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(ed.)

MARBURG
Revisited

**INSTITUTIONS
AND
STRATEGIES
IN**

**THE STUDY
OF RELIGION**

The institutional context of the history of religions in China

**This paper represents the report of a working group
which met in the framework of the conference at Marburg,
June 15 - 18, 1988, sponsored by the IAHR.**

Hubert Seiwert (Hannover) (et al.)

The working group on China had discussions on the basis of five papers: "The study of Chinese religions in China: A state of the art report" (Julia Ching), "Introductory remarks about the three levels of the institutional study of religion in the P.R. of China" with "A list of publications concerning the theory of religious studies in the P.R. of China, including descriptive titles and magazines" (Thomas Hahn), "A unifying perspective for the study of Chinese religious tradition" (Sung-hae Kim), "Limiting factors for the study of religion in China" (Jordan Paper) and "The academic study of religion in the People's Republic of China: Background, present situation and prospects for the future" (Chün-fang Yü). The following report collects the information presented in these papers, together with the results of the discussions¹ and some additional information which has been collected by the author.

1) Participants in the working group were: Julia Ching, Thomas Hahn, Sung-hae Kim, Jordan Paper, Michael Pye, Hubert Seiwert, Frederik Streng, Monika Übelhör, R.J. Zwi Werbłowsky and Chün-fang Yü.

1. Historical remarks on the history of religious studies in China

The history of religions as an academic discipline, being a product of the Western intellectual tradition, has no long history in China. This does not mean, however, that scholarly research in the history of religions is something new in China. Chinese scholarship can boast a well-founded tradition of historical research, and this in turn has included the history of phenomena classified as "religions" in modern terminology.

While the history of particular Chinese religions such as Buddhism and Taoism has been the object of scholarly activity in China long before the impact of Western historical methodology, the concept of religion as a general term became a focus of research only after the introduction of Western ideas. Indeed, traditional Chinese language has no exact equivalent to the Western concept of "religion".²

In so far as "religion" is a concept introduced into China from the West, Chinese intellectuals of the twentieth century also take over the interpretations and valuations of religion which were promoted by those Western intellectual traditions that became most influential in China. These were, of course, not the traditions of Christian theology, but of modern scientific and rationalist thinking, whose views of religion were, as a rule, rather critical. This is one of the reasons why religion does not range among the subjects which occupy a central position in modern Chinese intellectual life. The other reason is the enduring influence of traditional values in Chinese intellectual life. Confucianism always showed an open disrespect towards religions like Buddhism or Taoism, and this continues to influence the attitude of Chinese intellectuals.

Among the Western intellectual traditions which were introduced into China, Marxism is the one which after the founding of the People's Republic came to dominate all branches of historical and philosophical research in mainland China. Although Marxism is all but sympathetic towards religion, as a Western tradition it recognizes the social and intellectual role of religions in the history of mankind. To be sure, to orthodox marxists religion is above all a

2) The modern Chinese word *zongjiao* was coined in the early part of the twentieth century by Christian missionaries to translate "religion", as was pointed out by Jordan Paper.

reactionary force serving the interests of the ruling class of the old feudal society, but after all it has to be studied carefully in order to oppose it successfully. This is the intellectual background which led to the founding of the Institute for the Study of World Religions (*Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiusuo*) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Peking. The institute was established on a personal directive of Mao Tse-tung in 1964, with the aim of criticizing religion and advocating atheism.³ After being closed during the Cultural Revolution, the institute resumed its work in 1977 and remains to this day the most influential Chinese institution to deal with religion. It did not remain the only one, as we shall see immediately.

The above remarks on the historical background of religious studies in China should illustrate one important point: The concept of religion is a Western import into China, as is religion as a focus of research. Although research into religion is dependent on Western influences, it derives, however, not from the Western tradition of religious studies, but from intellectual traditions which are more or less critical of religion, if not anti-religious. This is a crucial difference to the history of religions in the West, which has one of its historical roots in Christian theology and endeavours to understand and explain religious phenomena without criticizing them. The dissimilar intellectual ancestry of religious studies in China and in the West led to different focuses of interest and, at the same time, to different methodological standards, which might prove to be more important than political and ideological restrictions. This applies, of course, less to purely philological research than to historical studies and interpretations.

2. Institutions of religious research in the Peoples' Republik of China

Research into religion is carried out by a considerable number of Chinese scholars, but only a few of them are attached to academic institutions that formally specialize in this subject matter. On the academic level, institutionalized religious research is still very limited.

3) Information supplied by Chün-fang Yü.

2.1. Academic institutions

The most important of these institutions is the afore mentioned Institute for the Study of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Peking. It is important not only with regard to its scholarly output, but also politically, since the Academy of Social Sciences reports directly to the State Council, i.e. the Central Government, which gives its president a rank only slightly below that of a minister of state. The implications of this high rank in the political hierarchy are manifold: on the one hand it means that the Institute is more strictly controlled ideologically than most provincial or university institutes⁴; on the other hand, it entitles the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to take decisions without restrictions by local or provincial authorities. This latter point may be important for foreign scholars who want to do research in some part of China, where the local authorities are not entitled or not willing to grant permission.

The Peking Institute for the Study of World Religions has presently seven research sections: Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Confucianism and Principles of Religion, the latter dealing with theories and principles of Marxist critique of religion. Head of the Institute is at present Professor Kong Fan. The vice-president of the Academy, Professor Zhao Fusan, is also a renowned scholar of religion.

On the provincial level there are also Academies of Social Sciences, some of which have Institutes for Religious Research. To be named here are the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, specializing in the study of Christianity and Buddhism, the Xizang (Tibetan) Academy of Social Sciences, concentrating on Tibetan Buddhism, the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences (Islam), the Qinghai Academy of Social Sciences (Tibetan Buddhism, Islam), the Gansu Province Institute for the Study of Religion (Islam, Tibetan Buddhism), the Ningxia Academy of Social Sciences (Islam), the Shaanxi Academy of Social Sciences (Buddhism, Islam) and the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, where research concentrates on the religion of the various national minorities in South China. The Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences has no distinct institute for the study of religion, but there are several scholars who specialize in the subject.

4) For almost two decades director of the Institute had been Ren Jiyu, who advocated a purely Marxist approach towards religion, regarding the critique of religion as the main objective of studies of religion (c.f. his opening article in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 1, 1979, 9-12: "Pochu mixin, jiefang sixiang, fahui Makesizhuyi de zongjiaoxue" ["Do away with superstition, liberate thinking and promote the Marxist study of religion"]). As will be seen below, other members of the Institute exhibit much more openness for other views of religion, especially during the past few years.

There are also a few universities where the study of religion is institutionalized. The Sichuan University at Chengdu has an Institute of Religious Studies. It is a center of research in Taoism, but covers also other fields of religious studies. The University of Nanjing (Nanking) also has an Institute for the Study of Religion, mainly Christianity. Fudan University at Shanghai runs a program of religious research in its Department of Philosophy. The Department of Philosophy of the renowned Beijing (Peking) University has a Section of Religious Studies, and the same applies to the People's University in Peking.

Religious research is also done in many institutions which do not formally specialize in religion. The religions of the national minorities (which include Tibetan Buddhism, Islam and the religious traditions of smaller ethnic groups, especially in Southwest China) are dealt with in the various Institutes of National Minorities, the most important being the Central College of National Minorities at Peking.⁵ For various reasons many of these institutes welcome cooperation with foreign scholars. To date the religion of ethnic minorities seems to be the only realm where field-research in religion is officially allowed⁶ (in this case excluding Tibetans).

2.2. Religious institutions

After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) religious life in China gradually reemerged in public, and the various religious communities started to resume the training of their functionaries. Several Buddhist, Christian and Muslim theological colleges have been established since then, where quite a significant number of mostly younger people are being trained. There are also similar institutions for the Taoist clergy, but their number still seems to be rather limited.

These religious institutions, which are of course supervised by the government, but not restricted by Marxist ideology, are also places of religious re-

5) Research into religion is established at the following Colleges of National Minorities: Yunnan (in Kunming), Xinan [Southwest] (in Chengdu), Xibei [Northwest] (in Lanzhou), Zhongnan [Middle-South] (in Wuhan), Qinghai (in Xining), Guangxi (in Nanning), Xizang [Tibetan] (in Xianyang, Shanxi Province), as well as at the Chinese Centre for Research in Tibetology (in Peking).

6) Cf. Lauri Honko's report on Finnish-Chinese cooperation and fieldwork among the Southern Dong in Guangxi: *Newsletter of the Nordic Institute of Folklore*, 14, 2-3, October 1986.

search, and there is a considerable output of literature published by religious organizations. Although some of the research done in this context can compete with the scholarship of the academic institutions, it would not be advisable to the IAHR to enter into official contacts with these religious organizations. The IAHR should carefully avoid being misunderstood as a religious organization by the Chinese authorities, otherwise the slightest changes in the policy of the state toward religion would directly affect the position of the academic study of religion and international cooperation.

2.3. Chinese Society for the Study of Religion

As has been mentioned before, many scholars doing research in religion are not attached to institutions which have "religion" in their letterhead. This indicates that the study of religion (or history of religion, if one will) as a distinct academic discipline is still not well established in China.

There are efforts, however, to unite scholars and institutions doing research in religion. In 1979 a Chinese Society for the Study of Religion (*Zhongguo Zongjiaoxue Hui*) was created, but it did not develop significant activities. This was partly due to the fact that the society brought together not only academicians, but also religious organizations. Immediately after its foundation a conflict between religious leaders and orthodox Marxists arose over the role of Marxist ideology in the statutes of the society. Protagonists were the Anglican bishop Ding Guanxu from Nanjing, and Professor Ren Jiyu, then director of the Institute for the Study of World Religions. After the party leadership interfered in favour of the orthodox Marxist interpretation, religious leaders left the society, which after that was practically obsolete.⁷

Another nation-wide society seems to be more active. The Chinese Society for the Study of Atheism (*Zhongguo Wushenlunxue Hui*), which was founded also in 1979, held national conferences in 1981, 1983 and 1985.⁸ Chairman of the board of directors was again Ren Jiyu⁹, who was also president of the Chinese Society for the Study of Religion. The report of the 1985 meeting¹⁰ shows that discussions were actually more about religion than about atheism. The institutions responsible for the organization of the conference included the In-

stitute for the Study of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute of Religious Studies of Sichuan University. Obviously a good deal of what is called "study of atheism" in China would be named "theory of religion" in the West, and there is no clear-cut institutional demarcation between the two fields of research in China.

Formally the Chinese Society for the Study of Religion would be the right address for the IAHR to contact in China. One should bear in mind, however, that the society was originally intended to be a kind of united front of religious organizations. Ironically, the fact that this united front never really worked, may be advantageous for its cooperation with the IAHR.

After the IAHR Marburg conference was held in June 1988, new developments have taken place in the Chinese Association for the Study of Religion. In December 1988 a new constitution was approved and a new leadership elected. The society is located in the Institute for the Study of World Religions in Peking. Quite remarkably, the new constitution does not contain a single reference to the aim of criticizing religion or the propagation of atheism. On the other hand, cooperation with foreign institutions of religious research is explicitly mentioned as one of the main objectives of the society. As a result of various meetings and correspondence it is understood that the Chinese Association for the Study of Religion (*Zhongguo Zongjiaoxue Hui*) will apply for affiliation with the IAHR at the next opportunity.

3. Problems of religious research in China

For several reasons research on religion in China is subjected to a number of political and ideological restrictions. The matter is politically sensitive, both in terms of theory and with regard to empirical or historical research.

Ideologically, the evaluation of religion as a cultural and social phenomenon has been a much debated question. While orthodox Chinese marxists still regard religion as "the opium of the people", the actual policy of the party towards religions became more liberal after the Cultural Revolution. This also paved the way for a reappraisal of the role of religion and allowed for more discriminating views. During recent years a kind of "opium war" developed among Chinese scholars of religion, centering around the question whether religion always has to be considered as a negative force, that is, as "opium of the people".

7) Information provided by Yü Chün-fang.

8) Nothing is known to the writer about later conferences.

9) Cf. *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 2, 1983; 152 f.

10) Cf. *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 4, 1985; 148 f.

The historical and political context of these discussions, which have mostly been held under the label "Religion in the Socialist Period", is the astonishing persistence of religious life in presentday China. This caused the problem about how to deal correctly with this phenomenon in terms of ideology. A certain agreement has been reached that religion is to be regarded as a historical and social fact that not only still exists in China but will continue to exist for a long time in future. It is also acknowledged by some scholars that religion can have positive social functions, which should not be overlooked.¹¹ Although in the past few years, since 1984, there have been many indications that the theoretical discussions about religion seek to go beyond the limitations of Marxist interpretations, it is obvious that the matter is to be handled cautiously, as it is ideologically sensitive.¹²

Even more sensitive seems to be empirical research dealing with religious activities in contemporary China. There are no problems in studying Chinese religions historically, i.e. relating to the period earlier than the 20th century. It is somewhat more difficult for the period of the Republic and even more for the time after 1949. But it is almost impossible to do field-research in presentday Chinese religions, at least for foreign scholars. This applies above all for religious activities which develop outside the temples and monasteries open for tourists. To be sure, Chinese authorities and institutions of religious research watch carefully all kinds of religious activities, including so-called "feudal superstitions", i.e. popular religious practices like exorcism, spiritmediumism, divination and the like. But the results of this research are treated as a kind of state-secret, being circulated only internally (*neibu*) and not published. As has been mentioned before, the restrictions for foreign scholars in doing field research do not apply to the religions of some of the smaller national minorities, but certainly to religious life in Tibet and probably also to the Muslim communities.

11) See for instance the discussions on the 4th congress of the Chinese Society for the Study of Atheism: "Zhongguo wushenlun xuehui disici nianhui zai Chengdu zhaokai", *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 4, 1985; 148.

12) It is quite interesting that, while most articles in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* ("Studies in World Religions") are summarized in English, theoretical discussions as a rule are not.

4. Publications; focuses and methods of research

4.1. Publications

The bulk of religious research done and published by Chinese scholars focuses on the history of Chinese religions, or more correctly on the history of religions in China, which includes studies on Christianity, Islam and Manichaeism and of course Buddhism. An analysis of the articles in "Researches in World Religions" (*Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*) from 1979 through 1986, which has been made by Jordan Paper, reveals that 80% of them covered five topics: Buddhism (39%), Taoism (14%), Islam (10%), Minorities (9%) and Atheism, Socialism and Religion (8%). Most issues had one or two articles on Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism. Other religions, like Christianity, Hinduism or Judaism were treated occasionally.

Besides the afore mentioned journal "Researches in World Religions", which is edited by the Institute for the Study of World Religions, there are a few other journals dealing with religion. "Materials on World Religions" (*Shijie Zongjiao Ziliao*), published by the same institute, contains mostly translations from foreign languages. The Institute of Religious Studies of Sichuan University publishes a journal "Researches in Religious Studies" (*Zongjiaoxue Yanjiu*), which started as internal material in 1982, but is now said to be available to the public. Obviously, there are some more periodicals, two of which are known, but they are circulated only internally. Several religious associations publish their own journals: *Fayin* ("The Sound of Dharma", published by the Chinese Buddhist Association), *Zhongguo Daojiao* ("Chinese Taoism"), *Tianfeng* ("Wind of Heaven", Chinese Catholic Association), *Zhongguo Musilin* ("Chinese Muslim").

As to book publications on religion, most of them deal with the history of Chinese religion in the context of the history of Chinese philosophy. The history of Buddhist philosophy is comparatively well covered, also the history of Confucianism, but there are still very few books about Taoism, although research on Taoism is obviously increasing. Even though the mutual influences of the three traditions are recognized and dealt with, there are no approaches which try to look at Chinese religion as a whole, either in history or at the present day.¹³ The only book which treats the history of Chinese religions in gen-

13) The importance of this approach was pointed out in Sung-hae Kim's paper for the conference.

eral is a re-edition of Wang Zhixin's *Zhongguo zongjiao sixiang dagang* ("Outline of the history of religious thought in China"), first published in 1933.¹⁴

There are currently some major publication projects, which show the great weight given to religious studies since the early 1980s, and which will certainly push forward future research in the history of Chinese religions. Beginning in 1984 a new edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon¹⁵ is being published, which is intended to be more complete and more accurate than the Japanese Taishō Edition now in use among scholars of Chinese Buddhism. The project is planned to be finished by 1995. There are also efforts to publish the Tibetan canon, both Tanjur and Kanjur, in regular book format, each to comprehend about 150 volumes.¹⁶

There are also important projects in the field of Taoism. The Taoist canon is being published in its entirety. Furthermore the Institute for the Study of World Religions is preparing an annotated bibliography of the Taoist canon (*Daozang tiyao*)¹⁷, a major research project, which will probably boost Taoist studies in the future.¹⁸

4.2. Theory and methods

Until very recently religious research in China took no notice of work done abroad. For this reason there is still a considerable gap between what is understood by "religious studies" ("history of religions", "Religionswissenschaft") in the West and in China. What is known to Chinese authors about Western theories of religion mostly belongs to the 19th century, such as theories about animism, totemism or fetishism. While historical studies on religion are comparatively well developed, there is nothing like comparative religion, or phenomenology, or anthropology of religion. Even sociology of religion practically does not exist, except in terms of Marxism.

- 14) Reissued Shanghai, 1988. The book had already been reprinted in Taiwan in 1970.
- 15) *Zhonghua Dazang Jing, Hanwen Bufen* ("China Tripitaka, Section of Chinese Texts"). Cf. *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 4, 1984; 1-14.
- 16) Information provided by Julia Ching's paper.
- 17) Cf. *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 2, 1984; 1-29; 3, 1984; 84-101, where there is a preliminary report and a few samples are prepublished.
- 18) Professor Julian Pas has kindly informed me of an article by Professor Jan Yün-hua: "Recent Chinese research publications on religious studies", *The turning of the tide - religion in China today*, ed. by JULIAN F. PAS, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1988. Unfortunately, the article was not available directly at the time of writing.

There are signs, however, that things are changing. Book publications like the "Dictionary of Religion" (*Zongjiao cidian*)¹⁹, which was published under the direction of the Institute for the Study of World Religions and deals with all major religions, indicate an increasing interest in religion as a universal phenomenon. Quite recently two Western "classics" of the study of religions have been translated into Chinese: Father Wilhelm Schmidt's "Vergleichende Religionsgeschichte"²⁰ and Malinowski's "Magic, science and religion and other essays".²¹

Even more significant are recent efforts to take notice of contemporary Western approaches in religious studies. In 1986 Yan Changyou published an article on Bellah's concept of American civil religion.²² Most remarkable is a book by Chen Linshu "Principles of religious studies"²³, published in the same year. The author, who is a member of the Institute of Religious Studies at Sichuan University, gives a systematic exposition of various approaches of research in religion, making extensive use of publications in English (including translations from other Western languages) and Russian. He does not hesitate to admit, that Communism under certain conditions can turn into forms which are very similar to religion, as for example the worship of single individuals or the prayer-like repetition of political slogans.²⁴

Quite recently a review of contemporary Western sociology of religion by Peng Yue and Zheng Tianxing²⁵ stressed the importance of an "objective" investigation into religion, which has to avoid judgements of value, that in-

- 19) First published Shanghai, 1981.
- 20) Translated under the title *Yuanshi zongjiao yu shenhua* ("Original religion and mythology"), Shanghai, 1987. Some may wonder why the Chinese choose the work of a S.V.D. missionary to be translated.
- 21) Translated as *Wushu, kexue, zongjiao yu shenhua* ("Witchcraft, science, religion and mythology"), Shanghai, 1987.
- 22) YAN CHANGYOU, "Meiguo guominzongjiao' guanjian", ("A bird's eye view of American civil religion"), *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 3, 1986; 102-110.
- 23) *Zongjiaoxue yuanli*, Chengdu, 1986.
- 24) The case is exemplified with Stalin and in China with Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four". The latter turned Marxist theory into a kind of religious dogma, propagated asceticism, negated scientific knowledge and practiced the reading of texts (probably referring to the so-called Red Book with sentences of Mao Tse-tung) much in the same way as the recitation of religious books (p. 329). Already in the foreword to the first issue of *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* in 1979 had Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four" been accused of having deluded the people in much the same way as religions do.
- 25) *Guowai zongjiao shehuixue guankui sikao* ("A bird's eye view of sociology of religion abroad"), *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, 2, 1988; 143-51. Both authors are members of the Institute for the Study of World Religions.

evitably add a subjective element into the treatment of religion. The authors admit that religion is after all a social "fact" that is to be investigated empirically as any other social phenomenon²⁶, which sounds quite Durkheimian and moves a big step away from the traditional Marxist approach towards religion.

Publications like these indicate that the spirit in which research on religion is done in China has considerably changed during the past decade. Limitations set by Marxist ideology are being challenged, not only in internal discussions, but also in open publications. Many Chinese scholars are eager to get acquainted with foreign approaches to religion and to do research unrestricted by ideological limitations. This does not mean that Marxist interpretations are going to be neglected, but it demonstrates that Marxist theories are no longer regarded as a kind of religious dogma. One can expect that the integration of traditional Chinese interpretations and Western approaches of religion will produce results which might be fruitful also to religious theory outside of China. It would, therefore, benefit not only the advancement of religious studies in China, but also the development of religious studies in general, to foster closer institutional contacts between Chinese scholars of religion and the international community, as represented by the IAHR. Circumstances have never been so favourable to this goal before, and nobody knows how long they will continue to exist in the future.

5. Prospects for further developments and co-operation

The case of religious studies in China could in many ways be promoted by closer contacts with the international community of scholars of religion. These contacts should develop on all levels, be they personal or institutional, bilateral or international. During the past years bilateral agreements of cooperation between the Academia Sinica and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on the one hand and the respective academic organizations in Western countries on the other have been reached, which usually open the way for foreign scholars to do research in China, and for Chinese scholars to go abroad. Understandably, to the Chinese authorities cooperation in the field of science and technology ranks much higher than in the realm of historical research, let alone religious studies.

Nevertheless, on the basis of such agreements there has developed a certain measure of individual contacts between Chinese and foreign scholars also

26) *Ibid.*; 148.

in the field of research into religion. Unfortunately, the linguistic problem is still a major one. Foreign scholars usually do not speak Chinese, except for sinologists, and only very few Chinese scholars speak English. As a consequence it is mostly foreign sinologists or historians of religion specializing in China who have established contacts with Chinese institutions and individual scholars. There is still much to be done to bring *Religionswissenschaft* as a whole to the consciousness of the Chinese academic world.

The working-group on China at the Marburg conference discussed several strategies to intensify international cooperation with China. This would not only benefit Western scholars who are doing research on Chinese religions, but also advance the institutionalization of religious studies in that country. Furthermore, it should be regarded as a goal in itself to integrate the scholars of one of the richest cultural traditions into the international academic community.

5.1. Holding an international conference in China

A good way to establish contacts with Chinese scholars and to promote the case of religious studies in China would be the organization of an international conference. The IAHR should try to form contacts with Chinese academic institutions which are prepared to hold such a conference in 1991. The best place would probably be either Peking or Shanghai.

We think that the theme of that congress should be such as to not confine participation to specialists of Chinese religions. Although, of course, the final decision about the theme has to remain with the Chinese organizers, it seems advisable to offer some suggestions, to show what kind of conference the IAHR has in mind. The working-group spent a good deal of time in formulating possible themes that can be adequately translated into Chinese, which is not an easy task. We came to the following three proposals:

- 1) Religious tradition: Unity and diversity
Zongjiao chuantong: Yi yu duo
- 2) The relation between ethnography and the study of religion
Minzuxue yu zongjiaxue zhi guanxi
- 3) Religious ritual and religious tradition
Zongjiao yishi yu zongjiao chuantong

5.2. *Exchange of scholars and postgraduates*

Holding an international conference in China could give a strong stimulus to the study of religion and its institutionalization in China. It is necessary, however, to support it by other measures, in order to make use of the momentum achieved and to turn it into a long-term process.

It seems essential to promote further personal contacts between Chinese and Western scholars. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as well as some of the academies on the provincial level have reached agreements with government institutions of most Western countries about the exchange of scholars and cooperation in joint research projects. Cooperation could be stimulated by inviting Chinese scholars to international conferences or guest lectures. It should be remembered that Chinese scholars of religion include also specialists of religions other than Chinese, e.g. Islam, Christianity, Tibetan and Indian religions and tribal religions.

The working-group agreed that it would be of utmost importance to encourage younger Chinese scholars to study Religionswissenschaft in countries where this discipline is well established. This would support the efforts made by the Chinese side to become more intimately acquainted with religious studies abroad. Given the fact that only the brightest of the younger scholars will be sent abroad, we can well expect many of them to be in influential positions in the future.

The difficulty is not that there are no younger Chinese scholars who are qualified or prepared to study, for example, in Toronto or Marburg, but that there are no funds. The IAHR should, therefore, encourage individual members or branch organizations to help Chinese junior scholars to get scholarships for studying abroad. Even just two or three of them could have a great effect on future developments.

Many religious institutions and organizations in the West offer grants for Chinese scholars and students to be trained abroad. The IAHR should welcome such efforts, but at the same time be aware that the study of religion as a non-theological discipline is not always well represented by religious institutions. Furthermore, it is essential to make clear to the Chinese authorities, that the academic study of religion in the West is not tied institutionally or ideologically to any religious organization. Otherwise, changes in the policy towards religion could also induce a notable setback in the study of religion.

5.3. *Joining the IAHR*

It would certainly be a significant step if Chinese scholars of religion would join the IAHR. There have already been representatives of the Institute for the Study of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences at the International Congresses of the IAHR in Winnipeg (1980) and Sydney (1985). Since then religious studies in China have further progressed. There are signs that there is a certain willingness to join the IAHR officially (see above). Given the uncertainties of the political factor one should perhaps not be too optimistic, but the present prognosis is good.

6. Further actions

On the part of the IAHR it is essential to improve personal contacts with Chinese scholars and institutions, the next step being the organization of an international conference in China. Of course, all members of the IAHR should help in strengthening ties with China. However, the working-group proposes that it continues its more specialized work by way of correspondence, in order to register and communicate developments in the study of religion in China. In this way the officers of the IAHR may be assisted in their task of promoting the international cooperation of all scholars doing research in religion.

... The question remains in any one country, which institution and which academic representatives are suitable partners for the IAHR. Generally speaking it is not religious authorities or organisations as such who are the organisational counterparts of the IAHR at national level, even though in some conditions they may be a determining factor in the institutional framework. It would be all too easy to enter a situation which is so dominated by a theological or an ideological concern that nothing is gained for the study of religion understood as a historical and comparative-systematic discipline. It is not easy to explain, in some quarters, that the study of religion is not itself a religious undertaking.

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