INTRODUCTION

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The religious situation of the people in Chinese societies is in ferment. The essays in this book describe in detail some of the religious changes taking place in these societies. To give some relevant background information, I will discuss three topics here by way of introduction: the nature of the religious market in Chinese societies, contemporary religious changes in this market, and the relation between Chinese governments and religion.

The Religious Market in Chinese Societies

In practice, the Chinese living in The People’s Republic of China (hereafter, China), Singapore, and Taiwan are, for the most part, divided among four religions: folk religion, Buddhism, Christianity, and Daoism.¹ The market analogy implies the assumption, which is increasingly justified, that these religions compete for the allegiance of Chinese people. I assume that most readers of this volume will have a general knowledge of Christianity, hence will comment briefly only on the other religious traditions that are discussed in the chapters that follow.

Folk Religion

Until recently almost all Chinese people practiced folk religion. Like all forms of this religion, the Chinese version has no central authority to establish what is orthodox belief or practice. There is thus much variation among practitioners, but several general points can be made.

People use folk religion to get this-worldly benefits, such as health or wealth, by gaining access to natural forces or the cooperation of

¹ Islam is an important religion among mainland Chinese, but this religion is not considered in this collection of essays, inasmuch as it has not shown a significance among other Chinese populations.
gods. If people learn of new gods or forces that are providing benefits to other devotees, folk religionists might borrow these religious entities and incorporate them into their own religion. While one’s destiny is predetermined, one’s luck can be influenced by seeking the help or advice of the supernatural. Fortune telling, spirit-mediums, and geomancy are used for this purpose.

Folk religionists are not part of religious congregations. They go to one or more temples or religious specialists until they have received help with their problems. Visits to folk temples often occur at times of personal crisis. The individual goes to ask help from favorite deities. No clergy may reside at the temple. When the individual has performed a ritual, he or she leaves. Ancestor worship is an important part of Chinese folk religion. Rituals, which are usually carried out in the home, are performed to honor the ancestors, to help them improve their lot in the other world, and to ask for help with practical problems. Chinese folk religionists accept values that are associated with Confucianism, most notably filial piety; thus it is believed that only when husbands, wives, and children play their proper roles in the patriarchal family structure would there be balance, peace, and harmony in the home.

During the last two thousand years, folk religionists have borrowed beliefs and practices from Buddhism and Daoism. Many of them believe in the doctrines of karma and rebirth (discussed below) and ask help from the Buddha and other revered Buddhist figures. The Daoist belief in the need to balance the forces of ying (gentility, the feminine) and yang (ferocity, the masculine) is also influential among folk religionists, leading many of them, for instance, to follow dietary rules that are meant to balance hot and cold elements in the body as a way to a healthy life. The balance of tastes in sweet and sour dishes is an example of the influence of Daoist beliefs.

Death rituals are especially important to ensure a pleasant existence in the next life. Upon death, the ying part of the person returns to the soil, while the yang part begins wandering the earth. Ideally the yang energy or force would be appeased and made available for help by a proper burial. Family problems are often “interpreted to be, in part, the work of dead ancestors who because of neglect by their kinsmen, inflicted harm in order to gain attention to their own predicament” (Eng 2003: 40).

Folk religion has a communal aspect. Some rituals celebrate local gods. These events bring the members of small villages and towns
together and often occur in conjunction with communal fairs and annual festivals. Traditionally Chinese clans would each have a hall in which were housed ancestral tablets, and where the ancestors would be worshipped on festive occasions such as the Chinese New Year. The chapter in this book by Chi-shiang Ling discusses how the many ideas that compose folk religion have been spread among the common people through morality books.

Since the thirteenth century, folk religion has in different times and places crystallized into sects. These groups are voluntary and organized. The sects are consciously syncretistic, borrowing from folk religion, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. They promise followers salvation, usually as meant in the Buddhist or Daoist tradition. Although never more than a minority of the population, some sects have been able to spread across the regions of China. The imperial governments always defined the sects as heterodox. Hence they were considered dangerous to the state and were suppressed. Paul Yunfeng Lu’s chapter is about a very popular sect, Yiguan Dao.

Buddhism

Buddhism offers the hope of a better life, and ultimately nirvana. A follower must seek wisdom. Of basic importance is to understand that suffering (a constant state of being unsatisfied) is the normal condition, but that one can escape this experience. The wise person comes to understand that everything is impermanent, that a sense of self is an illusion, and that the root cause of suffering is craving for things, people, feelings, and so on. With wisdom comes the ability to lead a virtuous life, and this accomplishment makes it easier to perform the rituals, especially meditation, the practice of which will eventually allow the person to live unattached to anything, nirvana.

Many Buddhists believe in the law of karma and the fact of rebirth. Supposedly our fortune is the result of the relative amount of good and bad deeds performed previously in this life as well as in previous lives. Acceptance of this belief has allowed Buddhists to explain injustice. It also offered people another way to perceive the Buddhist way of life, as one of amassing many merits in the course of daily life. For those who believe in karma, merit-making is an important preoccupation. Buddhists are told that they can earn merit by giving alms to the monks, helping finance temple building, following the ethical rules, performing acts of charity, and so forth. Another
related belief that appears among Buddhists is that it is possible to transfer merit to the dead. Such a belief would have obvious attraction to those who practice ancestor worship. Given the traditional Buddhist beliefs, there was no urgent need to “save” people.

Generally Buddhists accept that after death people are reborn and that the quality of the new life is determined by the law of karma. The karma-rebirth orientation means that everyone has endless time to reach nirvana and that people can accept Buddhism only when their karma is good (Tamney and Chiang 2002: 181).

Most Chinese Buddhists follow the Mahāyāna, rather than the Theravāda or Tibetan, form of Buddhism. (Thomas Borchert’s chapter, however, concerns Theravāda Buddhists among a minority ethnic community in southwestern China.) Among the Mahayanists the bodhisattva is the ideal, that is, someone who is on the verge of achieving enlightenment but puts off personally entering nirvana in order to help all sentient beings achieve this goal. Mahāyāna Buddhism also puts less stress on the need to avoid this-worldly activities in order to be saved. The attitude of nonattachment can be cultivated while performing normal activities. Thus Mahāyāna is less elitist than Theravāda Buddhism, in which the ideal of a monastic life as a necessary means of achieving enlightenment has been prevalent. Chinese Mahāyānists have accepted such “Confucian virtues as filial piety, congenial and harmonious family life, loyalty, moderation, and self-discipline” (Chen 1964: 209); only filial piety was really an addition to the Buddhist way of life.

Mahāyāna Buddhism, in turn, can be divided into Ch’ān (in Japanese, Zen) and Pure Land versions. The former emphasizes the need to meditate. Pure Land Buddhism promises followers that they will be reborn in the Western Paradise, which may be understood metaphorically or literally. The most important Pure Land ritual is the repetition of “Amitabha,” the name of a manifestation of Buddha. Amitabha became enlightened and caused to come into existence a paradise where all who prayed to him could go after death and live happily; in this “Western Paradise” the road to nirvana is supposedly easily traveled. Pure Land Buddhists, in effect, put their faith in Buddha to save them.

Prior to the communist victory in China, Buddhist monks were divided into: “wild monks,” who did not follow the rules concerning fasting and abstinence; “call monks,” who worked in the village tem-
ples and who were called to perform rites for the dead; and the Buddhist elite, many of whom lived in monasteries and who followed the rules for living as a monk (Welch 1968: 234–5, 253). Eighty percent of the monks fell into the “call” category. In the village temples, monks often engaged in exorcisms, fortune telling, faith healing, and the performance of funeral rituals. Thus in Chinese societies, Buddhism has been experienced as little different from folk religion. Until recently, the monks were awarded little prestige (Chan 1953; Yang 1961: 33; Tamney and Hassan 1987: 42–3).

Kenneth Chen suggested that in the 1930s, there might have been about four million Buddhist lay people, of whom 60–70% followed the Pure Land tradition (1964: 460). By this time, meditation had “degenerated into habitual quiet sitting,” and the recitation of Amitabha into “pure formalism without meaning or vitality” (Chan 1953: 65). The main occupation of the monks and nuns was performing folk rituals, especially death rituals, for some money. Writing about 1950, Wing-tsit Chan arrived at this harsh conclusion: “There can be no escape from the unpleasant fact that the sangha [the Buddhist order] is a congregation of ignorant and selfish people to whom religious observance has no spiritual significance” (1953: 80).

Daoism

Religious Daoism is distinguished by its devotion to the pursuit of longevity, indeed of physical immortality. Various methods have been developed to achieve this goal. One approach is to lead a virtuous life; here, the influence of Confucianism is obvious. In previous centuries, some Daoists devoted themselves to alchemy, producing elixirs from gold or cinnabar. Another approach uses techniques to preserve the life force within the body by performing breathing exercises, or doing calisthenics, or learning to keep the sperm during intercourse. Long life has also been pursued through meditation practices that were influenced by Buddhism. Daoists also emphasize the importance of the right diet; people need to have a balanced diet, the specifics of which are based on the understanding of ying and yang. Daoists have been important preservers of knowledge about Chinese folk medicine.

Daoism has influenced Chinese popular culture. Many groups have developed special exercise routines that are meant to strengthen the person by harnessing chi (a material force), and these are based on
Daoist sources. Similarly the martial arts, whose specialists are often the subject of Chinese movies, are rooted in Daoist writings. Daoism has also long been an inspiration to Chinese artists. Daoist philosophy and religion have coexisted with Confucianism in the lives of the Chinese elite. An old saying is that the elite is Confucian by day and Daoist by night. That is, they are good bureaucrats at work, but go home and paint or write poetry.

Daoism as it is commonly practiced is hardly distinguishable from folk religion, except that the monks of Daoism are better organized than are the spirit mediums of folk religion.

Daoism as an inherent and ‘locally born and bred’ religion in China, absorbed many beliefs and customs during its formation, and in its maturity continues to interact with folk religious activities. Daoism has absorbed so many classics and ideas of different schools that the Daoist Canon is a great encyclopedia of Chinese indigenous culture. People are even at times unaware that the religious services they attend are Daoist. (Liu 1993: 235)

The fate of popular Daoism in the first half of the twentieth century was similar to the situation of popular Buddhism at that time. While some Daoist monks and nuns lived in monasteries and led celibate lives, others lived in village temples and combined Daoist and folk beliefs and rituals. This book’s chapter by Graeme Lang, Selina Chan, and Lars Ragvald describes a similar situation in the village temples that they recently studied. Der-Ruey Yang’s chapter has a brief history of Daoism; he also describes how contemporary Daoist temple priests in China survive economically by cooperating with shamans, thus reproducing the symbiotic relationship between Daoism and folk religion that existed during imperial times.

Contemporary Religious Changes

During modernization, at least two processes are occurring. First, all world religions are undergoing religious purification, that is, the world religions are being purified of folk beliefs and practices (Tamney 1980). Thus in Chinese societies, folk religion, Buddhism, and Daoism are becoming increasingly differentiated forms of religion. Second, all religions are dividing into adherents who resist modernization, the traditionalists, and those who want to accommodate modernization, the modernists. The most notable East Asian example of this
process is the development of reform Buddhism, which is discussed below. Reformers seek to differentiate and modernize Buddhism. But recently even Daoist leaders in Singapore “have taken steps to shake off its [Daoism’s] negative, superstitious image and make its customs and practices more relevant to the Singapore of today” (Chen 1998: 56). As one would expect, these processes occur more frequently among more educated followers of a religion (Tamney 1980; Tamney and Chiang 2002; Eng 2003). The chapters in this book by Graeme Lang, Selina Chan, and Lars Ragvald, Chi-shiang Ling, Paul Yunfeng Lu, Der-Ruey Yang, Fenggang Yang and Dedong Wei, and Anna Sun include consideration of the effects of modernization on religions in Chinese societies.

Religious Trends

Singapore has the best statistics about religion, since they have included a question about religion in every census since 1980. The pattern of change is quite clear: Folk religion is declining, Christianity is growing, and Buddhism seems to be on the upswing as well. The decline of folk religion is dramatic. In the census, if respondents said they were Daoists or practiced ancestor worship, or belonged to a Chinese sect, they were put into the same category, which I am calling “folk religion.” In 1980, 38.2% of Chinese people aged 10 years or older identified with folk religion. In 2000, 10.8% of the population 15 years or older (the government changed the criterion for inclusion in the census) identified with folk religion (Tamney and Chiang 2002: 159). Moreover folk religionists were older than other religious groups in 2000, suggesting the probability of further decline. Affiliation with Christianity among the Chinese in Singapore increased, from 10.6% in 1980 to 16.5% in 2000. The change in identification with Buddhism among the Chinese in Singapore is also impressive. In 1980, the census reported that 34.2% of the Chinese were Buddhists; the figure for 1990 was 39.3%, and for 2000, 53.6%. Thus it was especially during the 1990s that affiliation with Buddhism grew. (In addition, 18.6% of the Chinese did not claim any religious affiliation.) Of course, given that Singapore is a city-state, with a well-educated population, it cannot be assumed that trends in other Chinese societies will resemble Singapore’s experience.

The Taiwanese government does not collect statistics about folk religion, but the government believes that the practice of this religion
has declined (Republic of China 1994). Despite the fact that folk religion is declining, its public practice has increased in Taiwan. The end of martial law has created an environment in which folk specialists such as spirit mediums can be more public. Moreover this change coincides with a growing affluence that allows Taiwanese to give financial support to all religions, including folk religion. Finally, spirit mediums are receiving more formal training, which may have made them more socially acceptable (Jordan 1994). Although the numbers are less reliable than those for Singapore, Buddhism also seems to be growing in Taiwan (Tamney and Chiang 2002: 165).

After the communist victory on the mainland, many Christians were among those who moved to Taiwan. Both Catholicism and Protestantism grew rapidly between 1950 and 1965. However since then, Christianity has stagnated. Christians are probably about 4 percent of the population (Sha and Shen 1996: 135). They tend to live in the cities and to be relatively well educated. “Thus there are a substantial number of intellectuals, making the Church primarily a ‘white-collar’ church reaching out to intellectuals. Just how to reach out to the working class is a challenge which the church is faced with today” (Sha and Shen 1996: 140).

On the mainland, the greater tolerance of religion over the last twenty years has apparently resulted in the revival of all religions. For example, there is supposedly a “renaissance of traditional culture in the villages,” which includes practices such as animal sacrifice and fortune telling (Pomfret 1998: 17). However it is difficult to tell if a higher percentage of the people are practicing folk religion than before the communist victory. Buddhism has also undergone a revival. There are now at least 200,000 Buddhist temples, 150,000 monks and nuns, and 30 colleges (Wei 2001). Undoubtedly the growth of Christianity in China has been spectacular since the beginning of the reform period. While only about one percent of the population is Catholic, and they are mostly poor (Madsen 2004: 104), rapid growth has occurred among Protestants, especially in rural areas among poor and illiterate people (Kindopp 2004b: 135).

Reform Buddhism

The reform movement in Buddhism is the result of state policies, which will be discussed in the next section, of challenges from Christianity, of the increasing contact of Chinese Buddhists with
Western Buddhism, and of the modernization of Buddhism in Chinese societies. In both Singapore and Taiwan, growth is associated with greater outreach efforts and more involvement in charity work (Eng 2003; Shiau 1999). The goal is to appear “modern” and thereby to attract more members. “Within the [Singaporean] Chinese community, Reformist Buddhism has emerged to challenge Christianity’s claims to modernity” (Eng 2003: 280). Fenggang Yang and Dedong Wei describe an example of the reform process in China in their essay. An ideal type of reform Buddhism (Eng 2003; Tamney and Chiang 2002) has these elements:

- An emphasis on creating an earthly Pure Land; engaging in social welfare programs and efforts to protect the environment
- More attention to outreach efforts, such as monks appearing on television, organizing college campus groups, and running summer camps for college students (Sha and Shen 1996: 133)
- A stronger role for the laity, including women; establishment of lay Buddhist groups
- More impersonal rules for monasteries to ensure the recognition of individual merit
- Provision of social activities such as sports events or cooking classes
- Developing ties to global Buddhism; reform Buddhism presents itself as not simply a parochial ‘Chinese’ religion but as part of global Buddhism
- An emphasis on personal spiritual development, especially by studying the scriptures and practicing meditation.

The last element is especially important. As Eng put it, a new generation of Singaporean Chinese sees “their religious needs as personal, no longer tied to the religious needs of their families or community. Thus, religion, to many of them, is a personal quest for spiritualism” (2003: 7). Supposedly 65% of the Chinese Buddhists in Singapore regard themselves as part of the reform movement (Eng 2003: 1).

Christian Growth

Christian growth in Chinese societies has resulted from many factors. On the one hand, the competition has been weak. Folk religion is not centrally organized and has been slow to respond to modernization. As previously discussed, until the rise of reform
Buddhism, this religious group had been perceived as indistinguishable from folk religion. In China, the deepening disillusionment with Communism has meant that this ideology no longer functions as an alternative to religion. On the other hand, Christian groups have had ready access to resources, which have been used to establish schools and medical facilities. This achievement has gained support, and sometimes converts, for Christianity. Moreover until the development of reform Buddhism, the only religious groups actively evangelizing were Christian ones.

An interesting question is whether China will follow the Taiwanese (growth followed by stagnation) or the Singaporean pattern (continual growth). In Taiwan, Christian growth has been hampered by two factors that do not apply in China. First, the modernist Presbyterian Church has played a leading role in the development of Taiwanese Christianity, but this church is not as strongly evangelistic as other Christian groups. Second, whereas about 80% of the Taiwanese speak either Taiwanese or Hakka, many Christian congregations are Mandarin-speaking (Sha and Shen 1996). In contrast, Christianity in Singapore has had several advantages, notably the facts that English is the main language in the school system and in the business world and that Singapore has been open to Western influence since the founding of the country in the 1960s.

Christianity has traditionalist and modernist wings. The latter are sometimes referred to as liberals or, in the case of Protestantism, mainline. Traditionalist Christians can be divided into fundamentalists and evangelicals; the former more strongly resist modernization than the latter. To confuse matters more, there are Christians who combine this religion with elements of Western folk religion, especially emphasizing the importance of religious experience, healing, and prophecying: On the one hand, there are the Pentecostals, who combine a fundamentalist attitude toward the Bible with folk practices; and on the other hand, there are the charismatics, who accept modified versions of the folk practices, and who theologically range from being comparable to evangelicals to being similar to modernists (Tamney 2002; Tamney and Chiang 2002: 170–1).

Much of the Christian growth in China is in rural areas. (Fenggang Yang and Jianbo Huang provide a history of a rural church and document its impressive growth during the reform era.) In part, this is a result of the weaker government surveillance outside the cities and big towns. Undoubtedly the promise of miracles, especially heal-
ing, is a very attractive feature of rural, traditionalist congregations (Hunter and Chan 1993: 174; Deng 1996: 115). Similarly indigenous Christian groups follow in the Pentecostal tradition and are among the fastest growing churches in China (Xu 2004: 109–10). For instance, the True Jesus Church combines obvious Western religious elements, such as devotion to Jesus, with leaders who are a version of traditional Chinese spirit-mediums (Rubinstein 1991: 138). However Chen Cunfu and Huang Tianhai described “a new type of Christian” appearing in urban areas (2004: 189). The new Christian works in the emerging free market part of the economy, and is affluent and well educated. It will be interesting to watch how this new Christian affects the religious institution.

Christian growth is not occurring equally among the types of Christians. Protestants are increasing faster than Catholics. Although adequate statistical information about this matter is lacking, informed opinions suggest that among the Protestants, growth is greater among the traditionalists, and especially among Pentecostals/charismatics (Rubinstein 1991: 155; Hunter and Chan 1993: 174; Wong 1996). The Reverend Stephen H. T. Hsu, who is Secretary for Evangelism at The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, told me in a personal interview that growing congregations are charismatic, with more informal services that incorporate lively music. It is interesting that the form of Christianity that includes folk elements is so successful.

Whereas the most compelling challenge for Buddhism is to modernize, the main issue for Christianity is indigenization. Structurally, Christian churches have completed or nearly completed this task; the churches are now in the hands of the local people. Culturally, there is much to be done. Christianity is still seen as a foreign religion. Among the main issues are

- the Christian assumption of an evil human nature, which runs counter to Mencius’s doctrine [of innate goodness], the idea of eternal damnation, which is denied by Buddhism, and the Christian demand for people’s total commitment, which is contrary to the Chinese experience with weakly bounded religions (Tamney and Chiang 2002: 177).

Of course, an image as foreign can help among people who are critical of what they see as the backwardness of their traditional culture. But in the long run, being perceived as foreign would seem an undesirable handicap. In this regard, it is interesting that in Singapore, the Chinese who usually speak English at home have been more
likely to become Christians, than those Chinese who usually speak Chinese at home. In 2000, while 40% of the English-speaking Chinese were Christian, only 9% of the Chinese-speaking identified with this religion.

Confucian Revival

Anna Xiao Dong Sun’s chapter describes the new interest in Confucianism on the mainland. Despite the absence of this tradition from the educational system in China for over 50 years, and thus the general ignorance about Confucianism, it seems inevitable that people would be at least curious about it, once the reform era commenced. However there are signs that Confucianism is losing its stature in other Chinese societies. During the 1980s, the Singapore government introduced a compulsory religious studies program into secondary schools; parents could choose the specific tradition their children would study; the government had hoped that most of the Chinese pupils would be in the Confucian studies option, but it proved to be relatively unpopular; in part because of this, the program became voluntary and has been rarely chosen (Tamney 1996). During the 1990s, the Taiwanese government changed the college-level course in which students studied Confucianism from mandatory to an elective. Given the overwhelmingly important role of Confucianism in Chinese history, there will no doubt be a continuing interest in the tradition. Moreover, as Sun points out, there is a movement to emphasize not only the ethical components of Confucianism, but also the religious aspects of this tradition. To gain relevance, however, Confucianism will probably have to be modernized. Chi-shiang Ling’s chapter describes how the Confucian content of the morality books is being adapted to a modern society, which is part of a broader movement to make Confucianism more appealing to modern people (Tamney and Chiang 2002). An interesting question is: How will a revived interest in Confucianism affect the fate of religions in Chinese societies?

Church-State Relations

Modernization supposedly includes the structural separation of church and state. A modern state guarantees human rights, which include religious freedom. For instance, in the United States the constitution
prevents the government from favoring any one religious viewpoint or from interfering with a person’s religion. Moreover, modern states are founded on secular goals such as promoting public health, social welfare, and economic prosperity. Of course, a complete separation of church and state is not possible. In cases of conflict, modern states control religious beliefs and organizations to ensure that religions serve the public good (Smith 1970: 85–6, 116).

In the present world, there are a variety of church-state relationships. Iran approximates a theocracy, although the tension between hardliners and reformers suggests that the situation is unstable. Some relatively modern states subsidize churches, most notably Germany and Spain, but also Italy and the United Kingdom.

For over a thousand years, the imperial Chinese government regulated religions. Religious groups were required to register with the state. Institutional Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and, in some centuries Christianity, were recognized. Roaming monks, who were not associated with recognized temples, and members of sects were considered dangerous and were often suppressed. In practice, “the behavior of local authorities toward unregistered religious groups often varied from disinterested neglect to violent crackdown, depending on the locality” (Bays 2004: 27). Thus for over a thousand years, China had state-supported religious organizations that were pressured to serve the political goals of the ruling elite.

The most destructive form of a state-church relationship in modern times occurred during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) in China. Religious organizations, except those that went underground, were in effect abolished. Religious activities were forbidden, and church assets were seized. Moreover an elaborate propaganda campaign sought to convince people that all religions were backward and doomed to disappear with modernity.

At present, the Chinese government recognizes only five world religions—Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Daoism. Freedom of religious belief and the performance of ‘normal’ religious activities is guaranteed by the government. However: “‘Superstitious’ activities, such as fortune-telling, divination, exorcism, and healing are expressly forbidden” (Spiegel 2004: 51). All religious organizations must belong to the appropriate government-controlled organization that has been established for each recognized religion. For instance, all Protestant churches must join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and all Catholic parishes, the Catholic Patriotic Association.
These organizations control the appointment of clergy, the running of places of worship, the publication of religious material, the training programs for clergy, and so on.

Official control extends even to the realm of beliefs. Political authorities impose boundaries for acceptable religious doctrines, denouncing beliefs that emphasize evangelism, supernaturalism, or salvational doctrines that challenge the government’s religious policies or contradict its projected symbolic order, which depicts all of Chinese society as unified under Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule (Kindopp 2004a: 3).

For example, official Catholic clergy are pressured to endorse government policies on abortion even though they are not consistent with orthodox Catholic doctrine. State policies during the reform era are more fully discussed in the chapters by Fenggang Yang and by Jianbo Huang and Fenggang Yang.

There are reasons to believe that the current policies in China regarding religion might change. First, local governments are finding religious organizations to be useful in achieving secular goals. For instance, religious sites are being developed as a way of stimulating tourism and thereby contributing to economic development (see the chapters in this book by Graeme Lang, Selina Chan, and Lars Ragvald, by Thomas Borchert, and by Fenggang Yang and Wei Dedong). Moreover the central government wants to enlist the private sector in coping with welfare problems. As part of this strategy, the state may allow religious groups to participate in the privatization of welfare (Christianity Today 2003). Second, China is increasingly enmeshed in global society and, as a result, might feel more pressure from foreigners to change. Third, globalization will expose more and more Chinese citizens to liberal, Western societies, and this might increase internal demand for the liberalization of religious policies (Chan 2004). Fourth, the current policies are a compromise between the conservatives and the progressives within the Communist Party (Chan 2004: 66) and are therefore unlikely to remain unchanged over time. Fifth, the policy of forcing all followers of the same religious tradition into a single group is contrary to the dividing of all religions into traditionalist and modernist versions. In China, there are two types of Christian churches, those that are officially recognized and those that are not; the latter are often called “underground churches,” even though there are unofficial churches whose practices are publicly known. Most Christians are in the unofficial
churches (Kindopp 2004a: 5). Among Protestants this split coincides with the division between traditionalist (unofficial) and modernist (Spiegel 2004: 48; see also Madsen 2004: 104–5). The current official structure is unrealistic for the Christians and will become increasingly so for the other religious traditions as they modernize.

Singapore is an alternative, non-Western model for China. The Singapore government expects the religious institution to contribute to society in two ways: first, by teaching the right values, and second, by getting involved in welfare work. When he was Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew said there are many reasons why “the established religions—not fake religions, new fangled cults, but orthodox religions” are allies of the government: “If nothing else, all religions are against addiction to drugs...” (Straits Times 1988). The government also wants religions to help in the effort to encourage families to take care of their elderly, and generally in privatizing welfare. For instance, the government financially assists welfare homes run by religious groups, and it gives grants to the Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic.

At the same time, the government regulates religion closely. There are several reasons for this. First, the Singaporean government seeks to eliminate any serious political opposition; the leaders do not want any version of Christian Liberation Theology or Islamism to become the basis of a political movement. Second, the government always worries about ethnic tensions resulting in social unrest; because religion and ethnicity are intertwined in Singapore, the regulation of religion is a means of controlling ethnic relations. Thus The Religious Harmony Act, which was passed in 1992, prohibits religious groups from engaging in politics and in aggressive evangelizing (Tamney 1996; Eng 2003).²

Will China become more like Singapore? Or, will China become closer to the church-state differentiation model? In any case, as several chapters in this book demonstrate, church-state relations in China are changing. “Into what?” is an interesting question.

² Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, church-state relations in Taiwan have also been more and more approximating the modern model (Katz 2003).
References


