China's Religious *Danwei*: Institutionalising Religion in the People's Republic

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Abstract

*This article is a study of the continuities and changes in the state-led institutionalisation of religion in the PRC from 1979 to 2009 and their effects on the structuring of China's religious field. A normative discourse on religion is constituted by a network of Party leaders, officials, academics, and religious leaders. Official religious institutions have become hybrids of religious culture with the institutional habitus of work units (*danwei*) in the socialist market economy. A wide range of religious practices have found legitimacy under secular labels such as health, science, culture, tourism, or heritage. Religious affairs authorities have begun to acknowledge the existence of this expanding realm of religious life, and to accord discursive legitimacy to the previously stigmatised or ignored categories of popular religion and new religions, but hesitate to propose an explicit change in policy.*

Over the past 30 years, China has witnessed the flourishing and transformation of multiple forms of religiosity, covering a vast range of practices including family rites of passage, temple festivals, modern spiritual networks, ethnic religions, and transnational communities.[1] Most of these developments have occurred from the bottom up, outside the institutional sphere assigned to "religion" by the state, and often escaping its direct control. Much of the literature on the state's religious policy during these years has built on a paradigm of church-state relations in which the focus has been on monitoring the

[1] The primary sources used for this article are the documents referenced in the text as well as interviews and conversations held between 2005 and 2009 with officials of the United Front and Religious Affairs Bureaus at the national level as well as of Shanghai, Shaanxi, and Gansu; several Chinese scholars active in the discourse on religion; officials of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Yingde County, Guangdong; office holders of the Huashan Daoist Association, Huayin, Shaanxi; as well as members of most of the religious communities mentioned in the article. I would like to thank the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient and the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China for its support in making the field research and collection of documentary materials possible. I am also grateful to Vincent Goossaert and Sébastien Billioud for their editorial suggestions.

repression and control of religion by the state, identifying the limits to religious freedom in China, and noting that, since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, if the overall trend has been one of a gradual loosening of restrictions on religious life, the state has continued to assert its ultimate authority over the religious sphere.[2]

While such an observation is broadly valid, the evolution of China's religious policy cannot be described as a simple process of the state stepping out (or back in) to give more or less freedom to religious groups and communities. On the contrary, the state has continued to play a key role in constituting and structuring the religious field, alongside religious groups and leaders themselves. To describe this dynamic, however, we need to avoid uncritically applying a paradigm of church-state relations derived from the Western experience, which assumes the prior mutual autonomy of church and state, describes the tensions and power relations between the two, and posits that the normal and desirable state of affairs, in a condition of secularised modernity, is one in which, while the state is neutral and free from the political influence of religious institutions, it does not interfere in the affairs of religious institutions and communities.

This paradigm is a result of the historical trajectory of Europe, in which the nation-state broke out of the shadow of the Church of Rome – a trajectory fundamentally different from the Chinese experience. After the proscription of Buddhism in 842 left the Buddhist *sangha* permanently weakened, for one thousand years until the nineteenth century no trans-local religious institution ever managed to secure its independence from the imperial state, which positioned itself as the supreme religious authority in a society steeped in religiosity without a clear distinction between the religious and the secular. For a century from the Opium War (1843) until Liberation (1949), the Christian churches asserted their independence from the Chinese state, but since this was a religion introduced from abroad, whose independence was forced on China by the guns of the Western powers, the churches could not readily stand as examples of a religious institution fully autonomous from the political sphere. Christianity did have a profound impact on the entire religious field during this period, becoming a normative model for all other religious traditions and of the very notion of religion as a distinct and

[2] See for example Beatrice Leung, "Religious Freedom and the Constitution in the Peoples' Republic of China: Interpretation and Implementation," *Diskus*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1-18; Tony Lambert, "The Present Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party," *Religion, State & Society*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2001, pp. 121-129; Pitman Potter, "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China," *China Quarterly*, no. 174, 2003, pp. 317-337; Jason Kindopp *et. al.* (eds.), *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2004; Beatrice Leung, "China's Religious Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity," *China Quarterly*, no. 184, 2005, pp. 894-913.

autonomous category.[3] When it found its place in the Marxist ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, however, the state-religion distinction came to designate not two autonomous spheres, but an opposition between two types of *political* forces, the dictatorship of the proletariat on the one hand and the instruments of feudalism and imperialism on the other.

The state-led institutionalisation of religion in the PRC

When the CCP took power in 1949, it thus considered the religious question solely from the angle of political struggle, both in terms of long-term vision and short-term pragmatic considerations. The purpose of religious policy was to eviscerate religious communities of their connections with political enemies and turn them into instruments of the Communist Party's United Front, all the while making efforts to avoid alienating religious believers, and, while respecting their freedom of belief, leave them to naturally wither away as the class basis of religion disappeared. No space was given to those forms of religiosity that had no potential symbolic and institutional autonomy from the feudal and semi-colonial structures of the old society: Confucianism, disorganised since the collapse of the imperial examination system and mandarinate, was completely banned as the very essence of "feudalism";[4] the thousands of redemptive societies,[5] which aimed to reformulate and revive traditional religion, were ruthlessly persecuted as "reactionary sects and secret societies"; the millions of communal cults, deeply rooted in traditional rural society, were stigmatised as "feudal superstition";[6] and only Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (and, as an afterthought, monastic Daoism), with their international recognition as world religions, their self-contained scriptural and symbolic systems, and their easily identifiable clerical institutions, were accorded legitimacy as "religion," and organised into state-sponsored national patriotic associations under the supervision of

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[3] See Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, chap. 3.

[4] Anna Xiao Dong Sun, "The Fate of Confucianism as a Religion in Socialist China: Controversies and Paradoxes," in Fenggang Yang and Joseph B. Tamney (eds.), *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*, Leiden, Brill, 2005, pp. 229-254.

[5] The "redemptive societies" were a wave of salvational movements that appeared in the first decades of the twentieth century, which typically combined the union of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, to which Christianity and Islam were often added) with spirit-writing, philanthropy, and a milleniarian eschatology, and often adopted modern forms of organisation and teaching. See Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity. Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 103-104; David A. Palmer, "Redemptive Societies: Historical Phenomenon or Sociological Category?," forthcoming in *Minsu ch'ü-yi*.

[6] Vincent Goossaert, "Le destin de la religion chinoise au 20e siècle," *Social Compass*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2003, pp. 429-40.

the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), while cooperative religious leaders as individuals were dealt with by the United Front Department of the CCP.

This article focuses on the state-led institutionalisation of religion from the post-Mao era until today, and its effect on the structuring of China's religious field. This institutionalisation has been limited to those recognised religions, and has excluded not only the other forms of religiosity mentioned above – which did and still do represent a far greater portion of China's religious field – but also newer forms of indigenous and global forms of religiosity that have appeared in China since the 1980s. For lack of space, this article focuses on the religious institutions of the Han majority, and among them, more attention will be paid to Buddhism and Daoism – for which the impact of institutionalisation has been the most profound, since there is no historical experience of national religious institutions, creating an unprecedented level of national integration of these two religions' clerical networks and liturgies.[7] This is not a study of the grassroots religious life of these communities, but of the institutional processes that aim to structure the grassroots – and whose actors typically complain about how difficult it is to organise the people, with their low levels of education and *sushi*.[8] My discussion focuses on what Vermander calls the state's "functionalisation" of religion -- how it creates what Fenggang Yang has called the "red market" of religion in China, in which "the red stain [of communist ideology] is reflected in the rhetoric of clergy, theological discourse, and practices of the sanctioned religious groups."[9] As with secular state-building in China, the degree of institutionalisation is stronger at the national level and is significantly weaker in more remote localities.[10] The process does, nonetheless, profoundly shape the religious

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[7] See Vermander's and Goossaert and Fang's contributions to this issue. The cases of ethnic minority religions, such as Tibetan Buddhism and the Islamic faith of the Hui and Uyghurs, as well as those of Catholic and Protestant Christianity, have played a fundamental role in the Chinese state's formulation of religious policy. But they have dominated the academic literature on Chinese religious policy, as well as international media attention, while China's religious mainstream has been relatively ignored. Since these religions are associated with either strong non-Han ethnic identities or with strong foreign-based religious institutions, they tend to generate more clearly differentiated relations between state and religion. On Tibet, see Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, and Melvyn C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein (eds.), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998. On Islam in China, see Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the Peoples' Republic*, Cambridge, MA, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1996. On Protestantism, see Daniel H. Bays, "Chinese Protestant Christianity Today," *The China Quarterly*, no. 174, 2003, pp. 488-504; Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993; on Catholicism, see Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

[8] See Kang Xiaofei's and Cao Nanlai's contributions to this issue.

[9] Fenggang Yang, "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China," *The Sociological Quarterly,* no. 97, 2006, p. 97.

[10] For a bottom-up approach to this question, see David A. Palmer, "Religiosity and Social Movements in China: Divisions and Multiplications," in Gilles Guiheux & K. E. Kuah-Pearce (eds.), *Social Movements in*

field. Institutionalisation is understood here as formulated by Ji Zhe, taking inspiration from Giddens:

> *An "institution" could be conceived of as the general manner of the reproduction of rules and resources. If an organization is reconfigured by the encompassing external institutional arrangement, so that its structure and its rules about the reproduction and distribution of resources tend to be identical with its institutional environment, then it can be seen as an 'institutionalized' organization.*[11]

On the one hand, the rejection of revolutionary iconoclasm and radicalism, and the policy of reform and opening up, has led to a greater tolerance toward religion; and an increasingly prominent discourse on the positive contributions of religion to philanthropy and social morality has even led to an exploration of ways of positively encouraging the development of religion. On the other hand, the Leninist model of state control of religious institutions has been retained and even reinforced as the state has expanded and modernised its bureaucracy. This tendency has been spurred by fears of political challenges and separatism emanating from an exploding popular religiosity – as in the case of Falun Gong[12] – and foreign links to religious communities, as in the case of Tibetans and Uyghurs. The tension between these two tendencies could only be resolved through strengthening religious orthodoxy, at the level of both discourse and institutions, so that religion could play its assigned role as an adjunct to social development, while also warding off political and separatist threats. The post-Mao religious institutionalisation, however, has not been a purely top-down enterprise as it had been in the 1950s; it is a project in which religious leaders, government officials, and scholars have invested themselves, combining different discursive regimes and forming a hybrid religio-bureaucratic institution. At the same time, the narrowness of the legitimate category of religion has reinforced the de-institutionalisation of other forms of religiosity, which have been forced to exist as dispersed networks or as underground organisations, and/or to seek institutionalisation under other categories such as health, tourism, or

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China and Hong Kong: The Expansion of Protest Space, Amsterdam, ICAS/Amsterdam University Press, pp. 257-282.

[11] Ji Zhe, "Secularization as Religious Restructuring: Statist Institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and its Paradoxes," in Mayfair Yang (ed.), *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, pp. 239-240; referring to Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, London, Macmillan, 1979; *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984.

[12] See David Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China,* New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.

heritage, leading them to become partly or fully assimilated into the secular logics of those categories. In the past few years, state religious authorities have recognised the existence of such phenomena and become more open to a potential broadening of the category of religion. But the logic of state-led religious institutionalisation implies that such a broadening does not lead to a "freeing up" of the religious sphere along the Western model of church-state separation, but rather to the difficulty of expanding institutional management over an ever-growing religious domain.

The patriotic religious associations created under the CCP's guidance in the 1950s were, for all five religions concerned, entirely new institutional formations. Never in history had China's Buddhists, Daoists, or Muslims been united in a China-wide organisation (there had been many attempts in the Republican period [1911-1949], but most of these had failed).[13] The multifarious Protestant sects and denominations were forced to merge into a single unit, cut off from overseas churches and missionary societies. And the Catholic association took orders from Zhongnanhai instead of the Vatican. Even within these five religions, the boundaries of legitimate religiosity were clearly drawn, excluding "feudal superstition" (especially in the cases of Buddhism and Daoism), links with "imperialist powers" (especially in the cases of Protestantism and Catholicism), and all groups that refused to submit to the authority of the patriotic associations (again especially in the cases of the Christian churches, as well as a portion of the Tibetan Buddhist clergy).[14]

The Cultural Revolution had seen all the socialist religious institutions abolished, from the United Front Department to the Religious Affairs Bureau and the Associations, as religion became a direct target to be eliminated. In the period of "reform and opening up" from 1979 onwards, this system was re-instated, but in a radically different context. Even when the state stepped back to leave more space for religious activity, there were no strong indigenous religious institutions to occupy that space – in sharp contrast to the Orthodox and Catholic churches that quickly reinvested the religious field in post-socialist Eastern Europe and Russia. In the absence of a single, dominant religious institution, the Chinese state continued, by will and by default, to play the central role of

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[13] On Buddhism, see Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972. On the Republican-era religious associations, see Vincent Goossaert, "Republican Church Engineering: The National Religious Associations in 1912 China," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (ed.), *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, pp. 209-232.

[14] For an analysis of CCP policy toward religion from 1921 to 1966, see Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *op. cit.*, chap. 6; for a collection of primary texts from 1949 to 1970, see Donald E. MacInnis, *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1972.

defining and protecting religious orthodoxy. Historically, China's religious institutions had already been weak before 1949; the PRC regime had created new institutions in the 1950s, but they had been primarily political creations, and were gutted by the Cultural Revolution. But it was these associations that were called on to organise China's resurgent religiosity, and that needed to be strengthened and further institutionalised. The state attempted to shift from ideological dogmatism to the political co-optation of religious leaders, the bureaucratic management of religious communities, and the harnessing of religious resources to the goals of economic development and social harmony.

The state-led institutionalisation of Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism has created a relatively homogenous institutional structure for these five traditions, a hybrid of the secular socialist work unit (*danwei*) and traditional forms of clerical organisation, which has become constitutive of the religious *habitus* of the leaders of these communities.[15] The *danwei* is the modular system of nested units under which, in socialist China, all units of production and administration were nationalised and organised, and to which all workers were assigned for life, providing not only work but also residential, leisure and welfare facilities. While officially registered religious communities, as associations, are not fully-fledged *danwei*, they partake of the same institutional logic: bureaucratic positions (such as *huizhang*, "chairman," *bangongshi zhuren*, "general manager," etc.) take precedence over, or even fully replace ecclesiastic rank; the key hierarchical relationships are those between the Association Chairman (who is usually also the abbot or leading cleric of the main temple or church within a given jurisdiction) and the representatives of the CCP United Front branch and the Religious Affairs Bureau. These relationships play themselves out in the appointment of personnel to other positions and in the internal politics of resource allocation. Rewards for performance, in the form of increased resources and appointment to higher administrative rank or to prestigious political positions (Peoples' Consultative Conferences), give as much weighing to political as to religious abilities. All of these performances, positions, and resources are negotiated through the *guanxi* culture of relationship management, which pervades the religious institutions as much as any secular institution.

As most *danwei* have, since the 1990s, been encouraged and even required to become self-subsisting in the market economy, so have the religious communities, which have

[15] See Billioud and Thoraval's contribution to this issue for a discussion of the juxtaposition of the post-Mao socialist habitus and traditional Confucian ritual sacrality.

been pressured to post positive economic performance by selling profit-making services and commodities.[16] However, while the *danwei* system was largely dismantled in the late 1990s, reducing if not eliminating most enterprises' requirement of political performance and leaving them free to live or die in the market, religious associations are among the categories of units along with schools, government administrations, the army, and strategic industries that remain under close political supervision. Religious *danwei* today are thus hybrids of religious culture with the institutional *habitus* of work units in the socialist market economy. This hybridisation is not an easy process, and can be painful to religious practitioners seeking spiritual purity. Nor are the relations between the different components of the institutional structure always harmonious; indeed, conflicts are frequent, sometimes even violent, between clerics, official associations, and the religious affairs authorities, or between religious institutions and non-religious units such as tourism authorities fighting over the use of scenic sites and their revenues.[17] But these conflicts, and the norms of playing them out and solving them, are themselves constitutive of the institutional order. In order to understand this process of institutionalisation, we need to consider the discursive networks in which the boundaries and forms of religion as a distinctive institution are defined, and the regulations that aim to translate the discourse into reality, and then consider the specific structure of the official bodies that create and reproduce these institutional forms. While I discuss discourses and institutions separately for ease of presentation, we should bear in mind that the two are in fact mutually constitutive.

The discursive network on religion

Each political system has its own regime of producing a discourse on legitimate forms of religion. This discourse not only assigns ideas, practices, and groups into a category of religion, with distinct rights, restrictions, and positions within the range of functionally differentiated social institutions in a given society, but also contributes to shaping the internal structure and norms of the religious groups themselves. Discourses on religion

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[16] See Yang Der-ruey, "The Changing Economy of Temple Daoism in Shanghai," in Fenggang Yang and Joseph B. Tamney (eds.), *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*, Leiden, Brill, 2005, pp. 113-148; Graeme Lang, Selina Chan, and Lars Ragvald, "Temples and the Religious Economy," *ibid.* pp. 149-180.

[17] See, for example, the case of Nanputuo described in David Wank, "Institutionalizing Modern 'Religion' in China's Buddhism: Political Phases of a Local Revival," in Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank (eds.), *Making Religion, Making the State: the Politics of Religion in Modern China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 126-150.

in the Peoples' Republic of China should be seen in the context of the broader economy of discourse production and circulation between various official and unofficial actors, including Party leaders and organs, government departments, academic institutions, religious leaders and followers, and the media. We also need to bear in mind how, within this economy, a whole set of categories has evolved, often in opposition to each other, each of which has been used to label phenomena related to what, in anthropological terms, may broadly be considered as pertaining to the religious domain. These categories include "religion" *zongjiao*, of course, but also *mixin* (superstition), *fandong huidaomen* (reactionary secret society), and *xiejiao* (evil cult); *minjian xinyang* (popular faith) as well as *wenhua* (culture) and *wenwu* (cultural relic), *fei wuzhi wenhua yichan* (intangible cultural heritage), *minsu* (folk customs), *minzu fengqing* (exotic ethnic customs), and anything that can be categorised as a "tourist resource"; as well as "nourishing life," "*qigong*," "martial arts," "Chinese medicine," "sports," and "science"; and even "philanthropy," "National studies," and "international exchange." Each of these categories is part of a distinct discursive network, entailing a different type of dynamic relationship with the state and its definitions of orthodoxy, and producing a different logic of organisation and action, within the common structure of what Billioud and Thoraval, in their contribution to this issue, call the "post-Mao habitus."

In the case of "religion," the discursive network is composed of Party leaders giving speeches on religion; the United Front Department and the Religious Affairs Bureaus at the national, provincial, and local levels; several types of academic institution—notably the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and departments of philosophy and religious studies at the main universities, some of which dominate academic discourse on a certain religion (such as Sichuan University's Institute for Daoism and Religious Culture);[18] and the leaders of the five religious associations, and of the official training institutes and seminaries of those religions. These different types of persons (officials, academics, religious leaders) have different perspectives but share a globally reformist outlook that generally encourages a secularised, ethical vision of religion; academics, no less than the religious leaders, have been active in formulating their vision of how the religion they study should modernise.

Members of the discursive network on religion, as officials, scholars, or state-recognised religious leaders, are expected to speak within the framework of broader Party

[18] Fenggang Yang, "Between Secularist Ideology and Desecularizing Reality," in Yang and Tamney (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 19-40.

policy. As such, their pronouncements carry a certain degree of authority and contribute to official discourse on religion. On the other hand, each has his own interests, allegiances, and integration into other discursive networks, so that there is a clear difference in the perspectives of the discursive actors. As Ryan Dunch has aptly formulated, a given policy pronouncement "functions as both code and cover: code for a set of officially sanctioned expectations, and cover for a broad range of intellectual and theological agendas invoking it as legitimation."[19] Party policy thus creates a common discursive framework that is invested and reproduced by actors with different interests and loyalties. The primary allegiance of religious affairs officials is to the government—but within the government they often see themselves (or are seen) as defenders of religious interests, or as promoters of a "proper" form of religion. Religious leaders toe the Party line in order to protect the interests of their communities, and also to reinforce their authority within the community. Scholars typically have a more liberal attitude than the government, but also need to establish and protect the legitimacy of their field of study, and they use academic norms of distance and objectivity to balance their sympathies with the religions they study. The best known case is the "cultural Christians," academics and intellectuals who do not explicitly profess belief in Christianity but take a Christian standpoint to engage in a critique of China's moral and social problems.[20] Another example is a network of scholars claiming the label of "New Daoism" *xin daojia*, who argue that Daoism should develop a new ideology for the twenty-first century based on environmentalism, gender equality, and traditional culture.[21] We may also cite the widespread influence among academics and intellectuals of reformist Buddhism through the writings and initiatives of clerics such as Hsing Yun or Jinghui.[22] It is in this context of multiple allegiances and complex motives that discourse on religion is generated through various publications and journals, and through meetings and conferences that might include one or several categories of discursive actor.

The evolving discourse of Party leaders

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[19] Ryan Dunch, "Christianity and 'Adaptation to Socialism'," in Mayfair Yang (ed.), *op. cit.,* p. 172.
[20] Dunch, *ibid.*
[21] Hu Fuchen, "21 shiji de xin daoxue wenhua zhanlue" (Strategy for the New Daoist Culture of the twenty-first century), in Hu Fuchen and Lü Xichen, *Daoxue tonglun* (Daoist Studies), Beijing, Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2004, pp. 716-744.
[22] Fenggang Yang and Dedong Wei, "The Bailin Buddhist Temple: Thriving under Communism," in Yang and Tamney (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 63-86; Zhe Ji, "Religion, Youth and Modernity: Summer Camp as a New Ritual Practice of Chinese Buddhism," in *Social Compass*, forthcoming.

Speeches of CCP leaders, and a few related official documents, provide the overarching framework for the discursive network on religion. These documents and speeches, of course, take into account the other voices within the discursive network, and also react to the general evolution of the domestic and international political context. They provide the guidelines for drafting national regulations on religion, which are few in number; the bulk of the administrative texts that apply to religious institutions are actually enacted at the provincial or local level, with much more detail on procedures, and also with a high decree of discrepancy between different places—reflecting the even higher degree of discrepancy in the actual practices of local officials, who are quite open to reform and experimentation in some places and bent on tight control in others. Details of the rituals and practices (divination, healing rites…) that are allowed or banned vary greatly from province to province.[23]

Every few years, speeches by the CCP's top leaders set the tone for the discourse on religion. Each time, there have been subtle adjustments in the discourse, in which the Marxist doctrine of the "disappearance of religion" is deferred to an ever more distant future, while the positive contributions of religion to society are given an ever-greater recognition. At the same time, the fundamental premise—of the CCP's ultimate authority over religion, and its duty to control and guide its development—has remained unchanged.

An important discursive change occurred when, in the early 1980s, scholars were permitted to debate and re-interpret Marx's comments on "religion as the opium of the

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[23] Xing Fuzeng, "Church-State Relations in Contemporary China and the Development of Protestant Christianity," *China Study Journal*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2003, p. 27 n. 42; Ying Fuk-Tsang, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: An Appraisal of Religious Legislation in China and the Regulations on Religious Affairs of 2005," *Religion, State & Society*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2006, pp. 354-355. See Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1989, for a comprehensive compilation of translated official policy documents, speeches and news reports from the 1980s. A complete collection of authoritative policy documents and speeches from 1979 to 1995 is published in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi zonghe yanjiuzu, Guowuyuan zongjiao shiwuju zhengce faguisi (ed.), *Xin shiqi zongjiao gongzuo wenxian xuanbian* (Compilation of documents on religious work for the new era), Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 1995. For the full text of several national, provincial, and local documents, see Xingzhengyuan dalu weiyuanhui, *Dalu diqu zongjiao fagui huibian* (Compilation of religious regulations of the Mainland region), Taipei, Xingzhengyuan dalu weiyuanhui, 1995; also Guojia zongjiao shiwuju zhengce faguisi, *Quanguo zongjiao xingzheng fagui guizhang huibian* (National compilation of laws and regulations on the administration of religion), Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2000. Some of these documents are translated in Human Rights Watch Asia, *China: State Control of Religion* 1997, http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1997/china1/, accessed 26 Sept 2009. Several local regulations are translated in Richard Madsen and James Tong (eds.), "Local Religious Policy in China, 1980-1997," *Chinese Law and Government*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2000. For a detailed, annotated directory of PRC regulations on religion from the national to local levels of government as of the early 2000s, see Chan Kim-Kwong and Eric C. Carlson, *Religious Freedom in China: Policy, Administration and Regulation. A Research Handbook*, Santa Barbara, CA, Institute for the Study of American Religion/ Hong Kong, Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion, 2005.

masses," claiming that this statement applied to the role of religion in nineteenth-century Germany and not to the essence of religion itself.[24] This opened the way for religion to be depicted as having positive as well as negative factors. The new thinking was reflected in a document issued by the CCP Central Committee on 31 March 1982 entitled "The basic viewpoint and policy on the religious question during our country's socialist period,"[25] often referred to as "Document 19," and which was both a revision of the Party's basic viewpoint on religion and an outline of specific policies and regulations. The document stated that in socialist China, now that class exploitation had been successfully eradicated, "the class root of the existence of religion was virtually lost." But since peoples' consciousness lags behind changes in social structure, old ways of thinking will continue to persist, people will still need religion at times of disaster and misfortune, and religion will not disappear until the long stage of socialism is completed and communism is realised.[26]

Document 19 provided the ideological justification for the restoration of religious life following the Cultural Revolution, and for the protection of freedom of individual religious belief enshrined in the revised Constitution of 1982.[27] The official religious associations were reinstated, officially designated places of religious worship were re-opened, and religious communities were allowed and even encouraged to engage in international exchanges with their coreligionists. But the policy drew a clear line between "normal" religious life, which was permitted, and other illegal activities. The 1982-1984 crackdown on "spiritual pollution" targeted those activities: reactionary secret societies (*huidaomen*) and "spirit-mediums and witches" (*shenhan wupo*) were to be prevented from returning to activity, while practitioners of superstitious professions such as divination, physiognomy, numerology, and *fengshui* were to be re-educated to find another profession to make a living; if they persisted, they were to be disbanded. The building of lineage

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[24] Yang Fenggang, "Between Secularist Ideology and Desecularizing Reality," *op. cit.*, pp. 23-25. For a translation of Chinese scholarship from the 1980s on religion, see Luo Zhufeng (ed.), *Religion under Socialism in China*, trans. Donald E. MacInnis and Zheng Xi'an, Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 1991, esp. pp. 151-156, challenging the orthodox interpretation of religion as an "opiate." The role of Protestant intellectuals in the academic "opium wars" in which these reinterpretations were aired is analysed in Ryan Dunch, *op. cit.,* pp. 165-168.

[25] First published in the *Selected Documents of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress, 1982,* translation by Janice Wickeri, published in Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today*, *op. cit*, pp. 8-25.

[26] Document 19, in MacInnis, *ibid.,* p. 10.

[27] "Article 36, Religious Policy," in MacInnis, *ibid.,* pp. 34-35.

halls and ancestral shrines was also banned, and those already built were to be expropriated.[28]

Notwithstanding these campaigns, religious activities rapidly multiplied in the more open atmosphere of the 1980s. The growing contacts with foreign religious networks began to worry CCP leaders. This concern became especially salient following the collapse of the USSR and during the Tiananmen student movement of 1989, and led to a crackdown on underground Catholic and Protestant leaders in 1990-1991.[29] At a "National Religious Work Conference" held in December 1990, Jiang Zemin stressed the importance of religious work in order to ensure ethnic harmony and protect China's territorial integrity, and to struggle against infiltration by foreign religious forces as well as against those, including Christians, who, through developing churches, were suspected of attempting, from the bottom-up, to put pressure on the CCP to lead China on the road to democracy.[30] These points were laid out in a new policy document, "Document 6," issued by the CCP Central Committee and the State Council on 5 February 1991,[31] which called for a reinforcement of the institutional management of religion, and prompted provincial and municipal authorities in several jurisdictions to issue detailed regulations.

The main culprits of religious infiltration and political interference were, in the 1980s, seen to be the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant missionary societies.[32] The possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican carried the risk of the Holy See attempting to control Chinese Catholics.[33] Protestant missionising was also seen as a threat through its multi-pronged strategies of evangelism. Increasingly, the influence of the "Dalai Lama clique" based in India and widely supported in the West was also blamed for stoking Tibetan separatism, and the possibility of Muslims in Central Asia

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[28] Chen Jinlong, *Zhongguo gongchandang yu zhongguo de zongjiao wenti – Guanyu dang de zongjiao zhengce de lishi kaocha* (The Chinese Communist Party and China's Religious Question: A Historical Study of the Party's Policy on Religion), Guangzhou, Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2006, p. 271. On the crackdown on redemptive societies banned as reactionary secret societies, see Robin Munro (ed.), *Syncretic Sects and Secret Societies: Revival in the 1980s*, thematic issue, *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology,* vol. 21, no. 4, 1989; also David A. Palmer, "Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labeling Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century China," in Mayfair Yang (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 120-126; on the revival and expropriation of ancestral halls and shrines, see Ann Anagnost, "The Politics of Ritual Displacement," in Charles F. Keyes *et. al.* (eds.), *Asian Visions of Authority*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1994, pp. 221-254. In spite of these policies in the 1980s, the reconstruction of ancestral halls has continued unabated.

[29] Asia Watch Committee, *Freedom of Religion in China*, Washington, Human Rights Watch, 1992, pp. 6-29.

[30] Speeches reprinted in Zhonggong zhongyang, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-204.

[31] Reproduced in Asia Watch Committee, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-35.

[32] "Document 19," *op. cit.,* p. 23.

[33] Beatrice Leung, *Sino-Vatican Relations: Problems in Conflicting Authority, 1976-1986*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992; Beatrice Leung and William T. Liu, *The Chinese Catholic Church in Conflict, 1949-2001*, Boca Raton (FL), Universal Publishers, 2004.

promoting the idea of an independent "East Turkestan" among the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was also feared.[34]

Jiang Zemin invited the leaders of the five religions to Zhongnanhai twice in 1991 and 1992 to discuss these issues and stress the importance of the "adaptation of religion to socialism." At a meeting of the United Front in November 1993, Jiang explained that the concept of "adaptation to socialism" meant that religious believers were free to keep their theism and their religious faith, but politically they should love the motherland and defend the socialist system and the leadership of the CCP.[35] They were to change their teachings and institutions that were not compatible with socialism, and use the positive aspects of religious teachings, practices, and morality to serve socialism. For example, cultural relics could be used for cultural development and patriotic education. Religious teachings and concepts could be used for socialist development, such as the liberal "theological construction" advocated by Protestant Bishop Ding Guangxun (1915-),[36] the Catholic notion of "love the Nation and love the Faith," the Buddhist theory of "humanistic Buddhism" understood as using Buddhism to serve society,[37] and the Muslim idea that "patriotism is part of faith." Religious teachings on morality could be used to improve the moral standards of the people, and international religious exchanges could contribute to building friendships and unifying the motherland (Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan). The government would help them adapt to socialism by identifying the useful elements of their religious tradition, encouraging them to eliminate their unhealthy habits and teachings, encouraging them to participate in economic development, and giving them the role of bridges between the Party-state and the masses.[38]

By the early 2000s, the tenor of speeches on religion was becoming even more positive. On 31 January 2001, Li Ruihuan (then a member of the Standing Committee of

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[34] Chen Jinlong, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-9.

[35] Speech reprinted in Zhonggong zhongyang, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-255.

[36] Philip L. Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K.H. Ting and the Chinese Church.*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2007; Ying Fuk-tsang, "Jiang lunli daode de jidujiao – dangdai Zhongguo shenxue dui shehui zhuyi de tiaozheng yu shiying" (An ethical Christianity – The adaptation of contemporary Chinese theology to socialism), in Ying Fuk-tsang, *Dangdai zhongguo zheng-jiao guanxi* (Contemporary Chinese state-church relations), Hong Kong, Alliance Bible Seminary, 1999, pp. 133-85; Xing Fuzeng, "Church-State Relations," *art. cit.,* pp. 34-37; Dunch, *art. cit.*, pp. 171-175.

[37] Ji Zhe, *art. cit.*, pp. 253-256.

[38] For a discussion of the theory of "adaptation to socialism" by the Central Party School's leading theoretician on religion, see Gong Xuezeng, *Shehui zhuyi yu zongjiao* (Socialism and religion), Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2003, pp. 251-323. For examples of the discourse on adaptation by representatives of different religions, see Zhengxie Guangdong sheng weiyuanhui bangongting, *Cujin jianshe hexie shehui: zongjiao yu shehui zhuyi shehui xiang shiying yantaohui lunwenji* (Promoting the construction of a harmonious society: Proceedings of the conference on religion and adaptation to socialist society), Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2005.

the Political Bureau of 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party and Chairman of the 9th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, CPPCC) gave a speech that, for the first time, discussed religion in a manner that legitimised CCP religious policy from the standpoint of traditional Chinese culture: much of Chinese culture is related to religion, he said, noting that China is a culture of harmonious assimilation, which has always absorbed different cultures and religions: foreign religions were constantly absorbing nourishment from Chinese culture and becoming "sinified." In that sense, he stated, the CCP's policy of religious freedom was in tune with traditional Chinese culture.[39]

At the end of the same year, at a meeting on religious work, Jiang Zemin recognised the dual nature of religion, including both its negative and positive sides. The list of positive aspects was longer than in his 1993 speech: religion now also provided philanthropy, ensured the emotional and psychological stability of the masses, and preserved social order and stability. He noted the deep historical roots of religion and its long-term existence and continued influence, and recognised that religion might continue to exist even after the disappearance of classes and states – admitting that the goal of religion's disappearance was even more distant than the realisation of communism.[40] Following his speech, an editorial in the *Peoples' Daily* on 13 December 2001 acknowledged that the CCP had the duty to represent the "legitimate interests of the broad masses of religious believers," who were recognised as "a positive force in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics."[41] In a speech on 18 December 2007 at a high-level Party study meeting, Hu Jintao further reinforced the positive discourse on religion, stressing that the "basic line" of the CCP's religious work was to enable religious people to "play an active role in economic and social development"; to help them resolve their material difficulties and unite them around the goal of building a "moderately prosperous society" (*xiaokang shehui*); and to strengthen the construction of the religious clergy, so that they would be well-trained to have the political, academic, and moral foundations for releasing the positive effect of religion on society.[42]

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[39] Chen Jinlong, *op. cit.*, p. 274.
[40] Ying, "New Wine in Old Wineskins," *art. cit.*, p. 349. For a detailed discussion of the practical implications of Jiang's speech, see Xing Fuzeng, "Church-State Relations," *art. cit.,* pp. 20-26.
[41] Chen Jinlong, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-8.
[42] Xinhua, "Hu Jintao: Guanche dang de zongjiao gongzuo fangzhen, zuohao xin xingshi xia zongjiao gongzuo" (Hu Jintao: To implement the Party line on religious work, do well the religious work under the new conditions), http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-12/19/content_7281396.htm, accessed 13 Oct. 2009.

The system of religious management: United Front, Religious Affairs Bureau, official associations

It was through the discursive network on religion that the goals enumerated by Hu Jintao could be carried out. This network refers to the deeply imbricated system combining the Party, through the United Front; the state, through the Religious Affairs Bureau; the religious communities, through their official associations; and academia, through the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, as well as other religious research institutes. The post-Mao religious institution began to take shape as early as 1978, when the policy of religious freedom was restored at the 11th Party Congress, and the state was given the mandate of "strengthening the management" of religion and of actively guiding the adaptation of religion to socialism – while emphasising that "feudal superstition" remained banned.[43] The United Front Department was restored in 1978, and proceeded to rehabilitate religious leaders (notably those who were famous and of high standing) who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, and to take measures to return them to normal religious life.[44] As in the 1950s, religious leaders were appointed to political positions: by the early 2000s, 10,000 out of 300,000 registered clerics held positions in Peoples' Congresses and in Peoples' Political Consultative Conferences (PPCC) at various levels.[45]

The Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB)[46] was also re-established in 1979, and given the tasks of supervising the re-establishment and operations of the official religious associations, the registration and management of clergy, and the registration and management of places of religious worship. United Front departments and Religious Affairs Bureaus and commissions were established at each level of government: national, provincial, municipal, and district. The United Front, as a branch of the CCP, is responsible for dealing with religious leaders as individuals, while the RAB, as a government unit, is responsible for dealing with the religious associations as corporate entities. RAB offices were responsible for administrative oversight of the official associations of the five recognised religions. The national RAB had a first division overseeing Buddhism and Daoism, a second division for Protestantism and Catholicism,

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[43] "Fully Implement the Policy of Religious Freedom," in MacInnis, *Religion in China Today*, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-32; Richard Madsen, "Religion and Feudal Superstition: Implications of the PRC's Religious Policy for the Christian Encounter with China," *Ching Feng*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1979, pp. 190-218.
[44] Chen Jinlong, *op. cit.*, pp. 304-17.
[45] *ibid*, p. 306.
[46] It was renamed State Administration of Religious Affairs in 1998.

and a third division for Islam. (A fourth division, for "policy research," "popular faith," and "new religions" was established in 2005, as discussed below).

In practice, at lower levels of government, it is often the same official who is in charge of the United Front, of religious affairs, and of minority nationalities affairs. This is not a centralised system, however: while lower-level religious affairs and United Front officials are supposed to follow the directives and policies of the central government, they are appointed by the provincial and local government and Party committee, to which they remain accountable, and not to the central Religious Affairs Bureau and United Front. There are thus extreme variations in the application of religious policy at the local level. The same situation prevails in the official religious associations, which were established at the provincial and local levels throughout the 1980s and 1990s: the leaders of these associations are "elected" by the members after extensive consultations with local United Front and RAB representatives, in order to ensure that the person elected would have religious legitimacy among the followers, while at the same time being politically acceptable to the government—the common understanding being that, if either of these conditions was not met, the work of the association would encounter serious difficulties, since it would lose the support of either the government or of the religious community. Since local religious leaders owe their selection to their local community and local RAB and United Front officials, their primary loyalty is to these local bodies and not to the national-level official association. The RAB is responsible for managing the legal religious communities, while the Public Security Bureau (PSB) prosecutes religious activities deemed illegal. Since the RAB and PSB at a given level jurisdiction do not necessarily communicate with each other or have good relations, policy implementation is not always coherent.

The national-level official religious associations were re-established in 1980: the China Buddhist Association, the China Daoist Association, the China Islamic Association, and the Protestant and Catholic associations. In the latter cases, in order to compensate for the lack of legitimacy of the Mao-era Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the authorities established new Christian associations that could focus on internal theological, pastoral, and liturgical matters, while the Patriotic Associations continued to handle political relations with the government and CCP. These new bodies were, for the Catholics, the National Conference of Bishops (1980), which was led by clergy as opposed to the lay CCPA and the National Administrative Commission of the Catholic

Church in China (1980), and, for the Protestants, the China Christian Council, which had an overlapping membership with the TSPM.[47] The YMCA and YWCA were also re-established in collaboration with the United Front, the Communist Youth League, and the All-China Womens' Federation, to organise the youth activity of Christians and to build ties with Christian youth in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and overseas.[48] Following their establishment at the national level, provincial and local associations were created. For the Daoists, for instance, there were 83 local associations in the early 1990s, 133 by 1999, and more than 200 by the early 2000s.[49]

The management of religious clergy

A key concern of the Religious Affairs authorities and of the official associations is the ordination, registration, and management of the five religions' clergy. To be permitted to work as religious professionals, clerics need to be acknowledged by their local religious association, which then sends their file to the local RAB. In 1997 there were 200,000 Buddhist monastics, including almost 80,000 Han Mahayana clerics (about one-third female), 120,000 Tibetan monks and nuns and 1,700 reincarnate lamas, and 10,000 Theravada monks among the Dai and other minorities in Yunnan. (These figures can be compared to those from the early 1950s: 240,000 Han; 400,000 Tibetan and 8,000 Theravada clerics.) The number of Daoist monastics was lower but growing, with 12,000 in the early 1990s and double that number a decade later.[50]

"Patriotic education" was implemented in all religious communities from 1994. Here, the main issue was integrating traditional forms of training and ordination with modern, standardised procedures being promoted by the state, as well as the question of political loyalty. For the ordination of monks, regulations were promulgated by the CBA and CTA. The first cohort of 47 Buddhist monastics were ordained in 1980; in 1987, 1,008 monks were ordained at Jizushan in Yunnan; the rhythm of Buddhist ordinations

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47 Karl-Fritz Daiber, "Les associations des cinq religions officiellement reconnues en République populaire de Chine," *Social Compass*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2004, pp. 255-71.
48 Chen Jinlong, *op. cit.*, p. 308.
49 See Xingzhengyuan, *op. cit.*, for the constitutions of the official religious associations. These texts, as well as many official documents pertaining to the official associations, are collected in Guowuyuan zongjiao shiwuju zhengce faguisi, *Zhongguo zongjiao tuanti ziliao* (Materials on China's religious associations), Beijing, Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 1993.
50 He Guanghu (ed.), *Zongjiao yu dangdai zhongguo shehui* (Religion and contemporary Chinese society), Beijing, Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2006, p. 147. On the institutional Daoist revival, see Lai Chi-tim, "Daoism in China Today, 1980-2002," *China Quarterly*, no. 174, 2003, pp. 413-427.

accelerated during the early twenty-first century so that about half the clergy was ordained. For Quanzhen Daoists, *shoujie* ordination ceremonies were reinstated at Baiyunguan in Beijing for a first cohort of 75, and in 1995, at Qingchengshan, for 400 candidates; for them, the number of ordinations was tiny in relation to the total monastic population.

The religious authorities are also concerned about the formal training of the clergy. Officials and scholars regularly lament the poor "quality" (*suzhi*) of clerics[51] -- and stress the need for raising up a new generation of well-trained religious leaders. That this should be properly done, under government supervision, is also important so that future generations of clergy will be loyal to the CCP's leadership and to the socialist system.[52] In 1991, the United Front and the central RAB issued a document detailing a policy to identify promising young clergy with good political attitudes and religious knowledge, to nurture them so that within five to ten years they could become the next generation of religious leaders.

The chief instrument for this training is the official religious academies and seminaries. The year 1980 saw the re-establishment of the China Buddhist Academy, the China Islamic Academy, the Nanjing Theological Seminary, and the China Catholic Seminary. After 1982, local academies were also created: six Buddhist, five Islamic, five Protestant, and five Catholic. In their first decade of operation, these academies produced 2,000 graduates.[53] Specialised Buddhist academies were set up for Han, Tibetan, and Pali (Theravada) Buddhism. The China Daoist Academy was finally established at Baiyunguan in 1990. By 1997, there was a total of 74 official religious training institutes. These academies and seminaries are organised in standard academic style, with courses of study lasting two to four years, followed by examinations and the conferring of a diploma equivalent to an associate or professional degree, as well as a religious title. After graduation, the graduates return to their religious units. The training, which includes political studies, Marxism, and foreign languages, differs from traditional modes of transmission, especially for the Daoists;[54] it is often not seen as a true spiritual education but merely a ticket to advancement in their official careers, giving clerics the academic and social background needed to successfully function within the system of relationship

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51 See Cao Nanlai's contribution to this issue.
52 Chen Jinlong, *op. cit.*, p. 309.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 310.
54 Yang Der-ruey, "Revolution of Temporality: The Modern Schooling of Daoist Priests in Shanghai at the Turn of the 21st Century," in David A. Palmer and Liu Xun (eds.), *Daoism in the 20th Century: Between Eternity and Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, forthcoming.

building and bureaucratic politics within which the religious associations are embedded. If the first leaders after the re-establishment of the religious associations in 1978-1980 often won huge respect for having survived the Cultural Revolution and invested all their energy in reviving their institutions, the next generation lacked such aura.[55] By the 2000s, a good number of clerics were complaining that the top levels of the clergy were controlled by clerics with diplomas (Ph.D. being preferred) who maintained good relationships with officials, spent a large part of their time in meetings and banquets, and were managers rather than religious persons, while spiritual training was disappearing. These bureaucratic leaders are in sharp contrast to charismatic types outside of or on the margins of official institutions, even though a few charismatic Buddhists and Daoists do get appointments in their associations.[56]

Managing places of religious worship[57]

Another of the tasks of the Religious Affairs authorities is to negotiate the "return" of religious sites to the official religious associations—especially famous monasteries, large churches, and temples in the cities and areas with high concentrations of believers, and in ethnic minority areas. Famous temples and churches of historic value are often restored at the government's expense, often more to impress foreign visitors (including official delegations from Buddhist and Muslim countries) than to accommodate local believers. The return of temples has been a source of constant conflict, since most religious venues had been taken over by other units and departments during the Mao era, and the most important sites were often under the control of the tourism, cultural relics, or parks administrations, which were not willing to give them up. In 1983, a policy was enacted to open "key" national Buddhist and Daoist monasteries to the public as places of religious worship, and for them to be managed by monastics. This led to the paltry number of 142 Buddhist and 21 Daoist temples being opened up. Progress was so slow that, again in 1994, a new directive was issued by the United Front and the Religious Affairs Bureau to

[55] David Wank, "Institutionalizing Modern 'Religion'," *art. cit.,* contrasts the first post-1978 abbot of the main Buddhist monastery in Xiamen, whose funeral procession in 1995 was attended by tens of thousands of kneeling laypersons, with his bureaucratic successor who did not elicit any comparable admiration.
[56] On the training of Protestant clergy, see Carsten T. Vala, "Pathways to the Pulpit: Leadership Training in 'Patriotic' and Unregistered Chinese Protestant Churches," in Ashiwa and Wank (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 96-125. On Catholics, see Beatrice Leung, "Communist Party-Vatican Interplay over the Training of Church Leaders in China," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2001, pp. 657-673. On Muslims, see Elisabeth Allès, "Muslim Religious Education in China," *China Perspectives*, no. 45, 2003, pp. 21-33.
[57] See Goossaert and Fang's contribution to this issue for a more detailed study of the Daoist case.

rapidly resolve the many outstanding cases. By 1995, there were 77,981 officially registered places of religious worship: 44 percent were mosques, 40 percent were churches (34 percent Protestant and 6 percent Catholic), 15 percent were Buddhist monasteries, and 2 percent were Daoist temples.[58] At the time of writing, over 30 years after the Cultural Revolution, negotiating the transfer of religious sites remains one of the major preoccupations of religious affairs officials and of the religious associations.

Officially designated places of worship are, according to Document 19, "under the administrative control of the Bureau of Religious Affairs, but the religious organisations themselves and professional religious themselves are responsible for their management."[59] In the case of Buddhist and Daoist temples, they are managed by their local Buddhist or Daoist association (which often has its offices within the premises of the major temples), following principles of "democratic management" (by resident clerics and not lay temple committees), under the supervision of the local RAB. Regulations for the management of temples stipulate the administrative structure and provide for the protection of historical relics. Religious life is to be "normalised" *zhengchanghua*; "normal" religious life includes scripture recitation in temples, rituals, and self-cultivation; whereas sorcery, exorcism, divination, spirit possession, spirit-writing, and *fengshui*, as superstitions, are illegal. Since the latter activities are among the main traditional sources of revenue for temples, this forced them to seek alternative income streams, notably through tourism; however, market demand, and more relaxed controls by the late 1990s, means that "superstitious" activities have become increasingly prevalent and visible in temples. Meanwhile, negotiating their autonomous space and control over resources with the local RAB and local Buddhist/Daoist association takes much of the time of temple clerics.[60]

Temples that are major tourist attractions enjoy high levels of revenue, leading to conflicts among religious associations and government agencies all claiming a share of the pie. In some jurisdictions, for example, provincial Daoist associations levy a fee of 5 percent on the revenues of all temples under their management. In some areas, RABs have shown strong interest in profitable temples, and ignored others. In temples managed by clerics, corrupt relations of profit-sharing between temple abbots and local

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[58] The low proportions of Buddhist and Daoist temples reflect the fact that prior to 1949, and again today in many rural areas, most Chinese temples are built and managed by local laypeople and are unaffiliated with either Buddhism or Daoism, although they often hire Buddhist and/or Daoist priests to conduct rituals. As a result, they cannot be registered as official places of worship unless they manage to prove (or fabricate) a historical or doctrinal connection with either of the two religions. For an example, see Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005.

[59] "Document 19," *art. cit.*, p. 18.

[60] Wank, "Institutionalizing Modern Religion," *art. cit.*

authorities have been the topic of frequent controversy. Often, the authorities simply outsource the management of temples to private businesses, which invest in the construction and promotion, hire clerics to staff them, and revert a part of the profits to the government.[61] The tourist and business potential of Buddhist sites has led to a trend of local authorities and entrepreneurs building open-air giant Buddhas in order to attract tourists and pilgrims—a phenomenon that has been decried by religious affairs officials.

Non-"religious" orthodoxies and heterodoxies

The institutional framework for religious affairs described above is based on a narrow definition of religion that excludes much of China's religious culture. The very narrowness of the category of "religion," restricted to official associations of the five recognised religions, and the political sensitivity and restrictions attached to the category, have led to a rush on the part of other actors, both within and outside the state, to designate a wide range of practices under *non-religious* labels, and thus to secure the legitimacy and legality of the practices – creating what Fenggang Yang has called the "grey market" of religion.[62] In so doing, however, they are subject to the norms associated with that non-religious category, which were defined and debated within the discursive network surrounding that category.

A notable case was the body cultivation traditions, which had been institutionalised under the category of "*qigong*" in the 1950s, where they were integrated into the discursive network of medicine, rather than religion. The post-Mao era saw *qigong* spread from Chinese medicine into the discursive networks of sports, national defence, and science, where, far from the restrictions and sensitivities of the "religion" label, many forms of religiosity were able to find expression under a cloak of legitimacy. For over a decade, from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s, while officially designated "religious" communities were banned from holding activities or publicly promoting their teachings outside the premises of designated places of worship, thousands of popular *qigong* groups could freely and publicly promote meditation, breathing, and gymnastic regimens that

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[61] He Guanghu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 210; Lang, Chan and Ragvald, "Temples and the Religious Economy," *art. cit.*; Kang Xiaofei and Donald Sutton, "Recasting Religion and Ethnicity: Tourism and Socialism in Northern Sichuan, 1992-2005," in Thomas D. Dubois (ed.), *Casting Faiths*: *Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
[62] Fenggang Yang, "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China," *art. cit.*

were often explicitly based on Buddhist and Daoist symbols and cosmology, induced trance states, and sometimes even involved deity worship.[63]

At the same time, by finding a home in the discursive regimes of medicine and science, *qigong* was required to submit to the normative standards and practices of those fields, transforming and secularising *qigong* in the process. When the opposite occurred, *qigong* became the target of a polemical campaign launched by some scientists and journalists labelling it as a "pseudo-science," "superstition," and as "evil cults," *xiejiao*. The latter appeared in contemporary usage around 1995 in the wake of the Waco and Aum Shinrikyo incidents in the United States and Japan. By 1998 it was being used by Buddhists to condemn Falun Gong, and was adopted by the state to justify its suppression of Falun Gong beginning in July 1999. This led to the formation of a new discursive and institutional network, that of "evil cults," made up of the Ministry of Public Security and its specialised anti-cult units, as well as state-sponsored anti-cult associations. In the anti-cult discourse, *xiejiao* was defined almost as an anti-religion, in sharp contrast to religion, which was depicted in unambiguously positive terms.[64] There was little overlap between the "religion" and "evil cult" networks: the categories were defined as mutually exclusive, and recognised religious leaders, scholars, and officials who dealt with "religion" did everything they could to keep the two categories impermeable in order to protect the legitimacy of their own work and avoid being contaminated by the highly sensitive question of "evil cults."

Religiosity also invested the discursive networks of tourism, Confucianism, and national studies,[65] as well as culture[66] and intangible cultural heritage. The latter became an official category in 2004, after the Chinese government signed UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage – which could include performing arts, craftsmanship, rituals, festivals, and folk customs. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for intangible heritage, and the nationwide network of cultural affairs bureaux, down to the provincial and county levels, has been mobilised to identify items of traditional culture to be officially designated as "intangible heritage" and benefit from special heritage protection and funding. Through this process, local ritual traditions

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63 David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.

64 David A. Palmer, "Heretical doctrines," *art. cit.,* pp. 113-134. See also Wang Zuo'an, *Zhongguo de zongjiao wenti he zongjiao zhengce* (China's religious question and religious policy), Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2002, pp. 356-361.

65 See Billioud and Thoraval's contribution to this issue; also Sébastien Billioud, "Confucianism, 'cultural tradition' and official discourses in China at the start of the new century," *China Perspectives*, no. 3, 2007.

66 See Dutournier and Ji's contribution to this issue.

and cults to popular deities such as Mazu and Jigong – none of which are recognised as "religion" – have found a new "canonisation," while inscribing them into the discursive and institutional norms of cultural heritage protection.

Opening the category of religion

Official policy has timidly begun to acknowledge the existence and even the legitimacy of this expanding realm of religious life. Chinese scholars of religion, sociology, and anthropology, through their studies of popular religion and new religious movements, and through their adoption of broader definitions of religion, have contributed to legitimising vast realms of activity previously stigmatised or excluded from the category of religion.[67] The increasing intensity of relationships with the outside world has also led to a realisation that the religious dimension of such exchanges requires coming to terms with the religious diversity of China's international partners. In 2005, a new set of regulations (*zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*) was promulgated, which was largely a consolidation of previous regulations and policies.[68] A notable change in these regulations was that the procedure for the registration of religious associations made no mention of the five official religions, making it theoretically possible for other religions to register (but no other religion had succeeded in doing so at the time of writing). Indeed, taking stock of the reality that the religious world extends far beyond the five officially registered religions, in the same year the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA, the former national RAB renamed in 1998) established a fourth division to look into other groups, especially those pertaining to "popular faith" *minjian xinyang* and "new religions" *xinxing zongjiao*, as well as to conduct research on religious policy.

At the time of writing, there was no explicit policy on popular faith and new religions, but there was a recognition that the phenomenon existed and should not be simply banned, and a willingness to build direct or indirect relationships with those communities, significantly contributing to removing any stigma associated with them – as long as they are not classified as "evil cults" or as challenging the CCP's authority or the territorial integrity of the PRC. If the category of "popular faith" (*minjian xinyang*) has emerged in official research documents as a realm of legitimate religious practices, it had not, at the

[67] Daniel L. Overmyer, "From 'Feudal Superstition' to 'Popular Beliefs': New Directions in Mainland Chinese Studies of Chinese Popular Religion," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie,* vol. 12, 2001, pp. 103-26.
[68] Ying Fuk-Tsang, "New Wine in Old Wineskins," *art. cit.* See Shuai Feng and Li Jian (eds.), *Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli shiyi* (Explanation of the meaning of the regulations on religious affairs), Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2005, for a detailed official interpretation of the regulations.

time of writing, been built into a recognised administrative category. Different provinces and localities have taken different approaches, which are being monitored by SARA, and have been summarised into three models: (1) no government interference; (2) registering communal temples as Daoist (*minjian xinyang daojiaohua*); or (3) officially registering them as a new category of "popular faith." A conference was held by SARA in 2008 to study the three options, but none was chosen, leaving the provinces to continue experimenting. At the same time, there were increasingly explicit indications that communal temples were (along with Buddhism and Daoism) seen as an important resource for slowing the growth of Christianity in the countryside.[69] Other local variations have been observed, such as communal temples registering as Buddhist, and, exceptionally, temples of the Three-in-One Teachings (*sanyi jiao*) have registered under that label in some parts of Fujian.[70]

Friendly exchanges of delegations have taken place between the fourth division of SARA and the Confucian Academy of Hong Kong, which is ardently lobbying for establishing Confucianism as the national religion of China,[71] as well as with the Yiguandao redemptive society in Taiwan (still officially banned on the mainland as a *huidaomen*, "reactionary sect and secret society"). The Eastern Orthodox Church, which has believers among the Russian ethnic minority and some Chinese in the far Northeast and far Northwest, as well as historic properties in Beijing and Shanghai, has been registered for many years at the provincial level in Heilongjiang Province and, after long negotiations, Orthodox religious services were authorised (in the premises of the Russian consulate) in Shanghai in the spring of 2008. Foreign Jews living in China – who had a significant historical presence in Shanghai and Harbin during the early twentieth century -- are allowed to associate and worship, but SARA refuses to recognise the claims of religious identity by descendants of the Kaifeng Jews, who had settled in China during the Song dynasty.[72]

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[69] Personal communication by a Chinese scholar who attended the 2008 conference; see also Goossaert and Fang's contribution to this issue.

[70] Xing Fuzeng, "Church-State Relations," *art. cit.*, p. 27, n. 42.

[71] See Ownby's contribution to this issue for a discussion of this question.

[72] Wang Zuo'an, *op. cit.*, p. 31. On the Orthodox, Jews, Mormons and Bahá'ís in China, see Chan Kim-Kwong, "Religion in China in the Twenty-first Century: Some Scenarios," *Religion, State & Society* vol. 33, no. 2, 2005, pp. 98-100; also Noam Urbach, "Globalizing the Religious Market in China: How Incoming Foreign Religions Affect State Religious Policy," paper presented at the conference on "Religion and Globalization in Asia: Prospects, Patterns, and Problems for the 21st Century," University of San Francisco, 13-14 March 2009. See MacInnis, *Religion in China Today, op. cit.*, pp. 360-366 for translated news reports from the 1980s on Eastern Orthodox and Jewish activities in China.

For "new religions," the main cases being dealt with by SARA are the Bahá'í Faith[73] and the Mormons.[74] Both profess strict obedience to the law as part of their religious teachings and scrupulously avoid establishing religious institutions in the mainland, earning the trust of the authorities while, through natural friendships and overseas travel, the number of Chinese believers grow. Expatriates from the two religions are allowed to establish associations (limited to foreigners) in major cities, while the authorities generally do not interfere with small-scale, informal gatherings of Chinese believers held in private homes.[75] While the Mormons regularly invite Chinese officials and scholars to Brigham Young University in Utah, which has a strong expertise in religion and law, SARA and the Bahá'í Assemblies of Macau and Hong Kong have held regular exchanges of delegations and joint conferences on building harmony and social development, which are important areas of Bahá'í teachings and engagement.[76]

SARA's contacts with these various groups, however, take place in the context of official exchanges with Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, or overseas, or with foreigners living in China, and do not necessarily concern policy toward these religions in the mainland. Some of the cases have been handled by SARA in the context of managing China's relations with Russia (which has aggressively pursued the rights of China's Orthodox Christians), Israel (which, at the diplomatic level, has ignored the Kaifeng Jews),[77] and the US (which has pressed for the rights of Mormons under presidents Bush and Obama, who appointed a Mormon as US ambassador to China).[78]

Conclusion

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[73] The Bahá'í Faith's history in China dates back to 1902, with small communities in Beijing and Shanghai in the Republican period. Cao Yunxiang (1881-1937), the first president of Tsinghua University and one of the earliest Chinese Bahá'ís, was the first translator of Bahá'í scriptures into Chinese. See Cai Degui, *Dangdai xinxing bahayi jiao yanjiu* (A study of the contemporary Bahá'í new religion), Beijing, Zhongguo renmin chubanshe, 2007; Graham Hassall, "China in the Bahá'í Writings," http://bahai-library.com/file.php?file=hassall_china_bahai_history, 2003, accessed 16 Oct. 2009.

[74] Other groups such as Sokka Gakai, the Unification Church, Tiandijiao, Dejiao, and the Red Swastika Society were active in the mainland through cultural, economic, and academic exchanges and philanthropy, but at the time of writing had no known relations with SARA.

[75] In September 2009, however, there were unconfirmed reports of the disbanding by the Public Security Bureau of 50 groups of Chinese Mormons.

[76] See www.srdchina.org and http://bahai-academic.hk/collection.php?langu=en-US&collection=Contacts_PRC_Bahai, accessed 16 Oct. 2009.

[77] "Fundamentally Freund: Why is Israel Ignoring China's Jews?," *Jerusalem Post*, 14 July 2008, http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1215330965901&pagename=JPArticle%2FshowFull, accessed 31 October 2009.

[78] "Obama names GOP gov. envoy to China," *USA Today*, 17 May 2009, http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-05-16-china-ambassador_N.htm, accessed 31 October 2009.

The official Chinese discourse on religion is now explicitly positive about religion and increasingly friendly towards religious communities that until recently were actively banned, stigmatised, or ignored. To be sure, this represents a greater degree of openness towards religion in general and towards a greater plurality of forms of religious expression – as long as they do not challenge the authority of the CCP or the territorial integrity of the PRC. But this opening up remains timid, and its outcome remains to be seen. Such an "opening" should not be understood as leading to an inexorable American-style deregulation of the religious sphere. Since 1979, China's religious policy has consistently sought to further institutionalise religion under the guidance of the CCP. The recent speeches by Hu Jintao and CCP policy documents, with their positive discourse on religion, have not called for the state stepping out of the religious realm, but for it to strengthen and expand the official religious institutions and their personnel. The hesitation of the authorities, in their growing recognition of the religious life going on outside those institutions, is not about how much to let it be free – but about how to effectively institutionalise and manage such a huge domain of social and cultural life.

Glossary

Falun Gong 法論功

fandong huidaomen 反動會道門

fei wuzhi wenhua yichan 非物質文化遺產

fengshui 風水

Hu Jintao 胡锦涛

huizhang 會長

Jiang Zemin 江澤民

Jizushan 雞足山

Li Ruihuan 李瑞環

mixin 迷信

minjian xinyang 民間信仰

minjian xinyang daojiaohua 民間信仰道教化

minsu 民俗

minzu fengqing 民族風情

qigong 氣功

sanyi jiao 三一教

shenhan wupo 神漢巫婆

shoujie 受戒

xiaokang shehui 小康社會

xiejiao 邪教

xin daojia 新道家

xinxing zongjiao 新興宗教

Tiandijiao 天帝教

wenhua 文化

wenwu 文物

Yiguandao 一貫道

zhengchanghua 正常化

Zhongnanhai 中南海

zongjiao 宗教

zongjiao shiwu tiaoli 宗教事務條例