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Contemporary Issues in State-Religion Relations

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Introduction

In the run-up to the Beijing Olympic Games in the Spring of 2008, many people were shocked by riots in Tibet and the passionate response they elicited all over the world among overseas Chinese and Tibetans. The official Chinese media's denunciation of the Dalai Lama as an "evil personage" seemed to illustrate the atheist Chinese regime's lack of respect for the holiest man of the Tibetan people. Earlier, the passing of a law regulating how the lamas could be reincarnated appeared as the epitome of an authoritarian state that seeks to extend its control not only to this life, but even beyond. In this particular instance, the apparent absurdity was that a government and a ruling political party that profess to an ideology of militant atheism could claim any competence in deciding who, when, where, and how reincarnations could proceed. Every year, human rights organizations have criticized the Chinese government for its heavy-handed approach to religious groups: forced reeducation of the adherents of Falun Gong and other religious organizations, persecution of Christians, and harassment of Muslims in Xinjiang who are accused of separatist or terrorist activities. These instances of state persecution suggest that despite its constitutional protections offered to religious believers, the government of the People's Republic of China tries to control and limit the expression of religious fervor as much as possible.

But there is another side to the relation between the state and religion in China. Tourists are invited to visit superb Buddhist shrines that have been restored with the state's support. They are told that this is part of the glorious Chinese tradition. Scholars in China and abroad will confirm that China has a rich religious tradition that is multifaceted, and that both throughout history and today, there are episodes of peaceful coexistence or symbiosis, if not outright state sponsorship of religion. When local authorities are not promoting the economic benefits of religious development (see next chapter), the state often seems to turn a blind eye to the

popular temple cults that now flourish in many parts of the countryside (see chapter 2). Even today, there are many ways in which the state responds to and interacts with religious believers in the different polities with a Chinese cultural heritage. In Hong Kong and Singapore, the legacy of colonialism has shaped approaches to religion that are derivative of the liberal political culture of the United Kingdom. In Taiwan, a society that is culturally Chinese, a sui generis liberal approach to relations between state and religion has been adopted. In other words, there are many ways in which a Chinese government can assert its authority over religion, beyond the use of coercion but also many ways in which Chinese religious believers relate to the state, besides dissent. This is clear when we look at China's long history, when we pay attention to the varieties of approaches adopted by the Communist Party since its creation when it deals with different religions, and when we consider the different policies of states that rule over populations with a Chinese cultural heritage. This is also clear when we look at the many ways in which Chinese people have practiced their religions with or without state permission, and still do today.

State Control of Religion in China: The Historical Context

The state has always sought to control religion in China, and rebels that opposed the state often claimed a religious authority. If separation between religion and the state represents a major characteristic of modern Western civilization, it is more appropriate to talk about the integration of religion and state in China. Not only did religious elites and personnel often provide legitimacy to the existing political structure in exchange for recognition from the state, but the state itself, on the basis of its "Mandate of Heaven," claimed supreme authority in religious matters. This symbiotic relationship between religion and state, however, had its downside: opposition to the government was often couched in a religious language, and when rulers faced challenges to their authority, they often struck hard at religion. Viewed in this perspective, the control of religion by the Party should not be seen as an anomaly, but as a continuation of an historical pattern, as described in the previous two chapters. In this chapter, we will examine state/religion relationships in contemporary Chinese political regimes: starting with the People's Republic of China, but then looking at other models in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

The Evolution of the Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

According to its own historiography, the Communist Party's religious policy went through four phases: from the beginning of the Party's history in 1921 until 1949; the United Front period (1949 to 1957); the "leftist" excesses (1957–1978); and the reform era (1978–).

COMMUNIST POLICIES BEFORE 1949

Before the CCP took power, its views on religion were informed by three different sources: the May Fourth Movement, Marxism-Leninism, and the views of Mao Zedong himself. The May Fourth Movement resulted from the climate of political instability that followed the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, and from the inability of any Chinese government to oppose the punitive conditions imposed by Western powers after World War I. The humiliation felt by students and intellectuals led to a questioning of traditional Confucian values and inspired a strong criticism of what they considered as the root cause of China's inability to stand up against foreign powers. In addition, as we have seen in the previous chapter, when the CCP was founded in 1921, the dominant ideological trend of the times was the secularization of republican regimes.

Marxism-Leninism represented the confluence of two trends in the West. The German intellectual Karl Marx affirmed that religious beliefs were merely the expression of unequal social relations, offering succor to people who felt helpless to change their own social circumstances. In a communist society in which scientific progress would end scarcity and social justice would be achieved, people would no longer need to rely on the "opiate of the masses" provided by religion. For Marx, there was thus no need to persecute religious believers: if the conditions for the existence of religion were removed, it would simply wither away.

As leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which replaced the old tsarist empire after the Russian revolution of 1917, Lenin looked at these issues from a different perspective because he was concerned with the issue of using Marxist theory to establish a socialist state. He agreed with Marx that the state should not impose its views on religious believers and that it was useless to try to force people to change their religious conviction. Lenin forcefully argued that religion should be a private matter, but he also added that for the Communist Party, which claims to understand the social origins of religious beliefs, atheism was the only appropriate understanding of religion.

Mao Zedong agreed with Marx and Lenin on the origins of religion in unequal social relations but he initially disagreed with their proposition that there was no need to forcibly eliminate religious belief. After Mao realized that China could not succeed in achieving a socialist revolution through the urban working class, which represented only a tiny fraction of society, and had to rely on the peasantry to achieve his goal of social transformation, he also saw that his intolerant policy toward religion had succeeded only in alienating peasants from the Party, and therefore he had to change his views. He accordingly subscribed to a United Front strategy, whereby the Party forged alliances with different classes and groups of people, including religious believers, as long as they supported the anti-imperialist goals of the Party. In the end, however, Mao agreed with Lenin and other communist leaders and supported the view that Party members themselves had to profess atheism.

THE UNITED FRONT POLICY, 1949–1957

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the Party and the new government set up institutions to deal with religious belief in general, and with religious communities in particular. The basic policy was as follows: (1) constitutional guarantees for "freedom of religion" limited to the freedom of *private belief*, with restrictions on the *social expression and organization* of religion; (2) co-optation of religious leaders through the United Front policy; (3) establishment of state-sponsored national associations to manage the affairs of the five recognized religions; and (4) eradication of popular religion branded as "feudal superstition" and of redemptive societies branded as "reactionary secret societies." This policy basically continued, in a more radical fashion, the model already tested in the Republican period (1911–1949) and discussed in the previous chapter, in which the state tries to distinguish between *religion*, which is subject to state monitoring, and *superstition*, which ought to be eradicated. As a result of this structure of control, worshippers and practitioners are forced to align themselves within or against political orthodoxy, and as a result the lines between the boundaries of acceptable and illegal religiosity remain contested.

The Communist Party upheld the view that religion should be respected and integrated in a patriotic alliance to fight imperialism and help the Party advance the cause of socialism, an approach known as the United Front policy. To ensure that the United Front policy could be properly implemented, the Party issued in 1950 a policy of religious freedom that was meant to provide guidelines to Party cadres.[1] The policy guaranteed that religious adherents are free to believe, as long as they respect the law and do not harm social stability. It also allowed believers to change religion, to become nonbelievers, and to adhere to different sects within any of the five recognized religions. The policy, however, did not protect the right to proselytize, and it forbade the involvement of religious institutions in health care and education, on the grounds that these activities undermined the authority of the state and were therefore seen as subversive. In sum, the policy protected the right for individuals to believe, but it did not offer guarantees for religious associations to develop. This policy, along with the United Front policy and its theoretical justification, continues to be the foundation of the religious policy in the early twenty-first century.

Ostensibly to show that religious believers' interests could be represented, but in reality to ensure that Party directives could be carried out, the Party encouraged religious believers to set up their own "patriotic" religious associations. Associations were thus established to represent the Buddhists, Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, and Daoists. People in leadership positions in the religious associations, in theory, are religious believers, that is, clerics or laypeople.

The founding of the China Buddhist Association (CBA) in 1953 was relatively easy: monks had already tried to create a national association to promote their own interests during the Republican period. Because of the Land Reform Act of 1950,

monastic property was seized by the state, and only a small portion was redistributed to monasteries. Some monks had views that were supportive of the Communist Party, and for its part, the Party realized that Buddhism could serve the interests of the state: many neighboring states in Asia counted a significant number of Buddhists, and good treatment of Buddhists within China could serve to illustrate that the PRC respected religion in general, and also that it was a major center of Buddhism itself.

The creation of a Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) for the Protestant Church of China in 1954 was also facilitated by the existence in Republican China of a National Christian Council that, since the 1920s, had promoted a theology of the missionary idea of "three-self": self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. This TSPM faced a daunting task because of the wide divergence in theology, tradition, and history among the various denominations that had developed in China. In the late 1950s, the TSPM claimed that the Protestant churches of China had arrived at a postdenominational stage and that all the denominational traditions that were of foreign origin had no place in the PRC. Already during the period of the Korean War, all Protestant and Catholic missionaries had been forced out of the mainland.

The Islamic Association of China (IAC) was also established in 1954, and it, too, built on attempts by Muslims to build national associations in the early twentieth century. PRC policy has long been lenient toward, if not supportive of, Muslim institutions in China, since the Chinese government valued good relations with Islamic countries. This diplomatic approach was justified during the first three decades after 1949, in the name of solidarity with the Third World.

For Chinese Catholics, the situation was more problematic: the pope was viscerally anticommunist and forbade Catholics from cooperating with the new regime. In addition, the Vatican was a state that refused to recognize the PRC, recognizing instead the Republic of China in Taiwan. The faithful were thus torn between loyalty to Beijing and allegiance to the pope. It was only in 1957 that a number of lay Catholics agreed to set up a Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), whose head would have authority over them instead of the Holy See. Many Roman Catholics thus consider this association schismatic. Patriotic Association leaders forbid priests and bishops to speak out on government policies that go against Roman Catholic doctrine, such as the official directives on contraception and abortion.

Because Daoism is more polymorphic and decentralized than the other four religions recognized by the state, it was harder to organize the Daoists into a national association, which was established only in 1957: this suggests that it was more difficult to find a leadership that could generate support for a unified version of the religion. As an indigenous religion with little influence in other countries, Daoism does not have the international importance of Buddhism or Islam (seen by the government as diplomatic bridges to potential Third World allies) or of Protestant or Catholic Christianity (seen by the Party as instruments of Western imperialism). As a result, dealing with Daoism was never a priority in PRC religious policy.

As explained in the previous chapter, only a fraction of the Chinese people identified with any of the five officially recognized religions; this did not mean, however, that the "nonreligious" majority were secularized atheists. The vast majority of the people participated in the worship and rituals to their ancestors and in village and neighborhood temples to local saints, heroes, and deities. Many were members of religious charitable associations, pilgrimage groups, redemptive societies, and other types of networks. But because none of these groups or practices fit neatly under the modern category of *religion* as it had been imported in the early twentieth century, they were simply stigmatized as "feudal superstition." Even when these practices were not directly targeted by political campaigns, their social foundation was destroyed by other policies and social changes: most local temples and lineage halls were turned into schools, government buildings, or storehouses; priests were required to change professions in order to engage in "productive labor"; lay associations were disbanded or secularized into performing arts troupes. In the case of redemptive societies such as Yiguandao (see previous chapter), whose leadership had often consisted of local elites now demonized as feudal landlords, members of the Nationalist Party, and collaborators with the Japanese, a harsh persecution was launched in the early 1950s to exterminate them as "reactionary secret societies."

THE LEFTIST PERIOD AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, 1957–1978

During the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), the CCP policy on religion became much more radical. The mobilization of the population for the sake of accelerated development required considerable demands on the workforce, as well as requisition of tools from peasants for a disastrous campaign of rural industrialization. In that context, most property and land still owned by religious institutions was confiscated. By the time of the Cultural Revolution, not much was left of the previous wealth to destroy. Most of the monks and nuns, priest, pastors, and imams had to return to lay life.

In addition, the international context, which was marred by tension with the United States over Taiwan and with the Soviet Union over ideological disagreement, led to campaigns against foreign interference. Chinese Christians were often suspected of spying on behalf of their foreign coreligionists. With an estimated thirty million deaths due to famine, the Great Leap represented one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century, and one of the deadliest calamities of all Chinese history. Between 1962 and 1965, when the leadership of the Party repudiated the excesses of that policy and its chief architect, Mao Zedong, China experienced a brief revival of religious practice. This trend alarmed the radical wing of the Communist Party.

Mao decided to react and recover his authority and power. He launched a directive at the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) to denounce "capitalist roaders" that had "wormed their way" into the Party, and criticized feudal and bourgeois ideology, including the religious beliefs that were seen as supporting

BOX 11.1 The Worship of Mao

The British professor of religious studies Ninian Smart noted in 1974 in a short essay that "Maoism does function analogically as a religion for China" (*Mao*, London: Fontana Press, 1974, p. 88). Mao was indeed the object of intense veneration from the Chinese people during his lifetime. His ideas were studied as dogma, and the episodes of his life and of the party, such as the Long March, were elevated to the status of myths. Mao was an object of adulation for millions, and he never opposed the cult of personality his supporters had developed. This cult lives on today for many. Millions of peasants worship him, just as their ancestors in imperial times venerated heroic persons, virtuous leaders, or good magistrates. In those times, a few generations after their death, exceptional people were revered as superior spirits, and some of them were even "promoted" to the rank of deities. Many people look at him today as an exceptional personality deserving of worship. His birthplace of Shaoshan, visited annually by millions of people, has become a center of pilgrimage. Along with posters, pens, calendars, lighters, and other souvenirs bearing his picture, people can also find golden amulets traditionally used to bring good fortune and health, with the picture of Chairman Mao in the center where a representation of the Buddha or Laozi was traditionally placed.

them. Because he could not count on the support of the Party apparatus, Mao appealed to the enthusiasm of young people to "smash the old world and establish the new." One focus of this campaign was the destruction of the "four olds": old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. The United Front Policy toward religion was repudiated, and religious institutions became prime targets of the attacks against the "four olds." The Red Guards sponsored by Mao ransacked, looted, and closed down temples, churches, mosques, monasteries, and cemeteries. Clergy had to return to lay life, and lay believers were ridiculed, persecuted, or physically attacked. Although the most tumultuous phase of the Cultural Revolution came to a halt after 1969, attacks against religion continued, culminating in 1975, when, under the instructions of the Gang of Four, the State Council issued a directive abolishing the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB).[2]

REFORM AND OPENING, 1978–PRESENT

The first stirrings of the revival of religions were already noticeable by the time Mao died in 1976. The revival of religions in the 1980s demonstrated that his campaigns against tradition had failed. After Deng Xiaoping took power in 1978, the Communist Party admitted that under Mao, there had been "excesses" that needed to be corrected. In 1979, the State Council overturned the verdicts of the Cultural Revolution, and reinstituted the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), later renamed as the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). In 1981, Deng could claim

that a return to the United Front policy was in line with orthodox Party policy, and he could reassure religious associations that they could safely resume their activities under the CCP guidance.

According to the 1982 Constitution, people have the right to believe in "normal religion," but a definition of what is *normal* remains unclear and depends on decisions made at the discretion of local authorities. Moreover, the Constitution "prohibits religious activities that impair public order, health, or education and proscribes 'foreign domination' of religious bodies and religious affairs." In other words, Chinese are free, as individuals, to adhere to any religious beliefs, but their religious practice remains limited by a series of regulations. People can worship in temples, churches, and mosques that are registered with the government, but if they worship in settings other than the ones officially designated for religious practice, they place themselves in a situation of potential illegality. Monks, priests, pastors, imams, and other clergy are free to perform religious rituals, administer their religious institutions, train religious personnel, preach, and lecture to laypeople, but they must engage in these activities within locations government officials deem appropriate.

Article 36 of the Constitution also states the following: "No state organ, public organization, or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion." The rules and the functioning of the Communist Party, however, often violate this stipulation. Although the Party has abandoned political campaigns promoting atheism, its regulations forbid citizens who are religious believers to join the Communist Party because the latter upholds the ideology of dialectical materialism and forbids cadres to be religious believers.

The regulations imposed on Party membership leave religious believers who do not want to recant but want to participate in political affairs the option of joining one of the eight satellite parties. In that capacity, or as individuals, they can run for positions in the government, in the national and local People's Congresses, or they can join one of the People's Political Consultative Conference Committees (PPCCC). Religious leaders, indeed, are usually nominated by the United Front Department for election to these bodies. The satellite parties, however, have no influence in the political process. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the members of the People's Congresses and consultative bodies are members of the Communist Party.

There is an important exception to this practice limiting the political participation of religious believers. Party members who belong to one of the national minorities (see chapter 3) can participate in the religious life of their respective autonomous regions, prefectures, or counties. This dispensation results from the policy on national minorities, which gives special regard to the customs of ethnic minorities in order to avoid alienating them from Party rule.

In 1982, the Party also issued a directive, known as Document No. 19, that reiterated the basic foundations of the Party policy: respect for the freedom of

religious belief, recognition that religion is a private matter and that coercion to undermine religion is ineffective, but also support for atheist education, therefore marginalizing the influence of religion over society. Provisions of that policy, which still remains in place, are a de facto constraint on the practice of religion. The document does not extend recognition to any other religion besides the five religions mentioned earlier, and therefore it does not change the state's attitude with respect to popular religion. Religious associations can train religious personnel and administer their own affairs, but they cannot do fund-raising or proselytize outside the bounds of churches, temples, and mosques. Finally, the Communist Party forbids its members from believing in religion and participating at religious events.[3]

In 1990, following the 1989 Tiananmen massacre and the riots in Tibet, the Party asked the State Council to convene a national work conference on religion to respond to these challenges to its authority. The conference issued Document No. 6, which emphasized the Party's need for control and regulation over religious affairs but also recognized the importance of religion in Chinese society. The document expressed the Party's concern over the potential negative effects of unregulated religion, and security forces were instructed to closely monitor religious activity. Beginning in the early 1990s, laws were enacted requiring the registration of religious venues by local government authorities. At the same time, religious associations were invited to contribute to society's progress. Jiang Zemin emphasized the need to reconcile tolerance of religious belief for the five recognized religions, along with strict control of religious orthodoxy. In doing so, he gave a greater degree of power over their own affairs to religious leaders.[4]

Throughout the 1990s, the Communist Party sought more openly to channel the resources of religion to its own ends: ensuring the prosperity of world religions such as Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity was seen as useful in refuting foreigners' claim that China not respect religious freedom. The enthusiasm of lay Buddhists in China and among overseas Chinese for the development of their religion also increased the value of Buddhist institutions in the eyes of the local governments, who saw in this renaissance of Buddhism an incentive to attract investments from "compatriots" in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, as well as abroad. Similarly, Daoist temples in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia have enthusiastically renewed ties with their coreligionists on the mainland, with the blessings of the authorities. The role of Islam also became increasingly important, because China wants to secure for its growing industry safe supply of energy from major oil exporters in the Middle East, and because China wants to reinforce its relations with important regional powers such as Iran.

Hu Jintao, who became paramount leader in 2002, did not present any new approach with respect to religion and seemed bent to continue the policies of his predecessors. However, his advocacy of the principle of "harmonious society" gave more room for religions to claim that they could contribute their experience and

teachings to the building of social harmony. Under Hu's tenure, various levels of the Chinese government have undertaken initiatives in the realm of religious affairs that appear to show more significant state support for religious institutions. In April 2006, with the support of the Religious Affairs Bureau, the First World Buddhist Forum was held in the city of Hangzhou, and a year later, an International Forum on the *Daodejing* was convened with the state's blessing in the cities of Xi'an and Hong Kong. These events served to underline the importance the Party sees in the positive influence of recognized religion on social stability and interethnic harmony. At the same time, the authorities began to open up to groups other than the five officially recognized religions, as described further below.

Geopolitical Issues and Chinese Religious Policy

The religious policy of the People's Republic has always been shaped by geopolitical concerns. During the 1950s, the main objectives had been (1) to cut the Christian churches off from the moral, financial, and administrative influence of the anti-communist and pro-Christian Western powers, the Holy See, and the enemy regime in Taiwan; (2) to avoid alienating the deeply religious Buddhist and Muslim borderland minority peoples, and reinforce their loyalty to China; and (3) to use Buddhism and Islam as diplomatic tools in relations with Third World countries. Beginning with the reforms of the 1980s, the same set of concerns remained, although the evolution of the Chinese economy and politics, coupled with world geopolitical events and trends, greatly complicated the issues. The promotion of "opening up to the world" and international trade provided many opportunities for believers of all faiths and organizations to expand and deepen transnational networks connecting China to other parts of the world, often with the encouragement of the authorities. The growing importance of relations between China and the United States and other Western economies significantly lowered the tension concerning Christians and their overseas connections, even if invoking religious freedoms for Chinese Christians and others became a ritualized component of meetings between Chinese and American leaders.

The overriding concern in dealing with the geopolitical implications of religion is maintaining and establishing the territorial integrity of the PRC as the sole government of China. This exacerbated the problem with the Vatican, which is one of the last states to persist in giving diplomatic recognition to Taiwan. Switching diplomatic recognition to Beijing remains a precondition for solving the problem of China's underground Catholic Church, discussed shortly. In addition, following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismemberment of the former Soviet Union into independent republics, the Party leadership became acutely concerned with preventing a similar occurrence in China: indeed, over 50% of the PRC's territory consists of borderland territories whose populations are largely non-Han, have strong cultural and religious ties to the populations of neighboring states, and have questionable loyalty to the

central government. This is especially the case for the Tibetans, and for the Turkic-speaking Muslim Uyghurs in the far western territory of Xinjiang.

TIBET

The Chinese government claims that China is a "multinational" state and therefore wants to show to the rest of the world that all the different cultures and religious traditions of the country are protected. Party and government leaders are especially anxious to convey to the outside world that it seeks to promote that goal with respect to Tibet. To support their claim that Tibet was always part of China, they stress the fact that during imperial times, the Yuan and the Qing dynasties sponsored Tibetan Buddhism as an overarching faith common to Tibetans, Mongols, and Manchus. This legacy matters very much to the Communist Party, which had hoped that the religion could foster unity among nationalities after 1949. However, the new government had great difficulty in achieving this goal. When the Communists won the civil war and established a new government in October 1949, Tibet had enjoyed de facto independence for a few decades, even though the international community did not formally recognize it as a state. Tibet was still governed as a medieval theocracy, with the Dalai Lama as its most powerful religious and political leader—a system highly incompatible with communism. In order to pressure Tibet to submit to its rule, Mao sent the People's Liberation Army to its borders, while promising to respect Tibet's religious and political system. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama signed a "ten-point agreement" in 1950, in which he recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, and stated that the Tibetan religio-political system was to remain untouched. But tensions rose throughout the 1950s, as the increasing Maoist radicalism that emanated from Beijing, and was being carried out among the Tibetan populations of neighboring provinces, led Tibetans to fear that their political system and religion would not be respected for long. These fears reached a boiling point in 1959, when a failed uprising, and the subsequent military occupation, forced the Dalai Lama and his government to flee to India, where they established a government-in-exile in the city of Dharamsala. This event, followed by the destruction that accompanied the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, restrictions on the growth of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, and systematic campaigns of "imposed modernization" increasingly alienated Tibetans from the Chinese government.[5]

By the 1990s, the Dalai Lama, while he was still worshipped as a living deity by Tibetans, had become an internationally respected, Nobel Prize–winning religious figure. Following the Marxist theory that poverty breeds religion, the CCP hoped to overcome that legacy though massive investment in economic development—enjoying a higher standard of living, the Tibetans would no longer be so devoutly religious, and they would even be grateful for the CCP's help. But these efforts did not succeed in changing Tibetans' view, and have even increased their alienation, because much of the economic activity and profits remain in the hands of Han Chinese.

CHINA'S MUSLIMS

The harmony in relations between the Han Chinese and Muslims, and therefore the relations between Muslims and the state, varies according to their ethnicity (see chapter 3). The Hui, who live scattered across the Chinese mainland, enjoy good relations and have few grievances against the government. The situation is different for many of the Turkic-speaking national minorities of China's western regions, in particular the Uyghurs living in Xinjiang. Many of them deeply resent the immigration of Han into their region. Before 1949, Uyghurs were a majority in Xinjiang, but in the last decade of the twentieth century, they were reduced to the status of largest minority. Although discontent among them is important, very few have organized politically, let along militarily, to oppose Chinese control over what they consider their ancestral territory. One of these groups, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), was declared a terrorist organization by the government in 2002. Links with al-Qaeda were alleged but never demonstrated. The aim of that organization, which is the creation of an independent state for the Uyghurs, however, is more political than religious. Therefore, repression against the organization is not so much a case of repression against religion as a conflict over territory and national identity. However, the Chinese regime is highly concerned that Islam could be used to reinforce Uyghur identity and strengthen separatist movements. In order to reduce the influence of Islam, since the mid-1990s the government has imposed strict controls on the religious practice of Uyghurs, going so far as to prevent schoolchildren from fasting during the month of Ramadan. These policies are likely to further alienate and radicalize Uyghur Muslims.

GRAY AREAS AND UNSANCTIONED RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Sociologists of religion Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge have argued that when relations between state and institutional religion are too intimate, such proximity may be detrimental in the long run to the religious organizations that are close to the government.[6] This proximity to the state for the religions recognized by the government opens up the issue of their credibility and their authenticity for the faithful. As a result, people who seek a more truthful expression of their religious belief may be tempted to join underground associations or organizations that are not recognized by the state. Many worshippers do not trust the leaders of the official religious associations, because they are too closely related to the government, and in particular to the Communist Party. This too close relationship between the government and official religious associations explains why many people may not want to participate in the events the government sponsors and would prefer to join activities organized outside official monitoring. Gatherings for religious celebration outside of locations designated for that purpose, however, are technically prohibited. Depending on the place, the time, the political climate, and the relationships

with local officials, such gatherings may be shut down by the authorities, or they may be tolerated.

Fenggang Yang (see chapter 12) has called such activities the "gray market" of religion in China, in contrast to the formal activities of the official associations (the "red market") and those activities that are formally illegal and face the wrath of government repression—the "black market." Gray-market activities can be connected to both the officially recognized religions and to other beliefs and practices that do not fall under the five recognized religions, but are still tolerated.

The case of Buddhism illustrates this phenomenon. As the economic reforms transformed China into a more mercantile economy and accelerated the rural exodus, Buddhist institutions became a source of wealth, as laypeople donated funds to the reconstruction of temples and monasteries. Today, Buddhist institutions are involved in commercial, social, and cultural activities ranging from organizing summer retreats to supporting orphanages, selling amulets in temples and building gigantic Buddha statues as tourist attractions, that straddle the boundaries of what is considered an acceptable and legal form of religion in the eyes of the government.

Christian churches also thrive in the "gray market" of religion. In the more than three decades that have followed the end of the Cultural Revolution, Christianity—and, in particular, the growth of the Protestant churches—is the fastest of all religions in China. This growth benefited from the support offered by coreligionists abroad, including many overseas Chinese Christians, and the relatively open attitude of the authorities in the first decades of the reform and opening policy. However, many of these Protestants do not recognize the TSPM or the China Christian Council (CCC) and have joined "house churches," where worshipping is by definition clandestine. These churches are tolerated in some places but banned in others. A similar cleavage splits Chinese Catholics. Many Chinese Catholics who disagree with the Patriotic Association leadership worship in underground churches. For years the clergy has been divided between a persecuted church loyal to the Holy See and a clergy appointed by Beijing. In the late 1990s, however, many bishops ordained according to the rules of the Patriotic Association have requested and gained recognition of their ordination from the Vatican. A resolution of the conflict over the authority of the Catholic Church in China, however, remains unlikely as long as the Holy See recognizes the government of the Republic of China in Taipei instead of the People's Republic in Beijing. An even more divisive issue is that of the appointment of bishops, the authority for which in the Catholic Church has always resided with the pope. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI pointed to a possible reconciliation by admitting that, for their spiritual good, Chinese Catholics can turn to bishops and priests who are not in communion with Rome if they have no other choice.

Another type of "gray-market" religious activity takes place under the guise of *qigong* gymnastics, breathing, meditation, and healing exercises (see chapter 5). *Qigong* became extremely popular in the 1980s and 1990s, under the institutional protection of the State Sports Commission as a form of physical fitness, of the State Administration of Chinese Medicine as a form of traditional therapy, of the All-China Committee for

Science and Technology as a pioneering mind-body science, and of the Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense as a form of parapsychology that could be used for military purposes. Under that legal framework, *qigong* groups could recruit adherents and finance and advertise their activities openly. Although *qigong* was not designated as a form of religion, many practitioners became deeply interested in Chinese cosmology and were drawn into the study and practice of Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religion.

One of the *qigong* groups, Falun Gong, claimed 100 million practitioners and became increasingly assertive in pressing its demands to the state. Because Falun Gong was not classified as a religion, thousands of CCP cadres could adhere to this movement without violating the Party stipulation forbidding them to be religious. After 10,000 practitioners staged a sit-in surrounding the headquarters of the Party leadership at Zhongnanhai in April 1999, Falun Gong was designated as an illegal "evil cult"—moving it from the "gray market" into the "black market"—and became the target of the harshest campaign against any social organization since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Groups that mobilize large numbers of followers and display an ability to assertively pressure or challenge the state are likely to be persecuted by authorities that fear the groups could organize popular resistance to the government. Other banned "evil cults" include certain Christian groups such as the Eastern Lightning Church, deemed heretical by the state-recognized Christian associations.

For other groups that do not fit within one of the five official associations, the government's attitude is ambiguous, evolving, and varies vis-à-vis different types of group. The Bahá'í Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), and the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as popular religion, enjoy increasing degrees of tolerance and tacit approval from the authorities. In the latter case, popular religious practices remain stigmatized as superstitions, but are also tolerated, if not encouraged, by local authorities as expressions of the national folklore or as "intangible cultural heritage." For example, the government has promoted ceremonies paying homage to the Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi*), the mythical ancestor of the Han people, since 1990. The governments of Shanxi and Henan, which both claim to be the ancestral land of the Yellow Emperor, have competed to build the most expensive shrine dedicated to his worship. The promotion of that cult was enhanced in 2008 with the decision to introduce a new public holiday, Tomb Sweeping Day, a traditional practice associated with ancestor veneration.

Other Chinese Polities

There are alternative frameworks for state-religion relations in Chinese states besides the Communist Party's approach. In spite of the continuities between imperial China, the Republican period, and the approach of the PRC authorities to religion, other configurations do exist that more closely resemble Western patterns

of separation between religion and state and freedom of religion. The cases of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore illustrate the diversity of configurations that can exist in societies in which a majority of the population can claim a Chinese heritage.

TAIWAN

For decades the Republic of China in Taiwan pursued the policies that had been applied in mainland China during the Republican era, but this time, because of the military assistance and the economic cooperation offered by the United States, the Nationalist Party was able to effectively implement a wide range of policies. During the first three decades after 1949, the ruling party imposed a policy of control over religion that bore some striking similarities with that which was enforced in the People's Republic, down to the recognition of a limited number of religions, and the requirement that only one national association should be responsible for the interests of all adherents to a single tradition. A Buddhist Association of the Republic of China was created, ostensibly to rival the mainland's China Buddhist Association in the international arena, but also to ensure conformity with Chinese norms by the Taiwanese associations, which had developed their own local characteristics over centuries and which had been influenced by Japanese colonialism. But besides these similarities, some significant differences were noticeable. Some redemptive societies that were banned in mainland China, such as Lijiao (the "Teachings of the Principle"), and the Xuanyuanjiao (the "Teachings of the Yellow Emperor"), could be practiced freely, sometimes with the complicity of members of the government, and received official recognition by the state. As in the mainland, however, Yiguandao was banned as a "heretical sect."

While China was attacking Chinese religious traditions during the Cultural Revolution, Chiang Kai-shek proclaimed the launch of the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement in 1967. Although bureaucrats targeted the local variants of Chinese popular religion in the name of preventing waste and modernizing the country, the government of Taiwan adopted a policy that was far more lenient toward organized religions. It gradually relaxed control over civil society and showed toleration toward religions' development in ways that were unimaginable on the mainland. Hence, when the authorities realized that religions such as Yiguandao were conservative and pietistic, the government simply stopped surveillance of its members and quietly lifted the ban on its activities. In addition, Christian and Buddhist institutions were welcomed to provide services in education and health care.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) played an especially important role on the island, despite its small number of adherents. Brought to the island as a missionary religion in the nineteenth century, it grew thanks to proselytizing by the local clergy and the use of the vernacular language. During the martial law period, the PCT developed a theology that stood for human rights, the right of self-determination for the inhabitants of the island, and the promotion of the

aboriginal people's welfare. Many government opponents during the period of martial law found support from PCT clergy. Peng Ming-min, one of the founders of the movement for Taiwanese independence, was a member of that church, and Lee Teng-hui, although a member of the Nationalist Party while he was president, also belonged.

As a result of the policies of tolerance, religious institutions did not confront the regime during the crucial years that led toward democratization. Although their attitude can be construed as complacent toward the authoritarian regime, the approach of Taiwanese religious groups probably encouraged reformist politicians in government and moderate opposition activists. Today, twenty-six religions are recognized in Taiwan and religious groups are major forces for the promotion of civil society and social cohesion.

HONG KONG

The Hong Kong Basic Law protects religious freedom and prohibits religious discrimination, and the government has not changed its policy since the handover of the former British colony to the People's Republic in 1997. Although the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is under the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China, religious believers in Hong Kong can, and do, get involved in local politics. There is a wide variety of religious beliefs in the HKSAR, and this is reflected in the government, which includes people of all faiths, as well as nonbelievers. Moreover, there is no officially recognized religion and no religious institution has to register with the authorities. The Chinese government's respect for this attitude of laissez-faire in the HKSAR gives some substance to the concept of "One Country, Two Systems" that is meant to guide relations between the PRC and the ex-colony. Because of these freedoms, adherents of religions that fear persecution seek asylum in the HKSAR. Falun Gong members, Catholics who refuse to recognize the authority of the mainland's "Patriotic" Association, and other members of unregistered religions have found there a climate to express their views without fear of being harassed. Moreover, Protestant churches and Buddhist charities use Hong Kong as a "rear base" from which they can proselytize or provide relief to the poor in the mainland. Relationships among religious groups in Hong Kong and the mainland are governed by the policy of "three mutualities" as laid down in the basic law: mutual respect, mutual noninterference, and mutual nonsubordination.

SINGAPORE

In contrast with Hong Kong, Macau, and, up to a point, Taiwan, the government of Singapore does not have to worry about the influence of the People's Republic of China in the management of its religious affairs. Like their counterparts in Taiwan, the authorities of the tiny island city-state promote the development of religion as

BOX 11.2 The Chinese States' Celebration of Confucius

Every year, Taiwan celebrates National Teachers' Day on September 28, which happens to be the birthday of Confucius according to the Western solar calendar. Others prefer to mark the birthday of Confucius according to the Chinese lunar calendar. In that case, it falls on the 27th day of the eighth lunar month, between the end of September and the beginning of November. The celebration of a holiday for teachers on Confucius's Birthday in Taiwan underlines the importance he accorded to scholarship and learning. The celebration follows a very elaborate ritual at a temple dedicated to him in Yuanshan, Taipei. In Hong Kong, the authorities have discussed a proposal to celebrate Confucius's birthday, but, concerned about the addition of yet one more public holiday, negotiations had to be conducted with the Christian community over which religious holiday, such as Easter, could be replaced by the birthday of Confucius. In the PRC itself, Confucius is not a target of criticism anymore, and in his native city of Qufu, very elaborate ceremonies are now performed to mark his birthday. In 2002, the Chinese government launched the development of the Confucius Institute, the equivalent to the British Council and the Alliance Française, to promote the teaching of the Chinese language and culture in foreign countries.

a source of social stability, as a cultural resource for the development of national identity, and as a provider of social services. The value of religious harmony is actively promoted by the Singapore government and supported by religious leaders of all faiths, and in that respect, the approach of the Singapore government to religion compares to that of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau in its positive appreciation of the role of religion. However, the authoritarian and paternalistic nature of the government may invite comparison with China: the authorities of Singapore do not hesitate to use the Internal Security Act when they believe religious believers can threaten social stability. The act was used twice in 2001 and 2002, against members of the Jemaah Islamiyah. The revival of Islam in neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia and the presence of an important Muslim minority in the city-state have to be taken into account by the government in its effort to instill citizenship education in ways that are respectful of the island society's multiplicity of religions.

Conclusion

One striking characteristic of the relations between state and religion in China is the wide variety of approaches implemented across the country and over time. There exist important discrepancies between the formal laws and regulations promulgated by higher levels of governments and the ways in which local authorities implement or ignore policies determined above them. There are also remarkable differences in the level of trust by authorities toward different religions, depending

on their contacts with foreigners, their influence on minority nationalities, their ability to generate material support, and their history of cooperation or conflict with the government. The state alternates between deregulation of religion and the maintenance of strict control; intellectuals close to the Party discuss openly the importance of religion in Chinese society, and many religious people try to cooperate with the authorities for the sake of the common good.

In sum, there exists a wide diversity in the modes of relations between state and religion across Chinese societies. The spectrum of relations range from what can be described as symbiotic, when the state sponsors religious activities and religious actors offer their support to the state via public rituals, to what can be termed adversarial, when police forces harass religious associations they fear, or when religious movements express dissent. Very often, relations between religion and state can also develop in a "zone of indifference," in which the state gives up the pretense of regulating religion and religious institutions desist from involvement in politics. This variety of relationship patterns obviously relates to the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices in Chinese societies, which has changed over centuries as China has increased its exchanges with the world community and as it continues to amplify its exposure to different views of the world.

Notes

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6. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).