

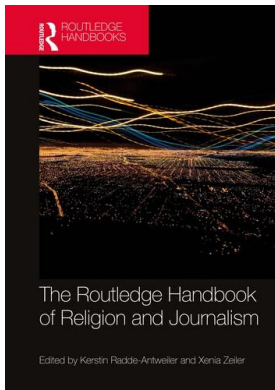
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 31 May 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Journalism

Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, Xenia Zeiler

Reporting religions with Chinese characteristics

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203731420-26>

Wai-Yip Ho

Published online on: 30 Oct 2020

How to cite :- Wai-Yip Ho. 30 Oct 2020, *Reporting religions with Chinese characteristics from: The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Journalism* Routledge

Accessed on: 31 May 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203731420-26>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

21

REPORTING RELIGIONS WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Sinicizing religious faith, securitizing news media

Wai-Yip Ho

Introduction

Independent movements swept over Asia since the mid-20th century and the birth of nation-states was often along the rise of modern press. In many cases in Asia, the emergence of print press and journalism was part of the modernization project, which was brought mainly by Western Christian missionaries – that is, modern Chinese journalism largely originated influenced by Western Christian missionary activities. That Christian missionaries initiated the printing press not only played a critical role in nation building and the formation of the modern state, but also liberated public voices from the control of the Imperial government. However, in some countries after independence, postcolonial governments tightly controlled both newspapers and religious bodies. In the current case of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the leadership of President Xi Jinping launched a national campaign of sinicizing religions (e.g., *Global Times* 2018a) and tightening the usage of social media including religious dissemination. Securitizing religion and controlling journalism are two sides of the same coin. In particular, Islam and Christianity are specifically targeted as *foreign* threats against the sovereign power of PRC. While Uyghur Muslims have been accused of propagating ethno-nationalism to split Xinjiang from PRC, Christian churches have been perceived as the alliance of Western colonialism since the late Qing era. Whether the present religious persecutions in China are unprecedentedly the worst is still under debate and observation, differences between the foreign journalists and state-run media covering religions in China clearly indicate that the global rise of China does not lead to a path of Western liberalism, secularization and free press. The current case of China's lack of free press is leading to another path of authoritarianism that is especially enforced through religious *Sinicization* and censoring news report in social media. Rather than exploring how Chinese society is inherently suppressing religion or how China is moving to another period of *Cultural Revolution* that is hostile to freedom of press, this chapter explores China's emerging trend of securitizing media and co-opting religion which are perhaps the consequence of a state-led national campaign of Sinicization. The deprivation of free press and lack of citizen journalism explains why these forms of journalism cannot play an impartial role to report news. In addition, state control not only incapacitates inter-religious dialogue, but the suspicion of religions as foreign threat or even terror also disables religious endeavors of peacebuilding.

Understanding religion and journalism in China

How Chinese understand religion: teaching, ideology, revival and Sincization

In pre-modern China, there is no equivalent Western conception of *religion*. The notion of *jiao* perhaps is the closest terminology that is compatible to religion. *Jiao* refers to the instruction and teaching, in which three ways or teachings (*sanjiao*) of Confucius (*rujiao*), Laozi (*daojiao*) and Buddha (*fojiao*) are the core institutional legacy in Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. After the fall of the last China's Imperial Qing Dynasty in 1911, the newly born modern China repudiated the feudal past and stood up embracing liberal spirits of science, democracy, progress, etc. To many young avant-gardes in the 1919 May-Fourth movement upholding modern notions of democracy and science, religion was equivalent to superstitious, feudal and anti-modern. Hu Shih, the leading public intellectual in the republican period of the 1920s, even claimed that "China is a country without religion and the Chinese are a people who are not bound by religious superstitions" (Hu 1928, 91) and it seems that the importance of religion in China was insignificant (Robson 2018, 199). While religion in the Republican period was viewed as anti-modern or backward, religious groups were generally tolerated. In the period of PRC-ruled China, the Chinese communist party (CCP), empowered by the Marxist ideology, criticized religion as *the opium of the people* as well as imperial residue of *feudal superstition*. Viewing religion of ideology that unmasks the exploitative nature of capitalism, the Maoist party-state aimed to reveal the falsehood of religious clergies and eradicate the religious powers and infrastructure (Chau 2011). In the peak of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), many churches, mosques and temples were damaged and even demolished by the Red Guards, a mass student-led anti-feudal movement. It was not until 1982 that the CCP re-visited the policy and declared a more tolerate stance and that the party's policy is to protect citizens' religious rights and the freedom of religious belief. By then and from 1980s onwards, the destroyed temples, churches and mosques were restored and rebuilt, leading to a religious revival over all parts of PRC (Lai 2005). It should also be noted that the religious revival is an aspect of greater social freedom that has accompanied the economic development (Overmyer 2003). Nowadays five world religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam) are legally recognized and formally protected in Mainland China. Among the major religions in modern China, Confucianism and Daoism are considered as native religions to China. Although Chinese society also consists of a large population of believers in Buddhism, Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) and Islam, they are considered as *foreign* faiths, brought from the outside to China. In the post-Mao Chinese governance, freedom of religious belief and worship is permitted. However, religion is largely subjected to regulation and restrictions in various forms, when the Chinese Communist Party viewed religious activities pose challenges to the political orthodoxy and ruling legitimacy of the state (Potter 2003). Since the rule of Xi, the control of religion has been tightening through the new policy of religious Sincization. The control is not only on the physical setting of religious sites but also on the digital dissemination of religious ideas.

Journalism in China: awakenings of the Chinese public

To trace the rise of modern journalism in China it is necessary to look at religious proselytism of Western Christian missionaries. At the same time, the introduction of modern

journalism to China in the 19th century is also part of the Western modernity project. As Clart and Scott (2015) argue that without the means of modern press of journalism to embody religious message, the dissemination of religious ideas in China would not be possible. In tracing China's modern history of journalism and communication, Zhao and Sun (2018) argue that after the Opium War in 1840, Western missionaries and businessmen inaugurated modern newspapers and periodicals, which brought the birth of China's modern journalism industry. While the Western missionaries' interest lay in spreading the religious message and Christian Gospel to the Chinese public, Chinese intellectuals later appropriated the printing press to educate the Chinese public about Western ideas of democracy, modernization and science. Although far from well-established, the birth of the printing press and modern journalism in China empowered private citizens to have a sense of individuality, rights of citizenship and most importantly a public voice participating in and shaping national affairs (Wagner 2009). It is not surprising that many newspapers were launched by the reformists. In tracing the origin of Chinese newspaper, the printing press first appeared due to the movable lead Chinese character printing device which was brought from Malacca to Hong Kong by Western missionaries. Then the printing machinery was subsequently procured by the reformist Wang Tao (1828–1908) who launched the first newspaper *Tsuen Wan Yat Po/Xunhuan Ribao* in 1874 (Chou 2018). Chen Siu Pak set up similar reform-minded newspapers like *China Daily* in 1899, instructed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, to provide propaganda against the Imperial Qing government, and the first issue of *China Daily* was published in 1900. Those revolutionary newspapers provided ideological platforms for spreading the idea of democracy and educated the Chinese public about urgent needs of revolution and finally contributed to the success of the 1911 Republican Revolution and the collapse of the Imperial Qing Dynasty.

After CCP took power in 1949, journalism has been under the leadership of CCP in the 1950s at every level (Yao and Liu 2018). It has been the mouthpiece of the Party to consolidate and justify the rule of CCP until now. Religious groups were severely persecuted, missionaries expelled and temples and religious properties ruthlessly attacked in the periods of the Anti-Rightist Movement (1967–1959) and the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) – although Chinese nationals by constitution were allowed the freedom of worship. Among various political campaigns, the ideological-driven Cultural Revolution affected negatively in restricting the liberal development of journalism. At the same time, religions were suppressed. Because of the historical baggage of Western imperialism and foreign missionaries in the late Qing period, plus the national leadership of the Chinese Communist Party since 1949, religion in the period of modern China has been viewed as an ideological construct and foreign intervention in destabilizing the Chinese society. CCP has been hostile to Christianity and Islam and maintained that such *foreign religion* must be controlled. Therefore, religion and journalism in China rarely enjoy an autonomous status beyond state control. In addition, the issue of reporting religious freedom in China has been a contested realm between international coverage and state propaganda.

China since the Open Door Policy. Religious dialogue and peacebuilding in an iron cage?

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack, inter-religious relations focused intensively on the conflict between civilizations (e.g., Huntington's notion of *clash of civilizations* in 1993), in particular on the enmity between Islam and the so-called West. In this vein, former Iranian President Khatami called for the urgency of dialogue between civilizations,

so that sustainable peace between civilizations and religions can be guaranteed. Different from the fear of religious conflicts between Islam and the West, some scholars observed that the inter-religious relations in Asia are seemingly characterized by a model of mutual integration and coexistence rather than clash and conflict (Chen 2015). There are already Muslim voices of dialogue in history (Esposito and Voll 2000), for example, in Indonesia, the late first elected President Abdurrahman Wahid proposed the notion of cosmopolitan Islam and global diversity, denouncing the narrow Islamic version of Jihadist thought. In Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim suggests the need of having a new global paradigm through our understanding of the need of including indigenous Asian values, but not exclusively Islamic. For example, also inclusionary sub-traditions in some Asian cultures emerged, such as in the cases of Gandhi in India and Ueshiba in Japan (Levine 2011). For a long time in pre-modern China, Confucianism and Islam co-existed peacefully and shaped the coherent worldview of Chinese Muslims (Bakar and Cheng 1997). In terms of intellectual and cross-cultural encounters, recent scholarly discussions of Chinese language Islamic literature or *Han Kitab* (Sino-Islamic texts) opened up an unprecedented horizon to understand how Islamic ideas from Arabian-Persian texts were transmitted and embodied in the Confucian Chinese cultural system (Aubin 2017). Recognizing that Muslims in China were losing their religious heritage, Chinese Muslims understood that a good way of passing Islamic tradition to the young Muslim generation of monolingual Chinese is through writing and transmitting Islamic thought in Chinese language. Such Chinese Muslim writings are dialogically synthesized and identify themselves simultaneously as Chinese and Muslim, the harmonious dual-identification to both Chinese and Muslim (Chittick and Murata 2013), which means a double consciousness and loyalty to both the Imperial Chinese empire and transnational Islamic faith. It is, however, since the founding of PRC in 1949 under the reign of Chairman Mao Zedong, that Marxism threatened such tolerant traditions and inter-religious dialogue. Series of political turmoil, natural disasters and religious persecutions happened in the formative period of modern China, including the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), Great Chinese Famine (1959–1961) and Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). It was not until the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1977 and subsequently the seize of power by the reformist Deng Xiaoping in 1978 that the Open Door Policy of China re-entering the international community was possible. Since 1978, China's economy began reintegrating into the global economy and has been remarkably growing over four decades. Without being intimidated by the global tide of trade protectionism, China's open door to the global business and market reform seemingly continues. Accompanied by economic growth over the past four decades, spiritual awakening and resurgence of faiths at the same time happened in all walks of lives. Unlike the rise of the middle class and the liberal democracy which resulted in secularization and freedom of press in the West, China's path of marketization and the subsequent global rise peculiarly leads to a different path of religious development and journalism. Recently, there has been an international coverage of China's new national policy of Sinicization that profoundly influenced religious freedom in China (Bowie and Gitter 2018). Under the shadow of Sinicization, Chinese state-run media discourse emphasizes that religious groups in China must operate independently from foreign intervention, that Chinese nationals with religious believers must follow the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and that religious teachings must be rendered compatible with "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Lam 2018). As a result of the new national 5-year plan (2018–2022) of Sinicization (Cervellera 2018a), overseas journalism reports, there is an unprecedented wave of religious intolerance or even persecution, targeting all religions but specifically the so-called foreign religions Islam and Christianity. While this new move seemingly targets *foreign* religions of

Christianity or Islam, Pastor Jin Mingri of Beijing's Zion church observed that the CCP has waged *comprehensive war against religion*:

The Communist Party has begun to see religion as a competitor. It's not just [Protestant] Christianity, but also Catholicism, Buddhism and Islam. They all want us to pledge out loyalty to the party.

(The Washington Post 2018)

Under the trend of religious Sinicization, foreign journalists increasingly report on a crack-down of religious infrastructures and new security measures related to religious practices in China (*The Guardian* 2018). Securitizing the use of new social media in relation to religious teachings and mobilization, for example, foreigners' online preaching in China has been banned and ideological control over religious contents in social media has been tightened (*South China Morning Post* 2018a). Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, a trend of Sinicization of religious faith and securitization of social media impacted on the reporting of religions in the PRC. Foreign journalism and Chinese state-run media differ in covering Chinese citizens' practicing faith and freedom to worship. In the case study of reporting Christianity and Islam in China, a divide between foreign journalism and Chinese state-run media apparently reveals the resurgence of Chinese nationalism through Sinicization of religious bodies and surveillance of media reports. Unlike US President Donald Trump's doctrine of patriotism (*America First*) over globalism plus his criticism of so-called fake news, the case of China's peculiar program of sinicizing religion expressing an anti-foreign intervention is part of a global resurgence of nationalism. To explain: rather than simply taking modern Chinese society as inherently hostile to religion or being against liberal practice of journalism, the recent tough measure of restricting religious rights and press freedom from foreign influence (Earp 2013) has been the consequence of legitimizing sovereign power, securitizing social stability and co-opting religious bodies in the post-reform period of PRC (Johnson 2019). In the trend of China's authoritarianism and global rise, China's deprivation of free press and lack of citizen journalism explain why a mediating role in dialogue and peacebuilding within religions in contemporary China is amiss.

Religion and journalism: catalysts of modernity, victims of nationalism

However, the inauguration of market reform and open-door policy over the past four decades lead to the fact that liberalization did not only occur in economic spheres. Ideological control over foreign ideas and religions and journalism have been relaxed since 1978. Marketization liberalized journalism, news no longer functioned exclusively for the propaganda of the Party and journalism diversified to report non-political matters in everyday life and economic reporting. Besides commercial media, other non-printing media and Internet news emerged, though the Party still holds tight control of journalism (Chen and Wang 2013). Countless confiscated churches, temples and mosques re-opened and others were newly established. Under the rule of CCP, religion did not become extinct. On the contrary, spiritual revival occurs side by side with economic development. In China, five officially recognized religions, namely Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Christianity and Islam, plus popular religions and so-called sects, have been flourishing since the reform period. In his widely acclaimed book *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao* (2017), Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ian Johnson, who spent over three decades in the Greater

China region observing various religious groups including underground family churches, Daoist believers and Buddhist pilgrims, witnessed that China has been undergoing one of the greatest spiritual revivals in the world. To approach the relationship between religion and journalism in Socialist China, covering news and reporting religion has not been away from the communist ideological apparatus of the PRC. In other words, religious faith in China is rarely regarded as a private issue or purely a personal devotion. Living under the present regime of the PRC, individual or religious body cannot enjoy full autonomy from the intervention of state power. Reporting on religion in China, therefore, must be consistent to the official propaganda and covering religion reflects the Party's media principles (Repnikova 2017). However, different religions in China are under varying degrees of ideological control and constraints of reporting religion are also diachronically different in various phases of the People's Republic. Nevertheless, after four decades of economic reform, ideological control over liberal thoughts tightened and religious proliferation was banned. Crackdown on religious infrastructures and widening control of social media and religious websites happen side by side (*The Guardian* 2018). While the Western liberal model contends that the marketization of media brings the democratization of political order, Stockmann (2013) shows that the case of China has been counter-intuitive. The Chinese government does not only survive through the flourishing use of new media platforms but also consolidates its legitimacy by means of responding to public demands and reinforcing state-propaganda by tightly controlling the media by the state power. The following sections will present the case study of how the Chinese government specifically targets Christianity (both Catholicism and Protestant Churches) and Islam before other religious groups, how these two faith communities have been reported on by the foreign journalism and how these two faith communities have been reported on by the foreign journalism and the China state-run media.

Sinicizing religion and securitizing online: crackdown or management?

In recent years, so-called Western journalism reported that the Chinese local government has been increasingly cracking down religious infrastructures (e.g., Christian churches and Muslim mosques) and installing surveillance overseeing faith communities. In defense, the Chinese state media, *Global Times*, criticized overseas media as solely highlighting the ideal of religious freedom but ignoring the practical needs of managing religious affairs in China:

Western media, organizations and politicians have frequently slandered China's religious affairs, accusing some of China's local government of cracking down on Christianity. They also constantly attack China's governance in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, threatening to impose sanctions against China. ... What we should do is to resolutely reject any interference from external forces and abide by the law so as to realize harmonious and orderly religious affairs throughout the country.

(Global Times 2018b)

In this section, Christianity and Islam are selected as two concrete case studies to illustrate how two major *foreign* religions are covered in the Chinese-stated run media in defense of foreign reports. The reason of selecting Christianity and Islam is that the Chinese government in recent years has been escalating pressure against these two religions. They are allegedly viewed for their foreign ties and social activism (*The New York Times* 2018b). Regarding Christianity, it includes the prolonged Sino-Vatican's controversy over the appointment of

bishops in the local Catholic churches and the recent heavy-handed policy in abolition of church buildings of the Protestant Underground churches. Regarding Islam, the following section discusses the Chinese government's response to the Hui Muslims' protest against demolishing mosques and against the management of re-educating Uyghur Muslims. In both cases, new measures of Sinicization through online control on religious dissemination were imposed.

Evangelical churches and Vatican-led Catholicism: a case study on Christianity

Tracing the intellectual origin of modern culture of journalism and publishing in China, one could not ignore the indispensable role of Western missionaries in bringing the modern press to the Chinese. It is found that the beginning of the modern Chinese press was the direct consequence of the Christian missionaries' strategic interest disseminating the Christian Gospel to Chinese through deployment and development of journalism and printing press as a tool of evangelism (Zhang 2015, 67–68). However, the Protestant missions arrived in China in the 19th century along with the military aggression and the unequal treaties of the Western colonial invasion. Since then, Christianity unfortunately earned a bad name of *foreign religion* that Chinese people rejected against the foreign Western political invasion and missionary activities simultaneously, as if the colonial aggression and the arrival of Christianity are two sides of the same coin.

In the case of Protestant churches in China, family or house churches have been widely reported as targeted by the Chinese government which specifically targets illegal underground house churches. Family or house churches are those churches not formally registered under the umbrella of the state-supervised system. Moreover, most importantly, their unregistered status and religious activity was viewed suspiciously as having perceived foreign ties. Cracking down the *Early Rain Covenant Church* in Chengdu in the Sichuan Province is one of the prominent cases widely covered by the international media. Reported by the *Financial Times* (2018), Wang Yi, a prominent pastor leading the *Early Rain Covenant Church*, and the Christian believers in the same church had been detained for allegedly prompting subversion of state power. In 2006, Pastor Wang was one of three Chinese Christian activists meeting US President George W. Bush in the White House. From the printing press to the Internet, Christianity has been spreading online rapidly all over China. While the religious awakening in China is now unstoppable, new measures of control of online religious activities and discussion have been imposed. The control of religious groups and the management of online religious dissemination are inseparable from each other. Live streaming of religious ceremonies, prayer, preaching and burning incense is banned and religious websites have to be officially approved to make sure the material are “morally healthy and political reliable” (Cervellera 2018b). For the Catholic churches, the Vatican over years insisted that the ordination of bishops is beyond the power of the secular state and that the Chinese government should not intervene with the church authority in appointing bishops. However, PRC has been reluctant to the Holy See intervening with the sovereign power in ordaining the Chinese priests. In September 2018, with the approval of the Vatican, the Chinese government accepted seven Catholic bishops appointed by the Chinese government's Catholic Patriotic Association (*Global Times* 2018d). However, some interpret it as the Vatican's compromise with the Chinese state power and as a betrayal of the millions of Chinese Catholic believers. Nevertheless, it means that the global rise of China reinstates the re-emergence of nationalism along the anti-foreign movements, especially in terms of religious affairs.

Hui Muslims and Uyghur Muslims: a case study on Islam

In many cases, religion and ethnicity (*minzu*) are closely related to each other, as in the cases of Tibetan Buddhism among Tibetans and Islam among Muslim minorities. In the case of Tibet, the Dalai Lama-exiled government has been accused of inciting separatism from the sovereign rule of PRC and therefore Tibetan Buddhism has never been simply viewed as a religion, but the Tibetans as a religious group were viewed as needing guidance under the leadership of PRC. In the case of Islam, PRC has fifty-six officially recognized minorities or 'nationalities' (*minzu*) and ten ethnic minority groups predominantly are Muslim believers. Among ten ethnic Muslim groups, Hui and Uyghur are the largest Muslim minorities in the PRC. In the name of fighting against religious radicalism, ethno-separatism from PRC and most importantly upholding ethnic solidarity in Xinjiang (*Global Times* 2018c), some current reports revealed that the Chinese government's heavy-handed policy has been persistently suppressing the Xinjiang region and the Uyghur people. The Chinese government denied the validity of such news reports (*The New York Times* 2018a). Internally, strict measures of counter-terrorism extend to prohibit Uyghur children from attending religious schools, men from growing so-called abnormal beards and women from wearing the veil (*Aljazeera* 2017). News reports revealed that the Chinese government restricted Uyghur Muslims from fasting and praying (*The Economist* 2017), even forcing them to eat and humiliating Muslims to drink by holding a beer festival in the annual month of Ramadan (Patience 2014, *Reuters* 2015). Externally, the Chinese government has been alerted to contain transnational threats posed by Uyghur separatists. In 2015, suspected Uyghur extremists targeted Chinese tourists at a famous Hindu shrine at Bangkok. Since then, the Chinese government has diplomatically requested Thailand to repatriate more than 90 Uyghurs in exile (Lipes 2015) and Egypt to deport more than 20 Uyghur students, studying at Al-Azhar, back to China (*The New York Times* 2017). Out of overwhelming international concerns about human rights and the religious freedom of Uyghur Muslims at Xinjiang, the issues may continue attracting ongoing scholarly attention and research on political Islam in China in the future. However, it should be noted that Xinjiang has been a highly politicized and sensitive target of Beijing for a while. Scholars often run high risks in researching the topic, as the field of studying ethnicity and Islam in China is getting more politicized. For example, Starr's edited book (2004) was heavily criticized to incite separatist movements in Xinjiang by PRC, and, as a result of this, thirteen contributors were barred from entering China (*The Washington Post* 2011). For the sake of securitizing Uyghur people and possible rebellion, foreign news reported that Chinese border police are secretly installing surveillance mobile phone apps on foreign visitors so as to intensify the scrutiny in Xinjiang (*The Guardian* 2019). Since 2018, numerous foreign reports stated that strict measures were imposed on China's Hui Muslims by shutting down Islamic religious schools and tightening public usage of social media (South China Morning Post 2018b). A shocking news report revealed that at least 1 million Uyghur Muslims were sent to be re-educated in highly secure training centers in Xinjiang. However, the Chinese authority argues that they voluntarily attended 're-education' training programs, so as to have their thoughts transformed from extremism (Sudworth 2019).

Conclusion: 'Sing Hallelujah to the Lord', religion on the front of journalism

This chapter presented the deteriorating measure against religious bodies in China covered by foreign journalists and the defense of China-state run media. While the foreign

correspondence reports that religious freedom and rights of Chinese believers have been at risk, the Chinese-state run media do not simply deny them as *fake news* but emphasize a new measure – to sinicize religion from the destabilizing influence of the so-called foreign powers. The divergence of reporting religion in China has to be understood within the context of the Chinese government in managing the overwhelming religious growth from foreign influence. Like Trump's *America First* policy, the case of reporting on religion in China prioritizes state sovereignty over transnational connection. National interest supersedes cosmopolitan values. In short, China's policy of Sinicization of religion is to stamp out so-called Western thinking, suppressing potential social forces of *Inciting Subversion* led by the foreign religions, in particular, Christianity Churches and Muslim separatists, so as to legitimize the CCP leadership and maintain social stability. In such, *foreign religions* such as Christianity and Islam, rather than indigenous religious groups like Buddhism, Daoism or Confucianism, have to be managed by means of sinicizing religions to Chinese culture and the religious online activities have to be securitized. Consequently, non-independent journalism plus the state-securitization of religions only sows fear in the civil society, without providing soil for trustworthy inter-religious dialogue or positive input of peace-building endeavors.

While foreign journalists portrayed the Chinese government as violating human rights by suppressing various religious groups, including Christians and Muslims in China, Chinese state-run media present Sinicization of religion as a means of governance to maintain the overall social stability in the secular world (*Global Times* 2019e). One may wonder which report genuinely represents the religious situation in China? Instead of judging which version of reports is *the* accurate representation of religious reality in China, foreign journalists and Chinese state-run media do similarly cover the vibrant religious revival happened in China. No matter how Chinese state-run media criticizes the foreign journalism, it is undeniable that the Chinese government is increasingly aware of the needs to manage religious groups and report religious matter in the state-media press. For instance, Ian Johnson (2017) compared China's recent religious revival with the American's Great Awakenings of the 19th century, which was a soul-searching period of social dislocation and unrest. Unlike the segregation of faith and politics plus journalism as an autonomous realm in the West, PRC, a country nominally governed by atheist communist ideology, has been censoring social forces of the civil society, including religion and journalism: Most recently, the censoring includes the coverage of religious issues in social media. In the case of reporting on Islam, the Chinese government has been tightening the media coverage of Islamic issues and the Muslim community, in order to prevent Muslim youths from the negative impacts of religious radicalism. In addition, tightening the control of media coverage of Islam is to avoid the ethnic frictions between the Han majority and Muslim minority. Having said that, it is mainly because of the Belt and Road Initiative that the Chinese government has been branding its own image to the Muslim world, conveying the message that Muslims in China are well treated.

In the case of reporting on Christianity, the Chinese government has been alerted to the foreign intervention of Chinese churches. In the case of negotiating with the Vatican, China is determined to reject the Vatican and defend the sovereign state power in ordaining its own Bishops. Related to the return of authoritarian rule and the shrinking of freedom of speech, it is to conclude that the challenges of reporting on religion in China continue, for instance, for Chinese journalists the liberty of press remains an unrealized aspiration (Zhang 2015, 76). On the one hand, some are pessimistic to the centralization of state power and strong man's governance, as it suppresses the freedom of reporting and fear of speaking up is strongly felt by most of the citizens in China. On the other hand, some do believe that the growing usage of social media and citizen journalism has been empowering Chinese civil

society to fight back top-down propaganda. In June 2019, the awakenings of Hong Kong civil society in anti-extradition protest has been spearheaded by the Christian hymn singing of ‘Sing Hallelujah to the Lord’ as well as series of peaceful prayer of Christian protestors outside the Legislative Council Building. The pacifist spirit of a Christian hymn not only sung by believers and non-believers in Hong Kong demonstration, but the power of the peaceful demonstration crystallized in this Christian song was also covered in the headlines to world press. If securitizing religion and controlling journalism are two sides of the same coin in the Chinese context, the case of Hong Kong of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China indicates that contemporary religious idea serves powerful peace-building resource igniting ordinary people’s mind and heart in quest of social justice and reform (Leung 2019; Zhao and Lai, 2019). In parallel, the role of journalism covering the Hong Kong protests, through the platform of new social media, is then to connect, inspire and leaven the global community in deeper mutual understanding and dialogue.

Further readings

- Earp, M., 2013. Disdain for Foreign Press Undercuts China’s Global Ambition. In: Committee to Protect Journalists. *Attacks on the Press: Journalism on the World’s Front Lines*. New Jersey: Wiley, 113–121. This book chapter explores how journalism, especially foreign press, has been facing restrictive measures in accessing information under the shadow of anti-foreign popular sentiment. Though, the chapter does not address directly how reporting religious issues restricted in China, the chapter however gives a clear picture under the current Chinese leadership in control of state propaganda, sensitive issues like human rights and religion are under strong censorship.
- Yao, Q. and Liu, Z., 2018. Media and Religion in China: Publicizing Gods under Atheistic Governance. In: Cohen, Y., ed. *Spiritual News: Reporting Religion around the World*. New York: Peter Lang, 179–198. This chapter provides a general overview of how religions are covered by the media under the tight control of government national policy since Communist Party took the power since 1949. Instead of holding a popular impression that religion is harshly portrayed by the atheistic regime, the authors interestingly provide an optimistic picture where state-run media is forbidden to attack religion, but to ensure the harmonious co-existence of religions.

References

- Aljazeera, 2017. China Uighurs: Ban on Long Beards, Veils in Xinjiang. *Aljazeera*, [online] 1 April. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/china-uighurs-ban-long-beards-veils-xinjiang-170401050336713.html>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- Aubin, F., 2017. Islam and Confucianism: A Offering to Fr. Malek. In: Hoster, B., Kuhlmann, D. and Wesolowski, Z., eds. *Rooted in Hope – Religion – Christianity*. New York and London: Routledge, 527–539.
- Bakar, O. and Cheng, G. N., 1997. *Islam and Confucianism: A Civilizational Dialogue*. Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilizational Dialogue of University of Malaya.
- Bowie, J. and Gitter, D., 2018. The CCP’s Plan to ‘Sinicize’ Religions. *The Diplomat*, [online] 14 June. Available at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/the-ccps-plan-to-sinicize-religions/>, accessed 7 October 2018.
- Cervellera, B., 2018a. A New Prison for the Church in China: Sinicization. *AsiaNews.it*, [online] 17 August. Available at <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/A-new-prison-for-the-Church-in-China:-Sinicization-44681.html>, accessed 4 December 2018.
- Cervellera, B., 2018b. Beijing Bans Online Evangelization. *AsiaNews.it*, [online] 11 September. Available at <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Beijing-bans-online-evangelization-44899.html>, accessed 4 December 2018.
- Chau, A. Y., 2011. *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation*. London: Routledge.
- Chen, S. and Wang, Q., 2013. Journalism History: China. In: Angharad, N. V., ed. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies: Content and Representation, Volume 1: Media History and Foundations of Media Studies*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 296–309.

- Chen, Y.-H., 2015. The Role of Religious Dialogue and Cooperation in Rebuilding a New Asia. *New Century Religious Study*, 14(2), 1–24.
- Chin, Y.-C., 2017. *Television Regulation and Media Policy in China*. London: Routledge.
- Chittick, W. and Murata, S., 2013. The Implicit Dialogue of Confucian Muslims. In: Cornille, C., ed. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 438–449.
- Chou, O., 2018. Newspapers in Hong Kong: Origin and Diversity. In So Y-K C., ed. *Hong Kong News Expo: Origin, Preparation and Expectation*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong News-Expo, 39–43.
- Clart, P. and Scott, G. A., 2015. *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China 1800–2012*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Earp, M., 2013. Disdain for Foreign Press Undercuts China's Global Ambition. In: Committee to Protect Journalists. *Attacks on the Press: Journalism on the World's Front Lines*. New Jersey: Wiley, 113–121.
- Espósito, J. N. and Voll, J. O., 2000. Islam and the West: Muslim Choice of Dialogue. *Journal of International Studies*, 20(3), 613–639.
- Financial Times, 2018. Prominent Pastor Held in China 'Foreign' Church Crackdown. *Financial Times*, [online] 13 December. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/69a92a9a-fe85-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521>, accessed 18 December 2018.
- Global Times, 2018a. Xinjiang Muslims Attend Sincization Training. *Global Times*, [online] 27 June. Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1108609.shtml>, accessed 5 November 2018.
- Global Times, 2018b. Religious Freedom Not at Odds with Management. *Global Times*, [online] 12 September. Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119383.shtml>, accessed 5 November 2018.
- Global Times, 2018c. Senior CPC Official Stresses Ethnic Solidarity in Xinjiang. *Global Times*, [online] 14 October. Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1122815.shtml>, accessed 5 November 2018.
- Global Times, 2018d. Chinese Catholic Organizations Voice Support for Provisional Agreement. *Global Times*, [online] 23 September. Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1120618.shtml>, accessed 5 November 2018.
- Global Times, 2019e. China Explores Effective Governance of Religion in Secular World. *Global Times*, [online] 6 January. Available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1134750.shtml>, accessed 24 January 2019.
- Hu, S. 1928. *Hu Shih Wen Ts'un (Collection of Writings by Hu Shih)*. Peiping: National Peking University Press, 91.
- Johnson, I., 2017. *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Johnson, I., 2019. How the State is Co-opting Religion in China and What it Means for the Country's Future. *Foreign Affairs*, [online] 7 January. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-01-07/how-state-co-opting-religion-china>, accessed 24 January 2018.
- Lai, C.-T., 2005. Study of Religion: The Academic Study of Religion in China. In: Jones, L., ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan, 10072–10076.
- Lam, W., W.-L., 2018. Vatican Agreement Latest Front in Xi's Widening Religious Clampdown. *The Jamestown Foundation*, [online] 10 October. Available at <https://jamestown.org/program/vatican-agreement-latest-front-in-xis-widening-religious-clampdown/>, accessed 5 November 2018.
- Leung, H., 2019. A 1974 Hymn Called 'Sing Hallelujah to the Lord' Has Become the Anthem of the Hong Kong Protests. *Time*, [online] 19 June. Available at <https://time.com/5608882/sing-hallelujah-to-the-lord-protestors-hong-kong-extradition-anthem/>, accessed 31 October 2019.
- Levine, D. N., 2011. The Dialogue of Civilizations: An Eisenstadt Legacy. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11(3), 313–325.
- Lipes, L., 2015. Thailand Forcibly Repatriating More than 90 Uyghurs to China: Exile Group. *Radio Free Asia*, [online] 8 July. Available at <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/repatriation-07082015175513.html>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- Overmyer, D. L., 2003. Religion in China: Introduction. *The China Quarterly*, 174, 307–316.
- Patience, M., 2014. China Xinjiang: Muslim Students 'Made to Eat' at Ramadan. *BBC*, [online] 11 July. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-28263496>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- Potter, P. B., 2003. Belief in Control: Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion. *The China Quarterly*, 174, 317–337.
- Repnikova, M., 2017. Thought Work Contested: Ideology and Journalism Education in China. *The China Quarterly*, 230, 399–419.
- Reuters. 2015. Exiles angered as China holds beer festival in Muslim county. *Reuters*, [online] 22 June. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ramadan-china/exiles-angered-as-china-holds-beer-festival-in-muslim-county-idUSKBN0P20L620150622>, accessed 29 July 2020.

- Robson, J., 2018. How Important is Religion in China? In: Rudolph, J. M. and Szonyi, M., eds. *The China Questions: Critical Insights into a Rising Power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 199–205.
- South China Morning Post, 2018a. China to Ban Foreigners from Preaching Religion Online. *South China Morning Post*, [online] 13 September. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2163961/china-ban-foreigners-preaching-religion-online>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- South China Morning Post, 2018b. Chinese Authorities Close Three Hui Muslim Mosques for 'Illegal Religious Education'. *South China Morning Post*, [online] 31 December. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2180142/chinese-authorities-close-three-hui-muslim-mosques-illegal>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- Starr, S. F., ed., 2004. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Stockmann, D., 2013. *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sudworth, J., 2019. Searching for Truth in China's Uighur 'Re-education' Camps. *BBC*, [online] 21 June. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-48700786>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The Economist, 2017. An American Agency Denounces the Treatment of Muslims in China. *The Economist*, [online] 7 July. Available at <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2017/07/07/an-american-agency-denounces-the-treatment-of-muslims-in-china>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The Guardian, 2018. China Cracks Down on 'Chaotic' Religious Information Online. *The Guardian*, [online] 11 September. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/11/china-cracks-down-on-chaotic-religious-information-online>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The Guardian, 2019. Chinese Border Guards Put Secret Surveillance App on Tourists' Phones. *The Guardian*, [online] 13 November. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/02/chinese-border-guards-surveillance-app-tourists-phones>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The New York Times, 2017. Egyptian Police Detain Uighurs and Deport them to China. *The New York Times*, [online] 6 July. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/world/asia/egypt-muslims-uighurs-deportations-xinjiang-china.html>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The New York Times, 2018a. U.N. Rights Officials Criticize China over Muslim Internments. *The New York Times*, [online] 13 November. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/13/world/asia/un-china-xinjiang-muslim-internments.html>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The New York Times, 2018b. Pastor Charged with 'Inciting Subversion' as China Cracks Down on Churches. *The New York Times*, [online] 13 December. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/13/world/asia/china-religion-crackdown.html>, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The Washington Post, 2011. U.S. Scholars Say Their Book on China Led to Travel Ban. *The Washington Post*, [online] 20 August. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/us-scholars-say-their-book-on-china-led-to-travel-ban/2011/08/17/gIQAN3C9SJ_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.66fe6bdf2a7d, accessed 3 July 2019.
- The Washington Post, 2018. With Wider Crackdowns on Religion, Xi's China Seeks to Put State Stamp on Faith. *The Washington Post*, [online] 16 September. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/with-wider-crackdowns-on-religion-xis-china-seeks-to-put-state-stamp-on-faith/2018/09/15/b035e704-b7f0-11e8-b79f-f6e31e555258_story.html?utm_term=.a6b4143be851, accessed 4 December 2018.
- Wagner, R. G., 2009. Journalism. In: Pong, D., ed. *Encyclopedia in Modern China. Volume 2*. New York: Charles Scribners Sons/Reference, 398–400.
- Yao, Q. and Liu, Z., 2018. Media and Religion in China: Publicizing Gods under Atheistic Governance. In: Cohen, Y., ed. *Spiritual News: Reporting Religion around the World*. New York: Peter Lang, 179–198.
- Zhang, Y., 2015. Western Missionaries and Origins of the Modern Chinese Press. In: Rawnsley, G. D. and Rawnsley, M. T., eds. *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media*. London: Routledge, 67–78.
- Zhao, Y. and Lai, C., 2019. Sing Hallelujah to the Lord': Religion on the Front of Hong Kong's Protests. *Hong Kong Free Press*, [online] 30 June. Available at <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/06/30/sing-hallelujah-lord-religion-forefront-hong-kongs-protests/>, accessed 31 October 2019.
- Zhao, Y. and Sun, P., 2018. *A History of Journalism and Communication in China*. Oxon: Routledge.