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Religion and Politics in the People's Republic of China: An Appraisal of Continuing Mistrust and Misunderstanding

Tak-ling Terry Woo 

Humanities department, York University, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada; twoo@yorku.ca

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Abstract: Western media reports on the relationship between state and religion in the People's Republic of China (PRC), American media especially often focuses on the anti-religious repression and violence in the Tibetan Autonomous and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regions on the western border of the country. These accounts shape a particular understanding of the PRC that fuels mistrust and misunderstanding. This essay seeks to understand elements that contribute to this journalistic orientation first by looking at government documents that outline the legal parameters for the practice of religion for both citizens and foreigners; second, by examining official U.S. oversight and critique of these; and finally, by considering accounts of accommodation and cooperation between the official institutions and religious practitioners and organizations. The PRC documents include two White Papers on official policies and a memorandum on religious charity work, "Provisions" for foreigners and "Regulations" for Chinese citizens. Also included will be critical analyses and commentaries from the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor within the State Department. Finally, accounts of the evangelical Christian Gospel Rehab in Yunnan and various Hui Muslim communities and individuals in Dubai will illustrate the multiple strategies used by the government in handling religious groups. The records suggest that the mistrust and misunderstanding between the two powers grow out of vastly different assumptions, perspectives and interpretations of the situation. They show that the PRC and the U.S. are very far apart in their understanding of religion in mainland China. While the communist state understands itself to be fighting separatists and terrorists in the western border regions in order to maintain security, peace and stability in the country, the Americans see the Chinese as persecuting religious and ethnic minorities.

Keywords: religion and politics; People's Republic of China; Uyghurs; Xinjiang; Tibet

1. Introduction

Many western media accounts about religion in People's Republic of China (PRC) and the treatment of religious practitioners by its government, in particular Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur Muslims, demonstrate well the mistrust and misunderstanding between the West and the Chinese. This is especially true for media in the U.S. This article aims to examine some of the elements that contribute to the mistrust by examining possible connections between both domestic and international politics and national policies on religious beliefs and practices in the PRC. Further, the misunderstanding between the West and the PRC has real consequences, as the tense 2018–19 U.S.–PRC trade talks and another recent prominent political-business case can attest.

On 22 January 2019, the U.S. confirmed that it would seek the formal extradition of Meng Wanzhou from Canada. Meng is a Huawei executive and daughter of Ren Zhengfei, founder of the multinational conglomerate that specializes in telecommunications equipment, consumer electronics

and technology-based services and products: the corporation has been seen as both a security threat and a challenge to American leadership in 5G (Fifth Generation) technology for over a decade. Meng was arrested at the Vancouver airport on Saturday, 1 December 2018 to face fraud charges for alleged attempts to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran while she was en route from Hong Kong to Mexico. Subsequently, four Canadians were reportedly detained and many believe that the arrests were made in retaliation to Canada's part in the Meng affair. I mention the incident here to highlight a simple reality: The People's Republic of China¹ does not trust that it or its citizens will be treated justly and fairly by the West and will take actions to stand up to what it perceives to be western bullying, even as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau assures that Meng will be treated with all the rights that accrue to her under the rule of law. "The West,"² in turn, believes that the Communist state is vindictive, authoritarian, beyond the rule of law with the inclination and power to command Chinese enterprises like Huawei to spy for them. Much of the North American media have reacted to the situation as if it were a clear expression of universal PRC deviousness just as the treatment of Tibetans and Uyghurs is often used to demonstrate the PRC's anti-religion stance and universal "fascism."³

Washington D.C.-based Richard McGregor, the Australian-born bureau chief of the *Financial Times*, for example, asks and answers his own question about the nature of the people of the PRC and specifically the Communist Party of China (CPC or CCP).

Would a successful, richer, more self-confident China be less prickly with foreigners and more amenable to compromise in its territorial claims? I think the opposite is more likely. The core mission of the CCP, to recapture China's vaulted place amongst nations, would be invigorated the more it had the means to do so. There is nothing in the party's DNA, nor the public's, as far as one can tell, that suggests China would be more accommodating if it were more powerful and better armed (McGregor 2018).

Huawei's trouble with the U.S. and the government's demand that Meng be released and its perceived retaliatory measures in handling the extradition from Canada, appear to practically demonstrate its lack of finesse and or accommodation. The tension in the Meng Wanzhou incident is heightened because of the general mistrust: the apprehension and detention of entrepreneur Michael Spavor and ex-diplomat Michael Kovrig especially and the pressure that the Canadian government applied for the release of the Canadians by rallying allies into a bloc merely further fueled the strain.

This mutual mistrust and misunderstanding are rooted in multiple fundamental cultural differences that we are unable unfortunately to explore fully in this article. For our study of religion in the PRC here, Nanlai Cao (2018) and André Laliberté (2015) are surely correct in their shared insight that the PRC positional strategy is one that is based on historical practice: that is, it follows the traditional "state-lead, religion-follow" model and there is no indication that there is interest in adopting a monotheistic-originated, neo-liberal, western-democratic position. Richard Madsen, a sociologist at University of California San Diego, provocatively labels the PRC approach as "the neoimperial sacral hegemony" in *The Upsurge of Religion in China* (Madsen 2010).⁴

The Chinese and western analytical templates or lenses for the various relational dynamics between religious groups and between the groups and the state are undeniably divergent. I argue that the PRC's stated and actual approaches to religion are not adequately presented in their historical and

¹ I use the cumbersome People's Republic of China (PRC) rather than simply the Chinese government to acknowledge Taiwan's claim to be the Republic of China and that it represents at least a sizable portion of the Chinese population.

² "The West" is not a homogeneous behemoth, in the same way that I argue that the PRC is not: I use this only to refer to a majority of the mainstream media.

³ I thank an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify this point.

⁴ Madsen argues that the PRC's categorization of the five state-sanctioned religions is based on a 19th century Protestant understanding of religion primarily as institutional. His analysis is interesting but space does not allow a discussion here. For details, see Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period, published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

sociological contexts and are consequently either poorly understood or not credibly received. Much work needs to be done here and I look forward to reading research and analyses that will help to bridge the “East/West” divide. Meanwhile, media reports about religion⁵ in the PRC that necessarily draw theoretical and historical background from scholarly work, tend to capture the politics of conflict on the country’s western border: Buddhism in Tibet and Islam in Xinjiang. On the part of the PRC, the recent 2018 White Paper on *China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief* (C3PFRB) may in part be an attempt to address this bias. In just under 5000 words in English, the C3PFRB repeats and explains once again that harmony is the state’s ultimate goal. It highlights charitable work done by religious groups; gives examples of “collaboration” between the religious groups and the state; and outlines the legal parameters for both native and foreign believers with specific warnings against extremism (SCIO 2018).

The sources I include here, however, on many occasions show that the government of the U.S. and academics and social activists in the West have tended to concentrate primarily on the heavy-handed, severe and oppressive means the PRC uses to handle political actions inspired and carried out in the name of religion. The accounts seldom capture what Vivienne Shue terms the “great latitude (that) has de facto been allowed for officially unsanctioned, even officially forbidden, economic, cultural and other activities to be carried on . . . (Ones) that everyone knows about, but no one admits to or publicly comments on.” More pointedly, the focus on the draconian means that what Andrew Nathan calls “authoritarian resilience” is often overlooked—that is, the “openness to improvisation (that) underscores the flexibility and adaptability of China’s regime” frequently goes unnoticed (McCarthy 2017) Even Brent Crane (2014) who acknowledges the acceptance of the Muslim Hui by the state in contrast to the tight control over the Uyghurs describe the PRC as xenophobic, neglecting the fact that the Hui are made up of many different Middle Eastern, Central and South Asian Muslims from numerous earlier migrations. Moreover, journalistic and scholarly analyses have rarely included examples where state and religious actors cooperate.⁶ But happily, Cao writes that a “small but growing literature has portrayed a dynamic, intricately compatible relationship between religion and nation building (that illustrates) how national and local religious leaders collaborate with China’s nationalist modernizing and secularizing projects”: a few examples will be reviewed here in a later section.

Many accounts of religion in Tibet and Xinjiang however do not seriously consider the impact of colonial history over the last two hundred years. For the PRC, this is no distant memory: there are still U.S. troops stationed in Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines and on active duty in Afghanistan. It is not difficult to understand the mainland government’s misgivings about “toxic” foreign influences, given such military presence surrounding the mainland. Ongoing Islamic threat and current U.S. armed service act as constant reminders of western involvement in the pre-1949 communist-era separatist movements and contemporary backed-by-the-West international diasporas: such as the British and then the Americans in Tibet; and Russia, the Soviet Union and once again, the Americans in Xinjiang. I have also found no substantive exploration of the historical cultural-psychological reasons for ethnic tensions between the Chinese—both state and people—and the members of the two minority groups. These tensions are in part rooted in the Manchu Qing dynasty

⁵ For example, Luqiu and Yang (2017) found that 84% of the western media coverage on Muslims and or Islam “involved conflict, terrorism or extremism.” The authors note that the PRC relies on western new agencies for international news and that there is scant domestic coverage of Islam and the Muslims. Reports tend to focus on the preferential treatment received by racial minorities, including the Uyghurs: such as exemption from the one child policy and affirmative action in the education system.

In light of this, Cao is surely correct in his conclusion that “more collaborative research efforts are needed to help explore and reconcile the gap between official rhetoric and the multiple realities of Chinese religions on the ground . . . (These efforts will) eventually help transform ‘religion’ from a fetishized ideological object into a multidimensional empirical concept in contemporary Chinese (and I would add ‘global’) public discourse.”

⁶ Or what some, like one anonymous reviewer of this article, might describe as situations where religious groups are regulated and subjugated to the state.

as the “sick man of the East”⁷ incapable of vigorous and effective defense against western incursion and the Han people as an effeminate, impotent and defeated people.⁸

Martin Jacques writes that the west continues to misunderstand the PRC and like New York University’s Professor Zhang Xudong and American sinologist Lucian Pye, (Zhang 2016) Jacques (2011) argues that China is more of a “civilizational state” than a nation state. Perhaps one might even posit that the PRC does not understand the insistence for a separate country by some Tibetans and Uyghurs when material gains may be sacrificed; the irony is especially sharp for Xinjiang when Urumqi has become an economic hub for Central Asia.⁹ So Zhang expresses anxiety about the clash of Islam with the West in his interview on China Central Television’s *Dialogue* and he worries that some people “stand by and live within their civilizational identity” and are unwilling to surrender their faith for secular material wellbeing. In light of this, he finds too optimistic China’s belief that material development will help to bring peace by replacing the “moral superiority” of the West that is based on “military strength and superior technology.”¹⁰

This expression of moral superiority¹¹ is clear in the initial treatment of the Meng Wanzhou situation. The demand for the release of Spavor and Kovrig is based on two core ideals: the rule of law and human rights. These values which are central to western liberal democracies belong to a functionally-religious belief system that Graeme Smith (2008) describes as secular Christianity, one with which the West uses to evaluate and judge other nations. Bilateral misunderstanding can, in part, be traced this mismatch of Euro-American ideals imposed on PRC conditions. Michael Szonyi recognizes, astutely, that the framework of secularization, often used to study Chinese religion, “even in its more restrictive forms is a highly contingent process that will shape other debates as well.” He

⁷ Of western origins, the moniker “sick man of the East” was intended as a parallel to the “sick man of the West,” the Ottoman Empire, which was also steadily declining both in power and influence in the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁸ For example, interviews with Uyghurs show that the Chinese are considered to be unclean since they do not observe rules of *halal* or what is allowed and *haram* or what is forbidden (Erkin 2009, p. 425); dirty and rude as expressed in the parts of Urumchi (the spelling follows the quoted author; also Urumqi) they live in and the way they conduct themselves (Schluessel 2009, p. 385); and untrustworthy because they are atheists (Finley 2011, 2007). Moreover, the Soviet message to Uyghurs during the mid 20th century was that “China was a colony of imperialism (and) Xinjiang was a colony of a colony” (Han 2011, p. 950). Contemporary Uyghurs continue to look west, away from the PRC, toward Islam and modern liberal democracies. The Han Chinese, on the other hand, see the Uyghurs as “lazy, unreasonable and poor—and potential terrorists” who are rightly blamed for “ethnic unrest and violence in Xinjiang.” (Luqiu and Yang 2017). In Xinjiang, the prejudice, even among “well-educated urban Han Chinese” against Uyghurs can be acute; they are seen as “ungrateful, lazy, violent, knife-carrying, pocket-picking criminals.” (Millard 2009).

Tibetans also look south and west away from the Sinosphere: historically to India, the birthplace of Buddhism; then to the U.K. for protection against the Nationalist Chinese in the early to mid 20th century; and now, as with the Uyghurs, to the west especially the U.S. Unfortunately, the full agenda of this article does not allow a more thorough examination of these elements.

⁹ For example, Erkin (2009) notes the irony wherein successful development and a more robust middle class has resulted in a sharper definition and a turn of Uyghur culture towards Central Asia and the Middle East and further away from China.

¹⁰ While I agree with Edward Said’s (2011) assessment that Huntington’s theory neglects the pluralistic nature within his set of “civilisations,” a broad generalisation can be made—in varying degrees, for those who accept and aspire to an ideal of globalization and pluralism and those who do not, as expressed in populist movements worldwide. This important difference can be found within Islamic, liberal democracies, communist oligarchies and other forms of civilizational and politico-social cultures. Zhang’s discussion of Huntington’s hypothetical “fault lines” finds itself well illustrated not only with Islam in conflict with “The West” but also populist movements in conflict with “The Establishment” within the west: that is, the fault lines are both within each “civilisation” (Said) as well as across them (Huntington). I agree with John Wang (2003) when he writes that the clash of civilizations or religions does not replace but rather adds to conflict based on nationalism and secular ideology.

¹¹ A refreshing change in the Meng Wanzhou case includes the recognition that the Huawei executive has a strong case against extradition and the voicing of complaints about the American disregard for Canadians. Vanderklippe (2019a) reports that John McCallum, Canada’s ambassador to China, claimed that President Trump’s remarks about using Meng in trade talks, extraterritoriality and Canada’s different position on sanctions against Iran are all reasons why Meng may not be extradited. The Globe and Mail reported also that McCallum was not the only one who spoke to the belief that politics was involved in the taking of Meng. David McNaughton, Canada’s ambassador to the U.S. had earlier complained about Washington, who he said “are the ones seeking to have the full force of American law brought against [Ms. Meng] and yet we (Canadians) are the ones who are paying the price . . . We don’t like that it is our citizens who are being punished.” On the same day, McCallum apologized and said that he “misspoke” and that Canada honours its international legal commitments; he was fired by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on 26 January 2019.

opines that western judgement of communist “state policy towards religion . . . is inevitably linked to how the legitimate exercise of power is constituted.” Szonyi points out, however, that “In contemporary China, this standard (of legitimacy) is not (based on) respect for individual rights alone (as in the West) but also the pursuit of nationalism and modernization.” That is, the PRC is as concerned about its geo-political integrity, the material well-being of all its citizens, as it is about individual rights.

The U.S. is especially enthusiastic in its missions for democracy—I use “missions” here intentionally for though western societies may be ethno-culturally diverse within their societies, the leaders of the West tend towards liberal democratic “mono-ism”¹² allowing little room for political and cultural diversity across civilizational and nation states internationally. The following are George W. Bush’s words at the International Conference on Financing for Development convened by the United Nations, on 22 March 2002 in Monterrey, Mexico:

We must tie greater aid to political and legal and economic reforms. And by insisting on reform, we do the work of compassion. The United States will lead by example.¹³ I have proposed a 50-percent increase in our core development assistance over the next three budget years. Eventually, this will mean a \$5 billion annual increase over current levels.

These new funds will go into a new Millennium Challenge Account, devoted to projects in nations that govern justly, invest in their people and encourage economic freedom¹⁴ ([The Millennium Challenge Account 2003](#)).

As a part of the process toward achieving this “compassionate” commitment [Epstein et al. \(2007\)](#) note in their *Congressional Research Service Report* that the ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2007, passed a year before the summer Olympic games,

contains provisions to promote democracy overseas, calls for specific State Department actions and reports, aims to strengthen the ‘community of democracies,’ and authorizes funding for democracy promotion in FY2008 (notably the year of the Beijing Summer Olympics). Also, it identified ‘governing justly and democratically’ as a key objective of its foreign aid democracy promotion in 2008.

In the same year, Shinzo Abe lobbied to bring together Asia’s “community of democracies” and was “actively supported” by the U.S. His proposal resulted in a five-nation naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal code-named “Malabar 07-02” in September 2007 that involved the “Quad” named below plus Singapore, where the U.S. has also stationed troops ([Pant 2017](#)). The group remained inactive, then disbanded after the PRC complained about collusion. But, in 2012 Abe again advocated for a free trade and defense arrangement comprised of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. to safeguard the Indo-Pacific “maritime commons” against the PRC. By 2016, Lavina Lee in Australia was describing

¹² The West has mostly dropped the “theistic” from their foreign policies and thus are no longer overtly “monotheistic” in their approach to international affairs but there is still a tendency toward the “mono”—hence “mono-ism.”

¹³ Here is an unmistakable illustration of the Judeo-Christian mentality of *tikkun*, fixing the world and standing as a beacon to the poor and suffering, fulfilling the injunction to “be ye a light unto nations” and perform its divine duty as the shining exemplar of “the city on the hill.” That there are in the U.S. deep income disparities, social inequities and continuing violence against marginal populations appear to have escaped attention.

¹⁴ After 9/11, on 14 March 2002 at the Inter-American Development Bank, President Bush called for “a new compact for global development, defined by new accountability for both rich and poor nations alike. Greater contributions from developed nations must be linked to greater responsibility from developing nations.” This Millennium Challenge Account was to receive an annual increase in fund that would amount to \$5 billion by 2005. In 2007, George W. Bush requested for the next fiscal year \$1.5 billion dollars specifically dedicated to the promotion of democracy to be disbursed through groups like the Millennium Challenge Account ([Epstein et al. 2007](#)).

In Canada, 2013, then Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, an evangelical Christian, established the Office of Religious Freedom to monitor and act as an advocate for persecuted communities internationally. A year after the election of Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister in 2015, the mandate of the office was expanded to the Office of Human Rights. ([Religious Freedom Office Replaced with New ‘Office of Human Rights’ 2016](#))

Japanese efforts at democratic alliance as “Abe’s Democratic Security Diamond and New Quadrilateral Initiative (Lee 2016).”

The critical American study of religion and state in the PRC, which will be discussed later, though carried out in the midst of these political moves, does not acknowledge them in their analyses. This lacuna suggests that the authors of the analytical reports believe that their work on religion in the PRC and the convergent political maneuvers belong in unrelated policy categories and that they are not connected in any essential or crucial way. That is, one might infer that the American analysts do not understand or consider international politics to have any explanatory value to the PRC’s control over religion or that the latter might see the nascent military operations as provocative.

Unsurprisingly, such an atomistic and bloc approach to the study of religion in/of the PRC, apace with such overt American missionizing, can generate at least some if not a great deal of tension and conflict. Even as the PRC comprehends itself to be an aspiring democracy albeit with Chinese characteristics, its understanding of human rights for developing nations stands in stark contrast to the Democratic way. For the communist state, improving people’s material lives without qualification is human rights: and towards this end, they take as a blueprint their own experience of lifting 700 million people out of abject poverty over the past forty years.

But even if the PRC no longer requires deep developmental funding from the West, its economy and technological development continue to be subjected to the insistence of “political and legal and economic reforms.” This tension between the communist state and the U.S. will be examined by considering first, the legally stated place and roles of religion through two post-Document 19 White Papers on policies and a memorandum on charity work; “Provisions” for foreigners; and “Regulations” for Chinese citizens within the political climate both domestic and international. Second, to examine the use of religion as a guileful unstated means of evaluating the PRC as an “(in)humane” nation by reviewing American comments, analysis and critique of these rules and their execution. Third, to review the evolution of official Communist Party of China (CPC) policies towards religion, to explore the variable and actual execution of government policies and the collaboration between various religious groups, as well as the relationships between religious groups and individuals with the state.

2. Religion in the PRC: Government Policies Amidst Domestic and Global Politics

Religion appears to play little or no part in the PRC’s long-term goals in domestic and foreign policies which focus mainly on achieving political stability and material prosperity through multilateral, global economic development. According to state reports and White Papers, for example, the domestic focus on poverty and left-behind children (State Council 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) and the international economic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, also known as One Belt, One Road) are designed to bring earthly tangible abundance and peace and stability to China, her neighbors and her trading partners.

In 2015 Xi Jinping announced, in his speech at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the establishment of an initial China-backed US\$ 2 billion aid fund to support the eight Sustainable Development Goals to: “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,” “Achieve universal primary education,” “Promote gender equality and empower women,” “Reduce child mortality,” “Improve maternal health,” “Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,” “Ensure environmental sustainability” and “Develop a global partnership for development.” The PRC also promised to aim for an increase to US\$12 billion its investment in the least developed countries, to forgive interest-free loans to the “least developed and small island developing countries” that were due at the end of 2015 and to “establish an international development knowledge center to study appropriate theories and practices for different countries.”¹⁵

¹⁵ See http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg_goals.html and [President Xi Jinping’s UN Speech in 6 Key Words \(2015\)](#) The launch of China’s Center for International Knowledge and Development (CIKD) was announced by Jorge Chediek, Secretary-General’s Envoy for South-South Cooperation in Beijing, 21 August 2017 (http://en.drc.gov.cn/2017-08/22/content_30965414.htm). See also (Xi Jinping, *Champion of the Poor* 2018).

The CPC has been consistent in its focus on reform for peaceful development. Section 2 of the December 2018 White Paper on Progress in Human Rights over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up in China reiterates the Two Centenary Goals and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation from the 2012 18th National Congress where

the CPC set forth a master blueprint ... to complete the building of a comprehensively moderate prosperous society and double China's 2010 GDP and per capita income for both urban and rural residents by the time the CPC celebrates its centenary in 2021; and to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious and reach the level of moderately developed countries by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its centenary in 2049 ([Full Text: Progress in Human Rights over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening up in China 2018](#)).

Religion may not be prominent in the short and long-term PRC policies and goals but the government does recognize the ubiquity of religious phenomenon and the particular American interest in it.¹⁶ It also understands both religion's strategic potential in helping to realize the common goals of the United Nations and the CPC and its potential in harming the attainment of these goals. In recognizing this, [Cao \(2018\)](#) writes, the state has set out the "disciplinary rule of 'party member should not have religious belief'" while promoting at the same time, the "pragmatic use of religion for 'national unity, social stability and regime resilience.'"

To frame and effectively manage this "pragmatic use of religion," three main categories of documents can be identified: those that offer a general policy framework, those that outline specific conditions of religious practice for foreigners while they are in the PRC and those that define the rules and regulations for citizens. There will be a focus on publications that have evolved from the foundational 1982 Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period ([MacInnis 1989](#)). These documents collectively demonstrate well the concerns of the state which have remained constant: political security, social stability and material prosperity.¹⁷

Launched during his first year as president, Xi Jinping's initiative of One Belt, One Road aspires to build thoroughfares facilitating trade through the Asian-Euro-African land masses; it is crucial in helping to build "a comprehensively moderate prosperous society." The creation of new overland and maritime "Silk Routes" in the 21st century recalls the historical silk roads and these new Silk Routes have been and will be constructed through nation-states with governments of various religious political affiliations and with sizable multiethnic and diverse religious populations including Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jews and indigenous animists-shamanists.¹⁸ The PRC is open to working with all of them without prejudice. In Africa especially, the PRC has taken care to note that economic and infrastructure aid will not be tied to requirements to demonstrate progressive

¹⁶ Perhaps Americans are projecting the experiences of their earliest settlers who were religiously persecuted in Europe.

¹⁷ Included in the first category that offers a general policy framework is the 1997 Freedom of Religious Belief in China, a White Paper. The memorandum Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles' Participation in Public Welfare Charitable Activities (Opinions) was added in 2012 and sent to government officials to foster a focus of charitable work. Then in 2018, a new White Paper, China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief, was issued and it included the focus on charitable activities described in the 2012 Opinions. Second, there is for foreigners, the 1994 Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of Republic of China (Provisions); it was revised in 2010. Third, developed for PRC citizens is the 2005 Regulation on Religious Affairs; it was revised in 2017.

¹⁸ In Asia, they include Islamic states in Central Asia like the "stans" (places), Buddhist states in Southeast and South Asia like Myanmar and Sri Lanka and the officially Hindu-secular India. Leaving Asia, there are majority Christian-secular states like Spain in Europe and majority Christian-secular states like Kenya and mixed-beliefs-secular (Christian-Muslim-Indigenous) states like Tanzania in Africa.

development in democratic institutions and human rights legislation, as with American aid¹⁹ (Legarda and Hoffman 2018; Kenderdine 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Xi 2017).

2.1. 20th Century Approaches and Regulations for Domestic and Foreign Practitioners

This sensitivity towards the need for international cooperation and connection on the one hand but also a parallel need for local national control over foreign incursions on the other, is clearly demonstrated by the PRC's own experience in its political relationship with the U.S., especially in relation to the two autonomous regions on its western border: Tibet and Xinjiang. In summary, the U.S. has acted and continues to act as a court of appeal, advocate and defender of the two ethnic minorities.

In 1980, for example, then Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang was shocked by the poverty he saw in Tibet and consequently initiated an economic program that greatly boosted the economic well-being of many Tibetans. Ironically, this material progress simultaneously created an economic "spiral of dependency" that fed more rather than less unrest²⁰ (Crowe 2013; IOSC 2009; *Sixty Years since Peaceful Liberation of Tibet* 2011). As with the situation in Xinjiang, (Erkin 2009; *Cultural Protection and Development in Xinjiang* 2018) better material conditions for some but the disaffection of others brought a revival of traditional culture including religion, as well as a broader-based interest in independence. Unfortunately, party officials mistook the renewed interest in religion both as superstition that would hinder material progress and a challenge to state atheism and continued to press reform on Tibet. In response, the Dalai Lama appealed to the Americans: on 21 September 1987 he presented a Five-Point Peace Plan to the U.S. Congress' Human Rights Caucus. The plan demanded that Tibet be "transformed into a zone of peace"; that the transfer of Han Chinese into the area be halted;²¹ that "human rights and democratic freedoms of the Tibetans be respected"; that the use of Tibet as a place for the manufacture of "nuclear arms and the dumping ground for nuclear waste" be stopped; and finally, that there be a start of negotiations for the future of Tibet. The PRC countered that the Dalai Lama's plan was nothing new and that "In essence, it continues the advocacy of 'Tibetan independence,' which both the Chinese government and people resolutely oppose." The plan was described in a Beijing Review article as absurd because it came from the Dalai Lama, "a representative of feudal serfdom." (Crowe 2013)

2.2. The 1994 Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens

Against the backdrop of ongoing tensions with Tibet and the U.S., sixteen years after Deng Xiaoping initiated reform, fifteen years after Ayatollah Khomeini forged a theocracy in Iran, three years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union which resulted in the revival of Islam in Central Asia,²² (Clarke 2010) and seven years before the attacks of 9/11, the PRC established of the China Committee

¹⁹ Kenderdine talks about some of the problems the Chinese face and have encountered such as the lack of experience in dealing with international projects for officials on the provincial level; the fear of Chinese economic dominance; and ideological differences in government systems across the Central Asian countries where China intends to realise their intention for One Belt, One Road connectivity.

²⁰ Many scholars take this complex phenomenon of socio-political inequity and unequal sharing of the many rewards of development as a main reason for unrest. The disparity is in part expressed by extreme wealth for some—Han, Uyghur and Tibetan alike but economic reliance on the state for many others. Most pernicious is perhaps the unequal distribution (perceived and real) of wealth along ethnic lines, especially in the Tibetan and Uyghur communities but also in the larger society. See Cao et al, Clarke, Crowe, Finley, Han, Lyons, Millard and Roberts for individual accounts. For an alternative understanding of politics rather than economics as a primary cause of unrest, see Andres Velasco, "Populism Is Rooted in Politics, not Economics."

²¹ The transfer of Han Chinese is not unique to Tibet. This same strategy is applied to Xinjiang and Hong Kong. For the latter, a daily quota of 150 mainland Chinese are allowed to enter the previous British Crown Colony. See for example <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1088378/hongkongers-want-fewer-mainland-immigrants>. This movement of people is not unlike the historical migration of the Han population from northern China to the south during periods of instability from Central and North Asian invasions.

²² Michael Clarke (2010) writes from 1999–2000 the Taliban consolidated power in Afghanistan and there was "intensification of the insurgency of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the Fergana Valley" to the extent that the PRC was able to persuade the Central Asian countries to act against terrorism.

on Religion and Peace (CCRP) under the auspices of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)²³—the top central government agency that deals with religious matters. The CCRP, with representatives from all five state-approved religions, attended the World Conference of Religions for Peace (renamed Religions for Peace in 2008) thereby joining international religious efforts towards peace in June 1994.²⁴ In the same year, the State Council promulgated the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of Republic of China, which delimited foreign involvement in religious matters within its borders (State Council 1994).

In 1996, two years later, the Shanghai Five (S5) emerged out of talks dealing with issues of demilitarization and border demarcation that resulted from the disintegration of the Soviet Union: member states included the PRC, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As the Islamist threat became heightened by the presence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan, the members of the S5 were motivated to take a stronger position against the “three evils of ‘separatism, extremism and terrorism.’” (Clarke 2010). This was a boon for the PRC as there had been increasingly violent incidents in Xinjiang since the 1990 Baren Incident in Akto county, which borders Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The incident was instigated by the Islamic Party of East Turkistan (IPET), a rebel group led by Zeydin Yusuf, who was allegedly backed by Afghanistan militia. The IPET “carried out a series of synchronized attacks on government buildings, ambushed police forces, seized weapons, took hostages and exchanged fire with the police.”²⁵ (Han 2011).

In the same year amid mounting insecurity from the threat of radical Islamism, the CCRP registered as a participant of the Asian Conference of Religion for Peace (ACRP). Peace did not, however, grace Xinjiang. Bombs exploded on three buses in Urumqi during the next February. This violence coincided with a huge protest which turned into a riot to the west in Ghulja (Yining in Chinese) where some Uyghurs carried banners expressing religious sentiments, calling for equality for Uyghurs and supporting independence (Han 2011). In October of the same year, the White Paper on the Freedom of Religious Belief in China (FRBC) styled in point form, was posted to the website for the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America. It is sheer speculation to suggest that the timing is an unobtrusive reminder to the Americans to stay out of Chinese politics.

2.3. The 1997 White Paper on the Freedom of Religious Belief in China (FRBC)

The 1997 White Paper refers to the 1994 Provisions. It is remarkable for its admission that the horribly destructive decade of the Cultural Revolution had had a “disastrous effect” on Chinese society, including the religious aspects. It is aspirational and acknowledges the potential benefits of religions in helping to rebuild the devastated post-Cultural Revolution nation. It states that “(t)he Chinese government supports and encourages the religious circles to unite the religious believers to actively participate in the construction of the country.” (White Paper 1997) The document restates Article 36 of the Constitution:

²³ SARA, the State Administration of Religious Affairs, is charged with the oversight of the five state-sanctioned religious organizations: the Buddhist Association of China, Chinese Taoist Association, Islamic Association of China, Three-self Protestant Patriotic Movement and the Chinese Patriotic Association. See also (China Committee on Religion and Peace and State Administration of Religious Affairs 1994).

²⁴ A PRC government organization represented by the five state-sanctioned religions at an international conference of religions is unlikely, at least to my mind, to garner much trust or support. The informal relationships between the various religions and the CCRP would be fascinating to study.

²⁵ Han writes that there were two bus bombings in Urumqi on 5 February 1992; several explosions in 1993 from February to September in Yining (Ghulja in Uyghur), Urumqi, Kashgar and several other cities. After the 1996 S5 agreement to interstate cooperation against terrorism and separatism, violence continued. On 27 February 1997 bombs exploded on three buses in Urumqi, coinciding with a huge protest in Yining during which “rioters torched vehicles and attacked police and (Han) Chinese residents; their banners and slogans included calls for Uighur equality and independence as well as religious sentiments.” Han attributes this violence to “strident repression” allowing “Uighur grievances and discontent” to simmer and grow.

Citizens of the PRC 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 citizen 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* (italics mine) . . . Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any domination.

The FRBC also reiterates concerns about instability and discord illustrating plainly that the legal, state-supported religious freedom is not absolute. It was issued nineteen years after reforms began, six years after the fall of the Soviet Union, a year after the formation of the S5 and amid the continued threat from both Islamists in Xinjiang and continuing unrest in Tibet. A central tenet in the 1994 Provisions is emphasized:

The Chinese government resolutely opposes attempts to split the country along ethnic lines, and any use of religious fanaticism to divide the people, split the country or harm the unity among all ethnic groups or engage in illegal activities and terrorist actions under the signboard of religion.

It is unclear if the PRC government was addressing the February violence in Xinjiang. What is clear is that the CPC “resolutely opposes” and will condone neither foreign nor local, indigenous actions that would rupture the unity of the state and people. The Freedom of Religious Belief in China goes on to give a brief historical background on the five religions accepted by the state—Buddhism, Taoism (Daoism), Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism and lists some of the state-sanctioned “national religious organizations” and activities that are legal and acceptable. These range from setting up schools to publishing and the proffering of social services. It then states:

In China all religions have equal status and coexist in tranquility. Religious disputes are unknown in China.²⁶ Religious believers and non-believers respect each other, are united and have a harmonious relationship. This shows, on the one hand, the influence of traditional Chinese compatibility and tolerance, and, on the other, the fact that since the founding of the people’s Republic of China in 1949 the Chinese government has formulated and carried out the policy of freedom of religious belief and established a politico-religious relationship that conforms to China’s national conditions ([White Paper 1997](#)).

2.4. *The Continuing Threat of Islamism*

Unfortunately, the threat from Islam did not end. According to PRC sources, Hasan Mahsum, the leader of the separatist East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), in 1998 sent “scores of terrorists” into Xinjiang and inland regions to establish a dozen training bases, just one year after violence in Urumqi and Ghulja. Official reports indicate that more than 150 terrorists were trained in fifteen preparatory classes that included workshops for making weapons, ammunition and explosive devices. Most ominously, the international religious-political landscape post-Freedom of Religious Belief in China changed drastically with the Islamist attack of the U.S. on American soil, 11 September 2001. Over a year from late 2001 to 2002, all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan had signed “military cooperation and base access agreements with the USA . . . receiving significant aid packages” in the process ([Clarke 2010](#)). On June 15 of the same year, Uzbekistan joined the members of Shanghai

²⁶ This claim is patently false and offers a good reason for western readers to dismiss offhand PRC publications as propaganda without taking more seriously the stated aspirations and ideals. Though there may not have been religious wars on the scale witnessed in Europe and the Middle East, there have certainly been disagreements, “disputes,” conflicts and even persecution of Buddhism, Daoism, individual Confucians and foreign enclaves of Muslim traders or Christian missionaries. See endnote 48 for a somewhat more nuanced or “reasonable” reading of this claim of “harmony.” The 2018 White Paper on China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief on 3 April changes the wording to “have rarely been seen,” signalling a new sensitivity to issues around religion.

Five to create the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.²⁷ As American forces fought radical Islamist groups and captured combatants in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the PRC asked for the repatriation of Uyghurs who had been captured during the war against terror: the U.S. refused.²⁸ In 2004 under these new global conditions, SARA issued Regulation on Religious Affairs that went into effect on 1 March 2005 adding to the 1994 Provisions and 1997 White Paper.²⁹

2.5. 21st Century American Interest in the Religious Ethos of the PRC

The PRC found itself (and continues to find itself) oddly squeezed by a strange band of actors, intent on imprinting themselves on it: these include passionate Islamists, committed Tibetan and Uyghur separatists, ardent human rights activists and eager secular-Christian missions of democracy from the West that are especially well-represented by the Americans. Considerable American resources have been dedicated to the study of the state of religion in the PRC as the three following Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) documents show. The reports reveal a special interest in the perceived failure of the state to uphold the rights of the faithful, lending support to Szonyi's observation that western judgements, especially American ones, are often linked to issues of human rights—that is, “how the legitimate exercise of power is constituted”—while ignoring the Chinese concern for nationalism and modernization (See p. 5 of this article.) The allocation of resources by the U.S. government, its detailed analysis and intention to influence the situation in a foreign nation demonstrate an unwavering commitment to the principle³⁰ of religious rights and freedom above all else. Disconcerting, however, is the fact that this commitment appears to be accompanied by an insensitivity or a lack of attention or an absence of insight or a dismissal of the possibility that the U.S. is (or may be perceived to be) infringing on the internal affairs of a sovereign foreign country and acting illegally according to the law of the land (or perceived to be doing so).³¹ The American disregard for Chinese policy and law dealing with the different facets of religion in the PRC, which the CECC documents and U.S. experts characterize as vague and inadequate; its support, both financial and political, of diaspora Tibetans and

²⁷ Here are the stated goals of The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: “The SCO's main goals are as follows: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.” See http://eng.sectsc.org/about_sco/. India and Pakistan became members in 2017 bringing to eight the member states alongside Russia, the PRC, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

²⁸ Clarke writes that in 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that Uyghurs would not be repatriated to China from Guantanamo. Further, a Washington DC circuit judge ruled that the remaining men should be freed and resettled in the U.S. However, this did not happen; instead the men were settled in various countries like Albania and Bermuda and at least one remained stateless. See [Henriquez \(2015\)](#) on the Guantanamo 22: a story of how a group of non-combatant Uyghur men were “captured” then sold as terrorists by the Pakistanis to the Americans, imprisoned in Guantanamo and eventually proven innocent. John Wang, writing about the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) on the other hand, states that 500 Chinese Uyghurs were captured in Afghanistan and no mention is made about the non-combatants. According to Wang, ETIM was intent on creating an Islamic state and was responsible for more than 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang from 1992 to 2003. The organization is described as being a part of an international network including the East Liberation Organization, East Turkistan International Committee, United Committee of Uyghurs' Organizations (Central Asia and Xinjiang) Central Asian Uyghur Hezbollah in Kazakhstan, Turkistan Party (Pakistan), Eastern Turkistan Islamic Resistance Movement (Turkey) and Eastern Turkistan Youth Leagues and other smaller groups like the Shock Brigade of the Islamic Reformist Party.

²⁹ See the report for a brief comparison of the 1994 and 2005 regulations.

³⁰ This principle is based on a western historical understanding of religion defined in monotheistic terms. Political power has more often than not managed or controlled religion through dynastic China; and secularism, in the form of the government of the Ru or Confucians, has a long history. The quagmire of what constitutes religion and the place it should occupy in society is too complex to handle here. Suffice it to say that American interests often fail to consider the history of both Islam and Christianity in Chinese history and the rather unattractive model of western religious institutions and history as witnessed in the numerous intra- and inter-religious wars and the persistent persecution of the Jews.

³¹ If the PRC were to examine any one of the following in the U.S.—the inequity in wealth distribution and tax laws, relentless quotidian violence and gun laws or the persistent prejudice against religious and ethnic minorities and equity laws in the U.S.—and then try to lecture the Americans about these issues and further try to influence outcomes in the same way that Chinese religious affairs are targeted in the U.S., I wager there would be a huge outcry in the West against such incursions.

Uyghurs; and its support for groups that champion independent states against the PRC unfortunately recall mid-19th and early 20th century extraterritoriality under the Manchu Qing dynasty.³²

2.6. *The U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China: "Human Rights Advocates Are Critical"*

Archived on the CECC website under the auspices of Senator Marco Rubio as the Chairman and Representative Christopher Smith as the Cochair is the full text of Regulations on Religious Affairs (both Chinese and English Text) issued on 30 November 2004 by the State Council.³³ (State Council 2010). The priority given to this issue is further marked by the CECC announcement of the New National Regulation on Religious Affairs to Take Effect on 1 March 2005 on 15 February 2005 (Rubio and Smith 2005b). Under the section entitled Human Rights Advocates Are Critical, the report states:

One Hong Kong expert predicted that the clearer rules would mean that there would be less room for unregistered groups³⁴ to maneuver. Taking another tack, Amnesty International pointed out that the new regulation does nothing to define the vague categories in earlier rules that have allowed the Chinese police a free hand in prosecuting—and persecuting—believers

The report then goes on to say that Chapter VI, Legal Responsibility, was the "most troubling to human rights advocates" because of the nebulous language and the growing list of forbidden activities. It focused specifically on three articles. Article 4 extends "prohibited activities" to include "the disruption of social order, harming citizens' health, obstructing the national education system, or otherwise harming the national interest, the public interest of society, and citizens' legal rights and interests." Article 40 deals with "the use of religion to carry on activities that harm national security or public security or violate citizens' personal rights and interests and democratic rights." And Article 41 lists "violations on registration, reporting, and independence of foreign interference." The notice for the new PRC Regulation is followed by a third webpage that is about an open March forum organized also by the CECC, one in a series of Issue Roundtables. The panel includes two academics, Dr. Carol Lee Hamrin and Professor Daniel Bays and a Senior Researcher from Human Rights Watch, Ms. Mickey Spiegel. Included at the end of the transcript are links to the testimonies for the roundtable and discussions on China's New Regulation on Religious Affairs: A Paradigm Shift?³⁵

³² American policies and consequent actions do little to assuage a deep sense of insecurity in the PRC and consequently its perceived need to protect itself. The urgent charge to defend the country comes from a long history of being conquered and dominated by intruders: the most recent and obvious include the Manchus, Japanese, Europeans and Americans. This profound sense of anxiety is perhaps most evident in the lyrics of the national anthem translated below:

Arise, we who refuse to be slaves;
Let us with our flesh and blood
Build our new Great Wall!
When the Chinese people arrive at the most perilous time,
Each and every one will be compelled to make a final roar.
Arise! Arise! Arise!
Millions of us with one heart,
Braving the enemy's gunfire, advance!
Braving the enemy's gunfire, advance!
Advance! Advance! Advance! Forward.

³³ I have been unable to find an English translation of the 2005 Regulations for Religious Affairs on a PRC government website. The Chinese version can be found at http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2008-03/28/content_6786.htm (accessed on 6 February 2019). The Congressional-Executive Commission on China includes both Chinese and English versions at <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regulations-on-religious-affairs> (accessed on 6 February 2019).

³⁴ This would include groups like Falungong (Discipline of the Dharma Wheel) that blend different religious beliefs and practices together and small ecumenical Christian groups.

³⁵ See especially Human Rights in China: "China's New Regulations on Religious Affairs: A Paradigm Shift?" available through a link at the end of the transcript (Rubio and Smith 2005a).

2.7. *The Bureau of Democracy, Human rights and Labor: “The International Religious Freedom Report on China including Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau”*

Finally, there was at the end of 2005 another report about religion in China published by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor within the Department of State. The International Religious Freedom Report (IRFR) on China including Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau³⁶ mentions the new regulations that took effect on 1 March 2005 too. Its account is remarkably balanced given the apparent U.S. antipathy to the PRC government and includes cases where the faithful have practiced unmolested even as the Bureau report reminds readers that the Secretary of State had since 1999 “designated China a ‘Country of Particular Concern’ under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.” The IRFR also states that “The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country.”³⁷

The IRFR gives a credible account with descriptions of the detention of some citizens and foreigners while reporting that many religious adherents also communicated that they were able to “practice their faith openly in officially registered places of worship without interference from authorities.” The document further notes that practitioners of “cults” like the Falungong and small Christian-based groups that are unregistered and excluded from the state definition of religion continued to be harassed. The conditions depicted for Muslims were likewise varied: in areas of ethnic unrest, they were subject to tight control, yet it is also reported that half of the 10,000 Chinese Muslims who performed the Hajj went with government-organized delegations.

2.8. *21st Century Contexts and Contents for the 2010 and 2017 Updates to the 1994 Provisions and 2005 Regulations*

It is a moot point if American extraterritorial oversight exemplified by the ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2007, their critique of Communist policies and implementation of religious practice and their support of religious/ethnic separatist groups-in-diaspora exacerbates religious and ethnic conflicts in the PRC. Enze Han notes that even a “ cursory comparison” between the Uighur and Tibetan cases will show that the two most politically active ethnic groups in the PRC are also the ones that have received “substantial external support from the beginning.” Strategically, both ethnic minority groups have now “successfully internationalized their cause” by appealing to the democratic West: the Uighur nationalists and diaspora community in fact aim to emulate the “prominence” of the Tibetans (Han 2011). Writing about Xinjiang, Han includes in his analysis five elements that have not only failed to end violence but have likely further aggravated the continuing conflict: they are political repression,

³⁶ See <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51509.htm>.

³⁷ See comment for endnote xxix. The report offers a statistical list of believers based on outdated PRC data: 100 million Buddhist, 20 million Muslims, 5 million Catholics (or closer to 10 million according to the Vatican), 16 million Protestants (or 20 million by the count of church officials or academics place the number between 30 to 100 million). While there are no official estimates of Daoists (Taoists) and practitioners of traditional folk religions, academics estimate several hundred thousand for Daoists and hundreds of millions of practitioners of traditional folk religions (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2005). These numbers have been updated to 200 million believers in the 2018 White Paper on China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief: 20 million remains constant for Muslims, an increase from 5 to 6 million for Catholics and more than double from 16 to 38 million Protestants. Acknowledging syncretic practices, no numbers are given for Buddhism and Daoism (Taoism) because “it is difficult to accurately estimate their numbers as there are no set registration procedures which ordinary believers must follow as part of their religion” (IOSC 2018).

economic grievances, cultural grievances, influx of Han migrants and history.³⁸ These five points are relevant and can be applied to the TAR too.³⁹

Beyond the socio-economic, political and cultural reasons for discontent and unrest, there are also demographic and deep-rooted historical reasons. A massive influx of Han Chinese into Xinjiang means that the 1953 population tally at 6% for the Han and 75% for the Uyghurs (Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and other groups made up the rest) has in the year 2000 been upended to an almost even proportion of 40% Han and 45% Uyghurs. This strategy of mass migration is repeated in Tibet and also perhaps unexpectedly in Hong Kong, where 150 mainlanders are allowed entry daily for a total of 54,750 annually. The anxiety implied in the PRC's migration strategy can in part be found in the past, in the pre-1949 separatist movements in the two regions and the colonial history of Hong Kong. The 2014 Hong Kong Occupy Central (also known as the Umbrella Movement) was notably conceived and fomented by Christian leaders (Lodge 2014a, 2014b; Westendorp 2015; Metaxas 2016).

Running parallel to Chinese anxiety is American research data that amplify its distrust of the communist state. Beyond the support for the Dalai Lama, the CECC collected and posted information that contradicted statistics from the PRC. While the Chinese reported in 2002 that illiteracy in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) was down from 95% to 4.7%, American findings reported that in 2003, 46% of Tibetans in the Region had received no schooling. In 2005 U.S. figures showed that Tibetans had the highest rate of illiteracy at 47.25% while the national rate was an impressive 9.08%. Crowe writes that this abysmally high rate for the Tibetans is profoundly problematic given the amount of resources that the Chinese state has invested in the region. He further notes that the situation is compounded by the practice of sending the best students to boarding schools out of the TAR region.⁴⁰

³⁸ See also (Cao et al. 2018). The authors believe that Xinjiang "currently poses the most imminent threat to the internal security ... as the conflict becomes linked with jihadist groups in other security hotspots, like Pakistan and Syria." Their summary of possible causal factors in the continuing ethnic violence include: "economic inequality," "legacy of suppression of local cultural and religious life," "political repression and underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups in provincial affairs and political life," "excessive use of force by government agents," "growing Islamist sentiment ... fuelled by radical Muslim movements in the neighboring Central Asian republics and in Pakistan and Afghanistan."

³⁹ First, Han writes that political repression was used against both groups in the initial 1996 "Strike Hard" campaign; and after 9/11, a home-grown anti-terrorism program targeted and linked indiscriminately Uyghur pro-independence movements and organizations with the Taliban and other terrorist groups. Second, he notes that economic grievances were an unintended byproduct of the implementation of the West Development Strategy, whose goal is ironically to bring prosperity to the western border region. The culprits are the lack of broad local indigenous participation and control over the two region's resources. For example, the control of oil development in Xinjiang by the central government, Han managers and workers with limited Uyghur involvement and the same unequal sharing of responsibilities and wealth in infrastructure projects like the Tibet-Qinghai Railway in the TAR, have been and continue to be interpreted both as favoritism for the Han and disregard for local interests and the displacement of traditional nomadic cultures. Third, Han points out, cultural grievances abound. In the Tibetan case, the state tried to displace the Dalai Lama, regulate the selection of the Panchen Lama and mandate the monks to study four textbooks from the series Explanations and Proclamations for the Propagation of Patriotic Education in Monasteries Throughout the TAR (Crowe 2013). In Xinjiang, there has been a chipping away at Uyghur-language education and since March 2004: the state declared that "all science subjects should gradually be taught in Mandarin-Chinese," as with all other subjects; and because of this, Uyghur school teachers must pass a Chinese proficiency test. Similar pressure against indigenous spoken languages apply to Han "dialects" too. Shanghaiese, for instance, is now taught in private schools because Putonghua has displaced it even in most home. The Han "advantage" is that a common written Chinese language though continually evolving, has been more or less standardized for over 2000 years.

⁴⁰ Here is the thorny issue of Han "prejudice" against minorities. In practice, Chinese informants tell me that Han students from rural areas with inadequate number of middle and high schools and the strongest students from all elementary schools are routinely sent away to board at schools that are respectively too far for a daily commute or the highest performing schools in the country. More pointedly, even in charges of genocide both by Kadeer and the Dalai Lama (Crowe 2013), it is unfortunately true too that the Han can level the same charges against the state for the horrendous decade of the Cultural Revolution, as the 1997 White Paper admits. Also important is a recognition that the Han have themselves departed radically from their multiple traditional cultures in a bid to both "catch up" to and to protect the nation from the West. When the element of comparable treatment—however terrible and the logic of material advance and strategic defence are considered, the actions of the state might be interpreted within an instrumental logic as stated by the CPC itself: the goals of a broad prosperity and peace for the majority, if not all. That the country has not been seized by protests may be a testament to the majority's acceptance of the government's policies and actions.

2.8.1. The National Endowment for Democracy and the Funding of PRC Dissidents

The American government has not stopped at its gathering of alternative data and its critique of PRC policies and execution of “vague” and “nebulous” laws. In 2004, the National Endowment for Democracy set aside an annual provision of \$75,000 to the Uyghur American Association (UAA), an organization that promotes independence for “East Turkestan”⁴¹ (Clarke 2010). According to the *People’s Daily*, Uyghur leader Rebiya receives much of her funding from the U.S. When she joined her husband in diaspora in the U.S. in 2005, she founded the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation (IUHRDF). Over the next year, she became the president of the UAA during its second General Assembly and was then elected to the World Uyghur Congress (WUC). In 2007, one year before 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, a symbolic global coming-of-age of the PRC, the U.S. further financed ETIM-like groups such as the WUC and IUHRDF to the tune of half a million dollars at \$520,000 (*‘East Turkistan’ Terrorist Forces 2011*).

2.8.2. Prosperity and Cultural Backlash: Rebiya Kadeer, the Muslim Dalai Lama and George W. Bush

With ample American support, Rebiya Kadeer is described by the Chinese media as “a Uighur Dalai Lama” who is “angling for a Nobel Prize.” (*‘East Turkistan’ Terrorist Forces 2011*) Like the Tibetan monk, she is portrayed as a “political exile who has long been engaged in activities aimed at splitting China and undermining national unity . . . (and who) has organized armed forces, engage in violent activities and instigated disturbances.” (100 Questions 2001) Kadeer is a prominent face and voice for the Uyghurs in diaspora (*Rebiya Kadeer’s Funding Sources 2009*). Like the Dalai Lama, she has accused the PRC of cultural genocide, declaring that “China continues to oppress our people.” (Crowe 2013; *Protest Marks Xinjiang ‘Massacre’ 2007*) This anti-Chinese rhetoric may seem surprising when Kadeer’s past is considered. Remarkably, she was elected to the 1993 8th National Committee of the People’s Political Consultative Conference (*Unveiled Rebiya Kadeer: A Uighur Dalai Lama 2009*). She was a successful business woman and listed as one of the wealthiest individuals in the nation, worth over 100 million yuan before she was taken into custody in 1999 for allegedly leaking state secrets and for tax evasion. Kadeer continued to receive much attention in the West too: in 2007, then-President George W. Bush met her in person, in Prague.

The next year, staying on message before the Summer Olympics, Bush referred to Uyghurs and Tibetans in a speech celebrating the 10th anniversary of the U.S. Congress’ passing of the International Religious Freedom Act (Clarke 2010). The unfortunate reality is that despite substantially improved material circumstances for most of the population or some scholars posit that it is perhaps because of the socio-economic inequality generated from the success of reform-generated development, the western border has remained a region of continual violence since 2007/8—mired in cycles of riots and protests, followed by state suppression and repression (Cao et al. 2018; Han 2011). Velasco (2018) theorizes that “cultural backlash” is a stronger explanation than “economic insecurity” for confrontation and conflict and he contends that populism often occurs in countries that are economically strong: the experiences of TAR and Xinjiang appear to support his thesis as prosperity has done little to assuage Tibetans’ and Uyghurs’ call for independence and violence seems to have escalated with economic prosperity and perhaps American support. In this heartbreaking conflict, the mistrust and misunderstanding are made amply clear: there is on the one side, Americans who believe they are supporting persecuted religious minorities fighting for freedom; and on the other, communists who talk about battling “splittists” that are trying to tear their country apart.

⁴¹ The *People’s Daily* logs a different number: it reports that when Kadeer arrived in the U.S., the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) sponsored National Endowment for Democracy “visited and offered financial support and annually grants US\$200,000 to the UAA.” (*‘East Turkistan’ Terrorist Forces 2011*); see also (*Lobbying for the Faithful: Uyghur American Association 2018*).

2.8.3. Violence in the Autonomous Regions of Tibet and Xinjiang and Its Spread Beyond

In March, the month that the PRC entered and overthrew the religious government of Tibet in 1959, five months before the start of the 2008 August Games, there were protests first in Lhasa, then violence in the Aba Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in southwest Sichuan. According to official reports, munitions, “propaganda material for ‘Tibet independence,’ devices for sending text messages to mobile phones and pornographic discs” were discovered at the Kirti Monastery in Aba County.⁴² Then, in February of the next year, 50 years after the Dalai Lama fled the communists, the first of many self-immolations took place; 2012 saw the largest number at 80.⁴³ The immolations moved beyond the Tibetan Autonomous Region into Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and occasionally as far away as Beijing.

For Uyghurs, 2009 proved a deadly year too. On 26 June, in southern Guangdong province, Han Chinese workers turned on and killed Uyghur co-workers in a Shaoguan toy factory because of a rumor that they had raped Han women. On 5 July, Uyghurs in Xinjiang responded with “peaceful protest” in Urumqi that ultimately turned deadly. Joanne Finley (2011) writes that they were demonstrating against the perceived “ethnic discrimination” and “non-transparency of information, state censorship and rumor concerning the Shaoguan factory incident of 26 June.” Continuing ethnic tensions surfaced with occasional outbreaks like the deadly attacks in the southern city of Kashgar. As with the Tibetan situation, violence spread across the country beyond Xinjiang with cases like a knife attack in a Yunnan train station in the southwest in 2011, a “fiery car crash in (Beijing’s) Tiananmen Square that killed five and injured 40” in the northeast in 2014, (Associated Press in Beijing 2014) and a knife attack in the Guangzhou subway station in the southeast in 2015 (Hoshur et al. 2011). Elsewhere in the Muslim world, there were incidents of instability that the communist state works so hard to avoid.⁴⁴

2.8.4. Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles’ Participation: Evolution of PRC Policies

Amid ongoing religious conflict, the government’s approach to religion continued to evolve and increasingly focused on beneficial aspects in religion. As Susan McCarthy puts it, charity allows religions to “spill over its designated boundaries,” especially when activities prove their “social utility.” Moreover, Vivienne Shue notes that “reformist practices can be embraced by the state and dignified with formal approvals.” For example, when an earthquake devastated Wenchuan in southwest Sichuan in 2008, the Taiwanese Buddhist group Cizi (Tzu Chi or Buddhist Compassion Relief) best known for its medical aid work, took part in rescue efforts. They performed relief work in areas affected by natural disasters: offering both medical assistance and spiritual comfort—praying for the injured, the dead and their families. This recognition of the positive socially gainful elements in religion was formally expressed in 2012, in an inter-departmental memorandum drafted by six central government agencies (including SARA, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the United Front Work Department that works with diaspora Chinese). The document was issued to party bureaucrats in different departments and at various levels, exhorting them to recognize and encourage charity work of religious organizations in the project of national rejuvenation and the building of a socialist society.

The memorandum, *Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles’ Participation*, sets out the meaning and benefits of charity work, the guiding principles and goals, operational parameters, the expected shape of activities and government favor and support in the performance of work that benefit society. Acceptable activities include efforts

⁴² See <http://en.chinacourt.org/public/detail.php?id=4303>.

⁴³ For details see https://sites.tufts.edu/gis/files/2018/05/Chokki_Tenzin_GIS101_2018.pdf, <https://freetibet.org/about/self-immolation-protests>. For the response from the PRC, see <https://www.eurasiareview.com/01122012-china-tibetan-immolations-security-measures-escalate/>.

⁴⁴ The Jasmine Revolution was ignited in December 2010 when a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire in protest against the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stand and the revolution he started unseated the country’s president. As the anti-government protests spread across much of the North African and Middle Eastern Islamic countries in west Asia, it was given the moniker “Arab Spring.”

to destroy the harmful and provide comfort; to help the disabled; to nourish the elderly and care for the young; to aid the poor and assist the needy; to donate resources for support of education; to provide health services; to protect the environment; to build public facilities for the social good; and other such legitimate and permitted beneficial charity work appropriate to religious groups and the congregations.⁴⁵ (SARA 2012; McCarthy 2017).

Opinions is so central to state policy on religion that it is mentioned in the 2018 White Paper on religion that will be discussed in a later section.

Beyond the domestic arena, the post-2004 period brought political change and ongoing concern over Islamist groups for PRC's Central Asian neighbors. The 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan brought about a change of government peacefully. Inspired by this, some in Uzbekistan aspired to a similar development but hopeful reformers met with charges of Islamic radicalism and violence: bloodshed in the city of Andijan was the result. Scholars disagree on the extent of Islamist involvement in Uzbekistan but the threat of radical Islam to the PRC was real enough when Americans reported Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) militants fighting alongside "al-Qa'ida and Taliban forces in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom (the military mission in Afghanistan after 9/11)." Mirroring the American funding of Tibetans and Uyghurs, the "close financial relationship of the Islamic movement with al-Qa'ida" was also worrying. So too was the finding that "ETIM fighters received terrorist training in Afghanistan, financed by al-Qa'ida and the Taliban." (*Globalsecurity.org* n.d.) According to PRC sources given in Wang (2003), the group was responsible for more than 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang from 1992–2003.

According to Wang, ETIM focuses on creating an Islamic state, a caliphate. On this issue, Aida Amanbayeva (2009) offers a different assessment: she cautions that nationalistic feelings and the wish to re-establish a caliphate does not turn a group or a community into terrorists and she believes that "no strong or viable relationship between Islam and terrorism in Central Asia has yet been formed." Wang, on the other hand, believes that the ETIM is part of an international network that operates mostly within the region of Central Asia, previously known as Turkestan/Turkistan.⁴⁶

2.8.5. The 2010 Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners within the Territory of the PRC

Amid the growing Islamist presence in Central Asia, American support of separatist groups-in-diaspora and the failure of domestic Strike Hard initiatives and the jailing of Uyghurs and Tibetans to stem the violence, the Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners within the Territory of the People's Republic of China was promulgated in 2010 (Detailed Rules). Detailed Rules is an amendment to the 1994 Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens⁴⁷ within the Territory of the People's Republic of China. Article 4 in the Detailed Rules reiterates yet again the PRC's respect for the freedom of religious belief of non-residents:

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate an English translation of the Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles' Participation in Public Welfare Charitable Activities. The translation here is mine.

⁴⁶ This area is bounded by Siberia to the north; Tibet, India, Afghanistan and Iran to the south; the Gobi Desert to the east; and the Caspian Sea to the west. Xinjiang as East Turkestan denotes both its geographic location—that is, "east" of West Turkestan (including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) and its ethnic kinship with Central Asia. The network of organizations that share common purpose include the East Liberation Organization, East Turkistan International Committee, United Committee of Uyghurs' Organizations (for Central Asia and Xinjiang), Central Asian Uyghur Hezbollah in Kazakhstan, Turkistan Party in Pakistan, Eastern Turkistan Islamic Resistance Movement in Turkey, the Eastern Turkistan Youth League based in Switzerland and smaller groups like East Turkistan Islamic Party, East Turkistan Opposition Party, Shock Brigade of the Islamic Reformist Party, East Turkistan Party of Allah and the Uyghur Liberation Organization.

⁴⁷ The National People's Congress Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) website for the China Committee on Religion and Peace, 1994, uses the term "Aliens" showing American influence but "Foreigners" is used in the 2010 amendment.

The People's Republic of China respects the freedom of religious belief of foreigners within Chinese territory, and protects and administers the religious activities of foreigners within Chinese territory in accordance with law.

The People's Republic of China protects friendly contacts and cultural and academic exchanges of foreigners within Chinese territory with Chinese religious circles in respect of religion in accordance with law.

Article 5 goes on to note that "Foreigners may participate in religious activities at lawfully registered Buddhist monasteries, Taoist temples, mosques, churches within Chinese territory according to their own religious belief." The freedom to practice is obviously circumscribed as the Detailed Rules continues on with discussions about requirements at the various levels of government including the county level, the provincial level and autonomous regions or municipalities directly under the Central Government (SARA 2010). The gap between the avowed commitment to freedom on the one hand and the conspicuous effort to demarcate state-sanctioned "legitimate" belief and practice on the other can perhaps best be understood as the reality that the "party-state has increasingly integrated its religious work into the national system of state governance and party building" especially after the CPC Central Committee's Conference on United Front Work (2015) and the National Religious Work Conference (2016) and the incorporation of SARA into the CPC Department of United Front Work highlighting "the party's centralized and unified leadership over religious work." (Cao 2018).

2.8.6. The 2017 Regulations on Religious Affairs

Seven years after the Detailed Rules for foreigners, the 2017 Regulation on Religious Affairs, a revision of the 2005 Regulation, was issued. It sets out once again parameters for "acceptable" practices in Chapter I, General Provisions. Article 2 reiterates the freedom of belief and states that mutual respect is required to maintain that liberty: "Citizens shall have the freedom of religious belief . . . Religious citizens, non-religious citizens and citizens with different religious beliefs shall respect each other and live in harmony." This is further contextualized in Article 3 which cautions that there are limits and that the freedom is "administered under the principles of protecting legitimacy, stopping illegitimacy, containing the extreme, resisting penetration (by foreign influence) and cracking down on criminals (like terrorists)." (SARA 2017; Zhang 2017) Specifically, Cao and Laliberté's insight that the PRC assumes the primacy of the state over religion is irrefutably confirmed by Article 27 under Chapter IV Premises for Religious Activities. It reads:

The department of religious affairs shall supervise and inspect the compliance with the laws, regulations and rules, establishment and implementation of the premise (such as temples, monasteries and churches) management system, modification of the registration items, religious activities and foreign related activities of the premise for religious activities. The premises for religious activities shall accept the supervision and inspection of the departments of religious affairs.

There is also Article 30 which controls even the aesthetics by prohibiting large, outdoor religious statues outside of temple and church grounds (Zhang 2017).

Set against the realities of state control over religious practice and ongoing tensions and occasional violence on the western border in the PRC, the "traditional Chinese (qualities) of compatibility and tolerance" lauded in the 1997 White Paper on Freedom of religious belief in China seem inaccessible to Tibetan monastics and radical Islamists. There is scant evidence of "equal status" at least for dissident groups and there seems to be an absence of coexistence in "tranquility" where "religious disputes are unknown in China."⁴⁸ (See White Paper 1997; State Council 2010).

⁴⁸ It is impossible to say what was in the minds of the authors of the White Paper but such egregious historical inaccuracies may originate from an uncritical reading of documents such as Carsun Chang's "A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and

2.8.7. Expanded Sphere of Practice and Increased Control Simultaneously: More Charity, Less Tolerance for “Disruptors”

This unfavorable impression of the contemporary reality is confirmed by “China’s revised regulations on religion fend off foreign influences,” a short article by Sheng Yang (2017) in *The Global Times (Huanqiu)*.⁴⁹ Yang writes that the “latest regulations are more specific and stricter, which analysts say are aimed at solving the latest problems of China’s religious affairs.” He quotes Liu Guopeng, a researcher at the Institute of World Religion Studies in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), who reports that through the influence of Wahhabism, some Uyghur and Hui groups have become “increasingly conservative and aggressive . . . (And that) the balance between religions has (been) broken” in places like Xinjiang Uyghur and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions, to the extent that the “conflict between Islamism and other religions has even caused violence and bloodshed occasionally.” Yang goes on to note that there have also been “incidents between Muslims and other people in some parts of China” like Tangshan in the northern province of Hebei. In the estimation of Cao et al., the Xinjiang region “currently poses the most imminent threat” to domestic security. But Islam is not the sole problem. Liu tells Yang that

... according to our research, Protestantism has been growing very quickly in recent years in the Chinese mainland, and the believers are more conservative than other Christians and they have frequently attacked some religions like Buddhism and Taoism, and also had conflicts with Islam.⁵⁰

Turning next to Chu Yin, an associate professor at the University of International Relations, Yang learns the unusually sensational account of two Chinese citizens who were killed by Islamic State militants in Pakistan. The new converts had been recruited by a South Korean missionary organization to preach in the Islamic country. Chu added that “South Koreans missionaries have been conducting underground missionary activities in China since at least a decade ago . . . Additionally, many missionary organizations are even sponsored by the [South Korean] intelligence agency, the National Intelligence Service.”⁵¹ Such changes in the religious landscape since the start of reforms 40 years ago calls for an updated approach outlined in the 2018 White Paper.

2.9. China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief: The 2018 White Paper

The 2018 White Paper is an updated framework to how the PRC intends to deal with religious issues within its borders. It replaces the 1997 version, includes the focus from the 2012 Opinions and is divided in five sections: I. Basic Policies in Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief; II. Legal Guarantees for Freedom of Religious Belief; III. Conducting Religious Activities in an Orderly Manner; IV. The Role of Religious Groups Has Been Fully Developed; V. Active and Healthy Religious Relations (IOSC 2018).

Reconstruction of Chinese Culture.” (Chang et al. 2000) Under the section “What the West Can Learn from Eastern Thought,” Chang writes that for the East (here the PRC) “‘the whole world is like one family.’ Though there are many nations now, mankind will eventually become one and undivided. Chinese thought has emphasized this attitude.” Then under “What We Expect from World Thought,” Chang writes: “The expansion of Western civilization has brought the peoples into close contact and unfortunately has also produced much friction . . . In order to achieve coexistence of the various cultures and world peace, one must first, through a transcendental feeling that goes beyond philosophical and scientific research, attain an attitude of respect and sympathy toward other cultures and thereby acquire genuine compassion and commiseration toward mankind in adversity . . . ”

⁴⁹ Whether such articles are an attempt to balance and or counter western analyses and commentary is impossible to determine. The English edition of the *Global Times* was launched in 2009, sixteen years after the Chinese edition, *Huanqiu*. It is owned by the *People’s Daily* and covers international issues primarily from the government’s perspective. While this poses the question of credibility, Yang’s article does offer an official explanation for the need for a revision.

⁵⁰ It is unclear what Liu means by “attack.” Drawing from personal experience, I would guess that Liu is referring less to physical abuse and more to verbal attacks, likely including charges of superstition against Buddhists and Daoists, overzealous attempts at conversion and highly animated discussions about Christian doctrine.

⁵¹ One wonders if South Korea is a proxy for the U.S.

China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief (C3PFRB) focuses on Xi Jinping's call for "law-based governance" and the "integrating (of) religious work into the national governance system."⁵² The Preamble reiterates the core values of "freedom of religious belief," "religious and social harmony" and ends with a singularly consistent declaration as follows:

Religious believers and non-believers respect each other and live in harmony, committing themselves to reform and opening-up and the socialist modernization and contribute to the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

Echoing Xi's predecessor Jiang Zemin, who admitted that "religion might outlast the CCP," the White Paper acknowledges that "Religion is an integral part of human civilization" and that policies and strategies must adapt to changing circumstances. It offers that the most pressing challenges currently are the proper "handling (of) religious relations" and the "curbing (of) religious extremism." Like the last sentence in the Preamble, the final sentence in the Conclusion is remarkably consistent and affirmative. (See [Shi 2018](#))

China will continue to respect and protect its citizens' freedom to religious beliefs, and strive to build the country into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and with a sound environment.

C3PFRB conveys clearly that the achievement of the freedom to religious beliefs is not an end in itself and that it is a part of the "realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation." Its implementation will "uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and (the state will) provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to the socialist society." That is, for instance, Muslims are not free to develop a caliphate and Christians are not free to teach Creationism in their schools.

Collaboration between the state and religious groups and within different sects of the same religion is encouraged. There are exemplary accounts of such alliances for Buddhists and Muslims in section IV:3 "Conscientiously resisting extremism."⁵³ In December 2017, religious groups issued a joint proposal calling for "religious communities to enhance their abilities to distinguish, guard against and resist the encroachment of cults" in the interest of the central aims of the government: social harmony and stability from moderate prosperity achieved through modernization.

3. Variability in Governance and Collaboration between Religious Individuals, Individuals and the State

The joint December 2017 proposal issued by the state-sanctioned groups illustrates well McCarthy's discernment that "Legally approved religions are expected to 'mutually adapt' to the needs and interests of the regime, for example by helping to build the 'harmonious society' and combating 'evil cults' like Falun Gong." When they do not, she writes, referring to the work of her colleagues Kang Xiaoguang and Han Heng, groups that "challenge . . . official ideology" and threaten the state because they "focus on sensitive issues or (if they) possess strong mobilizing capacity" are subject to stricter controls. Using the work of Wu Fengshi and Chan Kin-man, McCarthy adds that NGOs may "interact, negotiate, and

⁵² See also Xi Jinping's message about religious work: ([Xi Jinping Attends the National Conference of Religious Work 2016](#)) and ([Full Text. Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress 2017](#)).

⁵³ In January 2014, Buddhists gathered and were counselled to teach "the correct outlook on life and (oppose) extremist behaviours such as self-immolation or the incitement of others to do so." In May of the same year, Muslims convened and were steered towards condemnation of "violent terrorist activities" along with the release of a proposal "Keep to the Middle Path and Steer Clear of Extremism." Then in July 2016, the China Religious Culture Communication Association and the China Islamic Association held an International Seminar on the Islamic Middle Path in Urumqi, "advocating the role of the Middle Path in opposing extremism." These efforts recall both the Buddhist notion of emptiness and the Confucian ideal of *zhongyong* or the "mean," evidence of sinicization or the implementation of "Chinese characteristics." (See also [Tibetans: Communist China's unlikely Catholic Connection 2015](#)).

resist governmental pressure in different ways” that might then affect the methods through which officials deal with them. Finally, with the work of Teresa Wright and Teresa Zimmerman-Liu, McCarthy indicates that “harsh treatment . . . frequently has little to do with intrinsic factors like theology or belief” and may have more to do with achieving current policy goals. In other words, religion may be peripheral to the broadly stated national goals but it is a factor that will alternately be considered a hindrance to and or an aid in the achievement of the ultimate goals of prosperity, security and harmony.

3.1. State Accepted Religious Groups: Socially Engaged Communities in the Hinterland

Through her dual focus on Gospel Rehab (GR) in southern Yunnan set up in 1999 and Gansu Province Association for Minority Nationality Cultural and Educational Promotion (GAMCEP) established in the central northern province in 2009, McCarthy offers evidence for Andrew Mertha and Vivienne Shue’s theory that the “fragmentation of governance and the ability (of local officials) to deviate from the script allows more pluralism than one might expect of such a centralized, authoritarian system.” Further, she agrees with Karre Koesel’s assessment that charity in the PRC is a “tradable resource” that religious groups can use to “gain legitimacy and diminish suspicions toward their religious community.”

Both the Evangelist Christian GR and Hui Muslim GAMCEP programs predate the 2012 Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles’ Participation in Public Welfare Charitable Activities. Both anticipate and exemplify the spirit of the document. The Gospel Rehab was set up in one of the poorest provinces in the country and it dealt with problems like rural poverty, illiteracy, drug addiction and HIV/AIDS. It began as an unregistered drug treatment program in Yunnan that used “illicit” Christian “prayer and evangelism to treat addiction.” Even though it lacked approval, it was allowed to continue and was eventually absorbed into a program that is overseen by the state-sanctioned Three-self Patriotic Movement and Chinese Christian Council.

Gansu, like Yunnan, is also one of the poorest provinces in the country. The Muslim GAMCEP is registered with the provincial Civil Affairs Bureau, is government-backed but it is independent of the CPC. Its stated goal is the fostering of economic and educational advancement among ethnic minorities including Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz. The director, Yu Guimin, is Hui and he joined the communist party in the 1950s and is a retired party official. He advocated consistently for Muslim interests. When he secured a contract with the financing necessary to develop some land in Lanzhou, as the deputy chief of the provincial Forestry Bureau in 1997, he approved the construction of a mosque within the forest management area for Muslim construction workers.

GAMCEP is dedicated to advancing Islamic belief, adherence, community and identity. Donations are made to poor communities during religious holidays; and grants of cash, food and household goods are distributed to the needy. On the linguistic-literary front, the group has financed tuition-free Arabic language programs for male post-secondary graduates interested in studying in the Middle East; supports literary competitions by Chinese Muslim authors; funds the magazine *Seeing Like Us*; and produces *Gansu Muslim* a television show. In 2014, GAMCEP purchased over 500 solar water heaters for Muslim communities in impoverished Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai. Beyond working within Muslim communities, Yu also believes that imams and *ahongs* (religious teachers) should be a vanguard in building ethnic unity, in advancing “harmony among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslim Chinese” and in “promoting economic and educational advancement among Muslims, especially Muslim women.” All these endeavors are reminiscent of activities lauded by the 2012 Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles’ Participation in Public Welfare Charitable Activities.

But “educational and economic opportunities” may become restricted and the status of women undermined with the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and Lu Xin reports a litany of feminist charges against “extremist” men in *Global Times*: they “forbid the use of condoms”; do not care about their children; treat their wives like personal chattel; forbid their wives to work; insist their wives “wear robes and cover their faces” and “even beat” them (Lu 2018). But how credible is Lu’s account? How widespread is the turn to fundamentalism? We do not know. What we do know, as McCarthy reports,

is that GAMCEP works to counter foreign fundamentalist influences, especially ones that erode gains for women.

3.2. Hui and Uyghurs: Same Religion, Different Treatments

What we encounter in Yu Guimin and other socially oriented Islamic community organizations like his, is what Brent Crane (2014) calls “A Tale of Two Chinese Muslim Minorities: ‘Hui and Uyghur.’” The Hui have a long history in mainland China and have lived through various dynasties as a minority within larger Han populations. Their focus is not on independence but rather, revolves around worship as they are most concerned about the freedom to practice Islam. Referring to Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post, Crane describes a Hui Sufi leader in Ningxia who spoke openly about speaking to Osama bin Laden and other radical clerics while he was studying in Pakistan and who by 2006 had established a “virtual religious state” with a million and a half followers “and a network of mosques and madrasas.” This imam remained unencumbered, undisturbed by the CPC because he had expressed “unwavering loyalty” to the Party.

When the treatment of this Sufi teacher is compared with the situation for even ordinary Uyghurs, Crane concludes that “the difference in government treatment of the two Muslim groups rests not within religion but within the political realm.” The state does not interfere with the Hui because they do not challenge the government on the twin issues of “territoriality and ethnic unity”: as long as they neither want statehood nor differentiation from the Han beyond religion, they will be free from harassment.

The Hui see themselves as nationally Chinese, belonging to and citizens of the PRC. Wang (2018) writes that the Hui diaspora in Dubai draw on the “rich heritage of ‘Hui Confucians’ ... to reconnect the (Arab and Chinese) peoples by emphasizing the universal humanistic concerns in both Islam and Confucianism.” They are seen as “cooperative and patriotic”—though ironically, Wang notes, they also demonstrate a strong desire to remain in diaspora. The Chinese Muslims in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) “create more meaningful social exchanges beyond economic transaction” with “art, research, philanthropy, and medicine.” By this process, they become a part of the soft power for the PRC as “Cultural Ambassadors.” Since 2010, the Chinese consulate general has hosted an *Iftar*, the meal that breaks the fast at Ramadan, for all Chinese Muslim families including Hui, Uyghur and others. The success of the Hui in Dubai promotes “dialogues between Chinese and Islamic civilizations,” auguring “harmony among civilizations” and chasing away any potential clash.

3.3. Diaspora Hui Representing the PRC: Two Exemplary Individuals

Wang offers two individual examples of establishment “Good Muslims”—in-diaspora: Dr. Ma and Madam Wu. Dr. Ma is one of the most successful Hui businessmen active in the UAE, though he sees himself as a “religious man and aspirant scholar, (and) making money is but a means to help him achieve his goal.” In 2011, he established the first Confucius Institute on the Arabian Peninsula in Dubai while a few Muslim countries were in the throes of Arab Spring, including neighboring Bahrain. Islamic sensibilities are not offended by the “Confucius” in the institutes because Confucianism is conceived of as a philosophy and not considered a religion by the state.

Dr. Ma was born in a small Ningxia Hui village where his father was an *ahong* at the mosque. The patriarch taught his children Arabic and the *Qur’an* so that Dr. Ma was fluent in the language. For that invaluable skill, he was sent by the government to work in Cairo in 1992. Eleven years later, in 2003, he finished his study of the modernization process in Saudi Arabia for his doctoral dissertation. The philosopher’s goal to “bridge the cultural gap and promote better mutual understanding between China and the Arab world” dovetails perfectly with the government’s stated goal of harmony.

Madam Wu, like Dr. Ma, is a businesswoman. But unlike Dr. Ma, she was born into an influential secular Chinese Hui family and grew up in thriving post-reform Shanghai. After graduating with a degree in Arabic at the Shanghai Foreign Languages University in 1993, she started work with an American firm in Dubai. Highly motivated, she is self-taught in English and computer skills. In 1995,

she started work with Orbit Showtime Network, a Dubai-based TV network provider in the Middle East and North Africa. She appears to have become more observant and chose to wear a “black *Sheila* and black *abaya*” to the interview with Wang Yuting (Wang 2018).

In 2001, Madam Wu married a member of one of the local elite families and so expanded her social network organically. Her work is eclectic: she acts as a broker, makes introductions and arranges meetings between government officials from the PRC and potential associates, puts together important business deals and on one occasion even served as the “interpreter and business advisor for . . . a prominent businessman and member of the royal family when he visited Shanghai in 2012.” The role taken on by Madam Wu and Dr. Ma is not unlike hyphenated-North Americans who act as bridges to others with similar ethnic backgrounds and thereby ease relations by offering common ground: Canada’s ex-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the U.S. ex-President Ronald Reagan’s special “Irish” bond is one example; and the British hiring of Mark Carney, who holds Canadian, British and Irish citizenship, as the Governor of the Bank of England is another.

4. Conclusions

At the writing of this paper in mid-2019, it remains unclear what situation Uyghurs face in Xinjiang even after diplomats from selected countries were invited to visit for highly choreographed tours of “detention camps” in March 2019. Rumors continue to swirl around the story that “(a)n estimated one million Muslims are being held in detention camps in Xinjiang”—camps that authorities in Beijing call “vocational training centers” to deter radicalization, where inmates are taught “language, culture and vocational skills.” (Lyons 2018) As for the case of Meng Wanzhou, her legal team announced on 1 March 2019 that they are suing the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canada Border Services Agency, alleging that members of the two government offices “breached her constitutional rights when she was arrested in Vancouver on December 1.”⁵⁴ Two months later, on 9 May 2019 Mike Hager and Xiao Xu report in the *Globe and Mail* that Meng’s lawyers have “successfully delayed formal extradition proceedings” and recommend that the charges be dropped because “her arrest was an abuse of process; the fraud charge she is facing in the United States is for a crime that doesn’t exist in Canada; and the U.S. government’s extradition request represents an ‘abuse of power.’”

These new developments with the extradition case happen amid concerns of political interference in the judicial process in both the U.S. and Canada. The first calls out President Trump in his public musings that he could drop the request for Meng’s extradition if he were to receive concessions in trade negotiations with the PRC. The latter catches Prime Minister Trudeau with four high level resignations—including two cabinet ministers, that resulted from his handling of accusations by his ex-Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Jody Wilson-Raybould. Wilson-Raybould alleges that Trudeau and members of his government put undue pressure on her to overturn the decision made by the federal director of public prosecutions, Kathleen Roussel, to prosecute the Montreal Quebec firm SNC-Lavalin for charges of corruption.⁵⁵ These two possible and alleged infractions imply or indicate clearly that the rule of law is not yet perfect in Canada and the U.S.

Perhaps the case for Meng Wanzhou’s extradition might best be read as a cautionary tale on the blinding influence and power of mainstream narratives. Given the disproportionate focus on the authoritarian malfeasance against religious faithful and retaliatory actions taken by the PRC government, it is sometimes difficult to see clearly where the threat to the “multilateral rules-based order from

⁵⁴ See for example the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* and the UK *The Guardian* respectively at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-extradition-proceedings-delayed-for-huawei-executive-meng-wanzhou/>, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-huawei-executive-meng-wanzhou-files-lawsuit-alleging-breach-of/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/world>.

⁵⁵ SNC-Lavalin is by its own description “a global fully integrated professional services and project management company and a major player in the ownership of infrastructure.” See <http://www.snclavalin.com/en/> (accessed on 4 March 2019). For details about the Jody Wilson-Raybould story, see <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-more-than-half-of-canadians-say-charges-against-snc-lavalin-should-go/> (accessed on 4 March 2019).

1945” and global peace might come from. Vanderklippe (2019b) reports that Former UN Security Council President Kishore Mahbubani’s close analysis of current international politics suggests that the greatest threat comes from the U.S. It is the U.S. that has in recent years withdrawn from multiple multilateral agreements like “the Paris climate agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization Appellate Body, an optional protocol under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and a series of UN organizations, including UNESCO and the Human Rights Council.” (2019).

Unlike the peremptory claims for the rule of law in the U.S. and Canada, accusations that the PRC persecutes its religious faithful is blunted in a broader examination. When the conditions of the Uyghurs are considered against the treatment of Hui and evangelical Gospel Rehab for example, the PRC government’s actions do not look as comprehensively cruel as often depicted and assumed from media reports (Vanderklippe 2018a, 2018b). At the National Conference of Religious Work in 2016, Xi Jinping lauds the “stronger emphasis on a legal approach to religious work” but spoke also of the “need for improving the quality of the rule of law in dealing with religion,” acknowledging that the country still has some distance to go. He continued to say that the state “must persist in the separation of politics and religion and insist that religion does not interfere in politics” while conceding to a need to “improve the understanding of the principle of the rule of law.” Xi’s words suggest that the CPC is very much aware of the challenges in dealing with religious problems going forward.

In fact, Xi sees religion as a “very serious question” that has “special importance (because it) affects the relationship between the party and the lives of the people, affects harmony within society, affects the unity of the nation, (as well as affecting) the peace of the country and the integrity of our ancestral land.”⁵⁶ (Xi Jinping Attends the National Conference of Religious Work 2016) Thus the Communist Party of China recognizes that religion is going to stay and that it can aid in or hold back the building of a safe, prosperous and equitable society. Given the importance that religion has gained, Cao’s observations are notable: he discerns that China’s religious policy is “generally perceived to be restrictive if not antireligious in nature” but he adds that it “appears deeply contradictory and inconsistent,” establishing a variety of religion-state relations that can be described as “symbiotic,” “adversarial” or “indifference.” The diversity that Cao recognizes can be found in the practical strategies taken by officials: the first category is represented by the experiences of the GAMCEP in Gansu, Gospel Rehab in Yunnan and Hui in Dubai; the second is demonstrated by the tense and sometimes violent encounters with the Uyghurs, Tibetans and Falungong; and the third include the many popular Buddhist/Daoist groups and practices that are not counted by national statistics and which have not been included in this article.

It bears remembering here that communist China is a geographically huge, densely populated, ethnically diverse, culturally multiple, historically ancient, politically young and still developing country. The acute geopolitical conundrum that is Tibet and Xinjiang points to a knotted complex of imperial history of conquering Manchus and westerners and potentially “unfriendly” encounters on the borders of the PRC: Russia to the North; American presence on the east coast in Japan, South Korea and Philippines; American support for dissidents in Tibet and Xinjiang on the western border; American funding for the development of India’s nuclear power in the southwest (Grey 2016); American wars in modern East and Southeast Asia; American collusion with the U.K. for displacement of indigenous populations from Diego Garcia for the construction of a military base in the Indian Ocean (Vine 2015); and radical Islamism in the Western provinces.

International politics aside, quotidian experiences would defeat hegemonic accounts of religious practice and associated domestic policies in the PRC. If there were more studies of ordinary citizens, doing ordinary religious things, in ordinary places, the varieties of worship—both sanctioned and proscribed, would be obvious. I believe that the mistrust of the PRC’s treatment of its many and diverse

⁵⁶ This website for *China National Radio (Yang Guang Wang)* is in Chinese and the translation here is mine.

religious communities in part arises from a misunderstanding of the aims of government actions: that is, actions are mistaken to be anti-religious when they are targeted against real or perceived political territorial threats like the separatist Uyghurs and Tibetan or harmful heterodox religious practices like the belief in magical cures through meditation as in the Falungong. As Crane notes, the state is not anti-Islam, nor is it anti-Tibetan Buddhism—it is pro-unity and pro-security and these objectives would be plainly recognized if the evolution of state policies and strategies were analyzed within current political realities, both domestic and international.

Communist China has lifted most of its citizens out of abject poverty and promises to continue until all its people are fed properly, clothed well, gainfully working and given education. But it has failed to understand the depth of cultural and religious feelings of some of its minorities, most notably the Uyghurs and Tibetans. It has assumed that what has worked for the majority Han population would work for all other ethnic groups. This misunderstanding, it seems to me, requires education and not recrimination. On one hand, scholars, activists and journalists in the West might more seriously examine the differences in how the relationship between religion and politics has developed and is understood in West Asian as compared to East Asian traditions. On the other hand, scholars and party apparatchiks in the People's Republic of China might profitably investigate the psychological aspects of the willing faithful, even those belonging to "evil cults" such as the Falungong; as well as study foundational notions of commandments and orthodoxy, the singularity of revelation and divine inspiration and the centrality of free will (evolved into personal freedom) needed to realize the ultimate sacred act of imaging the divine in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. It would be a boon to all if both sides would consider how different presumptions and priorities could be accommodated. There is much work to be done toward banishing mutual mistrust and misunderstanding.

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