

An Oriental Christ: A Perfect Condition After the State was God

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for Calvin and his mission.

for his destination.

and for the peace and growth of *all* of his congregants.

that one day they will understand this dedication.

An Oriental Christ:
A Perfect Condition after the State Was God

Where do we begin with our understanding of the human composition of God, with humanity's embrace of the existential? Humanity has rendered faith volatile and constant, a consequence, not flaw, merely of developed sentience. Yet, whether God or evolution has burdened humanity with this responsibility, faith and belief continue their inexplicable and unwearied existence. People, whether atheistic, agnostic, or faith bound, have proven the existence of an utterly human liability for irrationality, or certainly rational subscription.

Emile Durkheim wrote of religion as purely existent within shared life, unsusceptible to segregation and compartmental comprehension. Max Weber considered religion as providing prescientific humanity with a sense of order, certainty, and safety in an unstable and measureless world. Both philosophers measured this premodern relic, this faith, as subject in future to the mercy of modernization and scientific thought.¹ Yet, here, both Durkheim and Weber dealt only with those experienced. Where must we begin when religion never existed? How does the emergence of religion in a hitherto secular context elucidate the origin and functional significance of religious faith?

Robert A. Segal maintains religious theory as claiming to have discovered only the conditions for the emergence and perpetuation of religion, not those necessary.² Theories, according to Segal, merely claim if "certain conditions exist, religion will likely, not always, arise."³ If those same conditions persist, the author continues, religion will "likely, not always,"

¹ Bellin, Eva. Jan., 2008. Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion. *World Politics* 60: pp. 317, 329-330

² Segal, Robert A. Mar., 2006. All Generalizations are Bad: Postmodernism on Theories. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74(1): pp. 159. Traces of such a consideration of religious theory can also be found in Bilimoria, Purushottama. 2003. What is the "Subaltern" of the Comparative Philosophy of Religion?. *Philosophy East & West* 53(3): pp. 340-366

³ Ibid.

survive. From this platform we may develop a better examination of both the origin and function of Christianity in China today.

Yet, where must the religious question begin when the ground was only permitted secular belief? Segal has perhaps provided an adequate framework for a first approach to such an examination. Why, then, was Christianity able to find a foothold in contemporary Chinese society, and for what reason is its presence so rapidly expanding? Why in bred secularism have we found religion? Durkheim and Weber appear to have been not entirely correct.

The rapid Marxist industrialization of China was deliberately without religion; the state was then to become the only official god. The state and world were allowed only a composition of material and substance, officially to which there was to exist no superior.⁴ The masses were left with and grew within nothing; the human liability for religion, faith, and conviction became unfulfilled and empty. This absence, whether today still viewed or felt as vacant, continues to be strained amongst new generations. Yet, a need for doubt has begun to surface amongst the populations from this inexperienced state; a religious void has arisen.

However, if we are to continue to grow in our own understanding of this development, we must assign value to two essential aspects of religion and its human acceptance. The adoption of religion must be understood as a fully human experience, carrying with it emotion, choice, and a bottomless spirit only tentatively regimented to religious doctrine. Gerd Thiessen wrote of the spirit as mutation, a seemingly random, unpredictable cultural innovation which may grow to transform history.⁵ We must not forget the immeasurable and instable human element of emotional choice.

⁴ Female Chinese Christian Congregant 1, interview by Thomas Eaves. May 10, 2009.

⁵ Thiessen, Gerd. 2007. *Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Perspective*. Fortress Press.

Secondly, considering human agency, we must also grow to understand the acceptance of religion not as an adaptation, but rather an adoption. Religion, itself, adapts to the social conditions present during the time of adoption. Religion possesses no agency. Religious movement happens through conversion, only considered as such if an individual or community has accepted or adopted such practice and mentality into their lives.

For this reason, we may no longer understand Christian expansion as geocentric or possessing a religious epicenter of thought. Due to both religious and social volatility, may any religion truly be thought of or lived as a singular, monolithic identity?⁶ Holding Christianity as central to an ominous West denies the resulting diversity of religious adoption. It is essential, as much of the current research has done, that we do not represent or conceive of religion as is lived in life, societies, and political conceptions as a singular, common identity.

I. A Secular State

A secular state has been defined by one author, Ahmet T. Kuru, as possessing two definitive characteristics. Firstly, according to Kuru, in a secular state, legal and judicial processes are out institutional religious control. Secondly, the government will have established neither an official religion nor atheism.⁷ Other scholars have typically included two other characteristics which Kuru has explicitly removed.⁸ These qualities are represented by scholars as the separation of church and state as well as the provision of religious freedom.⁹ Kuru

⁶ Beyer, Peter. 2003. De-Centring Religious Singularity: The Globalization of Christianity as a Case in Point. *Numen* 50(4): pp. 357-386; Ibid., Bilimoria pp. 341-343.

⁷ Kuru, Ahmet T. Jul., 2007. Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles and State Policies toward Religion. *World Politics* 59: pp.568-594

⁸ Ibid., p. 569.

⁹ Bhargava, Rajeev, ed.1999. Secularism and Its Critics. Dehli: Oxford University Press. as found in Kuru, Ahmet T. Jul., 2007. Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles and State Policies toward Religion. *World Politics* 59: pp. 569.

continues his categorization of state attitude toward religion through definition of religious states, states with an established religion, and antireligious states.¹⁰

The latter two simply defined by an official acceptance of or attitude toward religion. A state with an established religion stands as one with an officially sanctioned religion, while an antireligious state has an established atheism, thereby showing an official aggression against religious establishment.¹¹ Before critiquing this author's model, Kuru has also contributed an important development to the understanding of secularism.

. State policies toward religion, according to Kuru, are a consequence of ideological struggles between what the author has termed "passive secularists" and "assertive secularists."

The author writes:

Passive secularism, which requires that the secular state play a "passive" role in avoiding the establishment of any religions, allows for the public visibility of religion. Assertive secularism, by contrast, means that the state excludes religion from the public sphere and plays an "assertive" role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain. Thus, passive secularism is a pragmatic political principle that tries to maintain state neutrality toward various religions, whereas assertive secularism is a "comprehensive doctrine" that aims to eliminate religion from the public sphere.¹²

Kuru's study examined three countries, France, Turkey, and the United States of America. The ability of this definition to stand against the background of other countries is quite debatable. The author's definitions of both secular attitudes and, more importantly, secular, antireligious, and religious states are by no means universal and do, when addressing the world stage, leave large, unaccounted for gaps.

¹⁰ Ibid., Kuru p. 569.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., Kuru p. 571.

Ahmet T. Kuru's definition and discussion of secular states stops at the state. The author has forgotten, or certainly not included, the human element of the populous, of the in fact religious. Secularism may stop at the state, yet our research must not.

In China we neither find an aggressively antireligious nor purely religious state. The Chinese government, itself, has explicitly established its own atheism; party members are officially allowed no religious belief.¹³ Religion in China has not been separated from state. The government has a highly active hand in popular religious practice, even going as far as to construct an official, highly controllable Christian church. Constitutionally, China gives its population the right to religious freedom; yet, in schools, religion is taught and defined as weakness. Religion occupies an incredibly distinct position in China, and one which cannot be ignored.

If we follow the two criteria which Kuru has presented in his definition of a secular state, and in addition those which the author has chosen to omit, then we can begin to understand the status of the state with relation toward religion in China. Legal and judicial processes officially are indisputably removed from, here using Kuru's understanding of religion,¹⁴ institutional religious control. Yet, against his definition of a secular state, the government has plainly established an official atheism in hopes that the country will follow; however, in line with Marxist theory, the government refuses to establish an antireligious state with the understanding that religion is simply temporary and, when enlightened, people will abandon it. The Chinese government, as mentioned before, has a strong hand in religious affairs; there exists no

¹³ Cheng, May M.C. Mar., 2003. House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China. *China: An International Journal* 1(1): pp. 16-45. It appears this is also slackly enforced depending upon a member's religious background. Those party members who belong to a national minority are allowed room for religious belief.

¹⁴ Kuru writes: "By religion, I imply a set of beliefs and practices that refer to supernatural beings, generally God. In this definition, neither atheism nor an ideology like Marxism is a religion." p.569 (footnotes)

separation of Church and State. However, the government has provided the masses with a constitutional religious freedom.

There does seem to exist in the government an ultimate goal of a non-religious China. Religious practice not controlled by the government is indisputably illegal. Much religious practice, even in officially sanctioned locations, does happen in the private domain. There is present today in China both the officially religious, and those who, disheartened by religious control, move to the confines of the night, of an office, or home. China is by the above definition not a secular state; however, we must not forget the public educational system and the heavy hand of the government in religious life.

Within the public educational system, irrationality and religious belief are actively taught as weakness and as socially immobilizing. Government interference within religious life limits deep exploration. It is not the government which matters when considering the religious status of a state; it is the people and their response which should be of principal concern. How do we begin to understand or define the religious status of the Chinese state and society?

II. Safety and Organizational Response to Legal Status

Much contemporary work concerning the autonomous Christian communities in China suitably represents the unofficial Protestant movement as owning no national, formal, hierarchical organization.¹⁵ The unofficial Protestant church in China, itself, has not nationally composed an official catholic canon. Protestantism within this context merely refers to the unofficial, non-Catholic, pandenominational movement happening within China today. This

¹⁵ Bays, Daniel H. Jun., 2003. Chinese Protestant Christianity Today. *The China Quarterly* (174): p. 489; Cheng, May M.C. Mar., 2003. House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China. *China: An International Journal* 1(1): pp. 17-20; Wegner, Jacqueline E. Dec., 2004. Official vs. Underground Protestant Churches in China: Challenges for Reconciliation and Social Influence. *Review of Religious Research* 46(2): pp.169-182

movement has been characterized by scholars as organizationally fractured, delicate, and scattered,¹⁶ and appropriately by many as flourishing.¹⁷ However, we must, as much recent research has not done, develop a better understanding of the reasons for this disunity.

Of no public concern to many, it is this religious movement which has been categorized as subversive, a conscious and certain threat to the foundation of the communist state. If discovered, the unregistered and unofficial practice of this secret carries with it the official consequence of lengthy imprisonment. In some areas, tales of punishment from the North, of beatings, imprisonment, and defilement, occupy a tacitly acknowledged presence within the homes of congregations, this chastisement at the whim of both official law and local officials. In order to better understand the reasons for disunity amongst this movement, we must come to understand the inconsistent relationship between official law and officials' action.

A thorough examination of the legality of such communities, as provided by May M.C. Cheng in a recent article, indisputably proves these communions as illegitimate religious organizations, unrecognized politically by the Chinese state.¹⁸ The Chinese government requires all communal religious activities to be held at registered locations;¹⁹ such autonomous Christian communities violate this law by worshiping in unofficially designated places. Unregistered gatherings, if found assembling as a worshipping congregation, are incontrovertibly illegal; however, the political and social response to these discovered Christian communions varies considerably.

¹⁶ Ibid., Bays 2003; Wegner 2004.

¹⁷ Dunch, Ryan. "Protestant Christianity in China today: fragile, fragmented flourishing," in Uhalley Jr., Stephen and Wu, Xiaoxin (eds.). 2001. *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe. as found in Bays, Daniel H. Jun., 2003. *Chinese Protestant Christianity Today*. *The China Quarterly* (174): p. 489

¹⁸ Ibid., Cheng 2003.

¹⁹ Ibid. For further reading on Constitutional documents concerning religion in China please refer to May M.C. Cheng's 2003 article cited above.

Communities which harbor a large unregistered Christian community, composing a majority of the local population, enjoy more religious freedom than those where the Christian population represents only a minority. Such large Christian communities thwart the government's ability to without substantial social consequence suppress religious growth. Those autonomous Christian communities which considerably contribute to societal and human progression through mission work enjoy greater leniency in public mission; some unsanctioned outreach communities have even met with direct, explicit approval from government officials.

Religious fundamentalism, better described and understood by local Christian communities as extremism, drawing large numbers of congregants, concerns the government. Open unofficial communities attracting a great amount of social attention seem also to make the Chinese government uncomfortable. Often in these instances local officials have acted aggressively in the dissolution of these communities. Knowledge of past imprisonment of entire unofficial congregations does, as stated before, exist within autonomous communities.²⁰ No real or concrete knowledge seems to exist of where the government acquires their knowledge; only a very vague, hypothetical, and general idea is present amongst the communities.

Perhaps it is this inconsistency and unpredictability which functions as a form of suppression. Many community leaders particularly stressed the presence of the government, "one would be naïve," one missionary expressed, "to pretend the government doesn't know; of course the government knows. But they know we are doing the right thing."²¹ As long as one avoids extremism, he continued, and simply discusses Jesus and the Bible, the government will

²⁰ Ibid., Bays. pp. 492.

²¹ Male Chinese Missionary 1, interview by Thomas Eaves. May 14, 2009.

most likely not be bothered. With this knowledge, many autonomous communities no longer highly concern themselves with remaining hidden.²²

We must reconsider conventional vernacular concerning the unofficial Protestant movement. Much of the contemporary research has presented autonomous Christian communities as unanimously underground;²³ however, current times may prove this label both inadequate and unsuitable.²⁴ The West, as Cheng has referred to within her paper, has defined this movement as “underground” because it “runs contrarily to the existing regulations...on authorised [sic.] religious activities.”²⁵ Yet, the author continues, certain churches operate extremely openly and very accessibly.²⁶ These characteristics may require us in the future to reassess conventional use of the underground description.

However, openness and accessibility by no means represent a free religious state; these characteristics only stand for a small portion of the entire Christian condition. These movements are illegal. Other defenses have been developed by autonomous communities in order to deal with such bold qualities. No trust exists between Christian communities and government officials, here also including police both governmental and private. Missionaries, church leaders, and congregants may possess some knowledge of other unauthorized congregations and places of worship; however, these communities neither officially nor recognizably network. If one community is found worshipping by an official, no member shall have any concrete knowledge or evidence of other congregations.

The safest communities seem also to have developed a necessarily exclusive system of church growth. Many unsanctioned communions grow through invitation alone. Only a trust

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., Wegner 2004..

²⁴ Ibid., Cheng 2003.; May 14 Interview.

²⁵ Ibid., Cheng, p.34.

²⁶ Ibid. Here, Cheng specifically refers to her own case study of the Damazhan church.

worthy friend of a congregant will be invited into a community. Such a system also helps in preventing uncontrollable and rapid individual community growth. Growth is viewed both as good and dangerous. A community must be able to support the growth of a congregation beyond that of twenty-five members.²⁷ Large Christian communions are at greater risk of being discovered; beyond twenty-five members a congregation must begin to consider its future. If capable, communities which have grown to an appropriate size will split and become two smaller congregations worshipping in different locations.

Locations for worship, themselves, are fairly indistinct; one may find an altar cloth temporarily thrown over a table, or a cross hanging rather unseen on a wall. Places of worship often appear as easily collapsible and with no trouble returnable to their normal functional state. This may simply be a result of holding worship in places with alternative functions, but may possibly act as an indicator of the Christian consciousness. Worship is not invaded by paranoia, but appropriate precautions, as presented above, must be taken. The government knows Christianity, according to both congregants and leaders, and their response is relatively, if not entirely, unpredictable. Freedom is certainly limited. Yet, what can organization tell us about Christian consciousness?

III. Consciousness and Prayer of the Suppressed

Present within forced secular society today exists a strength capable of causing religious humanity to adapt their faith. Here, religion and its practice have compensated for immovable societal factors. Humanity has with its adoption, adapted, and the religion has therefore changed. How do we write of the presence of this strength? Prayer perhaps provides an adequate lens for

²⁷ This number has varied from twenty-five to fifty depending upon the capability of a congregation to support a larger congregation.

the examination of the current social conditions in China and subsequently present religious consciousness. Prayer amongst congregations often concerns itself with peace and understanding. Yet, in what current social context do we find this prayer?

State registration and monitoring of religious activities, according to Daniel H. Bays, although only erratically employed, have been a reality of religious life since as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE).²⁸ To such required registration or, certainly in modern times, attempted suppression, we see, whether conformity, submission, dissolution, or persistence, a religious response. No real tools are available for an assessment of religious response; yet, action and prayer may help us to begin to understand religious consciousness in an unnaturally secular state.

If we consider prayer as a means through which to publically and privately reflect upon life,²⁹ the content of prayer may provide insight into the needs and concerns of individuals and congregations as a whole. May M.C. Cheng has clearly expressed an important sentiment when growing in our own comprehension of this movement. Cheng writes of these churches as forming no "...united anti-government clandestine organization."³⁰ Much contemporary research has represented the unofficial movement as resisting the government. However, this representation may be entirely too limited in its comprehension of the mentality of many unofficial congregations.

During the worship service of many autonomous Christian communities there does not seem to be present a strong sense of anti-government fervor. Something we must be careful to represent. Both prayer and sermon do concern themselves with the government and the condition

²⁸ Ibid., Bays pp. 492.

²⁹ There exists, I am sure, a much stronger definition for prayer and a better representation of its function. Definition of prayer is not a primary concern for this paper; however, I hope through the presented discussion of the contents of autonomous community prayer one might find a stronger understanding of the essence and function of prayer.

³⁰ Ibid., Cheng, p.18.

of modern society. An absence of this vigor does not, though, mean a deficiency of circumstantial consciousness.

Prayer with relationship to the state of the government may be appropriately broken down into three loose primary areas of concern; however, the following divisions are by no means an ultimatum and may need further investigation. Congregations routinely pray for a loving and understanding spirit to permeate throughout the minds and hearts of government officials and the entire state, for true and full religious freedom, and for God's spirit to run freely throughout the country. Open prayer in congregations is by no means restricted or limited to these three points; however, with our examination of both social condition and Christian consciousness, these areas reveal an important spirit imbuing the hearts of many autonomous Christian communities.

Immediately, these three areas expose a radically significant reflection pervasive throughout many Christian communities. Without question there exists in the minds of many practicing Christians a need for change. Yet, what this change represents about the condition of forced secular society must not be ignored, as it is vital for our understanding of perhaps the entire religious resurgence in China.

As evidenced by adaptive organization, we see an awareness amongst Christian communities of the illegality of their assembly, as well as the ever possible and perhaps dangerous presence of the state. It may not be appropriate to label this consciousness as paranoia; a label of this sort would seem to imply a chaotic, tacitly frantic, destructive, and immobilizing mentality. Response to this awareness has taken two constructive forms, that of, as represented above, purposeful disorganization and prayer. Community organization and the lack of networking provide concrete evidence for a consciousness of delicate illegality. If prayer is

circumstantially responsive, then it is prayer which provides a lens through which to examine the effect and true meaning of this illegality for the Christian consciousness.

The prayer for the state presents an interesting question with regards to the status of religion in China today. The first point of focus for public prayer, that of the state, concerns itself ultimately with one thought. The prayer asks for the love which surpasses all understanding, true peace, to resonate throughout the People's Republic. There exists an understanding of the Chinese state as one where compassion has greatly dissipated and where fellowship is largely needed.³¹ This concern may reveal amongst many Christian communities a feeling of loss and a need for correction; within the Christian context this lost item has been understood as common compassion. Secularism may be understood by these Christians as loss.

One congregant spoke of the need for the *true* religious freedom. Having felt the need for community, exploration, and more freedom of religious speech, the congregant moved with his wife from the official Three Self Patriotic Movement Church to the unofficial church. There are many signals within the official church to indicate state control, he continued. A preacher drawing too much attention from the public, gathering large crowds, and preaching strong sermons will be removed from his church by the state.³² The reality of religious freedom within China needs to be further examined. If religious legislation and religious mentality neither positively correlate nor complement each other, then a problem must somewhere be present.

There certainly exists amongst much of the Christian community an awareness of religious limitation. Publically and officially there are, as presented, many limitations; perhaps this is why the unofficial church, itself, is growing so rapidly, today holding more members than

³¹ Ibid., May 14 Interview.; Male Foreign Missionary 1, interview by Thomas Eaves. May 6, 2009.

³² Male Chinese Christian Congregant 1, interview by Thomas Eaves. April 29, 2009.

the official movement.³³ People are responding to these limitations. These restrictions are significant enough for the unofficial response to be of great concern to the state. Unofficial and unregistered Christian individuals,³⁴ although understanding religious life as containing struggle, do understand their Christian public presence as restricted.³⁵ Restriction may not necessarily limit function, but may, however, limit one's own ability to live fully and publically a Christian identity.

If we consider a portion of the Christian consciousness as observing an immense world struggling due to loss and as functioning under very real restriction, then the context in which we find the third prayer becomes all too alive. Loss and limitation have brought forth a deep, spiritual longing. Freedom of assembly, best considered here as commonality, true freedom of individual public identity, and freedom, itself, have been regimented and publically confined to the limitations of state interference. A longing exists for boundless freedom of spirit. In this context we find a prayer for the liberation of God's spirit.

The spirit of God has been revealed as inextricably attached to human passion and understanding. We may have no true evidence of God's existence, one congregant said, but we may look around the room and we may see life's enjoyment. In this instance, the room the interview was conducted in had become a way of examining the world; the room, for a short period of time, had become the world. It is difficult, he continued, to know whether a glass of water is good to drink simply by looking at it; yet if by looking around the room we see another drinking it, we can see their reaction, we will know if the water is sweet, sour, good to drink, or

³³ Ibid., Bays 2003; Wegner 2004.

³⁴ The state officially requires all worshipping Christians to register as a congregant at an official Three Self Patriotic Movement Church.

³⁵ Ibid., April 29 Interview; May 14 Interview.

bad.³⁶ This was his unneeded proof. We may see or understand God's spirit as most purely existent in the common, endlessly compassionate, and purely human spirit. To understand God, we must have humanity.

One missionary perhaps furthered this with a rather universally problematic, but pertinent, point. When the true Spirit has been lost, he said, we can see a collapse of society. Historically, he continued, we can see this as reality. He then proceeded to discuss the social crumple of Egypt and other relevant countries after the loss of Christianity.³⁷ Yet, behind this missionary's rather debatable point we may find further truth not directly applicable to Christianity but rather the entirety of religion, here including a natural, unforced atheism.

Sermons, themselves, provide an interesting look into the hearts of unofficial churches and their collective mentalities. Often taking a less formal structure than the more liturgically concerned churches, these homilies seem to be geared toward the spiritual needs of each congregation. In such an intimate setting, one would be mistaken to assume a priest, pastor, or missionary has no awareness of the status of his or her congregation's spiritual and mental health. Good health, however, is not a universal concept. We then may find sermons and homilies as serving two purposes within a community. Firstly, they act as a measurement of and response to congregational health. Secondly, both act as a directive, subject to the goals for the future of the congregation, set forth by the leader. Sermons certainly serve as guidance, exploration, and direction in faith for many congregants.³⁸

Sermons seem to primarily focus upon three general themes, understanding true peace,³⁹ allowance for disappointment and failure,⁴⁰ and love. These areas of concern suggest a need

³⁶ Ibid., April 29 Interview.

³⁷ Ibid., May 14 Interview.

³⁸ Female Chinese Christian Congregant 2, interview by Thomas Eaves. May 12, 2009.; Ibid., May 10 Interview

³⁹ Sermon, given by Male Chinese Missionary 2. May 3, 2009. translated by Female Chinese Congregant 3.

amongst some in China today for the understanding of difficulty. These sermons and ultimately the Christian faith provide a means for communally accepted, publically appropriate, emotional digestion.⁴¹ Yet, these three topics provide more specific insight into the needs of these human beings carrying a soul once publically regimented to an unnatural societal condition.

These three topics had gone accessibly untouched for a certain forty years. The above areas of concern do not necessarily suggest China was for forty years without peace, failure, disappointment, or love; yet, the points of focus are responses to the condition of such qualities in contemporary society. Failure no doubt had a presence in China, as it does the world over. These responses deal with digestion. These qualities all were present, yet lacked an appropriate means for absorption, contemplation, and management. Negative features of life existed without appropriate public explanation.

One sermon dealt with the understanding of God's peace through difficulty. No solution was provided for life's difficulties by the leader, yet new devices for their digestion were. Sermons are particularly interested in the development of emotional strength, individual reflection, and ultimately healthy, progressive personal response to life's condition. Difficulties, according to this leader, are put in our way by God, whomever or whatever he or she may be, so that we may understand what it means to have peace in our lives.⁴²

A second sermon in the same church dealt partially with failure and disappointment in our lives. This topic, itself, approached from an ultimately very interesting angle, seemed to function as way of providing comfort for the listening community. Again, failure has and will always exist. Yet, healthy comprehension and means for dealing with such failure have publically been avoided. Perhaps no room is available in an age of rapid development and

⁴⁰ Sermon, given by Male Invited Speaker 1, May 24, 2009. translated by Female Chinese Congregant 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., May 6 Interview.

⁴² Ibid., May 3 Sermon.

economic strength for public individual failure. One's failure must be hidden. The leader, however, dispensed of this worry and anxiety, saying "God allows for failure."⁴³ Within Christianity, certainly in the unofficial church, we are beginning to find a mode for healthfully processing and opening hidden emotion.

We have seen manifested in the Christian religion a strong need for change in contemporary Chinese society. The Christian consciousness carries with it a keen awareness of social circumstance, as suggested through the prayer for change in governmental attitude, religious freedom, and the setting free of the Holy Spirit. A disturbance and void have been left publically and ultimately untouched for forty years, deepened by an official and unquestionable public religious education. We can observe plainly unfulfilled need; fulfillment of which will not appropriately be rewarded by free public experience and identity. Religion and life function in China as suppressed under suppressive, forced social conditions. We may not be able to directly respond to the secular question, yet we observe and sense an understanding amongst many people a feeling of utter suppression.

IV. Origin

Origin is perhaps best defined here as the cause for the initial realization of need. The occurrence of a need for change in popular life may be strongly evidenced by the phenomenally and inexplicably rapid adoption of Christianity within China over the last twenty years. Estimates of the number of Christians vary greatly depending upon the source. The government has estimated the number around fifteen million,⁴⁴ while other sources have placed the number

⁴³ Ibid., May 24 Sermon. translated by Female Congregant 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Wegner

closer to one hundred million practitioners.⁴⁵ Bays writes it is highly possible that on any given Sunday there may be more Protestants in China in church than across all of Europe.⁴⁶ We must ask from what root this necessity, as defined by many, has sprung.

The feverous state once provided god for the masses. Communism had provided publically strong and powerful community. Religion was, for the masses, forcibly stripped away and branded as useless. Religion never disappeared from China, the religious simply responded. Many of the religious, for either fear of being punished or persecuted, or merely then finding no need, neglected the maintenance of religious tradition. Yet, history would prove the state as unable to deliver peace, indiscriminate sustenance, and compassion. Suffering, hunger, and strife were visibly public, but private affairs. If one need proof of this, simply ask a man his opinion of Mao Zedong in public, and then follow him to the privacy of his household. The answer over tea will change.⁴⁷ Internally and privately, China was to commonly fail.

Soldiers, those who fought to let China stand on her own, were imprisoned by the same men for whom they painstakingly toiled. Teachers, scholars, branded capitalists, all of whom human beings, were torn from their positions and incarcerated, some for more than twenty years. The state which these men and women struggled to build threw them away for progress. Then this unique fervor ended, a new door was opened, and China grew. Today China stands as one of the most capitalistic nations in the world; yet, the communism for which many on both sides struggled has failed. People were left with no concrete guidance for emotional digestion, and the state still taught of religion and irrationality as ethical weakness. Science and fact today are still within the educational system held above the labeled illogical.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., Bays.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Bays p. 488.

⁴⁷ Interview.

⁴⁸ Interview; interview

One would be mistaken to assume that secularism has found no young roots in contemporary Chinese society. Many teenagers and college aged students have found absolutely no need for religious life. If people are able to find joy in shopping, one young journalist began over dinner, why do they need religion? The journalist then continued, “I find pleasure in materialism, in things, I have no need for religion.⁴⁹” Another journalist sitting next to him claimed also to have no need in her life for what she found as silly and anti-progressive beliefs.⁵⁰ Life had become for these two journalists plainly material without any further requirement; there was no need for contemplation beyond that of what was conceived by them as completely material occurrences.

Superstition, as deemed by the Communist Party, has struggled in the face of modernization. Young adults seeking better jobs and higher education have left their home town, only to return once or twice a year. The local religion of these teenagers is often highly immobile and left at home. These religions are disappearing. Yet, existent within the minds of many people is a memory of religion.⁵¹ Within this memory survives a longing, an unfulfilled curiosity, described by the one both missionary and church leader as the “truth of love.⁵²”

The rapid economic and industrial development of China, as sophisticatedly and concretely supported by the Communist Party, has, according to the same missionary, left *humanity* behind. The Party, he added, “has left people with less exposure to the love amongst the people.⁵³” The industrial expansion has left no room for noncommercial commonality and societal cohesion. It is a true wonder, the missionary continued, how the Communist Party has

⁴⁹ Male Chinese Journalist 1, interview by Thomas Eaves. May 20, 2009.

⁵⁰ Female Chinese Journalist, interview by Thomas Eaves. May 20, 2009.

⁵¹ The missionary also commented that this has made interest in and conversion to Christianity much easier. Those already without any religion, he said, are easier to convert.

⁵² *Ibid.*, May 14 Interview.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

made and functionally maintained itself without this love. That which claimed to be a god, failed and tortured its people and to this day has not provided a conscious apology. The Communist leaders have plainly in their lack of action denied the existence of difficulty and mistake.

We find amongst many in China today a developed need for understanding and honest guidance. Amongst these people, as with the entirety of humankind, we notice failure, unrest, joy, and life. Many house churches, themselves, started out of a group of people studying the Bible. Those Chinese who, during the 1960s and 1970s, were educated in United States of America and the West came to China with a newly discovered religion; they came alone into a mass of peoples struggling with comprehension.⁵⁴

These same Chinese who studied amongst other things the Bible in the West came to China possessing, themselves, a need for fellowship, commonality, and sharing of their fresh wealth. Much of the unofficial movement started, as it does today, out of the resulting Bible study groups. These churches have their roots in fellowship.⁵⁵ One foreign missionary spoke of the Christian movement as rebuilding China from the bottom up. The people, he said, have been forgotten. We may not be able to directly respond to the secular question, yet we can observe and sense an understanding amongst many people a feeling of emotional suppression.

The background of Christian converts in China greatly varies as well. Some converts were nonreligious, some were antireligious, some were Buddhist, and some simply lived. Perhaps, then, we may understand the origin of the unofficial Christian movement in China in three ways.

Firstly, it has become impossible to definitively pinpoint unnatural secularism as a precursor to religious development. Yet, we must not forget the strong hand of the state in the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

official Church, leading many to understand life as possessing no true public religious freedom. Many feel as if the unofficial church provides more congregational freedom in practice. Secondly, many congregants seeking to find an unofficial church are doing so in order to find a stronger sense of impartial communion. Individuals seeking Christianity are often looking for fellowship. Thirdly, impersonal and material society has provided many with a developed need for emotional digestion within a safe public context.

Finally, we are able to merely begin to understand the origin of Christianity in China; fact is incapable of compensating for human irrationality. As expressed through prayer, irrationality is ultimately a consequence of social condition. The state has provided a social condition which itself offers no outlet for humanity.

V. Function

Function is dependent upon origin. Origin will always define function. A change in function is a result of a development in origin.

There exists amongst unofficial Christian communities a memory of religious and public suppression. Joining an unofficial congregation is a direct response to, as expressed by one missionary, the distrust of the government in religious affairs.⁵⁶ Government interference in religious life has been processed by congregants as a suppression of public freedom of identity. As evidenced earlier, religion under the government may not truly function freely and is felt by many seeking public fellowship. Yet, fellowship does not define the entirety of the function of unofficial Christianity in China today.

The unofficial Christian movement has offered a place for failure and peace to its congregants. God, as one preacher expounded during a sermon dealing with the imprisonment of

⁵⁶ Ibid., May 14 Interview.

Paul, allows for failure.⁵⁷ It is God, another preacher reassured during another sermon, who puts these difficulties in our way so that we may grow to understand true peace.⁵⁸ Yet, this place for failure does not turn away those who have failed; it functions as place for those people to understand their failure as shared. Christianity has provided equal and indiscriminate access to failure. This Christianity has supplied for a compassionate and acceptably imperfect community. Human beings within these communities are given room to experience, digest, and, if necessary, fail. Humanity through Christianity is being restored.

These communities also function as places where congregants may grow to understand their difficulties. The leader who discussed what these difficulties mean did not provide a solution, but rather a possibility. The leader opened his sermon by asking the congregation, “What is the source for all the disasters?” He then began to speak about Satan. The leader did not blame a separate uncontrollable, intangible, and agentive force for all these things. Satan was examined as that which we can have power over through God. Both God and Satan in this discussion were presented and left to one’s own understanding. The sermon, however, suggested three conclusions.

Firstly, the preacher presented these difficulties as obstacles which God has put in our way so that we may understand true peace. Secondly, the experience of God in life is the truest form of belief. Finally, we already have real peace in God; “bad things” may happen, but through God we find peace. God, here, seems himself to be conceived of in three ways as expressed through the three above conclusions.

God is in the first conclusion conceived of as not an agentive force, but instead a culmination of life. The second conception of God is presented as one of intangible experience;

⁵⁷ Ibid., May 24 Sermon.

⁵⁸ Ibid., May 3 Sermon

perhaps touching the unexplainable necessity of belief which is brought about through the wonders of life's experience. Thirdly, God is conceptualized as a concentration on an amalgamation of all the world's teachings. Satan existed in the sermon not something in opposition to God, but something which stood in complement with God.⁵⁹

Certainly the sermon acted as a way in which the congregation could, together, explore the Bible and its teachings. There is a great concern amongst many unofficial congregations for educated, Biblically based faith exploration. Christianity does possess positively more than a grounded function in China which should not be ignored. Yet, Christianity does serve a very concrete social purpose which too cannot be avoided.

Christianity functions in counter to its origin, hoping to help correct in its congregants and the world that which brought about its strong existence. Christianity arms its congregants with tools and experience that can be applied outside of the walls of the church. The equality and individuality of well guided Christianity in China gives its practitioners indiscriminate strength to manage and joyfully progress in the world around them. The unofficial movement has per chance acted as a means for emotional diffusion.

One foreign missionary spoke of Christianity as humanities try at "having a bit of heaven now, and securing a piece of heaven in the future."⁶⁰ Christianity is well grounded and level in many areas, concerned with restoring and preserving the spirit of humanity in China now.

VI. Unnatural and Natural Secularism

Emile Durkheim and Max Weber both concerned themselves with the religiously experienced when considering the fate of religion in the face of science and modernization. If it

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., April 30 Interview.

is, in fact, appropriate to consider China as today a largely secular state, then how do we approach the apparent inadequacy in both philosophers' design? It may be helpful to consider the existence and history of religion within the general regions with which these philosophers concerned themselves. Briefly, both Durkheim and Weber dealt with areas of the world in which the history of religion has existed beyond living memory. The same proves to be true in China, as well.

The secular status of the West and Middle East is largely debatable. Perhaps the current religious condition in Middle East presents more of a threat to Weber's examination than the West does Durkheim's.⁶¹ Regardless of the condition of secularism, in all three areas there exists a memory of religion. Yet, arguably, in the modern West and Middle East religion has only stood as naturally challenged. Both areas have consistently possessed some quality from the government of religious freedom or sanction. Religion has certainly functioned as a more public experience.

Within China, as Daniel Bays has suggested, government interference has been a regular part of religious life since before living memory; such challenge to religious existence has come to be expected in daily practice. Yet, a reconsideration of Ahmet Kuru's categorization of secularism into either passive or assertive action may contribute to our understanding of religion's history in China. Kuru defines assertive secularism as "the state exclude[ing] religion from the public sphere and play[ing] an "assertive" role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain."⁶² Within Kuru's definition we find two critical pieces of information relating to state interaction with religion.

⁶¹ Ibid., Bays 2003.

⁶² Ibid., Kuru p.571.

Firstly, Kuru provides a definition of the aim of assertive secularism. Secondly, the author offers the reader the religious response. Religion in response to a social project aimed at removing religion from the public sphere moves to the private domain. Religion does neither necessarily nor entirely disappear. When removed from the public sphere, religion may circumstantially leave behind those who would not otherwise have access. We cannot assume a universal response to assertive secularism. However, as evidenced in China, much of the Christian life survives away from the view of the public eye. Yet, is this survival a response to current assertive secularism or a remainder of past antireligious action?

Within China's religious history we find an abnormality. Religious interference although a constant in Chinese history, was as Bays suggests a normality, only rarely implemented or thought of by officials. Chairman Mao's vicious antireligious fervor may be considered an interruption in liberal enforcement. Mao's goal was not to remove religion from the public sphere, it was to eradicate the human liability for religion, rapidly. Many did abandon their religion. Many also moved secretly underground and continued practice. Mao Zedong's attitude toward religion was a sharp injection into religious life. Many had no time to organize. Religion certainly dissipated.

Secularism was forcibly injected into Chinese society; Confucius, himself, was labeled by Mao a traitor. A social phenomenon which was formerly acceptable now became evil. The religious, if discovered, were persecuted. When Mao died so did eventually the fervor; yet, China had developed for ten years and would not now wait for religion to catch up. There still existed in the minds of many a memory of religious life; but no publically acceptable social context was immediately provided for its practice. The government's attitude toward religion was perhaps

more active and religion within the private domain, and there was now the illegal superstition. Secularism was not a natural development; it had been forcibly and abruptly injected into life.

Within a forced secular society, materials developed and buildings began to rise. Now, in a largely developed China, we find a religious resurgence. The question is “why?” Durkheim and Weber dealt with religion as a socially acceptable and public phenomenon occurring as normality. Yet what happens when religious life immediately becomes an abnormality, and those who are born are born into an antireligious world? Both philosophers have contributed greatly to our understanding of religious conception, yet they may not have been entirely correct.

If humanity has freedom to explore and scientific answers are provided, then perhaps yes, religion will one day disappear. However, perhaps when humanity is born into an inexperienced world, religion will one day be born again.

VII. Conclusion

The Rev. Dr. Lindon J. Eaves once spoke of the Easter Celebration in the Anglican Communion as an explosion. The Gospel reading for that Sunday was one I have struggled with, myself, for a long time. The author leaves the readers with nothing. The disciples come to the tomb where Jesus was laid, find nothing, and are afraid; the Gospel there finishes. How wonderfully appropriate nearly one and a half thousand years later. We know what happened to Jesus, of course, through the other Gospels and our Creeds. Yet this Gospel is bare and raw. They were afraid.

The Easter Celebration in the Episcopal Church happens after what is known commonly as Holy Week, a series of days where the passion and life of Christ are examined. The weekends with Good Friday, congregants leave with Jesus on the cross. The service, itself, is solemn and

graceful. The church is formally stripped of all color, liturgical decoration, and the cross is shrouded. As a child this service meant more to me than words could ever describe; not because of Jesus' death, but because of how bleak the church, my home, looked after the service. The church was quiet, dark, and warm.

Yet, we as a community return in hordes to hear the good news of the empty tomb. Jesus Christ is resurrected in the church every Easter Sunday with the congregation resounding 'Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The Lord has risen indeed!' We, as a community, witness the death of Christ, only to jump out with joy two days later. Perhaps the metaphor is too abstract to attach to the Christian consciousness in China today. Yet something within this explosion is too perfect; the metaphor fits too well.

The disciples and the finders of the empty tomb could not have known what lay ahead. They were afraid. Yet, today, so much time has passed, and we have witnessed the story. What a wondrous story it has been.

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Appendices:

Difficulties:

This is the first project I have ever attempted dealing with God and faith in life. I have attempted to balance my own theology and theory of faith with concrete evidence. The one challenge I really faced while attempting the project was the necessary incorporation of faith and what it means for its believers in the Chinese context. This has been one of the most difficult things I have ever attempted. Faith deals with consciousness and spirit, both of which are already two phenomenally abstract concepts.

Secondly, I had difficulty with paper resources, or books. The availability of such materials is just so highly limited and much of the research conducted so highly inadequate.

Methodology:

This project was my first extensive field study exercise. I, myself, have had no schooling in anthropological methodologies. I, after having completed this project, am of the conviction that although helpful, fieldwork should not be strictly regimented to field methodologies. Field ethics are absolutely critical. One must be ready for their methodologies to fail in an instance, and prepared mentally to deal with these problems in an instant. Even if these issues occur during an interview one needs to not worry and just respond calmly and thoughtfully. All has certainly not failed if the day's methodologies have.

I often intended to conduct an interview with a series of questions which in the end were never asked. One should know their topics of interest for the day by heart as sometimes during an interview a notebook may not be appropriate or destroy the atmosphere. Let the interviewee, to some extent, guide the interview.

Conversations with people are invaluable sources of information.

Translation:

Although ultimately a limitation, all of my interviews were conducted in English. The sermons which I listened to were all in *putonghua*, translated into English orally by a congregant.

Itinerary:

This is not a complete itinerary but includes a list of major events critical to my Independent Study Project. Many interviews were interspersed throughout my four weeks in Kunming.

April 30, 2009: → Interview with advisor in the afternoon.

→ English Corner at Green Lake Park in Kunming

May 3, 2009: → Attended house church

→ Attended missionary training seminar

May 6, 2009: → Interview with foreign missionary from England

May 10, 2009: → Attended foreign missionary run house church bible study and worship

→ Interview with two Chinese house church congregants

May 12, 2009: → Interview with Chinese house church congregant.

May 14, 2009: → Interview with Chinese missionary and house church leader educated in the United States.

→ English Corner at Green Lake Park in Kunming

May 17, 2009: → Attended baptism at Fuxian Lake in Yunnan Province

May 24, 2009: → Attended house church.

Budget (Major Expenses):

Advisor Fee: 800RMB (this was the amount accepted)

Donations to missions: 100RMB to Mission, 550RMB to House Church

Living Expenses: 725RMB for full stay at Yunnan Minzu Daxue

Food

Contacts:

I have chosen to omit this portion of the appendices in fear of jeopardizing missionaries' efforts. If interested in pursuing this ISP further, please contact me, Thomas Eaves at thomas.eaves@gmail.com or on my phone (804)363-0663