

**Current Issues in Religion and  
Politics III**

**Edited by Mario I. Aguilar**

**The People's Republic of China (PRC)  
and the Vatican:  
Prospects for Rapprochement**

**Hannah Smith**

**Working Papers of the Centre for the Study of Religion and  
Politics (CSRP) of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, UK**

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## Introduction to Current Issues in Religion and Politics 3

**Mario I. Aguilar**

### Preface

This series of papers under the title of Current Issues in Religion and Politics aims at presenting original research conducted at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP) of the University of St. Andrews. Papers edited and published have been prepared in the context of epistemological and contextual studies of religion and politics within specific contexts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and constitute work in progress. All research works falls within one or more of the models of religion and politics articulated within the next paragraphs.

**Paper 1** ‘Terrorist Reporting in the Swedish Media: Reinforcing an Oriental/Occidental Division?’ was prepared by Therese Rudebeck during an internship at the CSRP in 2011.<sup>1</sup> The paper is of importance because it highlights the political assumptions of terrorism in Sweden by the media fuelled by some political quarters such as the *Sverigedemokraterna* (Swedish Democrats, SD). Within this paper Rudebeck argues that the terrorist attacks on Stockholm on 11 December 2010 brought as a result a worrying assumption that terrorists were Islamists associated with foreign refugees living in Sweden and that the openness

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<sup>1</sup> Mario I. Aguilar and Therese Rudebeck, *Terrorist Reporting in the Swedish Media: Reinforcing an Oriental/Occidental Division?: Current Issues in Religion and Politics* volume I – Working Papers of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP), University of St. Andrews. St. Andrews: CSRP and Santiago, London and New York: Fundación Literaria Civilización, 2011.

of Sweden towards foreigners and asylum seekers constituted a risk to all Swedish citizens.

Rudebeck used the categories proposed by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* in order to suggest that uninformed quarters fuelled by the Swedish media were making a distinction between a political stable Europe (the Occident) and a world of terrorism arising out of Muslim immigration from troubled countries in the Middle East (the Orient).<sup>2</sup>

Rudebeck's research paper continues previous research conducted at the CSRP by Alissa Jones Nelson and makes available Swedish sources to an English-speaking audience within an 'empirical model' for the study of religion and politics.<sup>3</sup>

**Paper 2** 'Female Genital Mutilation in the Sudan: The Complexities of Eradication' explores the now internationally sanctioned as illegal practice of FGM in the Sudanese region. Any new research on the Sudan is important since South Sudan became independent in July 2009 and some cultural and religious practices associated with FGM had been imposed by traditional systems associated with Islam.

This paper explains the cultural form of FGM and the difficulties of eradicating this practice that requires girls to be cut in different forms before marriage and after birth. The practice not only brings physical pain and emotional inability to enjoy sexual relations but perpetuates a male dominated world and a

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition.

<sup>3</sup> Alissa Jones Nelson, 'Job in Dialogue with Edward Said: Contrapuntal Hermeneutics, Pedagogical Development and a New Approach to Biblical Interpretation', Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2009 published as *Edward Said, Contrapuntal Hermeneutics and the Book of Job: Power, Subjectivity and Responsibility in Biblical Interpretation*, London: Equinox, 2011.

social norm required by girls in order to acquire social acceptance and the role of wives and mothers. While the Sudanese state has signed international treaties banning this practice it has not ratified or enforce the end of the practice of FGM in Sudan. This paper recognises that cultural norms are slow to change but that it is possible and it suggests community involvement in educational programs and the re-employment of those practitioners who actually perform cuts on girls in the traditional setting. This is an important paper that speaks of the clash between traditional ritual practices and the contemporary politics of a globalized world.

**Paper 3** ‘The People’s Republic of China and the Vatican: Prospects for Rapprochement’ outlines some of the difficulties between the PRC and the Vatican. The Vatican as the state embracing the universal Roman Catholic community has, since 1949, continued advocating the appointments of bishops by the Pope and the need for bishops who perform the rite of Episcopal ordination to be in line with an apostolic succession in order to ordain subsequent bishops. It is a fact that the state laws of the PRC that have declared unlawful any religious practice that recognizes foreign authorities and religious powers outside China has not allowed this to happen.

This paper shows some signs of optimism due to Pope Benedict’s efforts but the reality is that Sino-Vatican relations provide a case-study of religion and politics which is unlikely to be resolved very soon. Thus, this paper remains central to contemporary discussions on religion and politics because it does not stress its lack of centrality for a secularised European world; on the contrary, this paper stresses the importance of understanding contemporary religion in order to understand China’s contemporary politics.

## **Preliminary Considerations and Theoretical Issues regarding Contemporary Research in Religion and Politics<sup>4</sup>**

**Research on Religion and Politics:** there is a need to move further from the common assumption that either research on religion and politics is exciting or interesting (academic colleagues) or that religion has nothing to do with politics (taxi driver). The constitutional model of the U.K. where the monarch is both the head of state and the head of the established church tells us otherwise.

**Research in Context:** research on religion and politics requires a social context, with the stress on the social because it is within social groups and communities that narratives and normative statements about rules, be they religious or political take place (I refer here to the ongoing work within the School of International Relations on ‘rules’, ‘force’ and other topics).<sup>5</sup> As I have already stated in my 2002 work research in theology and religious studies have more to do with each other than what is usually acknowledged.<sup>6</sup> Theology as a human narrative about God centres itself on the existence of the divine while religious studies or the study of religion in general examines the human manifestations of that divine

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these ideas have been taken from Mario I. Aguilar, ‘Models of Religion and Politics’, paper presented to the seminar of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP) on 5 October 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Mario I. Aguilar, ‘Truth Commissions and Rules: Justice and Peace’, in Anthony F. Lang Jr. and Amanda Russell Beattie (eds.), *War, Torture and Terrorism: Rethinking the Rules of International Security*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 162-173.

<sup>6</sup> Mario I. Aguilar, *Current Issues on Theology and Religion in Latin America and Africa*. Lewiston, N.Y. and Lampeter, U.K.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

existence as understood by human communities that shape their lives with rules, rites and celebrations that express the presence and action of God in the world.

**Diverse Contexts:** Normative forms of theology reflect a particular social context that varies and Christian communities have to mediate their own community rules with those of political systems and other social groups. It is interesting if not amusing that after 9/11 a clear interest in Islam has provided the ever increasing possibility of diversity on the face of religious fundamentalism and the growth of religious fervour among faith communities following Islam in the East as well as in the West. Among those responses: the U.K. advocated in 2006 a model of cultural diversity in which faith communities are very much part of the nation-building of political architects; France instead banned religious symbols in public places as to show respect and inclusiveness to all; Canada authorised the formation of sharia courts; the United States rallied faith communities under a rhetoric of nationalism and war.

**Research as interpretive project:** any research in religion and politics requires the possibility that there is a limitation to the interpretation of data, there is a hermeneutical aim rather than a cognitive one, and there is a diversity of opinions rather than a normative/objective one. The myth of ‘objectivity’ in the study of religion disappears.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mario I. Aguilar, ‘Introduction’ in *Current Issues on Theology and Religion in Latin America and Africa*. Lewiston, N.Y. and Lampeter, U.K.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

**Research as a multi-disciplinary effort:** several disciplines look at the same social or divine reality with different methodological assumptions and academic tools. While there is the need for specificity and disciplinary ‘correctness’ there is also the need for multi-disciplinary conversations recognising at all time that perspectives would be different and that disciplinary assessments are limited but not limiting.

### **Models in the Study of Religion and Politics**

**The Use of Models.-** Models are heuristic devices, tropes, that allow researchers to speak and connect. Models do not dictate social action; however help researchers to communicate ideas about social action. They provide a language across disciplines that sometime connect disciplinary languages, other times transcend disciplinary languages. Models have been used mainly in the social sciences, however lately also within biblical studies through the so-called socio-scientific approaches to the biblical text.<sup>8</sup>

**Models ad intra.-** These models suggest a specificity for theology and political science in which a single disciplinary methodology is assumed. A theological model presumes for example that theology and its predicaments assess social facts and social groups from a more normative ecclesial paradigm; a political science model presumes that political science has certain paradigms that are non negotiable to be tested in context. These ad intra models are usually found in the

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Philip Esler and Ronald Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: Social-Scientific Approaches to the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009.

faith communities that have to 'negotiate' social action with others and in doing so rely on given canonical paradigms. Ad intra models look from the inside to the outside be it from a canonical standpoint or from an individual existentialist paradigm. The 'we' and 'I' are predominant modes of existence and subsequently of research.

**Models ad extra.**- These models suggest a change in mode of existence and 'they' becomes a predominant mode of existence. In terms of a Durkheimian world research on religion and politics remains a 'social fact' and issues of 'organic solidarity' and cultural difference a *modus vivendi*. The researcher focuses on a subject of research and while there is never the possibility of objective truths and singular paradigms given and accepted the subject of research is 'out there'. That location of the subject provides a stronger possibility of multi-disciplinary research. The self-reflexivity does not disappear but the possibility increases of a dialogical conversation between partners in research.

**Research Output.**- Within the use of models is important not to unify research results, a danger that arises out of team work and common reports. Instead, the single disciplinary of a multi-disciplinary approach requires research statements that include common outcomes and diverse singular outcomes that could be contradictory at times. The quality of the output lies on the ongoing multi-disciplinary discussion rather than in the common, unified and agreed conclusions.

## Examples of Models of Research

**Choice model:** The researcher makes a choice if to include religion or politics within a larger social grouping in society. A theologian would include religion as a factor within research in society while it could be that an economist or an anthropologist decides to leave out questions about faith communities or religious organisations within a larger study of a social group. For example, the latest book by Tomás Moulian, *Socialismo del siglo XXI: La quinta vía* omits any mention of the contribution of religion within a future theoretical shaping of a socialist society in Latin America but acknowledges that among the few contributions by social groups in shaping Latin American society comes from the Christian communities.<sup>9</sup>

**Necessity model:** The researcher expresses social needs within contemporary research, thus takes whatever has been outlined in the aims and objectives of the research project without room for changes in language and object of research. This is a more scientific model that sometimes relies more on statistics and numerical data than on heuristic devices to express diversity, change and anomalies.

**Normative model:** The researcher assumes given canonical paradigms and assesses social action ad intra outlining the usefulness of data related to those canons rather than the possibility of opening new frontiers within research. This

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<sup>9</sup> Tomás Moulian, *Socialismo del siglo XXI: La quinta vía*. Santiago: LOM, 2000.

model not only operates within the faith communities but also remains part of the normative academic ancestry where those who have studied under a particular school of thought take their own paradigms and assesses social difference in relation to norms of what is possible and what is not possible.

**Empirical model:** The interpretation of data remains secondary to the data and the outcomes remain unified without expressing statistical misconceptions or disagreements.

**Theological model:** The centrality of the divine remains a characteristic of this model. Theological narratives and canonical expressions of authority guide the research and implant data with a guided hermeneutical reading.

**Neo-structural model:** The structures of the mind or of society are explored and connected in a manner worth of Claude Levi-Strauss but without assuming universal conclusions of method or shape.<sup>10</sup> This model remains structuralist but with a human face and certainly trying to avoid any accusations of orientalism.

**Constitutive model:** An inclusive model that allows a central place for religion and politics within the research project and asks questions of one and the other.

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<sup>10</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

**Regulatory model:** A model that combines the constitutive with the possibility of policy making within contemporary society. Within this model research aims at providing recommendations on religion and politics within society.

**Selective model:** Within this model the researcher selects to include, or to ignore, religion and politics and bases its research outcomes within a faith community or a social governing body.

**Substantive model:** The researcher interprets change from the point of view of the unchangeable within society and provides possibilities of change and diversity as the less favoured outcomes within research.

## **The People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Vatican: Prospects for Rapprochement**

**Hannah Smith**

Sino-Vatican relations represent a complex diplomacy challenge for both sides. The state-state relations are loaded with ideological disagreements, policy objectives and cultural differences and are further complicated by the Vatican's stance as both a sovereign state and a religious organisation. The Vatican by nature intervenes in the domestic arena of other states, overriding certain elements of their sovereign jurisdiction and though not without its limits, the Chinese remain uncomfortable with this interference. Nevertheless, Catholicism in China is growing, and despite ideological stalemates, the relationship between the Vatican and the PRC has progressed. As China grows in influence within the international system, projecting its capabilities and offering an alternative model for development, China and the Vatican continue facing each other. This paper explores the prospects of rapprochement based on the actors' self-interest. It argues that, despite differences, there exists the possibility for rapprochement, though it is still limited.

## **Chinese Attitudes to Religion**

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) attitude to religion rests on ideological foundations. In concurrence with the aims of Marxist-Leninism/Maoism the CCP seeks the eradication of religion as its overall goal (Leung, 2001, p. 658). Though five official religions are tolerated in the PRC (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism, see Luerhmann, p. 493) and the Chinese constitution protects freedom of religious belief (Bush, 1970, p. 15) there exists an ideological stalemate between the CCP and a variety of world religions. Ideological standpoints with religions were extremely prevalent in Maoist thought which can still bear certain influence affirming notions that religion serves as a tool of Western imperialism designed to divide China (Leung, 2005, p. 365). The multiplicity of religious groups operating in China and their proliferation threatens the CCP, both ideologically and organisationally. Thus, the stronger the voice of religious groups, the more the CCP has to shout. For example, recent crackdowns on Christian worship on Easter Sunday demonstrate that the Party is willing to take a hard stance on religious activities not permitted by the state.<sup>11</sup>

The Chinese relationship with the Catholic Church, as with other religious groups, has been full of conflict. Catholicism was first introduced to China in AD 635 by Nestorian Priests working as merchants. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Franciscan friars attempted to spread the Catholic faith (Chan, p. 815); however, a controversy over a papal edict forbidding the practise of Chinese rites resulted in the Qing emperors expelling the Jesuits from China (Lai, p. 48). Nevertheless, the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/04/fears-of-uprisings-prompt-china%E2%80%99s-easter-crackdown>

Jesuit Matteo Ricci's arrival in China in 1583 solidified Catholicism in China. The growth of Catholicism led to the eventual establishment of Vatican ties with Beijing in 1922 before 1949 and the centralization of China by Chairman Mao when it was a common occurrence that the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church were occupied by foreigners. With the CCP civil war's victory in 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China's relations with the Vatican in particular and foreign influences in general turned sour. With Maoist fears of imperialism "foreign priests were expelled, and many native ones fled overseas" (Chan, pp. 815-816). The CCP launched the 'Three Self Movement' (self-government, self-support and self-propagation) in order to "sever the Church's ties with the Vatican" (Lai, p. 48) and to pursue the PRC's ideological stance on self-sufficiency. Laity and believers were purged during the Cultural Revolution with extreme physical and ideological violence.

In 1957 the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) was established staffed with cadres from the Religious Affairs Bureau. This organisation is not a church in and of itself; rather it is an arm of the Party, ensuring that Catholic groups follow certain formalities and procedures. The main organisational aim is to sever Catholic allegiance to Rome and to this effect the CPA has appointed many Bishops of its own accord ignoring Roman Catholic Canon Law with states that Bishops must be appointed by the Holy See – showing a clear attempt by the CCP to avoid external influence (Leung, 2001, p. 658).

The establishment of the CPA fostered a split in China's Catholic population creating the 'Open Church', an organization that by acting in accordance with the CPA was patriotic and loyal to the CCP rather than Rome.

Resistance to this nationalistic development the 'Underground Church' was formed, a group remaining loyal to the Pope (Maheu, 2005, p. 10). Priests in the Underground Church have been reported to face harsh treatment from the CCP including arrests, imprisonment and abuse (Congressional Executive Commission on China). Realistically, the division has been theoretical only coming to light under pressure from 'anti-Vatican' movements. Despite those pressures and by the end of the 1990's it was claimed that most priests and bishops, even within the CPA, had undergone some sort of reconciliation with the Holy See (Leung, 2001, p. 658).

### **The Growth of Catholicism**

Despite the split, and the inhospitable environment to those loyal to Rome, Catholicism has grown in China. Lai claims that in 2003, there were 5 million Catholics in China, making them the 4<sup>th</sup> largest religious group (Lai, p. 44); other estimates claim that there are as many as 12 million Roman Catholics in the PRC (Macheu, 2005). What can be said with certainty is that the "proliferation of religions [including Catholicism] signifies the success of religious idealism over dialectic materialism" (Leung, 2005, p. 361). In 1986, there were 30 Catholic Churches in China; by 1992, this figure had reached 3,900 (Leung, 1998, p. 136). In a period with strained party membership (1/10<sup>th</sup> of members were prosecuted for committing economic crimes) the rise in religious popularity is a concern for the CCP (Lai, p. 361) and alternative voices are burdensome for the Party as it navigates the PRC through its reform period.

China's recent opening and modernisation are widely cited as the principle reason for increased religious activity. Deng Xiaoping's reforms created unforeseen economic growth and development so that "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has led to China eclipsing Japan as the world's second largest economy and holding growth rates of around 10% per annum.<sup>12</sup> Deng's Open Door Policy has led to China's increased projection in the international system. By 1971 the PRC gained its seat in the United Nations Security Council – affording it permanent 'five status' and subsequent veto powers. In 2001 China was invited to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and marking China's growing international recognition the country hosted the 2008 Olympic Games.<sup>13</sup> With this modernisation Maoist ideology was eroded and as a result CCP's legitimacy rested on economic growth rather than on its communist cause; religion had filled the ideological void.

### **Turbulent Relations**

"Competing claims of authority, influence, and power" (Luehrmann, p. 492) dominate the Sino-Vatican relationship. With no official ties since 1950 relations have see-sawed between stalemates and promise. Cited by many, the seven gear gap between Taiwan enhancing its ties with the Holy See and Vatican reciprocation indicated that the Vatican was waiting for China. It has also been claimed that as Deng liberated priests and moved to consolidate his power, Pope John Paul II was hoping to strengthen ties and maintain influence on the PRC (Luehrmann, p. 494).

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12427321>

<sup>13</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/BUSINESS/asia/12/10/china.wto/index.html>

The authority to consecrate Bishops remains the key issue in Sino-Vatican relations. Beijing stresses avoidance of external interference claiming that the responsibility lies with the CPA. The Vatican points to Canon Law and the separation of Church and state, claiming that Bishops must be approved by the Pope himself (Luehrmann, p. 494). Beijing ordained several bishops without Papal approval, yet the 1980's saw some accommodation developing. The Vatican began to recognise bishops appointed by Beijing and the CCP "relaxed the requirement that all Catholics join the CPA" (Luehrmann, p. 494). The end of the 1990's saw a near agreement for Pope John Paul II to travel to China and preside over a mass at Beijing's temple of heaven; however, discussion ended after Beijing's ordination of 6 bishops without the Vatican's approval). Following this, 120 pre-revolutionary missionaries were canonized by Rome, on October, 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 – China's national Day. Beijing did not hide its anger.<sup>14</sup> The Papal transition to Benedict XVI presented a fresh opportunity to pursue improvement in Sino-Vatican relations. In 2005, a number of bishops ordained had both CPA and Vatican approval, yet the appointment of bishops became an issue again in 2006 with the Chinese appointment of a further 3 bishops without approval from the Holy See (Luehrmann, p. 495). There remains, however, with new Vatican leadership, prospects for rapprochement as Cardinal Zen (Hong Kong) has claimed that 85% of bishops in the Open Church have been approved by Rome (Luehrmann, p. 495).

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## **Problems and Incentives**

### **Taiwan**

Taiwan (Republic of China, ROC) split from mainland China in 1949 following CCP victory in the Civil war. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China many foreign states gradually shifted diplomatic recognition to Beijing that insisted that Taiwan was part of China under the 'One-China Policy'. This culminated with the PRC displacing the importance of Taiwan at the United Nations, in 1971 (Zhao, 2004, p. 4). The Vatican remains the only state in Europe that recognises the ROC. Relations between Taiwan and the mainland have been turbulent and crisis-filled. However, the 1990's (overlooking the Straits Crisis of 1995-1996) saw strong economic cooperation developing. Beijing, however, would not compromise on the 'One-China' issue. Public opinion supports reunification thus in order to maintain legitimacy the party cannot afford to take a soft line (Odgard, 2009, p. 191). The territorial stance on Taiwan goes back to a century of humiliation where from the Opium War until the close of WWII Chinese territory was disregarded by a series of imperialist powers, adding further conviction to their nationalistic stance (Callahan, 2004).

The PRC cannot afford to risk military action over the island of Formosa. Despite claiming that they would resort to force should Taiwan declare independence the US-Taiwan security guarantee makes this rhetoric an impossible reality. Rather, we have seen systematic attempts by Beijing to isolate Taiwan in the international arena. China courts states with aid, trade, and even assistance

through UN Peacekeeping Operations in order to get them to shift their diplomatic recognition the Beijing.<sup>15</sup>

For Beijing, distancing Taiwan from its only source of European recognition would be a substantial benefit for fostering Sino-Vatican relations, strengthening the ‘One-China’ policy and increasing domestic support. It is a zero-sum game. The Vatican would also see advantages, principally access and (limited) control of the number of Catholics in China.

Beijing’s “sensitivity” to the Taiwan issue became apparent when it refused to send delegates to Pope John Paul II’s funeral after Italy granted a visa to Taiwanese President Chen Shuibian (Luehrmann, p. 497). However, the Vatican’s stance on Taiwan also became clear at this point. Taiwan complained after President Chen was seated alphabetically as ‘Taiwan’ rather than ‘China’ and given a very brief tour of Rome (Luehrmann, p. 497). Despite the election of (lapsed) Catholic Ma Ying-Jeou to Taipei in 2003, Pope Benedict the same year turned down an invitation to visit Taiwanese celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Catholic Church in Taiwan, sending a representative instead (Luehrmann, p. 497).

Treating both, the PRC and Taiwan, as self interested actors it seems clear that the Vatican is willing to sacrifice diplomatic ties with Taiwan in order to tap into the Chinese ‘market’ whilst Beijing sees a political opportunity to strengthen its position against Taiwan regionally and enhance its power in the international system.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/?fa=view&id=18401>

## **External Influences**

The issue of external influences in domestic affairs remains a stumbling block for Sino-Vatican relations. Stemming from the ‘century of humiliation’ Beijing holds sovereignty as a prize possession and is highly critical of ‘interference’ in the domestic domain. The ‘unique authority’ (Luehrmann, p. 497) Catholics give to the Papacy in Rome becomes problematic in this respect as the CCP continues to harbour suspicion against outside forces. Article 36 of the PRC’s Constitution goes as far as to prohibit religious affairs from being directed by foreign powers (Luehrmann, p. 497). Further, Beijing insists that political ties should be improved before discussing religious elements; however, it is clear that for the Vatican to extend a hand to Beijing papal authority must be confirmed.

Central to the fears of external influence stemming from the Vatican are Chinese concerns with stability. Deng’s reforms of the late 1970’s and 1980’s saw the erosion of traditional communist ideology as rhetoric such as “to get rich is glorious”, expression that flowed from a national language of capital.<sup>16</sup> CCP’s legitimacy became primarily based on economic growth. Growth requires stability, both inside and out, thus Chinese fears of dissent and separatism are linked to fears of CCP’s survival. China faces many separatist issues other than Taiwan, prominently Tibet and the Xingjian province. Both of these regions are characterised religiously, with Buddhist monks and Muslim communities respectively, and have fought hard for autonomy. The role of religion in fostering feelings of separation and organising dissent is unclear yet Beijing remains wary. Considering Pope John Paul II’s role in Poland fostering the collapse of

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<sup>16</sup> [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06\\_06/b3970072.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_06/b3970072.htm)

Communism in Eastern Europe “Beijing authorities need to be convinced that the mission of the church is religious, rather than political” (Luehrmann, p. 498).

### **Consecration of Bishops**

The consecration of Bishops is an issue of influence and control which (as previously discussed) proves to be a thorn in the side of Sino-Vatican relations. The Vatican insists that bishops must be approved by Rome yet Beijing resents the interference and has previously ordained several bishops without approval from the Holy See. The issue is one of leverage, who commands the most, and it seems both sides have reached a stalemate. Should diplomatic ties be forged, the issue of those ordained without papal approval would remain. A sub-class of clergy could emerge creating a schism within the Catholic community. Furthermore, Canon Law states that those ordained without papal approval (and the ordaining) ought to be excommunicated, a stance that would need to be clarified by the Holy See for diplomatic ties to be formed (BBC News, 2010).

Along with concerns over religious persecution, the Vatican views the CPA as seeking independence from Rome (Luehrmann, p. 499), as an arm of the Party and not a church in and of itself because the political nature of the organisation is clear. The Vatican is concerned with CPA’s attempts to force members to join and with frequent crackdowns on the Underground Church. Nevertheless, there remains scope for cooperation. Pope Benedict claimed that CPA bishops were validly ordained but illegitimate and called for a unified Catholic Church in China. Although concerns remain over bishops registered without papal approval it is estimated that fewer than 10 Bishops in China are not

in some sort of communion with Rome (Luehrmann, p. 500). As for the stalemate over who has the power to officially ordain them there are certain models to be followed. Fellow communist state Vietnam has adopted a system where 3 nominees are initially selected by the government and those names are then sent for papal approval. A similar nomination system occurs in parts of Switzerland, Germany and Austria (Luehrmann, p. 500).

### **Gains and Losses**

Before any further progress is made both actors would have to negotiate the gains and losses which could stem from the establishment of Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations. Whilst establishing ties could prove fruitful it could also prove problematic for both actors – hence the reason why off-the record negotiations have been occurring for so long at such a slow pace and further action remains full of trepidation.

It seems the principle aim of the Vatican is to enhance the freedom of worship in the PRC by ensuring that religious organisations hold allegiance to the Holy See rather than to the national party or the state. By being officially recognized by the state the Vatican also sets to gain from the number of Catholics (and their rise) in China. This is particularly important at a time when the Vatican is losing members in Europe, a phenomenon enhanced by the success of Protestantism in the developing world (Luehrmann, p. 500). Whilst there is an undeniable religious element to these aims there is also a political one. The Vatican can be viewed as a self-interested actor fighting for its legitimacy and survival. It is claimed that the Vatican will lose “if it is perceived to be sacrificing

moral principles (by ending its ties with Taiwan) for the sake of political gain” (Luerhmann, p. 500).

China also has to balance potential gains and losses. As previously discussed, the further political isolation of Taiwan is an overwhelming incentive for the PRC for establishing solid relations with Rome. Moreover, as part of its ‘charm-offensive’ Beijing is attempting to establish solid sets of relations with many Catholic countries in Central America. Not only would relations with the Vatican ease this process but Beijing may persuade many of them to switch diplomatic recognition away from Taipei to Beijing (Luehrmann, p. 500). Along with this, should the Church flourish under Vatican support, it could also help alleviate some of the socioeconomic problems that China struggles with domestically such as health care, environmental degradation and a growing wealth disparity. In fact, Chinese religious sisters are well known for becoming doctors in clinics dealing with the elderly, lepers and patients suffering from HIV/AIDS (Luehrmann, p. 501).

However, there are problems with any Chinese reconciliation with the Vatican that go beyond stalemates over authority and influence discussed above. Beijing’s sovereignty would be compromised should Sino-Vatican relations be established, something contrary to how China approaches global politics. For example, along with the issue over the consecration of bishops a papal representative would be established in Beijing sending information to Rome regarding the status of the Church (Luehrmann, p. 501). It is unclear as to whether or not Beijing will be willing to sacrifice this element of sovereignty for other political gain. Similarly, the size (and potential authority) of a united Church in

China could prove to be a challenging force to the CCP's authority. Not only would potential exist for clashes between the CCP and the Catholic Church but also for the Church to act as a mechanism through which voices of dissent could be aired - the destabilising potential is evident.

### **Conclusions**

It is clear that with the Papal transition from John Paul II to Benedict XVI there was a renewed scope for a move towards the establishment of improved Sino-Vatican relations. Along with overtures from officials and a changing international order it is notable that both actors are inherently self-interested and would consider pursuing diplomatic relations if they provide enough gain.<sup>17</sup> Although other elements, such as Taiwan, remain a zero-sum game, the 'Vietnam model' demonstrates how there is room for negotiation in other aspects of the relationship including the appointment of Catholic bishops.

Beijing remains wary of Vatican influence and the Vatican remains distrustful of the CPA. In order for diplomatic-relations to succeed an element of trust and predictability would be required something that has been lacking so far. Whether this could be established between two ideologically different actors located at opposite ends of the religious and political spectrum remains to be seen. Similarly, there is little to suggest that formal diplomatic recognition between Beijing and the Holy See would alleviate the difficulties faced by many Catholics in China.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://en.huanqiu.com/opinion/commentary/2010-05/531147.html>

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