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After several decades of religious renewal, China witnessed a sudden change in the past two years. The 19th Party Congress in October 2017, which changed the constitution and indefinitely extended the term in office of President Xi Jinping, adopted severe anti-religious measures, including the Sinicization (read Marxification) of religion, supervision by the CCP United Front Department, patriotic re-education of the clergy, and exclusion of minors from religious education and worship. One million Uyghur Muslims have been detained in internment camps in Xinjiang.

Whether to oppose or co-opt religion has always been a major question for the Chinese state. Although pre-modern rulers reached varying conclusions, they generally perceived the issues of religious policy as religious endorsement, political loyalty, and popular adhesion. In more recent times, engineering modernity became the main objective. The Republic of China pursued iconoclasm, temple destructions, and persecutions in that spirit, foreshadowing what was to come under the People's Republic and the Cultural Revolution.

International relations and sovereignty are important dimensions of Chinese religious policy today, especially bringing foreign religious organisations under the authority of the Communist Party and regulating the religious activities of foreigners in China. Cases in point are the recent agreement between Beijing and the Vatican, concerns over US sponsorship of Protestant movements, and claims that Xinjiang Muslims maintain links to Islamist groups abroad.

The capacity of religious communities to propose alternative societal models answers the dreams of many but poses a threat to the CCP. Today a well-off middle class is asking whether there can be more to a meaningful life than ideology and materialism. Given their power of mobilisation in the age of social networking, this is a question of major concern to the state.

Thank you very much, Thierry, for this kind introduction. Let me then start with a couple of introductory remarks on the state-religion relationship in China, first at present and secondly how it was envisaged in the recent and remoter past.

After several decades of religious renewal in post-Mao Zedong China and especially after the opening of Deng Xiaoping, a renewal that enjoyed a large degree of tolerance from the government, we have seen a sudden change in the last two years. The reasons for this change I think will ultimately be recognised as largely political, but I leave that to my co-panellist to discuss later. Let me just start by putting the religious question into perspective.

The question moved to the top of the agenda in 2016, when Xi Jinping convened and personally presided over a conference on the place of religion in China. This was the first time that such a high-level conference had been convened in 10 years. That something was afoot was confirmed a year later by the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 which, as you know, decided on a number of far-reaching constitutional changes, including the indefinite prolongation in office of President Xi Jinping. What is interesting is that along with these major political decisions, religion appeared once again at the heart of the political agenda of China. What were the measures introduced in 2017? The first and the most talked-about is the Sinicization of religion. The use of this term has interesting implications, to which I will return later. The second measure was to place religions under the authority of the United Front Department, the organization within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that oversees and keeps under surveillance civil society and elite groups that are non-CCP, together with their overseas extensions. This organisation was also given authority over ethnic minorities and religious affairs, with *their* respective overseas extensions. One can understand what this meant for the situation of religions in China. The third point was patriotic education; priests had to undergo training in Marxism, patriotism, and Chinese culture. The last item may seem surprising when applied to Confucian organisations and Daoist priests as a way of ensuring "Sinicization." Arguably, there is nothing more representative of Chinese culture than Confucianism and Daoism, which cannot be said of Marxism. We understand then that Sinicization actually means to ensure conformity with Marxist ideology and socialist values. Liang Xingyang, for example, became a model Daoist after extensive re-education. Like the model

workers of the 1950s, he became an important public and media figure who speaks out in defence of China in international controversies over questions like the Chinese expansion in the South China Sea. On the religious front, Liang let it be known that Daoists did not believe in heaven or the afterlife and was therefore compatible with socialist values. Furthermore, Daoism was not suitable for children. If Daoism was not suitable for children, they had to be protected from early indoctrination. This is in reference to another policy decided by the Party Congress, that minors would not be given access to religious education or worship activities. Of course, with regard to foreign religions like Christianity and Islam, the question of Sinicization appears in a different light. Historically, this had long been an issue regarding the Indian-derived Buddhist religion in China. It usually remained an undercurrent, but occasionally broke to the surface in the form of nativist hostility to Buddhism. At present, Christians still largely organise their own Sinicization, training sessions, and re-education. As for Islam, China did not take such chances. As widely reported, one million Uyghur Muslims are now in detention in internment camps in what is officially known as the Autonomous Uyghur Region of Xinjiang, their native area. Mosques are obliged to fly the national flag and provide training to children in Chinese language and culture. After denying the existence of the internment programme in the face of questioning by a United Nations Human Rights panel, China changed its discourse and legalised the system. Henceforth the camps exist and their prisoners are said to be legally detained.

More measures continued to be taken. In February 2018, new guidelines were issued, emphasizing that Chinese religions should find their inspiration in traditional Chinese culture. This is a well-tested method of de-sacralisation, already practised after the Cultural Revolution. Temples were no longer converted into factories or police stations; they became museums to be visited as part of China's cultural heritage, instead of places of worship. Similarly, religious doctrine was to be re-interpreted in the light of guidelines issued by the CCP. In April this year, a white paper on religion in China was published. It explains that control measures taken against individual religions aim at protecting the religious freedom of all, echoing an argument often made by French secularists. The white book further specifies that civil servants and Communist Party members are forbidden any form of religious activity, participation in worship, or visits to temples. They are liable to prosecution on charges of corruption for such acts, considered a breach of their engagement as communists and exemplary atheists.

To measure the potential for social antagonism inherent in these policies, it is useful to remember for a moment what drove the renewal of religion in post-Maoist China in the first place. One big issue was the question of values. A century and a half of disorientation and the systematic destruction of traditional values had left a troubled void. Perhaps, also, a need for a moral compass, especially in the light of government negligence, despite its impressive achievements in other areas, in such matters of societal concern as consumer protection, the environment, or food and drug safety. Other reasons for being drawn to religion included a desire for diversity in self-expression, beliefs, and practices in a society constrained by uniformity and thought control. Linked to this was the identity-building aspect of religious communities sharing common ideals and aspirations, a way of affirming and protecting a personal sphere in the face of an intrusive state. Again, religion provided an outlet for social engagement, for taking initiatives in support of education, charity, the poor, and the excluded. This was an area in which the state, including the CCP, traditionally accorded religion a useful function in society. Finally, certain religious doctrines held a clear attraction by contrast with the lived reality. Take, for example, the Buddhist and Christian doctrines of universal justice and equity – founded on laws that applied everywhere and equally to all, or the egalitarian character of many religious communities, at a time where growing inequality gaps in income distribution and privilege are wellsprings of social resentment in China as in the West.

State control versus personal aspiration: whether to confront or co-opt religion is an age-old issue in the state-religion relationship. As an historian, allow me a glance backward. From the outset, I would say that China is and has been fundamentally a religious state. The emperor was the Son of Heaven, certain Chinese rulers became Bodhisattva emperors, others were ordained as Daoist priests. The rise of Daoism as a large-scale social organisation in the later Han dynasty in the second century CE, took place against a background of the declining political power of the Han. Fast-forwarding to the nineteenth century, a similar situation prevailed in the Taiping rebellion, a Christian-inspired insurrection, whose leader claimed to be the younger brother of Christ. The movement reached large proportions and nearly toppled the Qing dynasty. In both cases, the questions of political legitimacy and insurrection were intimately linked to religion in China. The reason was that ultimately state and religion were conceived on the same model and founded on the same cosmic principles. They formed part of an organic whole, and when either of them was in decline or failing, then the viability of the other was called into question. Hence, the rise of religious movement posing as shadow empires in times of dynastic decline.

Between the two incidents mentioned, China knew periods of disunion and reunification, typically moments where religion stepped in as a legitimating authority, or as interpreter of the heavenly mandate to rule. The religious policies adopted by rulers of China who were of non-Chinese origin are instructive in this regard. After the unification of the Tang dynasty, the newly installed Turkic ruling family declared themselves descendants of Laozi, thereby merging the imperial cult with Daoism. After the Tang, neo-Confucianism was adopted as the state ideology. For Genghis Khan, the Mongol ruler of China and most of Asia, religious policy was the key to the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. He opted for Daoism. The Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty from the seventeenth century onward chose the opposite path. As foreigners, they favored Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism, as the state religion. Although rulers in early modern China came to varying conclusions, the stakes of religious policy were generally the same: to secure political loyalty and win the adhesion of the people.

In more recent times, engineering modernity became the main objective. In the nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals and statesmen felt that China's then backwardness was due to its belief system, and that getting rid of superstition would help China modernise. The Republic of China continued in this spirit, pursuing iconoclasm, temple destructions, and the persecution of religious followers, foreshadowing what was to come after the Communist revolution, under the Cultural Revolution, and to a large extent again today. In other words, what we are seeing now in China is not entirely new.

Finally, an important dimension of Chinese religious policy today are international relations and sensitivities about China's sovereignty. This is at the heart of the Sinicization campaign as applied to foreign religions: how to bring foreign religious organisations under the authority of the Communist Party and regulate the religious activities of foreigners in China. The recent agreement between Beijing and the Vatican was reached against a backdrop of Chinese mistrust regarding the Pope's spiritual authority over Catholics throughout the world. Many observers in Hong Kong felt that this was not a propitious moment in China's relationship to religion to reach out for an agreement. However, Rome seems to have deliberately turned its back to politics, pursuing instead a long-term pastoral mission, even against formidable short-term odds. As for the flourishing Protestant movements, they are widely suspected of maintaining close links to the United States. Unsurprisingly, measures taken against Islam are justified on security grounds and the need to prevent radicalisation and linkage with worldwide Islamist organisations. Moreover, in Xinjiang, Muslims are ethnically identified with the Uyghurs minority, allowing Islam to be treated as an ethnic phenomenon foreign to Han society.

To sum up, religious policy in China revolves around the crucial capacity of religious organisations to carve out separate civic and communitarian spaces within society and the Communist state, the dream of many, but the anathema of the CCP. Deng Xiaoping said "to get rich is glorious also." By "also," I suppose he meant in addition to seeking happiness in ideological zeal. China now has a vast middle class that has attained wealth and is beginning to ask if there are other sides to a meaningful existence beyond the choice between ideological zeal and pure materialism. The answers that religion provides to this question involve alternative societal models, posing a clear threat to the absolutist state. To this, add the power of mobilisation, especially in the age of social networking. Statistics about religious practice in China are difficult to objectify. It is estimated that 300 million Chinese participate actively in some form of religious organisation and that 80% of all Chinese people subscribe to some form of the values, beliefs, and practices of Confucianism, Daoism, and popular religion. The membership of the CCP is 90 million. When you consider these numbers and the power of mobilisation in the age of electronic networking, then there is certainly a matter of concern.

In closing, I do not wish to suggest that any position adopted in the long history of China regarding the state-religion relationship was ever definitive. This may well have been the conclusion of the Vatican, a long-standing observer. Pre-modern Chinese rulers famously hesitated in adopting their religious policy. Genghis Khan, having decided to patronize Daoism, later changed his mind and ordered the burning of the Daoist Canon. Xi Jinping is said to have earlier declared that religious activity and aspirations were an integral part of human civilisation, and to have personally befriended and supported a Buddhist community. Things may not be all black and red, as Deng Xiaoping would say. The question now is: why has religious policy in China taken such a sharp turn at this precise moment, accompanying the constitutional changes of 2017? But that is for my co-panellist.