32-52
- Thomas DuBois, “Religion and the Chinese State: Three Crises and a Solution”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64: 3 (2010), pp. 344-358
- Fan Lizhu, “The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuying, Boading, Hebei”, in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 53-66
- Fan Lizhu, “Popular Religion in Contemporary China”, *Social Compass* 50 (2003), pp. 449-457
- Goossaert, Vincent and Fang Ling, “Temples and Daoists in Urban China Since 1980”, *China Perspectives* 2009: 4, pp. 32-41
- Kung, Lap-Yan, “The Emergence of Exchange Politics in China and its Implications for Church–State Relations” in: *Religion, State and Society* 38:1 (2010), pp. 9-28
- Lai Chi-Tim, “Daoism in China Today, 1980–2002”, in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 107-121
- André Laliberté, “Entre désécularisation et resacralisation: Bouddhistes laïcs, temples et organisations philanthropiques en Chine”, *Social Compass* 56 (2009), pp. 345-361

- Michael Szonyi, "Secularization Theories and the Study of Chinese Religions", *Social Compass* 56 (2009), pp. 312-327
- Benoit Vermandier, "Religious Revival and Exit from Religion in Contemporary China", *China Perspectives* 2009: 4, pp. 4-14
- Zhe Ji. "Non-institutional Religious Re-composition among the Chinese Youth", *Social Compass*, 53 (2006), pp. 535-549

Edited books and special issues of academic journals

- China Perspectives* 2009: 4; *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003); *The China Review* 9: 2 (2009) (when specific articles have been used, this is noted elsewhere)
- Koenig, Wiebke and Daiber, Karl-Fritz eds. *Religion und Politik in der Volksrepublik China* (Ergon: Würzburg, 2008)
- Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009)
- Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008)

Ethnographic

- Daniel Overmeyer and Shin-yi Chao eds., *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and results* (Yuan-Liou: Taipei, 2002)
- Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain* (Brill: Leiden, 2010)
- Thomas Dubois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* (University of Hawai'i Press: Honolulu, 2005)
- Adam Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2006)

Popular beliefs (*minjian xinyang*)

<http://www.pacilution.com> (Pu Shi Institute for Social Science, see under the relevant category, which contains ample discussion)

http://www.hunan.gov.cn/zczn/200908/t20090831_15471.htm (regulations of places for religious activities [*minjian zongjiao huodong changsuo* 民間宗教活動場所] in Hunan, an early example of elaborate regulations)

Intangible Cultural Heritage (*feiwuzhiwenhua*)

<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org> (excellent English language online quarterly from Australian National University with rich information and scholarly work);
<http://www.chinaich.com.cn> & <http://www.ihchina.cn> for Chinese websites.

Scienticism

Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008)

Qigong movements

Nancy N. Chen, "Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns", in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 199-214

David Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

David Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2007)

Christianity

- Daniel H. Bays, "Chinese Protestant Christianity Today", in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 182-198
- Daniel H. Bays, "American Public Discourse on the Church in China", *The China Review* 9:2 (2009), pp. 1-16
- Cao Nanlai, "Boss Christians: The Business of Religion in the 'Wenzhou Model' of Christian Revival", *The China Journal* 59 (2008) 63-87
- Cao Nanlai, "Raising the Quality of Belief: *Suzhi* and the Production of an Elite Protestantism", *China Perspectives* 2009: 4, pp. 54-65
- Alan Hunter and Chan Kim-Kwong, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge [etc.] : Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Kristin Kupfer, "Christian-Inspired Groups in the People's Republic of China After 1978: Reaction of State and Party Authorities", *Social Compass* 51 (2004), pp. 273-286
- Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1998)
- Richard Madsen, "Catholic Revival During the Reform Era", in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 162-181
- Western missionaries: see for instance the Protestant group represented by Asia Harvest <http://www.asiaharvest.org/index.php> and the publishing work by Paul Hattaway

Islam

- Dru C. Gladney, "Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?" in: Daniel Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today (The China Quarterly Special Issue)* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 145-161

Taiwan

- Richard Madsen, *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

Tibet

Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille eds., *Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China's 100 Questions* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2008) critical evaluation of a variety of issues by prominent Tibet specialists. Not overly partisan.

Andrew Martin Fisher, "Close Encounters of an Inner Asian Kind: Tibetan-Muslim Coexistence and Conflict in Tibet: Past and Present", *Crisis States Working Paper 68* (Crisis States Research Center, London School of Economics: London, 2005)

Melvyn Goldstein, Ben Jiao, and Tanzhen Lhundrup, *On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet: The Nyemo Incident of 1969* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2009) shows how an incident of severe Red Guard fighting that is traditionally seen in ethnic terms as Tibetan resistance against Chinese suppression, really was a political affair in which Chinese and Tibetans were represented on both sides. Goldstein is also the author of excellent works on Tibetan early modern history, but stops in 1959.

Warren Smith, *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) is pro-Tibet, but attempts to write an academic history of Tibet.

Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the making of modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007)

Asian Values, "Harmonious society" and other new (or older) concepts

Marina Svensson, "The Chinese Debate on Asian Values and Human Rights: Some Reflections on Relativism, Nationalism and Orientalism", in: Michael Jacobsen and Ole Bruun eds., *Human Rights and Asian Values: Contesting National*

Identities and Cultural Representations in Asia (Curzon: Richmond, 2000), pp. 199-226

Guillaume Dutournier and Ji Zhe, “Social Experimentation and ‘Popular Confucianism’: The Case of the Lujiang Cultural Education Centre”, *China Perspectives* 2009: 4, pp. 67-81

Appendix: The Regulations of Religious Affairs

Constitution of 1982

(<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>)

Article 36. 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.

Regulations on Religious Affairs

Decree of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

No.426, adopted at the 57th Executive Meeting of the State Council on July 7, 2004 and effective as of March 1, 2005.

(English version taken from: <http://www.sara.gov.cn/gb/zcfg/xzfg/20100423-01-37d8114b-0a1c-11da-9f13-93180af1bb1a.html>)

Regulations on Religious Affairs

Chapter I General Provisions

Article 1 These Regulations are formulated in accordance with the Constitution and relevant laws for the purposes of ensuring citizens' freedom of religious belief, maintaining harmony among and between religions, preserving social concord and regulating the administration of religious affairs.

Article 2 Citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief.

No 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 any religion (hereinafter referred to as religious citizens) or citizens who do not believe in any religion (hereinafter referred to as non-religious citizens).

Religious citizens and non-religious citizens shall respect each other and co-exist in harmony, and so shall citizens who believe in different religions.

Article 3 The State, in accordance with the law, protects normal religious activities, and safeguards the lawful rights and interests of religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious citizens.

Religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious citizens shall abide by the Constitution, laws, regulations and rules, and safeguard unification of the country, unity of all nationalities and stability of society.

No organization or individual may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State, or in other activities that harm State or public interests, or citizens' lawful rights and interests.

Article 4 All religions shall adhere to the principle of independence and self-governance. Religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.

Religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious personnel may develop external exchange on the basis of friendship and equality; all other organizations or individuals shall not accept any religious conditions in external cooperation or exchange in economic, cultural or other fields.

Article 5 The religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the county level shall, in accordance with the law, exercise administration of religious affairs that involve State or public interests, and the other departments of the people's government at or above the county level shall, in accordance with the law, be responsible for the administration of relevant affairs within the limits of their respective functions and duties.

People's governments at various levels shall solicit the views of religious bodies, sites for

religious activities and religious citizens, and coordinate the administration of religious affairs.

Chapter II Religious Bodies

Article 6 The establishment, alteration, or cancellation of registration, of a religious body shall be registered in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations on Registration Administration of Associations.

The articles of association of a religious body shall comply with the relevant provisions of the Regulations on Registration Administration of Associations.

The activities carried out by a religious body in accordance with its articles of association are protected by law.

Article 7 A religious body may, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State, compile and publish reference publications to be circulated within religious circles.

Religious publications for public distribution shall be published in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State on publication administration.

Publications involving religious contents shall comply with the provisions of the Regulations on Publication Administration, and shall not contain the contents:

- (1) which jeopardize the harmonious co-existence between religious and non-religious citizens;
- (2) which jeopardize the harmony between different religions or within a religion;
- (3) which discriminate against or insult religious or non-religious citizens;
- (4) which propagate religious extremism; or
- (5) which contravene the principle of independence and self-governance in respect of religions.

Article 8 For the establishment of an institute for religious education, an application shall be made by the national religious body to the religious affairs department of the State Council, or made by the religious body of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government to the religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government of the place where such institute is to be located. The

religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government shall, within 30 days from the date of receipt of the application, put forward its views, and, if it agrees to the establishment, make a report to the religious affairs department of the State Council for examination and approval.

The religious affairs department of the State Council shall, within 60 days from the date of receipt of the application made by the national religious body or the report made by the religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government on the establishment of the institute for religious education, make a decision of approval or disapproval.

Article 9 An institute for religious education to be established shall meet the following conditions:

- (1) having clear and definite training objectives, a charter for school-running and a curriculum;
- (2) having the source of students who meet the training requirements;
- (3) having the necessary funds for school-running and stable financial sources;
- (4) having the sites, facilities and equipment for teaching that are necessary for its tasks of teaching and school-running scale;
- (5) having full-time leading members, qualified full-time teachers and an internal management organization; and
- (6) being rationally distributed.

Article 10 In light of the need of the religion concerned, a national religious body may, in accordance with the relevant provisions, select and send people for religious studies abroad, or accept foreigners for religious studies in China.

Article 11 The making of hajj abroad by Chinese citizens who believe in Islam shall be organized by the national religious body of Islam.

Chapter III Sites for Religious Activities

Article 12 Collective religious activities of religious citizens shall, in general, be held at registered sites for religious activities (i.e., Buddhist monasteries, Taoist temples,

mosques, churches and other fixed premises for religious activities), organized by the sites for religious activities or religious bodies, and presided over by religious personnel or other persons who are qualified under the prescriptions of the religion concerned, and the process of such activities shall be in compliance with religious doctrines and canons.

Article 13 For the preparation for establishing a site for religious activities, an application shall be made by a religious body to the religious affairs department of the people's government at the county level of the place where such site is to be located. The religious affairs department of the people's government at the county level shall, within 30 days from the date of receipt of the application, make a report to the religious affairs department of the people's government at the level of a city divided into districts for examination and approval if it agrees to the establishment.

Within 30 days from the date of receipt of the report made by the religious affairs department of the people's government at the county level, the religious affairs department of the people's government at the level of a city divided into districts shall, if it agrees to the establishment of a Buddhist monastery, Taoist temple, mosque or church, put forward its views upon examination and verification and make a report to the religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government for examination and approval; and for the establishment of other fixed premises for religious activities, it shall make a decision of approval or disapproval.

The religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government shall, within 30 days from the date of receipt of the report made by the religious affairs department of the people's government at the level of a city divided into districts agreeing to the establishment of a Buddhist monastery, Taoist temple, mosque or church, make a decision of approval or disapproval.

A religious body may begin the preparatory work for establishing a site for religious activities only after the application for such establishment is approved.

Article 14 A site for religious activities to be established shall meet the following conditions:

(1) it is established for a purpose not in contravention of the provisions of Articles 3 and

4 of these Regulations;

(2) local religious citizens have a need to frequently carry out collective religious activities;

(3) there are religious personnel or other persons who are qualified under the prescriptions of the religion concerned to preside over the religious activities;

(4) there are the necessary funds; and

(5) it is rationally located without interfering with the normal production and livelihood of the neighboring units and residents.

Article 15 Upon approval of preparation for the establishment of a site for religious activities and completion of construction, an application shall be made for registration with the religious affairs department of the people's government at the county level of the place where such site is located. The religious affairs department of the people's government at the county level shall, within 30 days from the date of receipt of the application, examine the management organization, formulation of internal rules, and other aspects of such site, and, if the site meets the conditions for registration, register it and issue the Registration Certificate of the Site for Religious Activities.

Article 16 Where a site for religious activities merges with another one, divides itself, terminates, or changes any item registered, the formalities for alteration registration shall be gone through with the original registration administration department.

Article 17 A site for religious activities shall set up a management organization and exercise democratic management. Members of the management organization of the site for religious activities shall be recommended or elected upon democratic consultation, and then be reported to the registration administration department of such site for the record.

Article 18 A site for religious activities shall strengthen internal management, and, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant laws, regulations and rules, establish and improve the management systems for personnel, finance, accounting, security, fire control, cultural relics protection, sanitation, and epidemic prevention, etc., and accept the guidance, supervision and inspection by the relevant departments of the local people's government.

Article 19 The religious affairs department shall supervise and inspect the sites for

religious activities in terms of their compliance with laws, regulations and rules, the development and implementation of management systems, the alteration of registered items, the conduction of religious activities and activities that involve foreign affairs. The sites for religious activities shall accept the supervision and inspection by the religious affairs department.

Article 20 A site for religious activities may accept donations from citizens in accordance with religious customs, but no means of compulsion or apportionment may be adopted.

No non-religious bodies or sites not for religious activities may organize or hold any religious activities, nor accept any religious donations.

Article 21 Religious articles, artworks and publications may be sold in the sites for religious activities.

A Buddhist monastery, Taoist temple, mosque or church that is registered as a site for religious activities (hereinafter referred to as a monastery, temple, mosque or church) may, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State, compile and publish reference publications to be circulated within religious circles.

Article 22 Where a large-scale religious activity, in which different provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government are involved and which is beyond the accommodation capacity of a site for religious activities, is to be held, or where a large-scale religious activity is to be held outside a site for religious activities, the religious body, monastery, temple, mosque or church that sponsors such activity shall, 30 days before the activity is held, make an application to the religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government of the place where such large-scale religious activity is to be held. The religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government shall, within 15 days from the date of receipt of the application, make a decision of approval or disapproval.

A large-scale religious activity shall, as required in the written notification of approval, proceed in accordance with religious rites and rituals, without violating the relevant provisions of Articles 3 and 4 of these Regulations. The religious body, monastery,

temple, mosque or church that sponsors such large-scale religious activity shall adopt effective measures to prevent against any accidents. The people's government of the township or town and the relevant departments of the local people's government at or above the county level of the place where such large-scale religious activity is to be held shall, within the limits of their respective functions and duties, exercise the necessary administration in order to ensure the safe and orderly progress of the large-scale religious activity.

Article 23 A site for religious activities shall prevent against the occurrence, within the site, of any major accident or event, such as breaking of religious taboos, which hurts religious feelings of religious citizens, disrupts the unity of all nationalities or impairs social stability.

When any accident or event mentioned in the preceding paragraph occurs, the site for religious activities in question shall, without delay, make a report to the religious affairs department of the people's government at the county level of the place where it is located.

Article 24 Where a religious body, monastery, temple, mosque or church intends to build a large-size outdoor religious statue outside the site for religious activities, the relevant religious body of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government shall make an application to the religious affairs department of the people's government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government, which shall, within 30 days from the date of receipt of the application, put forward its views, and, if it agrees to the building of such statue, make a report to the religious affairs department of the State Council for examination and approval.

The religious affairs department of the State Council shall, within 60 days from the date of receipt of the report on building a large-size outdoor religious statue outside the site for religious activities, make a decision of approval or disapproval.

No organization or individual other than religious bodies, monasteries, temples, mosques and churches may build large-size outdoor religious statues.

Article 25 Where a unit or an individual intends to alter or construct buildings, set up commercial service centres, hold displays or exhibitions, or make films or television programs in a site for religious activities, it shall obtain in advance the consent of the site

for religious activities in question and that of the religious affairs department of the local people's government at or above the county level of the place where such site is located.

Article 26 For a scenic spot or historic zone where a site for religious activities therein constitutes the main tourist attraction, the local people's government at or above the county level of the place where such spot or zone is located shall coordinate and deal with the interrelated interests between the site for religious activities and the park, relics, and tourism, and safeguard the lawful rights and interests of the site for religious activities.

The planning and construction of a scenic spot or historic zone where a site for religious activities constitutes the main tourist attraction shall be in harmony with the style and surroundings of such site.

Chapter IV Religious Personnel

Article 27 Religious personnel who are determined qualified as such by a religious body and reported for the record to the religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the county level may engage in professional religious activities.

The succession of living Buddha's in Tibetan Buddhism shall be conducted under the guidance of Buddhist bodies and in accordance with the religious rites and rituals and historical conventions, and be reported for approval to the religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the level of a city divided into districts, or to the people's government at or above the level of a city divided into districts. With respect to Catholic bishops, the matter shall be reported for the record by the national religious body of the Catholic Church to the religious affairs department of the State Council.

Article 28 Where religious personnel are to assume or leave the chief religious posts of a site for religious activities, the matter shall, upon consent by the religious body of the religion concerned, be reported to the religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the county level for the record.

Article 29 The presiding over of religious activities, conduction of religious ceremonies, sorting out of religious scriptures and pursuit of religious and cultural research by religious personnel are protected by law.

Chapter V Religious Property

Article 30 The land legally used by a religious body or a site for religious activities, the houses, structures and facilities legally owned or used by such body or site, and its other legal property and proceeds thereof, are protected by law.

No organization or individual may encroach upon, loot, privately divide up, damage, destroy, or, illegally seal up, impound, freeze, confiscate or dispose of the legal property of a religious body or a site for religious activities, nor damage or destroy cultural relics possessed or used by a religious body or a site for religious activities.

Article 31 The houses owned and the land used by a religious body or a site for religious activities shall, according to law, be registered with the real estate department and the land administration department of the local people's government at or above the county level, and be granted the certificate of ownership and the certificate of right to use; where the property right is altered, the formalities for alteration registration shall be gone through without delay.

The land administration department shall, when determining and altering the land-use right of a religious body or a site for religious activities, solicit the views of the religious affairs department of the people's government at the same level.

Article 32 The houses and structures used for religious activities by a site for religious activities, and their accessory houses for the daily use of religious personnel as well, shall not be transferred, mortgaged or used as investments in kind.

Article 33 Where the houses or structures of a religious body or a site for religious activities need to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or construction of key projects, the demolisher shall consult with the religious body or the site for religious activities concerned, and solicit the views of the relevant religious affairs department. If, after consultation, all the parties concerned agree to the demolition, the demolisher shall rebuild the houses or structures demolished, or, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State, make compensation on the basis of the appraised market price of the houses or structures demolished.

Article 34 A religious body or a site for religious activities may operate public

undertakings according to law, and the proceeds and other lawful income therefrom shall be subject to financial and accounting management, and be used for the activities that are commensurate with the purpose of the religious body or the site for religious activities, or for public undertakings.

Article 35 A religious body or a site for religious activities may, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State, accept donations from organizations and individuals at home or abroad, which shall be used for the activities that are commensurate with the purpose of the religious body or the site for religious activities.

Article 36 A religious body or a site for religious activities shall implement the systems of the State for administration of financial and accounting affairs and taxation, and may enjoy the preferential treatment in terms of tax reduction or exemption in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State on taxation.

A religious body or a site for religious activities shall report to the religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the county level of the place where it is located on its income and expenditure, and on the acceptance and use of donations as well, and, in an appropriate way, make such information public to religious citizens.

Article 37 In case of cancellation of registration or termination of a religious body or a site for religious activities, the property thereof shall be liquidated and the property remaining after the liquidation shall be used for the undertakings that are commensurate with the purpose of the religious body or the site for religious activities.

Chapter VI Legal Liability

Article 38 Where any State functionary, in administration of religious affairs, abuses his power, neglects his duty or commits illegalities for personal gain or by fraudulent means, and a crime is thus constituted, he shall be investigated for criminal liability according to law; if no crime is constituted, he shall be given an administrative sanction according to law.

Article 39 Where anyone compels citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion, or interferes with the normal religious activities conducted by a religious body or a site for religious activities, the religious affairs department shall order it to make corrections;

if such act constitutes a violation of public security administration, it shall be given an administrative penalty for public security according to law.

Where anyone infringes upon the lawful rights and interests of a religious body, a site for religious activities or a religious citizen, it shall assume civil liability according to law; if a crime is constituted, it shall be investigated for criminal liability according to law.

Article 40 Where anyone makes use of religion to engage in such illegal activities as endanger State or public security, infringe upon citizens' right of the person and democratic rights, obstruct the administration of public order, or encroach upon public or private property, and a crime is thus constituted, it shall be investigated for criminal liability according to law; if no crime is constituted, the relevant competent department shall give it an administrative penalty according to law; if any loss is caused to a citizen, legal person or any other organization, it shall assume civil liability according to law.

Where, in the course of a large-scale religious activity, there occurs any event endangering public security or seriously disrupting public order, the matter shall be handled on the spot and penalties shall be imposed in accordance with the laws and administrative regulations on assembly, procession and demonstration; if the religious body, monastery, temple, mosque or church that sponsors such large-scale religious activity is responsible therefor, the registration administration department shall cancel its registration.

Where anyone organizes a large-scale religious activity without approval, the religious affairs department shall order it to discontinue such activities and shall confiscate the illegal gains, if any; and it may concurrently impose thereupon a fine of not less than one time but not more than three times the illegal gains. In addition, if the large-scale religious activity is organized by a religious body or a site for religious activities without approval, the registration administration department may order the religious body or the site for religious activities to dismiss and replace the person-in-charge who is directly responsible therefor.

Article 41 Where a religious body or a site for religious activities commits any of the following acts, the religious affairs department shall order it to make corrections; if the circumstances are relatively serious, the registration administration department shall order the religious body or the site for religious activities to dismiss and replace the

person-in-charge who is directly responsible therefore; if the circumstances are serious, the registration administration department shall cancel the registration of such religious body or site for religious activities and confiscate the unlawful property or things of value, if any:

- (1) failing to go through the formalities for alteration registration or submission for the record in accordance with the relevant provisions;
 - (2) in the case of a site for religious activities, in violation of Article 18 of these Regulations, failing to formulate relevant management systems, or failing to have the management systems meet the requirements;
 - (3) failing to report, without delay, on the occurrence of any major accident or event in a site for religious activities, thus causing serious consequences;
 - (4) contravening the principle of independence and self-governance in violation of the provisions of Article 4 of these Regulations;
 - (5) accepting donations from home or abroad in violation of the provisions of the State;
- or
- (6) refusing to accept supervision and administration conducted by the registration administration department according to law.

Article 42 Where any publications involving religious contents contain the contents prohibited by the second paragraph of Article 7 of these Regulations, the relevant competent department shall impose administrative penalties upon the relevant responsible units and persons according to law. If a crime is constituted, criminal liability shall be investigated according to law.

Article 43 Where a site for religious activities is established without approval, or a site originally for religious activities continues to carry out religious activities after its registration as such has been cancelled, or an institute for religious education is established without approval, the religious affairs department shall ban such site or institute and confiscate the illegal gains; the illegal houses or structures, if any, shall be disposed of by the competent construction department according to law. If any act in violation of public security administration is committed, an administrative penalty for public security shall be imposed according to law.

Where a non-religious body or a site not for religious activities organizes or holds

religious activities or accepts religious donations, the religious affairs department shall order it to discontinue such activities and confiscate the illegal gains, if any; if the circumstances are serious, a fine of not less than one time but not more than three times the illegal gains may be imposed concurrently.

Where anyone organizes the making of hajj abroad for religious citizens without authorization, the religious affairs department shall order it to discontinue such activities and shall confiscate the illegal gains, if any; and it may concurrently impose a fine of not less than one time but not more than three times the illegal gains.

Article 44 Where, in violation of the provisions of these Regulations, anyone builds a large-size outdoor religious statue, the religious affairs department shall order it to discontinue the construction and to demolish the statue in a specified time limit; the illegal gains, if any, shall be confiscated.

Article 45 Where any religious personnel violate laws, regulations or rules in professional religious activities, the religious affairs department shall, in addition to having the legal liability investigated according to law, make a proposal to the religious body concerned to disqualify them as religious personnel.

Where anyone engages in professional religious activities by impersonating religious personnel, the religious affairs department shall order it to discontinue such activities and shall confiscate the illegal gains, if any; if any act in violation of public security administration is committed, an administrative penalty for public security shall be imposed thereupon according to law; if a crime is constituted, criminal liability shall be investigated according to law.

Article 46 Where anyone refuses to accept a specific administrative act taken by the religious affairs department, it may apply for administrative reconsideration according to law; if it refuses to accept the decision of the administrative reconsideration, it may institute an administrative lawsuit according to law.

Chapter VII Supplementary Provisions

Article 47 The religious exchange between the Mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Macao Special Administrative Region and Taiwan region

shall be developed in accordance with laws, administrative regulations and the relevant provisions of the State.

Article 48 These Regulations shall become effective as of March 1, 2005. The Regulations on Administration of Sites for Religious Activities promulgated by the State Council on January 31, 1994 shall be repealed simultaneously.