Religion in the Peoples' Republic of China:

An Overview

David A. Palmer

The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

In the three decades since the end of the Maoist era, all forms of religion in China have been undergoing restoration, innovation and expansion. Belying Marxist and secularist predictions of religion's inevitable demise, most forms of religion, whether new or traditional, indigenous or foreign, official or illegal, ethnic or universal, communal or individual, and all combinations thereof, have enjoyed increasing popularity. This chapter begins with a discussion of what counts as "religion" in the Chinese context and how it can be measured, and presents a brief outline of the historical factors underlying the current situation. It then provides an overview of the PRC's policy toward religion, which constitutes the framework within which (or, more often, outside of which) Chinese religious life is organized. It finally presents the basic evolution since 1979 of Chinese communal religion, the *qigong* movement, the Confucian revival, Buddhism and Daoism, Islam, and Christianity.

Keywords : Buddhism; Catholicism; Confucianism; Daoism; Islam; Protestantism; *qigong*; religion.

Introduction

In the three decades since the end of the Maoist era, all forms of religion in China have been undergoing restoration, innovation and expansion. The phenomenon has had significant impacts on the People's Republic's international relations and internal politics; a growing influence on Chinese civil society, intellectual discourse and grassroots social organization; and, in various contexts, intriguing connections between economic life and religious beliefs and networks. The growth of religion in China has occurred in

the wake of humanity's most thorough and sustained experiment in creating a society without any religion at all, during the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976) when all forms of religious activity and organization were banned for a decade. Belying Marxist and secularist predictions of religion's inevitable demise, most forms of religion, whether new or traditional, indigenous or foreign, official or illegal, ethnic or universal, communal or individual, and all combinations thereof, have enjoyed increasing popularity. These changes have put pressure on the state's regulatory framework for religion, which remains essentially unchanged since the 1950's, while the future role of religion in Chinese society remains an open question. This chapter will begin with a discussion of what counts as "religion" in the Chinese context and how it can be measured, and present a brief outline of the historical factors underlying the current situation. It will then provide an overview of the PRC's policy toward religion, which constitutes the framework within which (or, more often, outside of which) Chinese religious life is organized. It will finally present the basic evolution since 1979 of Chinese communal religion, the *qigong* movement, the Confucian revival, Buddhism and Daoism, Islam, and Christianity.

Counting religious believers in China

According to official statistics, there are 100 million religious believers in mainland China, amounting to approx. 8 % of the population. Most scholars, however, consider this figure to be a serious underestimation. In 2009, some Chinese researchers, operating independently, released a survey which raised the figure to 300 million (Goossaert, 2011); while in 2010, a joint Chinese-American survey was announced which claimed that over 85% of the adult population have some sort of religious belief or practice (F. Yang et al 2010; F. Yang 2010).

The reason for these discrepancies – besides the fact that local religious affairs officials have a career incentive to under-report the extent of religious activity in their jurisdiction – can be attributed to the complex organizational structure and patterns of identification in Chinese religious culture. In primarily Christian and Muslim societies, most people explicitly identify with a single, exclusive religion, each of which has its own institutions which aim to structure all aspects of a member's religious life, from life-cycle rituals (weddings, funerals) to theology, individual spirituality, moral teachings, congregational activity and social engagement. All of these aspects of spiritual and

religious life are widespread in Chinese culture, but they are not organized into a single institution; they are not always clearly distinguished from secular life, and they are usually not the subject of a conscious identification by individuals. Thus, it is likely that, if asked what religion she believes in, a Chinese person is likely to respond "none", even though she may well have a small shrine to Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, in her home, and goes to burn incense at a temple at special occasions. Furthermore, people may engage in acts of worship of gods without themselves being clear about how much they actually "believe" in what they are doing. As a result, surveys and statistics can be a misleading tool for taking the pulse of religious life, unless survey designers and users have a clear understanding of how religious practices and beliefs fit into Chinese culture and society. More recent studies have refined their methodology, by trying to measure not only religious affiliation, but also the extent to which people actually engage in religious practices such as burning incense at a temple, attending a church, wearing a charm, or following fengshui rules, or believe in notions such as heaven, hell, reincarnation or supernaturtal forces. A survey directed by Fenggang Yang and a Chinese research firm, using a sample of 7021 cases conducted in 2007, thus incorporated such types of elements into his questionnaire, yielding the following data, among others:

- In the previous 12 months, up to 754 million had practiced some form of ancestor worship.

- around 362 million had practiced some form of divination (including fortune-telling, face-reading, etc).

- around 141 million believed in the god of wealth (*caishen*), and a similar number practiced fengshui restrictions or had consulted a fengshui master.

In terms of religious affiliations, the survey estimates that around 185 million self-identify as Buddhists (around 18% of the adult population); 33 million self-identify as Christian (3.2% of the adult population, including 30 million Protestants and 3 million Catholics); and 12 million self-identify as Daoists (1.2%). Only around 15% can be counted as true atheists, having neither supernatural beliefs nor participated in any religious practices (F. Yang et al, 2010; F. Yang, 2010).

There are many reasons for the low levels of explicit religious affiliation of Chinese people, in spite of relatively high levels of religious beliefs and practice. One common explanation, held throughout most of the 20th century by Chinese intellectuals and most Western scholars, is that Chinese beliefs are an unorganized and incoherent motley of superstitions which hardly deserve to be called "religion." Recent historical,

anthropological and sociological scholarship, however, has questioned this view and established that it is itself a product of China's modern intellectual and political history, in which the adoption of Western and Christian categories has led to Chinese religious culture being ignored, denigrated, or vigorously repressed by both the Republican (1912-1949) and Communist (1949-present) political regimes (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011).

Historical background

In order to understand the complex diversity of religious affiliations and organizations in contemporary China, as well as the difficulties and contradictions of the Chinese state's current policy toward religion, it is essential to review this historical process. In the late imperial era (the Ming and Qing dynasties, 1363-1911), China was a religious state, with the Emperor acting as the supreme religious authority in his capacity as "Son of Heaven," who derived his legitimacy from the "Mandate of Heaven". Government was conducted by ritual as much as by law and administrative procedure, and the Confucian ideology upheld by the bureaucratic class was not only a moral philosophy, but essentially a ritual system derived from classics such as the *Liji* (the *Book of Rites*), which prescribe how to conduct sacrifices to the spirits of Heaven, Earth, of the four cardinal directions, the main agricultural crops, and so on. Magistrates and administrators were the priests of this ritual system in the provincial capitals and county seats. The imperial cult overlaid millions of autonomous popular deity cults and temples, most of which were the main organizational form of social groups, ranging from territorial communities (villages, irrigation alliances, neighbourhoods and cities) to professional guilds (for carpenters, boatmen, merchants, etc.) and charities, and even sworn brotherhoods and underworld societies. Through the ancestor cult of families, lineages and clans – which was also the organizational foundation of the large landholding estates and corporations of South China – domestic units and kinship networks were also integrated into the empire's Confucian orthodoxy. A religious dimension was integral to most forms of social organization, the culture was steeped in a common cosmology, and so, generally speaking, there was no distinct religious identity or affiliation. Buddhism and Daoism existed as organized "teachings," but, with the exception of a small number of lay devotees who had "taken refuge" in Buddhism or become a disciple of a Daoist master, these religions existed primarily as esoteric traditions, with specialized monks and priests offering ritual and spiritual services to the

population at large and to temple communities, which hired them as needed, most often without claiming any formal affiliation to one or the other set of teachings. These functions could also be played by the priests and masters of myriads of local ritual traditions, as well as by lay devotional associations and salvationist movements, some of which preached millenialist and apocalyptic doctrines. These movements, often led by charismatic preachers and healers, did recruit large numbers of self-identified followers. The Ming state, fearful of sectarian rebellions, banned the latter groups as "heretical doctrines (*xiejiao*). It also restricted the number of Buddhist and Daoist monks, and attempted to co-opt popular divinity cults by canonizing them, with the Emperor giving gods official ranks and honouring them with promotions in the hierarchy of the pantheon. Through these measures, the state attempted to impose itself as the final and supreme authority in religious matters. Although it restricted or banned organized religious groups and unlicenced temples, the state did so in the name of orthodoxy as a religious institution itself, based on essentially the same cosmology as the religion of the people (C. K. Yang, 1960; Lagerwey, 2010; Goossaert, 2011).

The introduction of Christianity and Western influence challenged the traditional Chinese religious system. From the 16th to 18th centuries, Catholic Jesuit missionaries had adopted a strategy of integrating Christianity and Chinese civilization. This involved downplaying the religious elements of Chinese culture, depicting elite Confucianism as a rational moral philosophy compatible with Christian religion, and dismissing the rest as superstition. Later, in the 19th century, a more aggressive missionizing approach was more exclusive and denigrating of Chinese religion. By the early 20th century, with China humiliated by the Western powers and Japan, modernizing intellectuals sought to understand the keys to Western power, and concluded that it derived from its science and/or its religion – neither of which China possessed. Christianity became the model for a new concept of "religion" (*zongjiao*) – understood as a unified system of belief, theology and ethical principles, with a scriptural canon, an educated clergy, exclusive congregational membership and worship, and highly organized national institutions. This model became the norm for the religious policy and regulations of all Chinese states, from the Chinese revolution of 1912 until the present. When Chinese constitutions stipulated the freedom of religious belief, and regulations provided for the recognition and registration of religious organizations, they have (with a few short-lived exceptions) applied only to the "religions" fitting the Christian model, i.e. Christianity itself (usually understood in China as two separate religions, Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam,

Buddhism and, more problematically, Daoism. All the rest – including most of the religious system outlined above – was delegitimized as superstition, and became the target of anti-superstition campaigns and movements to confiscate popular temples and convert them into schools, government offices, barracks, granaries and other uses, throughout the first half of the 20th century (Nedostup, 2009; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011).

PRC religious policy

After the PRC was established in 1949, the new regime based its religious policy on the same categories. Official, state-controlled religious associations were established for the Buddhists (1953), Protestants (1954), Muslims (1954), Catholics (1957) and Daoists (1957), which, combined, had only 11.4 million declared followers. Redemptive societies such as Yiguandao, which had more followers than any of the recognized religious institutions, were ruthlessly exterminated as "reactionary sects and secret societies." And ancestor worship, communal religion, and temple cults, which were practiced by almost all Chinese people, were banned as "feudal superstition" (Laliberté, 2011; F. Yang, 2006, p. 103; Palmer, 2008, 2011).

The religious policy of the PRC built on the ideology and experience of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as elaborated during the Chinese civil war and in "liberated areas" prior to 1949. Ideologically, the CCP followed the Marxist dictum that religion was the "opiate of the masses", an instrument of domination by the ruling classes and an illusionary otherworldly hope for people who had no chance to improve their lives in this world. In theory, this meant that religion would naturally disappear once the class-based social structure was eliminated and the peoples' hopes and desires attained through communism. There was thus no need to directly attack religion; it was its class foundations which had to be destroyed. In practice, however, the CCP developed a more pro-active and two-pronged approach to religion, in the context of its United Front policy of building friendly ties with potential non-communist allies, in a common struggle against the enemy. Those religious individuals and groups which were identified as actively collaborating with the CCP's enemies (depending on the time and context, this meant Japanese invaders, the Kuomintang, the feudal landlords, capitalists, colonialists, or imperialists) were to be targeted and ruthlessly eliminated, while those who shared the CCP's ideals and were willing to cooperate with the Party, were to be

nurtured and strengthened with government assistance, so that they could use their social influence and religious legitimacy to support the regime.

Geopolitical considerations were crucial in drawing the battle-lines of the United Front. Christianity was tainted by its close organizational association with foreign churches, Western imperialism and anti-communism; both Protestants and Catholics were torn by struggles between pro-CCP "patriotic" believers, who ran the official associations, and those who did not rally to the new regime, who were struggled against and driven underground, planting the seeds of the underground Catholic church, loyal to the Vatican, and the Protestant "house churches". Buddhism and Islam, on the other hand, were the religions of the ethnic minorities of the vast Western borderlands including Tibet and Xinjiang, which needed to be placated to ensure their allegiance to the Peoples' Republic; these religions were also used to build diplomatic bridges with Asian and Third World nations. Buddhism and Islam thus became important instruments in the PRC's ethnic and foreign policies (Welch, 1972; Goossaert and Palmer, 2011).

But by the end of the 1950's, leftist radicalism undermined the alliances of the United Front; a short respite in the early 1960's was followed by the total suppression of all forms of religion during the Cultural Revolution. Even the official religious associations were banned, as well as the State Council's Bureau of Religious Affairs and the Party's United Front Department itself. Tibetan Buddhists were the first to be alienated and the 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso, b. 1935), who had held positions as Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Peoples' Congress, took exile in India with his court in 1959; the more pro-Beijing 10th Panchen Lama (1938-1989) was himself imprisoned from 1964 to 1977. All temples, monasteries and churches were closed. Muslims suffered greatly, in some areas being forced to eat pork. Christians could only worship in secret. The shrines, statues, and manuscripts of communal cults were destroyed. Celibate monks were forced to marry, and many priests and pastors were sent to re-education camps. Little visible religion of any kind remained.

Following Deng Xiaoping's accession to power and the launch of the new policy of reform and opening up, the PRC government began a process of undoing the excesses of the cultural revolution. Religious leaders were rehabilitated and a small number of temples, monasteries, churches and mosques were re-opened. The Religious Affairs Bureau was re-established in 1979 and the United Front policy was renewed. The 1982 constitution guaranteed the freedom of individual religious belief, although it placed restrictions on many aspects of religious organization and activity.

The policy framework was outlined in more detail in "Document no. 19," also issued in 1982. This document stressed the importance of individual religious freedom and the counterproductive results of forcing people away from religion, calling for a more gradual approach -- but it reiterated the ultimate goal of marginalising and ultimately eliminating religion, and called for a more vigorous promotion of atheist education and propaganda. At the same time, the document called for a better implementation of religious freedom through the re-establishment of the official religious associations, the opening of more designated places of worship, the training of clergy, and the development of international religious exchanges – all of which were limited to the clergy, places of worship, and activities of the five officially-recognized religious associations. Document 19 legitimised the restoration of legal religious life, while inscribing it into a clear regulatory framework compatible with Marxist eschatology (MacInnis, 1989).

The 1980's saw the beginnings of a religious revival, as worshippers reclaimed and rebuilt confiscated or destroyed temples, churches and mosques. In Tibet and in the Muslim areas of the West, religious fervour bloomed, pent up for well over a decade. By the early 1990's, following the Tiananmen student movement of 1989, the CCP leadership became aware that religion continued to be an important social force. Prior to the Tiananmen events, riots had occurred in Tibet in February and March 1989, and Muslims, in the "Chinese Salman Rushdie Affair," had also demonstrated in several provinces to protest the publication of derogatory stories about Islam in Chinese books. Outside China, the Polish Catholic Church had played a role in triggering the chain of events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and Islam was a potential political factor in the several newly-independent central Asian states along China's borders with Xinjiang. The CCP leadership became concerned with how to more effectively control religion, and, through a series of high-level meetings of the State Council and with religious leaders, elaborated the doctrine of the "mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society" (in which it was primarily the former that was expected to adapt to the latter). A new policy ordinance issued in Dec. 1990, "Document no. 6," followed by other regulations in 1994, called for the closer monitoring of religious activity, places of worship and personnel.

These policy orientations led to a gradual expansion and strengthening, through the 1990s, of the institutional structure of religious management in the PRC. The basic foundations of this structure had been laid in the 1950's, but after its abolition in the mid

1960s and its restoration in the 1980s, efforts now turned to its more systematic implementation at the provincial and local levels (Madsen & Tong, eds. 2000; Chan & Carlson, 2005). The system of religious management involves three major types of organization: the United Front Work Department, which is an arm of the CCP; the Bureau of Religious Affairs (renamed State Administration of Religious Affairs – SARA -- in 1996), which is an agency of the government under the State Council at the national level; and the official Associations of the five recognized religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism), which are, in theory, democratic associations of believers. The United Front department is charged with developing close personal relations with the friendly leaders of non-communist organizations including minor political parties, commercial enterprises, overseas Chinese, ethnic minorities, and religious leaders. The United Front helps to arrange the appointment of respected religious leaders on political bodies such as the Peoples' Political Consultative Conferences, turning religious vocations into political careers, symbolically drawing clerics into the political process. The SARA oversees the implementation of religious policy, including the registration of places of worship and clergy, mediating disputes between religious communities and other segments of society, and the negotiation of the return to religious communities of properties confiscated by other government departments during the Cultural Revolution (a process which is still ongoing, over 35 years later). Different divisions within SARA are assigned to each of the five recognized religions. An additional division, established in 2004, is charged with research and policy recommendations, including issues in relation to religious communities "other" than the five officially registered ones, including Chinese popular religion, the Russian Orthodox Church, and "new religions," notably the Bahá'í Faith and the Mormons. By the mid 2000s, these "other" forms of religion were increasingly viewed by SARA as a legitimate reality and tolerated in practice -- although the government, at the time of writing, is afraid of opening a pandora's box by providing an avenue for formally registering any of them. In some provinces, the temples of popular religion can obtain legal status by registering as Daoist or, in rarer cases, as Buddhist.

The official religious associations are responsible for each religion's places of worship, and are the formal employer of the clergy. They also run seminaries and institutes for the training of clergy, which combine religious knowledge with secular and political education. Although their staff wear religious robes, these associations operate in a manner similar to other state-run socialist work units (*danwei)*. Though autonomous

in theory, the associations are embedded in a wider hierarchy in which they ultimately report to SARA. The latter, as well as United Front officials, play a role in the "election" of association leaders, trying to ensure that the individuals chosen to head the religion will enjoy both the respect and legitimacy of the religious believers, and the political approval of the government, so as to be able to effectively handle the relations between the state and the religious community (Palmer, 2009).

This institutional structure exists at the national, provincial, and municipal or county levels. Other organs also play a role in the formulation and implementation of religious policy. Academic institutions, notably the China Academy of Social Sciences and its provincial counterparts, as well as certain universities, engage in academic research on religion. By treating religion as a form of "culture" worthy of serious inquiry, their research, conferences and publications help to legitimise religious life, while they also act as think-tanks, conducting surveys and offering policy recommendations to the authorities (Overmeyer, 2001; Dunch, 2008). The police (Public Security Bureau) and other specialised agencies, on the other hand, are entrusted with repressing illegal forms of religion, especially the groups designated as "evil cults" (*xiejiao*), notably Falun Gong and some Christian sects (Tong, 2009; Dunn, 2009).

"Minority nationality customs" are an important legitimizing category for the religious practices of ethnic minorities. Indeed, while official and intellectual discourse does not consider religion to be a component of Han ethnic identity, religion (or "exotic customs" which are in fact religious) is considered to be an integral component of ethnic minority culture, and the defining aspect for some nationalities such as the Muslim Hui. Official policy toward ethnic minorities, which seeks to preserve the outward markers of ethnic diversity and identity (while promoting their substantive assimilation), thus tends to be far more open toward religion among the minority nationalities than for the Han (except when religion is suspected of fomenting separatism, as discussed below). In the 10 minorities nationalities designated as Muslim, all members of the ethnic group are automatically considered to be Muslim believers; government policy in effect upholds traditional orthodoxy which does not allow one to renounce Islam or change religions.

From the mid 1990s and until today, government discourse on religion has become increasingly positive. The crackdown on Falun Gong in 1999 (see below) caused a brief chill for many forms of religious activity, but it also generated an elaborate official discourse on socially-destructive "evil cults," contrasted to the true "religions" which, it was stressed, make positive contributions to social stability and development (Palmer,

2008). That a group such as Falun Gong could seemingly appear out of nowhere and quickly recruit millions of followers, led many officials to conclude that peoples' spiritual needs were being neglected, and that more orthodox forms of religion should be given more space in order to avoid the spread of sectarian movements. Nowadays, the doctrine of religion as an "opiate" is rarely mentioned, and speeches by senior leaders have admitted that religion still has a long life ahead of it. The positive contributions of religion to society are recognized, and its potential contributions to economic development, culture, and charity and philanthropy, are now explicitly praised and encouraged. At the same time, the authorities still fear the influence and legitimacy such contributions could bring to religious organizations, and so there are still many obstacles for religious communities to engage in charitable projects (Laliberté, Palmer & Wu 2011). Overall, although the legitimate space for religion has steadily expanded over the past decades, the basic framework for China's religious policy remains essentially unchanged since the 1950s.

Most of religious life in China, however, from Chinese communal religion to new religious movements, as well as unregistered Protestant house churches, Catholic communities loyal to Rome, and other informal groups, either does not fit under the official category of "religion" or has not been integrated into the official associations and thus, paradoxically, escapes from state management under the religious policy. It exists in a vast and growing grey area, often tolerated but with ambiguous legal status. Many temples, rituals and practices have secured legitimation by presenting themselves as something other than religion – as forms of Chinese traditional medicine, sports and science (in the case of *qigong* in the 1980s and 1990s – see Palmer, 2007); as state-supported "intangible cultural heritage" according to UNESCO norms (in the case of many deity cults, temples and ritual traditions); as tourist resources; as environmental or educational programmes; or as platforms for building economic and political ties with Chinese worshippers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia (Chau, 2005b; F. Yang, 2006; M. Yang, 2004).

Revivals of communal religion in rural China

Chinese "communal religion" refers to an integrated whole including a sacred local geography, temples and their organizing committees, cyclical festivals, ritual specialists, life-cycle rituals, and the ancestor cult. The sacred geography is expressed in

popular lore about the *fengshui* energetic qualities of features of the landscape including mountains, rivers, stones, trees, tombs, and temples, and in relation to which villages and homes are positioned and oriented. Temples and shrines are the centres of communal worship of local gods and saints; they are the embodiments of local mythology and history, and are built and managed by lay committees of community members with moral authority (chosen in various ways including as representatives of each family or lineage in the village, selected by lot, etc.). Many temples host annual fairs which, especially in North China, are carnival-like events drawing crowds in the tens of thousands over several days, who come to worship, watch opera performances, shop at makeshift market stalls, and enjoy the noisy crowds. In the South, cyclical *jiao* rituals (held at intervals of five or so years) and other festivals are also common, and often feature processions in which deity statues are paraded through the community's territory. While lay committees do most of the organizing, ritual specialists – who may be non-monastic Daoist or Buddhist priests (especially in the South), masters of salvationist traditions of the Unborn Mother cults, lay scripture-recitation groups, or others – are hired or invited to provide the liturgy, often with the assistance of amateur musicians. These ritual specialists also officiate at life-cycle rituals, notably births and funerals, and conduct healing rites. The cult of ancestors is conducted at an altar containing tablets for the deceased of recent generations, located in the central room of traditional peasant homes, and at their tombs, notably during the annual grave-sweeping festival (Qingming). While official policy, in order to eliminate the unproductive use of land by sprawling tombs, calls for the replacement of burials by cremation, cremation rates actually dropped in some areas in the post-Mao years, and remain low until today outside the cities (Goossaert and Palmer, 2011, pp. 231-232). In South China, lineage halls are also common, federating through periodic rites the descendants of a common ancestor in the same village or region. In single-surname villages, the lineage hall is often the main community organization. In the past, lineages often owned large land estates and managed their resources, running schools and charities for their members. Today, lineages no longer directly own land, but they remain powerful sources of identity and play an important role in local politics.

The revival of Chinese communal religion has been uneven in different regions, depending on a range of factors. The level of tolerance and support of local authorities is an important concern, and can vary based on personal and kinship ties between cadres and temple activists, as well as the incentives provided by the use of popular religion to build ties with potential investors from overseas Chinese communities, or to secure

government funding for heritage protection. Another factor is the appearance of capable activists with deep local ties and political skills, such as retired Party cadres, to take the lead and organize religious activities and rituals. And finally, the transmission of local religious memory is crucial. In some villages, priests and old people with good memories (even though liturgical manuals were destroyed during Maoist campaigns, they had them committed to memory and copied them down in the 1980s) have been able to reconstruct their traditions, which, sometimes, were only interrupted for a few years during the heat of the Cultural Revolution. But in other places, the interruption of transmission has been longer, and elder authorities are weak or forgetful, leading to the nearly complete disappearance of the local system of worship – or the younger generations are not interested in learning their skills (DuBois, 2005; Jones, 2011).

Earlier scholarly research seemed to indicate that the revival of communal religion was stronger in the coastal areas of South China, notably in Zhejiang, Fujian and parts of Guangdong (Dean, 1992; Tam, 2011; M. Yang, 2000). This could be explained by the government's more open policy in these provinces in the early period of post-Maoist reforms, greater material affluence (Chinese temples and rituals are expensive to build and stage), and ties with overseas Chinese eager to go on pilgrimage to return to the source of their ancestral cults (such as Mazu for many Taiwanese, and the Patriarch of the Clear Stream for Singaporeans: see M. Yang, 2004; Kuah, 2000). But more recent research has shown that, although it was perhaps slower to take off, popular religion is also undergoing a significant revival in the poorer, landlocked provinces of North China (Chau, 2005b; DuBois, 2005; Jones, 2010; Johnson, 2010).

The weak penetration of the state, and the low level of legitimacy of local cadres, has enabled popular temples in some rural areas to act as the main form of public organization and as a "second level of government," collecting funds from residents and building schools, roads, bridges and other facilities (Dean, 2001). Some studies suggest that strong temple associations (or lineage halls in single-surname villages) contribute to a higher level of responsibility and accountability of local officials by creating social solidarity and enforcing common moral norms (Tsai, 2007). In recent years, county and local governments have become more tolerant of popular religion, and in increasing numbers have become its active promoters, under policies promoting heritage, tourism and local identity. At the same time, however, structural changes may have a profound impact on the forms of popular religion. Massive temporary migration of labourers to the cities has left many villages inhabited mostly by their children and elderly parents. In

such places, rituals and festivals are poorly attended, except for the Chinese New Year, when most migrant workers return home. In the cities, the migrant labourers are disconnected from their local traditions; if they participate in religion, it is more likely to be Christianity, which they may then bring back to their native villages. Furthermore, the government's drive to create a "new socialist countryside" starting in 2006, which has been expanding the reach of the state into rural areas and, in many places, involved destroying old villages to rebuild them in modern buildings near major transportation arteries, will undoubtedly have a deep impact on traditional religious culture, which is so closely tied to local memories of place and longstanding community relationships.

Post-Mao urban religious culture and the *qigong* movement

While religious policy has attempted to identify, categorize and administer fixed and monolithic religious institutions, the social reality of religion has been one of rapid change, innovation and diversification. Much of the discussion of the "revival" of religion in post-Mao China has understood this revival in terms of a return to tradition, after decades of revolutionary campaigns which had cut the Chinese people off from their cultural and spiritual roots. However, owing to the profound ruptures in the transmission of tradition over the 20th century, coupled with the historical weakness of Chinese religious institutions and the contemporary reality of massive urbanization and commodification of culture, the reality is that most "returns" to tradition are, to a greater or lesser degree, innovations and reinventions which recombine elements of traditional culture to construct a spirituality or religiosity adapted to modern life.

This has been notably the case in urban China. The rural-urban divide is profound, but a product of the 20th century. In traditional China, local diversity flourished among the cities, towns and villages, but they all shared a common framework of culture, cosmology, and religious practices. In the modernizing projects of the Republican era (1912-1949), large cities became showcases of social experimentation, urban planning, rationalization, and hygiene, consciously in contrast to the "backward", "superstitious" countryside. The socialist regime further entrenched this distinction by concentrating resources and investments into urban development, and through the *hukou* household registration system which created distinct categories of citizenship for rural and urban dwellers. This division is reflected in China's religious landscape, in which the

rural areas are the repositories of tradition, both looked down on by modern urbanites, and the subject of their nostalgic yearnings.

The objective conditions for traditional communal religion, based on ascriptive ties to kinship and territorial groups, hardly exist in urban China, where, for almost 50 years until the late 1990s, the primary social unit was nuclear families living and working in the compounds of state-run work units. Ancestor worship, lineages, and neighbourhood temples and shrines all but disappeared, and only in rare exceptions did they resurface in the post-Mao era: many traditional neighbourhood communities had been dispersed by urban planning and assignment to residence in work units. For several decades, most urban Chinese had little or no direct contact with traditional forms of worship; religious practice could be said to have almost completely disappeared.

And yet, religious culture suddenly resurfaced in the post-Mao urban China, most visibly expressed through what came to be called "*qigong* fever", the most widespread form of urban religiosity in the 1980s and 90s, in which one or two hundred million persons participated in some way or another. This was a craze for traditional breathing, meditation, gymnastics, and healing methods, often steeped in Buddhist or Daoist symbolism, which drew millions of adepts, and turned into mass movements led by charismatic masters. The phenomenon was spurred by the confluence of many trends, including the official promotion of *qigong* as a simple form of physical exercise derived from Chinese medicine and which could be praticed by the masses; a fascination among some leading scientists, military leaders, and media for paranormal phenomena under the guise of scientific research; and the booming popularity of Hong Kong and mainland kung fu films, TV series, and novels steeped in religious lore, ranging from *Shaolin Temple* to *Journey to the West*, which popularized Chinese cosmology and featured the magical feats of martial artists based on the same techniques of mind and body control as those of *qigong*.

Qigong had emerged as a new category in the early 1950's, when the PRC's new health authorities, in the process of creating new, modern institutions of traditional Chinese medicine, engaged in a programme of revamping traditional healing practices, expurgating any "superstitious" content and reinterpreting the cosmology in materialist terms. *Qigong* was designated as one of the disciplines of Chinese medicine, alongside the materia medica, acupuncture, and massage, and state-run *qigong* clinics and sanatoria established in several cities. The goal had been to secularize the rich traditions of breath, mind, and body training which had been taught for centuries but often in a religious

context. That religious imprint could not be completely washed away, however, and *qigong* was banned as "feudal superstition" during the Cultural Revolution.

Qigong resurfaced in the 1970s, and was officially rehabilitated in 1979. Hundreds of masters quickly emerged, each teaching his own set of *qigong* exercises to groups of practitioners who gathered in parks and other public spaces. These groups expanded and formed national networks of practitioners of the same method. *Qigong* became an important component in the culture of early-morning mass exercises in urban spaces.

But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the *qigong* category also came to have associations going far beyond its original modern meaning as a set of health exercises. Some scientists conducted laboratory experiments on *qigong* masters who were said to be able to mentally emit *qi* (vital energy) to heal patients without bodily contact, and claimed to have discovered the material basis of this "external *qi*". At the same time, the print media were caught up in a craze of reports about children with paranormal powers such as reading with their ears or moving objects from a distance. When *qigong* masters were discovered who purportedly had the same powers, the claim was made that *qigong* was a body of knowledge which could systematically train and develop the "extraordinary powers" latent in every human being, opening the tantalizing prospect of a new scientific revolution. China's most politically influential scientist, Qian Xuesen (1911-2009), the architect of China's nuclear bomb and the Chairman of the National Association for Science and Technology, became an enthusiastic promoter of what he called "somatic science" (*renti kexue*) which would combine Chinese medicine, *qigong*, and paranormal studies. This enthusiasm spread to the National Defense research institutions, which saw much potential in the military applications of paranormal abilities, opened special research units, and kept *qigong* masters on its payroll for conducting experiments and to offer healing treatments to the aging leaders of the CCP's Long March generation.

Among the practitioners in the parks, some *qigong* methods induced trance states, glossolalia, and visions of popular gods, while many masters became charismatic cult figures. Yan Xin, the most popular master, filled entire sports stadiums for his mass healing lectures, during which he emitted *qi*, the sick claimed they were healed, and paraplegics stood up from their wheelchairs. *Qigong* became a booming subculture with its own official associations sponsored by the health, sports, and science authorities, several mass-circulation popular *qigong* magazines, a growing market for books and manuals on *qigong* masters and techniques, and thousands of masters, many of whom began to build highly integrated organizations of trainers and practitioners. One of the

largest of these, Zhong Gong, led by master Zhang Hongbao, which claimed 30 million practitioners, built a sprawling commercial corporation based on the sale of a progressive series of training workshops, and which also included health products, universities, and real estate investment (Palmer, 2007).

Falun Gong, which was launched in 1992 by Li Hongzhi, began as one of thousands of *qigong* methods, but it quickly grew in popularity. In contrast to most other *qigong* forms, the focus of Falun Gong went beyond exercises and healing to emphasize moral cultivation. Li Hongzhi described a supernatural cosmology replete with demons, Buddhas, spirits and aliens, and an apocalyptic worldview in which salvation could only be attained through exclusive commitment to himself and his method, and abandonment of all worldly attachments, including to emotional feelings and affections for other people, to other forms of healing or medicine, and to other religious practices or teachings.

Li Hongzhi moved to the United States around 1995, but Falun Gong continued to grow in China, attracting millions of practitioners in all the cities, and it was criticized in the press. Mass actions in response to criticisms, such as letter-writing campaigns and sit-ins, became a core dimension of spiritual cultivation. On 25 April, over 10,000 practitioners quietly surrounded Zhongnangai, the central Beijing compound of the CCP leadership, for the whole day.

The demonstration, the largest of its kind since the Tiananmen student movement a decade earlier, shocked the CCP leaders, who saw it as an existential threat. President Jiang Zemin resolved to exterminate the movement, now designated an "evil cult", through a ruthless repression campaign launched in July 1999. The suppression led to the end of the *qigong* movement as a mass phenomenon. Yoga grew in popularity and replaced *qigong* as a popular form of meditation and health practice. By 2000, Falun Gong had disappeared as a public movement in mainland China, but an underground network of diehard followers continued to subsist. Now based overseas, Falun Gong became a global cyber-network linking followers around the world through a cluster of websites, a digital TV station, and a newspaper, the *Epoch Times*, published simultaneously in several languages. This network was mobilised to publicise China's human rights abuses of Falun Gong practitioners in China, and, starting in 2004, to spearhead a campaign to discredit and topple the CCP as an "evil Party" (Palmer, 2007; Ownby, 2008; Penny, forthcoming).

The Confucian revival

In the aftermath of the *qigong* movement's collapse, the first decade of the 21st century saw a new wave of cultural revivalism, this time around Confucianism. Similar to *qigong*, Confucianism does not fall under the official category of religion in the PRC; but instead of restricting its development, this indeterminate status has allowed it to expand under a great variety of forms and guises. The collapse of the imperial state in 1911 had implied the dissolution of the ritual order, the examination system based on the Confucian classics, and the traditional bureaucracy which had formed the institutional structure of "Confucianism." In Republican China, the Confucian heritage had been carried and recast into in a wide range of forms: popular syncretistic salvational movements and redemptive societies such as the Universal Morality Society (Wanguo daodehui), the Fellowship United in Goodness (Tongshanshe) and the Way of Pervasive Unity (Yiguandao); an independent "religion", the Kongjiao, imitating the organizational forms and in competition with Christian churches (and aspiring to be declared China's state religion); an ethical tradition compatible with Christian faith and the ideological foundation of the New Life Movement; and a secular system of thought according to the norms of Western philosophy. With the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Confucianism became the very emblem of the old feudal order: the redemptive societies, which had more members than the five officially recognized religions among the Han Chinese, were ruthlessly suppressed as "reactionary sects and secret societies" (*fandong huidaomen*), while Confucian philosophy became a taboo topic even among academics (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011).

In the 1980s and into the 90s, Confucianism began to reappear as a topic of discussion and debate, but mostly confined to academics, as part of a broader trend in the post-revolutionary period to explore and rediscover China's traditional culture and thought, to debate its relevance to the contemporary period, and to re-examine whether it was the source of, or a solution to, China's ills and even its political dysfunctions. Numerous conferences were held, and restoration works and ceremonies were undertaken at the ancestral temple of Confucius at Qufu (Shandong), with tourism promotion as one of the main motivations. This occurred in the broader context of the economic rise of the four "Asian Dragons" (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore), which stimulated much discussion on whether their economic growth was related to their "Confucian" culture of academic success, hard work and strong family

ties – a notion promoted by Singapore president Lee Kuan-yew through his theory of "Asian values". Meanwhile, overseas academics, such as Tu Wei-ming of Harvard, were working on contemporary reformulations of Confucian ethics and spirituality, and re-introducing them into curricula and academic discourses in Singapore and China. During this period, then, although interest in Confucius was increasing on the mainland, a sharp contrast remained between the mainland, which was seen as "cut off" from its Confucian traditions and largely ignorant of is heritage, while an organic connection with the past supposedly existed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and overseas Chinese. Various groups and individuals from these areas were actively promoting the dissemimation of Confucian ideas in the mainland, and Confucius became a useful symbol for the PRC government in building patriotic ties with Chinese from Taiwan and overseas (Billioud & Thoraval, 2007; Billioud & Thoraval, 2008; Makeham, 2008).

In the 2000s, however, Confucianism became much more of a mass phenomenon in mainland China, as well as the subject of a more focused involvement and instrumentalisation on the part of the state. A multitude of popular initiatives took inspiration from the Confucian heritage. Most widespread was the classics recitation movement (*dujing yundong*), which encouraged children and adults to nurture the habit of reading, memorizing and reciting the classics. This could take the form of small groups of children being taught by an amateur retired teacher, programmes introduced into the formal curriculum of schools, or early-morning gatherings of students and retirees in campuses, parks and public spaces to read and comment the texts. Many enthusiasts established "academies" as places for the collective study and intellectual discussion on the Confucian teachings, as venues for providing more formal classes, or as centres for recruiting and deploying volunteers to teach the classics or do other acts of social service. Most of these academies were fragile-non-profit affairs, but some were businesses, offering workshops for a growing market of business entrepreneurs in search of moral purpose and cultural capital. Similar continuing-education programmes in "national studies" were also launched by a growing number of universities, catering to the same market.

Most of these initiatives do not consider themselves "religious," and contain little or no element of worship. But some groups learn and strive to practice ritual, and the cult of Confucius is popular in these circles. Some explicitly called for Confucianism to be declared as China's national religion, a position shared by some high-profile academics. Others are Buddhist groups which promote Confucian virtues and textual

study as part of a wider range of religious activities (Billioud & Thoraval, 2009; Ownby, 2009; Dutournier & Ji, 2009).

Meanwhile, while the state's stance toward Confucianism remains ambivalent, it has allowed for a much wider discursive space for its officially-sanctioned promotion. Though Hu Jintao's principle of "harmonious society" does not itself make explicit reference to Confucius, it seems to signal a shift in the official ideology which can be involked to legitimate all manner of initiatives inspired by Chinese traditional thought. And the establishment of a worldwide network of "Confucius Institutes" as an emblem for the international projection of Chinese "soft power," while still devoid of much content, symbolically elevates the Sage into a global symbol of socialist China.

Daoist and Buddhist temples, clergy and lay networks

In the 1950s, only a few dozen large Buddhist and Daoist temples had been preserved in the cities, as well as the main mountain monastic centres, and it is these officially-designated temples and monasteries which were re-opened after the Cultural Revolution – a few temples in each of China's large cities, and the sacred mountains and monastic complexes of Emei, Huashan, Putuoshan, etc. This represented only a tiny fraction of China's historically Daoist and Buddhist temples. Thousands had been destroyed, both during the Republican and Maoist revolutions; many others were still standing, but were occupied by the Cultural Relics authorities or by other units, none of which were willing to turn this valuable real estate over to religious communities. The Daoist and Buddhist associations in several cities tried to claim former temples, but the negotiations, usually conducted by the Religious Affairs Bureau, were difficult. Only if a strong case could be made to identify the temple as Daoist or Buddhist could the process begin, which was not always easy owing to the traditionally communal management of most temples. Even then, protracted negotiations and government support were required, which was unlikely; but it did occur, such as for the City God temples of Shanghai and Xi'an, which were restored and reopened under the municipal Daoist associations (Goossaert & Fang, 2009).

Since the 1950s, the large urban temples had been cut off from their traditional ties with networks of local temples and communities, and from their economic base of providing ritual services for the communities in which they were embedded. Instead, they obtained a meager revenue from the government and from the sale of entrance

tickets. But since the 1990s, as part of a general trend to push state-owned work units to become financially self-sufficient, urban temples have been required to find new sources of income. Tourism is one trend, with Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and sacred sites becoming tourist showcases charging high entrance fees. Another option has been for temples to offer healing, meditation, and health-cultivation programmes, summer camps and workshops, sometimes similar to *qigong* activities of a decade earlier. And many temples have become more active providers in the market for ritual services (including funerals and rites for healing and blessings), previously dominated by householder ritualists, as described below (D.-R. Yang, 2005). All of these trends imply a deeper participation in the market economy, which has led to much criticism of Buddhism and Daoism becoming excessively commercialized. Temples and monastic complexes require substantial funds to build and manage; but they can also become lucrative income streams. Many local governments have enthusiastically promoted the construction of grandiose temples and giant Buddha statues, in the hopes of stimulating tourist development, even in places where there are no historical sacred sites. The Shaolin temple has become an extreme example of a Buddhist monastery, of which almost nothing remained in the early 1980s, becoming a multinational kungfu-themed tourism, media and entertainment conglomerate (Ji, 2011). Some real estate developers have seen temples as an attractive addition to the standard investment portfolios of shopping malls and residential estates (Chan & Lang, 2011). In the summer of 2010, a Daoist priest in Chongqing, who had developed a successful model of turning his monastery into a retreat centre for healing and meditation workshops for well-heeled business elites and pop stars, was the subject of a media campaign to discredit him as a quack and swindler. The high profits from successful temples and religious tourist attractions lead to frequent conflicts between religious communities and tourism authorities and investors over the management and distribution of revenues.

Most of the monasteries are staffed by resident monks from Buddhist and Daoist (Quanzhen) monastic orders, which, as self-contained religious institutions ostensibly devoted exclusively to spiritual cultivation, are the closest match to the state policy's framing of religion. Monastic identity is defined by the norm of celibacy, "leaving the family" (*chujia*) to enter the religious community, although it is not observed very strictly in practice, especially among the Daoists. Monks still practice the tradition of moving from one monastery to another around China in search of masters, creating national networks of circulating clerics, which connect with local networks of temples and their

branches and offshoots. And these networks are overlaid by the state's hierarchies of local, provincial and national Buddhist and Daoist Associations and Religious Affairs bureaus (Herrou, 2011).

In the Daoist case, however, the vast majority of priests are not monastics but the so-called "householder" Daoists who live at their own homes with their families, are not affiliated to a single temple, and operate as independent ritual specialists providing life-cycle and healing rituals to individuals and families, and communal rituals for local temples. In some areas, they practice the Zhengyi liturgical tradition, while in other regions local traditions such as Lüshan, Meishan, and vernacular Buddhist ritual forms predominate. Until recently these "superstition specialist households" could not operate legally (Chau, 2006), but local Religious Affairs authorities and Daoist associations have begun a process of registering and licensing some of them, particularly if they are affiliated to the more orthodox Zhengyi tradition (Lai, 2003).

Many communal temples, which originally had only a tenuous connection with a recognized religion, are claiming a Daoist (or sometimes Buddhist) identity in order to secure their legality through affiliation to the local Daoist or Buddhist Association. "Daoistication" (*daojiaohua*) is an option considered by the religious affairs authorities, and experimented with in some regions, for registering and monitoring communal temples. But this normalization, whether it involves householder priests or communal temples, also involves engaging with a process of religious standardization emanating from the official institutions. This can involve posting Buddhist or Quanzhen Daoist monks at communal temples, attending political meetings, and undergoing formal academic-style training which substitutes secular discursive knowledge on religious history and philosphy for traditional master-disciple apprenticeship (D.-R. Yang, 2011).

Meanwhile, Chinese Buddhism and Daoism are becoming integrated into transnational religious networks. In the Daoist case, temples in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia have played a significant role in financing the reconstruction and expansion of temples on the mainland, and even in reintroducing or legitimating ritual traditions (Dean, 2011). And with the growing popularity of Daoist health and self-cultivation traditions in Europe and North America, Western Daoist organizations and enterprises are bringing groups of practitioners on "energy tours" to China, where they visit sacred mountains and interact with Chinese monks. Some monks have even been invited to give lectures and workshops in Western retreat centres. Daoism is thus gradually becoming connected to global circuits, interlinking and transcending its

traditional embeddedness in local society and national identity (Siegler, 2006; Siegler and Palmer, forthcoming.)

In the case of Han Buddhism, transnational flows have contributed to the growth of lay Buddhist movements. The Republican era had seen the emergence of reformist tendencies, often called "engaged" or "humanistic" Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) which afforded a greater role to the laity and advocated greater participation in contemporary social life and issues; but after 1949, though the modernizing rhetoric of reformist Buddhism was retained, there was little room for concrete innovations, and in the 1980s and into the 90s, there was little capacity within the mainland Buddhist institutions to engage with society or develop lay movements. During this period, however, since the late 1960s, Taiwan had become a world centre of reformist Buddhism and the base of several globalizing new Buddhist movements, such as Dharma Drum Mountain (Foguangshan) or the Compassionate Relief Foundation (Ciji gongdehui), which developed new forms of Buddhist lifestyle and identity (Madsen, 2007; Huang, 2008). These have had a direct and indirect impact on the mainland, contributing to a vibrant lay Buddhist culture. The first decade of the new century has seen the sprouting and flourishing of myriads of loosely-organized popular Buddhist networks, ranging from groups of devotees who print, compose, distribute and preach about morality books in temple courtyards, to gatherings of white collar professionals in vegetarian restaurants and business entrepreneurs who invite monks to give Dharma talks and initiations to themselves and their friends (Fisher, 2011; Fan & Whitehead, 2011).

Often it is lamas of Tibetan Buddhism who are patronized by these entrepreneurs, a sign of the growing popularity of their tradition among the Han. While the mystery and spiritual traditions of Tibet have long been a source of fascination for the Han, as in the West, they have become more widely publicised and accessible with the development of tourism. Beyond the flood of documentaries, exhibitions, glossy magazine features, backpacker guides, package tours and adventure expeditions to Tibetan areas, which are gaining in popularity among culturally sophisticated Chinese urbanites, a growing trickle of Han spiritual seekers are sojourning in Tibetan monasteries and spiritual camps located in the remote highlands of Gansu, Sichuan and Tibet.

Tibetan Buddhism has become a multifaceted, transnational and multi-ethnic religious movement in the post-Mao era. A conservative theocracy isolated and almost virtually cut off from the outside world in the first half of the 20th century, Tibet had

been suddenly thrust into revolutionary politics with its full integration into the PRC state in the 1950s. The Dalai Lama's flight to India in 1959 along with thousands of other monks, set the stage for an unprecendented globalization of Tibetan Buddhism, especially after many of these lamas ended up migrating to Western countries, and the Dalai Lama became an internationally revered spiritual leader and bestselling author. Like all religions in China, Tibetan Buddhism suffered from harsh persecution during the Cultural Revolution, but owing to the ethnic and political factor, the revolutionary campaigns have reinforced deep grievances and resentment between Tibetans and Han Chinese, and a deep religious faith has become a key vehicle for the expression of ethnic identity and aspirations vis-à-vis the Chinese state. Following the Cultural Revolution, both the PRC government and the Dalai Lama made attempts to initiate a reconciliation, but this failed in the 1980s. For some time the authorities tolerated Tibetans' veneration of the Dalai Lama, but by the end of the 1990s, he was being demonized as a splittist, and later as a terrorist. Monks and common people have had to reconcile, but increasingly have to choose, between their religious loyalties and the requirements of survival and development within the socialist system. (Goldstein & Kapstein, 1998; Makley, 2007)

Islam

Hui Muslims had been active within China's nationalist movement during the Republican period, and the CCP had developed strong ties with Muslim communities in the northwest during the Yan'an period in the 1930s and 40s. Under the PRC after 1949, Islam, though recognized as a religion, has been largely subsumed as a "minority nationalities" issue: all members of 10 out of China's 56 ethnic groups are considered to be Muslim by birth – the Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Dongxiang, Kyrghyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbeks, Baonan, and Tatar. Many special accommodations were made for their religious and ethnic customs, and two Muslim-majority autonomous regions – Xinjiang and Ningxia – were established (Gladney, 1996).

After the Cultural Revolution, the 1980's witnessed the re-establishment of official Islamic institutions and the revival and expansion of infrastructures. Mosques were restored and rebuilt, until, by some accounts, there were now more mosques than before 1949. Pilgrimages to Mecca were resumed, with believers travelling to Saudi Arabia through both official and unofficial channels in rapidly increasing numbers. Publishing

operations, both official and informal, were re-activated. Affirmative action programmes such as a more relaxed birth control policy and lower entrance standards for university, enjoyed by all minority nationalities, encouraged Han people to marry into or otherwise seek to join these nationalities, so that, between 1982 and 1990, the Hui population grew by 19% in eight years.

As in the 1950's, the official China Islamic Association is dominated by members of the Ikhwan movement, an anti-sufi reformist tradition which had been active as Chinese nationalists in the Republican period. Most of the mosques rebuilt with state funds after the Cultural Revolution are affiliated to the Ikhwan, while the sufi and traditional Islam (known as "old teachings", or *gedimu*) continue to predominate in rural Hui villages. Having been so effectively co-opted by the state, however, the Ikhwan have lost some of their legitimacy in the eyes of many Muslims. Disaffection with the Ikhwan seems to have stimulated the growth of the Salafiyya movement, introduced to China in the 1930's, which advocates political quietism and an uncompromising adherence to scripture, rejecting the Ikhwan drift toward secularism, Marxism, and political co-optation (Gladney, 1999).

Just as, in the 1950's, the CCP had adroitly played its Muslim card as part of its diplomatic strategy, the same approach was used in the post-Mao period, as trade and economic links have boomed between China and Muslim countries in Southeast Asia and the Middle East—the latter being crucial suppliers of oil and important clients for Chinese-sponsored infrastructure development projects. Many of these collaborations involve Hui as leaders, interpreters, or cultural consultants, while the increased links also facilitate religious exchanges: hundreds of Chinese Muslims have obtained scholarships to pursue Islamic studies in Muslim countries, while foreign Islamic foundations fund the construction of mosques and Islamic schools in China.

The increased links with other Muslim countries, especially of the Middle East, have had a certain impact on the practice and values of the Hui. Arabia, as the root of Islam, is often seen as the standard for Islamic authenticity, and as the source of an alternative civilizing discourse to the Han-centred hegemony emanating from the Chinese state. Countering Han-centred stereotypes of Hui backwardness, many stress the higher principles of purity, truth, and hygiene contained in Islamic civilization, and identify with the prosperity and material advancement of the Arabian states—producing a trend of "Arabisation" among the Hui, including the adoption of Arabic architectural styles for

mosques (replacing the Chinese temple style of older mosques with domes), enrolling in Arabic language lessons, watching Middle-Eastern videos, and adopting Arabic "Muslim" dress codes (such as blandly coloured womens' headdresses and *hijab*) (Gillette, 2000).

If geopolitical considerations have been a factor in an exceptionally lenient treatment of the religious practices of the Hui, it has been just the opposite for the Uighurs and other Muslim peoples of the far West. Here, in the face of violent acts of resistance by Uighurs, the Chinese state successfully lobbied both the neighbouring central Asian states, which were ethnically and historically close to the Uighurs, and the United States, otherwise keen to take up the cause of human rights in China, to obtain cover for a brutal suppression of any expression of perceived Uighur nationalism, in a campaign whose targets included any expressions of Islam outside of narrow, officially-sanctioned confines.

Sporadic anti-Han protests and incidents occurred throughout the 1980's. Some Uighur resistance groups took inspiration from the Mujahideen victory against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1989. It was the Baren rebellion, launched near Kashgar with calls to *jihad* in April 1990—in which dozens of rioters were killed by the army—which marked a turning point in the state's approach to the Uighurs and Islam in Xinjiang. From then on, the CCP resolved to crush any signs of dissent and to strictly control religious life. This occurred only months after the Tiananmen student movement, and just as the Soviet bloc was collapsing, with several new Muslim-majority republics attaining independence on the Western borders of Xinjiang. China's leaders feared the breaking away of Xinjiang, leading by domino effect to the disintegration of China and the end of the CCP regime. Tensions were aggravated by a series of bomb blasts in Urumqi and even in Beijing in the mid 1990's, and again by riots in July 2009. The "strike hard" campaign launched to fight crime throughout China in 1996, was, in Xinjiang, primarily directed at any suspected "separatist" activity, including much of the religious life. Unregistered mosques were closed, loudspeakers for the call to prayer were removed from minarets, in some instances certain prayers were banned, children were punished at school for showing signs of Islamic practice, and teachers and employees at state-run units were deliberately offered meals during the fast of Ramadan. Religious regulations which were only loosely enforced among the Hui elsewhere in China, such as limiting to two the number of students under each imam, were strictly applied (Kung, 2006, p. 385).

Due to the dearth of in-depth research, it is impossible to accurately gauge how deeply Islam is associated with Uighur nationalism, with some scholars stressing that the Islamic dimension is but a minor element. Clearly, however, Islam is being driven underground, and it seems likely that, in the absence of any other source of international support, and with possibilities for employment and material advancement increasingly blocked by Han immigrants, coupled with the stress on Uighur culture, Islam may become possibly the only remaining cultural and spiritual resource to which the Uighurs can turn (Castets, 2003; Fuller & Lipman, 2004).

Christianity

The Cultural Revolution had a defining impact on the evolution of Chinese Christianity. Owing to their direct association with foreign imperialists and a sometimes explicitly and actively anti-communist orientation, the persecution of Christians had been intense and systematic throughout the Mao years. And yet, the Christian community survived, and even expanded, through the worst years of oppression. Already, the failure of the state-controlled patriotic Catholic and Protestant associations to rally most of the faithful in the 1950's, had driven many to meet in small groups in their homes—the beginning of the "house church" movement—and led to the emergence of underground Protestant and Catholic networks. The imprisonment, torture and execution of many priests, ministers and lay leaders only steeled the resolve of communities which developed narratives of martyrdom and of bearing the Cross for their faith. Christians gave a spiritual meaning to their sufferings, endowing them with a force with which they could bear the abuse and emerge with an even stronger faith. It was such people who, once released, returned to minister to their flocks in caves, in fields, in private homes at night, or even to missionize to other villages. Hundreds if not thousands of new house churches were thus founded in the 1970s. These underground churches were definitively cut off from Western influence, were strongly rooted in the local contexts of believers' lives, and became far more "self-governing, self-financing and self-expanding" than the official "Three-self" churches could ever have hoped to become. These were communities in which the frequent absence of the clergy due to repeated arrests and imprisonment, led to the laity coming to play a strong role in the organization of liturgical and community life—a situation that continued into the 21st century, when all

churches faced an acute shortage of clergy which could not keep up with the growing numbers of believers (Hunter & Chan, 1993; Madsen, 1998; Vala, 2009).

By the late 1970's and early 1980's, the seeds which had been planted during the Cultural Revolution began to come to fruition, as both Catholic and Protestant religious activity came back into the open. On the one hand, religious activity was more tolerated, many churches and cathedrals were reopened or rebuilt, some church property was returned, and it was no longer necessary to meet secretly to worship. On the other hand, the Religious Affairs Bureau and the state-sponsored Patriotic Associations were re-established; these once again attempted to establish their leadership over the believers, leading to renewed conflicts over legitimacy and authority, and to the division of Christian communities into the state-sponsored churches and unofficial, autonomous groups which did not come under state control.

For the Catholics, the issue is the existence of two parallel hierarchies, one loyal to Rome and the Pope, the other to Beijing and the CCP. Unilateral consecrations of bishops by either side have led to periodic flashes of tension, although the reality on the ground is quite complex. While in some places, members of the official and unofficial Catholic churches boycott each other, leading some to speak of a "schism", in other places official and unofficial clergy informally divide territories between themselves to avoid conflict, or even jointly minister to the same community. The issue of authority within the Church—the CCP willing to grant the Pope a spiritual authority, but no institutional power—is compounded by the question of diplomatic recognition, the Vatican remaining as one of the few states in the world to recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan rather than the PRC. Both governments are divided between hard-line and accommodationist factions, and overtures are consistently torpedoed by provocative actions, typically the unilateral appointment of bishops by either side. (Lozada, 2001; Liu & Leung, 2002; Leung, 1998).

For Protestants, the issue is not one of two parallel hierarchies, but an asymmetrical relationship between a centralized, state-sponsored institution and a diffused galaxy of thousands of independent congregations ranging in size from prayer groups in homes to national networks of hundreds of thousands of believers, which had their own printing presses, retreats, and training systems. While the official churches control most buildings and assets in the large cities, this has not stopped the growth of house churches among urban residents, while in the rural areas and in the hinterland some unofficial groups

have become so large that they often move out of the "houses" and build large church structures which can seat thousands.

Indigenous networks such as the Fangcheng Fellowship, the China Gospel Fellowship, and the Born-Again Movement send evangelists to all parts of China, converting millions. These networks practice charismatic and Pentecostal forms of worship. Healing, speaking in tongues, and prophecy are integral to their practices of worship; morality and repentance are central to their spirituality. Many churches have become so coloured with local culture that they increasingly resemble the sectarian cults and salvationist movements of Chinese religion, with charismatic preachers leading their followers to turn to Christ for healing and exorcism (Hunter & Chan, 1992, p. 178; Yip, 1999; Bays, 2003, pp. 496-97).

While Catholicism continues to grow at the same rate as China's population, Protestantism has witnessed a phenomenal expansion—from one million in 1949 to at least 30 million by the end of the century—a thirty-fold increase. While such a figure still represents only 2% of the population, the rate of growth is so rapid that, if sustained over several decades in the 21ˢᵗ century, many Christians hope to eventually convert a significant proportion of the population. Already, some entire ethnic localities in the Southwest have become Christian—with the support of local authorities delighted at their accomplishments in curbing drug trafficking and crime—and several house churches dream of, and have begun preparations for, the goal of sending thousands of Chinese missionaries to convert the Muslims of the Middle East, as the last stage in a movement "back to Jerusalem" in expectation of the Second Coming (Aikman, 2003, pp. 193-205).

Although observers in the 1990's described the growth of Christianity as occurring primarily among elder, poorly-educated rural residents, it was clear by the late 1990's, that Christianity also held a strong appeal among educated urbanites and affluent entrepreneurs. In the city of Wenzhou, one of China's richest coastal cities with a large number of Christians (estimated at around 10 percent of the population), a new breed of "boss Christians" has appeared. These business owners, who are also zealous believers and leaders in congregations, preach a prosperity gospel and compete to build ever-larger and more dynamic churches. They consciously try to refashion Chinese Christianity into a more modern and sophisticated lifestyle that can satisfy the aspirations of people living in a market- oriented culture (Cao, 2011).

The growth of Christianity in the cities is largely extra-institutional: while official churches are simply unable to respond to demand, McDonald's restaurants have become as likely a place to conduct Bible study sessions as private apartments. For these urban believers, Christianity is part of the cosmopolitan, Western-inspired culture they aspire to – but also reaffirms moral values in continuity with traditional ethics (F. Yang, 2005).

It is too early to assess to what extent Christianity may affect public life in China in the future. The theological orientation of most Chinese churches leads them away from this-worldly concerns. But there are many Christians among a movement of lawyers and activists who are willing to defend the rights of farmers, workers, and religious believers in the Chinese courts, at great risk to their careers and lives. For these activists, religious faith translates into an active engagement to protect individual rights within the framework of what the Chinese state claimed to be an emerging rule of law.

Conclusion

China in the early 21st century has become a laboratory for religious change and innovation. Unlike most countries, China has no dominant religious orthodoxy, and all forms of religion are expanding. State policy has kept religious institutions weak, but the hegemony of a secularist and anti-religious ideology, which was dominant over most of the 20th century, is on the wane as well. The spiritual and religious yearnings and aspirations of Chinese people are finding ever more diverse outlets for expression, even as official policy, more open to religion but still anchored to a framework inherited from the 1950s, is at pains to adapt to an ever-shifting reality. While the 1980s and 90s could be characterized as decades of restoration and revival following the traumas of the Maoist period, in the 21st century, the dynamic is moving toward innovation and diversification of religious practices and pathways.

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