

CHINA'S RELIGIOUS POLICY

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"If you look at Chinese history, all the rebellions that led to change of dynasty had some religious connotations. The authorities don't like that."

—Jean Paul Wiest, Professor of History of Christianity in China, Beijing University of International Business and Economics.¹

People's Republic of China is the most populous country in the world. It has been the subject of attention over the last three decades, since China embarked upon reforms and opened up to the outside world, primarily for its economic progress which has been miraculous to say the least. In 2007, China contributed more to global growth than the United States, the first time another country had done so since at least the 1930s. It also became the world's largest consumer, eclipsing the United States in four of the five basic food, energy and industrial commodities.² Amid these achievements, there is dismay over the policies pursued by the post-1949 People's Republic of China, specifically over Tibetan issue for suppressing its cultural and religious identity. China is accused, specifically by the western media, for not granting the required and desired right of religious freedom to Tibetans. So is the question of Christianity whereby it is delinked from the Vatican in formal sense. Sometimes, religious persecution, real or unreal in the case of Muslims, is also reported. In the following passages, I intend to look at the development of the basic parameters of China's religious policy.

Introduction

There are five officially recognized religions in People's Republic of China, namely Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. Amongst these, only Taoism is the native religion while the rest have arrived in China at different points in history. Besides this, the society in general accepts the parameters of leading a moral life, set by Confucius. The teachings of Confucius have also incorporated the teachings of other religions like Taoism and Buddhism, during the course of time. The central concepts of Confucianism stress upon the need to achieve harmony in society through proper moral conduct in all relationships. The emperor had to abide by this code of proper behavior to maintain his "Mandate of Heaven" to rule. So the teachings of Confucius have their own socio-political order in the society. For China, the teachings of Confucius are, therefore, identification with the past.³

The three oldest religions, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, adopted the teaching of honoring the Heaven, the ancestors, stressing the preservation of the present world and adapting to it rationally. China has a patriarchal society. But it was having a negative link too, as it helped in securing the clutch of feudalism, e.g. in Tibet the theocratic system combined Tibetan Buddhism with a feudal system in the 18th century. This culture was capable of assimilating and absorbing many alien cultures without compromising the core Chinese values with Confucius' teachings being at the center. In order to get a foothold in China, the religions had to adapt to such Chinese characters. This was the case with Buddhism which initially practiced and pursued its traditions but was unable to penetrate the Chinese society, so it allowed worshiping of the sovereignty of the ancestors.⁴

The paper contends that the religious outlook of the post-1949 period is the product of diverse factors rooted in history. In some ways, the religious outlook of China is being shaped by the historical experience of Christianity in China before 1949. Though the other four officially recognized religions have played roles at certain points in history but had not "embarrassed the central government" to an extent of compelling the later to issue directives in dealing with them.⁵ Subsequently, in the post-1949 era, China is under media scrutiny over Tibet and to some extent the Islamic Turkistan movement. Once, we are able to understand the basic parameters of China's religious policy, it would give an insight to infer what the individual cases are and how should be they viewed. Thus, it is better to look at China's religious policy in a retrospective manner to identify those factors that shaped its prism in dealing with the subject. The purpose of the paper is to identify those factors shaping China's contemporary religious outlook and how it evolved since it became an independent, sovereign state on October 1, 1949.

There are two distinctive characteristics of Chinese civilization: first, it has never been interrupted by an alien culture that could erode its intrinsic identity; second, there has never been a unified theocratic national regime with directives operating out of the central state and stretching over all the territory. There have been no times, in Chinese history, which could be marked for the religious bellicosity encompassing a large population and territory. Almost all the religions stressed “ethical cultivation, creating harmony, revering ancestors and peace as their cherished values.”⁶ When these two propositions were violated, it led to a reaction from within the social fabric or government to conform it to Chinese character.

Religious Outlook in Pre-1949 China and the State’s Response

Among the officially recognized religions, only Taoism is indigenous and the rest have arrived in China at different points in history. But as far as policy outlook is concerned, it was only Christianity which had the power to embarrass the government and in turn the latter issued directives to conform it to Chinese characters. Besides this, there is the issue of incarnation of Lama in Tibet. But that is a settled and accepted tradition in China as far as the state and religion is concerned – some 800 hundred years back during the Ming Dynasty.⁷

Islam and Christianity are contemporaries in terms of arrival in China. The arrival of Muslims occurred in two forms. First, they came as traders from the Arabian Peninsula. Second, they penetrated China from the North during the heydays of the Mongol empire. They acquired Chinese education. During the rule of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), while returning back from pilgrimages to Mecca, they brought books in Arabic with them and translated them into Chinese. So indigenous Chinese Muslim literature was gradually created. It is a reflection of the social and political standing of Muslims at the time that many were appointed to government offices and in 1335, Islam was recognized by the emperor’s decree as the “Pure and True Religion.”⁸

We see that the historical baggage of Christianity in taking roots in China led to the characterisation of two sects of Christianity – Catholicism and Protestantism – as two distinct religions in China. The historical experience of the two is different so is the perception in society in general and state structure in particular in China.

Catholics arrived earlier than the Protestants. Catholicism arrived in China in the 7th century but its imprints in society became intense in the late 15th century to what is called the “first Christian offensive”.⁹ It is interesting to note that the foundation of western scholarship about China is based on the writings of “Biblical scholars.” The common reflection about the people of China and their way of life was that Chinese have “unorganised rationality.”¹⁰ Though China was not having an established theocratic tradition hostile to other religions, which was a helping prospect for nourishing Christianity, it proved to be the most frustrating experience of all for the missions preaching Christianity. The strategy employed for proselytizing China by Christian missionaries was aimed at the conversion of the Confucian Orthodox throne. So they fixed the gaze on the Chinese court. Thus they came in direct contact with the court rituals. Since the two civilizations had two different world views, the missionaries found the court rituals of conformity to Confucian ideas, of honoring the Heaven and venerating ancestors, as “paganistic exercise.”¹¹ The recognition of these Chinese customs was not less than the erosion of western concepts. After having an experience of 700 years in China, the missionaries found themselves confident enough to question the indigenous way of life. In 1693, Rome involved itself in the issue. The involvement of Rome in this regard proved decisive. Thus frictions developed. This reached to a critical point when in 1693, a French vicar, apostolic of Fujian, ordered missionaries not to permit Chinese Christians to perform, participate in, or attend ancestral rites or the sacrifices offered to Confucius. In 1715, the Rites Controversy reached a decisive point. In that year, Rome prohibited Chinese rites in the apostolic constitution. Rome’s decision profoundly affected the way Chinese Catholics behaved and eventually contributed to Emperor Kangxi’s hostility toward the missionaries. This led to a “Century of Ban” for Christianity in China with the issuance of the Decree of Kangxi in 1721 by Emperor Kangxi.¹² A matter of cultural accommodation was turned into cultural antagonism by the insensitive arrogance of Rome. Following has been the analysis of Professor Pan Guangdan:

“This is all because of agreement with the soil; the plant can grow and prosper naturally if it can benefit from the soil. This is not to suggest that Christianity is curse in itself. This is merely to say that a seed, a good seed can still bear ominous fruits if it fails to suit the soil it is sown in.”¹³

Voltaire, depressed by the religious bellicosity at home, presented an enchanting picture of China. He saw China as an enlightened nation where administration is entrusted to the “most learned and virtuous men.”¹⁴ But the missionaries had some other observation of the “other.”

In the middle of the 18th century, the Protestant nations, following in the wake of British military and naval power, forced the Chinese government to admit western missionaries to the empire and permit their teachings. They approached China with almost “unbounded self-righteousness.”¹⁵ This is evident from the writings of the Biblical scholars. Arthur Smith, a missionary, reflected about the Chinese people: “what the Chinese lack are not the intellectual abilities but character and conscience.” The Chinese were portrayed as quaint pagans misled from the path of eternal salvation by their own false religions. Chinese were the “quintessence of incompetence” and their only salvation lay in “God” and “West”. The Protestants paid no attention to the court and tended to ignore the official class.¹⁶

The “second Christian offensive” in China was from the very beginning bound up with the political power of the seafaring nations. Missionaries acted as the hotline between China and the western colonizers. The beginning of this episode in Chinese history is called “Century of Humiliation.”¹⁷ The era stretches from 1838 till the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The era is famous in China for excessive penetration of the West as the march of colonization was at its peak. The imperial thrust in China was accompanied by the parallel penetration of Christian missionaries. The hundred years of subjugation of the Chinese nation also saw two other striking features of religions in China: “feudalism” and “foreign nature.” Being a semi-colony of foreign powers at the time, the bulk of the Chinese psyche towards religion was shaped by the events that happened from 1839, with the eruption of what is usually called as the “Opium War” between the imperial Britain and the Qing Dynasty. This was followed by a series of unequal treaties made with imperial powers – Britain, US, Russia, Japan, France and Portugal – whereby the latter penetrated China by forcing it to give the former unparalleled trading concessions. The imperial thrusts and treaties could be summed up in one word “extraterritoriality.” This imperial thrust had its own complexities but at the moment it is necessary to look at the role of religion and its upholders in shaping those events and its subsequent effect over China’s behavior after it became independent.

In the wake of the Opium Wars, China was partly divided by foreign powers into various spheres of influence, politically and in terms of religious denominations. This could be observed from the fact that Karl Gutzlaff of The Netherlands Missionary Society was appointed by the English government Joint Chinese Secretary to the English Commission in 1835. Then with the outbreak of the First Opium War in 1839 and the subsequent treaty in 1842, meant at ending the war, Gutzlaff was called upon to help in negotiations. Apparently this participation was outside the realm of missionary work and created less than endearing attitudes toward Gutzlaff and his missionary purpose from the Chinese government. One of the stipulations in the treaty, that ended the Opium Wars, allowed for unrestricted propagation of the Christian gospel in China. Thus, with more freedom to move into the interior of China, many missionaries left the coast and ventured farther into the heart of China. Some of those “missionaries” were actually merchants or political operatives working to open up more trade with hope of increasing their own personal wealth and that of their benefactors. The Decree of Kangxi was revoked under French pressure in 1946.¹⁸

The era between 1850 and 1919 is marked with rebellions, chaos and destruction. Almost all the rebellions were either directed at excessive foreign penetrations or their meddling in the internal affairs of China. China made more than a dozen unequal treaties with the imperial powers in compulsion from the latter. The 1850s were marked for the emergence of Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) in the southernmost province of Guangzhou, a hub of foreign trade. Originally, a Christian religious movement turned into rebellion when troubled times, accentuated by the imperial treaties, provided favorable opportunities. The leader of Taiping, Hong, was a militant Evangelical, having faith that God had ordered him to destroy the Manchu rule. In 1851, they occupied Nanking, established their own Heavenly Kingdom and preached the overthrow of the existing order. It was a revolt to eradicate Confucian ethos on which authority of the central government rested. Thousands of people were killed during the Taiping Rebellion. As the central governmental authority enervated in the face of the Taiping Rebellion, some western leaders supported the uprising, either through local converts or deriving forceful concessions for the missionaries, in order to force political and economic concessions from the government in Peking (Beijing). Between 1858 to 1860, UK, France, Russia and US forced the authorities in Peking to enter into treaties. One of the stipulations of the treaties was concerning the residence of the foreign diplomats and missionaries in

Peking. The Western powers had at last got their way and exacted concessions from the Chinese government, whereby the latter agreed that both north China and Yangtze Valley should be open for trade. In the aftermath of a series of rebellions, the authority of the central government no longer stretched across the whole country. In the wake of the treaties and indigenous reactions and rebellions, the Chinese state looked like a loose, severed federating body. In order to retrieve the Confucian order, the central government made a concerted effort and sent Commander Zheng Guafan, a Confucian scholar. The impression in China was that Christian missionaries were the ideological arms of aggression. Merle Goldman termed the 14 years of Taiping Rebellion as "Christian Confucius struggle".¹⁹ During the dying days of the Taiping Rebellion, the French destroyed a local temple and replaced it with a Roman Catholic Church – sheer insensitive arrogance on the part of the West. The late 1890s saw a resurgent Germany and jealous Italy looking for colonies abroad. China was one of the prized destinations. Germany had an eye on the coastal area of Shantung. Under the guise Catholics and Orthodox missionaries were encouraged to flourish. Thus, as seen time and again in the history of "Christian" nations, the spiritual work of sincere believers is overshadowed by the incessant pursuit of wealth from more aggressive and temporal elements.

The central authority in China was no longer effective and there was a deep sense of humiliation among the people and a resolve to turn the episode. This was reflected during the Boxer Rebellion (1895-1901) whereby thousands of converts were killed by the Boxers for their connivance with the foreigners. The aim was simple, support Manchu and destroy the foreigners. As the society was degenerating in the face of these movements, the vacuum was filled by warlords and feudals. The Boxer Rebellion, which erupted in 1895 in the province of Shantung as a consequence of the teachings of White Lotus (a religious sect), was directed against foreigners in general and missionaries in particular. It also took targeted local converts, suspecting them of collaboration with the foreigners. Instead of paying heed to the voice of the Boxers, the central government opted to crush it with the connivance of imperial powers particularly Germany. It coincided with the event whereby Catholic missionaries, led by the French bishop of Peking, with backing of the French government, secured an official position equivalent of provincial governor in 1898. The repression of the Boxers was achieved with the help of imperial powers, France, Britain, Russia and Germany, in 1901. Kaiser Wilhelm II sent a Field Marshal to terrorize the local population in revenge of the Boxers. The result was the Boxer Protocol of 1901, another unequal treaty, coupled with an indemnity of \$333 million to be paid over a period of 40 years at an interest rate that would double the amount.²⁰ The aggression against Western rapacity by the Boxers is termed as a "patriotic act" by the present historians of China.²¹

Thus, the Boxer Rebellion, which emerged to retrieve national prestige, ended in a national humiliation. This was the first manifestation of reaction to foreign penetration and perversion by the society. This was a watershed event in shaping future religious outlook.

From 1888 to 1920, the then Chinese government tried to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican. But the attempt was impeded by France whose missionaries worked hard to maintain French dominance over Chinese Church affairs. The French government went so far as to break diplomatic relations with the Vatican in order to warn the latter not to reciprocate. It has been noted that from 1840 to 1920 there were more than 600 cases whereby the missionaries participated in opium trade, looting of land and property and the perpetration of serious misconduct. When cases were brought to the Chinese courts for relief, the reply, thanks to the unequal treaties, was, "Foreigners were beyond the jurisdiction of the Chinese court."²²

All this did not bode well for the image of Christianity in the Chinese culture and the religion subsequently faced a rough time adjusting in China. This time period also witnessed the emergence of the non-Christian movement and the anti-imperialist alliance. China entered the 20th century with a deep sense of national humiliation and religion played a definite role in this entire sordid episode. Christianity, which was supposed to spread the word of Gospel, became the tool of aggressors. In the words of Jiang Menglin, "Lord Buddha came to China riding on a white elephant where as Jesus Christ flew in on canon shells."²³

At the beginning of the 20th century, some attempts were made to do away with this trend. The Reform Movement of 1898 was a step in this regard. Since this aspect of religion was something novel to

Chinese history, voices emerged to remove feudal religious authority. This was manifested in May Fourth Movement of 1919. Cai Yaunpie, a forerunner of the May Fourth Movement called for replacing religious authority with that of science and knowledge. This was the time when religious authorities called for national salvation, independence and patriotism reflecting in the admonition of Buddhist Master, Hongyi, of never forgetting national salvation, Taoist Priest Maoshan's preaching of repulsing the aggressors and the heroic deeds of anti-Japanese Muslim Brigade.²⁴

This historical episode of Christianity in China has been summed up by Gerald Chan, "Before 1949, the Catholic and Protestant Church hierarchy was dominated by foreigners who regarded China as an area to proselytize. Zealous and overzealous missionaries went to China on board gunboats and merchant ships and as a result they closely collaborated with soldiers and merchants."²⁵ In a nutshell, Protestant and Catholic churches played to the tunes of colonialism and imperialism. The historical penetration and separate roles played by the two sects of Christianity has thus led to the recognition of the two sects as two distinct religions in China.

Ultimately, China witnessed the emergence of two polarized groups namely, Communists led by Mao Zedong and the so-called Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. In 1949, with the eventual triumph of the Communists, the Peoples Republic of Chian came into being. It could be argued that the triumph of Communists was the turning point for China – the birth of a system which claimed to define the duty of man in the universe without reference to the supernatural and signaled a return to the more agnostic position of Confucius. It was also convincing as it gave a more plausible explanation for the humiliation exacted by the imperial thrust.

Religious Policy of the People's Republic of China

"One of the commonplaces about Chinese society is the deep unshakable strength of Chinese culture. It is really a kind of supernatural instance, really, when you consider how well core Chinese values have withstood the furry of the last one hundred and fifty years."²⁶

According to French philosopher Rousseau, views are shaped by historical experiences. In Chinese considerations, religion and its propagators played a significant role in protracting and intensifying the miseries of the century of humiliation. "If you look at Chinese history, all the rebellions that led to change of dynasty had some religious connotations."²⁷ This aspect of religion has a significant bearing over the contrivance of religious policy. Various attempts were made by different groups, organisations to unify the country under some professed ideals between 1840 to 1949. But it was the eventual triumph of the CCP, led by Mao Zedong, which succeeded in unifying the country and establishing an order after uprooting the imperial powers and their local collaborators. The movement, which succeeded in establishing the writ over the majority of the population and area, had a defined sketch for ruling the future set up and handling its affairs. The post-1949 socio-politico-economic order is a paradigmatic shift in Chinese history. The biggest concern which haunted Chinese leaders then was how to preserve the achieved unity of the new republic along with its ideological component. The new state was preoccupied with the reconstruction of the war torn society and consolidation of their control over the nation. Fear of a perceived disruption, supported by external factors, was the crucial link in devising the social order, whereby; in the past religion had played a big role. Though the new ideology of the state was not indigenous but it was streamlined to China's conditions. In terms of formulation and execution of religious policies there are two distinct eras in the PRC.

Mao Zedong and Religious Policy

One can easily discern the position of religion in a state with a communist ideology. Religion and communist ideology derive from very different points of view. One stresses matter and the other idea as the base of their subsequent generalizations. The two generate diametrically opposed ideas. But unlike Russia, religion was not suppressed and marginalized in China for its ideological standings but for the role that it played in the history of China. Being the paramount leader, Chairman Mao was the sole arbiter of all policies in PRC. Under his guidance, the new Constitution was framed in 1954. The constitution was revised in 1982 whereby article 36 deals with religious issues.

“Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The State protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.”²⁸

Implicit in the article is the notion whereby the state assumed the role of protecting religious freedom. For that purpose, the state gave institutional representation to all the officially recognized religions. The adherents of each religion are supposed to be members of the respective religious association which in turn represents them in the state machinery. Though religion was diffused in the pre-1949 China, PRC institutionalized it. Another attribute which could be inferred from the institutional representation is the fear of the state of the political dimension of religion as had happened in the past. Thus it is forbidden to use religion for political expression. The second assumption in the article is that religious bodies and religious affairs being part of Chinese social fabric are not subject to any foreign domination. In short, religion must recognize the primacy of loyalty to the state and party so that China may not be dragged down to its past, that is the “Century of Humiliation” or a “Century of Ban.”

The most irritating aspect of religions in the pre-1949 China was the color of foreignness that it had. People called for changing the colonial structure of the Catholic Church. One of the crucial features of the trend was that Chinese Bishops be allowed to preside over diocese affairs. This is discernable from the statistics available of the pre-1949 China Church hierarchy. In 1948, there were 91 foreign Bishops and only 19 Chinese Bishops. Out of the 144 Dioceses, important ones as Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Tianjin and Wauhan were all in foreign hands.²⁹ A protestant clergy man in Shanghai, Yu Gouzhen, proposed that believers of noble aspirations should seek self-standing, self-support and self-propagation and not subject themselves to foreign churches. The idea of the “Three-Self” was first floated in 1851 by Henry Venn, founder of the Church Missionary Society, but was crystallized in 1951 under the banner Three-Self Patriotic Movement.³⁰ It could be summed up as, Christianity was unable to penetrate the cultural horizon of China suitable to China’s historical context.

The new China was hostile to anything reminiscent of Western imperialism, including the Roman Catholic Church. This was further invigorated when in 1951, the Archbishop issued a letter to all the Bishops and priests to refrain from the Three-Self Movement. Any body familiar with the history of China would see this hint as collusion with colonialism and imperialism, in exploiting the Chinese. The People’s Republic of China deprived religion of its official status; as China returned to the more agnostic position of Confucius. Nevertheless, the people were permitted to practice religion, unlike the case of Soviet Union. Foreign missionaries were expelled and their ties to Roman Catholic Church were severed. The post-1949 make up of Chinese religious policy can be divided into three categories. It must not despise and spoil Chinese culture that is “Confucianist communitarian culture”³¹ with the family as the basic unit and certain cohesiveness in society plus a willingness to work hard. It must not interrupt the social order. Its affairs must be handled by Chinese nationals, and must not act as an appendage and representative of an external body. This gave rise to a serious disagreement with the Vatican which has “reserved the right of appointment of Bishops solely to the Pope.”³²

A serious dispute between the Vatican and China is relations between Taiwan and the Vatican and the rendering of “diplomatic privileges to the delegates” of Taiwan. Implicit in the relationship between the two is the notion of two Chinas. The Vatican has given the status of ambassador to diplomats from Taiwan.³³ The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association in its seminar held in April 1983 passed a resolution which affirms the determination of the Church to run its affairs independently stating “Chinese Church is rooted in Chinese soil and people, therefore, its existence and development should confirm to China’s actual conditions.”³⁴ The Tibet issue is case in point. Dalai Lama is not feared for his religious doctrines but because of the policy of outlook whereby it wishes to exact a theocratic state – with Dalai Lama at its center – which is alien to Chinese history. Thus the state directs the reincarnation of living Buddha, a tradition in China which goes back to the Ming Dynasty.

We now come to the era of Cultural Revolution and its “Leftist Excesses”, its four-fold policies of shrugging of old ideas, culture, customs, and habits. Churches were banned. The Muslims were unable to

go for the holy pilgrimage to Mecca from 1964 to 1978; the year when about 10000 Chinese Muslims performed the pilgrimage.³⁵ The Revolution was equally directed at Confucian teachings despite its nationalistic identification with China's past. Perhaps the greatest mistake of Cultural Revolution was that it was a "revolution against Chinese culture."³⁶

The Post-Mao Era

Cultural Revolution was not meant at religion but shook the entire mental fabric of China till the arrival of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 when the "excesses of left" were put to an end.³⁷ Deng's era was a break from the era of Mao in many spheres. Deng allowed religious practices. Thus followers of all the religions resumed their constitutionally valid practices. Lee Kuan Yew, the architect of modern Singapore and Confucius follower, while reflecting on the developments initiated by Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese concept of "peaceful rise" christened it "Peaceful Renaissance or Evolution."³⁸ Evidently, he was referring to the surge in social, cultural and religious activities. In the wake of these events, the China Christian Council joined the World Council of Churches in 1919. The Chinese Catholic Church has sent representatives to attend some international religious conferences successively, such as the Fifth World Conference on Religion and Peace and the World Catholic Youth Day. In recent years, Chinese churches have sent quite a number of students to study abroad and invited foreign lecturers and scholars to teach in China's theological seminaries. Friendly international exchanges are also increasing in the areas of China's Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. Since 1978, there have been many attempts to introduce reforms in the minority nationality areas. Out of full consideration for the dietary habits and funeral rites of those ethnic-minority people who believe in Islam, the Chinese government has enacted regulations on the production of halal food and opened Muslims-only cemeteries. Many of the concepts associated with the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Autonomy for National Minorities" were adopted by 6th National People's Congress. The legislation makes provision for autonomous areas to develop their economy independently, albeit within the framework of state policy. At the height of the reform era in Xinjiang, minorities accounted for more than 65 per cent of delegates to the People's Congress, of which Uygurs make up 42 per cent. Minorities in Xinjiang headed 29, or 65 per cent of the standing committees. As the number of Muslim cadres would increase it is reasonable to assume that greater confidence will emerge among them. For China's Turkic Muslims, the introduction of Arabic script in 1982 redressed the grievance of cultural and religious import. The same year, a border agreement was signed with Pakistan and hundreds of traders now travel back and forth every year.³⁹

The Chinese government has consistently adhered to a peaceful foreign policy of independence and taking initiative in its own hands, and is willing to improve relations with the Vatican.⁴⁰ However, such improvement requires two basic conditions: first, the Vatican must end its so-called diplomatic relations with Taiwan and recognize that the government of the People's Republic of China is the only legal government in China and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory; second, the Vatican must not interfere in China's internal affairs on the pretext of religious affairs. In the first place, the relationship between China and the Vatican is one between two countries. Therefore, only when relations between the two countries improve can religious issues be discussed. Whether the relations between China and the Vatican change or not, the Chinese government will, as always, support Chinese Catholicism which holds aloft the banner of patriotism, sticks to the principle of independence and self-management, and stands for selection and ordination of Bishops by itself.⁴¹

It is reported that in the year 2004, China initiated establishing Confucius institutes not only in China but throughout the world. At the end of 2007, more than 210 Confucius institutes were established around the world. Of late, the CPC included the term religion in its manifesto in 2007.⁴² It is reported that Bible was the most widely published and best selling book in China in 2007. The government in China is not anti-religion but is concerned about the political dimension of religion. Considerable attention is paid to creating religious harmony in society. The roots of the concept of achieving harmony are in Confucius teachings. Ye Xiaowen, China's top official on religious affairs Xinhua, the official Chinese news agency, that "religion is one of the important forces from which China draws strength." He singled out Buddhism for its "unique role in promoting a harmonious society."⁴³ Officials in recent times have celebrated religious festivals a sign of praise for the role of religion in promoting social stability.

Conclusion

China's religious policy has its roots in its history. In order to understand the religious policy of today's China, one needs to look into Chinese history which is paramount in shaping the religious outlook. China today is not against religious penetration in the land but is against developments which have the power to "embarrass the government" at a certain point in history and consequently shape a reflexive response to it, either from the governmental machinery (as in the case of Century of Ban, Opium Wars, Taiping Rebellion and its consequences) or society (as Boxer Rebellion and May Fourth Movement). After the "Century of Humiliation," we now see the consolidation of a new state established in the backdrop of this dark period after a prolong struggle which ultimately led to the victory of the Communist Party of China led by Chairman Mao Zedong. The post-1949 Chinese history could be divided into Mao's era and post-Mao era. Though religion and Communism are two diametrically opposing forces, still in the post-1949 China, we do not see the ultimate banishing of religion as happened in Russia. China streamlined it into the new order of the state more in the light of the Century of Humiliation than communism. Though the way Communism was understood and implemented saw the persecution of religion but it was not biased towards one religion. Perhaps the greatest criticism that emerged regarding the implementation of the perceived communism was its target of Confucius teachings during the Cultural Revolution. The post-Mao era, which is referred to as opening up to the world, has ushered in an era which has not only bolstered economic gains but has also softened the attitude of the state towards political, social and cultural, and religious issues.

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