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Religion in China in the Twenty-first Century: Some Scenarios*

KIM-KWONG CHAN

Introduction

During the first 30 years of the People's Republic of China the Chinese authorities regarded religion as a distorted worldview hindering social progress. Religion became a target of political struggle, and the government's policy toward religion was restrictive after the Great Leap Forward Campaign and suppressive during the Cultural Revolution. During these 30 years religion was reported to be in rapid decline. By the late 1970s it was on the edge of extinction, embraced only by a few recalcitrant elders who still hung on to these feudal superstitious ideas. Religious relics such as temple buildings still survived, but it seemed that religion – as a community of believers or devotees who practice their faith in the open – had disappeared from the face of China.

With the Reform and Open (*gaige kaifang*) policy initiated from the late 1970s the government adopted a more liberal policy, allowing religion to resurface as part of the general post-Cultural Revolution rehabilitation. The government did not regard religion as a major social concern. It thought that even if the it allowed religion to re-emerge, rather than actively suppressing it by administrative means, there would be only a few remnants of religious believers mainly among the elderly. After all, most of the younger generation would not be religious after three decades of state-sponsored atheistic education. The government was convinced that religion would die off naturally as progress was made in social and economic development, as this distorted and unscientific worldview would find less and less ground to attract the naïve and ignorant masses. The government argued that allowing religious believers to practice religion would rally believers' support for the building of a progressive society, and that this would lead to the diminishing of the breeding ground of religion: allowing religion in China would lead to its decline. In its confidence the Central Committee issued a major document outlining religious policy during this Reform and Open period: citizens would enjoy freedom of religious belief, but within the five recognised religions and under the supervision of the government; religion as a personal affair

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could not interfere with or influence civil matters such as education; Chinese religious groups could not be subject to foreign organisations.¹

With this relatively liberal policy on religion, religious groups began to emerge, slowly at first, but soon gaining momentum. Within a short period of time the percentage of religious believers in the population surpassed the percentage of believers at pre-Liberation level (1949) and some, such as Christians,² increased to a historic high.³ In spite of restrictive policies, constraints imposed by the government-sponsored patriotic religious organisations and control exerted by government administrative organs such as the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) (*zongjiao shiwu ju*), religion in China has kept on growing to the point that it has become an important social force. It seems that religion in China carries a certain dynamism that attracts followers from all walks of life despite the ban on promoting religion in public. Religion eventually caught the attention of the senior leadership as the government recognised that religion in China had not developed as it had once predicted. Religion could become a serious social issue if not properly handled, especially in light of the tremendous socio-economic structural changes following on from China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO): this began in November 2001, and full merger with the markets of the WTO is envisaged by the end of 2006.⁴ The proliferation of religion in China in the context of the policies of Deng Xiaoping from 1978 alarmed the Communist Party of China (CPC), and in 1989 Chen Yun ordered Jiang Zemin to control the fast growth of religion before it was too late. Jiang then launched his policies of accommodation and regulating religion by law, applying sophisticated methods to manage religions in a regulated manner.

This paper will summarise current religious policy under the 'Three Represents' (*sange daibiao*) theory recently introduced by the CPC and will outline the present status of religion in China. It will examine trends of religious development in China in the light of China's WTO accession and socio-political changes, and highlight several challenges posed to the government's current theory as well as practice on religious policy. Finally, it will propose four possible scenarios for religion in China in the future by means of matrix combinations. I shall suggest that a more liberal policy on religion will enable religion to contribute to the stability of Chinese society, whereas a restrictive policy, such as the current one, will have the opposite effect.

Current Religious Policy

Historically China has always been multireligious and without any single 'state' religion dominating other religious groups. With some brief exceptions, the Chinese authorities have been mostly nonreligious, ruling over various religious groups without allowing any one of them to become a predominant group or influential political force. The current regime seems to follow such practice, with the additional incentive that it subscribes to Marxism-Leninism, which promotes atheism as the state orthodoxy. The government therefore defines religion as a private matter which can be pursued in confined areas but which is allowed to exercise virtually no influence on civil affairs. This is freedom of religious belief but not of religion. A particular government ministry, the RAB, deals with government-sanctioned religious groups and activities. The objective is to keep these groups within the political parameters established by the government as well as to lead these groups to support the socio-political objectives of the government. Religions that are either not approved by the government, or have stepped outside the government-sanctioned boundaries, are usually dealt with by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) as criminal organisations under

the category 'evil cults', such as New Religious Movements (NRMs)⁵ like Falungong, or as endangering public or social security.⁶ These policies and practices have been in place for 20 years; the government has been reluctant to adopt a more liberal stance in religious affairs while virtually all other social sectors have undergone major structural changes or adjustments.

Accession to the WTO ushered in a whole new range of social challenges for the Chinese government to tackle, from unrest among unemployed workers to the tensions caused by economic polarisation. The Chinese government faces unprecedented challenges in leading China back to the international community as a significant power, and at the same time preserving the CPC's absolute leadership over China. In the past few years the Chinese government has done a series of assessments on the situation since accession to the WTO as well as formulating policies on the above-mentioned political objectives. Religion, long ignored as a minor social issue, hit front page headlines in December 2001 when President Jiang Zemin called a conference on religious work attended by all members of the Politburo as well as by the heads of all branches of the government, the CPC and the military.⁷ This conference signified an adjustment in religious policy in the face of predicted religious growth in the context of social adjustment in China after accession to the WTO. Just prior to the conference there had been debates within the CPC as what the religious policy should be when China entered the WTO: should the government let go of control over religion just as it did in economic matters, merging China into the global world order? Or should the government suppress the growth of religion because according to CPC orthodoxy it is supposed to be an unscientific worldview hindering the progress of the society and therefore must be eradicated? The CPC came to the conclusion that it would deal with religious affairs within a pragmatic, rather than an ideological, framework. The basic orientation of this conference on religious policy can be summarised under four basic principles: recognition of religion, containment of religious activity, guidance of religious development, and suppression of non-sanctioned religions (Chan, 2004b, pp. 342–50).⁸

At about the same time, Jiang proposed and promoted a new theory called the 'Three Represents' as the guiding principle for the CPC as China experienced more social transformation. The 'Three Represents' theory suggests that the CPC represents the best interest of the people of China, the most advanced productive force in China and the most advanced culture of China.⁹ In 2002 the Sixteenth CPC Congress formally adopted the 'Three Represents' as the CPC's orthodox doctrine; the whole nation would integrate current policies within the context of this doctrine. As a result, in spring 2003 the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) (*guojia zongjiao shiwu ju*) (the RAB at the national level) generated a series of study materials putting the above-mentioned decisions on religious policy into the context of the CPC's new thinking embodied in the 'Three Represents'.¹⁰ New religious policy in CPC rhetoric is as follows. First, since longevity is of the nature of religion, it will exist for a long time, and the CPC should therefore actively guide religion to adapt to socialist society. Second, since the critical issue for religion in China is its mass nature (more than 100 million believers), the CPC should vigorously implement its policy on religious belief. Third, since religion is complex and unique, the CPC should emphasise the legislative nature of religious policy and stress the independent nature of religion in China. As for non-sanctioned religions, although it is not explicitly stated as part of religious policy, it is understood by government officials that they will be suppressed by legal and administrative means either as 'evil cults' or as 'activity that endangers public security', as mentioned earlier.

I shall now explain what each of these points means using ordinary language instead of CPC rhetoric. I shall discuss the first point at greater length because it reflects a fresh understanding of religion by the CPC. The second and third points are rather similar to earlier understandings.

According to the first point, the government openly acknowledges that religion has existed and will continue to exist as part of human civilisation. This amounts to an admission that the earlier CPC understanding of religion was not an accurate one. Religion is a cultural force that cannot be eliminated by administrative measures. This first point does not touch upon the thorny and embarrassing issue of the nature of religion because such a discussion would challenge the fundamental Marxist-Leninist interpretation of religion, that it is a distorted worldview which will disappear with social progress; its continuing existence in a developed society refutes this teaching. On religion, the CPC here takes a pragmatic stance, somewhat similar to its position on economic matters whereby it adopted the market economy by baptising it as 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics'. This pragmatic approach involves tolerating religion and making the best use of it. The government will neither encourage the development of religion nor suppress it by force. Meanwhile the CPC will continue actively to promote its worldview – scientific materialism and atheism – amongst the masses. On this point, this policy affirms that there is a categorical difference between CPC members and religious believers; it therefore emphasises that no religious believer can be a CPC member and vice versa. While the CPC can accept capitalists as members, then, no religious believer may join the CPC even if he or she represents the interests of huge numbers of believers. The only exception is if that CPC cadre is a member of an ethnic minority.

The government repeatedly emphasises the slogan that 'Religion must mutually adapt with Socialist society'. Literally this means that religion must adapt to the Chinese Socialist society in which it exists, but also that this Chinese Socialist society must adjust to the presence of religion. In reality, the government defines what adaptation is required by what religion, to the point that the religion in question even has to modify its teachings and practices in order to suit the objectives of the CPC. In other words, the CPC provides guidance to the religious groups, and these groups comply with such guidance.¹¹ Some of the current guidelines to religious groups in China are that they should help the country in economic development, for example introducing foreign investors to China, and that they should contribute to charitable projects for relief and poverty alleviation.

There are also particular guidelines for different religions. For example, the government's political guidance (Ye, 2002) to the Protestant Church in anticipating WTO accession is reflected in the opening address of the minister of the SARA, Ye Xiaowen, at the Chinese Protestant Representatives' Conference held in Beijing in May 2002.¹² He stressed that the church must confront the challenges of WTO accession as many hostile religious groups might take the opportunity to gain a foothold in China. The church must therefore step up its anti-infiltration capacity to block this foreign invasion, and at the same time cultivate positive relationships with friendly foreign religious bodies to promote the policies and achievements of China (Cao, 2002). This policy of political guidance reflects the mentality of the government that religion is one of the many social groups the government uses for its political objectives. The government needs to control religion tightly so that it can become a positive social force contributing to the stability of the regime and society. It also recognises that WTO accession may trigger a new wave of foreign religious influence, and it has every intention to resist such influence and will make every effort to do so –

in direct contrast to its policies in other sectors, such as the economic and commercial, where there is every effort to take in foreign elements in order to ensure a smooth integration into the global market.¹³

The second point shows that the CPC recognises that religion attracts massive numbers of followers and may compete with the CPC in loyalty; if not carefully controlled, religion may become a political rival. Because religious believers are so numerous, the CPC should implement its religious policy carefully in order to contain religious activities within a defined area. Religion is tolerated so long as it poses no threat to the ruling regime and no challenge to social institutions such as education and marriage. This policy is meant to define carefully how religion can and cannot operate in the context of Chinese socialist society, as well as reinforcing this boundary. This policy suggests that the CPC will treat religious affairs as a serious matter and will monitor them closely by heightening control through administrative measures.

The third point shows that the CPC recognises that religion is a complex phenomenon, and not merely a simple distorted world view held by ignorant peasants, as hitherto asserted in CPC teachings. Administrative issues regarding religion should be dealt with as objectively as possible. By emphasising judiciary means and legislative measures such as regulations on religious activities, the RAB can have some objective criteria for handling religious issues. Currently most of the provinces have passed their own religious legislation, and a national law is being drafted. Furthermore, the CPC has also recognised the complex relations between religious bodies in China and their overseas counterparts. In responding to the increasing foreign contacts in the context of WTO accession, the CPC emphasises both the independence of Chinese religious bodies and the need to enhance anti-infiltration capacities against foreign mission groups. All missionary activity organised from abroad is forbidden in China, and contacts between foreign and national religious groups must receive prior approval from the civil authorities. The aim is to contain religion within a politically nationalistic framework and to prevent religious groups in China from becoming extensions for advancing foreign interests.

In spite of the new understanding on religion, then, there is, fundamentally speaking, no change in the mechanism of dealing with religion. The government clearly assumes the authority to define what is a normal religion and what is not. When the government implements its policies and regulations on religion, only those religions defined by the government as normal can be allowed to enjoy the freedoms defined by those policies and regulations. Those groups that do not fall within the government's definition of normal religion, such as Falungong, are considered 'evil cults' to be prosecuted by law. Furthermore, religious groups within the category of normal religions must also register with the authorities in order to claim their legal protection; otherwise they are still illegal and will be prosecuted by law. The government thus uses legislative means to confine religious groups and their activities into a manageable area restricted by various legal boundaries. All these groups will also be under the governance of various religious organisations under the supervision of the government's RAB. There are also regulations to limit the involvement of religion in the public domain in areas such as education, marriage, civil affairs and even social morality; these are all areas deemed to be within the monopoly of the CPC. The government will therefore have a pretty good idea of what is going on in the various religious groups. Any group that does not want to have government supervision will, legally speaking, be an outlaw, and will be suppressed on the basis of political and national security, rather than on the basis of religion.¹⁴ Technically speaking, the Chinese government interprets the suppression of officially nonrecog-

nised religious activities not as issues of religious liberty, but as issues of national security and/or criminal activity. The government has already established a special task force within the PSB to target so-called 'evil cults'.

In December 2004, after six years of drafting, the government issued a document entitled *Religious Affairs Provisions (Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli)*, to become effective on 1 March 2005, to serve as a national guideline for religious administration (State Council, 2004). At the same time, it is also expanding and upgrading the RAB to meet the increasing demand on government involvement which will be required by the anticipated the growth of religion in China. The government will feel secure so long as it feels that religion is not getting out of hand and remains under government supervision and monitoring.

The Current Religious Picture

The government officially recognises only five religions in China: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. Other religions are regarded as evil cults or feudal superstitions (folk religion) and are dealt with separately. Members of the five recognised religions were originally organised in eight corresponding government-sanctioned patriotic associations: the Buddhist Association of China (*zhongguo fujiao xiehui*), the Daoist (Taoist) Association of China (*zhongguo daojiao xiehui*), the Islamic Association of China (*zhongguo yisilanjiao xiehui*), the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (*zhongguo tianjufiao aiguoahui*), the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference (*zhongguo tianzhufiao zhujiaotuan*), the Chinese Catholic Affairs Committee, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Protestant Churches of China (*zhongguo jidujiao sanzhi aiguo yundong weiyuanhui*), and the China Christian Council (*zhongguo jidujiao xiehui*). These later became seven organisations when the Catholic Affairs Committee merged with the Catholic Bishops' Conference as a subcommittee of the latter.

There are two exceptions to this general pattern. First, the Chinese (Russian) Orthodox Church, which lacks a national body but has individual communities, is registered with local authorities. Second, national minority groups can enjoy special permission to embrace religions that are not one of the five officially recognised religions as long as such a religion is part of the cultural heritage of this particular minority group. Furthermore, the religious affairs of foreigners in China are dealt with under separate rules. They are allowed to engage in their own sanctioned religious activities even if they are not following one of the five officially accepted religions; but no local nationals can be involved in these activities.

I shall now present a status snapshot of the five officially recognised religions, the other internationally recognised religions, folk religions, and the so-called 'evil cults' in China. There have been numerous studies published on each of these religions: religious issues in China have been attracting attention not only within academic circles but also among international religious organisations, human rights groups and various governments which incorporate human rights and religious liberty as part of their foreign policy agenda with China. *The China Quarterly* dedicated the whole of its June 2003 issue to religion, and the articles in that issue provide an excellent and up-to-date description of each of the five recognised religions in China. The snapshots of those religions given below are basically very brief abstracts of the material in those articles.¹⁵

Daoism

Although Daoism is the only indigenous Chinese religion among the five recognised religions, with more than 2500 years of history, it faced calamities similar to those suffered by the other religions during the Cultural Revolution. In the early 1980s there was a slow recovery of Daoist activities including the restoration of major Daoist temples, the re-emergence of the national Daoist Association of China and the establishment of the national Daoist Academy.¹⁶ By the early 1990s Daoist activities had become popular especially in rural areas, and began to get out of control as the line between legitimate Daoist activities and popular folk religious activities – officially regarded as feudal superstition – became blurred. In order to regulate Daoist activities the national Association issued guidelines for temple activities and certification procedures for Daoist priests.

There are two major schools of Daoist priests, Quanzhen and Zhengyi. The Quanzhen priests live in monastic style centred on a temple. Their activities are temple-based for the believers who live nearby or for pilgrims who travel to the temples. The senior abbots of the major historical Quanzhen temples in China ordain these priests. There have been two publicised ordinations, which took place in 1989 and 1995. The Zhengyi priests live at home and, unlike their Quanzhen counterparts, can marry. They perform Daoist rituals for the believers in the community at festival time or in celebration of passages of life. The transmitting of authority in this school has been a challenge because the hereditary office of the Heavenly Master of the Zhengyi School in China was discontinued in 1949; there are other Heavenly Masters but none in China. However, in 1995 the national Daoist Association took upon itself the authority to ordain Zhengyi priests in the hope of regulating the Zhengyi priesthood.

Officially, there are currently more than 25,000 Daoist priests and nuns with at least 1700 temples. Outside the official realm there are also many Daoist priests who are not officially sanctioned by the Daoist Association but who perform rituals and live among the common people. By tradition, they are authorised by local Daoist priests and affiliated with local Daoists altars, a somewhat simplified version of a Daoist temple. In many families the office of priest is hereditary for generations. Unregulated activities can range from orthodox Daoist liturgy to shamanistic rites. The popularity of these Daoist activities underscores the fact that Chinese rural society has a long tradition of religiosity and has preserved and perpetuated Daoism regardless of official policy and religious institutions. With the growth of economic prosperity in rural areas, especially in the coastal provinces where Daoist activities are concentrated, with a more liberal policy on religion, and with the revival of local cultural identity, Daoism – be it the officially sanctioned variety or Daoist activities which are beyond the edge of the official Daoist body – seems to be enjoying a strong comeback, at least for the time being. However, this ancient religion is facing new challenges, more as the result of the modernisation of Chinese society and the rapid growth of other religions than of government policy.

Buddhism

Like Daoism, Buddhism has a long presence in China: almost 2000 years. At times in history Buddhism has been the dominant influence over Chinese society – so dominant that the authorities have had to use administrative measures to curb its power. There was a central national Buddhist organisation until the early 1950s, when the government extended its control over religion. During the first 30 years of the People's

Republic of China Buddhism experienced a fate similar to that of other religions. Like Daoism, it emerged gradually from the ruins in the early 1980s and picked up momentum in the late 1980s as more Buddhist temples began to be restored.

There are three different types of Buddhism in China today: Tibetan Buddhism (or Lamaism), Han Buddhism (or Mahayana Buddhism) and Pali Buddhism (or Hinayana Buddhism). There is no strict ritual requirement involved in becoming a Han Buddhist, and hence there are no statistics on membership. Tibetan Buddhism is basically the religion of several ethnic minority groups such as Tibetans, Mongolians and the Tu, Moinba and Yugur people; these, together with a small number of converted Han people, total about 7.6 million. Pali Buddhism is basically the religion of the Dai, De'ang, Wa and Blang peoples in Yunnan bordering Burma and Laos; they total about 1.5 million. Of the 200,000 monks and nuns, 120,000 are Tibetan Buddhist (lamas and nuns), 10,000 are Bhiksu monks of the Pali tradition, and the rest are Han Buddhist. Together they run more than 13,000 temples, 3,000 monasteries and 19 Buddhist colleges/schools.¹⁷

Han Buddhism seems to enjoy much popularity: very large numbers of pilgrims visit the temples, especially the major ones. Its very large income (donations from devotees) is often a source of tension between the Buddhist organisation and various government ministries such as the RAB, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Park and Mountain Administration. Because of the potential lucrative income from Buddhist temples or holy sites their administration has become a complicated affair, not so much as a result of religious policy but more for financial reasons. With the economic boom in rural and urban areas there has also been a boom in temple building, and most of these temples are illegally erected. These sites, run by enterprising monks, often draw in huge amounts of income especially during festival times and the New Year period. From time to time the government demolishes them, giving administrative reasons; such events have often been reported in the foreign press as violations of religious freedom. These economic-related issues have become a major challenge to Buddhism in China as it struggles to seek its identity for the vocation of its clerics as well as to train its future leadership to cope with the rapid changes in Chinese society.¹⁸

Tibetan Buddhism has drawn wide international attention through the various powerful advocacy groups among Tibetans in exile, and particularly through the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan Buddhism issue is often disproportionately focused more on the political issue of the status of Tibet rather than on the religious teaching or institutions of this particular branch of Buddhism in China. Of the 7.6 million Tibetan Buddhists in China only about one third live in the Tibet Autonomous Region. There are in fact more Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhists in Qinghai Province than in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The monasteries in Tibet are often a sanctuary harbouring the dissidents of the Tibet independence movement; the Chinese authorities have been using heavy-handed tactics against these religious institutions in Tibet itself, but less so against Tibetan Buddhist institutions elsewhere in China.

Pali Buddhism enjoys prosperous development for it is regarded as part of the cultural identity of several national minority groups. The only major tension that has arisen with the government has been over the issue of sending children to temples as monks – a common practice in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia where Pali Buddhism is dominant. This practice interferes with the government's Education Ordinance of 18 March 1995 which stipulates that all children must follow the teaching curriculum set by the state. The authorities maintain that sending a child to a temple interrupts his normal educational programme, and that moreover it violates

the policy that religion should not be taught to children; such instruction may mean that the child is denied the right to choose his or her religion, including the right of not believing in any religion. In practice, I have noticed that many Pali Buddhist parents send their children to the temple with little interference from the government.

Islam

Islam has been in China for 1300 years. Those who follow Islam have been called the Hui, and Hui has been classified as a national minority group, the only group in China that is defined by religious affiliation. Currently there are almost 9 million Hui in China and it has been incorrectly presumed that all Hui are Muslim. It is also incorrectly assumed that they are all Chinese-speaking; many of those classified as Hui speak Tibetan or Mongolian.¹⁹ There are several other national minority groups which are basically all Muslim, such as the Uighur, Kazakh, Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Bonan and Tatar. With the Hui, these groups total about 20 million, speaking a number of languages, Turkic, Indo-Persian, Daric and Turkic-Mongolian.²⁰ The majority of the Muslims are concentrated in the north-eastern part of China bordering Central Asia. More than 95 per cent of the Chinese Muslims are Sunnis, but there are a few Shiites. There are at least 30,000 mosques with 40,000 imams and akhunds (Gladney, 2003).

When the government deals with Muslims it is hard to draw a distinction between national minority affairs and religious affairs. Very often Muslim activities are regarded as aspects of ethnic minority culture and custom which should be respected. For example, the government even gives guidelines to all publications that they should not contain jokes or other material that may offend Muslims. Instruction in the Islamic faith begins within the family at an early age, often through privately run madrassahs, and initiation rites (circumcision) are practiced among young males. Legally speaking such practices contravene religious policy in a similar way to those of Pali Buddhists who send young boys to a monastery for a few years of Buddhist education. Both practices allow young children to be exposed to religious instruction, which is legally permitted only for adults. However, in most cases the local authorities seem to turn a blind eye.

One of the most overriding issues concerning Islam in China is the link between radical Muslims and terrorists demanding an independent East Turkestan in the Xinjiang Hui Autonomous Region. This is more of a sociopolitical issue than a religious issue: it concerns the ethnic and religious accommodation of various Muslim groups as minorities *vis-à-vis* the majority Han population rather than questions to do with Islamic theocracy. Among the various Islamic groups in China there seems to be a wide continuum of different levels of accommodation. The Hui seems to be rather accommodating, while the Uighur, the second largest group with more than seven million, are at the other extreme, demanding a more separatist identity. As interaction between Chinese Muslims and Muslims in other countries increases, the Islamic extremist view is gaining ground in China; at the same time, however, the model of the Hui in China in reconciling Islamic culture with Han culture may have bearings on the continuous search for Islamic identity in a globalised world.

Protestantism

In 1949 there were about one million Chinese Protestants representing most of the major western denominations. This number declined gradually as China launched a

series of political campaigns against the Christian²¹ church. These included the severing of organisational relationships between Chinese Christian churches and their respective western counterparts, establishing a patriotic Christian association to rally the support of Chinese Christians, suppressing those Christians who did not cooperate with or submit to the leadership of the new regime, and the promoting of atheism as the state ideological orthodoxy. By the mid-1960s there were just a handful of churches still functioning in China. During the Cultural Revolution, whatever vestige of Christianity still remained in the open was destroyed by force. Many believed that Christianity had finally ceased to exist in China.

Since 1979 the government has allowed Christians to practise their faith, and to the surprise of all Christianity not only proved to have survived but also grew. In 1982 the government's estimate of the Christian population was three million, three times what it had been in 1949. During the past 20 years the Christian population has expanded at an astonishing rate, with new churches emerging in virtually every city and county in China, even in places where hitherto there was no record of Christianity. Currently, the Chinese government provides a figure of at least 16 million, and leaders of the China Christian Council put the figure at not less than 25 million.²² Almost all overseas experts (Aikman, 2003, p. 7) on the church in China would suggest a much higher figure, ranging from 40 million to 100 million.²³ There are at least 50,000 churches formally operating under the auspices of the authorities, and uncounted numbers of gatherings (or house-churches) often meeting in private households. The church-sponsored printing press has already printed more than 30 million copies of the Bible and operates more than 20 Bible schools or theological seminaries along with thousands of regional training centres or institutes. Virtually every ethnic minority group in China has some members embracing Christianity. Some ethnic groups such as the Lisu even regard Christianity as their ethnic religious identity; most Lisu in China have already embraced the Christian faith. All these developments have taken place during the past 20 years.

In 1958 the Chinese authorities ordered the various groups of Christians to unite into one single church. Since then, the China Christian Council has claimed that the Protestant Church in China is a post-denominational church. While there is, on paper, one officially recognised church institution – the China Christian Council – in practice many Christian groups within this Council follow their own ecclesiastical traditions in liturgy, sacrament and worship. Christian groups in China are further distinguished by whether they operate under the government-recognised church body, or without registration and hence illegally and liable to punishment.²⁴ As in many social sectors in China there is a vast grey area.²⁵ The autonomous Christian communities which opt not to register may be as simple as just a few believers who meet regularly to discuss faith issues in one member's living room, or as well organised as a national network with millions of followers operating its own printing press, training schools and websites.

The influence of Christianity goes beyond the church compound and is also beginning to make an impact amongst intellectuals. More than 20 universities now offer courses in Christianity and most campuses in major cities have Christian fellowships. In recent years there has also arisen a 'Back to Jerusalem' movement which calls for 200,000 Chinese missionaries to evangelise westwards, through Central Asia and eventually to the Middle East ending in Jerusalem.²⁶ Some groups had already been working, clandestinely, in those countries (Hattaway, 2003). It seems that the once tiny Protestant community in China has mushroomed into an influential social force that can be felt not only in almost all sectors of Chinese society but also

beyond the borders. Some argue that the centre of world Christianity has already shifted from the West to Asia and have even predicted that Protestant missionaries from China might be the next major wave of Christian expansion in the world.²⁷

Catholicism

In the political context of the Cold War the newly established Chinese government regarded the Vatican as a reactionary force hindering the progress of revolution. Intense pressure was placed on the Chinese Catholics as they were torn between the loyalty to the Papacy, which adopted an anticommunist stance, and the Chinese government, which demanded patriotism, that is political loyalty to the CPC. The Catholic Church in China finally broke off its formal relationship with the Holy See in 1957 and consecrated its own bishops to replace those foreign bishops expelled from China or those Chinese bishops who had fled the communists. These consecrations were done without approval from the Holy See. Since then the Catholic Church in China has established its own hierarchy, as guided by the Chinese authorities. The Vatican regards the original hierarchy – bishops living abroad as well as those jailed bishops who refused to cooperate with the Chinese authorities – as the legitimate Chinese Catholic Church. Since then the members of the Chinese Catholic Church have been divided into two factions, pro-Roman and pro-government, a situation not uncommon among the Catholic churches in Soviet-bloc countries during the Cold War. During the Cultural Revolution virtually all Catholic activities, including those of the pro-government Catholics, were banned.

Like other religious groups, the Catholic Church in China has emerged rapidly since the 1980s and has grown into a sizeable community. However, the division between the Pro-Roman Church (often called the Underground Church) and the Pro-government Church (often called the Open Church or the Patriotic Church) still goes on, and it carries not only religious but also political and diplomatic implications as China enters the international community. Currently there are at least 12 million Chinese Catholics, 74 bishops and more than 2000 priests in the Open Church and 46 bishops and at least 1000 priests in the Underground Church.²⁸ Both factions run their own seminaries with currently more than 1000 seminarians at the 19 seminaries of the Open Church and at least 700 seminarians in the Underground Church.²⁹

The very nature of the Roman Catholic Church requires all Roman Catholic communities throughout the world to submit to the authority of the pope, and this fact, together with the fact that the Vatican is a sovereign state, have often complicated the status of the Catholic Church in China. The Chinese Constitution rejects any foreign domination over religious bodies in China, and this suggests that the Chinese Catholic Church may not submit to the authority of the pope, who is a foreigner, or the Vatican, which is a foreign country. Further, the Vatican is one of the very few states that retain full diplomatic ties with Republic of China (Taiwan – a renegade province in the eyes of the Chinese government). Another issue is the Holy See's recognition of the underground bishops and their parallel hierarchy – illegal in the eyes of the government – which puts the government-recognised Open Church in an ecclesiastical limbo. Competition for final authority over the Chinese Church (the pope or the Chinese government), recognition of political representation of China (the regime in Taipei or that in Beijing), and the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church in China (the Open Church or the Underground Church) epitomise Sino-Vatican tension. Sino-Vatican rapprochement was on the horizon as both parties engaged in intensive negotiations in 1999–2000, but these negotiations came to a halt as the two

sides could not agree on the question of the administrative authority of the church in China or on a formula for episcopal appointment. Relations deteriorated still further with the controversy over the canonisation of 120 martyred saints of China by the pope on 1 October 2000, the National Day of the People's Republic of China. Despite the lack of improvement in Sino-Vatican relationships, however, there is every sign to suggest that the Catholic Church in China is still growing.

Other Religions

Russian Orthodox

Russian Orthodox began their presence in China as the tsar's legation stationed in Peking about 300 years ago. Russian merchants began to settle in towns bordering the Qing Empire as Russia expanded its influence in the Far East. Gradually some ethnic Chinese converted to the Russian Orthodox faith. The major influx of Orthodox believers took place when the White Russian Army and other Russians who fled the Red Army during the Bolshevik Revolution ended up in China (mostly in Harbin, Shanghai and Yiling). By the late 1940s there were sizeable Russian Orthodox communities with different ecclesiastical loyalties: to the Moscow Patriarchate or various Russian Orthodox communities in exile. In 1956 the Orthodox Church in China (*Kitaiskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov'*) formally became autonomous from the Moscow Patriarchate, but gradually went into obscurity as membership dwindled with the massive exodus of ethnic Russians from China to (mainly) Australia in the early 1960s. Church activity came to a halt in 1966.³⁰

The Chinese Russian Orthodox Church did not resume its presence until the mid-1980s in Harbin³¹ and the Harbin Orthodox church has been officially the only functioning Russian Orthodox community in China recognised by the government.³² Since the death of the last government-recognised Chinese Russian Orthodox priest – Gregory Zhu – in October 2000 there has officially no longer been a functioning Russian Orthodox Church in China. However there are more than a dozen communities of Orthodox believers in Beijing, Shanghai, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang as well as several validly ordained Chinese Russian Orthodox priests whom the government has not recognised. In February 1997 the Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate declared that it had the religious obligation to care for the Russian Orthodox Church in China. In 2000 the Moscow patriarch informed the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs of his willingness to send Orthodox clergy to China, but the Chinese authorities rejected such a proposal. However, the Moscow Patriarchate has already sent itinerant priests to minister to the Russian Orthodox believers in China, currently numbering more than 20,000 with about a dozen functioning communities and several churches (some newly built). There are currently at least 18 Chinese Orthodox students studying at seminaries in Moscow and St Petersburg and since August 2004 the Chinese authorities have recognised their status as theological students. In 2003 the Moscow Patriarchate re-established the Russian Orthodox parish of St Peter and St Paul in Hong Kong which ceased to exist in 1970 when the previous Russian Orthodox priest died. This parish has the mandate to take care of the Russian Orthodox in Hong Kong and more than 1000 foreign expatriate Russian Orthodox who live in the Pearl Delta in Southern China; regular church services have been conducted among these expatriates.³³ With the current developments among the Russian Orthodox in China and Hong Kong, the story of the Orthodox Church in China is

far from over,³⁴ contrary to the suggestion of some Chinese scholars that this community is on the decline (Le, 1999, p. 199).

Judaism

There were Jewish merchants in China for several centuries. A viable community was established in Kaifeng, Henan. Heavy sinicisation, along with lack of contact with other Jewish communities, resulted in the Chinese Jews losing their customs and faith. Although there are a few who claim to be descendants of Jews, none so far have been recognised by the State of Israel as Jewish. From the late nineteenth century, many Jews from all over the world came to China, especially Shanghai, to conduct business activities. In the process, they built their own communities with synagogues. Later these Jews were augmented by a large influx of Jews fleeing the Nazis in the late 1930s. Almost all of them left China, however, in the late and early 1950s, leaving synagogue buildings in many cities in China. There is no record of Chinese proselytes – of Chinese who converted to Judaism. Judaism has thus ceased to exist in China as a viable community since the early 1950s. During the past 20 years, however, there has been a large influx of foreign Jews who now work in China. Currently there are at least two functioning Jewish communities in China with their own rabbis, one in Shanghai and one in Beijing. These two communities include no Chinese nationals.

The Mormons

The Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) had no mission activity in China before 1949 and no Mormon church was established in Mainland China. Since the early 1980s some Mormons have been working in China in various capacities. They have established their own religious activities in many cities with the tacit approval of the local authorities. With the increasing numbers of Chinese travelling aboard and some becoming Mormons before they return to China there are now increasing numbers of Chinese nationals who belong to the Mormon Church. The Chinese authorities have not, however, officially recognised the Mormon Church as a valid religion in China. Thus these Chinese Mormons are in a legal limbo; legally they cannot join in foreigners' Mormon meetings because government policy segregates foreigners' religious activities from those of Chinese nationals.³⁵ However, in Beijing the local Public Security Bureau allows Chinese national Mormons to join the expatriate Mormon meeting. The Chinese authorities are in a dilemma: if they recognise the Mormons, this will open the floodgates to other world religions wishing to claim legitimacy in China; but to refuse to grant rights to Mormons seems perverse in view of the fact that they are recognised in almost all countries. Further, Mormons in China who are Chinese nationals (and who probably adopted this faith while they were overseas) can claim their right to freedom of religious belief as stated in the Chinese Constitution.

The Baha'i

The Bah'ai faith was introduced into China in the 1930s and gained some popularity. There was a small group of Chinese believers in Shanghai called Datong Jia. In 1950 this small community ceased to exist. There are Baha'i believers in Hong Kong and Macau, however, who have initiated many social and charitable programmes in China since the 1980s. Many Chinese nationals have become Baha'i

through contact with these programmes. The main activity of the Baha'i is meetings in believers' homes; they thus have no need for a sacred building. There is no professional clergy; all leaders are laypeople serving on a voluntary basis. Baha'i activity in China is therefore at very low visibility, rather like that of the house churches of the Protestant community. Increasing numbers of foreigners who are members of the Baha'i faith are businessmen and professionals. They have their own private meetings at home and constitute an active community. The government seems to know of the presence of both Chinese and foreign Baha'i in China; it neither recognises them as constituting a legitimate religious body, nor attempts to suppress their activities.

Folk Religion

Chinese folk religion denotes the traditional worship of a wide range of local deities, mostly by Han Chinese; these deities are neither Daoist nor Buddhist. Associated with this worship are a variety of spiritual figures such as witches, sorcerers, fortunetellers, geomancy masters and unlicensed Daoist priests. The law bans all these practices as manifestations of feudal superstition. In practice these are religious phenomena that have existed for centuries and are deeply ingrained in the psyche of the ordinary people, especially in rural areas. Villages often erect temples to honour their local deities; these temples, neither Daoist nor Buddhist, are scattered all over the Chinese countryside. There is no central organisation; each temple operates independently, supported by local devotees. It often happens that the local authorities even support such activities in order to boost local community identities. One popular cult, that of Mazu in Fujian, equally popular with fishermen on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, is even encouraged by the government in order to boost good diplomatic ties between Taiwan and China! Folk religion is not clearly covered by the government's religious policy and regulations, but it may perhaps represent the largest amount of religious activity, cover the largest areas, and involve the largest number of the population in China. It is certainly underreported and understudied.

'Evil Cults'

The government regards any religion that may pose a threat to public security, cause physical harm to the population or challenge the ruling regime as an 'evil cult'; such a religion is prosecuted by law and suppressed by the PSB. Article 300 in the Criminal Law provides legal provision for this.³⁶ Two of the best-known examples of 'evil cults' are Yiguandao and Falungong. Classified government documents reveal that in 2000 the government had a list of 16 religious groups which it defined as 'evil cults' and for which it had issued warrants for nationwide prosecution.³⁷ Many of these groups are pseudo-Christian groups of a radical nature; others are indigenous groups which can be classified as New Religious Movements. Some, such as the South China Church, preach a Christian doctrine that is no different from that of most Protestant churches in other parts of the world. What standard the Chinese authorities use to determine whether a group is an 'evil cult' or not is something of a mystery to religious scholars. Political considerations and administrative expedience seem to be the main criteria. Local authorities often use the label 'evil cult' as a convenient pretext for subjecting this or another undesirable religious group to various forms of abuses.

Trends in Religious Development

China's Reform and Open policy, together with the catalyst of WTO accession, will usher in a new era of social transformation in China which will involve such phenomena as economic polarisation, regional differentiation, a dynamic flow of population, new classification of social classes, and new opportunities. All these changes will radically reshape post-WTO China into a society full of paradox and contradictions. It will be a society that opts for the open market but under autocratic rule, a land where the extremely rich and the poor coexist, a job market filled with great opportunities and devastation, a state where the ruling Communist Party has capitalist members while trying to protect the proletariat, a society with a market policy of the survival of the fittest in a socialist framework which attempts to distribute resources fairly to all people. WTO accession seems to be generating an atmosphere of euphoria, optimism and opportunity for some, and of uncertainty, instability, ambiguity and insecurity for many.

It seems that in times of paradigm shifts such as the radical socio-economic transformation China is now experiencing people tend to look for forms of permanency such as religion. Although the CPC's teaching is the official ideology, this is far from being widely accepted. Religions have become an attractive realm where people facing changes can seek new meanings in life. This phenomenon is already evident in areas of widely divergent character. Henan is an economically depressed area with a large farming population lagging far behind the nation's economic progress; it also has the highest percentage of Christians among its rural population. The government suspects that religion will gain more recruits as people struggle with economic survival. Wenzhou is an economic boom area with the highest proportion of businessmen in China. The government has previously thought that economic progress would leave little room for religious development; but Wenzhou has perhaps the highest percentage of Christian population in China in its municipalities.³⁸ The growth of religion includes the officially sanctioned religions such as Christianity or Buddhism, as well as quasi-religious sects such as Falungong and so-called cults such as Eastern Lightning.³⁹ In short, there is a general trend of growth in religion as China gradually merges into the global economic order.⁴⁰ Such developments may carry profound implications for the shape of Chinese society in the making and produce a creative tension challenging the political frontier between the ruling Party (CPC) and the general population (Chan, 2004a).

Increase in Social Significance

All the available official statistics and reliable sources suggest that religion in China is on the rise. All officially recognised religious groups record continuous growth in terms of believers, religious venues, clergy and activities. In areas where religious believers are concentrated, such as Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet, Muslims in Xinjiang, or Catholics in rural Hebei, the religious intensity is clearly felt by all. As for non-official religions such as folk religion, anyone on a cursory tour in the Chinese countryside would notice the wide spread of folk religious activities especially during festival times.

Besides the increase in the visibility of religion within designated religious venues such as mosques and temples, religious influences are also being felt among nonreligious sectors of society. In the past, religion was a taboo subject in the public sector. The public's thirst for knowledge about religion, long denied by the state,

compounded by the liberal market economy, are now stimulating the availability of a whole range of religious-related products to the public. The market-driven publishing industry in China seems to have spotted the overwhelming demand from the public, mostly not religious believers, for books on religion. Currently books on religion, whether doctrinal or devotional, are seen everywhere in bookshops, which was not the case a decade ago; they are usually best sellers. Newspaper articles on religion, discussions on religion in Internet chat-rooms, religious names on commercial products, and religious music are commonly available to the public as people increasingly search for a transcendent meaning to life.

In academic circles, one of the most popular social science subjects in universities is religion. Currently more than 30 universities, including most of the nationally endowed institutions, offer courses or programmes on religious studies. Religion seems to be capturing the imagination of academics in search of a moral framework for the future of China as an alternative to the current state-advocated socialist morality. Reliable information suggests that on most campuses there are informal religious groups such as Christian fellowships or Buddhist study groups; officially such things are not supposed to exist.

All these areas of religious influence are not part of the programme of the official religious institutions, yet their influence can be far-reaching especially in terms of social values and ideas. Every sign suggests that such influence is beginning to gain momentum.

Growth in Political Maturity

The traditional 'state over religion' model of government administration of religious affairs relies on a group of subservient religious leaders who are reliable in executing the government's policies. The public perception of religious groups in China, particularly those sanctioned by the government, is that they are nothing other than an extension of the government with the purpose of controlling religion. However, the general withdrawal of government social involvement in the interests of a slimmer government, along with an increase in shouldering of social needs by the private sector, are encouraging the religious groups to strive for more autonomy from the government. It has been observed that the religious leadership seems to be gaining more control over the administration of religious issues and that it is growing more sophisticated in dealing with the government.⁴¹ It seems that religious groups can no longer be trusted as strict supporters of the government and that they have their own agenda for their own interests. As more government reforms are put in place, it is expected that religious groups will gain more autonomy to strive for their own sociopolitical agenda.

When religious organisations were re-established in the early 1980s they were hierarchical institutions modelled after the contemporary government's administrative apparatus. One of the main features of the Reform and Open policy is the empowerment of regional authorities for a more flexible response to economic change. A tension has hence gradually developed between the central government and local governments and such tension has become a vital source of initiative for reform of the government's administrative structures. With the younger generations of religious leaders – most of them well educated and many having studied abroad – replacing the top echelon of leadership, there is more diversity within each religious organisation than previously allowed. Such a development reflects changes in the religious organisations making them more relevant in the face of social changes.

There is a new sense of vitality as these younger religious leaders exercise their authority in a much more open society than the one in which their predecessors lived.

In the 1980s virtually all religions in China were in survival mode, trying to re-emerge from the ruins in a hostile environment. Most of the religious leaders could hardly believe that they could conduct religious activities in China again especially immediately after the haunting experiences of the Cultural Revolution. As China progressed in social reform in the 1990s, the religious groups were in consolidation mode as all of them strove to build up their clerical ranks as well as reclaiming their confiscated properties; this was a period of rapid growth of religious venues as well as membership. Currently Chinese religious organisations are all heading for expansion, extending their influence into the secular sector by propagating their faith directly through various private means, and demonstrating their faith by reaching out into the community beyond the four walls of religious venues through social or charitable programmes. This form of silent witness is a subtle political defiance of the government's policy of restricting religious activities within designated religious venues while yet remaining within legal boundaries, and may become a powerful means of extending religion into secular society.

Growth in Diversity

Not only are all religions in China growing in size; they are also growing in terms of variety of structure and expression. As noted earlier, religions in China tend to exist in two modes, official and unofficial. Current trends suggest that religions in China may have a multifaceted rather than a simply dualistic existence, paralleling social development into a multi-strata society. It is no longer a secret, for example, that most of the government-recognised bishops of the official Catholic Church do in fact have papal approval (recognition) and that their dioceses cannot be classified as either pro-Rome or pro-government. Similarly, many folk religious temples are neither exclusively Daoist nor exclusively Buddhist, but can claim to be both, since folk religion in China often contains both Daoist and Buddhist elements. As for the elusive and popular family gatherings in the Christian church, many of these groups are loosely linked with the official church but are not under its authority. The existence of vast grey areas, common in Chinese society, provides for a diverse expression of religious manifestations which are often beyond the scope of the government's administrative categories.

There is also an increase in the variety of types of religion. Many new types of syncretistic religion are emerging, based on all the five accepted religions except Islam. Eastern Lighting (*dongfang shandian*), for example, is based on the Christian faith but teaches of a new Messiah who was incarnated in China as a woman. Falungong is based on teachings from Buddhism; eventually a deified Master emerged. The Established King Sect (*biliwang*) drew inspiration from Christianity and developed its own Heavenly Court on earth. The banned Yiguandao owed much of its teachings to Daoism. These New Religious Movements (NRMs), commonly tolerated in most western countries, are all banned by China under the anti-'evil cult' Article 300 of the Criminal Law. It is fascinating to observe that despite their prohibition by the civil authorities and general denunciation by the five recognised religions there is no evidence to suggest that NRMs are on the decline in China. On the contrary, more and more new religions are constantly being recorded ranging from the Christian Nudist Sect to the Cold Water Sect (*lengshuijiao*).⁴² As China faces more structural

changes, social turbulence will become fertile ground for NRMs, a phenomenon that has already been observed in postsoviet Russia.

As well as locally developed religions, international religions too are on the rise in China. As mentioned earlier, increased interaction and contact between Chinese nationals and foreigners are expected in the future and more commercial activity is on the horizon. There will be more Chinese living abroad for various reasons, and these may acquire local religions and bring them back to China – a normal process of cultural-religious transmission, but one which is quite new to China. With an increasing number of followers of these religions, and help from coreligionists abroad, these believers may set up new religious groups in China. They will mostly likely gain recognition from international religious organisations, but not necessarily from the Chinese authorities, if the example of the Mormons and the Baha'i is anything to go by. Clearly all these trends are challenging current religious policy in various areas.

Challenges at Socio-Political Frontiers

The current definition of religion by the Chinese government is grossly outdated in several areas. The government takes the Marxist view on religion which was based on a Judeo-Christian model with institutional hierarchy, clergy, canons, doctrines and traditions. This model, developed in the nineteenth century, fails to account for Oriental religions like Daoism where membership is elusive, younger religions like the Mormons or the Baha'i which have no professional clergy and in which all leaders are volunteer laypeople, some syncretistic religions like Chinese folk religion which have no clear canons or sets of doctrines, and esoteric religions like New Religious Movements. It seems that if the government does not fundamentally redefine its understanding of religion in a much more modern framework, as it has done in the economic area by baptising capitalism as socialism with Chinese characteristics, its current outdated definition of religion will face ever greater problems as more new forms of religious manifestation emerge in China.

Let us take the example of traditional Chinese folk religion. The government is rather ambiguous in this area. On the one hand, folk religion is not, strictly speaking, Buddhism or Daoism. On the other hand, the government does not eliminate it by force and tolerates it in general. With WTO accession, there will be a more diverse China, with the rise of regionalism. One of the markings of Chinese regionalism is regional culture which always involves local legends and local deities. There has been a marked resurgence of local folk religion. For example the birthday of the local deity Mazu of Fujian and Taiwan, which has become a local festival, may become the new focus for the local community. There has been a rapid increase in temple building honouring traditional local deities in coastal regions where wealth is being concentrated. Such foci will help to shape new local identities in the face of the identity crisis that appears after the loss of traditional nation-wide social classifications. The wealth generated from commercial activities, especially in coastal provinces, will add fuel to these religious phenomena as well as strengthening local identities. Even in poverty-stricken areas, such as the northern yellow-earth plains in Shaanxi, the increasing popularity of local temples and deities would seem to show that local peasants have more confidence in petitioning local deities for help than in expecting help from the local government in times of crisis such as drought. A general loss of confidence in secular authority prompts people to seek assistance from the transcendent realm; this is a part of daily reality in traditional China. There are signs that the government is trying to regulate the spontaneous activities of folk religion by

experimental administrative measures.⁴³ However, these measures just give symptomatic relief. What is needed is a more systematic treatment that touches the core of the issue – the definition of religion.

The government claims the right to define what is a lawful religion and what is not and recognises only five religions. This self-claimed right is constantly challenged not only by religious believers in China but by the international community because those who are not regarded as belonging to the legally accepted religions face prosecution by the authorities. It ignores the reality that China is open to the world and that religious transmission is a normal cultural phenomenon. WTO accession will also usher in a new wave of foreign influences as multinational corporations (MNCs) compete for market shares in the newly available domestic market in China. The average Chinese will also pay more attention to the international scene, be it economic, political or cultural. The Chinese will therefore have more contact with foreign values, including religions such as Christianity or Hinduism, and knowledge of these will spread to Chinese who have had little exposure so far. Meanwhile many mission-minded religious organisations may well use WTO accession as a window of opportunity for launching mission campaigns directed at China, be it to empower already existing Chinese religious organisations, or to launch out into frontier areas, or to target Chinese outside China. Religion is no longer a taboo subject or an outdated ideology as formerly asserted by the CPC, but in reality is part of the heritage of the world's civilisation.

More foreigners will come to work in China as WTO accession increases the tempo of foreign involvement. These expatriates will not only cluster in the major commercial cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, where there are already well-established expatriate communities, but will also spread to smaller cities in the interior of China, bringing along with them their lifestyle, values and religious faiths. There are currently more than 700 Russian Orthodox expatriates living in Shenzhen and Guangzhou regions, and the patriarch of Moscow has already assigned a priest to care for the religious needs of these people. China will soon face a demand from foreigners to have more international chaplaincy services provided. Many of their religious groups have no counterparts in China, and hence the officially sanctioned religious organisations in China will find it difficult to provide spiritual care – a situation unforeseeable just a few years ago. The situation is likely to be further complicated by the fact that more intermarriage between foreigners and local Chinese citizens will take place. The current religious policy of separating foreign and national religious services is likely to face new challenges in dealing with the new reality of families of mixed nationalities.⁴⁴ Will foreigners be allowed to go to expatriate religious services with family members who are Chinese nationals technically barred from such services under the current policy? Will foreign clergy be allowed to minister to their own people as well as to the latter's spouses and dependents who are in China? These questions stretch to the limit the existing regulations, which are far from adequate to address these issues.

Denying freedom of religious belief to those Chinese nationals who embrace a faith other than the five recognised ones is against the Chinese Constitution and all international standards on religious freedom. A rigid definition of this kind also places the government in embarrassing situations, for example denying recognition to a world religion such as the Mormon Church while many members of this church are influential business investors in China, such as J. W. Marriott with his hotel chain. The government will eventually have to recognise the reality that there are legitimate religious groups in China beyond the traditional five. Once it has done so, however,

any respectable world religion will be able to claim such recognition, and the government needs to find new ways of approving lawful religion, or else simply forsake such authority.

The government currently imposes rather strong control over religious organisations, hoping to curb the spread of religion, for religion is still an ideological competitor to the CPC. The more religion develops, the less credible the teaching of the CPC becomes. Working with a hierarchical-institutional model of the religious group, the government's control mechanisms concentrate on visible activities, physical venues and statistics on believers and clergy, with the assumption that all religious activities are well defined in space-time – a static environment. This kind of assumption fails to account for the tremendous impact that religion can have on society in intangible forms, in such areas as moral values, social goodwill and academic stimulation, where the social status as well as social influence of religion are being subtly enhanced without its having a high physical profile.

As noted above, the government's religious policy is based on Marxist theory developed in a context vastly different from that of Chinese society today. Unless the government reformulates this policy, basing it on the empirical study of religious phenomena today, it will not only be unable to limit religious influence, but it will also possibly find itself inducing religions in China to channel their energy not into institutional expansion but into subtle social influence leading perhaps to wider religious influence in society.

Another factor which will bring new socio-religious dynamics to China is the staggering number of internal migrants and transients (officially called the floating population), currently amounting to at least 10 per cent of the population, or about 130 million people.⁴⁵ On the one hand, these internal migrants in general are highly susceptible to religion. Many uprooted peasant workers making a living in a coastal factory and longing for communal support will find faith, hope and care in a local Christian church to sustain them during this transient period. Many of these workers may embrace new forms of faith while living away from home and bring their faiths back to their home villages where hitherto they were unknown. The transmitting of religion in this way is totally unpredictable; there is no clear pattern in how a peasant worker may travel. On the other hand, increasing market opportunities in remote, obscure and hard-to-reach places will prompt business people to travel there, bringing with them new religions as well as new commodities. Many of these people, especially from Wenzhou, are religious believers. Wenzhou businessmen have for example established perhaps the only government-sanctioned Christian gathering point in Lhasa, Tibet. Soon there will be small clusters of religious believers in places where no one would have predicted their existence. These new religious groups may live in harmony or in tension with the already existing religious groups. Thus the social development of China will increase the population migration dynamic and generate complex patterns of both the dissemination of and the interaction between religions. Current administrative control, based on the model of a static society, is grossly inadequate to address these dynamic changes in society.

The government's policy of insisting on national administration of religion is a legacy of the past when foreigners controlled foreigner-introduced religion. Almost all young post-colonial countries have introduced a policy of this kind when nationalism has been a rallying point for national reconstruction. China has travelled a long way from the post-colonial era, however, and most economic sectors in China are joining the global economic order where nationalism is increasingly becoming an obsolete concept. The major economic forces are the multi-national companies (MNCs), which

no longer identify with any nation-state; shareholders especially belong to many nationalities with some even bearing multiple citizenship. In fact major religions are often forerunners of MNCs and often serve as a bridge or an informal buffer zone between nation-states. To demand that Chinese religion be exclusively nationalistic is to go against the global trend and to deny the positive contribution of religious communities to international relations. Such a policy, political in nature, easily triggers resentment among religious believers who naturally like to have closer ties with their coreligionists abroad and less cooperation with a government that imposes it.

The expansion of the Chinese economy into the globalised market will also have an impact on Chinese religious believers beyond the borders of China. One of the opportunities provided by the globalised market is for Chinese businessmen to capture a larger share of the global market by WTO treaties. Chinese businessmen have already been making their impact in newly emerging markets such as Central Asia, Eastern Europe, South East Asia and the Middle East especially in commodities such as electric household appliances, clothing and motorcycles. Many of these businessmen are religious believers and they may also spread their faith along their trading routes. Chinese Christian businessmen have already established their own churches or fellowships in most major European cities and also in cities such as Ulan Bator (Mongolia), Bucharest (Romania), Budapest (Hungary) and Khabarovsk (Russia). Similarly Chinese immigrants, legal or otherwise, who come from the same region may bring their own local deities along to the places where they establish their new homes: Mazu is now worshipped in Brooklyn, New York, and Yiguandao has established branches even in Romania. The newcomers are making an impact in the local Chinese community, as these religious groups may often be some of the very few organised Chinese communities providing social support and services for their fellow kinsmen.⁴⁶

The expansions of China's global influence may well open doors for Chinese religious believers to have access to other parts of the world, and the missiological and ecclesiological significance of this should not be underestimated, especially as Chinese are politically accepted by virtually every country, even by those missiologically hard-to-access countries such as North Korea, Cuba and Iraq.⁴⁷ What is more, there will be new dynamics between these migrant religious gatherings and the local religious groups, as the groups formed by the migrants may have stronger affiliation with their coreligionists at home than with those living next door in the host country. One can imagine, for example, a Chinese Protestant group in Wittenberg which knows nothing about Luther, has nothing to do with the local Lutheran Synod, and in fact is an offshoot from a nonregistered church in Henan using hymns printed in Nanjing. The continuous exodus of Chinese immigrants to other countries, legal or otherwise, may in fact usher in a new era of religious transmission as these Chinese believers bring their faith to a foreign land. (The number of Chinese in the diaspora increased from 22 million in 1985 to 33 million by the end of the century.) The current Back To Jerusalem Movement advocated by some nonregistered Christian churches in China claims that it is planning to send 200,000 Chinese missionaries abroad, mainly to Muslim-dominated regions. If this happened, would these missionaries be open to the accusation of violating the religious sovereign rights of their host or mission-target countries?

Some Scenarios

There is much conventional wisdom as to the future of China: from the rosy future of a developed nation with a population consisting predominantly of middle class families with their own cars and apartments, to the doom theory of economic collapse

leading to the breakup of the nation.⁴⁸ Similarly, predictions about religion in China range from that of increasing government suppression generating more religious martyrs to that of continuing religious revival whereby most Chinese will come to identify with one or another religion.⁴⁹ It is evident that there are multiple variants which can affect the outcome of an event, and some scholars have begun to employ a matrix scenario, of the kind mostly used in business applications, to predict China's future.⁵⁰

The following is an attempt to develop four scenarios for the future of religion in China based on two variants: religious policy and social development. As noted earlier, current religious policy is based on a classical interpretation of religion; the administrative model is institutional-hierarchical and the general guidelines are prohibitive. I shall call this 'Restrictive Policy'. If the Chinese government were to adopt a policy similar to that which it has adopted in the economic and social fields, analogous to religious policy in most developed countries such as the G-9 countries, it might have the following features: legitimisation of NRMs as well as other world religions; the permitting of diverse autonomous institutions within the various religions; freedom of religion rather than just of religious belief; and the permitting of foreign involvement in religious activities in China and vice versa. I shall call this 'Reform Policy'. The 'social development' variant starts from the fact that China is being transformed from a planned economy and rural-based authoritarian country into a market economy and an urban-based civil society. Such a transition is unprecedented in the history of China. An optimistic view will envisage a transition with minimum social shock and people's quality of life gradually and uniformly raised along with the increase in both rule of law and people's political participation. I shall call this 'Smooth Transition'. A pessimistic view will see this transition leading to huge income polarity, regional economic gaps, massive rural unemployment, rampant corruption, general social unrest, uncontrolled internal population flow, and eventually ineffective central authority leading to the breakup of the country into rival economic-political fractions; in short, chaos. I shall call this 'Rough Transition'.

Bringing together these two pairs of variants, we have the following matrix combinations:

Religious Policy:	<i>Restrictive Policy</i>	<i>Reform Policy</i>
Social Transition:		
<i>Smooth Transition</i>	I: Victim Model	III: Teacher Model
<i>Rough Transition</i>	II: Revolutionary Model	IV: Philanthropist Model

Scenario One: Restrictive Policy with Smooth Transition – Victim Model

With the increase in believers across the religious spectrum as people seek transcendent values after their basic physical needs are met, the current government institutional-hierarchical model will recognise that religious organisations are inadequate to embrace the demands of religious believers. Protestants, for example, are by very definition diverse in expression, united in basic faith matters but not uniformly adhering to one structure. More and more autonomous Protestant groups are appearing, and these groups are much more sophisticated than their predecessors in communication and in connecting with groups abroad as Chinese society progressively opens up. They will no longer be satisfied with passive religious activities contained within a fixed venue supervised by government cadres and will

want more freedom for diverse expression as enjoyed by their coreligionists abroad. Other religious believers will voice demands similar to those of the Christians. The various Muslim groups will want closer ties with their fellow believers in the Middle East, Catholics will want closer communion with Rome, some fringe Daoist/Buddhist groups which are regarded as practising folk religion will assert their religious orthodoxy and aspire to be recognised as legally accepted Buddhist/Daoist groups. Armed with better financial resources, modern communication networks and closer international ties, the dissenting groups both within the government-backed religious bodies and outside those bodies will make their causes internationally known. Meanwhile the number of world religions and locally developed NRMs emerging will continue to increase and attract new followers as the society becomes more open-minded and individuals become more concerned about their existential reality in the context of material well-being.

As seen above, however, the government's restrictive policy allows no diversity or freedom beyond the government-defined types of religion and parameters of activities. Restricted by the current policy, many religious groups are forced to exist in the grey areas on the edge of the illegal zone. As China heads towards the status of a state ruled by law, the PSB will be called in to arrest and prosecute those who step out of bounds. The number of such cases will escalate, but China will claim that it is acting in accordance with the law to punish criminals, using justifications similar to those it uses for its present treatment of Falungong. Outside the government-registered groups and activities, the bulk of believers will operate clandestinely and will channel their energy into preserving their freedom of religious expression. Unlike the situation in the 1980s and 1990s, when religious believers had limited resources, thanks to the smooth social transition most believers will now be well-to-do with an enormous amount of social resources at their disposal. With such resources in hand, they may well secure their alternative form of religious expression via one of the oldest Chinese administrative phenomena: corruption. The government's cadres in religious affairs and related ministries will soon discover the wealth that can be generated from their authority over religious believers, especially those who are defined as stepping out of line.

A new dynamic will soon develop: victimised religious groups cohabiting with corrupted government officials. Taking a pragmatic rather than an ideological stance, the government will be unlikely to surrender its power because of the obvious interests at stake, and religious believers will continue to live as victimised people so long as they can afford to pay the price and survive with limited freedom. The government will take them hostage for ransom. As for the officially sanctioned groups, they will most likely try to dissociate themselves from the non-sanctioned groups in order to preserve their *status quo* in the eyes of the government, in the same way that various religious groups today vehemently denounce Falungong. The officially sanctioned groups will thus further alienate themselves from the non-sanctioned groups as well as losing credibility with the general public, as the latter is likely to have stronger sympathy for the victimised or marginalised groups. The international community will keep on condemning China for human rights abuses, but China will feel no need to take heed of such condemnation (Wong, 2001), for it will already have become a powerful economic-political power with sufficient bargaining strength to ignore it.⁵¹ Religion in China will thus mostly be playing the role of a victim constantly at the mercy of the ever-stronger Chinese government, somewhat like the situation in the mid-Ming Dynasty era in China (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) when there was a relatively stable society with strong governmental control over religious groups and harsh punishments meted out to unorthodox religious groups.

Scenario Two: Restrictive Policy with Rough Transition – Revolutionary Model

As cheaper agricultural imports flood into China, one of the most devastated areas will be the agricultural sector because local grain will cost about 25 per cent more than imported grain. Most farms will be bankrupted, and this will generate several hundred million unemployed farmers. Only those with high value-high yields in joint venture agri-cooperatives, clustering in coastal regions, will thrive. After a couple of major floods in the central provinces, the refugees – mostly unemployed peasants – will swamp the urban areas, creating megalopolises that will drain the meagre resources designated for far smaller populations. Regional differences will widen greatly between the coastal and inner provinces. A few rich individuals will own most of the wealth and, of course, power. Regional governments will form strategic alliances to protect their interests against a weak central authority – a modern version of warlordism. The ineffective and bureaucratic banking systems will fail to respond effectively to speculation on the RMB in the international market, and this will lead to high interest rates and high inflation. The wealth of the once thriving middle class will vaporise overnight as a result of the crash of the financial market, the sudden devaluation of the RMB and the shutdown of most factories because of over-production and a shrinking domestic market compounded by the negative effect of the increasing cost of imported raw materials such as oil and steel. Hoping to rescue the situation, the hardliners will declare war against Taiwan under the battlecry of unification. This war will further bleed the already anaemic central coffers, and drag the army into an expensive and prolonged occupation of positions defending the main urban centres and supply lines of Taiwan. At the same time, several regional separatist movements will be causing internal conflicts in all border provinces. The unification of Korea will cause the destabilisation of the north-east region of China where there are large areas inhabited by ethnic Koreans. The current mass-scale foreign investors and firms will relocate to less risky areas like Eastern Europe and South East Asia. This rough transition will be similar to the situation in Russia in the first few postsoviet years as the state struggled with economic transition and the Chechen War, but on a much more complex and larger scale.

In times of chaos people usually seek to transcend reality and turn to faith. If China experiences rough transition, all religions will boom. The officially sanctioned religious organisations will experience a surge of membership; this will strain their meagre teaching capacities and will lead to a low quality of religious understanding among the new members and thus produce a breeding ground for the development of syncretist or alternative teachings, NRMs or ‘evil cults’ in eyes of the authorities. At the same time, the already existing non-sanctioned religions, such as the NRMs and dissenting groups among the five recognised religions (underground churches and newly imported religions), will all draw followers seeking for meaning in life. The restrictive religious policy will not allow religion to involve itself in social affairs, and religious believers will thus be unable to contribute their energy to helping to stabilise social turmoil. They will be able to offer only religious teachings emphasising otherworldliness. Similarly, religious believers will not be allowed to involve themselves in politics.

Restrictive government policies on religious affairs, compounded by the decline of social stability, may turn many religious groups to focus on millennium teaching, naming the time of the end of the world and hoping for a new era of peace and prosperity. All major religions in fact contain eschatological teaching of this kind. Many groups of religious believers throughout history have engaged actively in

politics in order to usher in the new era. Millennium teaching is very attractive to desolate people when they have nothing to lose. Teachings of this kind may quickly generate momentum by drawing in people who are disappointed with the current regime and who want to do something to change the situation. Religious teaching will provide justification for such action. The government will use heavy-handed tactics to suppress these groups. However, history clearly demonstrates that the more religious groups are suppressed, especially those with eschatological vision, the more this affirms their belief that they are on the right course and they simply become more dedicated.⁵² Martyrdom and suffering at the hands of the civil authorities becomes a sign of divine endorsement.

In the face of violent government repression of 'evil cults' or groups that 'undermine social stability', believers will feel that grave injustice has been committed against them. They will revolt against the government in the name of whatever divinity they claim. Religion will thus become a force for revolution, aiming to restore tranquility in times of social chaos, by force, if necessary, if there is no way of achieving this through peaceful means. Soon these groups will transform themselves from religious to political and from peaceful to military. The predicted government response will trigger more revolts and perhaps force some of these groups to merge into strategic alliances against it. Some religious groups with long ethnic identity will use this opportunity to rally for secession or separatism, causing regional interethnic as well as interregional conflicts spilling over to neighbouring countries. China will repeat the history of the Taiping Rebellion but with a much more diverse and wider range of rebellious groups. It will plunge into civil war and more chaos leading to political disintegration.

Scenario Three: Reform Policy and Rough Transition – Philanthropist Model

The government will realise that current religious dynamics are much more complex than envisaged by Marx and Lenin, and will adopt a pragmatic approach similar to that on economic reform. Using the 'black cat and white cat' analogy originally advanced by Deng Xiaopeng, namely that a good cat is the one that can catch mice regardless of the colour of its fur, the government will allow all types of religions to practise in China so long as they fulfill some basic registration requirements and are not violating the laws of the land. The policy of segregating foreigners and nationals as far as religious activity is concerned will be abolished. Esoteric religions with no defined clergy or devotees will be allowed. Foreigners and nationals alike will enjoy equal religious rights, which means that foreigners will be allowed to promote their religion in China so long as reciprocity is allowed for Chinese to spread religion in other countries. Religious organisations will be allowed to run schools so long as these fulfill the basic educational curriculum established by the state. The legal concept of 'evil cult' will be scrapped. Places of worship of any kind will be allowed as long as they pay tax on their income. There will be no requirement to join any national religious body in order to gain registration, and the government will no longer endorse any religious group or organisation as the sole representative of a particular religion. All religious groups or organisations registered with local authorities and any formation of national or region-wide networks will be on a voluntary basis. Finally, Party members will be allowed to embrace religion, for the Party will be more an instrument of government than an ideological organisation. The result will be a model of religious administration typically found in the developed nations.

As a result of this Reform Policy in religious affairs, religious bodies and activities will flourish all over the country. Although there will be more opportunity to propagate religious beliefs, religious organisations will not necessarily experience phenomenal growth, for those who are interested in religion will have more choices available to them. Further intense competition among religious groups for new converts will often result in increased transferring of religious affiliation. Diverse expressions or groupings within a religion will also weaken each group's ability to dominate the scene. For example, there will no longer be one single national or regional Daoist group to coordinate collective efforts to build schools for the poor rural areas. Instead, temples and Daoist priests who are of the same tradition, rather than in the same location, will consider themselves as an independent Daoist unit conducting their own affairs, including charitable enterprises; they may have their own chapters in different provinces. The absolute number of religious believers will grow only marginally. Similar developments have in fact been observed in the postsoviet countries of Eastern Europe, where all sorts of religious proselytising has been free to take place, yet has resulted in intense competition for the same group of religious seekers. Soon, various religious groups will try to establish their social credentials, or from a marketing perspective enhance their market share, by establishing community-based services ranging from orphanages and schools to relief programmes. Competition among these groups for clients will bring direct benefits to the needy, who will have a whole range of faith-based welfare programmes to turn to.

I have already described the Rough Transition social scene in Scenario Two and will not repeat it here. In summary, only the political elite and the rich entrepreneurs will be insulated from social chaos, whereas most of the Chinese population will be economically devastated. The central government will have few resources to help the massive number of unemployed workers and bankrupted peasants since most of the budget will go on maintaining military control over Taiwan and fighting separatist insurgents in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Yunnan and the north-east regions bordering Korea. Refugees from those areas, mostly Han residents from those national minority-dominated regions, will flood into the central provinces, generating community conflicts with local residents. Unemployed farm-labourers will flood into the rich coastal cities, generating new urban social problems such as slums and ghettos. Racial, community and regional bloody conflicts will become daily events.

Seeing here a golden opportunity to witness the credibility of their respective faiths, the various religious organisations will focus their energy on setting up social services and relief efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the people as well as to bring hope to those in despair. Most religious groups will have links with their international counterparts, and international religious communities will pool their effort to help to stabilise the social situation in China. Since most of the international religious groups are religiously rather than politically motivated, they will be willing to help China despite the international community's reluctance to do so because of the Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Various religious groups in China will soon establish interfaith dialogue and cooperation in order to intervene in community racial-religious conflicts. Peace marches and interfaith community solidarity programmes will be seen nationwide as many religious believers heroically sacrifice their lives to defend community harmony. In Muslim-dominated areas, the imams will preach care for non-Muslim refugees and tolerance for other faiths. In southern Yunnan, the Buddhist monks will open their temples to shelter the poor, regardless of their faith. All Christian churches will operate free-meal kitchens for the hungry. Religious groups together will thus form a powerful social safety

network to keep society functioning. These developments in China will mirror the types of religious philanthropic intervention seen previously in many devastated parts of the world such as that of Mother Teresa in India or of countless faith-based charity programmes in refugee camps in South East Asia or in the former Yugoslavia. Religious groups in China, liberated from the restraints of the old policies, will finally be able to give of their best as philanthropists to serve their country in need.

Scenario Four: Reform Policy and Smooth Transition – Teacher Model

As China enters the world economic order and gradually establishes the rule of law, ever more foreign investment will be poured into the economy. The ever-expanding manufacturing bases of this factory of the world will continue to absorb surplus farming labour. China will export not only goods but also services such as construction labour and skills competing for major international construction projects. More and more Chinese will enjoy middle-class living standards, and travel abroad for vacation will become commonplace: Chinese tourists will be seen and welcomed in every country. Soon, China will become the most important economic entity in the world, and any of its major economic and political decisions will affect the world's economic dynamics. The phenomenon will be like that of Korea in the early 1990s, but several dozen times larger in scale. Chinese citizens will enjoy not only more disposable income but also a wider range of freedom in speech as well as in political participation; the CPC will be the most popular political organisation because it will have led China into a new era of prosperity. The social, political and economic gap between China and Taiwan will be so small that it will make virtually no difference which side of the Taiwan Strait one lives on – a *de facto* unification. There will be little incentive for separatist movements among national minority groups for these groups will enjoy a much higher standard of living if they remain as part of China.

I have already described the religious Reform Policy in Scenario Three. With a comfortable standard of living, the Chinese will focus on art, culture and leisure. Religion will be popular and there will now be many more religious options to choose from. Traditional religion will experience a renaissance, for Chinese will be proud to claim back their cultural heritage. Sponsored by the private sector, Confucian academies, Buddhist study centres, Daoist monasteries and all sorts of folk religion study centres will develop and catch the attention of international religious and academic circles. Well funded by rich Chinese patrons and tacitly endorsed by the government, these centres will make a major impact in China as symbols of the recapturing of the past glory of Chinese civilisation in order to boost nationalist sentiment. Religious believers will, moreover, be living out their religious morality in order to sustain healthy economic developments. Christian and Buddhist businessmen and entrepreneurs will be establishing a benchmark for ethical behaviour,⁵³ as will religious believers in various professional groups who will be developing their respective professional ethical standards.

The sheer number of Chinese Catholics, more than the number of Catholics in Ireland, will soon have a major share of influence in the Roman Catholic Church once the Catholics in China formally establish ties with Rome. Many Chinese bishops will be appointed to senior posts in the Roman Curia, and Chinese cardinals will be making their voices heard abroad. The large number of Chinese Protestants – some predict there will be a couple of hundred million in 20 years' time – will soon place China in the major league of world Christendom. America will try to establish an

alliance with China in the context of the idea that Chinese Christians along with American Christians will form the largest and most powerful bloc of Christian population in the world to confront the expansion of the Muslim population (Aikman, 2003). As for the newly introduced foreign religions in China, they will attract such a large number of followers that the Chinese believers will soon have a large share of control over the decisions of these international religious organisations, in the same way that the large number of black African Anglicans have become so powerful that they can influence the decisions of the hitherto white-dominated world Anglican Communion. It is evident that if Chinese religious organisations establish ties with international religious communities, not only will foreign forces not dominate Chinese religious groups, but also on the contrary the Chinese will exert significant influence over international religious bodies.

Chinese missionaries, from religions both traditional and new, will be sent out all over the world. China will replace Korea as the largest missionary exporting country in the world. Chinese religious masters, from the traditional religions as well as from the newly developed Falungong-type syncretistic religions, will replace Indian gurus in the West as fashionable spiritual guides for the postmodern western world.

Given the chance to exercise their proper role as provided for by the Reform Policy, religions will thus contribute to the moral well-being of a prospering Chinese society. They will also certainly play a more important role in influencing the general direction and trend of world religions. As one of the most powerful nations in the world with virtually no political enemies – China will be friendly with both North and South Korea, it will deal with both Libya and the USA, it will trade with both Israel and the Palestinian authorities – Chinese will be welcome all over the world. Chinese religious masters and missionaries may thus shape the future religious landscape of the world.

Conclusion

Religion has long been ignored by the Chinese authorities as a minor matter on the social agenda, so trivial that it is often not listed. The former president of China Jiang Zemin once said ‘Religion is no small matter’, yet there is little evidence to suggest that the authorities are treating religion as a serious issue except when religion rapidly becomes a challenge to the authorities. The current policy is pragmatic in nature, evidently designed to keep religious influence at bay. However, this current policy is based on a rather outdated interpretation of religion, and is likely to have little flexibility to deal with religious issues that may have serious social and international consequences. The scenarios suggested above are nothing more than speculations, and I sincerely hope that the Rough Transition variant will not become a reality. One certainly cannot discount such a possibility, however. The scenarios suggest that the current Restrictive Policy on religion would generate negative social consequences in both social variants (the Smooth and Rough Transitions). However, should the government employ a Reform Policy, religion would be able to play a positive role even in the worst case of social transition. It would take tremendous courage to effect a religious policy change of this magnitude. Such courage is yet to be seen in the administration of religion; but it has already been demonstrated in the economic and social areas. In the last issue of *China News Analysis*, the editor, Laszlo Ladany, wrote of China ‘expect the unexpected’. Indeed China always surprises even the most learned sinologist. Are we not all hoping for surprises?

Notes

- ¹ *Guanyu wuguo shihuzhuyi shiqi zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben zhengci (The Basic Policy and Standpoint our Country should have on Religious Questions during this Period of Socialism)*, Zhongfa no. 19, 1982. The Zhongfa (centrally issued) rubric denotes that this is the 19th policy document issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in the year 1982. When it was issued it carried the *jimi* (institutional secret) classification as a classified document available only to a restricted readership. Since the mid-1980s it has been declassified and is available to all. It is commonly known as Document No. 19 and is available in most of the government-published books regarding religion. There is an English translation in MacInnis, 1989.
- ² The Chinese authorities regard Catholicism and Protestantism as two distinct religions. These two branches of the Christian faith are of course closer than the Chinese authorities' definition would imply, but in this paper I use the Chinese authorities' terminology. 'Christians' means 'Protestants', and these two terms are interchangeable in this paper. 'Catholics' means 'Roman Catholics'.
- ³ In 1949 there were fewer than a million Protestants. In 1982 the government estimated that there were three million. During the past few years the Public Security Bureau has been suggesting at least 25 million, while virtually all overseas scholars would give a much higher figure. See Aikman, 2003, p. 7.
- ⁴ In December 2001 Jiang Zemin chaired a National Conference on Religious Work attended by all members of the Politburo.
- ⁵ This paper uses the term New Religious Movements (NRMs) as described by Eileen Barker in her authoritative volume *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (Barker, 1999).
- ⁶ There are many publications presenting research on this topic. A recent comprehensive study is Potter, 2003, pp. 317–37. For a particular study on regulations dealing with 'evil cults', see also Richardson and Edleman, 2003, pp. 277–93.
- ⁷ A full report on this conference and the speech by Jiang were published in *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 13 December 2002.
- ⁸ Non-sanctioned religions are often referred to by the government as 'evil cults'.
- ⁹ For details see the government's official commentary, www.china.org.cn/english/ahuanti/3represents/68735.htm.
- ¹⁰ One of the most important articles is by Ye Xiaowen (2003), the director general of SARA. His article is published in a classified publication by the Academy of the CPC for internal circulation among senior cadres. The subsequent study materials from SARA are all written within the parameters established by this article.
- ¹¹ In compliance with the government's supervision over religious matters, some religious groups in China began to change their Constitutions to reflect this political reality. For example, the China Christian Council (CCC) amended its Constitution in May 2002 to include the wording 'This Council accepts the legal administrative authority of the State Administration of Religious Affairs ...' (Article Five of Chapter One of the revised CCC Constitution).
- ¹² It is a custom in China for senior government officials to address the religious leaders at religious meetings or gatherings in order to establish the government's political parameters within which religious groups are to operate.
- ¹³ The new president of the China Christian Council (CCC), Rev. Cao Shengjie, has made strong remarks on this 'foreign infiltration' issue in the working report of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the China Christian Council concerning the direction of the CCC in future relations with foreign religious groups (Cao, 2002). Similar remarks were also echoed at the national meeting of all the provincial church leaders who are responsible for foreign affairs held in Shanghai in August 2002. The content of this meeting emphasises the anti-infiltration issue, namely the need to be careful of foreign Christian groups which are trying to gain footholds in China by taking advantage of WTO accession openness.

- ¹⁴ The Public Security Bureau is in charge of monitoring and dealing with illegal religious activities. For a comprehensive picture of this area see the document issued by the Public Security Bureau (PSB, 2000).
- ¹⁵ Those who would like to know more about the current status of each of these five religions in China should refer to the *The China Quarterly*, 174, June 2003.
- ¹⁶ Most of the data on Daoism are taken from Lai, 2003.
- ¹⁷ The Chinese government lists the official figures on the government's official website and in promotional materials such as the booklet *China Facts and Figures* freely distributed at major Chinese airports. See for example CFF (2003, pp. 57–58).
- ¹⁸ Raoul Birnbaum has studied the issues of the training and identity of Buddhist monks in contemporary China. See Birnbaum, 2003.
- ¹⁹ There are also Hui Christians. They are members of the Hui national minority whose ancestors might have been Muslims but converted to Christianity at some point. There are churches built by Hui Christians in Shangdong. Personal communication with Imam Muhammed Noorudin Yang in Hong Kong, 12 May 2003.
- ²⁰ Dru C. Gladney is the foremost expert in this field and is the author of several volumes on Islam in China. See also Gladney, 2003.
- ²¹ See footnote 2.
- ²² For the latest government figure, see CFF, 2003, p. 60. Rev. Matthew Deng Fucun of the TSMP/CCC told a reporter in the USA in March 2003 that there were at least 25 million Protestant Christians in China.
- ²³ Aikman, 2003, p. 7, suggests a combined figure of Christians and Catholics of 80 million. I estimate a conservative figure of around 35–40 million. The head count of Christians in China raises methodological issues for practical reasons. Many of those who belong to non-registered Christian groups simply do not have reliable statistics to collect, nor is it feasible in the current political climate for them to do so. As for the officially released figures, they are often low figures provided for political purposes and in almost all cases on the extremely conservative (deflated) side.
- ²⁴ See www.china21.org for some of the cases in which Christians are arrested for refusing to register.
- ²⁵ See many such cases recorded in Hunter and Chan, 1993, and Yamamori and Chan, 2000.
- ²⁶ There was a mission movement in the 1940s among some faith-mission groups in China that advocated a similar mission orientation. In recent years this mission orientation has reappeared among Christians in China, especially among non-registered communities.
- ²⁷ This is a common speculation among scholars of world Christianity. See for example Jenkins, 2002.
- ²⁸ Personal communication with Anthony S.K. Lam, senior researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Center, Hong Kong, 10 December 2003.
- ²⁹ This is a conservative figure from Madsen, 2003 and does not include those who are studying overseas.
- ³⁰ Fr Dionisi Pozdnyayev is perhaps one of the most authoritative experts on the Orthodox Church in China (Pozdnyayev, 1998). He has travelled extensively in China ministering to the needs of the Orthodox community. He is also the Russian Orthodox priest in charge of the newly reestablished Russian Orthodox parish of St Paul and St Peter in Hong Kong, which ceased to function in 1970.
- ³¹ Personal communication with the priest Gregory Zhu, Harbin, Heilongjiang, China, April 1997.
- ³² Personal communication with the director and staff of the RAB of Heilongjiang Province, in Harbin, Heilongjiang, China, April 1997.
- ³³ Several personal communications with the priest Dionisi Pozdnyayev, Hong Kong, March and November 2003.
- ³⁴ The official position of the Chinese government and of Chinese academics has been that the Orthodox Church in China will eventually disappear when it has no functioning priest. However, the resilience of the Chinese Orthodox in preserving their faith and tradition, the

continuous growth of this community, the increasing number of Russian Orthodox expatriates in China and the intervention of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church have all contributed to the continuous development of this community despite the lack of a government-recognised priest.

- ³⁵ I was told that Chinese nationals who are Mormons have been joining the Mormon expatriates in Beijing for worship with the full knowledge and approval of the Beijing Public Security Bureau. This is a rare case of Chinese nationals being allowed to join in foreigners' religious activity with official acknowledgement. Personal communication from Tim Stranford, president of the Mormon Church in China, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, 6 October 2003.
- ³⁶ China's legal system is based on the continental legal system with modifications from the former Soviet Union. For the official text of this article, see Criminal, 1997. For a good commentary on the article see Liu, 2002, pp. 1375–85.
- ³⁷ See www.China21.org for the full text of these documents.
- ³⁸ Wenzhou is a coastal city in Zhejiang Province with its own dialect incomprehensible to others. Wenzhou people are famous for their independent spirit and entrepreneurship. It was the first region to take advantage of the Reform and Open Policy to establish private enterprises. Wenzhou businessmen are not only found all over China but also scattered through most of the emerging markets in the world. In the year 2000, 98 per cent of Wenzhou GDP came from private enterprises, the highest percentage among all municipalities in China.
- ³⁹ Eastern Lightning is one of the many pseudo-Christian sects which have developed in China. It is listed and described by the Chinese government among 'evil cults' on the website www.china21.org. Eastern Lightning's own site is www.voicefromthethrone.org
- ⁴⁰ For an expanded treatment of this topic see Chan, 2004a.
- ⁴¹ I have documented several cases of religious leaders who are using legitimate means to gain more operational space for religious activities. See Chan, 2005.
- ⁴² Personal communication from Kate Westgarth, senior research officer at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who specialises in documenting these sects in China, Hong Kong, 10 June 2003.
- ⁴³ Since Spring 2003 the government has provided a special budget for SARA to establish a new division for folk religion. Regional governments have already attempted to regulate folk activities by legislative means. One recent example is the regulation issued by the Nanping Municipality of the Fujian Government: see Nanping, 2003.
- ⁴⁴ On the current religious regulations in China see the Amity Foundation website: <http://www.amityfoundation.org/ANS/Religious%20Laws.htm>.
- ⁴⁵ The figure of 130 million is an estimate by BBC reporter Tim Luard (Luard, 2004). It is not possible to establish an accurate figure for this dynamic group of people. The government's estimate is between 100 and 150 million depending on how the migrant population is defined and the time of the year.
- ⁴⁶ I have encountered numerous forms and types of folk religious practices as well as worship of regional deities by Chinese immigrants who have brought these practices from their home town or village to North America; I also visited a Yiguandao temple/altar in Bucharest, Romania, in August 2004.
- ⁴⁷ Increasing attention is being paid to the missiological dimension of Chinese Christian businesspeople. See Chan and Yamamori, 2002.
- ⁴⁸ There are many writings on this theme. One of the best-known doomsday scenarios is Chang, 2001.
- ⁴⁹ So far, only Protestant groups are talking about the possibility of a 'christianised' China: for a typical example, see the website of China Ministries International (CMI): www.cmi.org.tw. Other groups, such as the Buddhists and Muslims, are far less optimistic than the Protestants.
- ⁵⁰ See Ogilvy and Schwartz, 2000 for some of the most popular business scenarios often cited in Chinese business circles.

- ⁵¹ The USA is currently in a powerful bargaining position as far as US-China relationships are concerned, but there is already doubt about the effectiveness of current US use of religious freedom as a leverage point in foreign policy towards China. See for example Wong, 2001.
- ⁵² The Taliban, White Lotus, Yiguandao and the Taiping Rebellion are all classic examples suggesting that suppression merely strengthens the conviction of the devotees concerned that their causes are just.
- ⁵³ There are signs that Chinese Christian businesspeople are establishing benchmarks for business conduct among their trade circles. See Chan and Yamamori, 2002, pp. 101–2.

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