



THE TEMPLETON LECTURE ON RELIGION AND WORLD AFFAIRS

BACK TO THE FUTURE: PRE-MODERN RELIGIOUS POLICY IN POST-SECULAR CHINA

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The secularization thesis is a pillar of modern social theory. There are different versions of this thesis, but all hold that religion will fade away and/or become irrelevant to public life in the modern world. In some countries, secularization is not only the basis of a descriptive theory but of normative policy. Chinese government policy toward religion is explicitly based on both the descriptive and normative aspects of the secularization thesis.

But many social scientists are now saying that the secularization thesis is wrong and that we need a post-secularist social theory to account for the empirically obvious facts of the early twenty-first century. Religious belief and practice have not faded away, and in many parts of the world they are playing a more obvious role in public life than in the past century. Religion, moreover, is dynamically evolving, taking on new forms as well as reviving old forms, and becoming intertwined with the modern bureaucratic state and the market economy in new ways. This leads to a crisis in modern social theory but also to crises in modern political practice.

In this article, I discuss how this crisis manifests itself in Chinese politics. This research is based partly on scholarly documents that have been presented to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) politburo. It has become common for Chinese officials to present advanced working drafts of new theoretical and policy positions to meetings of domestic and sometimes foreign experts for feedback. Such presentations often give a good indication of the direction in which policy is heading. These theoretical discussions by politically well-connected Chinese scholars, coupled with my own observations of the unfolding of religious policy across the country, yield the following portrait of a gradually consolidating official Chinese stance toward religion.

Unlike liberal democratic governments, which for the most part purport to be neutral towards religion, making religion a private matter beyond the reach of the state, the Chinese government has an active policy toward religion. The policy is carried out by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Communist Party's United Front Department. But the policy is, on its own terms, a complete failure, which, will not be overcome as long as it continues to be guided by secularization theory. There are signs, indeed, that the Chinese government is recognizing this failure and is seeking a "post-secular" theoretical foundation for its policies toward religion.

CCP POLICY TOWARD RELIGION

The policy of the Chinese government toward religion is set by "Document 19," promulgated by the Communist Party Central Committee in 1982, and titled "The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during our Country's Socialist Period."¹ The document was written as part of the early Reform program of Deng Xiaoping and it was a repudiation of the "ultra-leftist" policies of the Cultural Revolution, which had actively tried to obliterate religion from social life in China. Although there have been modifications in the policies based on this document over the past 25 years, it still sets the overall parameters for Chinese religious policy.

¹ Translated in Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 8-26.

The preface to Document 19 is classic secularization theory: religion is an historical phenomenon with its “own cycle of emergence, development, and demise.” The demise will come with modernization. The special characteristic of the Chinese version of the theory, of course, is its notion that religion in the early modern period is an opiate to relieve the misery of class oppression. With the triumph of socialist revolution, this class oppression should be over. But religion will not die out quickly because of cultural lag: “the people’s consciousness lags behind social realities, old thinking and habits cannot be thoroughly wiped out in a short period.” Thus,

“Party members must have a sober-minded recognition of the protracted nature of the religious question under Socialist conditions....Those who expect to rely on administrative decrees or other coercive measures to wipe out religious thinking and practices with one blow are even further from the basic viewpoint that Marxism takes toward the religious question. They are entirely wrong and will do no small harm.”

This does not mean, of course, that the Party should take a *laissez faire* approach toward religion. It means that its policy should be one of “respect for and protection of the freedom of religious belief”[...] “until that future time when religion will itself disappear.” Every person must be free to believe in religion and also to not believe. But “we Communists are atheists and must unremittingly propagate atheism.” It would seem to be somewhat contradictory to proclaim respect for religion together with such an absolute rejection of its truth value and such a firm commitment to propagate atheism. Document 19 tries to avoid the contradiction by declaring that the “crux of the policy of freedom of religious belief is to make the question of religious belief a private matter, one of individual free choice for citizens.” Thus, religion is tolerated as long as it is a private preference, with no influence on public life.

Although there is great disagreement among Western post-secular theorists of religion, they would share common ground in their critique of this framework for Chinese policy.² They would all note that the rise and demise of religions does not follow the linear pattern assumed by the Chinese policy. They would note that religion not only persists but continues to evolve dynamically in modernized societies. They would indeed recognize that there are “multiple modernities,” defined by different interactions between religious belief and practice and modern political and economic development.³ They would recognize that religion cannot usually be confined to private life but that for better or worse it is an active part of public life.⁴ Finally, they would be suspicious of definitions that conceive of religion in overly narrow, ethnocentric terms based on Western historical experience.⁵

If one looks at developments in Chinese society today, one will find ample reinforcement for the post-secularist point of view.

RELIGION IN CHINA TODAY

After being harshly suppressed during the Cultural Revolution era (1966-76), religious activity of all sorts has become increasingly visible in Chinese society. According to official statistics there are about 100 million religious believers in China. But according to a recent survey accepted for publication in an officially approved Chinese journal, there are at least 300 million religious believers. According to a well-connected scholar interviewed during my recent fieldwork, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party is itself concerned that all of these numbers may be too low and they are now commissioning large research projects aimed at getting more accurate statistics. And according to Peter Ng, emeritus head of the Center for the Study of Chinese Religion at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, as many as 95 percent of the Chinese people practice some form of religion (if one includes the ritual activities associated with celebrating festivals, carrying out weddings and funerals and seeking health and good fortune amidst the challenges of life).⁶

One reason for the disparity of numbers is the inadequacy of the categories used by both the government and mainstream scholars in China to define religion. As we have seen, in China’s official policy statements, religion is defined in terms of private belief expressed through voluntary participation in congregations organized through institutions with a clearly defined leadership separated from the economy and polity. This fits the modern definition of religion developed by Western scholars in the nineteenth century, based, consciously or not, on a secularized notion of Western Protestantism. Based on this definition, the Chinese government recognizes five (and only five) religions in China: Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. At least some manifestations of all of these are organized into distinctive institutions with a recognized leadership and practiced through congregations of voluntarily associating believers. These officially recognized institutions are placed under the supervision of “Patriotic Associations” that in turn are supervised by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Communist Party’s United Front Department.

Any religious activity that falls outside of the five officially recognized religions does not get counted in official statistics. This

² Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, and John Torpey, eds. *Exploring the Post-Secular*.

³ Shmuel Eisenstadt, ed. *Multiple Modernities* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

⁴ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵ Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiousities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁶ The figure of 100 million comes from the State Statistical Bureau. The estimate of 300 million comes from a survey by Tong Shijun and Liu Zhongyu, as reported in the *China Daily* (Feb. 7, 2007). The claim that 95 percent are religious in some way is from Peter Tze Ming Ng, “Religious Situations in China Today: Secularization Theory Revisited” Paper presented at the Association for the Sociology of Religion Meetings, Chicago, August 14-16, 2002.

includes such generally recognized world religions as Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Mormonism, and Ba'hai. But it can also include activity within the five recognized religions that is not connected with the appropriate state supervised patriotic associations. Thus the “underground” Catholic Church or the Protestant “house churches”—those Catholics or Protestants who practice their faith outside of the officially approved structures—are not counted in the official statistics (although they may be at least partially counted in recent unofficial, yet authoritative surveys.)

Even if we factored out the arbitrary designation of five officially recognized religions, however, we would still be faced with a fundamental inadequacy within the basic definition used for religion in China. The Chinese category defines religion in opposition to “superstition.” Most of the rituals connected with village festivals and rural temple worship, which are being revived and reinvented with great vigor have been defined as “feudal superstition.” They are more a matter of public practice than private belief and they are not organized into institutions clearly separate from local economic and political life. But modern anthropologists would want to consider these activities, through which hundreds of millions of people in China seek fundamental meaning and celebrate community, as religious.

Trapped within its conceptual confines, the Chinese government can only discern and measure a small part of its citizens’ rituals, myths, and beliefs. Here are some examples of the kinds of religious developments that are catching the government’s attention.

Officials preparing for the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 are now realizing that they need to provide religious venues for Jews, Orthodox Christians, Mormons, and Ba’hai’s even though these are not on its list of recognized religions. And for Shanghai to look like a world city, there should be churches, temples, and synagogues for these faiths not only on the grounds of the Expo itself, but within the city proper. (To sustain a claim to being a cosmopolitan world city, Shanghai has to do more than Beijing, which only opened up temporary religious venues for the “unrecognized” religious during the Olympics and kept them under tight surveillance.)

Another example: In the 30 years since the beginning of the Reform period, there has been an explosive growth in Protestant Christianity. There were fewer than a million Protestants before the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and under the Maoist regime, religion was severely restricted. But since 1979, the number of Protestants has grown exponentially. A conservative estimate (accepted in fact by many leading scholars of religion within China) is around 50 million.⁷ (Some Protestant leaders themselves claim that there are over 100 million.) The vast majority of this growth is outside of the Three Self Protestant Movement (TSPM), which is the patriotic association set up to govern the officially recognized Protestant churches. The most rapid growth is among evangelical and Pentecostal Christian assemblies with a pre-millennial theology, which holds that the end of the world is imminent, that the faithful will be raptured into heaven and the world will then go through great tribulations until the second coming of Christ. Most such new Chinese Christians concern themselves with spiritual matters and do not attempt any political activity that might bring the world to an end. There are some sects, however, that do see their faith as a mandate to bring about radical change in this world. The Chinese government’s attitude toward unregistered Protestant “house churches” has been one of great suspicion, and it certainly does not like eschatological talk. The house churches have been growing so fast, however, that the government can neither stop them nor ignore them. Thus, parts of the government have come to distinguish between those evangelical Protestants who take a relatively passive, spiritual stance toward the coming of the millennium and the minority with the potential for political confrontation. Since the Protestants outside of the TSPM are not under the purview of the SARA, however, other central government agencies have been entering into discussions with those house church leaders who are seen to pose no danger to social stability and who want to distance themselves from more militant religious activists. Meanwhile, however, agencies of repression, like the Public Security Bureau take a less conciliatory approach to house church development, and they have been actively carrying out arrests of house church leaders during the first half of 2009.

The government says that it grants religious freedom to Tibetan Buddhists. But it demonizes the Dalai Lama, greatly restricts the growth of monasteries, and claims the right to determine the re-incarnation of any future lamas. It claims that it does so because the Dalai Lama is a political figure rather than a religious leader, that monasteries are as much political organizations as religious ones, and that the government has the responsibility for determining leadership among all sectors of society. It claims that it is suppressing ethnic separatism rather than religious belief. But it is almost impossible for it to distinguish the two, and its attempts to distinguish them have deepened Tibetan religious zeal as a component of Tibetan nationalism.

Finally, literally millions of local temples have been constructed or re-constructed in rural areas. The pace of this reconstruction indeed seems to have been accelerating over the past decade. The construction of these temples and celebration of their associated liturgies is by no means simply a return to ancient traditions. Traditional rituals, myths, and practices are being enacted with modern technology such as video cameras and websites, and reconfigured to fit the sensibilities of villagers who are no longer farmers, but factory workers, entrepreneurs, and even professionals.⁸

⁷ Yu Jianrong (Institute of Rural Development, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), “Religious Demography and House Churches” 2008, cited in Compass Direct News Service, July 3, 2009.

⁸ Kenneth Dean, “Local Communal Religion in South-east China” in Daniel L. Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 32-52.

These examples could be multiplied. What they show is that many different forms of religion in China are not only reviving, but rapidly growing and evolving and intertwining in new ways with the modern economy and state. The theoretical categories that the Chinese government's policy uses to define religion and determine the difference between religion and superstition (and implicitly the relation between "modern" and "pre-modern" religion) are unable to comprehend these changes. The secularist assumptions behind the government's religious policy—that religion will gradually and inevitably, if not as quickly as once believed, fade away—are untenable.

As a result the policy itself—which aims to constrain the growth of religion, to confine it to the private sphere, and to keep it from affecting politics and ethnic relations—has utterly failed, even on its own terms. Despite all efforts to control its growth, religion has grown rapidly and overwhelmed China's systems for surveillance and control. Clumsy methods of suppressing unwanted forms of religion have actually intensified religiously inspired conflict with the state. The attempt to disconnect religion from ethnic conflict has only added religious zeal to ethnic struggle. The failure is obvious enough that the leadership of the Communist Party has begun to recognize it and is searching for a new approach to religious policy.

Groping toward a New Policy

The first reaction to a breakdown in the old policies has been to tolerate different, experimental, ad hoc responses to local religious developments, while officially maintaining the framework of Document 19.

But in the absence of any theoretical framework to guide it, the new policy is an incoherent mélange of disparate local policies. Document 19 envisions a careful management of five official religions by an official religious affairs bureau, until which time these religions slowly but inevitably fade away. But Chinese society now is a blooming buzzing confusion of religion that extends far beyond the imagination of Document 19 and beyond the scope of the organizations that Document 19 mandates to manage religion. As a result, many government agencies that were never mandated to deal with religion have now staked out positions in the religious field.

In Wenzhou, for example, local "Boss Christians"—entrepreneurs who have become Christian and often persuaded their employees to do so as well—negotiate directly with local officials rather than SARA about building churches, often as part of a total investment package. Wenzhou now has so many churches that it is being called "China's Jerusalem."⁹

In Shanghai, local officials have decided to build religious venues for religions outside of the five officially recognized faiths in order to put a good face on before the world during the 2010 World Expo. This is a city government initiative, independent of SARA and independent of central government policy.

These initiatives related to "world religions" from the West, are dwarfed by local initiatives toward rapidly evolving indigenous religion. In some provinces, local officials have solved the problem of "feudal superstition" by renaming some aspects of folk religion. Now, it is "non-material cultural heritage." Government cultural affairs and tourism bureaus establish "museums" to preserve and display this culture, but the museums are actually functioning temples.¹⁰

In some places, for example, local officials tolerate the existence of unregistered house churches and an underground Catholic church. (Sometimes the tolerance is lubricated with bribes.) In other places, and sometimes without warning, the public security bureau moves in. This can be provoked by internal or external developments. The house church movement has spun off some militant sects such as the Eastern Lightning, which claims that God commands that the Communist Party must be destroyed. It has also been accused of violently abducting members of rival sects. Such groups are duly labeled "evil cults" and are vigorously attacked by the police—although the police have not yet managed to destroy them. As for the Catholic Church, the government fears the external influence of the Vatican. In the 1980s, the Vatican encouraged the growth of an active underground Catholic Church (which includes about two thirds of all Catholics) By the early 2000s, however, it had also legitimized over 90 percent of bishops in the officially recognized part of the Church, and in 2007 the Pope issued a letter urging bishops in the underground Church to reconcile themselves with bishops in the officially approved Church.¹¹ However, the police recently arrested an underground bishop who was preparing to reconcile with the official bishop of his diocese. The reason given was that reconciliation should only take place at the behest of the government, not of the Vatican.¹² The government fears a unified Catholic Church that accepts the authority of the Vatican.

The public security forces have been willing enough to expand their scope to encompass imagined new religious threats to national security. The most spectacular expansion occurred in 1999, when the Falungong spiritual movement caught the government unawares by staging a large peaceful demonstration outside of the CCP leadership compound in Beijing. This in turn provoked the government to label the Falungong a "heterodox religion" (xiejiao, which the government officially translates as "evil cult") and to launch a massive crackdown. The crackdown stimulated a new expansion of the national security apparatus, the "610" Office (named after the day it was established, June 10, 1999). This secret police organization

⁹ Nanlai Cao, "Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State: An Ethnographic Account of Church-state Relations in China's Economic Transition." *Sociology of Religion*, 2006: 68: 1 45-66.

¹⁰ The examples are based on the author's own fieldwork in 2009.

¹¹ Pope Benedict XIV, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html

¹² "Arrest of Bishops Loyal to Rome Mars Vatican's China Meeting" *The Tablet* (UK), April 11, 2009.

bypasses the state criminal justice system and reports directly to the Party leadership. It coordinates intelligence gathering, arrests, prosecution, and incarceration, often without even the pretense of judicial review. It has units that extend all the way down to the grass roots of society. Although originally developed to destroy an “evil cult,” it has extended its reach to cover political dissidents and other threats to Party domination. The expanded organization has recently been given a new name—the “Harmonious Society Security Office.”¹³

Initiatives toward increased tolerance of some religious activities are joined with new methods of repression toward others. There does not seem to be much central coordination of these separate developments, and they separately develop at their own pace according to the ambitions of the various bureaucratic units that were their source. Recognizing the incoherence of its ad hoc policies, the Party is looking for a new theoretical framework to guide its approach toward religion. The framework seems to be heading back to the future, away from a modernist Marxist version of secularism and toward a modernized version of Imperial China’s sacral hegemony.

THE NEW IMPERIAL SACRAL HEGEMONY

In Ming-Qing China, (the 14th to 20th Centuries) the Emperor was the Son of Heaven. His primary responsibility was to mediate between Heaven (considered a deity) and Earth. The legitimacy of his rule was predicated on this sacral role, which of course depended on a Mandate of Heaven that could be lost through imperial malfeasance. The emperor fulfilled his role by carrying out important rituals to Heaven in the capital and elsewhere to secure the blessings of Heaven on his subjects. The emperor combined the Western roles of king and pope.

The emperor distinguished between “true teaching” and “deviant teaching”—and since “teaching” in China was closely amalgamated with ritual and myth, this was a distinction (to use modern Western language) between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The distinction was not based on doctrines primarily but on the practices of the followers of different teachings. Thus, many Western historians think that “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy” should be labeled “orthopraxis” and “heteropraxis.”¹⁴

Although the elites, who were the chief advisors to the emperor, were schooled in a Confucian tradition that was skeptical about most forms of popular religious practice, the emperors rarely suppressed and often encouraged village cults. These cults usually drew on a hybrid mix of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions. Such rituals and myths were orthodox “true teachings” if they solidified the proper hierarchical relations within families, helped build strong communities rooted in local agriculture, and thus bolstered social stability under imperial rule. As for large scale Buddhist and Daoist monasteries, the emperors held them in place through imperial patronage, which helped such institutions to thrive while ensuring that their leaders were loyal to the emperor.

However, sectarian organizations that gathered people together from many different communities, contravened gender distinctions by allowing men and women to worship together as equals, preached an imminent end to the present era, and sometimes became the organizational basis for rebellion—such organizations might be labeled heterodox and persecuted strongly.

Often the facts that might justify a distinction were ambiguous. When Catholic Christianity was brought to China in the sixteenth century by Jesuit missionaries, there was considerable debate within the imperial court about whether this “foreign teaching” should be considered orthodox or heterodox. The Jesuits eventually convinced the emperor that their teaching was compatible with the other teachings that sustained imperial rule and the Kangxi emperor in 1692 declared Catholicism to be an “orthodox teaching.” But when the Pope ruled against the interpretation of Christianity that was being proffered by the Jesuits, and thus contradicted the emperor’s judgment, the emperor declared Christianity to be a heterodox teaching. Designations of orthodoxy and heterodoxy could shift back and forth, but the infallible arbiter of such distinctions was always the emperor.¹⁵ As noted in a recent paper by Zhuo Xinping, the director of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Science, the basic principle of imperial policy toward religion was that “the government is the master, religion the follower (zhengzhu, jiaocong).”

In 2008, Xi Jinping, the Communist Party leader who is the presumptive successor to the current general secretary Hu Jintao, declared that the Party was now a “ruling party” rather than a “revolutionary party.” The Party will now justify itself by its role in promoting economic development, in defending its territorial integrity and promoting its rich national cultural heritage. The current regime’s main slogan is about producing a “harmonious society, a notion with Confucian echoes.” This is said, above all, to depend on “social stability.” In religious affairs at least, the approach now seems to be more indebted to

¹³ The existence of this office is widely reported in media published in the West by the Falungong organization. Independent informants in China confirmed its existence to me in 2009.

¹⁴ K.C. Liu, *Orthodoxy In late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Richard Madsen, *China’s Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See also: Richard Madsen, “Catholicism as Chinese Folk Religion” in Stephen Uhalley, Jr., and Xiaoxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 233-249.

the great Ming and Qing emperors than to Mao Zedong.

Zhuo Xinping's paper begins with a long introduction to the place of religion in Chinese history and to state-religion relations under the emperors. It includes a discussion of Marxist theory. In the 1990s, there was a great scholarly debate about the "opium theory"—Marx's statement that "religion is an opiate of the people." But the main point about this debate was that Marxism was being treated as social science, not sacred dogma, and therefore subject to scientific canons of empirical verification and theoretical interpretation. The history of China's rulers in protecting and promoting China's cultural heritage thus becomes a more fundamental basis for religious policy than Marxian theory.

There is in effect much greater toleration of some forms of religion than during the Mao era, and for that matter during the first two decades of the Reform era. In line with official government pronouncements, scholars like Zhuo Xinping insist that the cornerstone of religious policy is the Constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. But this is a different kind of freedom from the Western liberal tradition. In some ways, as Zhuo Xinping and many other Chinese scholars note, the Chinese policy of religious freedom gives more support to religion than countries, like the United States, which insist on a strict liberal separation between Church and state.¹⁶ Under that liberal principle of separation, the government is forbidden from giving any direct economic support to churches. But in China, the government actually pays to build churches and pays the salaries of religious functionaries—at least those that belong to the officially accepted Patriotic Associations.

In its new incarnation, the supposedly secular Party assumes a sacred aura. It now presents itself as the carrier of a sacred national destiny. It carries out spectacular public rituals like the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics—ceremonies which powerfully evoked the glorious cultural heritage of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism but gave no mention at all to Mao Zedong or even to socialism.

This can lead to new patterns of religious tolerance and repression. In the past, local village temple worship was labeled "feudal superstition" and suppressed in the name of Marxist modernization. In the emerging new policy, local temple worship and popular religious festivals are fine and even to be encouraged (although educated elites are skeptical about their truth content), as long as they keep villagers happy and perhaps draw in some tourism. Like the imperial government of old, the Communist Ruling Party is partial to polytheism—to a multitude of local cults that keep rural society divided and incapable of mass action. Christian communities are more problematic, because they practice a foreign religion, not part of the Chinese cultural heritage. But as long as they thoroughly indigenize—which in practice means that they accept the principle that the government is the master, religion the follower—they can be accepted.

With the collapse of a religion policy based on the secularization thesis, the ruling Party is thus falling back upon the old scripts of an enchanted imperial age. In an era of globalized religious movements, however, this too may not be adequate. It is complicated by two problems: the first stemming from the power of the Chinese state, the second from the weakness of the Chinese state in an age of globalization.

CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS GLOBALIZATION

The Ming-Qing emperors had problems with Axial religions: those religious movements (mostly stemming from the "Axial Age" of the first millennium BCE) that worshipped a world-transcending God or affirmed universal principles that transcended the boundaries of any particular empire and could be invoked to call any particular earthly ruler to account.¹⁷ They aimed to keep these out unless they became thoroughly "indigenized"—that is, supportive of established social order and imperial rule. Catholicism was declared a heterodox teaching by the Qing emperors after the Pope presumed to rule against the mode of indigenization that the emperors had deemed acceptable.

As China emerges as a major world power, its ruling Party is beginning to display its glory by exporting China's "non-material cultural heritage" around the world. The government is establishing "Confucian Institutes" to teach about Chinese language and culture in Europe and the Americas. Through the Olympic ceremonies, World Expo, officially sponsored performing arts troupes and through movies celebrating the glories of the ancient past the government propagates its Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist heritage. The kind of religion that it wants to export is one deeply embedded in Han Chinese culture, whose elites in the past have been willing to follow the "government master, religion follower" formula, and which celebrates the glories of Han Chinese ethnicity. Although it wants to export non-material cultural heritage, the ruling Party does not necessarily want to import it. It is open enough to importing global commercial popular culture, but wary of absorbing global religious culture.

Thus, Christianity, Islam, and Tibetan Buddhism pose severe challenges to a neo-imperial sacral hegemony. Although in many respects the Chinese Catholic Church has been indigenized, its theology still commits its leadership to be loyal to the Pope. The Chinese government concedes that Catholics can accept the "spiritual" authority of the Pope, but it reserves the

¹⁶ Zhuo Xinping, *Quanqiu huade zongjiao yu Dangdai Zhongguo* (Global Religions and Contemporary China), Beijing, Shehuikexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008, p. 30.

¹⁷ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

right to determine the exact boundary between spiritual and temporal. The Pope, on the other hand, thinks that he has that right. Global communications make it ever easier for information and influence about church matters to flow in and out of China, making the threat of foreign influence on the Catholics ever harder to eliminate. Negotiations between the Chinese government and the Vatican about normalizing diplomatic relations have spanned 20 years, but are currently at an impasse. The main problem is that the Vatican seeks more religious freedom for Catholics than the government is willing to give. And the Chinese government is afraid that even if the Vatican formally agrees to its conditions, the Pope has enough spiritual authority that he could continue to influence Catholics in ways that the government could not control.

Protestant Christianity in China is much more decentralized, and does not pose the threat of an authoritarian ecclesiastical power attempting to impose its version of orthodoxy on Chinese believers. But as a global faith, it too is open to influence spread through modern media (and often carried directly by modern missionaries) from around the world. However indigenized Protestant Christianity becomes in China, it will remain in communication with—and be subject to—influence by spiritual movements from abroad. A completely secular liberal government would not have much problem with such cosmopolitan religious influence. But a government that claims a modern Mandate of Heaven in principle could not tolerate such influence. The outlook is that the Chinese ruling party will try to restrict the spread of Christianity while actually encouraging the revival of much of its indigenous folk religion—but the restrictions will not likely be effective and the growth of Christianity will continue to cause controversy among the Chinese elite, and the result will be seemingly arbitrary, incoherent policies toward Christianity.

From its beginnings, Buddhism transcended all boundaries of kinship and nation. However, most of the Buddhism practiced by the Han Chinese in Mainland China is closely identified with Han Chinese culture and its leaders have accepted guidance from the state. But during the past fifty years Tibetan Buddhism has broken through the boundaries of Tibetan and Mongolian nationality and become a world religion, with enthusiastic devotees in America and Europe, as well as other continents. Since going into exile, the Dalai Lama has become a global celebrity, received and respected as a great spiritual leader by Popes and presidents around the world. Both his office and his charisma bring him great respect from most Tibetans. Tibetans have plenty of non-religious reasons to resist Han Chinese colonialism. But their allegiance to a faith, whose most revered leader is outside of Chinese government control, makes their resistance even more threatening to the Chinese government. According to the logic of sacral Imperial rule, all Lamas should in principle accept the spiritual suzerainty of the Chinese emperor, even though in practice they might have wide leeway in their religious affairs. Following the logic of sacral emperorship, the ruling Party has embarked on a campaign not just to criticize the Dalai Lama's political positions on Tibet, but to thoroughly demonize the man. He is portrayed as equal in evil to Osama Bin Laden, a person utterly devoid of any claim to spiritual leadership. Given the Dalai Lama's immense global popularity, such attacks are counterproductive in global public opinion and if anything, they increase the religious zeal of embattled Tibetans.

Finally, global Islam severely challenges China's neo-imperial sacral hegemony. The Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century and the Republican government in the 1930s both faced uprisings from the Uyghur minority that inhabits Western China. The Uyghurs are Muslims, but their Islamic faith was not necessarily the major cause of previous rebellions. Indeed, they practice various strands of Islam that divide them rather than unite them against common enemies. But globalization has brought Uyghur Muslims into contact with worldwide Islamic movements. There are pragmatic reasons for the Chinese government to worry about the radicalism that might come with such religious revival, but the reaction against it seems so extreme as to be counterproductive. In the name of suppressing "separatism," some Chinese authorities have begun to attack Islamic practice itself. At Ramadan in 2008, for example, it forced Uyghur men to shave their beards, restricted access to mosques, and discouraged ritual fasting. This perhaps can only be explained in terms of the affront such a globalized Islam poses to neo-imperial sacral hegemony. Such actions only serve to add religious grievance to the many other grievances that Uyghurs have against Han Chinese and potentially to connect Uyghur movements to global movements of political Islam. It does not seem that such connections were made during the Uyghur uprisings of July 2009. But the Chinese government's general hostility to globalized Islam adds dangerous fuel to fires of ethnic resentment.

With its Great Firewall of internet filtering and its massive surveillance resources, the Chinese Ruling Party can inhibit the influence of universalizing religious movements, but it is probably impossible to block such influences completely. Moreover, even partial repression of such influences exposes China to censure from increasingly assertive global movements for religious freedom.

This will be confounding to a policy modeled after the sacral hegemony of rulership in the Imperial age. The one way to keep universalizing global religious movements from undermining that policy is for China to become so powerful that it can set the terms of its relationship with the rest of world, or at least in Asia. Then it could use its military and economic might to enforce its claim that universal standards of religious freedom do not apply to China and that universal religions can only enter China if they accept the principle of government master, religion follower. Some political leaders think that they can accomplish this.

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