

# **Morality and Religion in China's Rise**

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A draft paper for an International Conference 'Improving the Human Destiny' organized by Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lingnan University, 11-12 June 2009.

## Morality and Religion in China's Rise

### Abstract:

China is rising aiming at the status of a great power. Yet internally the Chinese society is troubling with by various kinds of crimes. Statistical figures reflect that the rise of economy accompanies the rocketing of crime rate in the last decade. Hu Jin Tao called for the building of Morality in 2003. Traditionally, religion has been the reservoir of morality, but China does not invite religion to be the partner in helping the building of Morality. This paper discusses why the effect is very limited in China's campaign of building morality when it works by selectively choosing its partner for its own convenience without going to religion which is the reservoir of principles, values and morality.

### Introduction:

The rising of China as a great power has been a popular topic for political discussion. It is because China attracts the attention of the international community with its continuous growth of 8% in GDP in the last decade, its military might in the naval review in Qingtao on 23 April 2009, and its behaviour in the G20 Summit April 2009<sup>1</sup>.

Political scientist like Robert Dahl defined 'power' as the ability to get another actor to do what it would not otherwise have done (or not to do what would have done).<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Waltz defined that political actors are powerful to the extent that they affect others more than others affect them.<sup>3</sup>

The political behaviour of China in the recent G20 in London suggested that China is rising towards an influential and indispensable power in the international community but with a rather low per capita. The country's per capita income is classified in the lower middle category by world standards, at about [\\$3,180](#) (nominal, 104th of 178 countries/economies), and [\\$5,943](#) (PPP, 97th of 178 countries/economies) in 2008, according to the [IMF](#).<sup>4</sup> Internally China is experiencing a bottle neck of its socio-economical reform stemming from the needed but the not-yet reform in political system.<sup>5</sup> That is why the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decided to engage in self-perfection with internal reform to sustain its socio-political success, and to

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<sup>1</sup> "Chinese President Reviews Warship and Aircraft in Parade." *BBC World News*. 23 April, 2009  
"Taking the Summit by Strategy: China and the G20" *Economist*. 11 April, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Dahl. *Modern Political Analysis*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Englewood Cliffs. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, M.A.: Addison- Wesley. 1979.

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_the\\_People%27s\\_Republic\\_of\\_China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China) (retrieved on 1 June 2009).

<sup>5</sup> There are many discussions on this issues. Some dwelt on this issue with in-depth studies, some just mentioned this issue. The most recent one is: Joseph Cheng. (ed.) *Challenges and Policy Programme of China's new Leadership*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press. 2007.

retain the remarkable fruits of economic reform. In fact, Deng Xiaoping as early as in 1988 suggested a comprehensive deep reform to attain a well-to-do (xiaokang) society.<sup>6</sup> Later in 2007, Hu Jintao emphasised that the development of a socialist morality should be stressed and strengthened during the process of building a well-off society in an all-round way and the advancement of the socialist modernization drive.<sup>7</sup>

Traditionally religions are the reservoirs of values and principles which are the essential ingredients to build up morality. In the process of employing morality as one of many paradigms in launching deep reform to sustain the national development, what is the role played by religion including Catholicism in the pursuit of morality? In fact China has no recourse to religion in general and Catholicism in particular in the building up of socialist morality, when Rev. Zheng Yan 證嚴法師 and Mother Teresa have been role models of morality in the Western world.

Evident suggested that China does not feel comfortable to ask assistance from religious groups which are supposed to be the major potential pool of morality. This paper discusses the state and religion relations in China to explain why China refrained from seeking partnership with religion in morality building. Then the limited effect in China's campaign of building morality will be illustrated when it works by itself without going to religion which is the reservoir of principles, values and morality.

### **China is Aiming at a Great Power Status: Economically and Politically**

Before the G20 Summit in London 2009, China prepared the building up of its influence by enhancing its role as a responsible major power in restoring global confidence by visiting 15 countries and the European Union in February 2009 by Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Vice President Xi Jinping. These three leaders sent a clear message of confidence during those tours. Hu signed more than 20 cooperation agreements with five Asian and African countries during the visits. China signed currency swap deals with South Korea, Malaysia, Belarus, Indonesia and Argentina, worth about 650 billion Chinese Yuan.<sup>8</sup> China has also worked actively within regional blocs such as ASEAN and APEC to promote regional

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<sup>6</sup> Deng Xiaoping. *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan vol.III.[Selected works of Deng Xiaoping]*.Beijing: Renmin. 1993. p. 268.

<sup>7</sup> "Chinese President Calls for Building of Socialist Morality" – *Xinhua news Agency*. 18 September, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> "China says working 'constructively' within G20 to tackle crisis." *BBC World Service*. April 3, 2009.

economic cooperation as part of its efforts to help other countries to weather the financial crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Before the G20 London Summit (G20), The Chair of London Summit Gordon Brown foretold that China would play a constructive role in the G20 negotiation.<sup>10</sup> Hu Jintao in G20 met a number of leaders, including US President Barrack Obama, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Those meetings were believed to expand the common ground between China and the other G20 members and strengthen cooperation in boosting economic growth and reforming the international monetary system.<sup>11</sup>

In one of its latest efforts, China, along with the world's other major economies, at the high-profile G20 pledged to restore global confidence and seek sustainable economic recovery. In the G20, China's senior official in banking suggested to create an international reserve currency that is disconnected from individual nations and is able to remain stable in the long run. This official also recommended expanding the use of the Special Drawing Right of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in international trade, commodities pricing, investment and corporate bookkeeping. In the Summit China's pledged a loan of 44 billions to IMF enabling China to have a bigger say and voting right in the IMF and the World Bank in days to come.<sup>12</sup> China also got the support from Russia, Brazil, India, South Korea and South Africa on its proposed reform in the international monetary system.<sup>13</sup>

### **China's Internal Setback in Social Morality and Business Ethics.**

While China enjoys a good reputation as a rising power in international financial matters, internally, serious problems in business ethics and social morality have been surfacing to disfigure its international image stemming from its economic achievement. Questions on morality and ethics in business have been widely discussed by the general public when layer after layer of negative facts that have been laid bare before and after the scandal of poisonous "Sanlu milk powder" incident which became an international scandal. Even the official newspaper, *Renmin Ribao* joined the popular discussion on morality and business ethics and

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<sup>9</sup> "China says working 'constructively' within G20 to tackle crisis." *BBC World Service*. April 3, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> *Independent* March 21, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> "Taking the Summit by Strategy: China and the G20".

<sup>12</sup> "China says working 'constructively' within G20 to tackle crisis."

<sup>13</sup> "Taking the Summit by Strategy: China and the G20" *Economist*. 11 April, 2009.

condemned the scandal of poisonous food and fake products.<sup>14</sup> Amidst the scandal, the Central Government gives its condemnation on the food scandal as well as giving its orientation on socialist morality. It stated:

*“What is shocking is the loss of business ethics on the part of some enterprises. Honesty is the premise of a social contract, and morality is the cornerstone of civilization in business. As a common code and standard of conduct for people, morality is an important factor of civilization in society; it is also a basic condition for maintaining harmonious interpersonal relations and good social order.”*<sup>15</sup>

After ten years of modernization since 1978, China after encountering many obstacles in its rapid economic growth realized the urgent need for a deep reform. This deep reform, however is regarded as a strategy to guarantee the sustainability of the economic development which aimed at building up a well-to-do (xiaokang) society suggested by Deng Xiaoping.<sup>16</sup> Socialist morality became an important block in the in the building of deep reform programme. In other words, the building of socialist morality is to manufacture the “soft ware” after the “hardware” of economic reform has been taken shape in the whole process of national reconstruction. In March 2006, a nationwide morality drive was launched in the form of Hu's list of Eight Honours and Disgraces amid worries that some Chinese people have lost their direction and have blurred the difference between right and wrong during the country's rapid economic growth.<sup>17</sup> Hu Jintao remarked in 2008:

*“Morality is a key factor to the country's development, social harmony and the people's happiness . The development of a socialist morality should be stressed and strengthened during the process of building a well-off society in an all-round way and the advancement of the socialist modernization drive”.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>: Renmin Ribao Commentator "Morality Is the Cornerstone of the Market Economy - Warning No 2 From the 'Sanlu Milk Powder' Incident" *Renmin Ribao*. 28 September, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Renmin Ribao Commentator "Morality Is the Cornerstone of the Market Economy - Warning No 2 From the 'Sanlu Milk Powder' Incident".

<sup>16</sup> Deng Xiaoping. *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan vol.III.[Selected works of Deng Xiaoping]*.Beijing: Renmin. 1993. p. 268.

<sup>17</sup> *Xinhua News* Sept. 18, 2008

<sup>18</sup> "Chinese President Calls for Building of Socialist Morality" - *Xinhua* Sept. 18, 2008.

The Central Government in civic education through *Renmin Ribao* expounded the importance of business ethics and socialist morality as follows:

*"Morality is the soil in society on which all systems operate. Within the framework of civilization in a country, morality and law are mutually dependent like lips and teeth, and neither is dispensable. The country must be governed both by law and by morality. We should not forget moral development even for a moment in the course of perfecting the socialist market economy and pushing modernization forward. We will effectively build a strong defense line of civilization in society and promote scientific development in society in an all-around way only if we thoroughly carry out education on the concept of socialist honour and disgrace throughout society; vigorously promote civic virtue, occupational ethics, business ethics, and social ethics; and foster a good environment in society in which honesty prevails and the law is obeyed."*<sup>19</sup>

It seems the call of building morality falls into the deaf ear of the people when the "Sanlu milk powder" escalated into an international scandal which coincided with the campaign on the building of socialist morality. It revealed that the empty call for morality could not check the wide spread of social crimes against socialist morality.

Why it is so difficult to build up socialist morality? A Chinese scholar in Fudan University discussed this phenomena from a historical perspective.<sup>20</sup> He remarked that in the Land Reform, Mao Zedong was the model of socialist morality, and the Land Reform itself became a moral revolution in Chinese rural society to cast away the traditional Confucius morality(functional ethics) and to be replaced by socialist moral values. Cultural Revolution swept away the socialist moral norm and traditional values in the village and ignited collective morality and the worship of leader (Mao).<sup>21</sup> In the Modernization Era, when central planning economy gave way to market economy, collective morality and the faith in Mao gave way to Pragmatic Socialism and Economic Consumerism suggested by Deng --"to get rich is glorious" under The Black Cat and White Cat Theory.<sup>22</sup> Dengist Theory not only swept away Communist principles of Maoist Era, but also indirectly allowed the prevalence of Machiavellian approach in the socio-economic reform. In reality

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<sup>19</sup> *Xinhua News* Sept. 17, 2008

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Letian. "The Shifting Moral Culture of the Chinese village". A paper presented in International symposium on *The rising Individual and the Collective Morality: Social Transformations of Greater China in the Globalization*. 14 April, 2009. University of Hong Kong.

<sup>21</sup> Zhang Letian. "The Shifting Moral Culture of the Chinese village".

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Letian. "The Shifting Moral Culture of the Chinese village".

Deng's pragmatic Black Cat and White Cat Theory suggests that the end justifies the means.

On individual level, in contemporary China, the spirit of competitiveness, individualism, aggressiveness, self-protection and the art of fight-back are values to be cultivated in the long course of personal development instead of acquiring collective morality.<sup>23</sup> The situation was aggravated by the "One Child Policy" when urban parents did not dare to discipline their only child, the successor of the family line. Immoral practice in sex and money among the urban youth was partly the result of parental indulgence.<sup>24</sup> In current prevalence of individualism, the call for the development of socialist morality is defined as a check or curb of individual desire with the purpose to maintain the collective interest- social harmony.<sup>25</sup> Also a successful cultivation of the virtue of morality was possible when a role model was found in Maoist Era. Mao Zedong himself was the role model. In Dengist Era and after, no role model can be found in cultivating the socialist morality.

Thus, the fruit of the campaign on morality is very limited under this way of cultivation with empty words but no role models. On the contrary, in the past years all sorts of social crimes accompanied the economic development. Ironically, the up turning of economic achievement goes with the down turning of morality in the Modernization period. According to the report of the head of Prosecution Department in the NPC in March 10, 2009, the crime rate and prosecution rate increased 3.5% and 5.7% respectively compared with the previous year.<sup>26</sup> While the crime rate and prosecution rate between the five year period of 2003-2007 had drastically increased 20.5% and 32.8% respectively compared with the period of 1998-2002.<sup>27</sup> These figures confirm that all officials of national and provincial levels as well as business men ignored the calls of Central Government to observe business ethics and socialist morality.

## **Role Model of Morality in Taiwan and India**

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<sup>23</sup> Wang Gan. "Debating on parenting: Individual vs. collective Morality". A paper presented in International symposium on *The rising Individual and the Collective Morality: Social Transformations of Greater China in the Globalization*. 14 April, 2009. University of Hong Kong.

<sup>24</sup> It was suggested by an internationally known scholar on China affairs, Leo Goodstadt, who had engaged in China research for the last 40 years.

<sup>25</sup> Yan Yunxiang. "Conclusion: the Individualization of Chinese society" A paper presented in International symposium on *The rising Individual and the Collective Morality: Social Transformations of Greater China in the Globalization*. 14 April, 2009. University of Hong Kong.

<sup>26</sup> In the report of the department head of Prosecution Department in the NPC on March 10, 2009, [http://www.gov.cn/test/2009-03/17/content\\_1261384.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2009-03/17/content_1261384.htm) (accessed on 24 Feb. 2009)

<sup>27</sup> It was according to the report of the head of Prosecution Department made in the NPC on 10 March 2008. [http://www.gov.cn/2008lh/content\\_926172.htm](http://www.gov.cn/2008lh/content_926172.htm) (accessed on 24 Feb. 2009).

On the other side of Taiwan Strait for example, we find the compassion of a Taiwanese Buddhist nun Rev. Zheng Yan and her Chi Zi Charitable Organization 慈濟功德會. In India, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her religious order - The Sisters of Charity work world-widely caring the poorest of the poor. These two religious groups of international scale which attracted donations and followers came from a free society with democracy and religious freedom in Asia. People were moved by religious sentiment of compassion, the respect of human dignity and selfless love practiced by these attractive religious nuns of different religious denominations –Buddhism and Catholicism. They were able to stir up social moment in catering service to the under-privileged. They acted against the individualistic social trend of self-attainment, competitiveness, aggressiveness to offer selfless service to demonstrate the highest degree of socialist morality- love your neighbour as yourself. They are the role models of religious morality.

In China, with the death of Mao, “role model” of collective or socialist morality vanished in the thin air. The pragmatism of Deng’s White Cat and Black Cat Theory, invited the Machiavellian approach that allows the end justifies the means. When money has been becoming the highest objective in life, it is natural to have various kinds of short cuts to get oneself rich even with unethical and immoral means. It also explained why crime rate and prosecution rate have been continuously rocketing after the launching out of the campaign of morality building . The international scandal of “Sanlu Milk Powder” was the tip of an iceberg of the prevalence of poisonous food and fake products. It reflected that the Socialist moral practice in the Chinese society has been eroded in the process of individualization in the post Maoist Era.

Rev. Zheng Yan and Mother Teresa lived a very ascetic life with self-modification, and they attracted a group of followers who joined them to help out in their philanthropic endeavour. The spirit of Mother Teresa and Rev. Zheng Yan passed the test of authenticity when these two religious women practiced what they have preached and what they believed. The Chi Zi Charitable Foundation and the Sisters of Charity are the witnesses to the authenticity of these two religious leaders. Their joining in these charity organization to render helping hands is to tell the public with non-verbal language that the teaching of these outstanding religious leaders can work. With authenticity, Rev. Zheng Yan and Mother Teresa was possible to establish themselves as role models.

The sentiments of compassion and love/philanthropy are the fuel to propel the charitable work of Rev. Zheng Yan and Mother Teresa who inspired the people of

good hearts with compassion. Even Rev. Zheng Yan is a Buddhist, her charity work was inspired by the charitable services of Catholic sisters in Huanien Taiwan, when Buddhism in Taiwan has no tradition of going out to the society to serve the underprivileged and the poor<sup>28</sup>. The role model armed with compassion and selfless love with its principle coming from the Biblical teaching on the value of man, human dignity -- the image of God,(Genesis 1:27) the children of God who deserve our love.

However , the recent behaviour of the government to penalize the upright people.Trials Begin for Sichuan Activists Detained after 2008 Earthquake might be the tip of the iceberg of the issue.

Sichuan human rights defender Huang Qi (黃琦) was tried behind closed doors for “illegal possession of state secrets” on August 5. Huang pleaded not guilty and the court is yet to announce the verdict. Huang is believed to have been detained for reporting and giving interviews to foreign journalists about protests staged by families of schoolchildren killed in the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008. Another Sichuan activist detained for speaking with foreign journalists about the Sichuan Earthquake, Tan Zuo Yan (譚作人), was tried and sentenced to jail on August 12 in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province.<sup>29</sup> Tan’s defending team of lawyers were barred from going to the court for Tan’s defence by police.<sup>30</sup> Comments were very strong against Hu’s deed in harassing the human right activities as un-ethical when these people only revealed the truth of the great number of death of school children in the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.<sup>31</sup> The covering up of the truth and the punishment of the whistle blower is un-ethical indeed. With this political behaviour how can the state/Party tell the people that it is sincere and authentic in promoting morality and social ethics.

The party-created role model-- Lei Feng 雷鋒 was not accepted by the public, because it has no followers as witnesses to tell the public that the spirit of Lei Fang can work. Lei Feng model was created by the Party and Lei Feng himself was supposed to be the icon of the Party’s morality. However, he could not even attract the inner circle of the party members as his followers. If young Party members and some of the siblings of high officials did not follow Lei Feng, and

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<sup>28</sup> Rev. Zheng Yan acknowledged that her philanthropic work was inspired by Catholic nuns who run charitable work in Huanian, Taiwan.

<sup>29</sup> [http://crd-net.org/Article/Class9/Class10/200908/20090812011559\\_16764.html](http://crd-net.org/Article/Class9/Class10/200908/20090812011559_16764.html). (accessed on 12 August 2009)

<sup>30</sup> [http://crd-net.org/Article/Class53/200908/20090808094443\\_16695.html](http://crd-net.org/Article/Class53/200908/20090808094443_16695.html).(Accessed on 12 August 2009)

<sup>31</sup> 林和立 “胡總：您不能這樣做— 京打壓維權人士的反思” 明報 Mingpo.5 August 2009. B14.

did the same as Lei Feng had done, how can Lei Feng appeal to the public as a role model? A role model should be the one loaded with authenticity, and can be tested by time like that of Mother Teresa and Rev. Zheng Yan. In China the state/Party with its created role model --Lei Feng and others cannot inspire the people to follow Lei Feng by embracing morality, while morality is very essential for the sustainability of economic development. The Hu Jin Tao, the Party's chief Secretary had to swim against the current by suggesting once more the Eight Honours and Disgraces as directive to morality to sustain the economic development leading to a well to do (xiaokang) society. However the morality generated from religious sentiment takes a further step as a transcendental value to work further from a well to do society to the fulfillment of the inner human desire.

The state's appeal for morality is for the building up of this world's harmonious society in which personal happy livelihood can be protected. **This objective is not lofty enough** for the religious personnel like Mother Teresa and Rev. Zheng Yan who embraces the virtues which can penetrate into the inner self of a person to ignite the inner human nature of compassion and personal fulfillment. Urged by the inner desire of a person, with certain degree of sacrifice and selfless love, these two religious leaders witnessed the teaching of Jesus Christ. "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friend." (John 5:14)

In Christian teaching, when one deals with the fundamental principles of morality one has to consider basically all human goods as elements of personhood as stated in the Natural Law: these "goods" taken together, are what a person is capable of being.<sup>32</sup> When directive principles in morality is concerned, one has to go back to the judgments of conscience to direct one's choice. Directive on moral principles are not intuitions nor are the rule laid down by the Church or some other authority –moral truth rests in God's revelation – the Bible and the Natural Law.<sup>33</sup> In China these Christian concepts are foreign to the dialectic materialism which is the backbone of Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought--- the teaching source of socialist morality.

China hesitated to go to religion for assistance or cooperation in the campaign of building up of the morality. It was due to ideological incompatibility embodied

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<sup>32</sup> Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw. *Fulfillment in Christ: A summary of Christian Moral Principles*.. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 2005. p.xii.

<sup>33</sup> Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw. *Fulfillment in Christ: A summary of Christian Moral Principles*.

in dialectic Marxist-Leninism versus religious idealism . Political leaders in Beijing tried to resolve moral problems by reintroducing Confucianism as the teaching source of socialist morality.<sup>34</sup> If one takes a closer look at Confucianism, one might find many contrasting sub-sections in Confucianism such as liberal Confucianism, left Confucianism, official or conservative Confucianism, and depoliticised popular Confucianism. More important, Confucianism is just one ingredient in the eclectic mix characteristics of China today.<sup>35</sup> Various aspects of Confucianism have been undermined but the depoliticized Confucianism was popularized by media-friendly Chinese academic Yu Dan. Her interpretation on Confucianism was in 8 million copies of her best selling book --“The Chinese Chicken Soup for Souls”.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, a private school in Shanghai teaching Confucianism was asked to close down when its teaching mode went back to the traditional way of memorizing the Confucian classics. Its teaching method of English goes to back to the western classics including that of Shakespeare without following the mode of current educational system.<sup>37</sup> It indicated that China has been selectively choosing its ways and means from Confucianism to develop socialist morality according to its convenience.

In the Spring of 2009, all religious leaders were called to meet in Beijing for the celebration of Chinese New Year. On this occasion, Jia Qinglin 賈慶林, the Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) called religious groups across the country to play a more active role in promoting economic development and social harmony<sup>38</sup>. Religious leaders were asked to promote economic development and social harmony only but not in helping to build up socialist morality.

The Uighurs, in North West region have opposed Chinese rule after the Communists took power nearly 60 years ago. Recently, two suspected Islamic

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<sup>34</sup> Return of an Ancient Doctrine of Morals. *China Daily*. October 25, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Timothy Garton Ash “Comment & Debate: Confucius can speak to us still - and not just about China: There is a simplistic way to read this renaissance of an ancient tradition. The truth is very much more interesting” *Guardian* April 9, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Garton Ash “Comment & Debate: Confucius can speak to us still - and not just about China: There is a simplistic way to read this renaissance of an ancient tradition. The truth is very much more interesting” .

<sup>37</sup> “Authority bans Shanghai School Vaunting traditional Chinese teaching Methods” *People's Daily* (On-line version) July 27, 2006

<sup>38</sup> “Senior leader urges religious groups to promote development, harmony” [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn) 2009-01-20 (retrieved on 20 May 2009)

terrorists killed 16 Chinese police officers in a surprise attack on their barracks. Occasionally violent attacks in the 1990s brought an intense response from Beijing, which has stationed crack paramilitary units in the area and clamped down on unregistered mosques and religious schools that officials said were inciting militant action.<sup>39</sup> When Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang were fighting with Beijing like cats and dogs, China would hesitate to invite the Chinese Muslims to help in building morality either. Chi Zi Charitable Organization had not been given the permission from Beijing to set up its branch in China. Then how about the Chinese Catholics? When Mother Teresa's request to establish a house catering for the poor in China was rejected in 1990s, it indicated that the chance of inviting religious groups including the Catholic Church to help in building morality is slim.<sup>40</sup>

In the Western world, the virtues stemming from Christianity, rationality of Greek, and legality of Romans have been the three pillars supporting the Western civilization. Since religion is an important reservoir of values and principles in the western world, why did China hesitate to cooperate with religion in building of morality? The following discussion on the church-state relations in China might throw some light on this issue to illustrate why does China excludes religions in the campaign of building of socialist morality.

### **China's Perception on Religion**

Traditional China considered religion as a catalyst and framing element in social unrest.<sup>41</sup> The leaders of Yellow Turban Revolution, and the Taiping Rebellion made use of religion as a banner or icon to draw followers into their revolutionary groups. Leaders of contemporary China also perceived that the western anti-China force mobilized religion to westernize China and to harm China.<sup>42</sup> The Party believed that one of the means the capitalist West employed to topple socialist States was to link religious questions with internal dissents or underground forces.<sup>43</sup> As early as in 1990, right after the massacre at the

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<sup>39</sup> "China reels as Islamic bombers blamed for killing 16 polices" *The Western Mail*. August 5, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> It was reported by a Catholic who accompanied Mother Teresa on her trip to China in 1990s.

<sup>41</sup> Beatrice Leung. "The Hong Kong Catholic Church : A Framing Role in Social Movement"(a forthcoming book chapter)

<sup>42</sup> Chen Yun "Guanyu Gaodao Zhongshi Zhongjiao Xintiao Went de Xin". [The Letter on the Highly Concerned about Religious Infiltration] in Documentation Centre of Party Central and Policy section of Religious Affair bureau.(ed) *Xinsichi Zongjiao Gongzuo Wensin Xuanbiam [Selected document on Religious Work of New Age]* Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Press. 1995 p. 177.

<sup>43</sup> Chen Yun "Guanyu Gaodao Zhongshi Zhongjiao Xintiao Went de Xin". [The Letter on the Highly

Tiananmen Square on June 4 1989, Tu Sichu, 陶驷駒 the head of Public Security, remarked that religious adherents who had links with western Christianity, minorities in the northwest, the pro-democratic students, and anti-Chinese elements abroad are the major elements that might cause socio-political instability in China.<sup>44</sup>

Chen Yun's 陳雲 prophesy in the contribution of religion to the downfall of Communism was realized in the Fall of Berlin wall.<sup>45</sup> In the orientation of the rivalry between the state/Party and religion, Xi Zhongxuen 習仲勳 the head of the United Front work, set a limit on the religious work by refusing foreigners to work in China in assisting the religious revival. Aiming at preventing foreign infiltration as well as eliminating the growth of religion, Xi's guideline went against the general practice in the united front tactics by welcoming joint enterprise with foreigners and overseas Chinese in the business sector.<sup>46</sup> Jiang Zemin in the spirit of the United Front, gave a directive to mobilize religious believers to work for the social construction of the society while religions have to accommodate to the socialist regime.<sup>47</sup>

Competing for market between CCP and religions suggested by Chen Yun became the major argument in the church-state relations debate as early in 1990.<sup>48</sup> The Party argued that many underground Catholic bishops undermined the government appointed bishops, making the underground church to flourish once again.<sup>49</sup> The Dalai Lama's followers were also accused of having appointed the living Buddha. The CCP believed that once the Dalai Lama appoints a living Buddha, his clique will control a temple, a base which originally belonged to the CCP.<sup>50</sup> (This was argued in internally circulated documents after 1996.<sup>51</sup>)

The Party was very alert to the fact that some local "illegal"

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Concerned about Religious Infiltration]

<sup>44</sup> *The Nineties* Jan. 1991. pp.1-6.

<sup>45</sup> Chen Yun "Guanyu Gaodao Zhongshi Zhongjiao Xintiao Wente de Xin" [The Letter on the Highly Concerned about Religious Infiltration] in Documentation Centre of Party Central and Policy section of Religious Affair bureau.(ed) *Xinsichi Zongjiao Gongzuo Wensin Xuanbiam* [Selected document on Religious Work of New Age] Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Press. 1995 p. 177.

<sup>46</sup> Guo Wei "Zhongjiao Gongzuo zhanxian de jiechu lingdaoren Xi Zhongxuen tongzhi [Comrade Xi Zhongxuen : An Outstanding Leaders in the United Front Work]." *Zhongguo Zhongjiao* (Religion in China)(2002) no.36 :8-9.

<sup>47</sup> Jiang Zemin "Gaodu Zhongshi Minzu Gongzuo He Zhongjiao Gongzuo" [Highly Regard works on Nationalities and Religion] in *Xinsichi Zongjiao Gongzuo Wensin Xuanbiam* [Selected document on Religious Work of New Age] pp.249-255.

<sup>48</sup> Chen Yun "Guanyu Gaodao Zhongshi Zhongjiao Xintiao Wente de Xin"

<sup>49</sup> Luo Shu Gang. "Zhongjiao gongzuo de Yixie Redian Wenti" [ Some Popular issues in Religious Work] in *Neibu Wengao* (Internal Document) No. 5 (1996):.11-3 .

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

(non-government run) religious organizations instigated by foreign supporters were engaged in separatist movements aimed at splitting the nation through religious activities.<sup>52</sup> The periodic religious crackdowns in Tibet between 1992 and 1996, and the Muslim riots in Xinjiang Province, were blamed as Muslim Separatism. The Eastern Turkistan Organization in Turkey, actively promoted Muslim independence confirmed that China's leaders believed religious activities threatened the national security.<sup>53</sup>

Party theorists remarked that as a result of increasingly foreign influence, it is entirely possible that religion should be treated as a contradiction with the enemy to be handled by confrontation. The head of the Religious Affairs Bureau admitted that the Roman Catholic Church and Tibetan Buddhists were the two hard nuts to crack.<sup>54</sup>

### **China and Religion : Clash of Ideologies**

For the last four centuries in China, ideological clash is the clash between religious idealism with the dialectical materialism of Marxist-Leninism and Maoist Thought.<sup>55</sup> The CCP dialectic approach to "Religious Freedom policy" gives the impression to most outsiders that religious freedom prevails in China as it is in the West when control to the Catholic Church in China has been practicing from Mao to Hu Jintao and the degree of control depends on the political climate.<sup>56</sup>

The prophetic leadership of Cardinal Zen coming from one of the two special regions in China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) confirmed China's suspicion on religion. Zen stood behind the scene to support legal professionals in Hong Kong to struggle against the legislation of Article 23 of HKSAR Basic Law. His strong criticism on the pro-business-class political orientation of HKSAR, and on government policy of Right of Abode embarrassed the HKSAR government . Zen's criticism on the religious policy in China also annoyed

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> On the religious crackdown see: *South China Morning Post* 14 Nov. 1996. For the Muslim riot in Xinjiang see: *Hong Kong Economic Journal* 12,13, 14 Feb. and 18 Sept. 1997, and *Ming Pao* 10 Feb. 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Ye Xiaowen 1999 "Guanyu Zhongjiao Gongchu de Sanju hua". [Three Sentences on the Work of Religion] in *Zhonggong Zhongyang danxiao baogao xuan [Selected Reports of the Party Central School]* vol.162, no.6 pp.1-18 (internally circulated document). .

<sup>55</sup> Beatrice Leung. *Sino-Vatican Relations: Problems in Conflicting Authority 1976-86*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Beatrice Leung."China's Religious Freedom Policy: An Art of Managing Religious Affairs". *China Quarterly*. No.184,( Dec. 2005):894-913.

Beijing.<sup>57</sup> However Zen was treasured both by the Vatican, and the HKSAR's democrats because he is brave enough to implement the church's social teaching.<sup>58</sup>

Externally, the Vatican and the Catholic Pontiff like the late Pope John Paul II were world figure. A warmer relationship with the Vatican will lessen Western accusation of human rights, when the Holy See is the crystallization of the model of morality. However China's positive image in G20 in international community overshadowed China's record in violation of religious freedom and human right as demonstrated in Hu's meeting with the French President Sarkozy in G20 London Summit.<sup>59</sup> China's rise gave the hints that China can go ahead towards the status of a great power without caring religious organizations of transnational characteristics such as the Catholic Church.

The rise of Falun Gong was a sign that the Party's grip was no longer as far-reaching as in the Maoist era.<sup>60</sup> All these further complicated the societal considerations on religion in general and on Catholicism in particular whose prevalence would lead to a further loosening of the Party's ideological control.

### **China and Religion: The Clash of Authority**

Clash of authority has been embedded in Chinese politics when it deals with foreign religions.<sup>61</sup> The struggle between dialectic materialism plus Economic Consumerism of Dengist Era and religious idealism in China has been the main theme of the clash of teaching authority.

At this stage, Beijing knows the hollowness in Communist ideologist, but it needs Communism as the ideological forum to maintain its legitimacy. With the proliferation of religions in China, Beijing hesitates to compete with religion in general and Christianity in particular in the capacity in generating moral power. Evidence proves that the role models in religious sector like Rev. Zheng Yan and Mother Teresa attracts people because they practiced what they believed and preached. Their authenticity can be tested by time. The Party-created model Lei Feng could not

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<sup>57</sup> Beatrice Leung. "Catholic Church Relations with Hong Kong SAR Government: The Paradigm Shift" in Wong Yiu-chung (ed) *One country two system in Crisis: Hong Kong's Transformation since the Handover*. New York: Lexington Books. 2004. pp.113-136.

<sup>58</sup> Beatrice Leung and Marcus J.J. Wang. "the Hong Kong Factor in the Sino-Vatican Relations" Weibke Koenig und Karl-Fritz Daiber (ed) *Religion und Politik in der Volksrepublik China*. Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag. 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Sarkozy went against the wish of China met Dalai Lama, the religious dissent. He got the chance to meet Hu Jintao only after he changed his view on Dalai Lama.

<sup>60</sup> Beatrice Leung. "China and Falun Gong : Party and Society Relations in Modern Era."

<sup>61</sup> Beatrice Leung. *Sino-Vatican Relations: Problems in Conflicting Authority 1976-86*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

pass the test of time. In the context of “conflicting authority” the CCP has sufficient reasons not to invite religions, the reservoir of virtues in the building of morality. It is because China and religions are struggling for their market as Chen Yun pointed out as early as in 1990<sup>62</sup>. When people go to religion they do not go to the Party when dialectic Marxist Leninism and religious idealism are exclusive to each other.<sup>63</sup>

Beijing has its own preference by choosing the depoliticized sector of Confucianism as a means to serve its political ends. The lack of role model in CCP for building up morality compared with prominent religious figures (Mother Teresa and Rev. Zheng Yan) give extra reason for Beijing to avoid to compete with religion. The normalization of the Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations will lead to the relaxing of control among Chinese Catholics and eventually to other religious groups. One of the results in normalizing the Sino-Vatican relations is to induce prominent religious figures to China and to allow them to build their bastions of moral authority. The religious sectors might help the government to redeem the poverty problem by catering their philanthropic service to the under-privileged, but they might catch the hearts of the poor who should turn to the Party for loyalty. In the ideological competition between Communism and religion, if religion were not under Party/state control, Communism in China might be on its losing end as prophesized by Chen Yun, the second paramount leader next to Deng Xiaoping.<sup>64</sup>

In the clash of authority, we have evident to show that even China tightens up religious law and screws up its control on religious organizations and personnel to ensure its control of religion.<sup>65</sup> For example China issued a new set of religious law in 2004 to substitute the old one in 1999 with more articulation and stricter control to religion.<sup>66</sup> Even with very limited success in promoting morality in the national campaign, religions cannot render its helping hand in building up morality in China.

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<sup>62</sup> Chen Yun “Guanyu Gaodao Zhongshi Zhongjiao Xintiao Wente de Xin” [The Letter on the Highly Concerned about Religious Infiltration] in Documentation Centre of Party Central and Policy section of Religious Affair bureau. (ed) *Xinsichi Zongjiao Gongzuo Wensin Xuanbiam [Selected document on Religious Work of New Age]* Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Press. 1995 p. 177.

<sup>63</sup> Beatrice Leung "Hong Kong Catholic Church: A Framing Role in Social Movement" in Khun Eng Kuan-Pearson and Giles Giuheux ed. *Social Movements in China and Hong Kong in the 21st Century*. University of Amsterdam Press. (forthcoming)

<sup>64</sup> Chen Yun “Guanyu Gaodao Zhongshi Zhongjiao Xintiao Wente de Xin” [The Letter on the Highly Concerned about Religious Infiltration] in Documentation Centre of Party Central and Policy section of Religious Affair bureau. (ed) *Xinsichi Zongjiao Gongzuo Wensin Xuanbiam [Selected document on Religious Work of New Age]* Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Press. 1995 p. 177.

<sup>65</sup> It was reported by traveling priests in China who did nothing but to cater spiritual formation to the local Chinese priests who have insufficient spiritual formation starting from their seminary training.

<sup>66</sup> The religious regulations issued by the Council of the State [http://www.gov.cn/xxgk/pub/govpublic/mr/m/200803/t20080328\\_31641.html](http://www.gov.cn/xxgk/pub/govpublic/mr/m/200803/t20080328_31641.html) (accessed on 1 June 2009)

The report of the head of Prosecution Department in the NPC 2008 revealed the very limited success in building up morality when crime rate continuously increased even at the period of campaigning morality with the assistance of Confucianism. In the period 2003-2007,( the period after the launching of the campaign on building of morality) the number of criminal suspects were 4232616 cases, and prosecuted cases were 462655. There were 20.5% and 32.8% increased in crime rate and prosecuted rate respectively compared with the period of 1998-2002.<sup>67</sup>

However, in this research, we have evident to prove that the Chinese Communist Party has its own reasons by not have recourse to any one of five world religions for assistance and cooperation in building morality. It is because the CCP is facing a fundamental contradiction in betraying its ideology by replacing planned economy with market economy, and by admitting its class enemy the bourgeoisie into the Party. That is why the Party is not willing to face the ideological competition deriving from proliferation of religions and the withering of Communism.

## **Conclusions**

In the rise of China which aims at being a world power, morality problems pop up to accompany the growth of economic and political power. When institutionalized religions including Christianity, Islam and Buddhism are the reservoirs of morality, because they have role models such as Mother Teresa in the Catholic Church and Rev. Zheng Yan in Buddhism. These two religious women attract people to take up a moral life after they had gone through the test of time on their authenticity. On the other hand the party-created role model on morality, Lei Feng, could not attract people to follow as a role model because he failed to attract young CCPs and siblings of high officials to be away from corruption and to cultivate virtues including morality.

The religious morality which bears the transcendental value with the sources of teaching going back to the Bible and the Natural Law would not be accepted by dialectical materialism, the orthodox ideology in China.

The clash of teaching authority is the main reason that China refrained from going to religion for recourse in building up morality. Thus China selectively went to the depoliticized popular Confucianism as means to promote morality. However, the result was very limited.

The campaign of building up of morality cannot reap much fruit at this stage by judging from the crime rate and prosecution rate of the period of between 1998-2002 and from 2003-2007. The growth of crime paralleled with the length of time in the launching of the campaign.

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<sup>67</sup> It was according to the report of the head of Prosecution Department made in the NPC on 10 March 2008. [http://www.gov.cn/2008lh/content\\_926172.htm](http://www.gov.cn/2008lh/content_926172.htm) (accessed on 24 Feb. 2009).

Key words:

Morality in China, Mother Teresa, Rev. Zheng Yan, religious morality, campaign in building morality, Lei Feng, Sisters of Charity, Chi Zi Charitable Foundation, socialist morality, depoliticized popular Confucianism.