Hope for Religious Freedom for All in China[1]

BOB FU

Abstract

What theological foundation can best procure, promote, and protect religious freedom for all? If obstacles to securing the peaceful public manifestation of religious faith in the context of the diverse worldviews in the "public square" depend on the state, however, what is next? In China, the Communist Party routinely uses persecution and other tyrannical tactics to eliminate the expression of religious beliefs, making religious freedom appear out of reach. Nevertheless, research projects the demise of communism in China and increased Christianization and democratization. If this transition takes place, a contextualization of principled pluralism, *baorong duoyuan*, offers the best theoretical, practical foundation for religious freedom for all faiths in China's future.

Keywords

Religious freedom, persecution, China, principled pluralism, communism, Christianization, baorong duoyuan

---

[1] This article is adapted from excerpts and revisions from two chapters (two and five) to be included in a forthcoming book, used by permission of Wipf & Stock Publishers.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, in part, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, and religion."[2] Although "everyone" may hope for and even theoretically have this right, not everyone has it in practice, nor does everyone agree on exactly what "freedom of thought, and religion" entails.

Religious freedom may be defined in multifaceted ways and interpreted from the perspective of history, culture, ethnicity, or nationality and in light of political and legal terms. The Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) section of the UDHR reads in full,

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.[3]

Religious freedom can only be actualized or achieved in Timothy Shah's judgment when the state fully guarantees its private as well as public dimensions, including

> the freedom to pray, to worship, to commune with one's fellows of like mind and heart in the private practice of faith. But it is also the freedom to bear witness to one's beliefs and commitments, to be visibly religious in public life, to associate freely based on religion, and peacefully to encounter others with differing views on a basis of equality. It is the freedom to organize and act politically, to vote, to make arguments about public policy, and to legislate, based on one's religious beliefs, consistent with principles of universal justice toward others.[4]

Abraham Kuyper's sphere sovereignty promoting principled pluralism provides the foundation for my proposed theory to ensure religious freedom in China. It maintains that as a feature of the created order, God ordained distinct spheres of authority, with each retaining a purpose for existence and a unique right to exist. Figure 1 portrays the vertical interrelationships between God and his creation in human society with societal relationships existing between the horizontally portrayed spheres.

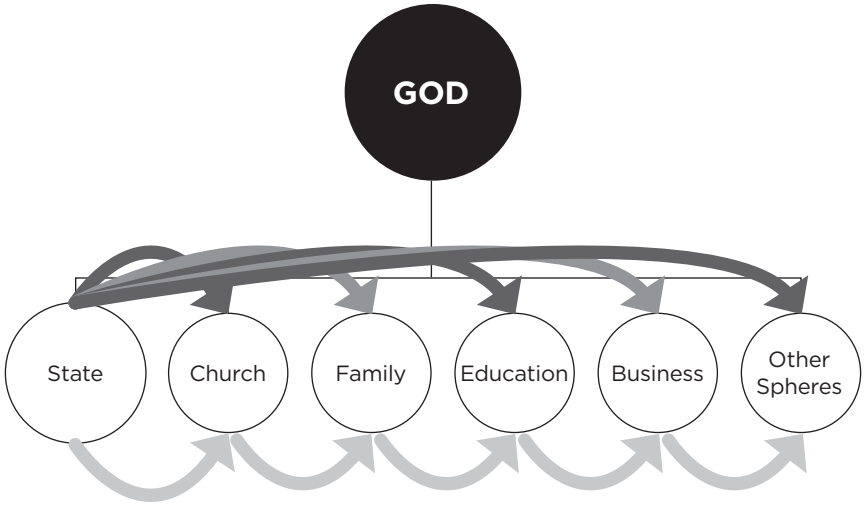
---

[2] "Article 18," in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948, United Nations, https://archives.un.org/sites/archives.un.org/files/UDHR/udhr.pdf.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Timothy Shah, *Religious Freedom, Why Now? Defending an Embattled Human Right* (Princeton: Task Force on International Religious Freedom of the Witherspoon Institute, 2012), vi–vii.

Figure 1. Interrelationships between Kuyper's Spheres[5]



Each sphere interrelates with the others as it functions in society within the designated boundaries that separate them.[6] Principled pluralism draws numerous concepts from the foundational notion of sphere sovereignty. It proposes that instead of society being constructed by autonomous individuals independent from each other, organically related social groups create a society. Social groups and structures exist independently of and prior to the intervention of the state.

Herman Dooyeweerd argues that the state could correctly explain the "right and might" nature of its role. He defines the state as a legal institution of government grounded on the historical foundation of a monopolistic organization of power inside a specific geographical area.[7] Figure 2 shows that Dooyeweerd advanced Kuyper's construction of a social order from God's creation perspective.

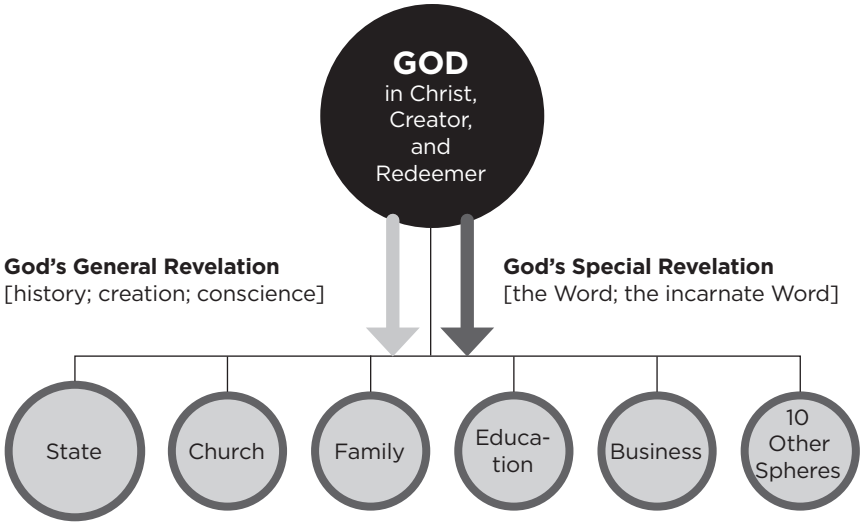
---

[5] Original figure developed and designed from information retrieved from Corwin Smidt, "The Principled Pluralist Perspective," in *Church, State and Public Justice: Five Views*, ed. P. C. Kemeny (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 136.

[6] Ibid., 136.

[7] Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 215.

Figure 2. Dooyeweerd's Perception of God's Revelations[8]



Responses from unregenerated and regenerated individuals vary, contingent upon responses to God's two revelations.

Dooyeweerd further developed the foundation for principled pluralism in the context of legitimate authority, especially the sphere of the state. He comprehensively and systematically expounded the task of each sphere, the norms or principles governing them, and how each sphere should relate to the other spheres.[9] Kuyper and Dooyeweerd concur on the concept of a limited, public-interest state.[10]

On the one hand, the state is neither capable of making, nor designed to make judgments on internal religious matters such as moral discipline or doctrine, nor of taking part in ecclesiastical deliberations; nor is the church able or designed to judge state matters or deliberations. On the other hand, the two spheres must work together and cooperate in the exercise of public justice, including the protection of religious freedom.

In exceptional scenarios, the role of the state extends to some allowance of conditional interference in other spheres. The state maintains the right to

[8] Figure based on *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–63.

[9] Dooyeweerd, *New Critique*, 102–5.

[10] Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of the State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), ch. 8. Also, see, Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 197.

safeguard harmony between different spheres and protect justice for all, especially for vulnerable groups and minorities in society. The state's identity includes a combination of justice and power. Alternatively, power may be foundational but only for promoting justice as the goal.[11] This constitutes the state's unique, irreducible role compared to that of other social institutions.

Jonathan Chaplin adds, however, "The coercive power at the foundation of the State exists not for its own sake but only to sustain the State in realizing its definitive destination, which is the discharge of its distinctive task of advancing public justice." He explains that the state not only reflects a "juridically qualified community" but also constitutes "a territorial public legal community."[12] James Skillen, who initially employed the term "principled pluralism," also expanded this concept.[13] Among other things, principled pluralism claims that the state's responsibility includes recognizing and protecting every individual as well as each valid human vocation, institution, and organization.

Whether someone is an atheist, a Christian, or a hedonist is almost always demonstrated in associational contexts, such as the family, the church, or other faith or nonfaith institutions, such as school, political party, and state. Conversely, contextual pluralism refers to a person's sexual, race, and national identity. However, being American, French, Hispanic, Italian, or South African does not necessarily imply associational or directional pluralism, which is not contingent upon individual reasoning or choices.[14]

Contextual pluralism does not itself guarantee that associational or directional pluralism will be respected by the state or other bodies. Culturally plural countries such as China, Iran,[15] and even Israel, where one monolithic directional ideology or religion or a belief such as communism, Islam, or

---

[11] Jonathan Chaplin, "Dooyeweerd's Theory of Public Justice: A Critical Exposition" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 1983), 9.

[12] Ibid., 186.

[13] James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984).

[14] Today, when a nation-state or ethnicity (contextual pluralism) comparatively or exclusively identifies itself with one monistic social structure (associational pluralism) under a solitary worldview (directional pluralism), this endangers basic human rights and religious freedom of minority groups. This is true where the state imposes one uniform, national ideological or religious identity for all its citizens, including in some communist, Islamic, Buddhist, and even Jewish countries or states. See General Assembly, United Nations, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm.

[15] *2017 Annual Report Overview*, The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017%20Annual%20Report%20Overview.pdf. Since 1998, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has listed China and Iran as CPCs (countries of particular concern), because they engage in or tolerate serious violations of religious freedom.

Judaism is legally enshrined or promoted by the state as its national identity,[16] often violate the universal principles of religious freedom and human rights. Some exceptions can be noted. For example, in a monolithic theocratic situation, as in Israel during Old Testament times, ethnic Jews (contextual pluralism) were perceived as almost identical to religious Jews (directional pluralism) and associated with its institutions, such as the temple (associational pluralism).

Diana Eck stresses that in its diverse relationships, pluralism simultaneously creates challenges and enhances life as it incites individuals to choose between contending goals, obligations, principles, and virtues.[17] To promote a spirit of toleration, Tom Driver suggests abandoning strong religious truth-claims: unless Christians divest themselves of theological requirements (salvation and liberation) for public behavior, they will fail to rid the world of the remnants of the formal political alliance between church and state.[18] If this were the case, however, in restraining the public expression of the core conviction of religions, how could a democratic society effectively protect freedom of religion or belief in accordance with international norms?

To discuss this question challenges Driver's exclusive approach, while sharing some of his legitimate concerns. For example, the risk of religious intolerance and conflict exists if the state endorses or establishes one religion, or belief, or nonbelief over another. Nevertheless, if truth-claim religions were to self-censure because of institutional and societal constraints, this could lead to religious relativism. Under *baorong duoyuan*, the state is called to treat every religion, or belief, or nonbelief system impartially. This guarantees that in a post-communist democratic pluralistic society, freedom for all would exist equally and fairly in public and private.

Christians should agree in principle to engage in dialogue without compromising truth-claims to facilitate a covenant partnership with God and others. Not doing so limits the ability of citizens with diverse beliefs to understand and communicate. Under God's common grace, as members of a free and equal citizenry in a democratic, pluralistic society, the state, for the sake of protection of religious freedom for all should encourage associations in every context, religious or nonreligious, to contribute to the common

---

[16] Lahav Harkov, "Israeli Ministers Approve Controversial Jewish State Bill," *Jerusalem Post*, May 7, 2017, http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Ministers-approve-controversial-Jewish-State-bill-489972.

[17] Diane L. Eck, "'A New Religious America': Religious Freedom as a Human Right," *Issues of Democracy* 6.1 (November 2001): 15.

[18] Tom E. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).

good. Christians and those professing different beliefs should not prevent others from expressing and sharing their diverse beliefs. It is productive for everyone to engage individuals in dialogue without violence and to learn from one another. Talking with and learning from others about different beliefs permits sharing and increases understanding for all.

Principled pluralism protects diverse expressions of belief and asserts that the primary role and authority of the civil government sphere, under God's common grace, is not one of a law enforcement officer. Freedom of religion is especially rooted in conscience. Christians in authority should protect the religious freedom of those with the same beliefs and other beliefs and practices, including those adhering to different (denominational) positions. Christians in authority should also ensure freedom for those professing beliefs incompatible with biblical law and teachings. This should even extend to those in conflict with or contrary to Christianity, including individuals practicing cultic or pagan religions.

In principled pluralism, no one religious, nonreligious, or antireligious belief should supersede another in the state. Defending religious freedom based on biblical guidelines and ascertaining that obedience to God's law supremely matters is a criterion for political and social freedoms and a deterrent to religious persecution. As Skillen argues, the true nature of religious freedom requires that the state has the right neither to determine religious limits nor to predefine religion.[19]

As the political, economic, cultural, and religious conditions in China are not yet as they would be in a Western democracy, the question arises as to how *baorong duoyuan* could help promote, protect, and preserve religious freedom for all. The pattern of state supremacy and official orthodoxy exists in China under a communist state that dictates that religions operate under the religious policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

China's constitution declares that its citizens shall enjoy "freedom of religious belief,"[20] but despite this guarantee, the state still regards any religious activities conducted outside the CCP's policies not only as heterodox in ideology but also as implying abnormal and illegal activities.[21] Religious

[19] Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment,* 119.

[20] Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China states, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief" (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1982), http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html.

[21] Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 191.

groups outside an approved and sanctioned list[22] become subject to persecution[23] and legal prosecution.[24]

Throughout China's history of diverse dynasties, the political structure of imperial authoritarianism routinely challenged the religious freedom of Chinese citizens. Conflict between ruling authorities and religions in China has persisted throughout most of the imperial era and into the present.[25] Currently, amid ongoing reports of persecution of certain religions and in spite of attempts to justify its opposition to religious freedom, the CCP claims that hostile foreign forces use religions to permeate Chinese society and win over the population. Jonathan Chao confirms that the relationship between the state and religion in China has traditionally been one of supremacy of the state over religion.[26]

During the Dynastic period, the emperor determined which religions to promote, tolerate, control, or suppress. Figure 3 depicts the state-religion relationship throughout the Dynastic period.

---

[22] Jason Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant: Protestant Resilience under Chinese Communist Party Rule," in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church–State Tensions*, ed. Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004), 122–48 (124). World religions like Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam are considered "heterodox" in relation to Marxist "orthodoxy," but may conduct their religious activities as long as these are under the supervision and control of the state.

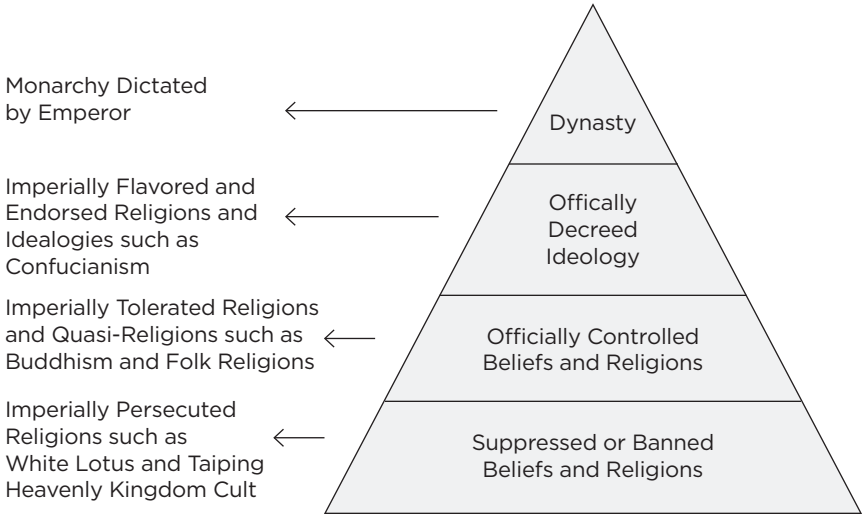
[23] Even those on the approved list, however, were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). See Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant."

[24] All groups outside the CCP's list are declared illegal; nevertheless, some are tolerated while those designated as "evil cult" groups are subject to legal prosecution. See Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant."

[25] In the history of Christianity in China, in three brief periods the church and state enjoyed relative harmony. The Nestorians experienced broad acceptance in China for 210 years until annihilated in AD 845 after heavy persecution against Buddhism by the Confucians in political power during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). The second peaceful period occurred when the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1600) moved into China in the late sixteenth century, after which Catholicism flourished for nearly a hundred years. The last period of harmony was between 1911 and 1949, from Sun Yat-sen's revolutionaries establishing the Republic of China to the CCP taking power in mainland China. See Jonathan Chao, "The Gospel and Culture in Chinese History," in *Chinese Intellectuals and the Gospel*, ed. Samuel Ling and Stacey Bieler (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), 10–17.

[26] Jonathan Chao, *Church and State in Socialist China, 1949–1988* (London: Oxford Center for Mission Studies, 1989), 8.

Figure 3. State-Religion Relationship in Dynastic China[27]



On October 1, 1949, when the CCP established the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Party designated atheism as the state's official ideology.[28] Despite reasons for challenging the concept that atheism could legitimately be regarded as a type of religion,[29] communism and atheism both aim to weaken the influence of traditional religion.[30] C. K. Yang argues that in CCP schools in China, as well as via internal circulars and intermittent propaganda campaigns, CCP theoreticians have reinforced atheism as a Marxist orthodoxy.

Document No. 6, issued by the State Council in February 1991, and Document No. 19, which the Party Central issued in March 1982, reinforce China's religious policy.[31] Despite the claim of religious freedom for Chinese citizens, it includes neither propagation outside approved places for

[27] Figure created and designed from information I retrieved from numerous references, including Chao, *Church and State in Socialist China*; Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

[28] Chao, *Church and State*.

[29] Nina Weiler-Harwell, *Discrimination against Atheists: A New Legal Hierarchy among Religious Beliefs* (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly, 2011), 110.

[30] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 58.

[31] Mickey Spiegel, *China: State Control of Religion* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1977).

religious activities nor the right to establish churches according to religious convictions.[32]

Since April 1996, the state has intensified its campaign to "make religion compatible with socialism," to enforce registration, and to terminate all religious activities not approved by registration.[33] Jinghao Zhou notes that the CCP carried out "monitoring and regulating [of] all religions,"[34] with the intent of ostracizing Chinese religious organizations and foreign influence. This effort contributed to China's contemporary state-religion relationship.

China currently considers religious activities practiced outside of state control or patriotic organizations heterodox in ideology and constitute "illegal religious activities" subject to prosecution or legalized persecution. The Chinese government requires that the Three-Self Movement[35] accept

---

[32] In his detailed interpretation of Article 36, Li Weihan, former Minister of the CCP's United Front Working Department, the CCP's chief religious policy-making body, states, "Every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion, and also the freedom not to believe in religion. Within a particular religion, every citizen has the freedom to believe in this or that sect." See Beatrice Leung and William Liu, *Chinese Catholic Church in Conflict, 1949–2001* (Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, 2004), 21. So as long as they supported the CCP, monks, Taoists, priests, or pastors would be considered friends of the state. The CCP's policy of religious freedom appears to be only a political ploy.

[33] The policy initiatives were set forth by Jiang Zemin, China's president and Chinese Communist Party secretary-general in November 1993 at a national conference on United Front work. At the 1996 Fourth Plenum of the Eighth National People's Congress, Premier Li Peng echoed the same themes. He cited Document No. 19 of 1982, *The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period*, which offered a corrective to the Cultural Revolution policy of severe repression by advocating the cooptation of believers that they might serve socialist construction, and Document No. 6 of 1991, *Circular from Party Central and the State Council Concerning Certain Problems in Further Improving Religious Work*. The latter was the first to mention adaptation, to espouse registration as a key supervisory mechanism, and to address the practical realities of implementing policy. Peng also referred to two 1994 sets of government regulations, No. 144, *Regulations on the Supervision of the Religious Activities of Foreigners in China*, and No. 145, *Regulations Regarding the Management of Places of Religious Activity*. On March 1, 1997, at the opening of the National People's Congress, Peng again referenced the need for religious groups to adapt to socialist society. See Samuel Wolfe, "CRS Report for Congress," CRS 3, August 17, 2000, "https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20000817_RS20655_fbf5fa1f602de4bed8519b70894db86b4e03884c.pdf.

[34] Jinghao Zhou, *China's Peaceful Rise in a Global Context: A Domestic Aspect of China's Road Map to Democratization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 173.

[35] M. E. Sharpe, *Chinese Law and Government* (Abingdon, UK: T&F Informa, 2003), 5. Currently, the Chinese government requires not only that the Three-Self Movement accept the CCP's leadership but that each church must register with the state. Those conducting individual religious activities must report these to the Three-Self Movement's local committee. Religious leaders must also report all religious activity locations to the provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs. In addition, every six months, each religious group must submit a written report of events to a special committee of the state. The state categorizes activities of house churches that refuse to register with the state and the practices of those religions conducting

the CCP's leadership and that each church register with the state. Religious activities must be reported to the Three-Self Movement's local committee. Religious leaders must also report all religious locations to the provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs. In addition, every six months, each religious group must submit a written report of events to a special committee of the state. Activities of house churches that refuse to register and the practices of those conducting activities outside the Three-Self Movement are listed as "illegitimate religious activities."[36] As China labels organized house churches that actively engage in evangelistic expansion as "cultic groups," they consequently become primary targets.[37]

The CCP's rule maintains the pattern of state supremacy and official orthodoxy. Any religion must adhere to legal ordinances and operate within CCP religious policies. As the state seeks to propagate its official orthodoxy, namely Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, it only endorses these.[38] It considers other ideologies and beliefs heterodox.[39] The attitude and understanding that China's contemporary ruling powers adopt towards religious freedom contribute to challenges to religious freedom, just as in the past under China's traditional state-religion regime. Nevertheless, national religious affairs leaders maintain that the requirement that any religion must adapt to CCP religious policies does not necessitate the changing of fundamental beliefs.[40] Since the 1990s, when President Jiang

their activities outside the Three-Self Movement as "illegitimate religious activities." The CCP uses the Three-Self Movement as a distinct state "tool" to control Chinese Christianity.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Numerous reports confirm religious persecution in the PRC, including material published by Amnesty International: Asia Watch Committee (U.S.), *Freedom of Religion in China* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 1992); Richard C. Bush Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); and Ho Kai-lin, *Laogaiying zhong de taianju erleu* [Children of God in the Labor Camp] (Taibei: Guangqi Press, 1990).

[38] After the Fifteenth National Congress of the CCP, the CCP added the Thought of Deng Xiaoping.

[39] Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant," 122–48.

[40] Elizabeth H. Prodromou, "Protecting Religious Freedom Abroad," *Harvard International Review*, July 1, 2011, http://hir.harvard.edu/protecting-religious-freedom-abroad/. "Legal Protection of the Freedom of Religious Belief," http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-2.html. In the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, freedom of religious belief is a basic right enjoyed by all citizens. Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief." http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-2.html, and "China: Religion and Chinese Law," Report for Department of Justice (June 2018)," *The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center*, https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1068681/download. "Religion should be adapted to the society in which it is prevalent. This is a universal law for the existence and development of religion. Now the Chinese people are building China into a modern socialist country with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese government advocates that religion should adapt to this reality" (para. 6).

Zemin launched his campaign to manage religions, one of the three basic strategies includes the goal to "make religion adaptable to socialism."[41] One could question, however, how religion can adapt to a philosophy that, at its core, holds that Marxism will lead to the eventual demise of all religions and asserts that "Marxism is incompatible with any theistic worldview."[42] The position of Xi Jinping, China's current president, further reveals that the ideology of the CCP is to align the hearts and minds of citizens to the CCP. In 2015, President Xi stated, "We must manage religious affairs in accordance with the law and adhere to the principle of independence to run religious groups on our own accord. … Active efforts should be made to incorporate religions into socialist society."[43] This attempt to more completely control religion mirrors one of the many CCP's concentrated, critical challenges to religious freedom in China.

In addition to the CCP's attempts to restructure and eliminate religion in China, the government utilizes criminal law to minimize religious influences in society and restrict religious freedom. For example, on July 1, 1979, the Fifth National People's Congress adopted the Criminal Law Regarding Religions. Article 99 of this ruling states: "Those organizing and utilizing feudal superstitious and secret societies to carry out counter-revolutionary activities will be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years."[44] In this statement the CCP's central committee conveyed the warning that religion must not interfere with education, marriage and family life, or politics.

Figure 4 depicts the state-religion relationship in contemporary China, which contributes to the continuing conflicts and challenges relating to religious freedom for all.

---

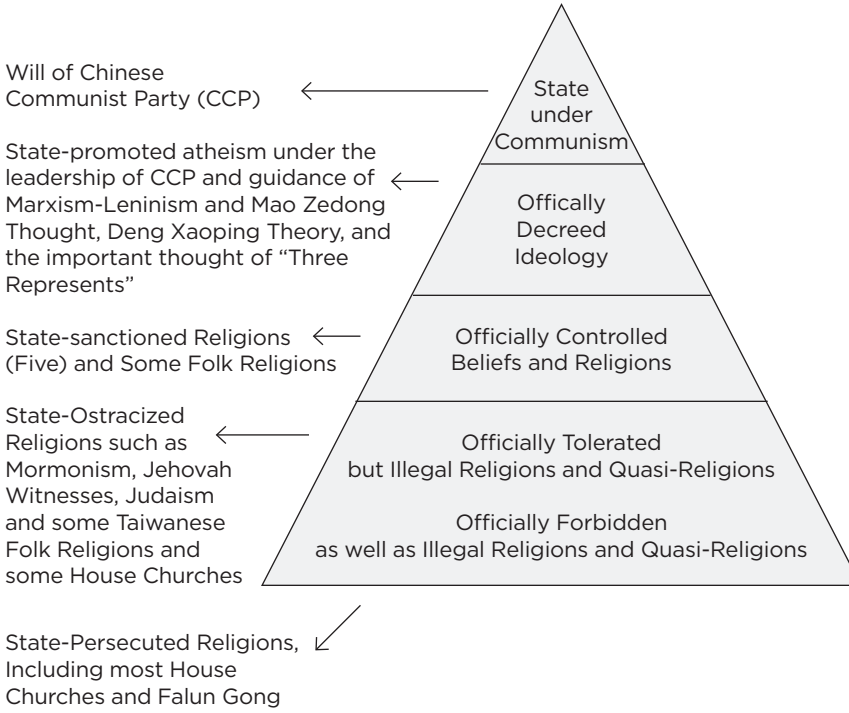
[41] The other two initiatives are: (1) wholly and correctly implementing a policy of religious freedom; (2) using legal means to strengthen administration of religious affairs. See Ye Xiaowen, "Shiji Zhijiao zhongjiao gongchuo de Sikao [Reflections on the Religious Work at the Change of Millennium]," *Zhongguo Zhongjiao* [*Religion in China*] 20.1 (2000): 4–9.

[42] Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 49.

[43] "President Xi Jinping Warns Against Foreign Influence on Religions in China," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/21/president-xi-jinping-warns-against-foreign-influence-on-religions-in-china, paras. 3–4.

[44] Zinghao Zhou, "Religious Education in China," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education*, ed. Derek Davis and Elena Miroshnikova (New York: Routledge, 2013), 78. Document No. 19, issued on March 31, 1982, provides another illustration.

Figure 4. State-Religion Relationship in Contemporary Communist China



The Constitution of the People's Republic of China embraces the aim of focusing efforts on socialist modernization by adhering to Chinese-style socialism.[45] Ultimately, the state hopes to transition China into an affluent and dominant socialist country with a significant culture and democracy. Conversely, China's contemporary state-religion relationship, which aligns with CCP practices, proves counterproductive to the state's reported intentions. As the CCP imposes constraints on genuine religious believers, this approach will inevitably lead to further worldview clashes.

Considering the many blatant attempts to control religion, I wonder how the state's practices can be sustainable when different officials understand,

[45] Translated in *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China*, Article 5: "The state upholds the uniformity and dignity of the socialist legal system. No law or administrative or local rules and regulations shall contravene the Constitution. All state organs, the armed forces, all political parties and public organizations and all enterprises and undertakings must abide by the Constitution and the law. All acts in violation of the Constitution and the law must be investigated. No organization or individual may enjoy the privilege of being above the Constitution and the law."

interpret, and enforce the laws differently. Despite evidence that freedom, not repression, provides the way to produce more peaceful, prosperous, and stable societies, China's policies and practices ignore this concept.[46] Instead of the CCP strengthening its control of religion, I foresee the likelihood that the state will weaken as it continues to deny religious freedom for its citizens.

Communist conceptions of religion have ranged from "the opium of the people"[47] to "feudal superstition,"[48] to anti-progressive,[49] to being the obstacle to the party achieving its goal of radical reorganization. In Document No. 19,[50] under the heading "Religion as a Historical Phenomenon in the People's Republic of China,"[51] the CCP defines religion as follows:

> Religion is a historical phenomenon pertaining to a definite period in the development of human society. It has its own cycle of emergence, development, and demise. Religious faith and religious sentiment, along with religious ceremonies and organizations consonant with this faith and sentiment, are all products of the history of society. The earliest emergence of the religious mentality reflected the low level of production and the sense of awe toward natural phenomena of primitive peoples.[52]

CCP officials routinely respond to charges that condemn or challenge their religious policy and argue that the state protects religious freedom for Chinese citizens. Despite repeated claims, the CCP promotes atheism as China's dominant ideology and persecutes certain religions. Nevertheless, some of the CCP's public statements regarding freedom of religious belief appear promising, such as the following, recorded in Document No. 19:[53]

---

[46] Leonard Leo and Don Argue, "The Huffington Post—Confronting China's Failure on Religious Freedom," in *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/op-eds/the-huffington-post-confronting-chinas-failure-religious-freedom, para. 8.

[47] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 42.

[48] Yoshiko Ashiwa, ed., *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 40.

[49] Klaus Larres, ed., *A Companion to Europe since 1945* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2014).

[50] The state still subscribes to Document No. 19's philosophy to manage religious affairs in China.

[51] Asia Watch Committee (U.S.), *Freedom of Religion in China*, 44.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Fenggang Yang, "A Research Agenda on Religious Freedom in China," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 11.2 (July 6, 2013): 6–17.

> What do we mean by freedom of religious belief? We mean that every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion and also the freedom not to believe in religion. S/he has also the freedom to believe in this religion or that religion. Within a particular religion, s/he has the freedom to believe in this sect [—] or that sect. A person who was previously a nonbeliever has the freedom to become a religious believer, and one who has been a religious believer has the freedom to become a nonbeliever.[54]

Even though the words in this document appear to align with international norms of the United Nations treaties, they do not clearly specify religious practice and organization.

Individuals and religious groups with grievances against the party remain voiceless and subject to prosecution and persecution. Even so, "the mutual religious stimulation that results from congregational worship, using the particular rites and practices of each religion"[55] nurtures empathetic feelings that unite people together. As religious followers meet regularly, they strengthen each other's faith and, in time, gain a stronger voice to support my conviction regarding the unsustainability in practice of the CCP's policy—it cannot physically control millions of religious adherents.

Representatives of global organizations working against the attempt to eradicate religion assert that state regulation cannot exterminate it.[56] I agree that the effectiveness of state power against religious freedom will ultimately fail as groups of believers challenge the CCP's religious policy, ultimately demonstrating its unsustainability in practice.

The old Chinese poem with the first line, "Let a hundred schools of thought contend"[57] marked the start of the Hundred Flowers Movement, a brief political campaign in which Mao Zedong deceived citizens with reassurances that they could freely speak, prompting them to verbalize their thoughts.[58] However, Mao betrayed the principle of equal voices in the

---

[54] Ibid., 7.

[55] *Religion under Socialism in China*, trans. Zheng Xi'An, ed. Luo Zhufeng (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1991), 107.

[56] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*.

[57] Richard Kraus. "Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend," in *Words and Their Stories*, 249–262, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004188617/Bej.9789004188600.i-342_016.xml, doi:https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004188600.i-342.46.

[58] In developing the name for my theory, *baorong duoyuan*, which evolved during my PhD research, I considered a line from a Chinese poem. This line, "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought [resonate]," reflects the ancient adage about the "contending of a hundred schools of philosophy" in the Warring States period (ca. 476–221 BC). Each word in this line carries a rich meaning. Hang-Li Zeng maintains that Chinese poetry encompasses "beauty in three aspects" and that in translating Chinese poetry into English, translators should attempt to retain the original beauty of the poem in meaning, sound, and form. Translating *baihua qifang*, the word *bai* translates to "one hundred," *hua* to "flower," and *fang* to "bloom." In this context, based on equality, one hundred flowers blossom simultaneously.

public realm.[59] Contrary to Mao, "All of the Hundred Schools arose in response to practical conditions [6th–3rd century BCE]. Their philosophers were either government officials or scholars, traveling from one feudal state to another and offering ideas for social reform."[60] The "one hundred flowers blossoming" diametrically opposes Mao's devious intent. *Baorong duoyuan* advocates for the principle of equal voices in the public square.

As China is an increasingly pluralistic society, with hundreds of worldviews and religions flourishing and competing, *baorong duoyuan* could prove to be the best option for protecting religious freedom for all in China. The concept of religious freedom not only refers to freedom for the numerous recognized religions, it also includes protection for atheists, secularists, agnostics, and even nonreligious people, as well as antireligious individuals and groups. The scope of freedom under *baorong duoyuan* applies to citizens both in their individual roles and in community with others,[61] not only to ensure the freedom of religious belief in private but to also extend that freedom to include the practice and manifestation of a person's belief publicly. The basic conditions necessary for *baorong duoyuan*, pluralism and democracy, are becoming more widespread, indicating that in the future, China may transition toward openness.

A democratic mainstream society with diverse cultures and groups is unlikely to show preference for one group over another. Han Zhu contends that as society develops, the presence of pluralism indicates that considerable progress has occurred and argues, "On the surface, a pluralistic society appears noisy and restless and without consensus. However, such a society will reach a final dynamic balance through its contradictions and in the end, a society full of different views and opinions."[62] Such a society is healthier and safer than an oligopolistic state like China, leaning only toward and recognizing one side—atheism. Contrary to reports about the rise of secular humanism and the demise of religion, two major religions, Islam and Christianity, are the fastest-growing contemporary worldviews.[63]

---

[59] Gilbert King, "The Silence that Preceded China's Great Leap into Famine," *Smithsonian.com*, September 26, 2012, http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-silence-that-preceded-chinas-great-leap-into-famine-51898077/#yM3RgTSshzWACBQA.9.

[60] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Chinese Philosophy," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2018), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-philosophy.

[61] Benjamin W. Redekop, *Enlightenment and Community: Lessing, Abbt, Herder, and the Quest for a German Public* (London: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), 223.

[62] Han Zhu, "China's Pluralistic Revolution," China.org.cn, May 26, 2013, trans. Li Jingrong, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2013-05/26/content_28924995.htm.

[63] Miroslav Volf, "A Voice of One's Own—Public Faith in a Pluralistic World," in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 271–82.

If the CCP interferes with religious affairs, Chinese religion cannot become an independent force to influence society and politics. Currently, Communist Party members fill every important post in China. The Constitution stipulates that all Party members must be atheists. As religious believers do not qualify for central positions in the public square, religions in China are unable to influence politics at the policy-making level.

Jayoti Das and Cassandra DiRienzo emphasize that greater press freedom, which influences politics, contributes to a peaceful nation.[64] China's restrictions on freedom of the press and media counter this as they suppress religious freedom and its influence. The Chinese government strictly controls reporting, media and television, radio, and newspapers.[65] Chinese religious believers should be allowed to freely express their beliefs through public media, including television, radio, art, literature, film, journalism, and other public forums. I suggest that China's changing political and religious climate, which evolves from a morally bankrupt CCP ideology and a faith vacuum, could serve as a conduit for democracy to advance religious freedom for all in China.

Bijian Zheng, reportedly one of China's leading thinkers on ideological questions, recognizes that China needs help from the rest of the world, a world from which, in a sense, the state has alienated itself.[66] Zheng also acknowledges that the CCP needs to make some adjustments in its quest for "a peaceful rise." It is particularly pertinent that, despite Zheng's admission, the CCP, while appearing to be open to change, maintains a relationship with organized religion that remains volatile and conflictual.[67] The democratization of China, which could pave the way for religious freedom, may eventually happen, not merely because of factors that force the state to change but also, perhaps, because of the necessity to change.[68]

Yang connects democratization with religious freedom and argues that until Chinese elites better understand and appreciate the true concept of religious freedom, further change in China will not occur and may even prove impossible. He also asserts that the organized design of state-religion

---

[64] Jayoti Das and Cassandra E. DiRienzo, "Conflict and the Freedom of the Press," *Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 4.1 (2014): 91–112.

[65] Chin-Chuan Lee, *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 100.

[66] Bijian Zheng, *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian, 1997–2004*, Brookings, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/20050616bijianlunch.pdf.

[67] Eleanor Albert, "Christianity in China," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 11, 2008, cfr.org/backgrounder/Christianity-china.

[68] Merle Goldman, "Is Democracy Possible?," in *China: Contemporary Political, Economic, and International Affairs*, ed. David Denoon (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 137–46.

relations, the comprehension of the religious freedom concept, and a civil society with a dynamic balance are vital to religious freedom.[69] Yang stresses that religious freedom arguably constitutes "the first freedom in a constitutional democracy, that is, it comes first before the other freedoms and may serve as the basis or wellspring for other freedoms."[70] When aligned with the philosophical intent of international agreements, the positive results that follow the implementation of religious freedom complement a country's economic development and social order.

In some countries, including China, where no constitutional tool such as "judicial review" exists, rights which the Constitution stipulates may not amount to much.[71] In addition, abuse of constitutions and misinterpretations of their meanings negates the power of the Constitution and citizens' rights.

Zhuo Xinping argues that two divergent purposes exist in legislation on religion in China. One purpose is the protection of religious freedom. Legislation on religion enacted for this reason expresses respect for religious belief and other faiths in human society. The other purpose includes the controlling of religion or, minimally religious organizations and activities.[72]

Table 1 compares essential elements of political liberalism, principled pluralism, and *baorong duoyuan*.

In a practical sense in a Chinese context, drawing from both political liberalism and principled pluralism, *baorong duoyuan* will do the following:

- hold elected officials accountable by citizens
- subscribe to a constitutional system that not only guarantees but protects the fundamental rights of citizens
- endeavor to advance a civil society so that citizens are "equal and free"
- promote government with a central structure that respects the sovereignty of other spheres, impartially protects religious freedom for all, and guarantees a mechanism that will execute fairness in matters of public justice
- advance the goal of citizens working together for the common good of all

---

[69] Yang, "Research Agenda on Religious," 6–17.

[70] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 6.

[71] Abdurrahman Bapir, "Understanding Liberal Constitutionalism: Judicial Review, Protection of Rights and Constitutional Norms During Emergencies," 2014, https://www.academia.edu/9449606/Understanding_Liberal_Constitutionalism_Judicial_Review_Protection_of_Rights_and_Constitutional_Norms_During_Emergencies.

[72] Zhuo Xinping, "Religion and Rule of Law in China Today," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3.2 (2009): 519–27.

Table 1. Comparison of Political Liberalism, Principled Pluralism, and *Baorong Duoyuan*[73]

	Political Liberalism	**Principled Pluralism**	***Baorong Duoyuan***
Historical origin	Post-Reformation	Late nineteenth century	Early twenty-first century
Social context	Conflicts with irreconcilable yet reasonable worldviews	State demand for conformity and uniformity under pluralism	A projected democratic, Christianized, pluralistic post-communist China
Worldview orientation	Secular worldview	Judeo-Christian (theist) worldview	More inclusive, impartial, directional, pluralistic worldview
Constitutional perspective	Liberal constitutionalism favoring secular establishment	Liberal constitutionalism with a modest Christian establishment	Liberal constitutionalism with neither secular nor religious establishment
Protection of religious freedom	May protect religious freedom for all religions in private while exercising restraints on religious voices in public political discourses and even constraining certain religions	Tolerates freedom of all worldviews in private settings and in the public square, with minor favoritism toward Christianity	Protects freedom for all worldviews in private as well as in public settings; aligns with international norms for religious freedom
Interrelations of spheres	State-directed social order under a politically charged, uniform "overlapping consensus," with potential strife between contained and non-contained worldviews	Sphere autonomy under organic social unity with potential tension between Christian and non-Christian worldviews	State-facilitated, impartial, harmonious interrelations between different spheres with diverse worldviews
Role of religious education in public schools	May permit certain types of religious education to be taught	Allows religious education to be taught	Encourages religious education to be taught

[73] Original table developed from current research.

Designed for a liberal constitutional framework in a democratic, pluralistic state, as some predict China will be in the next two decades, *baorong duoyuan* emulates the message that the Golden Rule encourages—treat others the way one would want to be treated. Found in all cultures, religions, and worldviews, versions of the Golden Rule range from "those of ancient Egyptian religions to those of West Asia (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), South Asia (Hinduism and Buddhism) and East Asia (Confucianism). Nonreligious worldviews such as those of the Council for Secular Humanism and the British Humanist Association"[74] also sanction variations of this.

If the demise of communist rule occurs as predicted, and if as also projected, China transitions into a democratic, pluralistic state, citizens may finally realize their hope for religious freedom in their country. Then, *baorong duoyuan* will not only offer but prove to be the best option for the state in China, as well as for other countries open to its principles, to help ensure religious freedom for all.

[74] Johannes A. Van Der Ven, "Reflective Comparativism in Religious Research: A Cognitive Approach," in *Religion: Immediate Experience and The Mediacy of Research: Interdisciplinary Studies, Concepts and Methodology of Empirical Research in Religion*, ed. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Christopher P. Scholtz (Frankfort: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 105.