



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



Political Religion: The Case of the Cultural Revolution in China

Author(s): Jiping Zuo

Source: *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 99-110

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3710718>

Accessed: 22-03-2015 18:43 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/3710718?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press and Association for the Sociology of Religion, Inc. are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Sociological Analysis*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Political Religion: The Case of the Cultural Revolution in China*

Jiping Zuo

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

This article focuses on Chinese ritual activities during the Cultural Revolution, when all the traditional religions were abolished by the Chinese Communist Party. It shows that China has never been an atheist country and explores the similarities of Chinese communist rituals to Western religious rituals; it spells out the differences between Chinese political religion and Western civil religion. The analysis is based primarily on the personal experiences and observations of the author during that period.

Throughout Chinese history, the legitimacy of the political regime was built upon the charismatic authority of the emperor, an authority strengthened by hereditary succession (Weber, 1964). This style of leadership did not change when the Chinese Communist party came to power. Because of the agrarian nature of the Chinese economy and the lack of political differentiation, the new regime still relied on the charisma of the national leader.

After the 1949 revolution, the exercise of charismatic authority reached a peak during the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China (1966-1976), characterized by the near deification of Chairman Mao Ze-dong. Although China declared itself an atheist country, this deification, combined with Mao's interpretation of Marxism, created a form of "political religion" that affected millions of people and profoundly transformed Chinese society (see Murvar, 1985).

This article focuses on Chinese ritual activities during the Cultural Revolution, exploring the similarities and differences between Chinese traditional religion and the "political religion" of China during this period, as well as between it and the "civil religion" of Western societies (e.g., Bellah, 1970:168-89). Such an analysis will contribute to an understanding of relationships between religion and society as proposed by Max Weber, whose work on the religion of China constitutes a powerful interpretation of Chinese culture and society from the historical point of view (see Eisenstadt, 1985).

TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS IN CHINA

For a long time the image of deity among the Chinese people consisted of various

*I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Hugh P. Whitt for his supportive guidance and valuable comments, and to Norma Luebke for her assistance in revising the text for publication.

types of spirits who may be divided into two general categories, official and popular gods (Weber, 1964). The gods such as the Spirit of Heaven and ancestral spirits belong to the first category, belief in which was prescribed by the state; whereas the God of War and the God of Trade were popular gods in a completely unsystematic pluralism of magical and heuristic cults. The Chinese spirits, especially the mighty and universal ones, retained an impersonal character. The emperor was considered the "Son of Heaven" and was believed to be granted the right to communicate directly to the Spirit of Heaven and to make sacrificial rites. Furthermore, it was the emperor's right to grant recognition to power deities as objects of worship, bestowing title and rank upon them or demoting them on an occasional basis. The masses, on the other hand, led by the heads of households, worshiped only their own ancestral spirits. Popular deities were worshiped in the village temple with a few ritual manipulations and the occasional prayers of individuals.

With respect to the traditional religious schools, Confucianism was the dominant official religion ever since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.). Compared with other religious schools such as Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism, in essence, was an ethical doctrine rather than a religious belief. It was used as a moral code for the hierarchical pattern of social relations, serving the purpose of maintaining the patrimonial order. The dissemination of Confucian doctrine was accomplished by literati (educated scholars), whose positions were closely related to the bureaucracy and whose services were essential for rationalizing the imperial administration. Alongside the official cult, there existed popular religions characterized by animistic magic. Although the literati despised the popular religions, they were widespread among the poorly educated masses. Emotional ecstasy was common among followers of these popular religions (Weber, 1964).

Although the official and popular religions were practiced at different levels, they both served important functions. Official religion provided both a rationale for the existing social structure and a behavioral guide for individuals to help maintain the society. Popular religions served to meet the psychological needs of individuals, providing the release of anxiety and other benefits.

THE RISE OF POLITICAL RELIGION DURING THE EARLY CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Karl Marx was blunt in his rejection of religion: "I hate all the pack of gods . . . who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity" (in McGovern, 1985). Human beings, having created God (or gods), elevate the divinity above themselves thereby falling prey to religious alienation and false consciousness. For Marx, religion was, in essence, the reflection of human misery and a sickness of society. It was also the opiate of the people, a means used to justify the status quo and legitimate the current social order. As such, religion for Marx was in the realm of the fantastic, an illusion that obscured the nature of class interests and prevented the oppressed from doing anything to change their miserable situation (see Cimic, 1985; McGovern, 1985; McGuire, 1981). In contrast to religion, Marx's atheism has been seen by communist leaders as leading to true human self-realization. Communism, in other words, has

been seen as a form of practical humanism that liberates people from false consciousness (Cimic, 1985). Consequently, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, religion in China was suppressed by the new Communist regime (Yang, 1967). Government pronouncements declared religion to be a superstition that must be replaced by Marxist doctrine (Overmyer, 1986).

The attack on religion was intensified during the Cultural Revolution, which began with the elimination of the "Four Olds" (old ideas, old values, old customs, and old traditions). The traditional religions, defined as "feudal superstition," were included in the Four Olds and came under severe attack. Outward expressions of religion were completely forbidden. All religious ritual was discontinued. Many temples were torn down; others, closed. Images of Buddha, even those in the National Museum, were destroyed or simply disappeared. Scholarly writing about Chinese religious history ceased; it was as if the religion of China had never existed (Overmyer, 1986).

Ironically, at the same time as it attempted to destroy traditional religious activities, the Chinese communist regime initiated and encouraged a new religion centered around Mao Ze-dong, chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and leader of the People's Republic during the Cultural Revolution. As some Western scholars suggest, Mao was, all of a sudden, seen as a god and widely worshiped by the people (Jochim, 1986; Overmyer, 1986). My experience confirms this. Beginning in the summer of 1966, the streets of Beijing were filled with banners with such slogans as "Long live Chairman Mao" and "Be ready to die in defense of Chairman Mao." The songs the children sang were reminiscent of Western hymns in praise of Jesus. One song proclaimed, "My love for my parents is great but greater still is my love for Chairman Mao." Another said, "We think of you every minute, Respected Chairman Mao."

Mao was glorified as "the Red Sun," "the Great Teacher," "the Great Leader," "the Great Commander," "the Great Steersman," and significantly, "the Messiah of Working People." Catching a glimpse of him in public left observers with unforgettable memories, and many were reduced to tears by the experience. The masses would spend the night in the street if they knew Mao's route the next morning would take him past them. When Mao finally appeared, the people would jump, shout, cry out, and wave the "Little Red Book" in agonies of joy. This experience of ecstasy is not unlike the uncontrolled outpourings of emotion that sometimes accompany religious revivals in the West (see Glassman, 1986).

Despite the economic slowdown during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, printing and badge-making flourished into two important industries. These printed Mao's works and his portrait, and produced Mao badges resembling Western political buttons. Huge press runs of Mao's writings were distributed free of charge to the entire population by the Communist Party. Meanwhile, a great deal of metal was diverted from other industries to the manufacture of Mao badges. Many people would wear several badges at the same time.

Ritual activities were set up in association with this fanatic devotion to the idol Mao. For instance, it was quite common that, in the morning before breakfast, family members stood before Mao's picture asking for instructions for the day. In the evening, standing before Mao's picture again, they made a quiet confession of the "sins" they had committed during the day. In my experience, this kind of activity was practiced

by some middle school students in Beijing as well. They marched to Tian An-men Square every Monday morning for instructions and again on Saturday evening to confess the wrong things they had done during the week. People worshiped Mao as a routine activity — often before working, before class, before a meeting, or before dinner. They would all stand up, facing Mao's picture, and say: "We wish longevity to our Great Leader, the Reddest Sun in our hearts — Chairman Mao!" When a formal meeting or a conference was held, two songs in praise of Mao were added at the beginning and the end of the meeting: "The East is Red" and "Sailing in the Sea Relies on the Steersman." These two songs were considered as sacred as the Chinese national anthem. The masses were also expected to learn and practice a special dance of loyalty to Mao. Thus he was worshiped continually through verbal expression, singing and dancing.

Mao's works became "Holy Writ": one sentence was as potent as ten thousand ordinary sentences, and his writings were printed in the "Precious Red Book." In order to make them more accessible and convenient for a person to carry, some of his quotations were collected in the "Little Red Book" and handed out to each individual (Overmyer, 1986). People were required to learn these quotations by heart and to solve daily problems with Mao's words. It was required that the first session of the school day or a period at the beginning of work in the morning be assigned to reading Mao's works. Working people would meet twice each week to learn Mao's works and, sometimes, documents from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. No absence was allowed, and nobody was supposed to challenge any of Mao's ideas or even question them. The punishment for challenging the thought of Mao Ze-dong could be as severe as death. Moreover, during that period, whenever a new "highest instruction" from Mao was announced, people would go onto the street and celebrate at the very moment the new instruction was released, even if it was midnight, holding the "Little Red Book" high in their hands.

People were also asked to separate themselves from anyone who might be disloyal to Mao, including family members and close friends. It was often the case that young people fought with their "national traitor" parents; couples divorced their "counter-revolutionary" spouses; individuals exposed and denounced their "bourgeoisie" friends. No tears would be shed if one of the family members committed suicide, for suicide was considered as alienating oneself from Mao and from the people.

Labeling, an extremely effective method of shaping deviant behavior according to norms established through religious doctrines, has had an important role in warding off "devils" or "heretical beliefs" in the history of Western religion (see Erikson, 1966). The Chinese Communist regime has never stopped using labeling as a way of getting rid of its dissidents through various political movements. In "The Movement to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries" (1950-1952), the common label for dissidents was "counterrevolutionaries"; in "The Anti-Rightist Struggle" (1957), the label turned out to be "rightists"; in "The Four Clean-ups Movement," it was "bad elements." However, the Cultural Revolution witnessed by far the widest application of this strategy (Bridgham, 1967). It began with Mao's admonition: "Never forget the class struggle!" Newspaper editorials kept warning people that there were "new bourgeois elements" in the socialist system (Hak and VanRee, 1984). The Red Guards, a new and mainly

teenage organization created to carry out Mao's Cultural Revolution, took the lead in identifying all kinds of old and new "class enemies." Within only a few days, officials in authority were accused of being "capitalist roaders"; intellectuals, the "stinking Number 9" (Number 9 refers to a low position in the social rank; proletarians were Number 1.); prisoners under Chaing Kai-shek's regime, "traitors"; Chinese who had returned from overseas, "spies"; others who were not acceptable to the Red Guards, "monsters and demons." All these "class enemies" were exposed by the Red Guards and subject to severe sanctions from the proletarian dictatorship. Most of them were politically examined and denounced, publicly humiliated, forced to confess their "sins" to Mao, or physically tortured.

There were millions whose houses were searched and property confiscated, and who themselves were expelled to the "cowshed" in remote areas to undertake a thorough "conversion." Thousands of innocent people were beaten to death without knowing why. Thousands more committed suicide. According to estimates, two hundred suicides occurred on the campus of Beijing University alone between August and October in 1966 (Foreign expert, 1966). This political labeling was not limited to the "class enemies" but extended to their offspring as well. The children from these families were labeled as "convertible children," and after graduation from high school, they were sent to the countryside to get reeducation from peasants.

Symbolism is another aspect of the rituals associated with the Cultural Revolution in China. During that period, the relationship between Mao and the masses was seen as that of the sun and sunflowers. Like sunflowers turning toward the sun, the hearts of people turned toward Mao. Meanwhile, all of the places where Mao had ever stayed or would still visit, such as the house in which he was born, Tian An-men Gate, and the Yanan Pagoda, were seen as "holy" places, and they often evoked strong emotions of love and respect to Mao. The "Little Red Book," as well as Mao's instructions, were considered the source of strength and the remedy for all kinds of problems. As for the so-called reactionaries, anyone who carried the "Little Red Book" might be spared further torture from the Red Guards. People seemed to gain a certain power by having the book with them. Mending stitches on the uniform and colorless suits people wore represented industry and thrift, which were always considered "a glorious tradition of our Party," and demonstrated that a person had been working hard for the ultimate liberation of proletarians all over the world.

All of this suggests that the elimination of traditional religion did not lead China to atheism. On the contrary, a new religion was created. In the eyes of the masses, there still existed a "supernatural" power (Yinger, 1970). The "manna" proceeding from Mao prevented a man from believing himself to be the master of his own fate or that social progress could be achieved solely by human effort, as Marxism claims. The phrase *political religion* best conceptualizes this new system.

Maoist political religion is similar to the traditional religions of China in several respects. First, like Confucianism, the orthodox position on Mao's thought served as a justification for the status quo in the Chinese communist system. Since Mao's doctrines were treated religiously, they legitimated his regime and prevented any changes either on the theoretical level or in practice.

Second, some rituals took religious forms. Alberto Moravia, an Italian novelist,

for example, compared a procession of the Red Guards to that of a traditional religious parade held for a community god:

As the flag moves closer to us, we can see the whole procession. The marchers are boys and girls, Red Guards, as we can guess from the scarlet bands they wear on their arms. All of them are in blue trousers, white shirts, boys and girls alike, each with the little book of Mao clutched in his [or her] hand. At their head marches the standard-bearer, the flagstaff thrust into his belt. Then come two girls, carrying a portrait of Mao, framed in gold decked with red festoons. And behind the portrait come the demonstrators, single file. . . . It need scarcely be said that the style of these processions, like that of the propaganda shows with their songs and music and dancing, is religious in the traditional peasant pattern of religion. In place of the red banner, set the standard of the Confraternity, replace Mao's portrait with the patron saint of the village, and you'll scarcely be able to see any difference; basically, nothing has changed (in Jochin, 1986:59).

Third, the fanatical attitude that the masses held toward Mao's "Little Red Book" resembled people's attitude toward animistic magic in the past. As people in traditional Chinese society believed in the power of magic, the masses in the Cultural Revolution believed that the "Little Red Book" would save them from all trouble.

Finally, the role of ritual in the revolution was generally the same as in traditional religion (Parker, 1984). At the individual level, it helped reduce anxiety and provided a sense of security and confidence; at the community level, it strengthened social cohesiveness and social control.

A major deviation of this political religion from traditional religions was that with Mao's being perceived as God, God became personalized and was directly accessible to the masses. This deification of Mao, as will be seen later, played a crucial role in the early success of the Cultural Revolution.

To sum up: because of the religious ritual activities of the Cultural Revolution, China was by no means a truly atheist country. Fundamentally there is little difference between the political religion and the traditional religion of China. The only difference lies in the efforts of Communist leaders to replace old belief systems with Maoist Marxism, an atheist ideology. This ideology was widely and rigidly imposed, with its supporting rituals, while traditional religious practices declined.

WHY NOT CIVIL RELIGION?

Some may argue that this new Chinese religion should be considered a form of civil religion, since it was national religion and partly shared the traditional religious heritage of the country. The concept of "civil religion" was first introduced in Rousseau's work and later developed by Robert Bellah, who defined American civil religion as "a genuine apprehension of a universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people" (so Lane, 1981:42). Although both civil and political religion are concerned with politics and reinforce the legitimacy of political ideology, the nature of the religious element in Maoism is completely different. In civil religion, the religious element is provided by connecting the existing political order with a transcendent power derived from traditional religion, whereas in political religion the religious element is created in the

sacralization of the political order. In China, political ideology and authority became sacralized. Any attempt to question the "sacred" nature of Mao or his thought would be met with reaction as extreme as the response of the Catholic church to sacrilege during the Middle Ages.

While civil religion limits its authority to political matters, political religion claims authority not only over political affairs but over all aspects of social life. The Cultural Revolution did not focus on the political movement alone, but extended its power and influence over a broad area of culture, education, economy, family, and even personal life-style. Individuals were required to be completely loyal to the greater collective society. In addition, the content of civil religion is general, so that it does not conflict with conventional religious or political norms and values. On the other hand, norms, values, and social relations are uniquely specified within political religions. During the Cultural Revolution, specific values and norms were closely identified with Mao's doctrines. Any attempt to violate officially prescribed norms would be considered sinful.

Christel Lane points to two further differences between civil and political religion in her cross-cultural comparisons (Lane, 1981). First, she finds that the religious element contained in Soviet political religion is in bitter conflict with "church" religion, while this is not the case with civil religion, which tends to support church tradition. This distinction further demonstrates the political nature of religion during the Cultural Revolution in China, with its monopoly on sacred values, its resulting demand for total commitment and exclusive allegiance, and its denunciation of people who held different opinions as heretics and reactionaries. Second, civil religion demands only passive involvement, whereas political religion commands devotion from all participants. The latter was typically the case during the Cultural Revolution. Everybody was required to participate in this political movement. No single person was able to escape it: one was either condemning or condemned.

THE CAUSES OF POLITICAL RELIGION IN CHINA

In his analysis of the social structure of China, Weber (1964) clearly identifies several dominant features of Chinese society that prevented the rise of capitalism, namely associations in production, self-government of villages, and the patrimonial structure of law. This type of social structure certainly limited the transformative capacities of Chinese society and hampered the development of capitalist relations. Weber's analysis is also helpful in understanding political religion in contemporary China. Lack of development in capitalism means a lack of industrialization. For hundreds of years China has remained primarily agricultural, with a low level of economic production and a concomitant underdevelopment in the natural sciences, which has left the society vulnerable to nature in agricultural production. This vulnerability is associated with reliance on supernatural powers for explanations and solutions. The backward technology was also in line with an overall low level of education. Particularly in the imperial era, this meant not only that only a small proportion of the population received an education but also that the natural sciences were neglected. The curriculum consisted mainly of Confucian ethics, literature, and writing skills. Competition among

prebendary and degree-hunting literati was concentrated on getting into the ruling stratum. Consequently, there was a lack of resources of knowledge and creativity in coping with all sorts of difficulties, and the masses were prone to believe in magical powers.

Self-sufficiency was another feature of agrarian society in China. Economic activities were basically organized around the kinship system. In response to this economic structure, there developed a political system characterized by patrimony and patriarchy, which prevented the growth of a legal-rational bureaucratic system and law enforcement. As a result, leadership was based on charisma, which was always an extraordinary force, given the assumption of supernatural power. As Weber observed, the emperor "had to prove himself as the 'Son of Heaven' and as the lord approved by Heaven insofar as the people fared well under him." Meanwhile, "the personal qualities which were necessary to the charismatic image of the emperor were turned into ritualism and then into ethics by the ritualists and philosophers" (1964:31). Once the emperor's charisma was in position, his legitimate leadership could be exercised at his own discretion.

Although the imperial realm passed away almost a century ago, Chinese society is still shrouded in feudalism culture. This is mainly because economic development and political differentiation progress at a slow pace even though China has altered the old kin-dominated social structure. In fact, the political regime did not intend to destroy all parts of the tradition. It simply transferred the emphasis of the tradition from the kin group to the party. For example, instead of emphasizing loyalty primarily to kin, the party became the center, and patriarchy was exercised at the national level. This slowness to change laid a foundation for the rise of political religion in the early Cultural Revolution. Mao's personal effort was a direct factor.

As a result of his considerable contributions to Chinese revolutionary history in the modern era, Mao's image had been transformed over time — partly through his followers' efforts, partly on his own — into that of a prophet. Meanwhile, Mao personally isolated himself from the masses. This practice added to his mysterious image. However, his legitimate leading position was severely challenged by his co-workers because of a series of mistakes he had made since the founding of the People's Republic, which brought serious consequences to the Chinese economy and the well-being of the people. In order to retrieve his former power, he removed dissidents from their positions through the destruction of the existing administrative system. The strategy he used was to strengthen his charisma among the masses, who later proved to be the main forces for warding off dissidents. Neoreligious images and terms such as "the Red Sun" were used, since the old religious terms or images were no longer supposed to work. New forms of rituals were developed to propagandize his charisma. In this way, a personal god was created, and the religious sentiments of the population were agitated. By introducing the concept of a personal god from the Western world and by purposely keeping religious rites that had been used in worshiping popular gods, Mao successfully created a political religion by which he destroyed the old administrative system and resumed his top position.

One thing worth noticing is that, although intellectuals represented an important part of the ruling stratum in traditional Chinese society, under Mao's regime

they were attacked. Several factors may account for this. Most of the intellectuals at that time had been educated before the rise of the People's Republic, and Mao did not trust them. In addition, their attitudes tended to be conservative with respect to the revolution because their values were strongly influenced by Confucianism, which emphasized stability and harmony. Another reason is that the intellectuals always despised ritual and fanaticism and were undoubtedly reluctant to accept them under Mao. Perhaps the most important reason is that, because of their education, intellectuals had powers of judgment and a desire for knowledge, as well as the *means* to search for truth. This was particularly true for modern persons with education in the natural sciences. Thus, the intellectual posed a threat to the success of Mao's Cultural Revolution.

The situation for working-class people was quite different. The majority of them were big beneficiaries of the People's Republic through public ownership and the collective economic system, and they were grateful to Mao. In addition, many of them were poorly educated and therefore easily fooled. As far as young students were concerned, they were growing up during the Mao era; their naivete made them credulous, and their simplemindedness made them brave in this political movement. Recognizing all these factors, Mao put his emphasis on appealing to workers, peasants, soldiers, and young students. This is why he suddenly appeared in public after being isolated from the masses for a long time: ten times reviewing thousands of Red Guards; many times walking through the masses, shaking their hands. Like emperors in the historical period, he used his charisma effectively to exercise his dictatorship over the whole nation. As in traditional Chinese society, where the social structure hindered the development of capitalism, the political religion of the Cultural Revolution postponed the achievement of industrialization in modern China.

DID POLITICAL RELIGION DIE OUT WITH THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION?

Although more than a decade has passed since the Cultural Revolution ended, the accompanying political religion has not been entirely buried with it. The impact of political religion is still in evidence, in spite of the fact that it is no longer possible to legitimize one's position simply by exploiting charisma. Chinese citizens still feel political and normative pressure from the top, emphasizing uniformity of values and conformity to the party. The "Anti-Spiritual Contamination Campaign" (1983) is a good example. By imposing the present orthodox doctrines ("Adhere to the Four Basic Principles prescribed by the Party.") and the moral code ("Keep consistency with the Central Committee of the Party."), the party implies that no other sorts of ideas or deeds are allowed. At the individual level, some people from the older generations have internalized this political ideology, and political religion has become an important part of their lives. These people can hardly tolerate any challenge to the orthodox position of Mao Ze-dong's thought, even though they themselves were the victims of the Cultural Revolution. Some aged people, who have devoted their whole lives to "remodeling their world outlook," are still trying to be recruited as members of the Communist party, only for the purpose of accomplishing their conversion.

The Beijing massacre of prodemocracy protestors on 4 June 1989 by the Chinese government also may be seen as an attempt to use political religion as a means of keeping people's thoughts under control. Since the massacre, the Chinese Communist regime has continued the imposition of political religion with the help of military force. It has tightened its control over the nationwide mass media, which function only as the official voice of the Communist party. It labels the democracy movement as "counter-revolutionary rebellion" and the prodemocratic protesters, which included tens of thousands of civilians, as "counterrevolutionary rioters" and "violent thugs." Meanwhile, it uses "the existence of class struggle" — a term otherwise abandoned after the Cultural Revolution — to justify the continuing crackdown and the arrests of prodemocracy activists. It has also resumed mandatory political study sessions on the instructions of Deng Xiaoping, whose words are treated as the key document to unify the thoughts of the party and the nation — another "Holy Writ." Deng himself is flattered as "the designer in chief" of economic reform in China. On the other hand, all the books the regime dislikes are removed from the bookstores and burned. Ideological control of college students has been strengthened. In addition to their regular political studies, students entering Beijing University, where the democracy movement originated, are sent to the army to get political and military training for one year before they take formal courses in the university. The aim of this policy is to train the new students politically and keep them in line with the party's interests.

In spite of the strengthening of political religion, the effectiveness of the party is obviously diminishing along with the rapid economic advancement, educational achievement, and frequent contact with the outside world that had occurred since the economic reforms that began in the early 1980s. The massive student-led democracy movement between 15 April and 4 June 1989, China's biggest prodemocratic rally in the contemporary era, clearly demonstrates the awakening of the masses and the decline of the influence of political religion. The best indicator is perhaps the massacre itself. The fact that the government had to resort to bullets and tanks to end the demonstration suggests that the political religion is losing its power. Thus, there is a fundamental difference in China today in comparison to the time of the Cultural Revolution. Instead of getting actively involved in the study of "Holy Writ" and showing the extreme loyalty to the party and Deng as they had for Mao two decades ago, resistance to Communist propaganda has grown among the people, including persons who had been Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.

This unprecedented movement toward democracy also reflects a growing independence among intellectuals. Because of their historic attachment to the ruling class in China, intellectuals did not develop separate political, administrative, or social organizations. Even their long-term exclusion from political life and the ruling stratum of the Communist regime failed to bring group consciousness to intellectuals. But today, for the first time in Chinese history, intellectuals as a group are challenging political authority, urging the government to reform. Never before have so many intellectuals actively participated in a widespread social movement of this kind. According to statistics, students and other intellectuals presented 91 written proposals, requests, appeals, and declarations to the party, the nation, and the world during the democracy movement alone (see *Truth*, 1989). This group consciousness no doubt reflects a long-

term structural change in the development of education in China, and more profoundly, it shows the influence of humanism from the Western world in the last decade. The rise of intellectuals is certainly one important factor in the decline of political religion in China.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that the abandonment of conventional religion in China in the Cultural Revolution did not help the country achieve what Marx described as atheism. On the contrary, China resorted to a political religion to support its communist regime. Therefore, it cannot be considered an atheist country in a Marxian sense. Political leaders used rituals as a tool to enhance their power because religion and ritual tend to hide the true source of power from those over whom it is exercised (Ahern, 1981). Political religion in China reflects the long-term relationship between religion and society. Its rise was based on traditional society, and its development had a substantial effect on Chinese social structure. Although the Cultural Revolution ended over a decade ago, the impact of political religion on the lives of the Chinese people is still profound. However, the democracy movement of 1989 reveals a remarkable decline in its effectiveness, now that the economic and social environment have changed. Even though the Chinese Communist regime presently continues to rely on political religion to achieve its purposes, it has to make a much greater effort. Now there is an increasing conflict between the strengthening of political religion from the top and resistance from the bottom. As the numbers of people in China educated in a modern context continue to grow (as they must if China is to maintain viability as a society), I doubt seriously that this effort will be successful in the long run.

REFERENCES

- Ahern, Emily Martin. 1981. *Chinese Ritual and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bellah, Robert N. 1970. *Beyond Belief*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bridgham, Philip. 1967. "Mao's 'cultural revolution': origin and development." *China Quarterly* 29:1-35.
- Cimic, Esad. 1985. "Marx's critique of religion and/or atheism." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22:519-24.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. 1985. "This worldly transcendentalism and the restructuring of the world: Weber's 'Religion of China' and the format of Chinese history and civilization," pp. 46-64 in Andreas Buss (ed.), *Max Weber in Asian Studies*. Leiden: Brill.
- Erikson, Kai T. 1966. *Wayward Puritans*. New York: Wiley.
- Foreign expert. 1966. "Eyewitness of the cultural revolution." *China Quarterly* 28:1-7.
- Glassman, Ronald M. 1986. "Charisma and social structure — the success or failure of charismatic leadership," pp. 179-203 in Ronald M. Glassman and William H. Swatos, Jr. (eds.), *Charisma, History, and Social Structure*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Hak, Han and Erik Van Ree. 1984. "Was the older Mao still a Maoist?" *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 14:82-93.
- Jochim, Christian. 1986. *Chinese Religions*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Lane, Christel. 1981. *The Rites of Rules*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGovern, Arthur F. 1985. "Atheism: is it essential to Marxism?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22:487-500.
- McGuire, Meredith B. 1981. *Religion: The Social Context*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Murvar, Vatro. 1985. "Patrimonialism in China and the Islamic world," pp. 185-215 in Vatro Murvar

- (ed.), *Theory of Liberty, Legitimacy and Power*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Overmyer, Daniel L. 1986. *Religions of China*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Parker, Seymour. 1984. "Cultural rules, rituals, and behavior regulation." *American Anthropologist* 86:584-600.
- Truth. 1989. *The Truth of Fire and Blood* (documentary on the prodemocracy movement in mainland China in 1989). Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems. Republic of China.
- Weber, Max. 1964. *The Religion of China*. New York: Free Press.
- Yang, C. K. 1967. *Religion in Chinese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yinger, J. Milton. 1970. *The Scientific Study of Religion*. London: Macmillan.