

# The Role of Chinese Christianity in the Process of China's Democratization

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While the Chinese economy is rapidly developing, China remains a communist country. The Communist Party of China (CPC) is not ready to process “a formal democratic transition,”<sup>2</sup> though it has opened its windows to partial political and social reform. By Western standards, the Chinese government is “still ranked among the most repressive in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Because of Chinese economic power and the nature of the communist system, it is urgent to promote China's democratization and make China a responsible government. If Western societies and scholars do not deal with China properly, China will have a profound negative effect on the stability of Asia and the world.<sup>4</sup>

How can China make the transition from a communist regime to a democratic system? Religion and politics are two main support systems in modern society. Jacques Gernet has referred to these two aspects in democratic societies as the “political sovereign” and the “doctrinal sovereign.”<sup>5</sup> The issue of the relation of religion and politics is the key to understanding China's transition. According to Jason Kindopp, however, “The rise in importance of church-state relations within China remains largely unexamined either in China or in the United States.”<sup>6</sup> There has been a misunder-

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1 Thanks for Suzanne Orrell for reading this article and making corrections.

2 Catharin E. Dalpino, *Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 3.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

5 Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 108.

6 Jason Kindopp, “Policy Dilemmas in Chin's Church-State Relations: An Introduction,” in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, edits. Jason

ing for a long time in Western societies that the Chinese people are not a religious people, and that Chinese religions do not involve Chinese politics. After Eastern European socialist countries collapsed, many Western scholars predicted that Chinese Christians would follow in Eastern European Christian footsteps and play a pivotal role in the process of China's democratization. In the United States, there are two opposite opinions on the relationship between politics and religion in China. The first opinion is that China is not ready for democratization, so it is necessary to promote liberalization first instead of democratization.<sup>7</sup> Some evangelists echo this idea, and advocate that China's democratization will rely on the role of the Chinese Christian movement. China is actually "in the process of becoming Christianized."<sup>8</sup> The second opinion, represented by the neo-conservative movements, suggests that democratization is the key to religious freedom in China. There is no religious freedom without democratization. Some scholars suggest that "the United States should respond by building a domestic consensus on international religious freedom policy toward China."<sup>9</sup> This paper argues that the Chinese people are religious people. Since religious movement and democratization are two sides of the same coin, there is no Chinese democracy without religious coordination, but Chinese religion can only play a marginal role without fundamental changes in the Chinese political system. The idea of Christianization could potentially harm China's modernization. To realize China's democratization, it is necessary to promote religious movement and democratization.

### I. THE RELIGIOUSNESS OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE

Chinese religions can be categorized into two main groups: indigenous religion and imported religion. The three traditional Chinese religions—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—are indigenous religions. Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism are imported religions. According to the Chinese official report, there are more than 100 million religious believers in China, while Western scholars estimates that in China more than 200 million relig-

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Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p. 12.

7 Dalpino, *Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes*, p. 3.

8 David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc. 2003), p. 285.

9 Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in Chin's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," p. 19.

ious believers worship in eighty-five thousand authorized venues.<sup>10</sup> Most Chinese believers “profess Eastern faiths.”<sup>11</sup> Among 200 million religious believers, there are only about 40 to 60 million Protestants, 12 million Catholics, and 18 million Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

1. Chinese indigenous religions. Strictly speaking, Confucianism and Daoism are typical Chinese indigenous religions, although many Western scholars do not regard Confucianism as religion. Since Buddhism came into China in the first century from India, it has merged in Chinese society. Apparently, it is not fair to exclude Buddhism from Chinese traditional religion. In fact, some scholars tend to define Buddhism in China as sinicized religion rather than imported religion. The three traditional religions are integrated elements of Chinese religion. Li Shiqian, a famous Chinese scholar, described the three religions in this way 1,500 years ago: “Buddhism is the sun, Daoism the moon, and Confucianism the five planets.”<sup>13</sup> James Wood points out that China’s religious heritage is made up of three religious traditions, the so-called *san jiao*,<sup>14</sup> which together depict the “religiousness of the Chinese people.”<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, the Chinese government only recognizes five religions, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, and Daoism. Some scholars also do not see all the three Chinese traditional religions as religions but rather as humanism and philosophy. Derk Bodde, for instance, states that it is better to understand *san jiao* as “three teachings” rather than “three religions.” According to Bodde, the Chinese word for religion is *jiao*, which means “teaching” or “system of teaching.” When the Chinese use this term, they make no distinction between the theistic religions and purely moral teachings.<sup>16</sup> In some Western people’s minds, religion in China is a practical means that serves all kinds of ends.

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10 Ibid., p. 1.

11 Quoted in Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, *1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, released on 25 February 2000.

12 Kindopp, “Policy Dilemmas in Chin’s Church-State Relations: An Introduction, p. 1.

13 Quoted in Stephen F. Teiser, “Introduction: The Spirits of Chinese Religion,” in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 1.

14 James E. Wood Jr., “Religion and the State in China: Winter Is Past,” *Journal of Church and State* 28 (Autumn 1986), p. 394.

15 John N. Jonsson, “Introduction,” in Kwong Chunwah, *Hong Kong’s Religions in Transition* (Waco, Texas: Tao Foundation, 2000), p. ix.

16 Derk Bodde, *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science: The Intellectual and Social Background of Science and Teaching in Pre-modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), p. 148.

The end is neither defined nor desired, but is unknown most of the time, which encourages a continuation of myth and wondering. The moral teaching is thus developed so as to provide guidance for people to follow, rather than to worship without a desirable ending. So, being a Buddhist, a Daoist or a Confucian-style person makes no difference as long as you following the moral teachings that are generated from these Western defined terms as "religion."

One of the reasons for some scholars to view Confucianism as humanism is that Confucius did not perform miracles and refused to discuss death and the existence of gods. Confucianism does not have religious texts, systematic rituals, or formal organizations. Still, Confucius was very religious. When Confucius was a boy, he was fond of religious matters and performed religious ceremonies. *The Analects* records his prayers, fasting, and regular attendance of worship services. Confucius discussed God using the terms *shang-di* and *tian* (heaven). It is no wonder that Chen Jingpan affirms that Confucius was a "true heir of [the] best religious heritage." He concludes that Confucius was "not a teacher of religion, but a religious teacher."<sup>17</sup> According to Julia Ching, in China the term *state religion* always refers to Confucianism. Confucianism has served both secular and religious functions throughout history.<sup>18</sup> A friend of mine notes that Confucianism is not just an indigenous religion, but it is a universal code for all Chinese in different situations. Confucianism has been a major moral guidance, albeit with some interruptions, such as in the new cultural movement in the early 20th century, and most recently from 1966-1979 in the CPC-controlled mainland China. However Confucianism continuously enjoyed its dominant position; shared it with Christian faith in the republic era between 1912 and 1949.

In comparison with Confucianism, some commentators agree, Daoism and Buddhism have served far greater religious functions in Chinese history. In China's long history, more dynasties endorsed Buddhism as a *de facto* Empire's or Kingdom's guidance from Daoism. However, both of them engraved significant political influence upon different heavenly-mandated kings and queens. Daoism is a salvation religion that guides its believers beyond this

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17 Chen Jingpan, *Confucius as a Teacher: Philosophy of Confucius with Special Reference to Its Educational Implications* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1990), p. 351.

18 Julia Ching, "Ethical Humanism as Religion?" in Hans Kung and Julia Ching *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 87.

transitory life to a happy eternity. It has a clearly enunciated belief in a hierarchy of gods, associates human weakness and sickness with sin, tries to heal such ills with the confession of sin and forgiveness, and bridges the gap between human beings and divine beings through the ritual practices of prayer and penance. Buddhism came to China and began its missionary venture in the first century. Buddhism preaches karma, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Paths, and affirms a spiritual dimension through belief in meditation and transcendence which lie outside of time and history. Robert Thurman calls this process the “inner revolution” toward life, liberty, and the pursuit of real happiness. Few scholars deny that Buddhism is “one of the world’s three major universal religions, along with Christianity and Islam.”<sup>19</sup>

2. Imported religions in China. Christian missionary activity in China began in the seventh century. Nestorian Alopen, the first Christian missionary, arrived in *Xian* in 635 during the Tang dynasty. The second wave of the Christian mission was the Roman Catholic missionary movement. John Corvino, the first Catholic missionary and a zealous Franciscan monk, arrived in China in 1291 under the Yuan dynasty,<sup>20</sup> but the Catholic mission did not have much influence on China until Matteo Ricci arrived there in the sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup> After the first Opium War, both Catholicism and Protestantism began to develop relatively rapidly in China. Although Christian missionaries worked in China for centuries, the Western missionaries were not very successful in converting the Chinese people, especially intellectuals. Ralph R. Covell observed, “Whether Christian messengers attempted to present a Chinese gospel or one uncritically imported from a distant land, the results were virtually the same. The response to the Christian faith in China was always minimal, and the church never constituted more than a fraction of one percent of the national population. The Chinese masses never perceived that the biblical message addressed their deepest needs.”<sup>22</sup> Jason Kindopp held the similar viewpoint that “Until recently, most outside observers

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19 Christian Jochim, *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986), p. 10.

20 J. Theodore Mueller, *Great Missionaries to China* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 1947), p. 32.

21 David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 232.

22 Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 4.

viewed that Christian missionary enterprise in China as a failure, drowned in the sea of history."<sup>23</sup>

If "the Chinese have always been a religious people,"<sup>24</sup> why has the Christian mission experienced such difficulty in China? Theologically, the central Christian doctrines, such as creation, sin, and incarnation, contradict Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture. Gernet points out that "the concept of a God of truth, eternal and immutable, the dogma of the incarnation—all this was more easily accessible to the inheritors of Greek thought than to the Chinese."<sup>25</sup> Politically, the contacts between China and Western Christianity before the nineteenth century were mutually beneficial, but the Christians were supported by gun ships and protected by unequal treaties in the nineteenth century. Foreign churches and foreign missionaries enjoyed extraterritorial privileges in China. Some Western missionaries joined the Eight Power Allied Forces against China in 1900, as military officers who took part in the slaughter of Chinese civilians; some participated in the drafting of unequal treaties, including the Sino-British Treaty of Nanking in 1842, the Sino-American Treaty of Wanghea in 1844, and the Sino-American treaties of Tientsin in 1858; and some Western missionaries even called for restoring the Qing dynasty, an inhumane feudal society. Consequently, the Chinese people had little sympathy for Christianity.<sup>26</sup> Culturally, some Western missionaries had a tendency to criticize Chinese culture. Early Christian missionaries frequently rejected Chinese civilization and denounced the Chinese people. The first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison, blamed the Chinese for being "selfish, deceitful and inhuman among themselves."<sup>27</sup> According to Jonsson, scientific dogma and dialectical materialism are also largely responsible for the failure of Western countries to appreciate Confucian thought. Even some Western missionaries understood that destroying the traditional Chinese culture was the first task of the Christian mission in China.

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23 Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in Chin's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," p. 1.

24 Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*, p. 4.

25 Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, p. 3.

26 Kan Baoping, "The Christian Church in its Chinese Context," in *Contemporary Religious Trends within the Socio-Political Climate of East Asia*, ed., John N. Jonsson (Waco, Texas, mimeographed, 1996 Baylor University), pp. 10-20.

27 Quoted in Xiaoqun Xu, "The Dilemma of Accommodation: Reconciling Christianity and Chinese Culture in the 1920s," *Historian* 60 (Fall 1997), p. 22.

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Because of the influences of the Chinese cultural and religious tradition, foreign missionaries gradually recognized Chinese culture and tradition and founded the Chinese Union in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> After the Nationalist government was finally settled in Nanjing in 1927, Chinese Christianity gained more ground. However, the growth of the Chinese Christian movement was slowed down again, when the CPC came to power in 1949. Since the reform movement began in 1978, more and more Chinese people have envisaged that Christian value has a manifold and pervasive influence in the development of Chinese civilization, and has significance for China's modernization.<sup>29</sup> Today, the Christian concept of sin helps Chinese self-understanding from a new perspective. The concept of salvation and transcendence inspires the Chinese people moving toward democracy. The Christian concept of ecumenism is important and helps the Chinese people in reconstructing the Chinese cultural system.<sup>30</sup> However, God reveals himself in different forms in different countries. China's modernization does not simply mean its Westernization or Christianization. China should not move through the transition toward democracy by overthrowing Chinese traditional culture.<sup>31</sup>

## II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND THE CPC

1. Why does the CPC particularly hate Christianity? There is an illusion that the Chinese people have enjoyed religious freedom, because there are about 200 million religious believers. Strategically, Chinese official tolerance for Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism has been greater than that for Christianity. The three traditional religions often face fewer restrictions.<sup>32</sup> Why is the CPC willing to tolerate the three religions? First of all, the three religions neither have any ecclesiastical organization at the national level,<sup>33</sup> nor form a hierarchical system that controls all temples. Most of the traditional religious temples are scattered in the re-

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28 Jessie G. Lutz and R. Ray Lutz, "Karl Gutzlaffs Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union," in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel Bays (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 269.

29 See Xinging Zhou, "The Significance of Christianity for the Modernization of Chinese Society," *Crux* 33 (March 1997), p. 31.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-37.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

32 U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2004," released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, p. 6.

33 Holmes Welch, "Buddhism under the Communists," *The China Quarterly*, No. 6 (April-June, 1961), p. 1.

remote areas, which are far away from the center of politics and even lack regular communication with the outside world. Those temples that are located at the center of major cities or in urban areas have actually become commercialized. Daoists retreat from society and choose to be close to nature. Buddhism and Daoism also have a shortage of intellectual leadership with a modern educational background. Thus Buddhism and Daoism show their "weakness in the lack of adequate appreciation of science and the new technological environment."<sup>34</sup> In this sense, it is not easy for traditional religions to attract Chinese intellectuals. In addition, the three traditional religions show no interest in becoming a secondary political force to challenge the political authority. In Chinese history, some Buddhist priests only occasionally offered some advice for emperors and politicians. Some Daoist teachings advocated a new world order, but they were not the real force that provoked the rebellion.<sup>35</sup>

Both Islam and Christianity are theistic religions. Islam came to China in the seventh century from southeastern Asia. The Chinese Islamic population is about the same as the Christian population, but Islam has less influence than Christianity. There are fifty-six nationalities in China. The Han people make up about 93 percent of total Chinese population and the Han culture has dominated Chinese society for more than 2000 years. Most Chinese Muslims belong to about ten minority groups. Most of them live in remote border provinces, especially in the northwest and southwest areas, such as Gangsu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces. Chinese Islam has a shortage of prominent advocators at the national level and lacks seats in the government. Thus, the Islamic message is hard to get through to the mainstream of Chinese society.

Historically, Muslims came to China as immigrants or traders rather than missionary workers. They set up their families and have gradually naturalized in China. Chinese Muslims have generally been peaceful. In imperial China, Chinese Muslims fomented only several small peasant uprisings. Under the communist regime, Chinese Islam has been tightly monitored, especially in some regimes, such as Xinjiang, in which Chinese authorities restricted

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34 Lucy Jen Huang, "The Role of Religion in Communist Chinese Society," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, No 7 (July 1971), p. 694.

35 See Frederick Hok-ming Cheung, ed. *Politics and Religion in Ancient and Medieval Europe and China*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999.



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Muslims' religious activity and teaching. Chinese Muslims are relatively isolated from the rest of the Islamic world. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is a militant group operating in Xinjiang, the Western part of China, and is link to some international groups. After September 11, the Chinese government put the ETIM on the list of terrorist group. Thus Chinese Islam does not have a strong influence on the mainstream of Chinese society and even is ignored by the majority of the Chinese people. The communist government has not seen a real threat from Chinese Muslims either.

Unlike Muslims, Western Christians came to China for Christian mission. Western Christians have persistently launched missionary movements since the sixth century. After the Opium War, under the protection of Western power, Western Christians launched a new missionary movement in the east coast cities, which then expanded to all of China's major cities. While introducing Western culture into China, Western missionaries established schools, hospitals, manufacturing, and humanitarian services. Urban residents, intellectuals, and officials were deeply influenced by Christian ideas, and this is one of the reasons why the revival of Chinese Christianity is growing fast in the reform era. Chinese Christians are very organized with a strong Christian faith and having regular meetings, fellowship, worship services, and the other religious activities. Numerically, "Christianity remains a minor religion in China."<sup>36</sup> According to Chinese official reports, only about 1.5 percent of China's population is composed of Christians, but the majority of Chinese Christians inhabit developed areas that are equipped with good communication tools, so they can quickly respond to political issues and easily organize social activities. The Chinese city is the center of economy and politics, and the urban residents are the main force of Chinese society. In the CPC's eyes, Chinese Christians might cause social instability of Chinese society.

In contemporary China, Chinese intellectuals are moving toward Christianity. On the one hand, since China opened its door to the rest of the world, about ten million Western tourists have visited China every year. More than five thousand Western English teachers are teaching English in Chinese universities and most of them are Christian missionaries. Although some teachers become more interested in revitalizing the traditional Chinese culture than

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36 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 287.

in devoting their time to preaching Christianity, there is no doubt that there are teachers who devote themselves to the Christian mission. On the other hand, the Chinese people have the opportunity to go to foreign countries. About three hundred thousand Chinese students and their family members live in the United States, and about two hundred thousand Chinese students and their family members live in European countries. In the United States, surrounding the university's campus, both American and Chinese churches closely work with the Chinese people. Eventually, the Christian church has become the second cultural center in which Chinese students study English as second language, hold wedding services, and have their babies baptized. According to surveys, in the United States about half of the overseas Chinese students participate in various church activities, and more than 10 percent of Chinese students and their family members have been baptized. The rest of the students and their family members have generally recognized Christianity. These Chinese students and their family members have a certain influence on Chinese politics.

After reading my manuscript, an American scholar pointed out that "I do not see the close association of the Chinese students with the churches. For a long time in Chinese history, foreign missionaries in China simply complained that the Chinese were the 'rice Christians'. Most of them came to the Church for something to eat, rather for their soul and spirit. The same kind of impression is still around that many Chinese students have their practical reasons other than seeking for salvation. I have not been impressed by anyone who returned to China and devoted their life to Christ other than seeking better pay with their American degrees." Based on his comments, I have experienced that Western misunderstanding and prejudice of the religiousness of the Chinese people are still around.

2. How does the CPC control Christianity? Some people have tried to argue that the CPC does see the potential challenge of the Christian faith to its rule, but that it has not made efforts to suppress Christianity since the opening of China in the late 70s. This is simply not true. The CPC began to suppress Chinese Christians in 1949,<sup>37</sup> when it came to power. The Chinese government deported Western missionaries in order to cut off the relations of Chinese Christians with Western society. The CPC also propa-

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37 Ibid., p. 286.

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gandized atheism, Darwinism, and Marxism to brainwash the Chinese people, and persecuted house church leaders to eliminate independent churches. For example, Wang Mindao, a fifty-six year old pastor of the independent church,<sup>38</sup> was sentenced to 15 years in prison in the 1950s. Thomas Alan Harvey asks, “Why the Chinese government felt so threatened by a fifty-six year old pacifist preacher.”<sup>39</sup> In fact, the CPC does not fear an old man but, essentially, fears religion as whole, especially Christianity. The conflict between Wang Mingdao and the government is not the confrontation between an individual person and the government, but between the independent church/house church and the communist government. It is safe to say that “Christianity was particularly hated by the new Communist rulers,”<sup>40</sup> and that “government persecution is stronger against Christians than other religious groups.”<sup>41</sup>

In the reform era, the CPC continues to suppress Christianity. The CPC suppresses Christianity through various means. First of all, the CPC controls Chinese Christianity through the official Chinese ideology—Marxism and Maoism. Marxism is the theoretical foundation of the CPC and the official ideology of socialist China. Not only the Youth League Members and the Party Members, but also all the Chinese people, including church members and seminary students and faculty, are required to follow the principles of Marxism. In Chinese colleges and universities, Marxism is a required course. However, atheism is a central tenet of Marxism. According to Marxism, the abolition of religion and the socialist movement are the same process—the communist movement toward the ultimate goal of the communistic society. Marxism, in theory, has no room for religion. The CPC forcefully shifted people’s faith in religion to its ruling and forced religious clergymen to become subjects of the CPC’s ideology.

The CPC controls Chinese Christianity through organizations. From the national level to the local level, both the party and the

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38 Francis P. Jones, ed., *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the Study of the Protestant Church in Communist China* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1963), p. xv.

39 Thomas Alan Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao’s Stand for the Persecuted Church in China* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Brazos Press, 2002), p. 101.

40 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 286.

41 Quoted in Pedro C. Moreno, ed. *Handbook on Religious Liberty around the World* (Charlottesville, V.A.: the Rutherford Institute, 1996), p. 52.

government have set up corresponding departments to regulate Christian churches. The United Front Office is the party branch that is in charge of religious affairs and that supervises the government branch—the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), which works directly with religious organizations, such as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of Protestant Churches of China (TSPM), the China Christian Council (CCC), and the China Catholic Patriotic Association. The Three-Self Movement is a special tool for the CPC to control Chinese Christianity. Beginning in 1949, the CPC carried out the policy of “monitoring and regulating all religions,” cutting Chinese religious organizations off from foreign influence. The history of the development of the Three-Self Movement has clearly shown that the Three-Self Movement is the “instrument by which the churches were brought under the control of the state.”<sup>42</sup> According to the Chinese government, the goal of the Three-Self Movement is to assist the party and the government in implementing the party’s policy. The Three-Self Movement must accept the leadership of the party; every church must register with the government according to the law; individual religious activities must be reported to the local committee of the Three-Self Movement; all places of religious activity must be reported to the provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs;<sup>43</sup> and all religious groups must submit a written report of their activities to the special committee of the government every six months.

Some scholars argue that the Three-Self Church is better than none, because the Three Self-Movement does not only lead Chinese Christians to follow the leadership of the government, but it also allows the Chinese people to attend church services without fear of the consequences and purchase the Bible in any officially approved Protestant or Catholic churches.<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that, under government pressures, many evangelical pastors and top leaders in the Three-Self Church “are either agnostic or overtly Marxist in their ideology.”<sup>45</sup> House churches are still illegal in China: The members and ministers of the house church have

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42 James E. Wood Jr., “Religion and the State in China: Winter Is Past,” *Journal of Church and State* 28 (Autumn 1986), p. 401.

43 James E. Wood, Jr., *Church-State Relations in the Modern World* (Waco, Texas: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 1998), pp. 197-201.

44 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, pp. 13-14.

45 *Christianity Today* editorial, “China’s Christians Face harsh New Rules,” *Christianity Today*, Internet Edition, 26 April 2002.

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been arrested from time to time in the reform era. Seminary professors are also not allowed to preach in underground churches. For example, Professor Ji Tai, a Swiss-trained Christian intellectual and associate dean at the Nanjing Theological Seminary, “was expelled from the seminary for ‘illegal religious activities’ and opposition to the educational policy of the seminary.”<sup>46</sup> Obviously, “China still lags miles behind in terms of freedom of religion and freedom of expression,” although China has become “a paradise of personal freedom” in the post Mao era.<sup>47</sup>

The most important tool that the CPC uses to control religions is the implementation of religious policy. Government policy regulates all aspects of religious life: “religious venues, clergy, activities, believers, and even theological doctrines are all subject to government dictates.”<sup>48</sup> Religious policy is made by the United Front Department and implemented by the Religious Affairs Bureau (RB) and the Public Security Office. Under the Mao regime, the CPC implemented very rigid religious policy. The new policy “framework established after 1978 provides limited space for religious believers to practice their faith but also calls for comprehensive control measures to prevent religion from emerging as an independent social force.”<sup>49</sup> The first and most important document regarding religious policy in the post Mao era is the “Document 19”, issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 31 March 1982. Document 19 declared that religion must not interfere with politics, education, marriage and family life, and reaffirmed that the government prohibited counter-revolutionary activities under the cover of religion. The latest government documents regulating religious organizations are “Regulation Governing Venues for Religious Activities Decree” and “Regulations Governing the Religious Activities of Foreign Nationals within China,” issued by Premier Li Peng in January 1994. Registration is the key to the CPC’s policy to control religions. Every Christian church must register with the government; individual religious activities must be reported to the local committee of the Three-Self Movement; and house churches are illegal in China. Registration is based on the “three-fix” policy, including patriotic association, a

46 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 132.

47 Ibid., p. 227.

48 Kindopp, “Policy Dilemmas in Chin’s Church-State Relations: An Introduction,” p. 14.

49 Ibid., p. 2.

fixed meeting point, and activities confined to a specific geographic area. Any violation of the government's religious policy is subject to punishment.

### III. DEMOCRATIZATION AND CHRISTIAN ROLES IN COMMUNIST CHINA

1. Has the CPC changed its nature? Some scholars argue that the CPC is dead and that communism has decayed dramatically over the past decades in China. Consequently, "religious practice of one sort or another has steadily increased."<sup>50</sup> It is true that there has been fascinating progress made in many aspects of Chinese society in recent years, but this does not necessarily mean that the CPC has changed its nature. The CPC is the largest communist party in the world, with 72 million party members. Since the former president Jiang Zemin retired two years ago, the new leader of the CPC, Hu Jintao, has actually made no progress in political reform. The recently revised Constitution of the People's Republic of China continues to insist that the Four Cardinal Principles—Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, the leadership of the party, the proletariat dictatorship, and the socialist road—are the theoretical foundations of China. At present, the Chinese government continues to deny a multiparty system, reject free elections, and suppress political dissidents.

Legally speaking, Chinese citizens enjoy full freedom of religion under all versions of the Constitution of China, but in practice, every footstep of Chinese religious believers is restricted. The government owns all land, and no one is permitted to build a church without a special government permit. The Chinese government tightly controls the media, including television, newspapers, radio, public forums, and the Internet. The party censorship system makes it impossible for the Chinese people to organize private publishing houses, or to publish articles that discuss religious rights from a democratic perspective in official magazines. The government continues to crack down on Christian house churches and home religious activities. Even in the official Chinese Christian church, ministers must submit the manuscripts of their sermons before the worship service. Within such a controlled system, one scholar asks, "How much freedom will be these associations given

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50 Arthur Waldron, "Religion Revivals in Communist China," *ORBIS*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring 1998), p. 325.

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in the future to engage in religious activities?"<sup>51</sup> As Jason Kindopp notes, the Chinese official "constraints on a wide range of religious activities conflict with religious norms and values," and the CPC's "explicit policy of training and installing 'patriotic' religious personnel to clerical positions in an even greater source of conflict with religious believers."<sup>52</sup>

The CPC's policy toward Chinese religion has changed from time to time, but the nature of the CPC's anti-religion has never changed. Jason Kindopp observes that "Although the CCP has stepped back from its extreme antireligion policies of the Mao era, China's leaders have not yet demonstrated the political will to embrace a more accommodative posture."<sup>53</sup> In December 2001, President Jiang Zemin insisted that the party's leadership in religious work and the government's management of religious affairs must be strengthened and must not be weakened.<sup>54</sup> The Chinese government continues to repress Chinese religion, especially Christianity. Under this circumstance, Chinese Christianity can only play a marginal role in the process of democratization. China's democratization cannot rely only on the Christian movement.

2. Democratization and Christianization. Dalpino makes a distinction between democratization and political liberalization. According to Dalpino, liberalization is conceived "as a process of transforming relationships—among members of the regime, between the regime and state, and society, the people and their rulers, and even among everyday citizens—that stops short of comprehensive institutional reform."<sup>55</sup> The process of liberalization can be "defined as a loosening of control by an authoritarian regime without the intention to move immediately toward a democratic transition,"<sup>56</sup> but political liberalization can be an official policy so it can take place in the old framework of the political system.<sup>57</sup> Liberalization is the precursor of democratization, "but democracy cannot be taken as the assured outcome of a liberal

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51 Bob Whyte, "The Future of Religion in China," *Religion in the Communist Lands* 8 (1980), p. 8.

52 Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in Chin's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," p. 4.

53 Ibid., p. 11.

54 Quoted in Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in Chin's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, p. 5.

55 Dalpino, *Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes*, p. 4.

56 Ibid., p. 3.

57 Ibid., p. 4.

experiment.”<sup>58</sup> Obviously, liberalization and democratization are two different levels of political transition. Delpino suggests that, under the communist regime, it is necessary to promote political liberalization first, and to “defer a democracy promotion effort,”<sup>59</sup> because in this way policy changes can “build a more solid foundation for an eventual transition to democracy.”<sup>60</sup> During the political liberalization, we should use the term political pluralism rather than the word *democracy*,<sup>61</sup> use multipurpose organizations rather than “democracy gangs,”<sup>62</sup> and think “social rather than ‘political.’”<sup>63</sup>

Some people believe that if Christians become more prevalent and remain patriotic and do not turn into revolutionaries (unlike the Falun Gong), then the CPC may come to view Christians as less threatening, because religious freedom can co-exist with the CPC. According to David Aikman, there is no Chinese democratization without Chinese Christianization; the Christian movement is part of political liberalization. China’s moment of greatest achievement may occur only “when the Chinese dragon is tamed by the power of the Christian Lamb.”<sup>64</sup> It is not just necessary to Christianize China in order to democratize China, but it also possible to Christianize China,<sup>65</sup> and China actually is “in the process of becoming Christianized.”<sup>66</sup> According to David Aikman, nowadays Chinese Christians make up about 7 to 8 percent of China’s population,<sup>67</sup> and he believes that some Chinese officials, including military officials and deputy provincial governors, judges, and lawyers have become Christians. Even the three daughters of the former president of China, Liu Shaoqi, have been baptized.<sup>68</sup> Chinese Christianity has penetrated into many aspects of Chinese society, e.g., there are Christian-run nursing homes, orphanages, hospitals, and private schools. Some Western scholars predict that “with some thirty to seventy million souls and a growth rate of 7 percent annually, the

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58 Ibid., p. 4.

59 Ibid., p. 3.

60 Ibid., p. 3.

61 Ibid., p. 95.

62 Ibid., p. 104.

63 Ibid., p. 100.

64 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 292.

65 Ibid., p. 286.

66 Ibid., p. 285.

67 Ibid., p. 8.

68 Ibid., p. 10.



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number of Christians in China dwarfs the number of Christians in most nations of the earth.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, Chinese Christians “will constitute 20 to 30 percent of China’s population,”<sup>70</sup> which translates to about 450 million Christians in three decades. Christians will continue to operate and eventually will be able to bring about changes once they hold dominant positions. According to his assumption, China is going to be Christianized soon.

Aikman downplays the negative impact of the CPC on the Chinese Christian movement, and he is over-optimistic about the Chinese Christian movement. The CPC remains a ruling party and continues to “promote atheist thought in a positive way and persist in educating the masses of various ethnic groups with the Marxist perspective on religion.”<sup>71</sup> Any Christian believers are not allowed to hold public office. Under these circumstances, it is hard to believe that deputy provincial governors, judges, and lawyers are willing to become Christians. It is widely acknowledged that less than 1.5 percent of China’s population is Christian. Moreover, it is not realistic to predict that the Chinese Christian population will reach one-third of the total of China’s population, even though the CPC has collapsed in thirty years. Although Chinese culture can be compatible with democracy as the case in Taiwan has shown us, democracy does not bring rapid growth of Christian population. Only 5% of Taiwanese population is Christian although Taiwan has enjoyed democracy since the late 1980s. It was not Christianized before the democratization took place on the island.

Aikman has also over assessed the role of “cultural Christians” or “Chinese scholars interested in Christianity,” who “were not satisfied that either the Marxist interpretation of religion or the standard Western Darwinian understanding of life adequately explained the human condition in general and the Chinese condition in particular.”<sup>72</sup> While acknowledging that Chinese scholars are interested in Christian theology and practice, it is worth noting that the role of Chinese intellectuals in communist China is lim-

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69 Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao’s Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*, p. 159. Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 291. Also see *Christianity Today* editorial, “Free China’s Church” *Christianity Today* Internet edition, 7 January 2002.

70 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 325.

71 *People’s Daily*, 11 March 1999.

72 Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, p. 17.

ited. Most Chinese intellectuals who are interested in research projects on Christianity are not Christians themselves. In this sense, the “cultural Christians” are actually not part of the Christian movement, but are instead part of the Christian cultural periphery. Chinese intellectuals and scholars, including seminary professors, are required to follow Marxist methodology and the Four Cardinal Principles in conducting research on religion. Otherwise, their research achievements are not allowed to be published. Chinese intellectuals who post their articles on the internet without permission from the relevant authority are subjected to punishment.

The history of the Western missionary movement has proved that China cannot be easily Christianized. The lesson of the early 19th century when Western missionaries tried first to act like Chinese, and then to influence the Chinese with Christian ideas and philosophy is still vividly remembered as the cooperation of Western Christian missionaries with the imperialist devastation of China. The Chinese people do have a longer memory of Western Christian missionaries misleading them than of their own warlords slaughtering them. Western missionary long-standing desire will be most likely realized along with the democratization process in China’s modernization. Only through democratization will Christianity be embraced with volunteer followers, who have less concern about their personal fate.

The idea of Christianization is not only utopian but it also harms China’s democratization. The history of the Christian movement reminds us that a country easily becomes a theocratic power if it is Christianized. A democratic country should come with diverse culture and plural religions. Since there is not a single Christianized country in the West, how can we Christianize China, which has had a strong humanist tradition for more than 2000 years. Moreover, China is still a poor country. The top priority for the Chinese people is to modernize China in order to make the Chinese people rich. There is no democratization without economic prosperity. By the same token, it is impossible for the Chinese Christians to exercise religious freedom without a fundamental change in the Chinese communist political system. Any attempts to Christianize China would mislead the Chinese people. Still emphasizing the key role of the political reform does not mean that the role of Chinese Christianity is insignificant in the process of

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democratization. Religious freedom and democracy are the two cornerstones of modern democratic societies.

China's religious freedom ultimately relies on the Chinese people's efforts, but international society's support will accelerate the development of the democratic movement. However, the vast gulf between Western and particularly American views and the official Chinese viewpoints remains.<sup>73</sup> Western democratic societies are concerned about violations of religious freedom in China, while the Chinese government is emphasizing its status quo. The U.S. annual report on international religious freedom has listed China as a "country of concern." Under the Bush administration, religious freedom becomes a leading issue in bilateral relations.<sup>74</sup> In meeting with China's president Jiang Zemin in October 2001, President George Bush raised the issue of religious freedom. As a result, the Chinese government made a concession and offered President Bush an opportunity to make a live and un-censored televised speech on religious freedom and human rights.<sup>75</sup> This event had a significant impact on the Chinese Christian movement and the Chinese society. When the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited China in March 2005, she attended a worship service in a Chinese Protestant Church in Beijing, sending a clear and strong message to the CPC, that is, China must improve religious freedom in order to improve the Sino-US relations. Without a single doubt, constructive dialogue between the two governments is very helpful in improving religious freedom in China. It is necessary for the US government to include the religious freedom issue as part of foreign policy toward China, but the future of Chinese Christianity fundamentally relies on the Chinese people. The United States "should respond by building a domestic consensus on international religious freedom policy toward China," but "initiatives should be based on international norms, not merely American ones."<sup>76</sup> Democratization is not about how to Westernize China or Christianize China, but how to modernize China and democratize China.

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73 Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in China's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," p. 18.

74 Ibid., p. 18.

75 Ibid.

76 Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in China's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," p. 19.

