CHAPTER 2

Religion and Spirituality

2.0 Introduction

Gerda Wielander

In the People's Republic of China, the year 2020 started with a new set of regulations for the management of religious groups, which came into effect on 1 February. These regulations only confirmed what has been a clear trend under Xi Jinping: the ever-tighter control of all religious activity in China. While in 2020 international attention mostly focused on the Chinese state's repressive measures in Xinjiang with its religious and ethnic aspects, all religious faiths have seen the scope and range of their activities severely curtailed in recent years, with many religious leaders sentenced to long prison sentences.

The new set of regulations is designed to ensure further progress in the 'sinicisation' of religion which started in 2016 when Xi Jinping chaired the National Working Meeting on Religions. In his speech he emphasised the need to 'build a socialist theory of religion with Chinese characteristics', insisting that 'religions must adhere to the direction of sinicisation, and interpreting values and dogmas in a way that corresponds to the needs of China' (UCA News 2018). The need for 'sinicisation' is not confined to belief systems which have historically been considered foreign like Christianity and Islam—and indeed Marxism. Even Chinese religions need to 'sinicise' in order to follow up the developments of China in the New Era and to dig into religious elements in line with core socialist values.

The Central Institute of Socialism—headed up by Ye Xiaowen who from 1995 to 2009 led China's State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)—

provides lectures on religious 'sinicisation' and has issued five-year plans for all major religions setting out planned developments from 2018–2022. For Islam, this includes the so-called 'four entries:' entry into mosques of the national flag, the Chinese Constitution, love of socialist values, and the teaching of traditional classical literature. For Christianity, this means promoting a 'Chinese Christianity' and plans for a retranslation and annotation of the Bible to find commonalities with socialism and a 'correct understanding' of the text (Kuo 2019). What we have learnt since 2015 is a clear determination on the part of the government to bring all religious activity into the realm of the state and to redefine it within the parameters of state ideology. The government's systematic attempts to control and 're-educate' Muslim Uyghurs in large-scale detention camps is the most extreme example of this control. The destruction of religious statues of all faiths (Wang 2019) and the detention and subsequent sentencing to nine years of prison of well-known house church figures like Wang Yi of Chengdu's Early Rain Church (Johnson 2019) are further signs of the severity of the crackdown on religious activity outside the state-defined realm.

By starting this piece with a focus on religious repression, I follow the well-established pattern of emphasising the repressive measures and curtailment of religious freedom which many observers and academics adopt. In the remainder of this introduction, however, I want to focus on additional facets of Chinese religious life and its interaction with other sectors of society which the pieces in this section of our Review invite us to think about.

The first is wealth. Religion used to be mostly associated with the rural population, often with low levels of education, feudal values, and a lack of development. But religion and spirituality in China are no longer predominantly associated with the poor or destitute. A 2017 survey found that more than one third of all surveyed stated that they engaged in some form of religious practice across all religions (Lu and Gao 2017). The appeal of religion and spiritual practices to middle class audiences is well documented. This ranges from a growth of Christian believers in urban areas to the romanticisation of Tibet as a spiritual place by China's urban middle class (Yeshe Lama 2018) and a whole raft of spiritual practices often originating in Asia but reimported in westernised forms through the forces of globalisation (Borup 2017). That wealth has become a factor in Chinese religion is also recognised in the new regulations which set out clear rules on accounting practices and tax regulations, a change that signals awareness of the change in the demographics of religious believers in China in the twenty-first century and the amount of funds now available to some of them.

This leads to the issue of how best to spend this money? Caroline Fielder's and Jane Caple's pieces provide examples of the different views on how best to support religion through donations, or, conversely, how to spend one's money in a religiously inspired way. Charity lies at the heart of this debate. The first nationwide week of religious charity in China took place in 2012, organised by China's State Administration of Religious Affairs, which signalled support

for religious groups' involvement in charitable services. This event came a few years after the Wenchuan earthquake, which is seen as the true turning point in China's charity activities. For social groups trying to prove that their values are compatible with the state's and a state keen to tap into social resources to provide essential services, charitable work appeared to be the perfect area of activity for religious groups. Until recently, religious organisation could only carry out charitable work of a very limited scope, relying on 'religiously inspired organisations' (as Fielder puts it) such as the Amity Foundation (which many would consider an entirely secular organisation), now China's largest charity, to plan and implement projects to which they might contribute funds and volunteers.

Amity Foundation is the lead organisation in the type of work which the Chinese government considers desirable activities for social organisations, including religious organisations, with a specific focus on areas like poverty alleviation, education, and health care. Amity's and many other social organisations' charitable activities fall into what Weller et al. (2018) refer to as NGO facilitated industrial philanthropy. But Caple's article shows that not all agree on this type of philanthropy. In the case of the Tibetan Buddhist donors she has studied, investing in ritual and temple construction is seen as a preferable way to show support for their religion. Indeed, religious communities in China, Taiwan, and SE Asia and their leaders aren't all willingly drawn into the compulsion to engage in charity. Among the alternative public goods provided by religious communities are community ritual, cultural heritage and community identity, spiritual goods, and solving life's problems (Weller et al. 2018), all services that fall more into the realm of psychological support and thus also contribute to the well-being of the community and society more widely.

Networks are hugely important in Chinese business culture and society and belonging to a religious or spiritual congregation or community constitutes membership of an important in-group that can bring tangible benefits. David Stroup's piece highlights the importance of such networks when in need of social support as a result of migrating to a different part of the country. Many migrants will seek out faith-based communities or networks in their new place of residence to get help with both the mundane challenges of everyday life like filling in forms or applications, but also with the psychological challenges of being a stranger in a new place. Different religious groups have different ways of signalling their belonging to a faith-based network. In a climate where overt signalling like particular dress, hairstyle, or regularity of prayer has become problematic or even dangerous, more discrete ways of signalling one's belonging to a certain faith can become important. Naming is an overt yet invisible signal of belonging to a particular group, as in the Christian names Mark McLeister's informants have adopted. While these names sound foreign—and provide a degree of anonymity when used in writings (Wielander 2013)—they are also a sign of inculturation and follow the tradition of expressing one's hopes and aspirations (in this case spiritual aspirations) through the naming of a child.

Finally, the pieces remind us that intra- and inter-faith relations remain an under-researched issue in the Chinese context. David Stroup's article gives us a glimpse of what dynamics come into play when members of the same faith but from different geographical areas get the chance to interact, a process in which both sides stand to benefit and learn about themselves and each other. More interestingly still would be studies that explore inter-faith relations. Where do Chinese Buddhists and Chinese Muslims find common ground? How do urban middle-class spiritual fantasies about Tibet hold up when experiencing Tibet first hand? What are other faith groups' positions on the treatment of Uyghur Muslims?

The new regulations which came into effect in February 2020 stipulate that religious groups must 'follow the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party' and 'shall publicise the Communist Party of China's directives and policies;' they also make a statement about research. Article 22 stipulates that religious groups 'shall carry out research on religious culture and religious texts… thoroughly uncover content in religious teachings and rules that are conducive to social harmony…and in line with the outstanding traditional Chinese culture' (China Law Translate 2020). It seems we will need to frame our writings on Chinese religion and spirituality within the context of regulation and suppression for some time to come.

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2.1 Religion, Economy, and the Social Good: Reflections from Tibet

Jane Caple

As China has got richer, more funds have flowed to monasteries on the Tibetan plateau. Growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism among affluent urban Chinese has been an important factor, but there has also been an upsurge in local religious giving. This has paralleled the dual processes of accelerated development and increased securitisation of Tibetan areas following widespread unrest in 2008 and a subsequent series of over 150 self-immolations. In the part of northeast Tibet (Amdo/Qinghai) where I have been working, Tibetans have poured resources – in some cases the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of pounds – into a wave of new religious construction and escalating levels of expenditure on rituals and the sponsorship of monastic events.

Supporting the monastic community and building temples and other religious structures have historically been among the most common forms of Buddhist generosity practice in Tibetan and other societies heavily influenced by Buddhism. Yet, in northeast Tibet the dynamics and scale of these practices have been the subject of debate. It is not surprising that criticisms have been voiced by those Tibetan intellectuals critical of Buddhism or Buddhist institutions, but concerns have also circulated among monks and laypeople across social strata who have themselves participated in these practices. In exploring and thinking through the terms of these debates, I have been reflecting on what they might be able to tell us about conceptions of wealth, virtue, and the social good in Tibetan communities in China experiencing break-neck socio-economic development as well as political uncertainty.

It is clear that contemporary debates about the ethics of religious giving are enmeshed in Tibetans' participation in and experiences of economic transition and state-led development. Over the period 2008–2015, I witnessed rapid urbanisation through conversion of land for urban development, as well as voluntary, state-sponsored and forced migration. A general increase in disposable incomes was accompanied by rising levels of consumption and a growth in highly visible wealth disparities. These transformations were reflected in practices of religious giving. For example, when the members of one village pooled

Fig 2.1.a: Rongwo Monastery, northeast Tibet, 2013. Photo by the author.

over four million yuan (around £444,000) for the reconstruction of a temple in 2014, individual pledges ranged from 2,000 to 200,000 yuan (roughly £22,000). A local businessman I met in 2013 said he had readily spent roughly 280,000 yuan (over £30,000) to fund a spectacular one-day religious event for monks without needing to save or get into debt. This kind of spending power was far beyond that of most of the people I knew – not to mention myself.

In the West—as indeed among many Chinese—Buddhism and Tibetan culture are often imagined to be other-worldly and anti-materialist, representing the antithesis of today's 'global' consumer society. In reality of course, even those Tibetans who are ambivalent about marketisation and openly aware of the politics of state-led development enjoy more comfortable lifestyles and aspire to greater prosperity. This does not in itself pose any inherent contradiction with Buddhist values: wealth is positively associated with virtue in Buddhist discourse, which makes explicit a connection between virtuous action (like generosity) and wealth, status, and personal efficacy and power. Nevertheless, this has all sat uneasily with a popular feeling that an increasing economic-mindedness and a weakening of faith and virtue are undermining the very grounds of Tibetan communal well-being, morality, and identity.

On the one hand, people are concerned that contemporary practices of religious giving reflect and exacerbate this broader shift in minds and values. The cynical view is that a lot of giving is primarily prestige-oriented and motivated by competitiveness or social pressure. As such it risks contributing to community breakdown, as well as creating difficulties for households that struggle to keep up with escalating expectations. On the other hand, these are clearly

Fig 2.1.b: A new temple under construction in northeast Tibet, 2015. Photo by the author.

moral practices. As I have dug deeper into the histories and affective dynamics of specific cases, I have started to glimpse a more complex picture in which practices of religious giving are experienced and received as (sometimes exemplary) practices of and expressions of faith and virtue. It is precisely from this – as well as from the flashing of cash – that prestige is derived. But can we go as far as saying that the dynamics and scale of contemporary religious giving is (sometimes?) oriented towards countering the very societal shift in values for which it is being critiqued?

This would certainly seem to fit with observations made by other scholars about the ethics of an emergent 'Tibetan' entrepreneurialism: ideally, profits from business should be used for the benefit of both self and others (contrary to Christian notions of charity, self- and other-interest are not dichotomous in Buddhism). But the debates circulating in relation to religious giving take us further, showing what seem to be (newly emerging?) fault lines in ideas about how that ideal should be realised. Leaving to one side the question of mind and motivation, a key area of contention concerns what people should do with new-found wealth. Is it better to build a temple or to give money to monks? Or should people instead fund hospitals, local education, or vocational training? What makes someone an exemplary Tibetan and a good Buddhist – and what brings the greatest benefits and best serves the social good?

The recent controversy prompted by the outpouring of donations for the reconstruction of Notre Dame Cathedral indicates that such questions about religion, economy, and value are of global relevance. They are imbricated in a politics of value and can provoke strong moral-emotional responses grounded in common sense understandings of benefit, virtue, and the social good. Many commentators were outraged that a burning cathedral in Paris prompted people to give a total of nearly one billion euros in days when systemic poverty in France was not being addressed, black churches were being burnt down in racist attacks in the US, the planet was facing extinction… and the list goes on.

It might seem obvious to a tertiary-educated Tibetan schoolteacher that spending hundreds of thousands of *yuan* to sponsor a one-day religious festival for monks is excessive and wasteful. How could this possibly compete with the good of giving compassionate aid to poor neighbours or school students? But for his brother it might be equally self-evident that sponsoring such a festival is the most virtuous way to spend his money – or that rebuilding the village temple is of greater collective benefit than spending money on education. These divergent ideas about benefit and the social good can tell us something about the different ways in which Buddhism has been mediating people's engagements with accelerated development—as well as the different ways in which Buddhism and Buddhist values are understood, felt, and engaged with in contemporary Tibet.

2.2 Names from God: The Power of Protestant Names in China

Mark McLeister

Zheng Shengjie (郑圣洁), a second-generation Christian, is a young preacher and one of the leaders of a growing Three-Self-affiliated congregation in Huanghaicheng. Shengjie was originally named Zheng Xinkai (郑新开) by his mother, a clear reference to Deng Xiaoping's 'reform and opening policy' (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) of the early 1980s. His mother's reasoning for choosing such a name was due to 'her strong patriotic feelings' (*ta dui guojia de re'a i* 她对国家的热爱, lit. 'her strong love for the country') and the hope that her son could contribute to the reform process. Shengjie's mother converted to Christianity when he was five years old, and when he was seven, his mother changed his given name from Xinkai to Shengjie, having sought advice from her church leaders. Shengjie means 'holy and pure' and is a term which appears frequently in the biblical text. Her prayer was that Shengjie would be a 'clean person' (*ganjing de ren* 干净的人). Beyond the literal meaning is the idea that when something is pure and holy, it is 'separated' (*fenli* 分离) for God's use. The change in name was a clear signal that Shengjie's mother now had a love for God which superseded her patriotism, although she insists that she is still patriotic and is a better citizen now than she was before becoming a Christian.

Fig 2.2.a: One of Huanghaicheng's churches. Photo by the author.

As a preacher, Shengjie is now an embodiment of his mother's aspiration (and prayer) that he would contribute to the building of the church. According to Shengjie, when he was young, he didn't really understand the meaning of his name. Now, in his thirties, he sees the 'deep spiritual meaning in his name' (*tai da de shuling de hanyi zai qizhong* 太大的属灵的含义在其中). His name, he believes, is something which he needs to follow, and has a real impact on his life as a 'binding force' (*yueshu li* 约束力).

Broadly speaking, personal names in Chinese societies have much more social and political significance than in Western societies. In contemporary China, it is common for people to have two names, and not uncommon for people to have multiple names, with each name signalling something about the holder's position within a given social setting. Shortly after birth, many children are given a diminutive or 'milk name' (*ruming* 乳名, aka 'small name' *xiaoming* 小名), generally used by family members and close friends, and a formal–legal name (*xingming* 姓名 aka 'big name' *daming* 大名), registered

with the state. Nicknames, 'online' or 'cyber' names, and 'English' names are also common, but we won't consider these here. Formal–legal names (and milk names to some extent) are particularly important because they typically belong to the bearer for life. Parents and family elders often consider in depth the meaning, sound, and form of the characters when naming a child. There has been something of a revival in recent years of diviners and professional name-givers being consulted.

Protestant Christianity is the fastest-growing religion in the People's Republic of China, with adherents numbering an estimated 70 million (Stark and Liu 2011). However, despite Protestant Christianity's remarkable growth, the everyday lived religion of Christian adherents is under-researched. I have been conducting ethnographic research in a group of Three-Self-affiliated churches (which are registered with the state) in a coastal city in northern China for the past decade in order to further understand the everyday lives of Chinese Protestant Christians.[1] I am currently examining formal-legal and diminutive names in this Three-self-affiliated Christian community.[2]

Many of my research participants who are Protestant adherents have personal names which are recognisably 'Christian', and these can be divided into different name-types. The three main name-types are names composed of Christian concepts such as 'grace' or 'holiness,' e.g., *Qi'en* 起恩 or *Shengjie* 圣洁; names borrowed from the biblical narrative such as 'Joseph' (*Yuese* 约瑟) or 'John' (*Yuehan* 约翰); and names made of a combination of characters which represent a verse from the biblical narrative, e.g., 'Manna' (*Mana* 吗哪) from Exodus 16:31. It is common for Christians to explain their given names when they meet new people or for parents to explain their child's Christian-themed name to others, revealing that these names are much more than a personal label.

Born in the 1980s, Zheng Shengjie was one of the first to receive a Protestant name in his church community. Having experienced the excesses of the Cultural Revolution era, many Christian parents in Huanghaicheng in the 1980s and early 1990s were reluctant to choose overtly religious names for their children because they 'did not have a sense of security' (*meiyou anquangan* 没有安全感). Now, however, it is much more common for people who have grown up in these church communities to have a clearly defined Protestant name.

As was the case with Shengjie, church leaders play a central role in the naming process and some are regarded as such adept name-givers that they are approached by people from outside of the church to name children. I have examined in some detail in previous research the role of the Holy Spirit in Huanghaicheng congregations (McLeister 2019). Some church leaders I interviewed believe that the Holy Spirit gives names to children through them. All name-givers in the churches spend time reading the Bible and praying before making a final decision on a name. The Holy Spirit gives them 'an insight' (*yi ge kanjian* 一个看见) or 'moves' (*gandong* 感动) them so they choose an appropriate name. Many Christians in this community believe that the ability to bestow names on children is a special spiritual gift (*teshu de enci* 特殊的恩赐).

Fig 2.2.b: A Christian grave in Huanghaicheng. The personal name of the Christian is Yongjie 永杰, which means 'forever pure'. Photo by the author.

Some parents believe that the names given by church leaders are more 'effective' (*youxiao* 有效) than names which lay Christians choose themselves. Just as Shengjie believes that his name has an impact on his life, many Christian parents believe that a Protestant name can have a powerful positive influence on the behaviour of their child, and the name will serve to guide the bearer through their life. Some parents talked to me about their child's name as a 'reminder' (*tixing* 提醒) of the Christian message. Sometimes, when calling their child's name, these parents explained that they would reflect on the idea that God had bestowed the name on the child and that the child would one day learn about the fuller and deeper meaning behind it.

From this brief overview, we can see some aspects of the power of Protestant names in this Christian community. In seeking such names for their child, Christian parents are making a conscious choice about their religious identity and their aspirations for their child. As bearers of parental aspirations, the

names protect and guide the child. As markers of a shared religious identity, the names help to foster community ties.

Notes

1. To protect the anonymity of my participants, I use the pseudonym Huanghaicheng for my fieldsite.
2. This research project has been generously supported by funding from The Carnegie Trust and The Royal Society of Edinburgh.

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2.3 Migration, Faith, and Belonging in Urban Hui Communities

David R. Stroup

On a cold, grey day in early December 2015, I sat in a booth in a restaurant in Jinan's Hui Quarter. Specialising in the famous *halal* hand-pulled noodles (*shou gong la mian* 手工拉面), the staff of the restaurant all hailed from the rural suburbs of Xining, in far-away Qinghai Province. Over a heaping plate of piping hot stir-fried cumin and mutton noodles (*zi ran yang rou gai jiao mian* 孜然羊肉盖浇面), I talked with my interviewee, one the restaurants' cooks, an 18-year-old man recently arrived at Shalndong from the west. In between mouthfuls I asked him about his impressions of Jinan after only a month of living in the city. Glumly, he replied 'Jinan's okay'. Pressed for further details he explained, 'It's not as good as back home. The Hui here just aren't as faithful'.

Later, a lifetime resident of Jinan who worked as a baker in the Hui Quarter echoed these sentiments. He explained 'The Hui from the northwest go to pray more often than a lot of locals. For them, Islam is absolutely a part of their daily

lives. But, we local Hui are very business-minded (*shangye hua* 商业化). We're really concerned about work, and don't have a lot of time to go pray'. Throughout my time in Jinan, responses like these became common. Time and again, respondents told me about how the arrival of migrant Hui from outside the city changed the neighborhood's social landscape.

Jinan's experiences hardly stand alone in contemporary urban China. Cities across the country currently struggle to incorporate the millions of in-country migrants who leave home in search of economic opportunity. The challenges members of this 'floating population' (*liu dong ren kou* 流动人口) face are numerous, and well documented (Zhang 2001; 2005; Zheng et al. 2009; Loyalka 2012). For *shaoshu minzu* 少数民族 (ethnic minorities) like the Hui, migration may pose even more acute difficulties in the form of cultural barriers and local prejudices (Iredale and Guo 2003; Côté 2015). Such shifts in cultural landscape may prove especially difficult for the Hui, whose in-group cultural heterogeneity, may cause feelings of alienation even within their own community (see, especially Erie and Carlson 2014). As they attempt to find a place in their new environs, these Hui migrants often feel forced to decide between maintaining tradition and meeting the demands of the usually marketised, secularised, Han-dominant local culture (Burgjin and Bilik 2003).

In part, these difficulties stem from the gap in economic status between Hui migrants and locals. As one respondent, a Hui engineer and lifelong Jinan resident explained, '(migrants) are still integrating. They still face some discrimination. They are not as educated or economically well off'. Another Jinan resident, a local member of the clergy, remarked that migrants from rural western China exhibited different priorities in education. He claimed, 'some of them, in places like Ningxia, when they're young can speak and read Arabic but can't even write their own names in Chinese'. An educator in Xining, himself a transplant from a rural community, argued that moving to cities provided a positive opportunity for migrant children to become better educated, claiming '(Migrants') children also see so much more of the world. At the very least, their *Putonghua* 普通话 (Mandarin) is standard'.

More frequently, though, respondents argued that gaps in literacy and custom prevented rural migrants from fully integrating into their new communities. These difficulties even trickled down into an inability to access public services, respondents argued. A man in his thirties who worked as a salesman in Jinan argued that, 'For People from the northwest (*Xibei* 西北), religion is the centre of their whole life. Not only that, they frequently ask the *ahong* 阿訇 (*imam*) to be a mediator for their life's conflicts. So, when conflicts arise in their lives, when they need an intermediary between people, they go find the *ahong*'. A member of the local clergy echoed these assertions, lamenting that unfamiliarity in dealing with civil services led so many migrants to depend upon the mosque to resolve their problems.

Conversely many of those Hui who move from the rural countryside to cities like Jinan, or Yinchuan (the capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region)

express frustration with their urban ethnic and religious counterparts. As one academic in Yinchuan explained 'A lot of migrant Muslims who come here find Yinchuan to be very *danhua* 淡化 ('watered down,' or secular)'. A cab driver in Xining who had spent time living in east China groused, 'Muslims from the east like in Shandong don't know anything about Islam'. Incredulous, he added 'They smoke, and drink and everything!' Others made similar remarks. An electronics salesman, originally from Gansu, but living in Beijing listed the ways in which Beijing's Hui were different from those in his hometown. Citing everything, from manner of dress, to diet, and attitudes no marriage, he complained, 'Beijing Muslims' way of thinking is just more *kaifang* 开放 (used negatively to imply permissiveness or libertine behavior)'.

Despite these tensions, however, the engagement between different segments of the Hui community that migration causes does stimulate transformations in how Hui communities negotiate boundaries of ethnic identity. Daily practices like those of diet, dress, or religious observance are key markers of an ethnic identity (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Goode and Stroup 2015). Continued negotiation and debate over which practices should stand as the 'correct' manifestations of identity may trigger shifts in the boundaries of ethnic identity, or subdivide communities along cross-cutting identity cleavages (Chandra 2012; Wimmer 2013). In Hui communities, renewed conversations concerning the content of Hui identity stimulate change on many levels.

In some cases, secular Hui rediscover faith after engaging with more pious migrants. A respondent in Xining beamed with pride at the positive example provided by northwestern migrants, boasting 'the people who live in East China, they're very *danhua*, but when people from Qinghai go to the cities they start to pray more often, and believe more deeply'. A woman who operated a corner shop in Jinan's Hui quarter also attributed changes in mosque attendance to migrants, stating 'I think they're a big influence on the neighbourhood. They go to pray every Friday. Local Muslims aren't this observant'.

Likewise, experiences in the predominantly secular environments change the outlooks of migrants. The socioeconomic and political consequences of migration are not only evident at the destinations at which migrants arrive, but also in their places of origin (Bastia 2011; Brubaker 2010; Redclift 2016). A Hui scholar in Yinchuan remarked, 'It works both ways; (migrants) adapt to Yinchuan but they also spur locals to think about being more active'. A young woman who worked as a teacher in Xining, herself having grown up as a migrant in Zhejiang, remarked 'Because (migrants) go out to work, they also widen their horizons, open up their worldview, meet different people. This will also make changes. Some learn new things and transform their hometowns'.

The impact of these exchanges is wide ranging. Not only does this re-engagement of disparate parts of the Hui community serve to draw internal boundary lines that cross-cut ethnic identities with competing class, age, gender, sectarian, and other identities, it also forges new understandings of what it means to be Hui. Especially for the young people who understand migration

first-hand, the experience of living around and with Hui from other backgrounds opens up opportunities for a new, broader negotiation of the cultural markers which denote group membership.

Thus, the changes wrought by shifts in population demographics forge new conceptions of Hui ethnic identity. As one lifelong Hui resident in Yinchuan mused, 'Maybe these (migrant) people's children, the next generation, they can become residents of a New Yinchuan (*xin de Yinchuan ren* 新的银川人). This includes residents of Old Yinchuan's children's children also becoming a part of New Yinchuan. Maybe it could be like that'.

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2.4 Out of the Margins: The Rise of Religious Charity in China

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China has enjoyed a long and rich history of religious charity and philanthropy with some of the earliest forms of Chinese charity inspired by Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist teachings promoting the values of benevolence and compassion and focused on mutual assistance and charitable giving between kinship lines. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, however, both religion and charity became viewed with suspicion and over time events and practices waned until the mid–late 1980s when it became possible once again for religiously inspired organisations to become involved in social welfare and development work. A decade later, following deliberate efforts by the state to rehabilitate the concept of charity within wider society, religiously inspired charitable organisations (RICOs) began to re-emerge in earnest.

Today, after a period of marginalisation, we can see that religious charities from a number of traditions are once again on the rise. This year's annual charity fundraising event held by Chinese internet giant Tencent (the 'Tencent 99 Giving Day') saw the Nanjing-based RICO, the Amity Foundation, become its 10th biggest beneficiary. Given that religion and charity have been sensitive spheres of influence in China's recent history and have therefore been tightly managed, the exposure given by the event was doubtless extremely meaningful in bringing Amity's work, its vision and mission to the fore of the general public's imagination. The 435 projects that Amity put forward for support must have resonated with a lot of individual donors as they managed to raise a total of almost 66,520,000 RMB (approximately £7.3 million) over the course of three days.

For any organisation this would be considered a major success, but as one considers Amity's religious heritage it is worth spending a moment asking what the rise of Amity, and the emergence of the wider RICO sector, can teach us about contemporary Chinese society. Scholars like Durkheim and Troeltsch have long-since argued that religion can mirror wider society and I would suggest that RICOs such as Amity present us with a particularly interesting lens through which to explore developments in wider Chinese society.

Firstly, as organisations created at a specific time and for a specific purpose, their very existence, organisational values and ideals can help us appreciate changes in Chinese society, including shifts in rhetoric, modifications in social

behaviour, and changes in political focus. The growing presence of RICOs in wider society reflects a much-changed social and political reality compared to that of the 1950s to early 1980s, when both charity and religion were viewed with suspicion. Charity, once seen as a marker of a feudal society and a means of keeping the poor in their place is now no longer seen as a challenge to the Party or a critique on its ability to provide for its citizens. Similarly, although differing voices can still be heard, religion has morphed from being viewed as a 'drug' which should be eradicated, to a 'medicine' with the potential to bring about social stability and provide healing for the nation. Christianity, previously viewed with disdain, as summed up in the old adage 'One more Christian, one less Chinese' (*duole yige jidutu, shaole yige Zhongguo ren* 多了一个基督徒，少了一个中国人), has seen a considerable change in fortunes since the period of reform and opening up. A renewed openness in both policy circles and society has allowed for Christianity to now be seen by some as a potentially progressive force with a distinctive and growing Chinese voice.

From the outset Amity has taken a lead in challenging stereotypes and initiating positive forms of dialogue between religious groups and wider society, including those outside China. In Chinese its name is made from two characters '爱德' (*ai de*) meaning love and virtue (or virtuous deeds). In 1984 one of the founding fathers of the organisation, Bishop KH Ting, wrote a letter to international friends where he laid out his vision for Amity to be an organisation which promoted love and virtuous deeds, emphasising the positive contribution of Chinese Christians to society. No longer should they be seen as foreign lackeys or traitors, instead Amity would be a vehicle for Chinese Christians to come together to do their part 'as citizens in nation-building' in order to 'make the fact of Christian presence and participation better known to our people, without in any way weakening the work of the church proper' (Amity Foundation n.d.).

Established formally in 1985, the Amity Foundation has grown from a three-man organisation with limited resources to a multi-million-pound foundation, headed by a woman and which now serves as an incubator to aspiring young charities within the wider sector. Since its inception Amity's work priorities have echoed and reinforced patterns from wider Chinese society. These include a mirroring of the reform and opening process through the re-establishment of links with international 'friends' in the 1980s (including the establishment of a new model for overseas relationships which focused on people-to-people sharing based on mutual respect, comprising an understanding of the changing realities of local church life rooted in new China and led by Chinese); a focus on social changes and the need to mitigate against growing inequality within Chinese society through the rehabilitation of charity within Chinese society in the 1990s (taking up the call to 'Go West'; facilitating technical knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practice with grassroots communities within impoverished sectors of Chinese society; building trust across social divides and channelling funds and help to where they were most needed); building social resilience in the 2000s, including the rebuilding of communities following a

number of natural disasters, and recognising the need to develop a Chinese funding base so as to become more self-sufficient (the financial crisis had a big impact as 98% of project funding still came from overseas in 2008); and undertaking a process of internationalisation in the 2010s (acting as a conduit for Chinese volunteers going overseas, and the transmission of Chinese ideas of development and charity to the world through the opening of Amity offices in Ethiopia in 2015, in Geneva in 2017, and in Kenya in 2019).

Alongside this mirroring of social changes, RICOs such as Amity have also acted in the cognitive sense of allowing society to see itself, and in that process to become more self-conscious and open to change. As such it has more subtly served as a catalyst of socio-cultural change. In a society which has sought to privatise religious thought and confine religious activities to within the physical walls of religious institutions, such as churches, temples, and mosques, RICOs have sought to extend religion's scope by taking their work firmly into the public sphere and working with faith communities and those with no religious belief. The process of taking religion into the public sphere has not only been a challenge to forces in support of secularisation but also questions more conservative elements from within the church who see charity, social welfare, and development as the work of the state and criticise RICOs for diverting important resources away from what they see as 'real' religious work. Such challenges bring to mind C. K. Yang's (1961) distinction between what he saw as institutional and diffused religion, emphasising the fluid and dynamic potential of the cultural role of religion, as opposed to the more restrictive traditional institutional embodiment as emphasised in both policy circles and traditional church structures.

In many ways the appeal of the Amity Foundation is simple and lies in its ability to connect people and to build trust across communities, religious and ethnic divides. It is also in its ability to present a form of religion which echoes Bellah's (1967) notion of a civic religion—drawing inspiration from a particular religious tradition, in Amity's case working alongside Protestant churches both inside China and globally, and yet at the same time being independent of those same churches or indeed any other recognised religious institution. As such Amity draws on particular teachings and yet remains religiously 'distinctive', and is therefore able to develop its own character and cultivate its own sense of integrity. Not being rooted in the church structures and hierarchies frees it from many political and doctrinal constraints and broadens its appeal to wider sectors of society.

This more nebulous, non-doctrinal approach does not necessarily align with organised religion but should not be seen as a weakening or a rejection of religious values. As its popularity in recent fundraising events also shows, this form of religious expression arguably has an appeal to wider sectors of society who themselves are more fluid and questioning in their approach to religious and other issues of concern. RICOs such as Amity are becoming

increasingly a more active and vocal sector of society, not just within China but now also internationally. As such these organisations, which have historically had relatively little attention paid to them, deserve to be much better understood and scrutinised.

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