

## Introduction of Triple Markets

The triple market theory helps make sense of the complex religious situation in contemporary China.<sup>1</sup> It differentiates three types of religious organizations, individuals, and activities. The Communist party-state treats these three types of religions very differently, pursuing strategies ranging from co-option to eradication. In response to the varied control measures of the party-state, different types of religions have manifested different responsive patterns. Moreover, because both the control measures and religious groups have changed over time, some religious groups have shifted from one market to another. To observers, the red-market religions are readily visible, the gray-market religions are less visible because of their ambiguous legal status, and the black-market religions are least visible because of their underground nature. In order to present a fuller picture of the religious landscape in China today, in addition to the visible religious sites that have been officially approved, we must also take into account the less visible religions in the gray and black markets. The triple market theory helps to make invisible religions visible.

The red market in China comprises all legal (officially permitted) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities. After the CCP took power on the mainland in 1949, the newly founded People's Republic of China (PRC) sanctioned five religions—Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism—and established the so-called patriotic associations to control them.<sup>2</sup> During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all religious organizations were banned, religious venues were closed down, and religious activities were prohibited. Since 1979 the party-state has adopted a relatively more pragmatic religious policy permitting these associations to re-establish a limited number of temples, mosques, and churches. Although the officially approved religious groups under the patriotic associations have enjoyed an enlarged social space of freedom in the last several decades, the red market is not a free market. The party-state not only bars other religions from entering into this market, it also imposes many restrictions on the approved religious groups, such

as limiting the construction and renovation of religious buildings, limiting the frequency and size of religious activities, controlling the selection of clergy, demanding political loyalty in addition to religious piety, and so on.

The black market comprises all illegal (officially banned) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities that are conducted underground or in secrecy. Before 2000, the black market included all Protestant house churches, the underground Catholic Church, and new or traditional sects seen by the party-state as “counterrevolutionary organizations” or “evil cults.” A major segment of the black market was comprised of underground Catholics. When the PRC was founded, the anti-communist pope Pius XII prohibited any collaboration between Chinese Catholics and the Communist government and its organizations. The Chinese party-state responded by jailing many Catholic leaders. Since 1979, an underground Catholic Bishops Conference has operated parallel to the national association. Similarly, many indigenous Protestant churches initially refused to join the national church system. They resorted to gatherings at private homes, which is why they are often called “house churches” (*jiating jiaohui* 家庭教会). Since around 2000, the party-state has reduced its crackdowns on most of the house churches and underground Catholics, thus moving large parts of the black market into the gray market. However, some Catholic bishops and priests and some Protestant leaders have been treated as black-market offenders and have been jailed or pursued by police. Currently, the black market comprises about two dozen “evil cults” banned by the government. Some of them are heretical Christian groups, such as the Church of the Almighty God (*Quannengshen jiaohui* 全能神教会), also known as Eastern Lightning (*Dongfangshandian* 东方闪电), and the Three Ranks of Servants (*Sanban puren* 三班仆人). Others are new religions rooted in Chinese tradition or recently imported from other parts of the world, such as the True Buddha Sect (*Zhen fo zong* 真佛宗) and the Unification Church (统一教).

The gray market comprises all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with ambiguous legal status. These groups, individuals, and activities lie in a gray area of religious regulation and may be perceived as both legal and illegal, or neither legal nor illegal. The gray market is the key element of the triple-market model. It can be analyzed via two general categories: explicitly religious and implicitly religious phenomena. Explicitly religious phenomena include illegal activities conducted by

1 The triple market theory was first articulated in an article (F. Yang, “The Red, Black, and Gray Markets”) and was subsequently modified and incorporated into F. Yang, *Religion in China*.

2 For further analysis of the relationships between official religious organizations and the government, see Bays, “Chinese Protestant Christianity Today”; Madsen, *China's Catholics*, 25–49; Gladney, “Islam in China”; Yang and Wei, “The Bailin Buddhist Temple.”

legal religious organizations and individuals. For example, religious clergy of the official patriotic associations may venture out to proselytize at unapproved underground churches. Meanwhile, many groups in the gray market are sponsored by government officials, for either political or economic reasons. For example, many officials in local governments are eager to contribute to building Buddhist and Daoist temples because they wish to attract overseas Chinese investment and strengthen cultural ties with overseas Chinese. The Bureau of Tourism may renovate or construct some temples for the purpose of tourism while stationing staff dressed as priests in them to attend to tourists' religious expressions. Many villages and towns have revived popular practices, including building temples dedicated to ancestors, historic heroes, and immortals who have become tutelary gods.

Government restriction of religion influences the dynamics of the tripartite markets. The black market is a logical consequence of heavy regulation. When government tries to restrict and eliminate certain religious groups, a black market will emerge in spite of high costs to individuals. And there are always people who are willing to pay a higher price for their religion, even to the point of sacrificing one's life. A recent example is the Beijing Shouwang Church, where several house church leaders refused to join the official Protestant association and have been placed under house arrest since 2011. Further, when the red market of religion is restricted and the black market is suppressed, a gray market will emerge. When people cannot find satisfaction in the red market but are unwilling to risk black-market penalties, the gray market fills the gap. Moreover, the more restrictive and suppressive the regulations, the larger the gray market becomes.

Over time, religious groups may shift from one market to another. Many Qigong groups, operating under the name of "science of health," belonged to the gray market for most of the 1980s and 1990s. In 1999, however, Falun Gong 法轮功, a large Qigong group spreading throughout the country, launched a sit-in surrounding the headquarters

of the CCP. This event irritated the party-state, which ruthlessly suppressed Falun Gong and also disbanded all other Qigong sects, thus driving Qigong practices into the black market. Moreover, through policy adjustments and pressure, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the official Protestant association, has reached out and successfully convinced some house churches to be incorporated into the legal group. These churches moved from the gray market to the red market. They obtained legal status and more resources, but at the price of submitting to party-state scrutiny and control. Other market shifts are possible as well. A red-market group can shift to the black or gray market if its leaders decide to pursue more autonomy. For example, between 2013 and 2016, Zhejiang authorities carried out a campaign to remove crosses on church rooftops. Many defiant church leaders were punished, and some pastors were jailed. In response, many ministers within the official association dropped out and began to work with house churches or went underground.

The religious landscape in China is complex, extending over a vast land with diverse geographical terrain, local and ethnic cultures, and political and economic contexts. It is also subject to sudden changes, as China is in the process of rapid modernization. The descriptions of the three markets in the sections that follow can only provide a broad overview of major religious groups at the national level. The five red-market religions are presented in chronological order, according to the year in which the corresponding national association was established: Buddhism (1953), Islam (1953), Protestantism (1954), Daoism (1957), and Catholicism (1957). The gray-market religions vary widely and have fluid boundaries, and thus we could only describe a set of distinctive examples, including Confucianism, folk religion, house churches, underground Catholic churches, and the Mao cult. There is a lack of scholarly studies on the black-market religions, with the exception of Falun Gong. We have provided a profile of each of these religious groups based on the available published evidence.