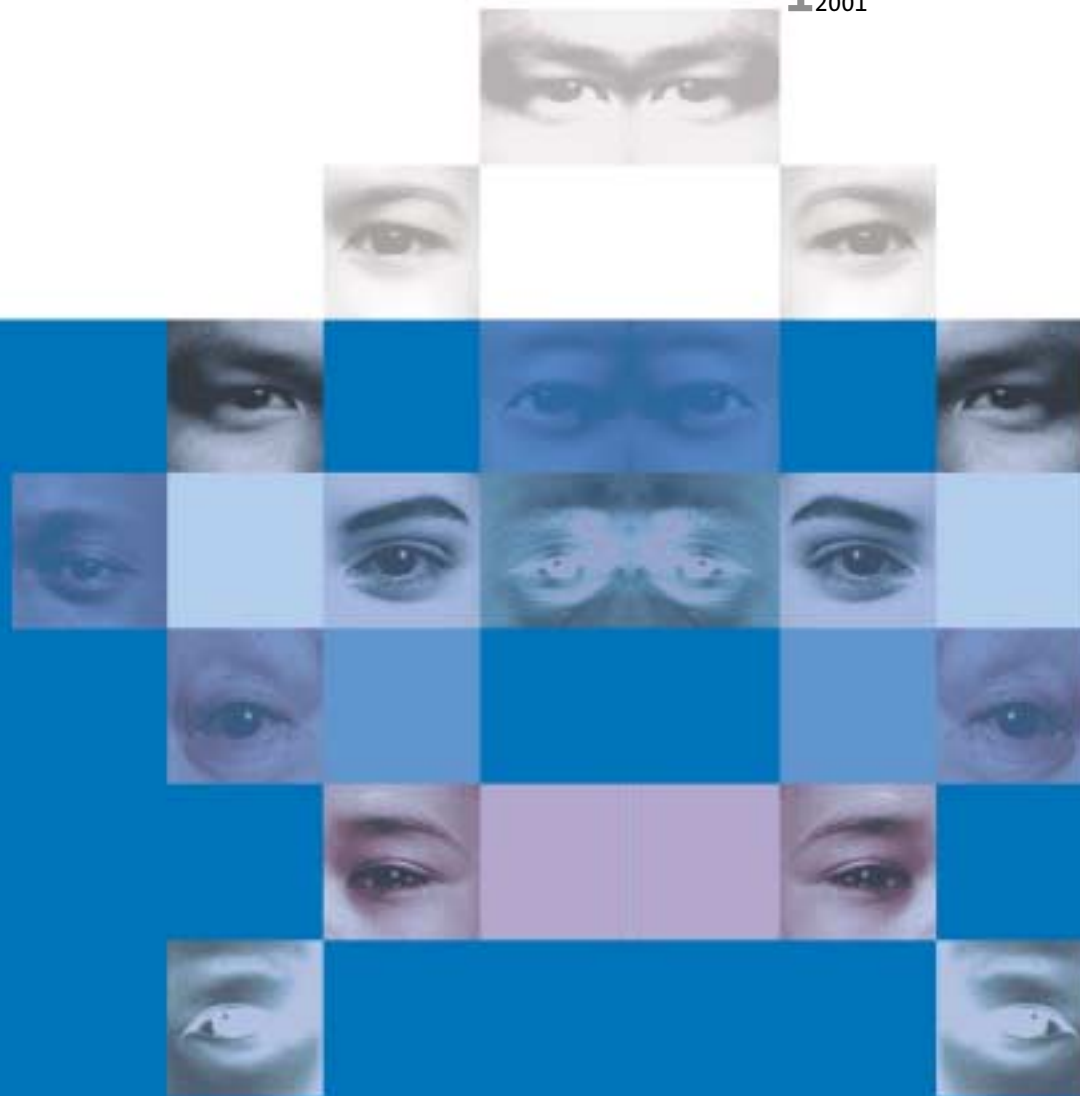


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Georg Evers  
**Human Rights.  
Religious Freedom  
in the People's  
Republic of China**

The *Human Rights Desk* at **missio** has been given the task to promote knowledge about the situation of human rights in various selected countries of Africa, Asia and Oceania, and to make an effort to contribute towards the improvement of the conditions for human rights in these countries. To realise this aim we are committed to promote the various efforts at net-working in the field of human rights and to improve the exchange with our partners in the churches of Africa, Asia and Oceania, and also with the political organisations and bodies in the Federal Republic of Germany. In the series "*Human Rights*" the *Human Rights Desk* will publish country studies, thematic research papers as well as the proceedings of conferences in the field of human rights studies.

The present study "*Religious Freedom in the People's Republic of China*" treats the problem of freedom of religion in the PR China against the background of the historical role which religions have played in the history of China. It will be demonstrated how in Chinese tradition, religions exercised certain functional roles and displayed specific characteristics which are still operative today in the religious policies of the Chinese government and the Communist Party, as it can be seen in their one-sided emphasis on the control function of the government in the field of religious activities. During the last two years the PR China was facing several major political, economic and social decisions which had great bearings on the situation of human rights in general and on religious freedom in particular. In a first step the present study takes up the question whether something like a "specific Chinese approach" to the problem of human rights exists. When we take into account the characteristic Chinese world-view, it is true that we can detect certain nuances and differences in emphasis in certain aspects, but not a real fundamentally different understanding of human rights. In Chinese tradition, however, we can detect a surprising continuity when we look at the relationship between religions and the state, which even today has a strong influence on the religious policy of the Chinese government. The constitution of the PR China guarantees the freedom of the religions to determine the contents of their doctrines themselves, but stipulates that all religious activities in public are controlled rigorously by the government and the Communist Party. They alone determine which religious activities are considered to be "legitimate" and which are "illegitimate" and then can be prosecuted as "criminal" offences. In the study we will concentrate on fate of the Catholic Church in China to show the consequences this understanding of religious freedom has. With focus on the problem of religious freedom, we will have a brief look at Protestant Christianity and at the other officially recognised religions in China, namely Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Islam. The study goes on contending that the sharp discrepancies between the Chinese government and the Falun-Gong-Movement and its persecution by the Chinese authorities are not a sign of strength, but that they demonstrate the ideological weakness and insecurity of the Communist Party who is afraid of losing its ideological pre-dominance in China. The enforcement of the government's control on religious activities which could be observed in the last two years is therefore an indication of the unstable situation of the Communist Party who has just celebrated the 80<sup>th</sup> birth-day of its foundation with much fanfare and pride.

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## General Data on the PR China<sup>1</sup>

<b>Name of the country</b>	People's Republic of China (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo)
<b>Surface Area</b>	9 572 419 square kilometres
<b>Inhabitants</b>	1,245 Milliard (1998)
<b>Population</b>	91,9% Han Chinese, 8% members of over 50 ethnic minorities, 1,4% Zhuang, 0,8% Hui, 0.8% Manchu, 0,7% Miao, Uighurs, Kazachs a.o.
<b>Population Growth</b>	1,2% (period of 1992-98), 25% younger than 15 years of age.
<b>Languages</b>	Chinese (Putonghua) spoken by 70% of the population. Other Chinese idioms as well as languages of ethnic minorities.
<b>Political System</b>	Socialist People's Republic consisting of 23 provinces, among them as 23rd , the Province of Taiwan.
<b>Supreme Constitutional Organ</b>	National People's Congress with 2972 members, elected by the Provincial Parliaments, autonomous regions, cities and the National Peoples Liberation Army.
<b>Head of State</b>	since 1993 Jiang Zemin, who at the same time holds the functions of Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of National Defence Committee.
<b>Prime Minister</b>	Since 1998 Zhu Rongji
<b>Religions</b>	<p><i>According to official statistics provided by the Chinese Government in 2001:</i></p> <p>Buddhists: 50 Mio., Muslims: 18 Mio., Protestants: 10 Mio and Catholics: 4 Mio.</p> <p><i>Numbers provided by specialised institutes, Church circles and foreign political institutions:</i></p> <p>Buddhists: 100 Mio (8%), Muslims 20 Mio (1,6%), Protestants: 15 Mio (1, 2%), when non-registered Churches are taken into account the numbers would increase to 50-75 Mio (4-6%). Catholics: 10 Mio (0.8%). As regards Daoism there are no reliable statistical data. There are more than 1.000 Daoist temples with over 10.000 monks and nuns<sup>2</sup></p> <p>N.B. Reliable statistical data on the numbers of religious believers in the PR China are not easily to be obtained, since figures given by different institutions and organisations are often contradicting each other.</p>

## Religious Freedom in the People's Republic of China

### Introduction

In the present study the focus will be on the problem of religious freedom in the People's Republic of China. We will critically discuss the actual situation of religions in China contrasting it with the role religions have played in the course of Chinese history. It is true that religions in Chinese tradition have developed certain specific characteristics which are still influencing religious life in the PR China today. On the other hand, in the present religious policy of the Chinese Communist Party, the one-sided emphasis or obsession of the government to control all religious activities, is in conflict with the self-understanding of the religions and also in opposition to the general understanding of the human right of religious freedom.

The general situation in the year 2002 indicates that the PR China has been undergoing important political, economic and social changes which in different ways will also have an impact on the situation of human rights in general and on religious freedom in particular.

In the year 2001 China celebrated the 80th birth-day of the Chinese Communist Party which since the year 1949 has exercised a monopoly on political power, which in all the various revisions of the constitution of the PR China has been reconfirmed. Regarding the other eight officially recognised political parties in the PR China, this has the consequence that they are allotted the role to present an image of democratic plurality to the outside world which de facto is not realised in the political system of the PR China at all. A further consequence of the political hegemony of the Communist Party is that there does not exist a clear distinction between the function and role of the Chinese government and those of the Communist Party. As a matter of fact we have in China at every stage of government and administration a double structure of government and party authority. This makes it difficult to determine who in the government or the Communist party is making political decisions and is running the daily affairs of the state. The Chinese Communist Party has celebrated the Eightieth Anniversary of its founding on a grand scale, but these celebrations could not hide the fact that at present the party is facing a deep crisis which has existed already for some years and slowly is eroding the party's undisputed ideological leadership. For all echelons of political power in the PR China, and especially for the cadres of the Communist Party, the central problem is the phenomenon of wide-spread corruption which is destroying the credibility

of all state functionaries. An additional factor of unrest and ideological confrontation is the ongoing dispute among party members whether the ideals of a socialist society can be reconciled with the economic system practised at present in the PR China – euphemistically dubbed “socialist market economy”<sup>3</sup>.

At present the government of the PR China is pursuing several important projects in the fields of foreign policy and international co-operation which are in the process of being realised or will have to be dealt with in the near future. At the meeting of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in Geneva in spring of 2001, the government of the PR China successfully blocked a motion by US government to censure the human rights record of the Chinese government. Like in previous years, this motion of the US government did not reach the necessary quorum of votes. Another important success of the Chinese government was that after a long and intensive campaign, Beijing was chosen as the site of the Olympic Games for the year 2008. Previous Chinese bids were rejected, because of the human rights record of the Chinese government. And in Moscow in July 2001, too, several delegations were reluctant to vote for Beijing for the same reason. In the end, the majority of delegates accepted the argument that awarding the games to Beijing, would guarantee that human rights would be respected better, because the Chinese government would be more closely watched by the international public. In December 2001 China was accepted as the 143rd member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), an important step which will have far-reaching consequences for the economy and the international standing of the Chinese government. The most important factor which prolonged the proceedings of obtaining a membership in the WTO was again the problem of the poor human rights record of the Chinese government. It is therefore correct to observe, that all these great political or economic projects of the Chinese government, which are part of a continuous general opening of the country for more co-operation with the international community of nations, are directly connected with the problem of improving the human rights conditions in the country. To observe and secure the right of freedom of conscience and religion, which constitutes one of the central individual human rights, will be of highest importance for the success of the policy of the PR China to foster and strengthen its international relations and its place among the nations of the world.

### **Are there specific Chinese elements in the approach to human rights?**

In the eyes of the Western world, the image of the People’s Republic of China has been and still is, that it is a country where human rights are not much respected and in which the freedom of religion is regularly violated. As one example Amnesty International regularly accuses the Chinese government in its reports of torturing prison inhabitants and of making use of the instrument of capital punishment in an excessive way, which is without parallel when compared with other governments in the world<sup>4</sup>. Again and again political dissidents in China have made the experience that the Chinese Communist Party is not willing to share its monopoly on political and ideological leadership in the country, which it has been exercising since 1949 and which has even been written into the constitution. For almost three years the members of the Falun-Gong-Movement have been experiencing what it entails that their movement has been forbidden and declared by the Chinese authorities to be an “evil cult” and that consequently all their religious activities were declared to be illegal criminal acts. When the Falun Gong organisation protested against this ruling, the Chinese government responded by imprisoning many members and by brain-washing them in specialised re-education camps. In a similar way Christians who engage in religious activities by coming together for worship at places not recognised by the government, are then declared to have committed a criminal offence. Their priests and pastors again and again are thrown into prison or sent to labour camps, and their places of worship, considered to be illegal by the government, are closed and often demolished<sup>5</sup>.

The Chinese government defends this restrictive policy against criticism from inside and outside by pointing out that according to the constitution of the PR China human rights are respected, including the right of religious freedom, adding that the exercise of these human rights has to stay “within the confines of the laws of the PR China<sup>6</sup>”. Furthermore the Chinese government has repeatedly declared that it considers the understanding and the content of human rights to be always dependent on the cultural and societal factors in a certain society. This conditioning of human rights accounts for the actual differences we encounter in the understanding and practice of human rights in different countries. With reference to the specific cultural and social conditions in China, the Chinese defend the position that they are entitled to have an understanding and practice of human rights which is different from the one prevalent in the West, where the rights of the individual person are ranked highest. In accordance with Chinese history, culture and understanding of the human person they stress that in Chinese tradition the obligations towards the community and society

have always had priority to individual rights<sup>7</sup>. In Chinese tradition and anthropology human beings become individual persons first and foremost by their places in the community and in society. Only when individuals have fulfilled their obligations towards the family, the group, and society at large, they are entitled to claim their individual rights. The welfare of the community ranks clearly above that of individual persons. Therefore, whenever there occurs a conflict, the fulfilment of the obligations and duties towards the community will rank first and have absolute priority over the rights and claims of the individual person<sup>8</sup>. In the PR China, the notion that human rights are transcendent or based on natural law is not accepted. Chinese tend to insist on the fact that in their understanding human rights are not transcendent and eternal values, which cannot be changed or be developed, but that human rights have to be realised step by step in concert with the social and economic development within a given society, and that, therefore, they are only concrete and real in a given historical context<sup>9</sup>. According to this argumentation, the economic, social and cultural rights ought to be valued on a par with the civil and political rights of the individual. Only the state can create the material preconditions for the realisation of human rights. From the Chinese government's point of view there is one more principle which is of tantamount importance, namely, that human rights should not be used as instruments to interfere in the interior affairs of any state<sup>10</sup>. The Western concept of the inviolable dignity of the human person, endowed by nature with certain rights, which he or she can defend against demands made by the community, appears in the eyes of the Chinese to be suspect, because it gives the individual person an exaggerated position. In Western understanding it is considered to be a positive achievement that an individual insists on his personal one in case of a conflict with society. For Chinese the appropriate behaviour of an individual would rather be to forego his personal interests in favour of social concerns. Of course, the understanding of human rights in present-day China is not only determined by going back to Chinese traditions of old. The Communist idea of the equality of all humans and the common obligation and task to build up an egalitarian socialist society have heavily influenced the understanding of human rights in the PR China. Nevertheless continuity and fidelity are to be observed towards the traditional understanding of the priority of the social over and against individual human rights throughout Chinese history<sup>11</sup>. Representatives of the Chinese Democracy Movement, like e.g. Wei Jinsheng<sup>12</sup>, however, point out that there exists a two thousand year old tradition of human rights in China, - a tradition, which is disavowed by and discontinued by the Communist leadership in the PR China.

## Continuity in the Chinese Understanding of the Role of Religion

The Chinese are said to be rather pragmatic and not to have much liking for philosophy, metaphysics and not at all for abstract theology, but rather to have a strong sense for the 'here and now'. In the long history of China the value of a religion always has been judged by the yardstick whether it did contribute to the welfare of the state and the community and whether its adherents could gain some advantages from it already in this world. For any government in Chinese history - and that holds true, regardless of the many changes in the form of government, for the Imperial Government, for the Republic under Sun Yatsen (1911-1926), as well as for the Communist People's Republic of China - the decisive element in the policy towards any given religion has been, whether a religion supported the existing order, contributed positively towards the welfare of the state, and helped to preserve the interior peace of the country<sup>13</sup>. The concept of unity plays an overarching role in Chinese thinking and consequently, has shaped religious policies in China where the emphasis has been on the preservation of peace and harmony within the state and society. As regards the relationship between state and religion in Chinese history, we can observe three patterns<sup>14</sup>:

Religion enters into a close relationship with the state and becomes a power sustaining and supporting the government, by mediating the blessing of Heaven onto the Emperor, respectively, onto a given government in power at the time; or, to express it in more secular terms, by positively engaging itself for the common good within society. In the course of Chinese history, Confucianism has fulfilled in an exemplary way the role of an orthodox religion in the understanding of the state. As regards Daoism this could be said only with great reservations. Buddhism and much more Christianity, however, have played in the past up to the present often the role of a heterodox religion, because they have challenged the existing order and worked for change or even for revolution within society.

Religion leaves the world and retreats into contemplation and meditation in monasteries and hermitages. In the past Chinese Buddhists have followed this path of fleeing the world, of mysticism or ascetism. In Daoism we also find this escapist and meditative tradition alive.

Religion is challenging the political system and tries to bring about political and social changes. The state normally reacted by declaring such activities to be heterodox practices which were forbidden and suppressed. In Chinese history, the secret religious societies within Buddhism and others have thus challenged the authorities and were consequently persecuted. A good example is the

movement of the White Lotus Sect in Chinese Buddhism which during the 12-17th century again and again inspired the revolts of farmers and other disgruntled groups within Chinese society. The perhaps most significant example is the Taiping Rebellion in the 19th century which used Christian concepts and ideas for its revolutionary ideology and activities. Common for all of these groups is that they were aiming at fundamental changes within Chinese society.

The aim of every Chinese government in Chinese history has been to control all religious activities and to make sure that the unity within state and society was not endangered or hampered by religious ideas or activities. The official religious policy of Chinese governments was developed and controlled by Confucian scholars. The Confucian ideas of state and society determined the scope orthodoxy and decided whether certain religious activities violated the rules of orthodox religious behaviour, and consequently had to be forbidden and punished by the state. Whenever the government took measures against certain religions, these restrictive acts were always justified as necessary measures by the government to preserve public order. In the government's argumentation, such punitive action never was directed against religion as such, but only against groups which used religion to cover up their criminal activities of subversion and revolution and therefore did not have any right to complain that their human right of religious freedom was at stake. The Confucian understanding of state rested on the principles of rationalism, moralism and Sino-centrism, that is the conviction, that China as the Middle Kingdom, constitutes a cosmos in itself. The unity of the state, which in Chinese history again and again was endangered, could not be built on religious faith, but only on reason and ethics. Rationalist Confucianism, combined with a pragmatic legalism (*fa-xue*), constituted the central principles which had the aim to preserve the cultural and political unity of the Chinese people<sup>15</sup>.

This has been the way of understanding the role of religion during the Imperial times, and this basically is still the understanding today in the People's Republic of China<sup>16</sup>. Mao Zedong, too, was firmly in accord with this Chinese tradition when in a rationalist way he selected Marxist science as cornerstone for his regime, and later during the Cultural Revolution introduced the idea of serving the people as ethical and moral category and declared Marxism and Socialism with Chinese characteristics to be the only orthodox doctrine. The new element in the religious policy of the Communist government can be seen in the use of Marxist religious criticism, which expounds the idea that all religions will disappear automatically as soon as a socialist state has been realised, because then the religions will have fulfilled their temporary role to be the opiate of the people, that is to be a kind of medicine to help people to survive in the face of

adverse societal situations<sup>17</sup>. Religion is defined as "the futile and erroneous answer of human as reaction to his or her powerlessness and anxiety in the face of powers of nature and power structures within the society"<sup>18</sup>. The official religious policy during the early period of the PR China was shaped by this Marxist inspired criticism of religion. According to this all religions were "opiate of the people" which would whither away, because their functions to act as sedative and instrument for consolation would dry up after a socialist society has been established. The Communist party and government make a distinction between "religious activities considered to be legitimate for the time being" in the religions recognised by the government, and "feudal superstitious practices" which are part of popular religiosity. The latter are generally prohibited and will be persecuted, because potentially they might threaten public order, the health and the well-being of their adherents. Already in 1927 Mao Zedong has summed up his research in the popular religiosity of Chinese peasants by stating: "It is the peasants who made the idols, and when the time comes they will cast the idols aside with their own hands; there is no need for anyone else to do it for them prematurely"<sup>19</sup>. In a similar way, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai has told Chinese Protestant Christians in 1950: "So we are going to go on letting you teach, trying to convert the people. After all we both believe that Truth will prevail; we think your beliefs untrue and false, therefore if we are right, the people will reject them, and your church will decay. If you are right, then the people will believe you, but as we are sure that you are wrong, we are prepared for that risk"<sup>20</sup>.

The constitution of the so-called "Chinese Soviet Republic", as the first area in China controlled by the Chinese Communist was called, contained a clause which guaranteed religious freedom while at the same time maintaining the right of anti-religious propaganda<sup>21</sup>. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the constitution promulgated in 1954 contained this terse statement on religious freedom: "Every citizen of the People's Republic of China shall have freedom of religious belief"<sup>22</sup>. From the beginning the Chinese Communist Party in its religious policy has distinguished between elements of religious beliefs and doctrines on the one, and the institutional organisation of religious activities on the other hand. As regards the content of religious doctrines, these were basically left to the religious groups themselves which were given the freedom to organise these according to their faith beliefs. The religious institutions and their activities, on the other hand, were subjected to a strict supervision and control by the Communist Party and the different government organs, in order to prevent that the religions should exercise any influence beyond the circle of their believers on the political and social life in the country at large. But already at the early stages of the Communist regime, and then especially during the time

of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), efforts were made to eradicate and destroy all forms of organised religious life indiscriminately utilising brutal force, because they were considered to be relics of an old and obsolete era and actively to propagate atheism in their place. The constitution of March 1978 which was passed shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution defines religious freedom in article 46 briefly thus: "The citizens have the right to believe in a religion, the right not to believe, and the right to propagate atheism".

### **Religious Freedom in the Constitution of the PR China in the Year 1982**

In the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution all forms of religious life had been practically abolished as "old and out-dated" relics of the past, but afterwards religious freedom was restored and constituted an important element of the reform policy of Deng Xiaoping. The expressed aim of the reformers was to engage all elements in Chinese society in the construction of the socialist state by reviving the "United-Front-Policy" which included all government recognised religions. The passage in the new Chinese constitution which in a new formulation defined the right to religious freedom attributed to the religions a positive role in Chinese society. The constitution, promulgated in 1982, states in article 36:

"Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No organ of state, mass organisation, or person is allowed to force any citizen to believe or not to believe in religion. It is impermissible to discriminate against any citizen who believes or does not believe in religion. The state protects legitimate religious activities. No person is permitted to use religion to conduct counterrevolutionary activities or activities which disrupt social order, harm people's health, or obstruct the educational system of the country. Religion is not subject to the control of foreign countries<sup>23</sup>."

According to the religious freedom, guaranteed by the constitution, all legitimate religious activities of religious groups recognised by and registered with the government are protected. However the right to determine which religious activities are considered "legitimate" and which are not, rests solely with the government organs of the Religious Affairs Bureaus on the national, provincial or local levels. Persistently the Chinese government continues its efforts to gain more and more complete control over all religious activities by issuing ever new rules and regulations. For the Christian Churches in the PR China this means that religious activities are considered only then to be legitimate when they occur within institutions and organisations recognised and controlled by the government, whereas all religious activities which occur outside these

organisations, e.g. those of the Underground Church, are considered to be illegal and therefore liable to be persecuted according to penal laws as criminal acts.

Besides the article 36 in the Chinese Constitution, there are other important documents regarding religious policy in the PR China. The most important among them is "Document 19" which has been issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party as guide-line for the religious policy in 1982<sup>24</sup>. In this document we find a confirmation of the reformed religious policy, according to which the respect for and protection of religious convictions and confession constitute an essential part of the religious policy within the PR China. There is however, the qualifying additional statement, that this policy will be valid only till the time "when all religions will disappear after a truly socialist state has come into existence". The Chinese government is confident that this time will come, because already today it observes that the former colonialist dependency and the influence of superstitious practices have been terminated and overcome. Furthermore, we find the admission that in the religious policy during the period of the Cultural Revolution many errors and faults have been committed which have to be rectified by the new religious policy of the Chinese government. As compensation for these injustices, some churches and buildings which had been confiscated and used for secular purposes, should be returned and also financial assistance could be given in certain circumstances. For the party and the state it will be important to ensure the co-operation of the various religious leaders in order to work together for modernisation and further development of a socialist society in China. The party is convinced that this can best be achieved when all religious activities, especially the formation of religious leaders, are conducted under the strict and absolute control of the various Religious Affairs Bureaus. Buddhists, Moslems and especially Christians have many international connections to be observed and controlled. At the same time, those international connections of Chinese religious leaders might help to bolster the international reputation of China in the world. Vigilance, however is called for that foreign religious organisations are not interfering in the interior affairs of China. Financial assistance from abroad should not be prohibited principally as long as it is controlled by government agencies and is given without strings attached which might jeopardise the independence of the Chinese recipients.

### **The Practice of Religious Policy in the PR China**

The official religious policy is determined by guide-lines, documents or orders which are released by the government's different organs. Documents coming from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and commissions attached to it have the highest authority. A slightly smaller importance is

attached to the documents emanating from the State Council, the People's Congress, the Chinese government and Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese People. Besides there are internal papers, e.g. coming from the security apparatus containing concrete orders of how to proceed and cautions against dangerous tendencies within certain religious communities. The iron rule is, that all religious organisations have to accept the political guidance by the state and the Communist Party and to realise the objectives and aims given them by the government's different organs, if they want to be recognised. The controlling government's organs are the Religious Affairs Bureaus on the national, provincial or town levels. The number officials working there has increased enormously during the last twenty years with the result that the standard of competence and formation of these officials could not be maintained. This lack of formation and competence shows negatively in the daily actual performance of these officials, who normally do not belong to any religion for their part, and mostly have only rudimentary knowledge of the religion which they have to attend to administratively. As regards the realms of doctrine and cult, the religious communities enjoy a certain independence and are allowed to regulate their interior affairs by themselves. But in all other activities they are under the direct control of the government, as all social and political institutions are in the country. The Chinese state and the Communist Party follow a policy of relative religious freedom which, however, is not based on the recognition of theism or on acceptance of religious values, but which is solely anchored on the realistic and pragmatic insight that religions might be useful for the political aims and objectives of the party or the state<sup>25</sup>. In recent times Jiang Zemin, in his capacity as head of state and chairman of the Chinese Communist Party has put forth the so-called "Three Words" in order to set down the principles ruling the religious policy. According to them, there are three objectives to be realised: "1. Carry out the Party's policy on freedom of religious belief in a full and correct manner. 2. Strengthen supervision over religious matters according to law. 3. Actively guide religion to adapt to a socialist society<sup>26</sup>".

Any form of religious activity is considered to be legitimate if it occurs within the frame-work of religious organisations officially recognised by the Chinese government and only within their premises. At present there are five religions which are officially recognised by the Chinese government, such as: Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. Each of these recognised religions is represented in the Consultative Conference of the Chinese People, the organ of the United Front Work Department. The Daoists, Buddhists and Muslims each have a national association, whereas the Catholic Church in China has three organisations, the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference, the

Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and a National Administrative Commission. The Chinese Protestant Christians are organised in the two bodies of the "China Christian Council" and the Three Self Patriotic Movement of Chinese Protestant Christians. The control organs of Party and government insist on unlimited information regarding the organisational activities of all religious institutions. As regards the doctrinal contents of the teachings within the different religious groups the religions enjoy a certain freedom as long as they remain in the religious field and do not try to change the existing social order. Concretely, this means that the religious organisations have to limit the scope of their activities strictly to religious contents, the ritual and liturgical field, because they are not allowed to venture into the areas which are reserved for the state<sup>27</sup> in a socialist society. That has the consequence that generally speaking, the religions are not allowed to engage in activities in the educational, medical or social sector. The exercise of religion is therefore strictly limited to purely religious matters. Religion, after all, is a private matter. Making converts by missionary activities in public is forbidden in the PR China. The formulations of religious freedom in the different constitutions of the PR China grant the right for the religious believers to hold on to their conviction, but they stress at the same time that people who have no religious affiliation also have the right to propagate atheism. Members of the Chinese Communist Party are prohibited to adhere to any religion, because Communist party members generally are expected to be materialists or atheists. The same prohibition applies to all military personnel in the People's Liberation Army, who are not allowed to be active members in any religion or to participate in religious services. In the predominantly Muslim areas and also in places in the North of China where there are Christian villages, it has been inevitable to tolerate that some party cadres continue to be active Muslims and Christians. There are, however, indications that the leadership of the Communist Party has some difficulty to maintain this prohibition. After all there has been a considerable religious growth in the past few years, and the attractiveness of religious beliefs did also include some party members who have become sympathetic to religious beliefs and in several instances have joined religious groups and become members. That these instances are considered to be disturbing and inappropriate, can be seen by ordinances and statements emerging from party organisations which reiterate and enjoin the prohibition that party membership and religious affiliation cannot go together<sup>28</sup>. These nervous and agitated reactions of the party leadership gives rise to the assumption that these are not only isolated cases, but that it is a widespread phenomenon emphasizing how fragile the ideological foundation of this official party doctrine really is. Whereas during the 80s and at the beginning of

the 90s the official propaganda insisted that it has to be the aim of the Communist Party to build up a “socialist spiritual culture” in the PR China, we find hardly any reference to this ideological project today. The ideologues of the party are obviously very much on the defensive and are hectic in their desperate efforts to stop the growing defection from the Communist ideology, its rejection, and the turning to alternatives in the religious field. The events surrounding the Falun-Gong-Movement in recent times have made clear that this movement has succeeded to gain adherents up to the highest echelons in party, military and government circles<sup>29</sup>.

### **The Problem of Registration of Religious Institutions**

In the 90s the nationals as well as provincial governments have issued for the registration of religious organisations in order to strengthen the control of the growing religious life in the different religions of China. In December 1999 the Central Committee of the Communist has in co-operation with the United Front Work Department and the different Religious Affairs Bureaus issued new rules and confirmed the old religious policy in eight principles:

1. The existence of religions has to be tolerated, but at the same time atheism should be propagated.
2. The development of religious life is not to be encouraged, on the contrary its influence should be slowly diminished.
3. The religious policy of the Party has to be executed in full.
4. Religious freedom has to be respected, but all forms of religious life should be strictly controlled.
5. Religious affairs should be administered in such a way, that party and government agencies will not be involved in the interior affairs of religious organisations.
6. All religious organisations should be animated to contribute to the building up of society.
7. Illegitimate religious activities should be stopped, but unnecessary harshness should be avoided.
8. International contacts of religious organisations are allowed, but care should be taken that religious groups will not be infiltrated by foreigners.

The governing bodies of all recognised religious organisations had to undergo special instruction sessions to become familiar with these new rules. This relatively more restrictive religious policy within the PR China was partly caused by the experiences of the collapse of “real existing socialism” in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Chinese Party and government members had

carefully observed the great influence religions had had in this turnover and wanted to make sure that in the PR China a similar development was not going to take place. Although the numerical strength of religions and their possible influence on society cannot be compared with the influence religions have in Eastern Europe and Russia, nevertheless, the Chinese officials wanted to exclude that the international relationships of Chinese Christians, Muslims and partially also of Buddhists would result in phenomena which could change or influence developments within Chinese society.

In the year 1994 other legal provisions and ordinances for religious organisations were issued<sup>30</sup>. The two most important documents were, firstly “Rules of the State Council for the Administration of Places of Religious Worship” (Document 144), and secondly “Regulations of the State Council for the Behaviour of Foreigners who are residing in the People’s Republic of China” (Document 145). Both documents have the aim to strengthen the possibilities of the state to exercise an even stricter control of religious activities. Several provinces for their part issued regulations and rules for the control of religious life which were more restrictive than those of the national government. In consequence of these administrative measures there were several incidents where not-registered Church buildings and meeting places were destroyed by government agencies, a policy, which has continued periodically till today. An especially striking example of these harsh measures against “illegally erected temples, shrines, churches and prayer- and assembly places we find in the actions of the government of Wenzhou in Zhejiang province in December 2000. The area around Wenzhou is considered to be a stronghold of the Protestants, who have experienced a tremendous growth after the Cultural Revolution. The aim of these restrictive measures by Chinese authorities is to assert absolute control of all religious activities and to stop all activities which occur in organisations not controlled by and registered with the respective government’s institutions. There are six conditions for the registration of a religious organisation:

- a) There has to exist a meeting place
- b) There has to be a sufficient number of faithful who participate regularly in the religious activities.
- c) There must be qualified religious personnel.
- d) The membership of a given organisation must reach a minimum quorum.
- e) There must be rules for the exercise of religious activities.
- f) There must be a regular financial income.

These regulations are intended to stop all groups which might use the cover of religions to disrupt public order and cause disturbances. The actual implemen-

tation of all these rules and regulations of religious activities is very much dependent on the different regional or local conditions. There are e.g. places where registered and non-registered religious institutions coexist with one another and where the distinction between “Official Church” and “Underground Church” does not play a role. Here we can detect that there is a discrepancy between the officially propagated understanding of the relationship between state and religion and the actually exercised religious policy which is limiting the validity of religious freedom to a great extent. In the understanding of the Chinese Communist Party and the government religious freedom is valid solely within the framework prescribed by the state, that is only within organisations recognised by and registered with government agencies. All other forms of religious activities violate state laws and therefore these are considered to be illegitimate and criminal activities against which the government agencies have not only the right but the duty to proceed in the interest of preserving the public order. As regards the present discussion on the Falun-Gong-Movement especially this aspect is stressed, that all measures are solely intended to preserve the public order and to protect the citizens against the influence of the so-called “evil cults”, which try to harm the physical and psychological health of their members under the pretext of religion.

### **Religious Freedom and the Catholic Church in China**

After the coming to power of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 and the end of the long civil war with the Guomindang under Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek), the Catholic Church and also the majority of the Protestant Christians belonged to the “losers” of this long-drawn out conflict. The Christian Churches had supported the Guomindang and therefore were considered to be hostile and unpatriotic elements<sup>31</sup> by the winning party of the Communists. The Catholic Church was especially suspect and appeared as a foreign body, because its leadership, the bishops, priests and religious, still was made up by mostly foreign missionaries and the organisational directives were coming from the Roman centre. Thus the Catholic Church was seen as “non Chinese” and “unpatriotic” by the Communist government. During the Korean War (1950-1953) the situation took a turn for the worse, because the foreign missionaries in China were accused of being spies for the United States. Many foreign missionaries were put on trial and expelled from the country. In 1951 the Papal Internuncio Antonio Riberi, too, was forced to leave China and took residence in Taiwan. Together with all other groups in Chinese society, the religions were forced to join the “United Work Department” and under the leadership of the Communist

Party to contribute positively to the emerging “New China”. The Chinese Christians were under the pressure of working for the building up of a socialist society. When in 1957 the “Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association” (CCPA) was founded, it met with the opposition by the majority of the Chinese Catholics, but was enforced systematically by the Religious Affairs Bureaus on the different levels of the state, the province and the cities. Due to the control of these government agencies, the Catholic Church in China adopted the formula – originally coined by Protestant Christians – of the Three Self, that is the Self-administration, Self-preservation and Self-propagation – as criteria of an independent (autonomous) and indigenous Chinese Church<sup>32</sup>.

The problem of the diplomatic relationship with the Vatican and the appointment of Chinese bishops by the Pope have developed into one of the most controversial issues for the Chinese government and till today they are of great importance for the life of the Catholic Church in China. The first obstacle to normalising the relation with the Vatican is from the part of Beijing the diplomatic relationship between the Vatican and Taiwan. Again and again Beijing has reiterated its demand that this relationship has to be severed before any agreement with the PR China could be realised. Furthermore, in the eyes of the Chinese government the appointment of bishops for Chinese dioceses by the Pope constitutes an intolerable interference in the interior affairs of the PR China. In 1958 the first two bishops were elected and later consecrated without Roman approval. This happened at the height of the Cold War, when communication from China with the Vatican had become rather difficult. The harsh negative reaction by Pope Pius XII led to similar hard reactions and positions on the part of the Chinese government and the Party. Within the Catholic Church in China, it came to a split among Catholics who in their majority sided with the pope and the minority which accepted the action by the Catholic Patriotic Associations as the appropriate reaction to the political changes and the existing political power in the “New China”. Many Chinese Catholics were anxious and doubtful whether the consecration of bishops, who had been elected and consecrated without the permission by Rome, were not only illegitimate but also invalid.

If the latter was true, it meant that priestly ordinations administered by these bishops would be “invalid” as well, and consequently all sacraments they were administering would not be valid either. Canonically speaking, however, these episcopal consecrations should be considered to be *illicitum, sed validum*, that is “not allowed”, but “valid”<sup>33</sup>. The controversy concerning this question resulted in a split among the Catholics in China, in that one group opted to work with those organisations which were recognised by the Chinese authorities, whereas

another group decided against any form of co-operation. This group normally is called the “Underground Church”<sup>34</sup>.

During the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), however, all religions in China were persecuted as “old” and “outdated” relics of the past. At that time the “Red Guards” did not ask whether a Catholic believer belonged to the “Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association” or to the “Underground Church”, they were persecuting all Christians, and for that matter all religious believers, put them into prison or sent them to a work camp without making any distinctions among them. All Christian churches were closed in China, the only exception being the Nantang Cathedral in Beijing, which was kept open for religious services for the Diplomatic Corps in the capital. Nearly all churches in the country were used for non-religious purposes, as factories or cinemas, and several churches were outright destroyed. The expectation of the Communists, however, that in concordance with Marxist religious theory, the religions somehow would disappear by themselves, was proved wrong by the historical development<sup>35</sup>. During this period many attempts were made by the “Red Guards” and Party cadres to hasten this allegedly “historically necessitated process” of the demise of all religions by persecuting various religious groups and obstructing religious activities. This destructive policy succeeded in stopping all public expressions of religious activity, but did fail in eradicating religious belief as such. The campaign by the “Red Guards” to replace religious beliefs with Mao-Zedong-Thought, as expressed in the “Red Bible”, and to form a new generation of Chinese who took the Maoist ideology of “serving the people” as the lodestar of their lives, found much attention in the West among radical groups of students, but also more serious observers of the Chinese scene. The notion of the “New Human according to Mao”, who according to the propaganda of the time supposedly was only too ready to work selflessly for building up a socialist society, appeared for many in the Western “decadent and capitalist” society<sup>36</sup> as a tempting and challenging alternative.

### **The Discrepancy between the New Religious Policy and the Claim for Ideological Leadership**

The beginning of the reform politics of Deng Xiaoping in 1979, also marked the beginning of a new and revised religious policy<sup>37</sup>. The new government expected from all religious organisations to engage themselves in the task of realising the “Four Modernisations”, the official policy of the new rulers in that period. Some church buildings were returned to the Catholic Church and others repaired, sometimes with the government covering the financial costs involved. Officially these government’s subsidies were declared to be a re-compensation by the

government for the “inappropriate” use of church buildings for which rent had not been paid. At that time Catholics and also Protestant Christians for the first time were able to get government’s licenses to erect some completely new Churches. It came as a big surprise inside China and also abroad that religious life had not only not been extinguished in China, but on the contrary, that there was something like a religious revival to be observed in which many Chinese who were disillusioned by the excesses committed by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution turned to the Christian Churches or other religions for orientation and guidance. In theory, the claim to ideological leadership by the Communist Party remained intact, but the nervous reaction of the Party showed that it considered this religious revival as a threat to their ideological hegemony. During the following years it became even more obvious that the Communist Party never succeeded again to regain its former complete ideological control in the whole of China<sup>38</sup>. The phenomena of the democracy movement, the renaissance of the religions, the so-called “Christianity Fever” and in recent years the spectacular growth of the “Falun-Gong-Movement” show clearly that the Communist ideology has to reckon with competitors who succeeded to attract more and more adherents among the intellectuals, among the youth but also among the common people, while on the other hand, the Communist Party encounters difficulties in recruiting new members. The Communist Party still remains the leading political power in the country, and therefore capable of providing the leading positions in the administration and government’s businesses for their members. Its diminishing ideological influence, however, nourishes the anxiety among Party members that they might be losing their leading role within the Chinese society in the long run. As a reaction the obsession to exercise absolute control over all possible contenders has grown and has led to a general increase in the control of all other organisations, especially the religious organisations and their activities<sup>39</sup>.

The same tendency, namely to exercise the highest possible complete control of all religious activities, can be observed in the repeated attempts of the Religious Affairs Bureaus everywhere in China to ensure that in all Catholic parishes a “Patriotic Association” is installed. These attempts of setting up Patriotic Associations, meet strong resistance among the Catholic faithful in many places in China, who argue that this kind of institution is alien to Catholic tradition and is contrary to Catholic ecclesiology and Canon Law. In addition, most leading members of these Patriotic Associations are either not very fervent or even no Catholics at all. In recent times we find many statements by government agencies which praise the extension of the Patriotic Associations as evidence that “democratic structures” are developing within the otherwise so hierarchical

Catholic Church. Till today these and other attempts to make the Patriotic Associations palatable for the Catholic faithful have not been successful, because most Catholics fail to see them as positive elements. This insistence by the government and the Party to spread the agencies of the Patriotic Associations can be seen as yet another expression of the tendency to force organisational structures on religious bodies which run counter to the self-understanding of these religions themselves. This policy often hampers the free exercise of religious freedom, granted by the constitution, in which religions are hindered from ordering their own interior affairs without interference by the government.

### **Rapprochement between the Vatican and China?**

Again and again there have been attempts to come to find a way to normalise the relation between the Vatican and Beijing. At the same time, we could sometimes observe strange manoeuvres to sabotage these attempts to reach an agreement and bring about a normalisation. One recent example for this tendency is the incident in the beginning of the year 2000, when in Beijing on January 6th five bishops were consecrated who were selected by the Catholic Patriotic Association in an obvious attempt to defy the Roman authorities. Foreign observers interpreted this confrontational action as an expression of force by those groups within the Patriotic Association who are against any agreement to take up diplomatic relationship between Beijing and Rome, because they rightly fear that in such an event, they would be bound to lose their present privileges or to have them strongly reduced. But what had been intended to ascertain the undiminished strength of the Patriotic Association, turned out on the contrary making public that resistance against their manipulations has been growing among Catholics in China. This could be observed in the many incidents of outright or subtle refusal to participate actively in these episcopal consecrations, in that e.g. chosen candidates refused the honour of becoming bishops, and again when bishops invited to be consecrators, suddenly “fell ill” or simply did not attend the ceremonies. Even many of the seminarians of the National Seminar in Beijing, who were ordered to attend the ceremony, boycotted it with the consequence that several of them were dismissed, and that those professors who were accused to have been responsible for the “negative ideological attitude” of the seminarians, were forced to leave the seminary.

### **The Conflict of the Consecration of the Chinese Martyrs**

When on October 1st 2000 Pope John Paul II canonised 120 Chinese martyrs in Rome, the Chinese government interpreted this as an intentional provocation, because the date of the canonisation, October 1st happened to coincide with

China's National Day celebration of the founding of the People's Republic of China by Mao Zedong on October 1st 1949. The explanation given by Vatican authorities that the choice of the date of October 1st was due to the fact that the feast day of St. Theresia of Lisieux, the patron saint of Catholic mission, is celebrated on this day, failed to assuage the Chinese, because it was not only the date of the canonisations which had enkindled the ire of the Chinese government. The Chinese questioned the “holiness” of some of these “Chinese martyrs” who as expatriate missionaries not only preached the Gospel, but had collaborated with the colonial and imperialist forces to exploit the Chinese people. Furthermore the Chinese government argued, that many of the Chinese who converted to Christianity had betrayed their own country, or in a milder interpretation, had become Christians in order to escape the misery of their lives in poverty. For the Chinese government, the real heroes at the time had been the so-called Boxers, because they had shown true patriotism when they took position against the manipulations of the foreign Christian religion and defended the old customs of China against them. Therefore they and not these so-called martyrs should be seen as heroes. Consequently, the Religious Affairs Bureau prohibited the Catholics in China to celebrate or only to mention the canonisation in any form during Church services. All material, like calendars, liturgical texts and pictures of the Chinese martyrs, which had been prepared already in advance of the date of canonisation, had to be withheld and in cases where things had already been delivered, they had to be retrieved and then destroyed. All Church personnel, starting with bishops, priests, seminarians and extending to the simple faithful were “invited” for special study and reform sessions to learn and intensify the official view of the Chinese government and the Communist party. Not only the leading figures of the Catholic Church in China, but also representatives of the other religions in China, had to make public statements in which they condemned the canonisations and protested against the arbitrary action of the Vatican.

### **Aggravated Proceedings against the Catholic Underground Church**

Around Easter 2001 there were repeated reports that the security organs of the state were proceeding against bishops, priests and members of the Catholic Underground Church in the provinces of Hebei, Fujian, Jiangxi and in Inner Mongolia. Several bishops were arrested who for the most part were already very advanced in age and had served many years in prison and work camps. The centre of the persecutions was in Hebei Province, where the majority of the Chinese Catholics live and where the Underground Church has its staunchest supporters<sup>40</sup>.

For many years the spiritual head of the Underground Catholics had been Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan (1907-1992) of Baoding<sup>41</sup>. In several provinces like Zhejiang and Hebei many churches and buildings, which were used as churches, were torn down, because they had been erected or used without permission by the authorities for activities which were considered to be “illegal” or “criminal” in the eyes of the authorities. In Jiangxi province, a provincial directive with the title “Matter of procedure for eradicating illegal religious activities of the Catholic Church”, was published in 2000, according to which individual members of the Underground Church were forced to admit in writing that they had committed the fault of not co-operating with government agencies and to acknowledge that the policy of autonomy for the Catholic Church in China was correct. In addition the destruction of all churches, meeting places and illegal seminaries was called for. In the city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province the Catholics continued to celebrate their liturgy simply on the ruins of their destroyed church in the open around a crucifix they had erected on the site.

The aim of this campaign of destruction was not only directed against Catholic institutions, but also targeted Buddhist, Daoist temples and Muslim mosques and other places of worship which had been erected without permission of the pertinent Religious Affairs Bureaus. Many old Buddhist temples and Daoist monasteries everywhere in China had been repaired or new ones erected with or more often without the permission of the authorities in recent years. In recent times there were many cases that, especially in the countryside, temples, great statues and other religious buildings were set up without permission of government agencies and outside of the officially recognised religious institutions. In many villages there were many instances in which old clan temples were erected again in veneration of the ancestors of an extended family, often financed by donations by family members who had become rich either in China or more often outside China. In the eyes of the religious authorities this explosive growth of private religious institutions, outside their control, poses great problems and appears to be threatening public order.

### **The Principal Problem of the Underground Christians in the PR China**

The Underground Catholics in China consider the passage in the Acts of the Apostles: “To obey God rather than men” (Acts 4:19) as foundational text for their resistance against the Communist government and their refusal to co-operate in any way with the authorities of the Religious Affairs Bureau. They hold fast to their conviction that in the government of the PR China, they are faced with an atheist regime which is bent on destroying all religions and especially

Christianity. Therefore, they consider themselves to be in a state of emergency in the confrontation with the Communist regime which has come to power by force and which is professing an atheist ideology, and therefore, has no right to infringe upon the religious rights of its citizen and to suppress religious freedom by unjust laws and regulations. By being faithful to their conscience and the doctrines of the Church, the faithful in the Underground Church feel entitled and justified to ignore those laws of the Chinese government which interfere with religious freedom. Accordingly, the Catholics in the underground refuse all forms of collaboration with the government and the Communist Party in the PR China. They are convinced that if in any form they start to collaborate, be it small and insignificant in the beginning, it will result de facto in forfeiting their own position in the end. They suspect that whoever symbolically is extending only a small finger in co-operation, will be snatched by his whole hand, and thus will be losing his freedom completely, and eventually become entangled in this unjust regime. These Underground Christians refuse to listen to the argumentation of Catholics in the Official Church, that the religious policy in the PR China has seen changes in the course of time since 1949. After all the negative attitude towards religion which was displayed in the actions and the behaviour of the Communists in the founding state of the PR China, highlighting in the cruel persecution of all religions during the Cultural Revolution, has given way to the somewhat reformed religious policy of today, which still is far from ideal and often lacks respect for religious freedom, but has elements which could be used to come to some form of coexistence and cautious co-operation. The Catholics of the Underground on their part, indiscriminately accuse those bishops and priests to have betrayed their faith and weakened the position of the Catholic Church, who decided to collaborate in a controlled way with the authorities after they had spent many years in prisons and work camps during the Cultural Revolution. The Underground Christians are adamant and not ready to acknowledge the slight progress made recently with regard to religious freedom. In their assessment of the performance of the Communist government in China, it does not matter that the same authorities have at least tolerated the opening of Churches, the renovation of old ones and the construction of new churches, further the erection of seminaries and the permission for female religious congregations to resume their work. For them these measures are only tactical concessions on the part of the Communist who never have changed their basic aim of destroying all religions, and as long as that is not possible, to control all religious activities and regulate religious life by all kind of laws and rules.

The main bone of contention between Catholics within the “Official Church” and those in the Underground Church centres on the problem of the

election and consecration of bishops without the approval by the Pope. The Catholics in the underground do not only consider all episcopal consecrations made without prior approval by the Pope as invalid, but maintain the position that all ordinations of priests by these bishops are invalid as well. This will have the further consequence that the sacraments administered by these bishops and priests are also illicit and invalid. Within the Underground Churches extensive use was made of the special faculties which the “Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples” had given for the whole of the PR China in an indiscriminate way in 1978. In the following year these faculties were used by the Underground Church to consecrate quite a number of their own bishops. Since all bishops in the Underground Church were living with the constant fear that the authorities might arrest them and send them into prison and work camp, they had decided on the precautionary practice to consecrate a substitute for each of these bishops, so that in the possible case of an arrest, another bishop would be ready to take over the leadership of the diocese in question. In several dioceses this practice has had the effect that today there are several bishops in one diocese who all claim to be the canonical shepherd entitled to exercise jurisdiction. The professional competence and sometimes moral quality of some of these bishops and priests are lacking, because they never had the chance to be trained adequately in theology, canon law and spirituality. Generally speaking, we can observe that the acerbity and rancour which was poisoning the relationship between Catholics in the Official and the Underground Church tend to become problems of the past. In the course of time the conflict between the two groups has lost some of its acrimony, because the great majority of the bishops operating in the official Church have become reconciled with the Pope and have been recognised by Rome<sup>42</sup>.

Seen from the perspective of the Chinese government and the Communist Party, the Catholics in the Underground Church still are seen as subversive and counter-revolutionary forces which the government has to control and to suppress so that it does not jeopardise its own position. Ye Xiaowun, the present director of the National Religious Affairs Bureau, generally accuses the members of the Underground Church that they are abusing religion in order to create unrest within society, that they are disobeying the laws of the government and therefore, have to be seen as enemies of the people. The government simply could not act otherwise than to punish them for their actions which outwardly appear to be religious, but in reality, however, constitute criminal acts<sup>43</sup>.

## The Role of Protestantism in Chinese Society

Protestant Christianity came into China in the 19th century. This was the time of imperialism and the “unequal treaties”, which were intended by the Western Powers to divide their spheres of interest within China. The first Protestant missionaries preferably committed themselves to the work of education and health services. In the beginning they centred their activities mostly in the cities. With the foundation of the China-Inland-Mission by Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) Protestant missionary activity gained a new focus in the rural areas<sup>44</sup>. The string of schools and universities founded at that time became important and influential. Several of them continue till today as government institutions run by the state. At the time of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the number of Protestant Christians in China amounted to 700.000, whereas at the same time the number of Catholics was 3,5 million. In the early years of the PR China, Protestant Christians – many of them had been holding positions within the different YMCA's organisations – formed the Three-Self Patriotic Movement with the principles of self-government, self-support and self-propagation to affirm their autonomy and independence from foreign missionary societies. The beginning of the Korean War (1950-1953) brought a further strengthening of the patriotic sentiment among Chinese Protestants. But also among Protestant Christians in China there differences arose on the question where to draw the line in the co-operation with the Communist government and to what extent Protestant Church organisations should submit to the near total control of all religious activities by the state and the Communist Party. Some of the so-called “House Churches” and other more evangelical groups, as e.g. the “True Jesus Church” or the “Little Flock”, decided against any co-operation with the state and opted for a life in the underground by refusing to have their groups registered with the Religious Affairs Bureau of the government. In the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) however, when every expression of religious life and church activities in public were suppressed, all Protestant Christians equally suffered persecution.

Since the beginning of the reform policy in 1979 the Chinese Protestant Christians have experienced a period of rapid and substantial growth. During the time of persecution the denominational differences among the various groups of Protestant Christians had lost much of their dividing significance. In the newly constituted “China Christian Council” all Protestant Christians were represented and understood themselves as a “post-denominational Christian community”, in which all Protestant Christians in China could feel at home. The ideal of developing the “China Christian Council” into a post-denominational “China Christian Church”, which had been the original

intention at the founding of the China Christian Council could not be realised, however, due to various adverse circumstances and developments. There was e.g. the problem of common worship which proved to be difficult, because the old liturgical practices differed substantially according to the former denominational background of the faithful. It therefore turned out to be necessary to preserve some of the old liturgical forms in order to give a feeling of belonging and connection with the past to the elder Christians. The China Christian Council, however, was successful in establishing a uniform way of theological education for future female and male pastors by erecting the central theological seminary in Nanjing, followed by other seminaries in cities like Shanghai, Guangzhou etc. With the founding of the “Amity Foundation” in 1985, the Protestant Christians were successful in setting up a Non-Government-Organisation (NGO) in which Christians are co-operating with Non-Christians in the fields of health care, education and social work, mostly areas not covered by governmental agencies. In the field of publication, the publishing firm of the Amity Foundation, the Amity Press, has been enabled, with the assistance of the United Bible Societies, to publish more than 25 millions full bibles in Chinese, as well as several bible editions in local languages used in China. In 1991 the China Christian Council succeeded in becoming member in the World Council of Churches (WCC) and thus was able to strengthen its ties with Christians world-wide.

The number of Chinese Protestant Christians has been growing at an astonishing pace. At present, the estimates of the number of Protestant Christians in China range from 15 to 30 million. Some estimates are going even higher and give numbers going up to 50 million Protestant Christians in China. The reason why it is so difficult to find reliable statistical data of church membership can be seen in the fact, that in recent years several groups of Protestants have emerged who refuse to become members in the China Christian Council, but try to remain institutionally independent and to form their own organisational church structures. In the past few years tensions have been growing within the China Christian Council with regard to the intention to develop the China Christian Council into a united church, as the original plan at its founding had been determined. In this context, the already existing different conceptions regarding church organisation and its theological foundation between those Christians coming from a more evangelical background, like the “Little Flock”, the “House-Church-Movement” as well several new ecclesial movements, and those of the main-stream Christians have become aggravated. In the past the leadership of the China Christian Council has always tried to steer a middle course in order to safeguard that the Religious Affairs Bureaus of the government felt sufficiently informed to fulfil their control function, and at the same time to make

sure that those groups which were rather critical of the regime remained within the organisation of the open church. This conciliatory approach of the Church's leadership has met with criticism by some communities and parishes which hold that this attitude is tarnishing the witness to the Gospel, which they consider to be after all the primary *raison d'être* of all church activity. In some cases, these groups have succeeded to bypass the claim of the China Christian Council to be the only representative of all Protestant church life in the PR China and were able to set up their own separate church structures. Most of the time, they did not succeed, however, to gain official recognition by registering with the Religious Affairs Bureaus of the government. This has the consequence that most of these Protestant groups exist in a kind of grey area, always threatened to be dissolved as illegal religious organisations. Understandably, it is difficult to find reliable data, as to how many of these groups exist, where they are and in what way they are co-operating among each other. The fact, that these groups live a dangerous existence becomes clear when one is reading the reports that in several provinces in the PR China churches and meeting places have been destroyed by the state security during the last three years. Among those Protestant groups there are also some which have been founded by charismatic religious leaders and which have strong apocalyptic strains in their beliefs in that some of these groups expect the end of the world to be near, others celebrate ecstatic services with glossoly and other in-orthodox liturgical rites. Some of these groups, like e.g. the so-called “Shouters”<sup>45</sup> are already several years old, others have been founded recently. The all have in common, that they are not willing to become member of the China Christian Council as regards their organisational structure, even less as regards their doctrines and practices. Seen in the context of the actions by the Chinese authorities against the Falun-Gong-Movement which was the first religious organisation to be declared by the government to be an “evil cult”, it is obvious that the authorities are exercising a stricter control and surveillance of these Christian groups, too<sup>46</sup>.

### **The Phenomenon of the so-called “Cultural Christians”**

The phenomenon of the so-called “cultural Christians” constitutes a development within the Chinese intelligentsia which has to be seen in the context of Chinese culture in general and the ideological deterioration within the Chinese Communist Party in particular<sup>47</sup>. For centuries Chinese intellectuals, who for most of the time were identical with Confucian scholars, have distanced themselves from the vulgar religious ideas and practices of the common people. In today's China, after the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, the Communist ideology has lost much of the ideological leadership it has claimed since the founding of

the PR China. For many years Chinese intellectuals, who as a group were ostracised during the Cultural Revolution as enemies of the people, have been searching for a replacement or alternative for the Marxist-Communist doctrines<sup>48</sup>. Among Chinese intellectuals there is a long-standing consensus that science and religion are mutually exclusive. This had been the case already during the era when Confucianism was the dominant teaching and later in the period, when Chinese intellectuals were entering into discussion with Western science and modern atheism. In their studies of Western ideas, Chinese intellectuals have mostly accepted the ideas of religious criticism by Feuerbach and Marx uncritically, and subscribed on their part to the thesis that religion contains only pre-scientific knowledge and that it is incompatible with the critical attitude of science. At the beginning of the movement of the so-called “cultural Christians”, we find a young Chinese scholar who obtained a doctorate in Christian theology at the university of Basle and who after his return to China became very active in the field of publications. After he had been teaching at different universities in the PR China, Liu Xiaofeng became director of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong. He initiated a debate on the problem, whether in the present ideological crisis in China, Christian philosophical and theological ideas might be helpful and conducive to give positive inputs and ideas for the modernisation of Chinese society. Liu Xiaofeng himself criticised the weak points within Chinese tradition which according to him, has proved to be incapable of providing the answers for the most fundamental existential questions of human existence, its destination, suffering and death<sup>49</sup>. Liu Xiaofeng and his group have started on a vast translation project. They have begun to translate selected works in the field of Christian philosophy and theology into Chinese language. Their aim is to make their ideas available for Chinese intellectuals and to give new and fresh impulses for the present stale ideological debate with the hoped-for result that this might lead to new answers and approaches. Besides Liu Xiaofeng, there are several other intellectuals who in other Chinese universities and notably in the “Chinese Academy of Social Sciences” in Beijing and its “Institute of World Religions<sup>50</sup>” and other similar institutions have joined the debate. Many of them do not want to be called “Cultural Christians”, but prefer the more general term of “Scholars in Mainland China Studying Christianity” (SMCSCs). This movement among intellectuals in China constitutes a new phenomenon and shows that there have occurred far-reaching changes within the ideological field, especially regarding the role of religion in society, the problem of religious freedom and other related topics. This is most notable in the work of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and its related institutes for the various religions which have begun to study the developments within the

religions in the PR China seriously and objectively. In the past, the same institutions and in a similar way the institutes in Shanghai, Nanjing, Chengdu and elsewhere were given the task of proving the superiority of atheism over all forms of religions and to collect all evidence that the traditional religions were disappearing under the new social conditions of socialism which made their temporary role of being “opium of the people” superfluous. Today the old cadres who were ideological hard-liners, have left these institutions and have been replaced by experts who often have studied abroad and who, besides their expertise in the field of religions, often show a remarkable sympathy and closeness to religious ideas and practices. The present director of the Institute of World Religions and director of the department for the Study of Christianity at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, Dr. Zhuo Xinping e.g. has studied in Munich where he wrote a dissertation in Catholic theology. In August 2001 Zhuo Xinping was elected president of the “Society of Religious Studies”, the biggest corporation of researchers in the field of religious studies in the PR China. The “Society of Religious Studies” intends to provide scientific basic studies of the various religious traditions and to assist the Chinese government in developing a religious policy which responds better to the changed conditions in society and the needs of the religious communities in China. Many Chinese intellectuals approach Christian ideas in a sympathetic way and consider them as object of their studies. In doing so, they are not interested in the lived reality of religious practices like the sacraments or other rituals. These forms of “popular religiosity” are for most Chinese intellectuals rather irrelevant, because they are not interested in religions for their own personal life, but mostly only as a field for their intellectual research. For them Christian ideas are interesting in so far as they might help to find new insights which could be helpful to alleviate the present ideological crisis in China. The phenomenon of the “Cultural Christians”, therefore, constitutes a rather elitist and selective approach to Christianity. At the same time, it would be wrong to see these intellectuals as some kind of organised group. The whole movement has more the character of a community of scholars who are engaged in study and research of Christian topics and who present their ideas for discussion and appraisal.

## The Other Religions and the Problem of Religious Freedom<sup>51</sup>

### Daoism

Already in the past, Daoism did not have a rigid organisational structure like most other religions have, and till today this state of affairs has not changed much. Daoism has always been rather close and often even indistinguishable from expressions of popular religiosity. This accounts for the fact that Daoism still has much influence on the common people. With its ascetical and world-fleeing straits, Daoism often appears as a religion which advocates anti-political and anti-government attitudes. Daoism is very much the religion of the common people and forms the substratum of much what is considered to expression of typical Chinese religiosity. Because of its lack in organisational structure, it is difficult for government religious agencies to fulfil their role of control and direction. Daoism is included in the list of the five religions, officially recognised by the government. The government agencies of the different Religious Affairs Bureaus have expressed their criticism again and again, that several of the Daoist religious doctrines and practices are rather close to or even in themselves outright superstitious acts, and thus intolerable and punishable by law. Even if some superstitious activities might still be tolerated in certain cases, these are much more critically seen by organs of the government and the Communist Party. Moreover the attitude to consider worldly affairs of lesser importance and therefore to be negligent in fulfilling the duties of obedient citizens is widespread among adherents of Daoism. This has had the consequence that Daoists became objects of persecution and were accused of lacking in political awareness and activity every time one of the many political campaigns were enacted in the PR China. After the storm of the Cultural Revolution, during which all organised activities of Daoists were suspended, there has been a noticeable revival of Daoist activities. In connection with the growing awareness of the ecological crisis China is facing at present, Daoist ideas and practical attitudes towards the preservation of nature are seen by government agencies as a positive contribution to the preservation of the environment and strengthening of public health. The basic ideas of what constitutes “healthy living”, contained in several of the Daoist doctrines and practices, like e.g. Daoist vegetarian cooking, have gained acceptance in the general public as well. As good pragmatists the Chinese Communist Party recognises that the renovation of Daoist temples and gardens surrounding them constitutes a contribution to ecology in genera<sup>52</sup>.

### Buddhism

The new reformed religious policy of the Chinese government after the end of the Cultural Revolution did not have much positive effects with regard to Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism. There had been some attempts by Chinese authorities to engage in talks with the Dalai Lama and even some indications that he might be able to return to Tibet under certain circumstances. But these attempts at reconciliation did not carry far and did not bring any practical results. On the contrary, the Chinese authorities have continued to persecute monks and nuns, because they were suspected of abetting the movement for an independence of Tibet. Officially, the Chinese policy is directed against the obscurantism and feudal practices of the Lamas, who in the propaganda of the Chinese government are said to be obstructing the necessary modernisation of Tibet. The Han Chinese are resenting that after nearly 50 years of Chinese occupation, the resistance of the Tibetan population against Chinese rule could not be broken. That the Tibetans are not willing to accept China as their home country, but insist on cultivating their own independent religious and cultural identity, is seen by the Chinese government to be the work of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism. During the Cultural Revolution the Red Guards have used brutal force to destroy the many monasteries and nunneries with disastrous impacts<sup>53</sup> on the cultural heritage of the Tibetan people. But even today the persecution and harassment of monks and nuns are continuing in a more subtle, but no less ruthless way<sup>54</sup>.

In the rest of China Buddhism enjoys more freedom. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution Buddhism in China has experienced some form of religious renaissance<sup>55</sup>. According to official statistical data the number of Buddhists in China amounts to more than 100 million. Buddhist monks and nuns together are said to be close to 200.000, and the number of temples and nunneries is said to be around 13.000. That means, that Buddhism is numerically the biggest religious group in the country. Of the 55 national minorities in China, more than 20 are deeply influenced by Buddhism. The Communist government is observing the growth of monks and nuns who enter into the renovated or newly constructed monasteries with misgiving. Positive in the eyes of the government is to the utmost that the Buddhist monasteries, much in the way of Daoist institutions, are contributing to the preservation of nature and the ecology, and thus can be said to be of “practical use”. The traditional pilgrim centres of the four holy mountains of classical Chinese Buddhism have been restored and can be visited by pilgrims again. In the person of Zhao Puchu, at present vice-president of the Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese People and president of the Chinese Buddhist Association, the Chinese Buddhists have a forceful representative who enjoys, not only within his own organisation, but nation-

wide respect and authority. Several times in the past, Zhao Puchu has come out with clear statements regarding religious policy and freedom in the PR China. Internationally he is known by his co-operation within the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP).

## Islam

Islam has come to China already during the time of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), that is shortly, after its founding, and has become one of the minority religions. In spite of this rather long history, Islam has retained its character of being a foreign religion. Most Muslims live in the border areas of Western China, that is, in the strategically important provinces of Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Yunnan and Shanxi. During the period of the Cultural Revolution, Muslims also suffered persecution like all other religions. The Red Guards were especially fond of mocking Muslims by forcing them to eat pork meat<sup>56</sup>. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Islam in China has experienced a period of reconstruction and revival, most strongly among the ethnic minorities in Western China, but also elsewhere in the country. The Chinese government views the close to 30 million Muslims in China with some apprehension and suspicion and considers the Muslims in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Qinghai as a security risk, because of the autonomy aspirations among these ethnic minorities. During the past years there have been repeatedly smaller and also bigger military engagements between Muslims and government forces, especially in Xinjiang. The ethnic ties among the Turk ethnic groups, combined with the common Muslim faith, extend beyond the national border of the present PR China. The Chinese leadership fears that these separatist tendencies could threaten the national unity and that pan-Islamic movements might spread and create unrest and terror<sup>57</sup>. In the beginning of 2001 some clashes between Muslims and government security forces occurred at the border between the provinces of Hebei and Shandong, because the Muslims were angry, because their religious feelings had been violated and because they were stopped in protesting against this. The reason causing this incident was that in a local Mosque members of an anti-Muslim group of Han Chinese had fastened a pig's head at the door of the local mosque, with the clear intention of violating the religious feelings of the local Muslim community. This incident developed into riots and clashes between the Muslim community and their neighbours which could be brought to an end only after several months by the authorities which finally succeeded in restoring religious peace by publicly admitting that these attacks by anti-Muslim groups were illegal and violating the religious freedom guaranteed by the Chinese constitution.

## Confucianism

Even if it is true that Confucianism does not belong to the religions officially recognised by the Chinese government, it is considered to be an important ideological and philosophical force which in the past has exercised a strong influence on the Chinese people as regards ethical standards and the general concept of society and social values<sup>58</sup>. On the other hand, Confucianism has been viewed by the advocates of China's modernisation after the First World War as an outdated and spent model of human society and human relationships that they considered to be obstructing the development in China of becoming a modern nation state. This has been the conviction of the students of the "May-Forth-Movement" who in 1919 started a strong protest movement against the conditions of the Versailles Peace Treaty, which the students considered to be a violation of China's national pride. At that time the students were shouting anti-Confucian slogans like "Down with the House of Confucius"! Similar anti-Confucian ideas can be found in the political program of the Chinese Communist Party which was founded in 1921. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards condemned the person of Confucius and his doctrines to be absolutely obsolete and detrimental for the building up of a socialist society in China. It was during this tumultuous period of Chinese history, that the Red Guards destroyed the ancestral temple of Confucius in Qufu and burned his writings. With the change of China's economic policies from a Communist government planned economy to a so-called "socialist market economy", Confucius and his teachings experienced a rehabilitation. Analysts of the economic growth in the so-called "Tiger Economies" of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore named "Confucian values" as cause for the phenomenal success of these economies. The ethical standards contained in Confucianism, the strong position of family ties, the willingness of life-long learning and the high esteem of education, these were said to have been the driving force for economic expansion and success<sup>59</sup>. Faced with the obvious difficulty to explain how the new economic policy could still be considered to be in accordance with the classical Marxist principles of a socialist society, the Communist Party in China was only too ready to tolerate a certain renaissance of Confucianism. This could be seen e.g. in the campaign of "Building up a Socialist Morality" at the end of the eighties, when Jiang Zemin, in his capacity as Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party, made an appeal "to accept all those good elements within Confucianism in order to educate the young generation to develop the good traditions of the Chinese people"<sup>60</sup>.

## Actual Political Conflicts

### The Challenge by the Falun-Gong-Movement

When discussing the problem of religious freedom in the PR China, it is inevitable to make some reference to the brutal crackdown of the Chinese leadership on the Falun-Gong-Movement. Even if it is true, that in the strict sense, the Falun-Gong-Movement does not consider itself to be a religious movement, but rather one of the many Qigong-Movements in the country, it has de facto developed in such a way that today it has all the elements of a religious organisation. Originally, at the time of its founding in 1992 by Li Hongzhi the Falun-Gong-Movement was registered within the organisational structure of the Qigong-Movements, that is with the Chinese Qigong Association and not with the Religious Affairs Bureau<sup>61</sup>. Whereas in most other the Qigong-Movements the exercises of correct breathing and body movements are in the centre, we find in the Falun-Gong-Movement a strong emphasis on the person and doctrines of its founder Li Hongzhi. As a matter of fact, Li Hongzhi has founded a kind of syncretic new religion by freely making use of elements taken from Buddhist and Daoist traditions. He presents himself to his adherents as the great enlightened one who, like a second Buddha or Bodhisattva, promises to implant the “wheel of the teaching” (fa-lun) into the breast of his adherents and thus to be spiritually capable to influence and guide them and lead them towards a liberated life.

The Chinese government, however, considers the Falun-Gong-Movement to be an “evil cult”<sup>62</sup>, and stresses the point that its members refuse to accept medical treatment when ill, while relying on the miraculous powers of Li Hongzhi, who as their spiritual master miraculously will heal them. According to government’s statistics, which regularly are corrected upward, this superstitious belief in the miraculous faculties of Li Hongzhi is said to have led to the death of hundreds of Falun-Gong membes. The hectic and brutal response to the Falun-Gong-Movement by the Chinese authorities, however, is not only motivated by the laudable intention to safeguard public health, but much more by the fact, that the rapid growth of such a powerful organisation which the Falun-Gong-Movement undoubtly is, because it has proved to be able to attract millions of adherents all over China and in other countries abroad as well in the course of a few years, constitutes a threat to the ideological hegemony of the Communist Party. For the Chinese government it came as a big surprise how effectively this organisation has been able to make use of the modern communication techniques of telephone, fax-machines, and especially the electronic mail, to mobilise its adherent, as was proven by the mighty demonstration of Falun-Gong members

on Tiananmen square in April 1999. This peaceful demonstration on Tiananmen square, the very heart and centre of Chinese political power and full of symbolic meanings, has shocked the Chinese authorities and made them react with such cruelty and vengeance. The most threatening aspect of the Falun-Gong-Movement is in the eyes of the Chinese authorities that it was able to recruit members among the highest levels of Chinese bureaucracy, the military and even among party cadres. It did not help much that the representatives of the Falun-Gong-Movement stressed the a-political character of its organisation. In the eyes of the Chinese government and the Communist Party it is suspected to have political ambitions, or at least, to be capable of playing a political role, given its formidable organisational structure. This accounts for the harshness and cruelty displayed by the authorities in dealing with the members of the movement, who in the majority are people in the age bracket around 50 and who for their part consider the exercises of breathing and bodily movements to be good for their health and who for themselves do not have any political ambitions. The restrictive measures by the Chinese government have succeeded in destroying much of the infra-structure of the Falun-Gong-Movement. Many of the adherents have been put into prison, where they have been tortured, where some were killed or had their health impaired. Falun-Gong members are put into special prisons and work camps, where they are forced to undergo a systematic re-education program which by connecting physical violence with psychological brain washing techniques more and more often succeeds in “convincing” them that Falun-Gong after all is an “evil cult”. Former Falun-Gong members return to normal life in society on condition that they admit that the practices and doctrines of Falun-Gong are false and dangerous and condemn the movement, in conformity with the government policy, as an “evil cult”.

The harsh reaction to and the persecution of the Falun-Gong-Movement has led generally to stricter control measures of other religious organisations as well. The government, and even more so the Chinese Communist Party are obviously afraid that the growth of religious life which can be observed in the PR China during the last years, might lead to a weakening of its power and ideological leadership in the country. In conformity with the “United-Front” policy, the other religious organisations in the country followed the government’s lead and condemned on their part the Falun-Gong-Movement dutifully as an “evil cult”<sup>63</sup>.

### The Unresolved Problem of the Democracy Movement and the Tiananmen Incident

The Communist Party in the PR China is not willing to give up its monopoly on power and to be the only political power in the country by allowing other

democratic parties to compete in fair political discourse bringing about a gradual change in the political life of China. With the beginning of the reform policy under Deng Xiaoping in 1979 there have been many attempts to form new political parties besides the Communist Party. All these attempts have been thwarted by harsh reactions of the Chinese government and the Communist Party. The most spectacular incident was the protest movement of students on Tiananmen square in May and June 1989 which ended with the bloody suppression on June 4th, when the People's Liberation Army used tanks and guns against its own people for the first time in the history of the PR China. Since that fateful date, the call for a rehabilitation of the students and for a public admission that they were acting not as counter-revolutionaries but as true patriots has not ceased.

### **The Continuing Tension between Religious Freedom and State Control of Religions**

The fact that religious freedom in the PR China exists according to the constitution and actual religious policy by the government and the party has to be admitted. At the same time it is true that the exercise of this freedom in the religious practices within the different religions is heavily controlled as regards the organisational structure, the formation of the religious personnel of priests, imams, monks and nuns, the religious publications and many other activities. Religious groups and organisations are allowed only in a very restricted manner to engage themselves in the fields of education, the health services and social activities. Only recently there have been openings for religious organisations to become active in the social sector. All religions have to admit that in a socialist state like the PR China it is the privilege and the duty of the state and the party alone to guarantee the services in the field of education, health and medicine as well as in social care. As regards the publication by religious organisations, all their printed material is considered to belong to the group of "internal publications" (neibu), which means that these publications cannot be sold in public book stores, but only within the religious organisation. This holds true e.g. for the three Catholic publications which appear in Beijing, Shijiazhuang and Shanghai, among which the bimonthly paper "Faith" with 45.000 subscribers in the whole country is the biggest.

### **Enforced Conformity in Public Statements by Religious Bodies regarding Social and Political Problems**

The freedom of public opinion and public criticism of the social and political developments within the PR China are widely restricted. Whenever there are important incidents or events, it is the government and the party who determine

the orthodox and right responses expected from the religious organisations and which after having received the necessary guidance and instruction are supposed to come out with more or less conform public declarations. This could be seen on several occasions in the last two years, e.g. when all religious organisations condemned unanimously and largely in an identical way the Falun-Gong-Movement as an "evil cult". This striking conformity did not do much to strengthen the credibility of these statements which slavishly followed the government's and the party's lead. Another similar phenomenon could be observed, when representatives of Chinese religions took part in the Millennium World Peace Summit in New York in August 2000, where the statements condemning the "evil influence" of the Dalai Lama, who had to be accused to be "destroying the national unity of China", again were of a striking conformity. Also at the session of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in Geneva in April 2001, the argumentation of the representatives of Chinese religions consisted again in simply reiterating the official government position. During the controversy regarding the canonisation of the 120 Catholic martyrs in October 2000, again the official statements by Catholic bishops and priests, as well as the condemnations coming from other religious communities, smacked of the same enforced conformity. These examples show that the government and the party are afraid of allowing free discussion and insist on a forced unanimity which lacks credibility and conviction.

### **Demands on the PR China**

- Insist on the universality of human rights and their indivisibility.
- Refute the mere legalistic argumentation trying to justify violations of common human rights with reference to Chinese laws and regulations.
- Refute the argument that any criticism from abroad regarding the practice of human rights within the PR China can be considered to be an "interference in the interior affairs" and therefore constitutes a violation of the principle of sovereignty guaranteed by international law.
- Pointing out that the demand of the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party that all religions have to support the "building up of a socialist state with Chinese characteristics" is contrary to the self-understanding of these religions and contradicting some of their doctrines. Real harmonious relations between religions and the state or the party presupposes mutuality and cannot consist in an one-sided and forced conformity.<sup>64</sup>

## Footnotes

- 1 Statistical data were culled from reference works like Fischer Weltalmanach 2001, Frankfurt 200, 163-171; Spiegel Almanach 2001, Hamburg 2000, 136-142; Munzinger Archiv, Ravensburg 1998.
- 2 Cf. US Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2000, China, February 2001, p. 23.
- 3 When President Jiang Zemin during the celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the Communist Party of China made the proposal to grant membership in the Communist Party to the recently emerged group of entrepreneurs, many of the older party members reacted surprised and annoyed. The old cadres could not understand how these new capitalists could fit into a communist party.
- 4 Cf. Amnesty International, People's Republic of China: The Death Penalty in 1999, AI Index ASA 17/05/2001; Amnesty International, People's Republic of China: Torture – a growing scourge in China, AI Index ASA 17/04/2001.
- 5 A comprehensive appraisal and critical presentation of the situation of human rights in the PR China can be found in the Report of the American State Department: 2000 Country Reports on Human Right Practices on China, February 25th 2001.
- 6 This is the normal way of speaking on religious freedom, as can be seen e.g. in the statement by the Director of the National Religious Affairs Bureau, Ye Xiaowen, at a conference in Hong Kong in February 2001. Ye Xiaowen stressed in his fundamental contribution that all citizens in the PR China enjoy religious freedom as long as their religious activities stay within the confines of the existing laws. He pointed out explicitly that the Falun-Gong-Movement has to be seen as an evil cult which is endangering the lives of its followers and the welfare of Chinese society in general and therefore is rightly persecuted as a "criminal organisation".
- 7 The Chinese government has issued several „White Papers on Human Rights“ in the past. That was the case in 1991, and again in 1995. The last White Paper was published in April 2001 by the Information Bureau of the State Council and contained the claim of the Chinese government that during the last years great progress in the field of human rights has been made in the PR China.
- 8 This interpretation of human rights in Chinese tradition has been criticised by G. Paul. Cf. G. Paul, Die traditionelle chinesische Philosophie: eine chinesische Grundlage universaler Menschenrechte, in: KAS Auslandsinformationen 7, 1997, 4-17.
- 9 Cf. St. Puhl, Rechtsverständnis, Menschenrechte und die chinesische Tradition, in: Fallbeispiel China, Ökumenische Beiträge zu Religion, Theologie und Kirche im chinesischen Kontext, R. Malek (ed.), Nettetal 1996, 367-414.
- 10 Cf. G. Schubert, China und die Menschenrechte, in: KAS Auslandsinformationen 4 (1997), 50-63.
- 11 The assertion that there exist fundamental differences between the concept of human rights in the West and that in Asian or in Chinese understanding, has been discussed controversially in the past. In the mean time, there has been some kind of agreement reached, that human rights are only secured, when they are understood to be "universally" valid. At the same time, it is admitted, however, that the reasons, why there are nuances and differences in the actual practice of human rights, have to do with cultural, religious, ideological and other factors, according to which in a given society, either the individual or the social human rights are prevalent.
- 12 Wei Jinsheng, Zur Zukunft der Menschenrechte in China – ein Plädoyer für Engagement und Optimismus, in: G.v.Arnim et al., Jahrbuch für Menschenrechte 1999, Frankfurt 1998, 17-28.
- 13 Cf. R. Malek, Theorie und Praxis der chinesischen Religionspolitik, eine frappierende Kontinuität, in: China, sein neues Gesicht, B. Mensen (ed.), Nettetal 1987, 151-179.
- 14 Cf. C. K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society, A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Forms, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967.
- 15 Cf. R. Malek, Der traditionelle chinesische Staat und die Religion(en), in: Zwischen Autonomie und Anlehnung, R. Malek/W. Prawdzik, (Hg.), Nettetal 1987, 31-54.
- 16 A good documentation of the religious policy in the PR China can be found in D.E. MacInnis, Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China, New York 1972; idem, Religion in China Today, Policy and Practice, New York 1989.
- 17 Cf. Zhuo Xinpíng, Theorien über Religion im Heutigen China, in: R. Malek (Hg.) „Fallbeispiel China“, Ökumenische Beiträge zu Religion, Theologie und Kirche im chinesischen Kontext, Nettetal 1996, 417-429.
- 18 Cf. Jiang Ping, Die Religionstheorie des Marxismus und die Religionspolitik der Partei sorgfältig studieren!, in: China Heute no. 5-6, 1986, 8-16, p. 8.
- 19 Cf. D. MacInnis, Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China, New York 1972, p. 9.
- 20 Cf. D. MacInnis, op.cit. p. 24.
- 21 Promulgated in 1931 this constitution contained the following clause regarding religious freedom: „The Soviet government of China guarantees true religious freedom to the workers, peasants, and the toiling population. Adhering to the principle of the complete separation of church and state, the Soviet state neither favours nor grants any financial assistance to any religion whatsoever. All Soviet citizens shall enjoy the right to engage in anti-religious propaganda. No religious institution of the imperialist shall be allowed to exist unless it shall comply with Soviet law“. Cf. MacInnis, op.cit. p. 19.
- 22 Cf. MacInnis, op.cit. p. 21.
- 23 Cf. D. MacInnis, Religion in China Today, Policy and Practice, Maryknoll, New York 1989, p. 34s.
- 24 „The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period, in: D. MacInnis, Religion in China Today, Policy and Practice, Maryknoll, New York 1989, p.8-26.
- 25 Important is the clear statement by Liu Peng of the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing which he made at a conference in Hongkong on November 30, 1995: „Religion is accepted by the state on the supposition that it recognises the state's political authority, accepts its leadership in all social spheres, and carries out its policies. The state administration manages religious organisations that are not involved in government administration, the judiciary, or education. The role of religion in society is strictly limited... Every patriotic organisation must accept the leadership of the Communist Party and the government. The Central Government reiterated this statement in Doc. No. 6, 1991. These official pronouncements indicate clearly that the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party, State, and religious organisation is that of leading and being led... These religious groups are managed by the government and must carry out Party and government policies. While the religious groups are independent in terms of administrative and organisational relationships, they are no different politically from those institutions under the direct leadership of the government... This means that religions in China are proscribed from involvement in administration, judicial affairs, and all forms of education, whether in schools, in correspondence courses, or in the media... According to the analysis above, church and state relations in China fit under state dominance over religion. Obviously, this policy of the freedom of religious belief is based not on any awareness of theism or a concept of religious values, but rather on the realistic and pragmatic consideration that religion can serve the political goal of the Party and State“ (cf. Tripod, Vol. XV, no. 88, 1995, 5-18).
- 26 Cf. Ye Xiaowen, A Review and Reflection on Religious Work at the Turn of the Century, in: Tripod XX (2000), no. 120, 27-40.
- 27 Cf. W. Gluer, Gegenseitige Anpassung und Harmonie, Zur Religionspolitik in der Volksrepublik China, in: R. Malek (ed.), Fallbeispiel China, Ökumenische Beiträge zu Religion, Theologie und Kirche im chinesischen Kontext, Nettetal 1996, 491-502.
- 28 Cf. the Document with the title: „Members of the Communist Party cannot be adherents of religious groups“ in: D. MacInnis, Religion in China Today, Policy and Practice, Maryknoll, New York 1989, p. 80-85. „In summary, if a Party member believes in religion he is going in the opposite direction from the Party and is not worthy to bear the name of Party member. A Party member should arm himself with a scientific world-view, and become a materialistic, atheistic, heroic fighter who never stops in the struggle to bring the highest ideals of Socialism and Communism.“ loc.cit. 82.
- 29 Cf. Georg Evers, Chinas Staatspartei und die Falun-Gong-Bewegung, in: Herder Korrespondenz 53 (1999) 10, 532-537.
- 30 Cf. China Heute 13 (1994) no. 5, 135-136.
- 31 The persecution of the Catholic Church in the early stages of the PR China is documented in: D. van Coillie, Der begeisterte Selbstmord, Freiburg 1965 and J. Schütte, Die Katholische Chinamission im Spiegel der Rotchinesischen Presse, Münster 1957.
- 32 Cf. J. Spae, Church and China: Towards Reconciliation?, Chicago – Leuven 1980.
- 33 As regards the canonical assessment, cf. Geoffrey King, The Catholic Church in China: A Canonical Evaluation, in: The Jurist 49, 1 (1989), 69-94.
- 34 Cf. A. Lam, China's Underground Movements: Meaning and Resolution, in: Tripod 19 (1999), no. 112, 5-18.
- 35 On the height of the Cultural Revolution, some of the „China Watchers“ were discussing whether the Red Guards really had succeeded in eradicating all traces of religious activities. Seen from the outside, religious life in China had ceased to exist. One of the most renowned among the China Watchers, the Jesuit Laszlo Ladanyi, wrote at that time an article with the telling title: „Are there still Christians in China?“, cf. Katholische Missionen 90 (1971), 12-16.
- 36 Cf. J. Charbonnier, Histoire de Chrétiens en Chine, Paris 1992.
- 37 Cf. A New Beginning, An International Dialogue with the Chinese Church, Th. Chu/Ch. Linds (eds.), Montréal 1983.
- 38 A good overview of recent developments of and the problems within the Catholic Church in China can be found, in „The Catholic Church in Modern China, Perspectives“, E.Tang/J.P. Wiest (eds.), Hongkong 1997.
- 39 Cf. B.A.Meheu/F. Mi, China's Religious Policy, 1981-1999, in: Tripod 19 (1999) no. 113, 6-30.
- 40 A good overview of the different currents can be found in A. Lam, The Catholic Church in Present-Day China, Hong Kong 1997.
- 41 In 1992 Bishop Joseph Fan Xueyan has died in prison after having been tortured severely. Since then his grave has become a much visited memorial till the authorities levelled the site in May 2001 in order to stop the growing veneration by Catholic faithful.
- 42 Cf. A. Lam, China's Underground Movements: Meaning and Resolution, in: Tripod XIX (1999), 5-18; idem, The Catholic Church in Present-Day China, Hong Kong 1997.
- 43 Ye Xiaowen in a talk during the Sixth National Congress of the Catholics in China, cf. Tripod XVIII, 1998, 49-58, 54.
- 44 Cf. A. Broomhall, Hudson Taylor – China's Open Century, Parts 1-5, London 1981.
- 45 In January 2002 the international press reported the case of Lai Kwong-keung, a Hong Kong based businessman, who was arrested for smuggling some 30.000 bibles into the PR China for the Protestant sect of the „Shouters“. When convicted Lai could receive the death penalty. The Chinese government considers the „Shouters“ to be an evil cult and the smuggling of bibles a criminal act. The intervention by President George Bush turned the case into an international affair, because China is very sensitive when in the name of human rights a foreign government mingles in the internal affairs of the country.

- <sup>46</sup> An example of stricter control of Christian groups is the case of Gong Shengliang, the founder of the South China Church, an underground church in Hubei Province who was given a death sentence suspended for two years. 15 other members were sentenced to penalties ranging from two years to life imprisonment. The South China Church was forbidden by the government as an „evil cult“ in April 2001. The government charges that Gong and his followers have committed criminal acts and that the juridical proceedings against them have nothing to do with religious freedom and human rights.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. A. Sprenger, A New Vision for China: The case of Liu Xiaofeng, in: *Inter-Religio* 19 (1991), 2-20.
- <sup>48</sup> Cf. E. Tang, The Second Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and Christianity Today, in: *Identity and Marginality, Rethinking Christianity in North East Asia*, W. Ustorf/T. Murayama (eds.), Frankfurt 2000, 55-70.
- <sup>49</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, The Form of Faith of Chinese Intellectuals in the Context of Modernisation, in: *China Study Journal* 7 (1992) 3, 4-8.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Zhuo Xinping, Discussion on ‚Cultural Christians‘ in China, Presentation at the International Conference „China and Christianity“ in San Francisco in October 1999.
- <sup>51</sup> Cf. G. Evers, Religionen und religiöse Traditionen in China, in: *Lebendiges Zeugnis* 51 (1996), 4, 257-269.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. R. Malek, Das Tao des Himmels: Die religiöse Tradition Chinas, Freiburg 1996.
- <sup>53</sup> As regards the persecution of Tibetan nuns, cf. Ama Adhe, *Doch mein Herz lebt in Tibet*, Freiburg 1997.
- <sup>54</sup> In a White Paper, published in 1998, the Chinese government has re-iterated its claim that it is respecting the right of the Tibetan people to freely exercise their religion. Cf. the documentation in *China Heute* 18 (1998) nos. 2-3, 43-45.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. Alan Hunter, The Fate of Buddhism in Deng Xiaoping's China, in: *Ching Feng* 35 (1992) nos. 3-4, 178-199.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. R. Israeli, *Muslims in China, A Study in Cultural Confrontation*, London 1980.
- <sup>57</sup> The fact that the Chinese government so eagerly accepted to become member of the anti-terrorist campaign of the USA after the September 11th terrorist attacks against the United States, can be easily explained. After all, China sees the possibility to connect its own attacks against Muslim separatists in the West of China with this international campaign against terrorism.
- <sup>58</sup> Cf. J. Berthrong, trends in the Interpretation of Confucian Religiosity, in: *Ching Feng* 35 (1989), 224-244.
- <sup>59</sup> Cf. F. Fukuyama, Konfuzius und Marktwirtschaft, *Der Konflikt der Kulturen*, München 1995, Kwok Pui-lan, *Business Ethics in the Economic Development of Asia: A Feminist Analysis*, in: *Asia Journal of Theology* 9 (1995), 133-145.
- <sup>60</sup> The talk was delivered at an international conference on Confucianism in Qufu in 1989.
- <sup>61</sup> In its many publications and especially in the internet, Li Hongzhi and his followers insist that the Falun-Gong-Movement is neither a religious nor a political organisation. They rather insist that it is simply a „spiritual practice“, and at that „the fastest growing in the world“.
- <sup>62</sup> Cf. the brochure produced by the China Anti-Cult Association, „Combat Evil Cults, Safeguard Human Rights“, China Science&Technology Press, Beijing 2001. The Falun-Gong-Movement is here listed together with the „People's Temple“ of Jim Jones, the „Aum Shinrikyo“ of Shoko Asahara, the French „Science Sect“, and the „Davidian Cult“ in the USA.
- <sup>63</sup> In April 2001 the Catholic bishops Fu Tieshan of Beijing, Liu Yuanren of Nanjing, Jin Luxian of Shanghai and Jin Peixian of Jilin have issued statements condemning unanimously the Falun-Gong-Movement as an „evil cult“. Cf. *China Catholic News*, Beijing, April 2001, 1-10.

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