



Oligopoly Dynamics: Official Religions in China

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In the economic approach to the study of religious change, the nature of religious economies is commonly dichotomized into monopoly and free market. According to Stark and Finke (2000), a religious monopoly, enforced by state regulation, breeds a lazy clergy and consequently a less religiously mobilized population. Conversely, in a deregulated market, that is, a free market, religious pluralism tends to prevail over monopoly. 'To the degree that religious economies are unregulated and competitive, overall levels of religious participation will be high' (Stark and Finke 2000: 199).

This simplistic conceptualization has two problems. First, critics (Bruce 2000; Beaman 2003) have pointed out that there is no completely unregulated market, and that state regulations can be either *against* religion or *for* religion. In the U.S., for example, the First Amendment establishes basic rules; and zoning, tax, and other regulations are also pertinent to religious organizations. In this sense, there is no 'unregulated' religious economy. Nonetheless, it is important to note that U.S. regulations are not intended to restrict any particular faith, but to ensure equal competition

and free religious exercise, although the reality may fall short of the ideal (Beaman 2003; Beyer 2003; Gill 2003). *Equal treatment to all religions, instead of freedom from regulation, should be considered the most important measure of religious freedom.*

Second, Stark and Finke link together the terms 'unregulated and competitive' in categorizing certain religious economies, but how about religious economies that are both regulated *and* competitive? Conceptually, this is probably the case for oligopoly economies, in which only a select few religions are permitted and the rest are suppressed. Indeed, most countries fall into this category nowadays. Oligopoly is certainly not monopoly, nor can it be equated to pluralism or to a *laissez-faire* free market. Given their prevalence in today's world, the dynamics of oligopoly economies of religion deserve much more careful examination. Under oligopoly regulation, how do the officially sanctioned religions operate? Is there inter-religious competition? What kind of religious groups grow or decline?

Elsewhere (Yang 2006) I have articulated a triple market model to account for the religious

economy of China and similar economies under heavy regulation. I argue that 'heavy regulation leads not to religious reduction, but to complication of the religious market, resulting in a tripartite market with different dynamics' (Yang 2006: 97): a red market (officially permitted religions), a black market (officially banned religions), and a gray market (religions with an ambiguous legal/illegal status). A red market comprises all legal or officially permitted religious organizations, believers, and religious activities. It is 'red' because the officially sanctioned religions are stained with the official Communist ideology, as reflected in the rhetoric of clergy, the theological discourse, and the practices of these religious groups. The red market is a typical case of oligopoly, in which only a few religions are permitted and heavily regulated.

In this chapter I will elaborate on the red market religions in China. I will first describe the general status of the officially permitted religions and on the government's control apparatus, and then present two cases – a Buddhist temple and a Protestant church.¹ These descriptions will reveal the dynamics of state favoritism, religious competition, and patterns of religious survivals and revivals. Simply put, state favoritism might have contributed to the revival of Buddhism, but state discrimination has not stopped the rapid growth of Christianity. Indeed, state repression might be a factor contributing to the popularity of Christianity in the Chinese populace.

THE RELIGIOUS OLIGOPOLY OF CHINA

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, atheist ideology compelled the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to impose control over religion. Foreign missionaries were expelled, cultic or heterodox sects were banned, and major religions that were difficult to eliminate were co-opted into 'patriotic' associations. Through tremendous government maneuvers, the China Protestant Three-Self² Patriotic Movement Committee was established in 1954; the China

Buddhist Association in 1955; the China Islamic Association in 1957; the China Daoist Association in 1957; and the China Catholic Laity Patriotic Committee in 1957, which later became the China Catholic Patriotic Committee. Soon after that, existing denominational and sectarian systems were banned. Amalgamation was imposed upon each of the five religions.

Limited Tolerance and Broad Restriction

Following 13 years of banning all religion from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, the CCP reverted to its previous policy of limited tolerance toward religion. In 1982, the CCP issued the edict 'The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on Religious Affairs during the Socialist Period of Our Country', widely known as 'Document No. 19', which has served as the basis for religious policy until today (Yang 2004). This fundamental document grants legal existence to Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism under the government-sanctioned 'patriotic' associations, but not to any group outside the five religious associations, nor to other religions. Denominationalism within a religion is prohibited. Document 19 proscribes proselytizing outside approved religious premises, and insists that atheist propaganda must be disseminated unremittingly. In line with this Document, the PRC Constitution of 1982 reaffirms freedom of religious belief, but clearly stipulates that only certain religious activities are protected. Since 1982, the CCP and the government have distributed circulars, enacted ordinances, and issued administrative orders (Potter 2003) that aim to tighten control over religion.

The control apparatus of religion involves several government ministries and bureaus, including the Ministry of Public Security (police), the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the Religious Affairs Bureau (also known as State Administration of Religious Affairs), and the United Front Department (UFD) of the CCP Central Committee. The UFD has a division on religious affairs, which is supposed to frame

religious policies and to rally religious leaders around the CCP. The day-to-day administration of religious affairs is in the hands of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). The RAB operates downwards from the central through provincial and prefecture levels down to county governments, sometimes combined with the Commission of Ethnic Affairs at the provincial and county levels. At provincial and lower levels, the RAB chief is often an associate director of the CCP's United Front Department.

RAB oversees and manages all day-to-day religion-related affairs, including approving the opening of temples, churches, and mosques, approving special religious gatherings and activities, and approving the appointment of leaders in the religious associations. In practice, the RAB usually rules through the religious associations. The associations of the five official religions are nongovernmental organizations in name but they function as an extension and delegation of RAB. For example, in principle, the provincial-level Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee (TSPM) holds the power to ordain ministers, but no one can be ordained without prior approval from the provincial RAB. The prefecture- or county-level TSPM appoints the senior pastor of local churches, but the appointment must be first approved by the same level RAB. More importantly, the national, provincial, prefecture, and county level TSPMs are separate organizations independent from each other. That is, the local TSPMs are not under the leadership of the provincial or national TSPMs. TSPMs report to the RAB on the same level and the one immediately above. When a church plans to organize meetings or activities involving people beyond the local administrative region, it has to apply to the higher-level RAB. That is, if the activity involves people from another county, it has to be approved by the prefecture RAB; if from another prefecture, then from the provincial RAB; if from another province, then from the state RAB. This applies to all five religions.

The RAB plays the central role in dealing with religious believers and organizations, and it cooperates with other government agencies

in reinforcing religious regulations. Religious associations must also register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, but the registration must be stamped first by the RAB. The Ministry of Public Security deals with all illegal religious activities, including any illegal activities of the five official religions and all activities of all other religions. Like political activists and dissident groups, some religious groups and active leaders are also watched by the Ministry of State Security (MSS). Since the early 1990s, the Chinese authorities have made it an integral part of religious policy to guard against infiltration by foreign religious organizations and foreign political entities that are suspected of using religion as a means of political infiltration.

It is clear that the red market is not an open market, nor a free market. Only five religions are permitted. Many restrictions are imposed on government-sanctioned churches, temples, and mosques. They include 'monitoring by the state, required political study for pastors [and other religious ecclesiastics], certain restrictions on acceptable topics for preaching and intervention in church personnel matters' (Bays 2003: 492). Some restrictions are explicit in law, others are implicit in CCP circulars, and many are arbitrarily decided by local officials. Explicitly, Article 36 of the Constitution of the PRC (in effect since 1982) maintains: 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. A key word here is 'normal'. 'Normal' religious activities are defined by the officials in charge. What is normal in other countries may not be normal in the eyes of the Chinese authorities. For example, the religious education of children is common in most countries. In China, however, providing religious education to children under the age of 18 is mostly prohibited. In principle, Christian churches cannot lawfully hold Sunday school for children. Similarly, churches are not allowed to baptize young people under the age of 18.

Of course, exceptions can be made when politically necessary, such as when a child was

recognized as the reincarnation of the Tibetan Buddhist Panchen Lama. Religious initiation and education have been permitted for several boy lamas. In 2001, Christians filed a law suit against the local RAB in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, contending for equal rights to comparable religious practice for their children (Pomfret 2002), but the ban is still in effect. In the red market of religion, Chinese authorities do not treat all officially permitted religions equally.

The Size of the Red Market of Religion

It is difficult to know how many believers there are in the five permitted religions because the Chinese authorities usually guard such numbers as state secrets similar to military secrets. Nonetheless, responding to pressures and inquiries from foreign governments and Western media organizations – and reacting to criticisms from international human rights groups and religious organizations – the Chinese government has provided some religious statistics. The Chinese government's *White Paper: Freedom of Religious Belief in China* (1997) states:

According to incomplete statistics, there are over 100 million followers of various religious faiths, more than 85,000 sites for religious activities, some 300,000 clergy and over 3,000 religious organizations throughout China. In addition, there are 74 religious schools and colleges run by religious organizations for training clerical personnel.

–Buddhism has a history of 2,000 years in China. Currently China has 13,000-some Buddhist temples and about 200,000 Buddhist monks and nuns. Among them are 120,000 lamas and nuns, more than 1,700 Living Buddhas, and 3,000-some temples of Tibetan Buddhism and nearly 10,000 Bhiksu and senior monks and more than 1,600 temples of Pali Buddhism.

–Taoism, native to China, has a history of more than 1,700 years. China now has over 1,500 Taoist temples and more than 25,000 Taoist priests and nuns.

–Islam was introduced into China in the seventh century. Nowadays in China there are ten national minorities, including the Hui and Uygur, with a total population of 18 million, whose faith is Islam. Their 30,000-odd mosques are served by 40,000 Imams and Akhunds.

–Catholicism was introduced into China intermittently in the seventh century, but it had not spread widely until

after the Opium War in 1840. At present, China has four million Catholics, 4,000 clergy and more than 4,600 churches and meeting houses.

–Protestantism was first brought to China in the early 19th century and spread widely after the Opium War. There are about 10 million Protestants, more than 18,000 clergy, more than 12,000 churches and 25,000-some meeting places throughout China.

These numbers are believed to be based on a religious census conducted jointly by the State RAB and the Central UFD in 1995, the details of which have not been released to the public. Since then, the Chinese government has been reluctant to update the statistics, although some government officials and religious leaders acknowledge the rapid increase of most religions.

Actually, these numbers are guesstimates at best, fabrications at worst, serious undercounts for certain. Because of the Communist desire for reducing religion, local government officials tend to under-report the numbers of religious believers. As a matter of fact, Ye Xiaowen, the head of the State RAB since 1995, acknowledged this ubiquitous problem in a speech at the CCP Central School in Beijing. According to him, a major problem of gathering accurate statistics is that, as a rule of the political game, 'the numbers come from the cadres; and the cadres come from the numbers'. More precisely, local officials who report negative or lower growth of religion are more likely to get promoted (Ye [1997] 2000: 9).

Meanwhile, it is difficult to count religious believers. Buddhism and Daoism do not have a clear membership system. A Buddhist or Daoist believer does not *belong* to a particular temple, may patronize several temples, or may just practice at home. Although Protestant and Catholic churches have had clear definitions of membership, congregational leaders are often discouraged from reporting the real numbers because of the government's hostile policies toward Christianity. Many churches do not even keep baptismal records, so that baptized Christians are not easily identifiable by the authorities.

Nonetheless, when we examine official statistics over the past several decades (see Table 30.1), we can still see some broad trends.

Table 30.1 *Official statistics of five religions in China*

	Catholic Believers (million)	Protestant Believers (million)	Islamic Population (million) ⁴	Buddhist Believers (million)	Daoist Believers (million)
Early					
1950s ^{a, 2}	2.7	0.7	8.0		
1956 ^b	3.0	0.8	10.0	Several tens of millions ⁴	10.0 ³
1982 ^a	3.0	3.0	10.0		
1991 ^c	3.5	4.5	17.0		
1995 ^d	4.0	10.0	18.0		
	Clergy ⁵	Clergy	Clergy	Monks/Nuns	Monks/Nuns
1982 ^a	3,400	5,900	20,000	27,000	2,600
1995 ^d	4,300	18,000	40,000	200,000	25,700
	Churches and meeting points ⁶	Churches and meeting points	Mosques	Temples	Temples
1995 ^d	4,377	37,000	36,200	13,000	1,557

Sources: a. Document No. 19; b. Luo (2001)¹; c. White Paper on the Status of Human Rights in China; d. Li (1999)¹.

Notes:

1. Li (1999) and Luo (2001) are officials of the CCP United Front Department.
2. The numbers of the early 1950s are consistent with nongovernmental and non-Chinese publications.
3. No number of Buddhist and Daoist believers is given in most of the years because there is no membership system. The only estimates in 1956 were uttered by the late Chairman Mao Zedong in a published conversation.
4. The number of Muslims is the total population of 10 ethnic minorities that consider Islam as their ethnic religion, although many do not practice or believe.
5. The professional ecclesiastics of different religions are not totally comparable because Buddhist and Daoist monks and nuns may not interact with lay believers, whereas Catholic priests, Protestant pastors, and Islamic imams are ministering to the laity.
6. The religious venues of different religions also have very different functions: Churches and mosques are buildings for regular weekly lay gathering, whereas many temples are monasteries in the mountains that receive occasional pilgrims, and some of them are secluded for hermits with few or no outside visitors. The so-called Protestant and Catholic meeting points are mostly congregations with simple, shabby buildings, not necessarily small congregations.

The numbers of believers listed for 1956 and 1982 deserve particular attention. The 1956 figures are the last official count before the enforced disbanding of denominations, followed by 13 years of efforts to eradicate all religion (1966–1979). The official count in 1982 shows that the numbers of Catholics and Muslims remained the same, while the number of Protestant Christians increased 3.75 times from 800,000 to 3,000,000.

It is widely known that many religious people have stayed away from the red market but engaged in the black and gray markets (Yang 2006). The China Buddhist Association leaders sometimes claim more than 100 million Buddhists. Catholics inside and outside China often estimate the number of Chinese Catholics at 10 to 12 millions. Estimates of Protestants vary widely, from 50 million to over 100 million. The population of 10 ethnic minority groups

that subscribe to Islam is about 22 million today, although many of them may not practice the religion.

Specific cases clearly reveal the dynamics of the red market religions. In the next two sections I will describe a Buddhist temple and a Christian church, both of which are government approved religious venues. The Christian church faces many more obstacles to carrying out its normal religious activities, whereas the Buddhist temple has managed to expand rapidly under government support.

A THRIVING BUDDHIST TEMPLE

Bailin is a Buddhist temple located in Zhaoxian, Hebei, about 300 kilometers (186 miles) south of Beijing. Before 1988, all the temple buildings

except a pagoda (*stupa*) were destroyed. Since 1988, a number of buildings have been constructed one after another, culminating with the grandeur of the Ten-Thousand Buddha Hall completed in 2003. Within 15 years, a site of ruins was transformed into a sublime Buddhist center with a 14-acre (80 mu) compound of magnificent buildings in the traditional Buddhist style of architecture. The number of residential monks has reached around 150, and their outlook and ritual performance have impressed many domestic and international Buddhist believers.

Moreover, Bailin has functioned as the center of Buddhist revivals in the whole Province of Hebei and beyond. By the end of 1987, the whole province had only two Buddhist temples open for religious services; their shabby halls and tatty living quarters were in desperate need of renovation, but the small income from devotees and tourism was not enough even to support the daily life of the few ailing monks who tended the temples. In the whole province, no more than 4,000 lay Buddhist believers had taken *guiyi*, a formal rite of conversion comparable to baptism for Christians. From that point on, however, Buddhist growth in Hebei has been nothing but extraordinary. For example, within the space of two days in May 1988, 461 people in the county of Renxian in Southern Hebei took the *guiyi* rite under the Bailin Abbot, the Venerable Jing Hui (*Chan Magazine*³ 1990, 4). On 8 January 1995, over a thousand people took the rite at the Bailin Temple (*Chan Magazine* 1995, 2). More and more temples were reopened, restored, or rebuilt throughout Hebei Province. By the end of 2003, there were over 580 Buddhist monks and nuns stationed at over 280 Buddhist temples open for religious services. Hebei suddenly became one of the provinces with a very active Buddhist Sangha (monks and nuns) and lay believers, attracting pilgrims from beyond Hebei and China.

How did the Bailin Temple achieve such expansion within a mere 15 years? How could it lead revivals throughout the whole province? In the sociological literature on religious growth and decline, the dominant supply-side

model argues that in an unregulated religious market, strict and competitive groups tend to grow (see Finke and Stark 1992; Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Iannaccone 1994; Finke 1997; Stark and Finke 2000). However, the thriving Bailin Temple is not strict, for it has offered Summer Camps free of charge to participants. Nor is its doctrine in high tension with the surrounding culture. To the contrary, Jing Hui has proclaimed a brand of Buddhism that clearly accommodates the ruling CCP and its Communist ideology. He emphasizes living harmoniously with other people, rather than challenging others.

To explain the success of the Bailin Buddhist Temple in today's China, it is necessary to include – but go beyond – institutional factors as well as individuals' tactics. The major factors in its success include the able leadership of the well-connected and well-positioned Venerable Jing Hui, his articulation and promotion of a marketable brand of Buddhism – the Life Chan – with innovative slogans and practices, the financial support of wealthy overseas and domestic donors, and most importantly, the political support of government officials.

The Leadership of the Sangha

Traditional Chinese Buddhism has been a Sangha-centered religion. Following the Mahāyāna tradition, the Sangha is composed of celibate monks and nuns living at the temple-monastery to carry out their own practices, to tend the statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and to perform rituals for lay worshippers. Some of the lay believers may take the conversion rite of *guiyi*, but they do not belong to, or formally affiliate with, a temple. Lay believers who are attracted by the Sangha, especially by the abbot, may patronize the temple by making donations to the monks or to funds for the construction of temple buildings. Most lay believers go to a temple to make personal requests, and their donations tend to be small and spontaneous. Therefore, a temple's existence and expansion depend less on the number of regular attenders at the temple and more on a few wealthy and

generous donors. A charismatic abbot is thus critical for a temple's survival and growth.

The Venerable Master Jing Hui is the indispensable magnet in the success story of the Bailin Temple. He is an entrepreneurial monk who has mobilized multiple resources for his endeavors to revitalize Buddhism. Born in 1933 in Hubei Province in South-Central China, he was abandoned by his parents in dire poverty when he was only 18 months old. Reared at a Buddhist nunnery, he became a novice monk at age 15. A few years later, he took refuge as a disciple of the Venerable Master Xu Yun, the most revered Buddhist monk in modern China. In 1956, the Chinese Buddhist Academy was established. Jing Hui entered the first class, and upon graduation he was admitted to its graduate program. His talents and diligence were recognized by his classmates and teachers. However, sharing the fate of most clergymen in the 1950s and 1960s, in due time Jing Hui was persecuted and sent to a camp for reeducation through labor. During the brutal Cultural Revolution period, Jing Hui was even forced to return to a secular life in his hometown in Hubei Province. Not until 1979, when the CCP's religious policy reverted from eradication of religion to limited toleration, was he able to return to the religious life.

Before coming to Hebei Province, Jing Hui worked as the chief editor of the *Fa Yin* (Voice of Dharma), the official magazine of the Buddhist Association of China. Working at the magazine and being involved in the operation of the Buddhist Association of China for nearly a decade, Jing Hui gained remarkable experience and unusual access to various resources.

First of all, this mannerly monk was able to develop personal relationships with various important people, including very senior monks throughout the country, foreign Buddhist leaders, overseas lay Buddhist patrons, and government officials in charge of religious affairs. The political, religious, and financial support of these people was essential for the revitalization of the Bailin Temple.

Secondly, the nature of his work editing the magazine made it both necessary and possible for Jing Hui to become a scholar, knowledgeable about the Buddhist theories, ideas, and practices

of various sects and senior monks, as well as about modern developments of Buddhism in China and other societies. Working in this important position helped Jing Hui develop a thorough understanding of political dynamics and policy subtleties. The chief editor of the official magazine is the ultimate gatekeeper of the information flow within the Chinese Buddhist community. He was responsible for publishing articles that were both appealing to Buddhist believers and acceptable to the CCP authorities.

In October 1987, he accompanied a Japanese Buddhist delegation of over 100 people to visit the lonely *stupa* in Zhaoxian. The pilgrims expressed the wish to restore the Bailin Temple. They had even raised some funds in Japan for the restoration work. Soon after, coincidentally, representatives of the Hebei Province's CCP's United Front Department (UFD) and the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) went to Beijing to invite Jing Hui to come to establish the Hebei Buddhist Association. Zhao Puchu, the President of the Buddhist Association of China, commissioned Jing Hui to go and establish the Hebei Buddhist Association and revitalize the Bailin Temple and the Linji Temple, another renowned Buddhist temple in Hebei Province. With Zhao's endorsement and evident support from people with some political clout, Jing Hui accepted the challenge and came to Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei Province, in January 1988. Soon after, the Hebei Buddhist Association was organized, and Jing Hui became its President.

Before going to Hebei, Jing Hui had attracted some highly educated young people as followers or disciples through the *Fa Yin* magazine. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, when the student-led pro-democracy movement was crushed by tanks, many college-educated young people began to turn to religion to search for personal salvation and national direction. Whereas some urban young people have converted to Christianity (Yang 2005), a number of college graduates have become Buddhist monks and nuns. Jing Hui has attracted several such highly educated young people who have become his disciples. Overall, it is said that about a third of the Bailin Sangha have had a college education.

A Marketable Brand of Buddhism

In late dynastic China, Buddhism became a religion very much detached from the world. The teachings focused on sufferings in the world and on how to become free from these sufferings through chanting, rituals, and secluded meditation. Most of the temples were monasteries deep in the mountains. Along with its increasing withdrawal from the world, Buddhism declined in Ming and Qing Dynasties. However, throughout its long history, some Buddhists have emphasized helping others to achieve enlightenment and to engage with the world. The Chan sect especially underscores gaining enlightenment in daily life.

In modern times, some Buddhist laymen and monks hoped to reform traditional Buddhism and make it more relevant in social life. The most influential Buddhist reformer in the first half of the twentieth century was the Venerable Master Tai Xu (1890–1947). He advocated 'Buddhism in the World' (*renjian fojiao*). He also instigated such reforms as establishing Buddhist academies on the model of Christian seminaries and operating charity projects on the model of Christian missionary works. One of the most notable contemporary leaders of reformed Buddhism has been the Venerable Master Hsing Yun (1927–), who developed the Foguangshan sect and led it in establishing many temples in Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and North America. He refers to his brand of Buddhism as 'Buddhism of Life' or 'Humanist Buddhism' (*rensheng fojiao* or *renben fojiao*). In March–April 1989, Hsing Yun made his first visit to mainland China, together with a 70-person delegation. Jing Hui, representing the Buddhist Association of China, was among the few who accompanied Hsing Yun and his delegation on their four-week pilgrimage journey throughout China.

After coming to Bailin Temple, Jing Hui developed his own distinct brand of Buddhism – the Life Chan (*sheng huo chan*). In the 'Life Chan Pronouncement', published in the *Chan* magazine, he states that learning Buddhism, practicing cultivation, and living life should be combined into an organic unity. 'It is

Buddhism with Chinese cultural characteristics' (*Chan Magazine* 1993, 1). He further articulated:

The ultimate goal of Life Chan is 'a life of enlightenment, a life of dedication' (*jue wu ren sheng, feng xian ren sheng*) 'A life of enlightenment' is continuous improvement of the quality of oneself ... and 'a life of dedication' is continuous effort to harmonize self-other relations. (*Chan Magazine* 2002: 6)

To promote his brand of Buddhism, the Life Chan, Bailin Temple has been holding the annual Life Chan Summer Camp since 1993. The week-long camp includes traditional Buddhist practices such as morning and evening chanting, sitting-still meditation, and walking meditation. It also has innovative activities appealing to intellectuals, such as lectures and discussion sessions with scholars and the more scholastic monks. In addition, it incorporates the modernized ritual of passing on the candlelight at an evening service, which has been popularized by Hsing Yun and his Foguangshan sect in Taiwan. The Life Chan Summer Camp has been a great success, with up to 500 participants in recent years, the maximum the temple could accommodate. It has also become known as the signature activity of the Bailin Temple, highly praised by the participants, top leaders of the Buddhist Association of China, overseas and domestic Buddhist clergy, and university scholars of Buddhist studies.

The summer camp has been free of charge for participants, and the funding has come from donations by Hong Kong Buddhist business people. In fact, the summer camp has been the most effective means for Bailin Temple to attract financial support for its physical expansion. Between 1993 and 2003, the Bailin Temple doubled in size by acquiring adjacent land.

Political Support by the Authorities

Both the Sangha leadership and having a marketable brand of Buddhist ideas and practices have been important for Bailin Temple's revitalization. But the most critical factor for its success has been the political support of government officials.

First of all, without the permission of the authorities, there would have been no reconstruction of the Bailin Temple. After all, the old Bailin Temple had been largely destroyed before the Communists took power, thus it fell outside the range of 'implementing the religious policy' after 1979. The post-1979 religious policy has been very much restricted to restoring temples, churches, and mosques to the level immediately before the Cultural Revolution or that of the late 1950s at best. The Bailin Temple was not on the 1983 list of 'major temples' designated for restoration as religious venues, which includes only two Buddhist temples in Hebei – Linji in Zhengding and Puning in Chengde. Nonetheless, the Bailin Temple was granted permission for restoration – indeed, not only permitted, but also actively encouraged and supported by the authorities at all levels.

Although there were very few Buddhist believers in Hebei in the 1980s, the Hebei government provided firm and persistent support for Jing Hui in his efforts to develop Buddhism in Hebei. The Hebei RAB actively and insistently recruited Jing Hui, covered the expenses of his initial activities in Hebei, and directed the local county government to 'return' the site of the Bailin Temple to the newly established Hebei Buddhist Association. Since then, the Hebei RAB has sent representatives to every major activity of the Bailin Temple, including every ceremony of ground-breaking and dedication of the buildings, every Life Chan Summer Camp, and other major gatherings. Furthermore, provincial support has gone up in rank, including the most powerful Provincial CCP Secretary.

Similarly important for the success of Bailin Temple is the support of the local government of Zhaoxian County. The county government's support has been mostly motivated by the perceived economic benefits, including attracting overseas Buddhist businessmen to invest in the county. Beginning in 2001, a 33,000 square-meter (eight acre) commercial plaza has been developed across from the Bailin Temple. It was designated as one of the major economic development projects of Shijiazhuang Prefecture and Zhaoxian County. It boasts of

being the country's largest wholesale center for artefacts used in Buddhism, such as statues, incenses, construction materials, musical instruments, clothes, etc. How many economic benefits for the county have been generated by the temple-related projects remains to be studied.

The most important support for the Bailin Temple, however, comes from officials of the central government. Without the open encouragement of the highest authorities, the Bailin Temple would have been unable to hold the large-scale, high-profile, cross-provincial activity of the Life Chan Summer Camp. Without tacit backing by the highest authorities, Bailin Temple would have been unable to sustain criticisms from inside the Buddhist community and from Communist ideologues. Abbot Jing Hui acknowledges:

Consistent support by the government is the fundamental assurance and guarantee for the expansion of our activities. This is because the Life Chan Summer Camp is a very sensitive activity. Many college students have participated in it. Some people raised criticisms, saying that Buddhism was competing with the Communist Party for the next generation. This view was brought to the Central United Front Department and the State Religious Affairs Bureau. In response, they [the officials] did some explanations... The State Religious Affairs Bureau, the Hebei Religious Affairs Bureau, and the United Front Department did a lot of work. They have indeed given us powerful support.

The support of the central government also manifests itself in publishing positive news reports in the *China Religions* magazine, the official publication of the State Religious Affairs Bureau, and other state media. They have also arranged to have China Central Television make a special news report about the Bailin Temple. But the most effective support is through the visits of high-ranking officials. On 15 April 1999, the Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and Politburo member, Li Ruihuan, visited Bailin Temple. On 1 April 2000, Vice Premier Qian Qishen came. On 5 November 2001, President Jiang Zemin, accompanied by top military and party officials, made a visit. Jing Hui told us that there were some difficulties early on:

Things gradually began to turn better after the dedication of the Hall of the Universal Illuminating Light in 1992.

The really important moment was after completing the Guanyin Hall in 1995, when the Provincial Party Secretary made a visit. From then on it has really turned better... On 5 November 2001, President Jiang Zemin came to visit us. The situation turned unprecedentedly better. His visit itself was a very great support to us. It was not only helpful for us here, but also helpful for the whole Buddhist community.

Why does the central government support the Bailin Temple? There might be some interest in the positive moral functions of Buddhism during the transition toward a market economy. However, the more important reasons to support the Bailin Temple appear to be political. One concerns the outside world: Bailin Temple is used as a showcase of China's freedom of religion. The other concerns managing religious affairs: Bailin Temple is used as a model of religious accommodation to the socialist society under CCP rule.

First, China has been constantly criticized by Western countries for its bad human rights record, including its restriction of religious freedom. To answer Western criticisms, the Chinese government published the *White Paper about Freedom of Religious Beliefs* in 1997 and several other white papers about the human rights situation in China. It has also invited foreign delegations of religious leaders to visit religious sites in China. The Bailin Temple in the 1990s became an excellent showcase for the purpose of international public relations. Not only do Japanese pilgrims continue to make frequent visits to the Bailin Temple, but European and American delegations have now also been brought there. During a recent visit, the Politburo member Li Changchun made this remark: 'We should more often arrange for foreigners to come here to see, to let them know, the real status of religion in China.'

Second, since 1979, restrictions on religious organizations have increased (Potter 2003; Kindopp and Hamrin 2004), but restrictive regulations and severe suppression have not been effective in curtailing religious revivals. Adopting an alternative strategy since the mid-1990s, the authorities have tried hard to co-opt religious organizations – 'actively guide the religions to accommodate the socialist society.' The authorities have encouraged religious leaders to develop new theologies suitable for the socialist system under CCP rule.

Given this situation, it was indeed delightful for the CCP leaders to find that Jing Hui's Life Chan appeals to Buddhist believers. They hope that other Buddhist leaders will follow his example, and wish that other religions would model themselves on the Bailin Temple's approach. In practice, on 23 August 2004, a group of 66 Catholic leaders participating in a national seminar led by Bishop Ma Yinglin was taken to the Bailin Temple.

Meanwhile, the Bailin Temple Sangha has deliberately and frequently expressed patriotism. At major gatherings, the first item of the ritual procedure has always been to play the national anthem. The Bailin monks have also learned to repeat 'love the country and love the religion,' with 'love the country' preceding 'love the religion.' In the long speech given at the Third Conference of the Board of Directors of Hebei Buddhist Association on 29 November 2001, Jing Hui made repeated calls for patriotism, insisting that the Life Chan is fully compatible with the CCP's idealism:

It is totally possible to make Buddhism accommodate socialist society. The Buddha told us, the most fundamental principle of spreading the dharma is 'the proper theory for the right moment'. The proper theory for the right moment requires us to combine the Buddhist dharma with the particular social reality and mental reality, to serve the fundamental goal of purifying human hearts, and solemnizing the nation (*Chan Magazine* 2002: 2).

Jing Hui also equates the ideal Communist Society to the 'Pure Land' in Buddhism, saying that it is the best social system that humans have ever devised. Such words are certainly music to the ears of the CCP leaders who are in pressing need for affirmation of Communist society's ideological goals and for popular support of its leadership. In comparison, Christians in China are less generous in giving lip-service to the ruling Chinese Communist Party and its ideology.

A PERSEVERING VILLAGE CHURCH

Until recently, the rapid growth of Christianity in China since the 1980s had occurred mostly

in rural areas (Leung 1999). The Wu Village (Wuzhuang, a pseudonym) is a remote village in the southeast corner of Gansu bordering Shaanxi Province. From Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province, it takes more than five hours by train to reach the city of Tianshui, and one more hour to get to the village by local train or two more hours by bus through the spiraling mountain roads. It takes about 18 hours by train from Tianshui to Beijing.

Christianity was first brought to the Tianshui area by British missionaries of the China Inland Mission at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, the Wuzhuang Christian Church was formed by over 30 converts. By 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, there were more than 200 believers in Wuzhuang.

In 1958, the church buildings were confiscated and occupied by the village government as its office and as the elementary school. In 1962, as the political climate became less tense, about 40 members came together and began Sunday worship services at the then elementary school. The building was used by the school on weekdays and by the church on Sundays. Beginning in Spring 1964, however, all religious activities were banned in the whole of Tianshui Prefecture, as well as in many other parts of the country. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), several Wuzhuang Christian leaders were persecuted and jailed, including Deacon Wu Ende, who was in prison from 1966 to 1973 and who later became an independent evangelist.

In the 1970s, Wuzhuang Christians clandestinely gathered at homes in the night. In Summer 1975, two young men were baptized in the Wei River behind the village, the first baptisms in two decades. Many more people followed in their footsteps in the next few years. After secretly celebrating Christmas in 1978, they began Sunday worship services in the daytime – semi-openly – although still illegally. By 1980, the number of Christians in Wuzhuang had reached 300.

In 1982, Wuzhuang Christians succeeded in getting back one of three church properties, the one that had been used as the Village Committee Office. A new Village Committee Office compound was then constructed across

from the church; four loudspeakers were installed on top of its room. Wuzhuang Christianity began a period of rapid growth so that by 2000 there were at least a thousand Christians in Wuzhuang, who amounted to about a third of the total village population of 3,129.

Claiming the Anti-Imperialist Heritage

In 1982, religious tolerance was formally reinstated in 'Document No. 19.' Wuzhuang Christians took the circular to the local government bureaus and petitioned to get the buildings back. Only after showing this CCP document did the local government officials consent. In the process, the Beidao District TSPM Committee mediated between the government bureaus and Wuzhuang Christians, eventually reaching a compromise – returning one of the three church properties.

In the process of petitioning to reopen the church, besides leveraging with 'Document No. 19,' Wuzhuang Christians had to offer persuasive justifications that pleased the authorities. Above all, they had to acknowledge repeatedly the legitimate authority of the Chinese Communist Party. In their oral and written presentations, church leaders had to praise the greatness of the past and present CCP leadership, the glory of the CCP's history, and the correctness of the current CCP policies. Moreover, they had to recite the officially imposed slogan 'love our country, love our religion' (*ai guo ai jiao*), with 'love our country' preceding 'love our religion,' although many TSPM leaders did not feel comfortable singing such praises to the CCP and the state.

Wuzhuang Christians do not find all patriotic rhetoric difficult to say. Besides submission to the CCP and the state, patriotism in the official discourse also includes anti-imperialism. Wuzhuang Christians have had little difficulty about elaborating on this. In petitioning for the return of their church buildings, the leaders handed to the authorities a copy of the church history as narrated by Elder Wu Shengrong, which includes this

anti-imperialist story: In 1920, after Wuzhuang Christians had built a sanctuary, a British missionary offered a donation and asked the church to give the deed to the China Inland Mission.

At that time, our Elder Wu Buyi realized that it was the imperialists' trick to control our church. We firmly refused it, so that their planned plot failed. That was probably the first case of all the churches [in this area] in which a foreign swindle effort was of no avail.

The description of this incident was well liked by the TSPM and CCP authorities, for it was later included in the official publications, *History of Christianity in Tianshui* and *History of Christianity in Gansu Province*, as an example of Chinese believers' patriotism in their struggles against Western missionaries. As a matter of fact, that incident was the precursor of the Christian Independence Movement (*jidujiao zili yundong*), which spread throughout China in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Wuzhuang Church History continues:

In the year 1927, when the National Revolutionary Movement was at its climax, Brother Tong Liu-ge of Tianshui initiated the independence movement of the Chinese churches from the control of Western missionaries. He called Chinese believers to establish Chinese indigenous churches with four measures: Self-governing, self-supporting, self-evangelizing, and self-standing (*zili*, independence). So our village church became the 'Independent Christian Church of China' and formally cut off all ties with foreign missionaries. The imperialists' control of our church passed into history.

However, in spite of the heritage of Christian independence, Chinese authorities continue to treat Protestant and Catholic Christians with greater suspicion than other religious believers in regard to their political loyalty. Christians are still referred to as believers of a 'foreign religion.' The CCP worries that Chinese Christians may be used by foreign hostile forces that seek to 'peacefully subvert the socialist system.'

In 1991, the CCP circulated *Document No. 6* -- 'A Further Notice to Better Deal with Religious Affairs'. It declares that China faces two kinds of political threats related to religion. First, 'overseas enemy forces have always been using

religion as an important tool for their strategic goal of "peaceful subversion", infiltrating China and causing damage to our country.' Second, 'the separatists are also making use of religion, attacking the leadership of the Party and the socialist system, threatening the unity of the country and harmony among the ethnic groups.' While Tibetan Buddhism and Uyur Islam are the references for the second threat, Protestantism and Catholicism are the focus of the first threat. Anti-infiltration has become a major concern of the authorities in regard to Christianity.

Within this social and political context, and to ensure continuous legal existence, Christian leaders of the government-approved churches must repeatedly reiterate their patriotism and political loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, but they are only willing to do so to a certain extent.

'Give to Caesar What Is Caesar's, Give to God What is God's'

Besides the anti-imperialist heritage, Wuzhuang Christians also stress that they do love the Chinese nation and are good citizens. They would quote what Jesus said, 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' (Matthew 22: 21). An often preached message to the congregation is 'all those who believe in the Lord are obedient to the laws and regulations.' Indeed, the accountant of the Wuzhuang Village Committee confirmed that 'These Jesus believers are all honest, good fellows, and really easy to deal with.' This pattern of civic obedience and social charity among Christians has been reported by several studies published in China (Xu and Li 1991; Jing 1995; Wang 1987).

However, obedience to the government does not mean that Wuzhuang Christians are willing to abandon their faith. Rather, it means that as long as they are given the space to practice their religion, they will be good citizens. While they are willing to 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's' they also insist on 'giving to God what is God's.'

The Chinese authorities unquestionably demand political loyalty above all else, including religious piety toward God. Li Dezhu, the

Deputy Minister of the Central United Front Department of the CCP, once said, 'In regard to religion, when the national and the people's interests are violated, there is but one principle to follow: Stand by the interests of the nation and the people. No ambiguity is permitted on this point. No damage to the state is allowed with whatever excuses' (Li 1996: 13). Such a demand places Christians in the government-approved churches in an impossible situation, forcing them to choose between compromising their faith and going against the authorities.

Fortunately, Christians do not have to deal with this problem everyday. In the reform era, it seems that as long as Christian leaders reiterate patriotic slogans and show respect to the CCP authorities on formal occasions, they do not have to take the slogan 'love the state first' to heart or change anything in their religious beliefs and practices. The current leader, Elder Liu Guizhu, said, 'The authorities often hold meetings to emphasize the importance of "loving our country and loving our religion". But as I see it, these meetings are nothing but formality and superficiality.'

It is interesting to note Elder Liu's name. His given name is Guizhu, which in Chinese literally means 'belongs to the Lord.' It is a name that Chinese Christians can immediately recognize for its Christian identity. However, he is known to the government officials as Liu Guozhu, which in Chinese means 'a pillar of the state' or 'a pillar of the nation,' a commonly recognizable patriotic name. Among Wuzhuang Christians, Elder Liu is known only as Guizhu, his Christian identity. He also referred to himself as Guizhu when we talked with him. It appears to us that to accommodate the authorities' demand for patriotism, Elder Liu chose to use the patriotic name 'a pillar of the state/nation' for the formal registration of the church and for official occasions. This kind of acknowledgement of political loyalty may seem superficial, but that seems to be good enough for government officials.

Keeping State Intrusion at Arm's Length

Government's control over religious organizations has been less effective in the rural areas

than in cities. Urban churches are more easily and closely supervised by government officials. For example, following official guidelines or hints, ministers at the churches in Tianshui City have avoided preaching on certain topics. Pastor Wei of the Beidao Church told us:

There *are* some topics that are not suitable to talk about at the present. The Religious Affairs Bureau has given me hints against topics like the doomsday, the final judgment, and the creation of the world. I should talk about them as little as possible, if at all. But we hold that, if it is in the Bible, we should talk about it. I am against the so-called 'construction of theological thinking'. That stuff belongs to the unbelieving type.

The 'construction of theological thinking' is a theological movement promoted by Bishop Ding Guangxun, the chief leader of the TSPM in the reform era. Bishop Ding has spoken on various occasions and published the *Collection of Ding Guangxun* in 1998. His central idea is to make Christianity compatible with the socialist society under Communist rule, which would be achieved by emphasizing the notion of love above everything else. Underground Christians have rejected this idea as giving up faith in Christ. Some aboveground church leaders have also resisted the movement as blurring distinctions between Christians and non-Christians. Both underground Christians and aboveground critics say that the importance of 'justification by faith' should not be compromised for whatever reasons.

Pastor Wei, who had been imprisoned as a young man for three years in a 'reform-through-labor camp' in Xinjiang, has been Chairman of the Beidao District TSPM Committee since the TSPM was reopened in 1982. While he was determined to resist this particular ideological movement for the 'construction of theological thinking,' his non-cooperation had obviously generated heavy pressure on him. He has had to prepare himself psychologically to step down if the situation became worse.

In comparison, the leaders of the village church in Wuzhuang have felt little such pressure. First, they really have no position to lose. Their leadership status has been attained very much through members' trust nourished over a long time. Even if an official title of Eldership

or Deaconship were removed by an order from above, that would not take away their influence and trust among the members. Second, the TSPM and government officials have made infrequent visits to this remote village. Therefore, the indirect hints or even explicit guidelines of the RAB have made little impact on the content or mode of the pulpit message delivered at the Wuzhuang Church.

Nonetheless, Wuzhuang Christians conform as much as possible to the requirements of the Religious Affairs Bureau and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee. This manifests itself in many routine arrangements of church affairs such as holding regular meetings to study state policies, regulations, and laws and having a 'fixed place' to hold activities, 'fixed persons' in leadership and membership and 'fixed areas' for ministry. The 'three fixes' are to restrict evangelization across administrative borders. Apparently, the Wuzhuang Church has observed this regulation even though they do not like it.

However, Wu Ende, the former deacon who was jailed for six years during the Cultural Revolution, traveled around the Tianshui Prefecture to evangelize in his new status as a layman. In fact, tens of thousands of nameless evangelists have been active in the vast rural areas since the 1970s. Believers call them 'brothers' and 'sisters,' 'uncles' and 'aunts' (Aikman 2003). These nameless evangelists have led the revivals in rural areas, which have multiplied the number of Christians in China in the last few decades. Wu Ende was just one of them. Since he does not hold a position at the church, the authorities could not impose pressure on the church to stop his evangelization.

Another example of the Wuzhuang Church's conformity to official requirements concerned the appointment of an Elder. State regulations require church Elders and Deacons to obtain the approval of the higher level TSPM committee and the RAB. When the Wuzhuang Church was to elect Elders and Deacons in 1996, the Beidao TSPM under the instruction of the Beidao RAB handpicked a Wuzhuang believer, Wu Shenzhao, and appointed him as one of the three Elders. The TSPM and RAB

wanted Wu Shenzhao to keep an eye on the church and report any violation of regulations. He was used as a means of state control. The Wuzhuang Church acquiesced to the appointment. While the rest of the church leaders and lay members have been careful not to antagonize Wu Shenzhao, they have managed to circumvent his power and influence effectively by distancing themselves from him. Most of the church affairs have been decided by the senior Elder, Liu Guizhu. Believers would not go to Wu Shenzhao for anything important to church life.

Facing the Village Communist Chiefs

While the village church has managed to keep state intrusions from above at arm's length, Wuzhuang Christians have to face fellow villagers day by day. In this ancient village that has a majority of Wu families, clan ties are actually not very strong. The power of the village has been in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party cadres. Although Christians comprise one-third of the village population, they have no share in the political power. They have stayed away from village politics in the hope that this would avert interference with their religious practice from other villagers. However, their unbending beliefs set off open antagonism from the village Party chief. While their faith gave them the strength to endure in silence, the Party chief's abuses, the larger political atmosphere for social stability ensured their peaceful existence in the village.

Without a clan temple (*ci tang*) or long-term clan association in the village, the CCP authorities retain the actual political power. With a population of over three thousand, Wuzhuang is considered a large village and entitled to have five official positions. The most powerful is the Secretary of the CCP Village Branch (*cun zhishu*), followed by the Chairman of the Village Committee (*cun weihui zhuren*), the Vice Chairman of the Village Committee, the Director of Agricultural Production (*shezhang*), and the Accountant. The villagers are organized into eight Production Brigades (*shengchan dui*). Although about a third of the villagers are

Christian, no Christian has ever held any of the five administrative positions; and only one of the current eight brigade leaders is a Christian. The Party Secretary position naturally requires CCP membership, and the CCP Constitution has been clear that CCP members must uphold atheism. The Party cadres at the village do not like to share power with Christians. First, they are not compatible in ideology. Second, Christians do not smoke or drink, which would make the CCP cadres feel uncomfortable on social occasions or at the dinner table.

However, Wuzhuang Christians have expressed little desire to occupy any of the official positions. According to church leaders, Christians have been afraid of being corrupted and committing sins against God if they stepped into the quagmire of power. They have also been afraid of being suspected of having political ambition. In the current ideological and political conditions, Christians have to show no interest in politics at all to avoid inviting trouble.

Even though Wuzhuang Christians have tried hard to avoid problems, they have nevertheless stumbled into various troubles. The most difficult ones in the reform era involved the *laoshuji*, the previous Party Secretary of the village. His antagonism toward the church started in the mid-1980s when the authorities decided to endorse and foster the folk practice of worshipping Fuxi – the progenitor of Chinese civilization – in restored temple buildings and during festivals that would attract tourists and contribute towards solidarity among Chinese at home and abroad. The *laoshuji* imposed a temple tax on all villagers in order to help finance Fuxi worship, but Christians refused to comply.

They told him that as believers in God they would not be involved in any idol worship. Uncle Fu explained to us: 'If it were charity for disaster relief, we all would be willing to contribute. But we absolutely will not give any money for idolatry.' Indeed, Wuzhuang Christians have noticeably stayed away from the festivals on Guatai Mountain. Their refusal angered *laoshuji*. He took it as a sign of the lack of submission to his power as the Party Secretary. He also felt a loss of face in front of his fellow

Temple Management Council members. In the following years, instead of collecting a separate temple tax from each household, *laoshuji* ordered it to be lumped together with other taxes and fees. Because there were so many items of taxes and fees without clear explanations, villagers commonly could not tell which item was for what purpose. Christians suspected that the lump sum taxes might include the temple tax, but they never could confirm it, thus they did not confront *laoshuji* regarding it. The only thing they could do was to pray to God to stop the whole Fuxi worship thing.

After the incident of tax resistance, *laoshuji* became openly antagonistic to Wuzhuang Christians. He intentionally and regularly turned on the loudspeakers on the roof of the Village Committee Office when the church was holding a worship service or some other gathering. He would broadcast revolutionary songs or Qinqiang opera at the highest possible volume. The Christians simply kept quiet about the very intrusive loudspeakers.

In 1995, as church membership increased, the Wuzhuang Church renovated and enlarged the sanctuary, added a chapel, and replaced the worn-out mud walls of the yard with new brick walls. They also built a covered gate, on top of which they erected a tall cross in bright red. The cross faces the loudspeakers silently, yet sturdily. It is a symbol of perseverance and determination. The renovated church visibly outshone the Village Committee Office across the street. This made *laoshuji* unhappy. Moreover, adding oil to the fire, a *feng shui* master in the village told him that the taller church gate overshadowed the Village Committee Office, which would bring bad luck to the Village Committee. This made *laoshuji* depressed. He made several attempts to stop its erection or to destroy it. He asked the town government to send officials to Wuzhuang and to issue an order to tear down the walls and gate. Some officials came and inspected the church. Surprisingly, however, they told *laoshuji* that having the new walls and gate was not a big deal. They ignored his request and left, which enraged him. After that, in addition to turning on the loudspeakers, he sometimes stood in front of the Village

Committee Office and swore at Christians as they were walking into the church. The Christians simply ignored his provocation and went to their gathering. During some evening services, *laoshuji* walked into the church and ordered the group to leave, accusing the crowd of disturbing the neighbors' sleep. The Christians simply acquiesced 'because we believe the Lord will redress the injustices for us.' Two months after interrupting a revival meeting in July 1998, however, *laoshuji* died suddenly and unexpectedly. According to Elder Liu,

Even nonbelievers felt that it was very strange. They said that it was because he offended our God. It was God's punishment of him. After that, many people became fearful [of the Christian God]. In the past some nonbelievers would curse us in front of us or behind our backs. But they dared no more.

Not only did average villagers seem to have learned the lesson of not insulting Christians, the new Party Secretary also resorted to assuagement. At Christmas 1998, he led all the village cadres to the church and conveyed greetings to Christians on this special occasion of their most important festival. He also brought a gilt board to the church, on which were inscribed the words 'everlasting friendship' (*youyi chang cun*). Under his new leadership, the loudspeaker has also come on less frequently.

The new Party Secretary's efforts at assuagement do not signify any change of the overall religious policy. As a new chief of the village, he needed to consolidate his power. He knew that Christians were cooperative citizens on civic matters. He understood that it would do no good to antagonize this large mass of Christian villagers. The goodwill visit and the gilt board were gestures intended to end the bad relations under the old Party Secretary.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the red market of religion in China, political submission to the government and theological accommodation to the ruling ideology are

preconditions for a group's legal existence. In the oligopoly where equal treatment of all religions is not the norm, state favoritism is probably inevitable. The two case studies show that the Chinese authorities have shown favoritism toward Buddhism and imposed greater restrictions on Christianity. As a result, the Buddhists seem to be more willing to embrace Communist ideology and subscribe to the current political rhetoric, whereas the village Christians are acquiescent to the authorities but also trying to keep some distance from the ideology and politics in general. Having lived through the more difficult years of attempted eradication and suppression, Christians have learned to live in peace without giving up their faith. Indeed, Wuzhuang Christians feel genuinely grateful for the improved political condition nowadays. After all, the overall situation has indeed improved in comparison with the earlier decades under Communist Party rule. It is still far from the ideal of religious freedom, but the social space for religious practice has enlarged.

The survival and perseverance of the Wuzhuang Christian Church show that reform-era China has followed a religious policy of tolerance with restrictions, but the restrictions have not been very effective. In order to attain and maintain a status of legal existence, the church has had to resort to the patriotic rhetoric imposed by the authorities, conform to numerous ordinances and guidelines, and acquiesce to the appointment of a church elder by the Religious Affairs Bureau through the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee. Nonetheless, the Wuzhuang Church has managed to keep state intrusions at arm's length. Wuzhuang Christians have exercised extraordinary forbearance, especially in dealing with the village Communist Party chief. State discrimination has not stopped the rapid growth of Christianity. Interestingly, because many Chinese perceive the government as corrupt and regard the Communist ideology with disbelief, state repression of Christianity is probably a factor contributing to the popularity of Christianity in the Chinese populace.

Unlike the struggling village church, the success of the Bailin Buddhist Temple has

resulted largely from explicit support by government officials at central, provincial and county levels. However, oligopoly is not monopoly. Political support itself is not enough to guarantee Buddhist revivals. In addition to winning the political support of the authorities, Abbot Jing Hui has also tried hard to maintain his legitimacy in orthodox Buddhism. In this regard, inheriting the ancient Bailin Temple that had been eminent for a distinctive tradition of Zhaozhou Chan is very helpful. Meanwhile, Jing Hui has repeatedly emphasized his discipleship status under the Venerable Xu Yun, who was probably the most revered monk among the Buddhist Sangha and laity in modern China. These claims of religious capital have helped the Bailin Temple to market his brand of Life Chan Buddhism.

The apparent blooming of the Bailin Temple is not a result of fair competition in a free market. Instead, the authorities have provided consistent support. If such support is lacking, an even more famous Buddhist temple would not have been able to thrive. Indeed, the more famous Linji Temple, which is located in the same prefecture but in a different county, has not been as successful. Linji Temple in Zhengding is known as the original temple of an important Chan sect – the Linji sect – and thus it enjoys a more prestigious status within Buddhism. It was one of the only two Buddhist temples in Hebei Province that were included in the 1983 list of ‘major temples’ designated for restoration as religious venues. That list was suggested by the Buddhist Association of China, approved by the State Religious Affairs Bureau, and decreed by the State Council, which is the highest cabinet of the Chinese government. When Venerable Jing Hui was sent to Hebei Province, the President of the Buddhist Association of China commissioned him to restore both Bailin Temple and Linji Temple. However, Linji Temple has retained its shabby halls. The key obstacle is that the County Government of Zhengding has not provided the same kind of political and other support as the Zhaoxian Government. In Zhengding, there is a large population of Muslims, and the Religious Affairs Bureau director of Zhengding was from the *hui* ethnic group. *Hui* is one of the ten ethnic groups that subscribe

to Islam. Similarly, Jing Hui’s effort to spread Buddhism in Cangzhou Prefecture, where there are many Muslims and Catholics, has not been very successful.

Also telling is the failed revival effort of Venerable Jing Hui in Baoding City. Upon arrival in Hebei, one of Jing Hui’s first assigned tasks was to organize the Buddhist association for the Prefecture of Baoding, which happens to be the very center of underground Catholics in China (Madsen 1998, 2003). Several Baoding Municipal and Prefecture bureaus blocked attempts to return and restore the Great Compassion Hall (*da ci ge*) for religious services. One of the arguments was that the Great Compassion Hall was not a functional temple in the 1950s and 1960s, so that it was not within the scope of ‘implementing the religious policy’ meant to return pre-Cultural Revolution religious properties to religious organizations. Therefore, lacking political support at the local level makes Buddhist growth impossible.

As a temple in a highly regulated economy, the success of the Bailin Temple has clear limitations. While the Life Chan doctrine pleases the authorities, other Buddhists regard it as a compromise and have criticized the Bailin activities, although the criticisms were muted after President Jiang Zemin’s visit in 2001. Another limitation is that Bailin is not a local congregation. Most of the participants of the signature activity – the Life Chan Summer Camp – come from afar, often from other provinces. Most of the major donors have been overseas Chinese Buddhist businesspeople. How long the Bailin Temple can maintain the continuous support of these distant devotees remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, economic marketization is now well underway in most of China, and this has led to further relaxation of state control over the private life of citizens. In the more market-driven coastal provinces, Christians and others seem to enjoy greater freedom to practice their religion. Moreover, to follow international norms, the authorities have made ‘rule by law’ or the ‘rule of law’ an official goal in deepening reforms. Although these reforms have been ‘two steps forward and one step backward,’ things seem to have been moving in the direction of

greater freedom. Taking a broad and long-term view, we have seen – and will likely see more – progress toward greater freedom of religion in China. The oligopoly of five religions increasingly faces challenges from both domestic and international forces in the globalization era. As long as China maintains its orientation toward a market economy and global integration, it is only a matter of time before the authorities have to open up the religious market toward other religious groups outside the five ‘patriotic’ associations and toward other religions.

NOTES

1. The case studies come from my collaborative work with Dedong Wei (Yang and Wei 2005) and Jianbo Huang (Huang and Yang 2005) of Renmin University of China. I would like to acknowledge and thank them for their fieldwork contribution.

2. The Three-Selfs are self-administration, self-support, and self-propagation.

3. *Chan* magazine is the official publication of the Hebei Buddhist Association. The full texts of every issue have been online at <http://www.chancn.com/magazine/index.asp> (accessed on September 13, 2004). Citations to this magazine will be indicated by the year and issue number only.

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