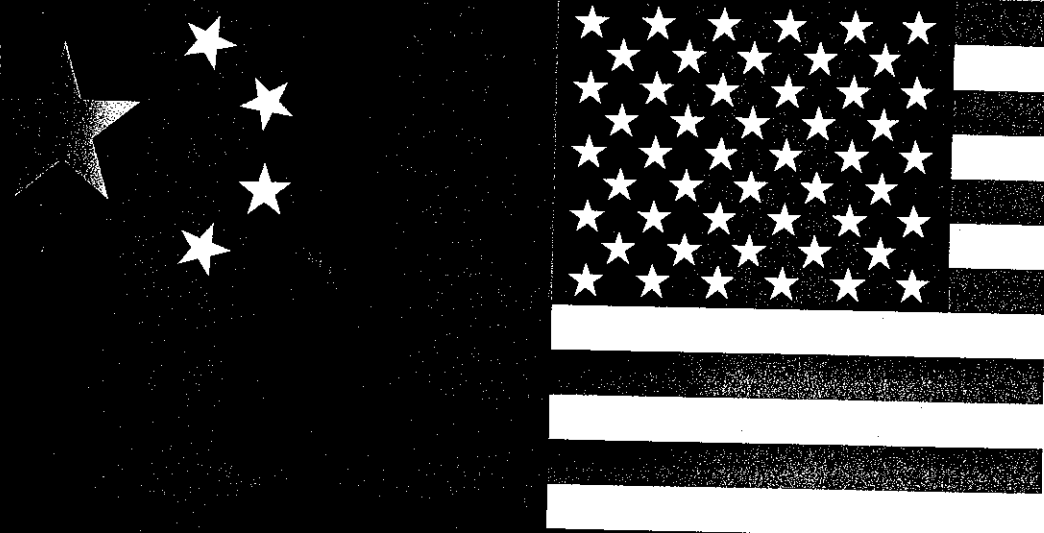


The United States and China:  
**MUTUAL PUBLIC  
PERCEPTIONS**

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Edited by  
Douglas G. Spelman





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# THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA: MUTUAL PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

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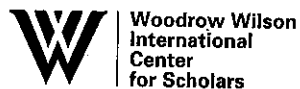
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on Chinese circumstances and the current world situation. China will not transplant economic systems from other countries. A different version of the rule of law and democracy is possible for the world, and China is trying to explore another development model and another version of the rule of law and democracy.

A fundamental question is whether China should completely Westernize as it attempts its ultimate goal of development. Modernization does not mean either Westernization or Americanization. American-style capitalism and Chinese-style socialism do share common ground, but have different views and approaches. While "One World, One Dream" was the theme of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, "One World, Multiple Systems" should be the theme of the human pursuit of the rule of law and democracy.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, China's goal is to establish a government that is law-abiding, democratic, honest (corruption-free), efficient, and green. China is determined to enhance the rule of law and strengthen human rights protection.

The United States has had a tremendously successful experience in exercising the rule of law. However, we should also recognize the limitations of the U.S. rule of law model. China and the United States, two of the world's great cultures, should take the lead and work together to create a better rule of law for humankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although we may disagree on many issues, we are in the same boat and we have no choice but to make joint efforts to sustain a better tomorrow for future generations.

## RELIGION IN CURRENT SINO-U.S. RELATIONS

Xu Yihua

No one symbolizes the importance of religion to Sino-U.S. relations better than the late John Leighton Stuart, the former president of America-supported Yenching University who later became U.S. Ambassador to China. Dr. Stuart died in the United States in 1962, and in his will expressed his desire to be buried with his wife in the old campus of Yenching, now part of Beijing University. Executing the terms of his will, however, had been blocked until 2009, when his remains were returned to Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, to be buried with his missionary parents, but not with his wife in Beijing. This and similar stories are quite symbolic, indicating the fact that religion still serves as a kind of barometer of Sino-U.S. relations, which are now close enough to allow Dr. Stuart to be reunited posthumously with his parents in Hangzhou, but still far enough apart to frustrate his wish to be buried together with his wife in Beijing.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part describes post-missionary Sino-U.S. religious interaction; the second part examines closely some aspects of this interaction; and the third part evaluates the importance of the religion factor in current U.S. policy towards China.

## POST-MISSIONARY SINO-U.S. RELIGIOUS INTERACTION

The Christian missionary movement is one of the most important chapters in the chronicle of Sino-U.S. relations. For a long period of time, American

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missionaries served as a spiritual vinculum or a cultural bridge between China and the United States. American missionary societies spent a huge sum of money and a great deal of energy and, as well as, suffered great human sacrifices in the founding of numerous educational, medical, and philanthropic institutions in China. Also, they helped build up a reservoir of good will in Chinese society toward the United States and American people. But the forced withdrawal of Western missionaries from the Chinese mainland around 1950 cast a long shadow over Sino-U.S. relations, and has made religion a constant and emotional factor between the two countries ever since.

Against this background, religious interaction between the two countries at the present time takes various forms. It is neither confined to Christian missionaries nor focuses on evangelism, even though foreign missionaries have already come back to China. Current religious interaction between China and the United States has become more diversified and pluralized than at any time in the past.

Some features characterizing the religious interaction between China and the United States in the so-called post-missionary era are as follows: first, because of the Chinese government's regulations forbidding foreign missions in China, foreign missionaries are no longer the major actors in this exchange. Hence sending missionaries to China is no longer the only or chief means of evangelism for American missionary societies as it was in pre-1949 China.

Second, also different from the missionary period, the post-missionary period of Sino-U.S. religious interaction involves both the private sector, such as faith-based /faith-related NGOs and universities, and government activities such as cooperation in the campaign against religious terrorism, intergovernmental religious dialogue on religious freedom, etc. Like the previous missionary movement, the intergovernmental interaction in the field of religion is able to both promote and set back the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Third, China is a country with rich religious resources and traditions, but it is also a relatively weak country in terms of its "religious products" and religious exchange or "trade" with the outside world. Even though China is not a passive recipient but an active participant in current Sino-Western religious exchange—witness, for instance, the fact that it is one of the leading Bible exporting countries in the world with an annual production of 12 million copies of the Bible, with some 8 million of them being exported to more than

fifty countries around the world—still, Sino-U.S. religious exchange is quite unbalanced in favor of the United States. While the United States suffers a large trade deficit with China, China in turn has run quite a significant deficit with the United States in this religious exchange.

Fourth, one of the most significant consequences of the post-missionary Sino-U.S. religious interaction is that American religious ideas and practices, such as the separation of church and state, have become, to a certain degree, a frame of reference for the general public, intellectuals as well as the government officials, in China. This will have a long-term impact on Sino-U.S. relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## SOME AREAS OF SINO-U.S. RELIGIOUS INTERACTION

One of the most prominent areas of this interaction is religious publication. In addition to the translation and publication of books on the academic study of religion, a large number of U.S. books on religious subjects ranging from Billy Graham's *The Secret of Happiness* to Alice Grey's *Stories for the Heart* have been published in China. American biographies and autobiographies, like Dale Buss's *Family Man: The Biography of Dr. James Dobson* and Jim Bakker's *I was Wrong*, have also been translated and published in China by government publishing houses. Actually Dr. James Dobson is a popular American author in China and at least five of his books in Chinese on so-called family matters can be found in local bookstores. The Rev. Rich Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* has three Chinese versions and one bilingual version in China, and the version by Shanghai's SDX Joint Publishing Company, one of the most well-known government publishing houses in China, has already sold more than 250,000 copies. The first two volumes of the *Left-behind Series* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins have also been translated and printed in huge numbers. These books are usually categorized as inspirational readings and therefore can get around government censorship.

Another related area worth examining is religious studies, especially religious studies at the university level or setting in China. This is one of the shining spots in Sino-U.S. religious exchange. It is not an exaggeration to

say that most of the research and teaching programs on religion in Chinese universities and research institutions have been assisted by American institutions and scholars, especially when these programs were being set up. A large percentage of the seminars, workshops, summer programs and conferences on religion and religious studies conducted by Chinese institutions in recent years have also benefited from the participation of American scholars or have been financially supported by American foundations. This exchange has effectively formed an institutional network through which Western theories and methodologies of religious studies are being brought to China. Nowadays a key government university in China may offer more courses on religion and enroll more graduate students engaging in the study of religion than a comprehensive university in the United States.

One type of Western religious group active in China is the faith-based NGO (FNGO). Unlike missionaries, FNGOs are allowed to work in China even in the field of religion. The U.S.-based East Gates International and two other FNGOs, for instance, have distributed more than 6 million copies of China-published Bibles on the Chinese mainland in the last twenty years. East Gates International has also built more than 300 Christian libraries all over the country. Large-scale American FNGOs, such as World Vision, Adventist Development Relief Agency, American Friends Service Committee, Habitat for Humanity, and Heifer Project International, either have offices in Beijing or extensive programs in China's interior. Even though we do not have the exact number, it is safe to say that there are at least hundreds if not thousands of Western FNGOs operating in China, and most of them are based in the United States. American NGOs, like the Kansas City-based Heart to Heart International and Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse, were among the first foreign groups to join the earthquake rescue mission in Sichuan in 2008. Now FNGOs have replaced missionary societies and constitute the largest institutional presence of American religion in China. Another strong presence of American religion in China is the American expatriate communities in various cities; some of these communities have their own places of worship, preachers, and even mission programs.

Missionaries, including American missionaries, have also returned to China, mainly in the form of short-term missionaries. China has the largest non-Christian population and therefore is a focal point of the missionary

campaign to evangelize billions of "unreached people" in the so-called 10/40 Window area. Each summer there are hundreds of Christian fellowships or summer camps organized by the Eastern as well as Western missionaries in different places in China. For various reasons, China has not been a major destination for American missionaries yet, but religious publications, websites, tourism, English teaching programs, and other means of communication and exchange have provided American churches and missionary societies with alternative ways of evangelism in China.

It is interesting to note that polling about religion has become a new area for Sino-U.S. cooperation at the grassroots level in recent years. In China, there are several notable polls and surveys on religion. One of them, conducted by Shanghai's East China Normal University in 2007, found that 31.4 percent of Chinese aged 16 and above, or about 300 million people, are religious, and among them, 40 million are Christians. The most comprehensive "in-house questionnaire survey on Christianity in China" just reported by a research group from the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has also found an increase in the number of Christians, though their number was smaller—23.05 million. On the U.S. side, there are also numerous surveys on China's religion, especially Christianity, and the number of Christians, according to these surveys, varies from some 40 million to 130 million. These U.S. surveys of Chinese religion are often conducted with the help of Chinese pollsters, like the Pew Global Attitudes Survey Projects of 2005 and 2006, the Committee of 100 Survey of 2007, and Baylor University Survey of 2009. They all purchased their data from the Horizon Research Consultancy Group, a Chinese polling institution. This Chinese religion survey fervor started by American institutions has the effect of repudiating the previous low government figures and putting pressure on the Chinese government to conduct its own surveys, and to pay more attention to the religious resurgence around the country. The empirical and quantitative research inherent in the surveys will also have a long-term effect on the academic study of religion in the country.

Even though Sino-U.S. religious encounters are not confined to government-to-government exchanges, official exchanges are still a crucial factor influencing bilateral relations. The campaign against religious terrorism is an area for Sino-U.S. cooperation as well as conflict. Both China and the United

States have been afflicted by religious terrorism. But it is the United States, not China that is the biggest victim of religious terrorism or extremism. Religious terrorism is regarded by the United States as one of the biggest threats to its national security, but China is the country which is most unlikely to do any harm to the United States in that regard. Actually the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States reduced tensions between the two countries and made China an ally or at least a strange bed-fellow in the U.S.-led campaign against international terrorism. On the other hand, the Chinese government has recognized and appreciated the fact that the U.S. government designated some Chinese organizations, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, as terrorist organizations and attacked Eastern Turkistan cells in Pakistan, even though Beijing sometimes criticized the double-standard employed by the U.S. government in treating China-defined religious terrorists in its custody. In short, attitudes towards international terrorism is a defining line separating friends and enemies drawn by the U.S. government in the post "9/11" era and anti-religious terrorism has become an important strategic consideration, at least for the time being, in Sino-U.S. relations, more important than other religious issues.

Among these issues, religious freedom is definitely the most sensitive and challenging. It has been on the agenda of China-U.S. summits, especially during the previous Bush administration, and the China factor was quite prominent in the legislative process which led to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998. China has been designated by both the Office of International Religious Freedom of the State Department and the Committee of International Religious Freedom as an "egregious" violator of religious freedom or one of the "countries of particular concern" (CPC, which could also mean, coincidentally, the Communist Party of China) in their annual reports on international religious freedom required by IRFA. The focal points of Sino-U.S. religious disputes or American concern over the issues of religion in China are Catholic underground movements, Protestant home churches, Tibetan Buddhism, and the Falun Gong cult.

Actually there are different understandings in the United States of the issue of China's religious freedom or religious discrimination. Formerly most American institutions from Freedom House to the Voice of the Martyrs condemned China as one of the least free or worst countries in terms of religious

freedom in the world. Last year, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life issued a new study entitled *Global Restrictions on Religion* which examined the situation in 198 countries and regions in the period from 2006 to 2008. Basically the study divides the restrictions on religion into two levels, governmental and social, and the various degrees of restriction are also classified by the study as low, moderate, high, and very high. According to the study, social hostility towards religion is moderate in China, even though the governmental restrictions are quite high. Therefore the highest overall level of restriction is not found in China, but in countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Egypt, Indonesia, and Iran when both measures are taken into account.

The study also admitted that it examined only the restrictions on religion, and did not include "the amount of religious dynamism, diversity and expression in each country." If we take these overlooked elements into consideration, the religious situation in China could appear even more tolerant or less repressive. Actually it would be very hard to find another example of high or stiff governmental restrictions on religious practices coexisting with low social restrictions or hostilities elsewhere in the world. There are many reasons for the relative openness of and few restrictions on religious practices in China, but important among them is the government is opening up the "private sector" for all kinds of activities, including religious ones. It therefore can take credit for this relative openness of religious affairs. Actually, in view of the current social acceptance of religion in China, some Chinese scholars argue that the image of religion in China has already been transformed from the "opiate of the people" to a form of social capital. However, bridging the gap between the restrictive official policy toward religion and the relative high degree of social tolerance remains a herculean task for the Chinese government.

Of course, the government's policy towards religion has been applied differently from locality to locality and also from religion to religion in China. Various folk religions, for instance, do not face the same kind of strict governmental control as Tibetan Buddhism does. On the other hand, as a special version of theocracy, the Tibetan exile government's model of church and state is further from the American model than it is to the Chinese model which recognizes, at least in principle, the separation of church and state. It is doubtful that this Tibetan model of church and state could have survived

even in the United States. And it is also doubtful that true freedom of religion could be bred by this model of church and state.

## RELIGIOUS FACTORS IN CURRENT U.S. POLICY TOWARDS CHINA

The influence of religion on American foreign policy has always been circumscribed by a variety of factors, such as the tradition of the separation of church and state, the realist tradition of American diplomacy, the Republican pro-business emphasis and the history of internal frictions among religious groups. Nonetheless, concern over international religious freedom in recent times has become a key element of U.S. global politics, constituting an important force balancing the business interests and strategic considerations that dominate American foreign policy.

With regard to American policy toward China, bipartisan consensus has emerged on several issues. One might be called "the values consensus," that is, to promote religious freedom in China. Also, the Democrats' "embracing religion" and their victories in the 2006 and 2008 elections strengthened what I would call "the trade protectionism-religious human rights complex" in Congress. This is partly because religious freedom is a win-win issue for both parties, and because criticism of China's religious record will continue no matter which party is in power, even though economic and trade issues become more prominent in the time of economic recession or crisis. Concerns over international religious freedom appear to have become a new foreign policy consensus in the United States since the collapse of the bipartisan consensus on foreign policy during the time of the Vietnam War.

A "countervailing" bipartisan consensus might be called "the China consensus," based on both U.S. national interest and China's current international status. That is, agreement that the U.S.-China relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships of the United States, agreement evident in the many efforts to institutionalize bilateral ties by this and previous administrations. The economic interdependence between the two countries has already reached the level of MAD (mutually assured destruction or mutually assured development) and it is hard to ignore the common interests of the

two countries in other areas such as preventing nuclear proliferation, promoting regional security and advancing environmental protection. In normal circumstances, this China consensus tends to restrain the values consensus, and makes the issue of religious freedom a less significant factor in bilateral relations. But it is still possible for religious groups in the United States to change the status quo of current Sino-American relations, to tip the balance so to speak, and have a substantial impact on certain aspects of U.S. policy toward China by resorting to values generally accepted by Americans and forming a broad political coalition on religious freedom.

Despite the huge differences in their respective positions, there still exist quite a few commonalities between the Chinese and American governments in their views toward religion and in their ways to handle religion in domestic and foreign policy.

For instance, both sides regard religion as a factor vital to their national interests and security. This is true despite that fact that there are great differences between China and the United States in treating religion as a national security issue. Whereas religion has been defined as a non-traditional security issue in the United States since 9/11, the Chinese government has always regarded religion as a security issue ever since its founding some sixty years ago. As I argue elsewhere, the issues of national security and united front are two major CPC considerations in making its policy toward religion. Also, whereas religion as a security issue has become "harder" in the United States, now treated as a "homeland security" issue, religion as a security issue has become "softer" in China, being increasingly viewed as an ideological rather than a geopolitical threat to the regime.

Secondly, both countries believe in the existence of a "hierarchy of human rights," though the United States gives priority to religious freedom, which some call "the first liberty," whereas China has traditionally regarded religious freedom as a much less important issue in its human rights agenda. But now the gap is narrowing since the Chinese government is becoming more aware of the importance of religion as a human rights issue and also the importance of religious freedom to its international image.

Thirdly, both countries regard their models of social development and church-state relations as exceptional. However, American exceptionalism is more judgmental and often expressed in the form of universalism, and



the American standard of human rights and religious freedom—often interpreted as the international standard—is often used to evaluate and criticize the religious situation in other countries; whereas Chinese exceptionalism is more defensive and is commonly embodied in its non-cooperative or even isolationist policy resisting the so-called Western interference in its domestic affairs, especially in the area of religion.

Finally, the foreign policy establishments of both countries are followers of what could be termed “diplomatic materialism,” or suffer from “religion avoidance syndrome,” to employ the term used by Mr. Thomas Farr, Former Director of the Office of International Religious Freedom, to describe the U.S. foreign policy establishment. As he and others of similar view maintain, promoting religious freedom as a foreign policy issue is ghettoized or departmentalized in the State Department, and is far from the mainstream of American foreign policy. In China, the importance that the government attaches to religion has never matched its rhetoric—statements such as “there is nothing trivial in religious affairs”—and it is well-known that the administrative organs handling religious affairs of both local and central governments are poorly staffed, usually taking a back seat and keeping a low profile in Chinese officialdom. In fact, as China’s national interests have become more numerous and pragmatic, the status of religion has been decreasing in the country’s strategic and foreign policy considerations. For instance, no one would argue today that the issue of religion, which used to be regarded as matter of paramount importance in the years when ideology was supreme, should override the issues of Chinese currency appreciation or the increasing price of iron ore from Australia. It does seem that both countries need to address the issue of “religion gap” or “religion deficit” if they want to take religion seriously as a bilateral issue.

## DIFFERING VIEWS OF RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

Richard Madsen

Unlike liberal democracies, which generally accord their citizens the right to complete freedom of religious belief and practice, the Chinese government asserts the need to control religion so as to preserve social harmony and economic modernization. The government has a bureau officially in charge of religious affairs—the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). The state claims the prerogative of determining what counts as true and false religion, and uses the power of the police to try to wipe out “false” religion (AKA “evil cults” or “feudal superstition”). The state also chooses the leaders of approved religions and monitors many of the activities of the religions themselves.

Yet, on the surface the Chinese government shares a fundamental assumption with most liberal democracies, including the United States—the assumption that secularity is inseparable from modernity. The constitutions of liberal democracies like the United States are based on the political philosophies of the Western Enlightenment (in America, especially the theories of John Locke), which hold that religious belief should be relegated to private life, to a realm of personal freedom protected by a religiously neutral state.

Chinese official policy toward religion is also based on the secularization assumption, in this case derived from Marxism. As with all government policy in China, the policy toward religion is set by the Communist Party. The

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