Introduction, Christianity and the State in Asia

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Christianity and the state in Asia: complicity and conflict

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Christianity is one of the largest and fastest-growing religions in Asia. A survey of the relevant literature, however, reveals a relative paucity of comparative studies on Christianity in the region. Thus, one of the main aims of this volume is to examine the experience of being a Christian in Asia, particularly in relation to how the state has either hindered or facilitated the propagation, regulation or maintenance of the Christian faith. There are two aspects to this discussion. The first is the ongoing and complex interplay between the global reach of Christianity and the ways in which it is articulated in Asian localities. In spite of active foreign missionary activity in the region, the 'indigenization' of Christian theologies and rituals draws attention to local agency in the expression of faith. The experience of being Christian in Asia, in light of the faith's 'global' orientation, has engendered new and diverse forms of interaction among its adherents (cf. Heftner 1993, 1998; Kaplan 1995; Horton 1971). As with the Dayak in Borneo or the samahans of the rural Philippines, indigenous Christianity has often exceeded the orthodoxies prescribed by their mission 'sources'. This has in turn created highly contextualized forms of religious and doctrinal expression that this volume seeks to trace (e.g. Keyes 1996: 290; Love 2004). The second aspect of the discussion focuses on how Christian churches¹ and their followers negotiate their public roles and identities vis-à-vis the state as arbiters of modernity (cf. Leung 1996; Viswanathan 1998; Gifford 1998). In both these themes, a fundamental concern is over the conditions under which Christian religious practices at various times either clash or converge with the mechanism of the state, in light of the challenges brought about by processes of modernization.

In discussing the relationship between Christianity and the state, it should be pointed out that a certain kind of interaction with governmental authority lies at the very heart of Christianity's birth story. That the Holy Family escaped the temporal authority of Caesar, highlights the fact that the birth of Jesus was possible only through the circumvention of the state's jurisdiction. The death of Jesus - the other fundamental cornerstone of the faith - likewise came through the penal instrument of the state, even though the Bible records Pilate's reluctant complicity. When Jesus famously exhorted Jews to render what is due to both God and Caesar, he identified two distinct sources of
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Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was a key leader in the civil rights movement in the United States. He is renowned for his role in the fight against racial segregation and discrimination, particularly through nonviolent civil disobedience. His powerful speeches, including the famous "I Have a Dream" speech delivered in 1963, inspired millions and continue to be a source of inspiration to this day. King was a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and is remembered for his commitment to justice and equality for all.

The image contains text in both English and another language, possibly Filipino or Tagalog, discussing a topic related to innovation and Christianity. The text appears to be discussing the contributions of an organization named "The University of the Philippines" to a project related to innovation and Christianity, with a focus on how these contributions can be integrated into education and research.

The text also mentions the importance of collaboration between the University of the Philippines and other entities, such as the Department of Science and Technology, to promote innovation and education in these areas.

Overall, the image presents a thoughtful discussion on the role of religion and higher education in fostering innovation and societal change, with a specific focus on the contributions of the University of the Philippines to these goals.
of the ‘civilizing mission’, in numerous cases the colonial authorities considered the work of missionaries more as a nuisance that might jeopardize existing social and political arrangements, and hence detrimental to colonial interests. In the case of Malaya, for example, given their reliance on traditional system of governance as an effective form of political control, the British discouraged (or did not actively support) evangelization efforts while supporting Islam in the Malay states. Missionary activities were restricted to other minority ethnic groups, which were not part of the centres of political power, such as the Chinese and the Indians, and to ‘tribal’ groups such as the Bidayu and the Iban (Gabriel 1996).

As Keyes (1996) has noted, at the height of colonialism in the nineteenth century, local rulers in Southeast Asia, whose legitimacy to rule was inextricably intertwined with notions of kingship stipulated by non-Christian religions such as Islam and Buddhism, were often hostile towards missionaries. The early converts were mainly among people from the ‘margins’, such as those from the highlands, the outer islands and recent immigrants. This pattern of conversion directly contributed to the tension and conflict that were witnessed in some countries, such as Indonesia, Myanmar and India, where many Christians in the peripheral areas were engaged in separatist movements in the transition from colonial rule to national independence. In such cases, Christianity as a religion fuses with ethnic identifications that are defined in opposition to a majority population and political centre allied with a dominant, non-Christian religion.

However, Christianity as a ‘minority’ religion in Asia does not necessarily imply a marginal role in national societies. For example, although Christians comprise about 29 per cent of the total South Korean population, the history of Christianity in this country provides a good illustration of how the ways the religion is introduced to a country shape its relationship with the state, and how Christianity can play a pivotal role in national politics far beyond what the ‘minority’ status would suggest. The first important point to note is Korea’s different historical experience of colonialism compared with most other Asian countries. As Japan was the colonial power that ruled Korea from 1905 to 1945, the Koreans did not experience Christianity as the religion of the colonizer when Protestantism first gained a foothold toward the end of the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, the spread of Christianity was facilitated by both Korean Christian returnees who had lived abroad, as well as foreign missionaries whose national profiles differed from that of the colonizers (Adams 1995: 14).

Thus, unlike many other places in Asia where Christianity was associated negatively with colonialism, the religion in fact played an important role in the Korean nationalist movement against Japanese rule and the imposition of Shinto as a civil religion. Many Christians participated in the anti-imperialist effort against the Japanese, and a significant proportion of the signatories of the famous March Declaration of Independence in 1919 were Protestants. At the same time, Korean Christians (together with the Confucians and Buddhists) were at the forefront in resisting Japanese efforts to introduce State Shinto; they instead sought to promote Christianity as a modern, ‘Western’ learning and civil religion for Korean national revival (Freston 2001: 63). When Korea regained independence following the end of the Second World War, its first president, Rhee Syngman, was a Methodist, and Christians were over-represented in his government. In this period, the positive image of Christianity was enhanced due to its association with the country’s ‘liberators’, the Americans. Moreover, in the context of the Cold War, and particularly in the subsequent division of the Korean Peninsula, Christianity became deeply entwined with the self-identity of many South Koreans vis-à-vis the officially atheistic Communist regime in the North. Meanwhile, many Christian churches and groups in South Korea were actively involved in the pro-democracy movement directed against the dictatorial military regime of Park Chung-hee.

The participation of the Church in the struggle for democracy crucially led to the formulation of the so-called Minjung Theology that interpreted the Christian understanding of salvation in terms of ordinary people’s struggles against oppressive structures (including the state) that deny human rights and dignity. The Minjung Theology is significant because it is a theology of Christian social action and the state based upon the Korean experience, and at the same time it further deepens and broadens the Christian theological reflections on these issues. The Minjung Theology has been compared to the Liberation Theology of Latin America, but without the latter’s strong adherence to Marxist ideology (Suh 1995: 149). After the toppling of authoritarian rule, the first two democratically elected presidents of recent decades, Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, were both profoundly influenced by the Minjung Theology. Thus, given the Church’s integral role in the Korean nationalist struggle against Japanese colonial rule, and its subsequent participation in the South Korean pro-democracy movement, Christianity’s position in South Korea seems assured. This fact is amply illustrated in Chang-Won Park’s chapter on the Christian reaction to the South Korean government’s push for cremation to replace burial for funerals to free up land for housing and commercial developments. Even though burials had been the normal Christian practice, most Catholic and Protestants did not consider the new government policy to be anti-Christian. For the Christians, the main concern was more over the tension between ‘modernization’ and ‘tradition’, rather than about secularization’s threat to their religious practices in society. By accepting and supporting the government’s argument that cremation was a way of ‘modernizing death practice’, the Korean Church has played an important role in the promotion of cremation as an acceptable form of funerary practice.

The role that religion plays in a national culture is another factor that determines the nature of the relationship between Christianity and the state. Of particular concern, is whether a state promotes any form of ‘official’ or ‘civil’ religion (cf. Bellah 1965). In Japan, for example, the promotion of State Shinto that fused with the cult of the emperor and Japanese nationalism,
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In recent years, an increase in social media and online platforms has provided opportunities for the rapid and wide dissemination of information. This has led to a need for more robust information management systems. In the context of information overload, it is crucial to have an efficient system for information processing and dissemination.

The current system relies heavily on traditional methods, which are time-consuming and inefficient. To address this issue, there is a growing interest in developing advanced information processing systems. These systems aim to provide faster, more accurate, and more relevant information to users.

One such system is the distributed intelligence system. This system leverages the strengths of distributed computing to process large amounts of data in parallel. It allows for the rapid dissemination of information, which is essential in today's fast-paced environment.

The introduction of this system is expected to revolutionize the way information is processed and disseminated. It promises to provide a more efficient and effective solution to the problem of information overload.

In conclusion, the distributed intelligence system presents a promising solution to the challenges faced by current information processing systems. Its implementation would not only improve the efficiency of information dissemination but also enhance the user experience.
perceived foreign intervention in its domestic affairs (cf. Leung 1992). In the coming decades, as China engages in geopolitical wrangling with other powerful countries, will Christianity become a source of contention, or a bridge, between Western countries and China? Internally, will the rapid growth of Christianity in its various forms be seen by the Chinese Communist Party as a threat to its authority? As Bryan Turner argues in his chapter, ‘Evangelism, the state and subjectivity’, conversion is sociologically significant because it ‘almost inevitably changes social and political identities and therefore can often represent a challenge to the state’. While the Party leadership can to some extent monitor the religion through its official ‘Patriotic’ Catholic and Protestant churches, it has much less control over the highly independent, fractious Pentecostal-charismatic movement, and the so-called ‘house churches’. If China’s dealings with the Falun Gong can serve as a reliable guide, we can be quite certain that, should a Christian cultic movement gain widespread popularity, the Chinese authorities would not hesitate to exercise its full range of repressive capability.

Christendom and the state

The issues discussed above lead us to ponder more generally on the global prominence of Christianity. There have been many works that describe, and even extol, the explosive growth of Christianity around the world. Latin America and Africa have received a great deal of attention from those who seek to articulate Christianity’s ‘new face’ among populations of the ‘South’. Taking a global perspective on Christianity, scholars have argued that there has been a perceptible shift in Christianity’s centre of gravity, so to speak, from the traditional European and North American areas to the southern hemisphere where most believers can be found (Jenkins 2002; Samneh 2006: 120).

It is interesting that some of those who proclaim this ‘Southern shift’ are also adamant about the diminishing role of the state in influencing this expansion. Indeed, the frenetic avalanche of conversions seems to encourage some confidence in the notion that the rise of ‘Christendom’ renders impotent, if not redundant, the capacity of the state as the main arbiter and determinant of religious loyalties among the faithful. Both Philip Jenkins and Lamin Sanneh – two of the more prominent commentators on the ‘Southern shift’ of Christianity – express a strong belief that the critical mass of Christian populations in the global south, coupled with the increasing numbers of Christian migrants to the West, will significantly alter the landscape of the international order; to one in which allegiances are grounded more in spiritual claims than in states and governments. The declining prominence of the nation state is thought to proceed in tandem with the re-emergence of a transcendent Christian identification that unites cultural communities of the South, under the banner of a worldwide Christendom.

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China’s economic development and its growing role in the global economy have significant implications for the Future of International Law. The country’s rapid economic growth and increasing influence on global affairs have raised questions about the shape of future international law and the role of China in shaping it. This article explores these issues, focusing on the role of China in the context of international law, its impact on global governance, and the challenges and opportunities presented by China’s growing influence.

China’s economic power and its role in international negotiations have placed a premium on understanding the country’s legal system, legal culture, and legal institutions. This understanding is crucial for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars alike, as China continues to play a more significant role in global affairs.

The article begins by examining China’s legal system and its evolution over time. It then discusses the country’s approach to international law, focusing on its participation in international organizations and its role in multilateral negotiations. Finally, it considers the implications of China’s growing influence for the future of international law, including the potential for a shift in the balance of power within the international legal system.

In conclusion, the article argues that China’s growing influence on global affairs poses both challenges and opportunities for the future of international law. While China’s rapid economic growth has brought significant benefits to the country and to the world, it has also raised questions about the role of China in the international legal system and the implications of this role for the future of international law.

The article concludes with a call for further research and analysis to better understand the relationship between China and international law, and to ensure that the international legal system is able to adapt to the changing global landscape.

References


population, became the target of persecution and race riots, particularly at the height of the economic turmoil of the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s. More recently, however, with decreasing incidences of violent attacks and improving economic conditions, the Indonesian government has been more accommodating of the building of American-style mega-churches, where Christians are able to assert their faith after more than a decade of persecution. So, while it can be seen that the practice of Christianity is manifested in the public sphere in an overt capacity, this vitality has become possible through some form of state toleration that has emerged from a history of struggle and persecution.

It is vital, therefore, that the state be treated as an integral component in understanding the place and persistence of religious belief in the region. In this vein, this volume may be considered a contribution to the growing body of work that points to the resilience of religion in spite of what was thought to be the disenchanted impact of secular nationalism. Yet it is no longer novel to merely indicate religion’s persistence as a foil to the secularization thesis. While we agree that empirical evidence from Christianity in Asia refutes the argument that religion will decline in the face of rationalized state structures (if not relegated to the private sphere entirely), this is not the agenda of this volume per se. It is more productive, we believe, to examine the contours and ramifications of the persistence of religions in the face of the process of modernization. A cornerstone of this volume is the methodological claim that it is through the focus on the relationship between states and churches that this issue can more meaningfully be understood.

Significant strides in this undertaking have been made by volumes such as Keyes, Kendall and Hardacre’s Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the modern states of East and Southeast Asia (1995). The contributors to that volume collectively argue that far from being irrelevant, religions have become viable alternatives in the face of state control. In seeking to regulate, some states in Asia have provoked people to look to religion as an avenue for criticizing, resisting and challenging those who control state power. In contrast to the positions of Jenkins and Sannach, the editors claim that it is not the growth of religions per se that has encouraged this situation, but modernizers and nationalists, who, by reiterating the gap between rational action over traditional practice, ‘have made the limits of rationality much more clear; the gap between rational decision making and the practical reality of the world generates uncertainty and ambiguity that many seek to resolve through returning to religion’ (p. 15). A return to religion manifests itself as a ‘crisis of authority’ in the modernizing states of Asia, particularly as governments realize that no civic order encouraged by the state has been successful in addressing all the existential and moral vicissitudes that people face. This may well suggest that ‘religion and politics keep forming all kinds of symbiotic relations, to such an extent that it is not easy to ascertain whether one is witnessing political movements which don religious garb or religious movements which assume political forms’ (Casanova 1994: 41).

There is a danger, therefore, in overestimating a ‘crisis of authority’ as characteristic of Asia as a whole. We agree that religion can offer an alternative source of authority to that of the state. However, we contend that it is also important to draw attention to instances of state complicity, indirect or otherwise, in the ongoing activities of Christian communities in the region. While modernization calls for a de-emphasis of primordial loyalties or irrational beliefs that are typically associated with religious sensibility, state-sponsored calls for national unity inevitably entail the crafting of shared values and histories which form the bases of an imagined (or, as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) would argue, invented) community. In few countries in Asia where Christianity is predominant, calls for nation-building are often articulated through the idiom of religion, reiterating its continuing relevance and vitality. The Philippines immediately comes to mind in this regard, considering the long history of the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines role in effecting and influencing political and social change.

The experience of the Philippines is equally applicable for the region’s newest country, Timor Leste, which gained independence from Indonesia in 1999. While the Evangelicals are actively seeking converts throughout the volatile new nation, their effort is impeded by the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, either through sheer pressure of numbers or through outright intimidation of converts who have received ‘visits from nuns, death threats or occasional beatings’ (Wright 2008). The departure of the Indonesian authority after a 24-year occupation has left the field open for the Roman Catholic Church to exert its dominance, leaving Muslims, Buddhists and Protestants in the country less emboldened in the practice and propagation of their faiths. In spite of a huge Catholic majority, however, the official status of the Catholic Church is not codified in the country’s constitution, prompting moves to sign a Concordat with the Holy See. The Concordat would ensure that the Timor Leste government would likewise adopt the Vatican’s position on issues such as abortion and prostitution. Timor Leste’s President, Jose Ramos Horta, was blunt in acknowledging that ‘only an idiot or an atheist would govern this country completely alienated from the Church hierarchy and the Church as a whole’ (ABC Radio Australia, 16 October 2008). What this demonstrates is that the state continues to be a critical arbiter of Christian identity, even in places in which it is demographically dominant. Furthermore, such instances demonstrate that the mandate of the state is contingent upon at least the symbolization of Church backing. Indeed, Christian groups have often supported the various agendas of the state, hence willingly or otherwise further legitimizing state authority.

Christians as dual citizens

Wilford and George (2005: 11) have pointed to the fluidity of the interaction between church and state, arguing that ‘[s]eeing room for manoeuvre is not an intrinsically oppositional or resistant activity; individuals and groups can
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