

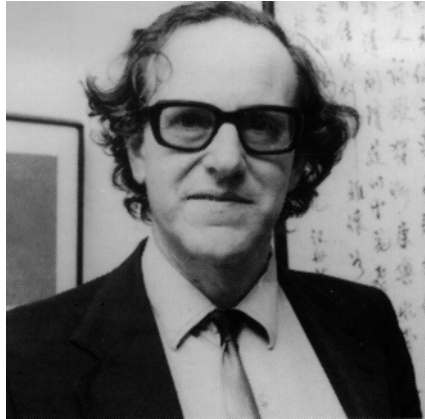


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CHINESE SOCIETY SINCE MAO: RELIGION AND FAMILY

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Professor Mackerras (B.A. Melbourne, 1961; B.A. (Hons) Australian National University, 1962; M.Litt. Camb., 1964; Ph.D. Australian National University, 1970) comes from a well-known Sydney family. He lived in China from 1964 to 1966 teaching English, and his eldest son, Stephen, was born there, being the first Australian citizen to be born in the People's Republic of China. Professor Mackerras has returned several times to China, most recently spending over four months there in 1982.

Professor Mackerras has been, since 1974, a Foundation Professor in the School of Modern Asian Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, the leading centre of Asian studies in Australia. He has been Chairman of the School since mid-1979. He has studied widely on Chinese society and history, especially China's minority nationalities, theatre, literature and arts and questions of family and population policy.

He has published about a dozen books and numerous articles in scholarly and other journals and newspapers about China's history and contemporary society. The books include "Modern China, A Chronology from 1842 to the Present" (Thames and Hudson, London, 1982); "The Performing Arts in Contemporary China" (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981); "Chinese Theatre from its Origins to the Present Day" (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1983) - editor and contributor; and "China: The Impact of Revolution" (Longman, Melbourne, 1976) - editor and contributor. A book co-authored by him on Australia-China relations will appear in 1985. He also broadcasts frequently on matters connected with China.

Professor Mackerras is married with five children. His recreational interests include music and jogging.

The death of Mao Zedong on 9 September 1976 and the fall of the "gang of four" less than a month later stand like a giant chasm in the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Mao had been the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from 1935 until his death; and from 1966 led the famous Cultural Revolution which attempted to commit the whole of China's society to Mao's vision of Marxist-Leninist revolution. The "gang of four" were among his strongest supporters in that endeavour and included his wife Jiang Qing.

The new leadership which replaced Mao and the four was initially led by Hua Guofeng, but in mid-1977 Deng Xiaoping, who had suffered disgrace and humiliation during the Cultural Revolution, was rehabilitated and returned to senior positions both in the Party and government. Deng has grown stronger and stronger in influence, at the expense of Hua, who was finally toppled to relative insignificance by the Sixth Plenary Session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee in June 1981.

The policies of the Deng leadership place top priority on economic modernization. The Cultural Revolution came under increasingly bitter criticism and the Sixth Plenum denounced it as a near total disaster, making the decade 1966-1976 the "ten years of

catastrophe." The same meeting re-evaluated Mao's role in the history of the PRC. It affirmed his activities down to 1957, but was less than enthusiastic about his leadership from then on and castigated him for "primary responsibility" in causing the Cultural Revolution.

The policies of economic modernization and negation of Mao's late years have resulted in vast changes in social life in China, most of them in the direction of greater freedom. This lecture focuses on two aspects of society: religion and family. Both are important in China, especially the second.

It is necessary to note as background to both topics that China's population of 1,008,275,188 (according to the census of mid-1982) is 93.3 per cent Han Chinese and 6.7 per cent non-Han. There are fifty-five minority nationalities, which have cultures ranging from slightly to extremely different from the Han. Most of them speak non-Chinese languages. Despite their relatively small population of about 67 million, they take up well over half the total area of China. Several inhabit strategically very sensitive areas, especially the Uygurs and Kazakhs of the far west of China who live near the Sino-Soviet frontier, and the Tibetans many of whom dwell near the border with India. During the Cultural Revolution years, officious Red Guards (Tibetans as well as Han) and CCP members tried to

suppress the local customs and cultures of these peoples. However, since 1980 there has been a drastic reversal of such practices, and the authorities have done their best to salve the bitter resentments caused by the Cultural Revolution and move towards a modicum of ethnic harmony.

Religion

Of all aspects of social life, not only of the minority nationalities but also the Han, possibly none suffered more seriously under the impact of Cultural Revolution policies than religion. Everywhere in China, temples, mosques and churches were closed down, many damaged, and some even destroyed. The open practice of religion became all but impossible, and monks, *imams*, priests and other clergy were sent "into production", meaning that they became workers or peasants.

The policies of the Deng leadership, and especially the negation of the Cultural Revolution, have been tantamount to a declaration that religious persecution was both widespread and severe during Mao's last decade. They also imply a public wish by the government for a degree of religious freedom.

The state Constitution adopted by the National People's Congress in December 1982 is the fourth since

the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and the most detailed and liberal so far. Article 36 is devoted entirely to the subject of religion and reads:

Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.

The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state.

Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.[1](#)

What this statement does is to lay down the principle of religious freedom, but also spell out some limitations to it. It forms a good starting point for a discussion of the actual situation of the various religions in China today.

A contemporary Chinese encyclopedia claims that "among the Chinese people, especially the Han people who occupy the overwhelming majority of the whole country's population, the number of religious believers is not great." But it goes on to concede that among ten of the minority nationalities, almost everyone believes in religion.[2](#) Among the Han people, Buddhism has the most numerous followers, but if the minorities are

included then the religion which is spiritually and institutionally strongest is undoubtedly Islam. There are no Han Moslems, because the Hui nationality more or less by definition consists of those people who are Han in all ways except in their practice of Islam. There are some 7.2 million Hui. In addition the peoples of nine minority nationalities are Moslems, most notably the Uygurs and Kazakhs. The total population of the ten Islamic nationalities is about 15 million.[3](#)

Christianity has revived and even strengthened in recent years. A priest of the central official Catholic cathedral in Beijing, which was built by the famous Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci early in the seventeenth century, told me late in 1980 that there were about 3 million Catholics in China. These were adherents of the Patriotic Church which has no communion with Rome. This figure was probably an underestimate even then and is certainly higher now. A March 1982 CCP document on religious policy stated that the number of adherents of Protestant Christianity had grown from 700,000 to about 3 million, but Christian sources "say this figure is far too low".[4](#) Although some of the minorities include Christians, the great majority of Christians are Han.

Other religions include lama Buddhism, to which the Mongolians and Tibetans adhere; Daoism, a Han religion; various forms of polytheism and nature

worship, found among the minority nationalities of the southwest such as the Miao, Yao and Wa; and shamanism, which survives among several of the smaller nationalities of the northeast and southwest. Among these, the strongest is undoubtedly lama Buddhism. The Tibetans follow their lamas with a faith which does not appear to have weakened at all since the 1950s and may even have strengthened.

There are five government-sponsored associations which supervise the affairs of the five main religions. Between April and December 1980 the Chinese Islamic, Daoist, Catholic, Protestant Christian and Buddhist associations convened their first major meetings since before the Cultural Revolution, signifying not only their own revival, but that of the religions they represented. Since then, there have been numerous other signs of stronger activities.

One particularly important aspect of the survival of any religion is the training of clergy. In the case of Islam the China Islamic Association ran a training course for *imams* at the end of 1980 and later sent ten students to Egypt to study Moslem doctrine at the Azhar University in Cairo, the first batch of Chinese students sent abroad for that purpose since the CCP's accession to power in 1949. In September 1982 these various people were all to start classes for forty students at the reopened Institute of Islamic Theology

of China.^{[5](#)} Although one institute for about 15 million believing Moslems is not much, it does represent a beginning in a country where professional training is sparse in most areas of life.

The first Chinese Buddhist Theological Institute was reopened in 1980, and others have been added since then, including in Tibet. In October 1982 a Catholic seminary began classes in Shanghai with thirty-four novices from Shanghai and nearby provinces aged from 18 to 30. They were embarking on a six-year novitiate which would stress bible studies, theology, foreign languages and culture.^{[6](#)}

The repair and use of buildings, be they temples, mosques or churches, is clearly another vital side of religious revival, especially in the aftermath of a movement which closed, damaged or destroyed as many religious buildings as did the Cultural Revolution.

Nowhere was damage more serious than in Tibet, and there beginnings are being made to restore and reopen lama temples. A particularly famous example is Lhasa's Zuglakang Monastery, which dates from the seventh century. During the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards launched an attack upon it, but a Han Chinese source claims that intervention from the local military command prevented them from inflicting serious damage. With the change

in policy the monastery was restored and now functions actively again. At any one time there are "dozens of worshippers, men and women, young and old" and even pedlars selling incense on the street outside. Possibly even more important are Buddhist shrines which individual Tibetans keep within their houses or flats. Official journalists write openly of such matters in the Chinese media, as though they were a source of pride.[7](#)

In Xinjiang, the most westerly region of China where the Uygurs, Kazakhs and several other Islamic peoples live, I was told in September 1982 that there were some 14,000 functioning mosques, and that some were newly built. The latter statement I was able to check through random wanderings in two cities there.

Christian churches have also reopened. I have already mentioned the old Beijing cathedral. Work on renovating the equally famous Zikawei Cathedral in Shanghai, which was seriously damaged during the Cultural Revolution, was begun in 1980 and services restored in November the same year. "House churches", by which lay preachers offer their own houses for worship, are more numerous. It is reported that in the single province of Jiangsu, adjoining Shanghai, there are twenty-six normal Protestant churches, but over 8,000 house churches.[8](#)

There is no doubt that these religious buildings are actively used. I have myself watched packed Islamic and Catholic services and have friends who report identical experiences with Protestant Christian or Buddhist equivalents, the latter especially in Tibet.

All these signs point to a definite, and even very impressive, revival in religions of all sorts in China in the last few years. The Chinese government has assisted with budgetary allocations to help pay for the restoral work of many mosques, temples, churches, seminaries and other buildings. In my view its willingness to devote scarce resources to religions is a sign of its genuine wish for religious harmony.

On the other hand, there are definite limitations to religious freedom. These are apparent in several different respects.

In the first place, it is *normal* religious activities which Article 36 of the 1982 Constitution declares must be protected. This leaves open the question of which religious activities are normal and which abnormal. Decisions on such matters clearly rest with state or party authorities and may vary from time to time.

The most obvious application of this problem is the "unofficial" religious activities which mushroomed in the first years of the present decade. These lay

outside the sponsorship of the various government-run associations listed earlier. They included the Christian house churches and similar Islamic groups. At first the government tolerated them, and may well have been unaware for a while of how rapidly they were growing. When the attraction of religion became obvious, the government felt forced to rethink its policy. In March 1982 the CCP issued an authoritative document on religion. The new statement looked askance at services, bible readings or worship held in house churches and such places. The document declared that such meetings were "in principle not to be permitted, but should not be rigidly stopped. Through work undertaken by the patriotic religious personnel to persuade the religious masses, other suitable arrangements should be made."⁹ The "patriotic religious personnel" are the staff of the official associations. This statement allows for differing decisions on what is "normal" at grass-roots levels. In practice, CCP officials and those of the government-sponsored associations have moved against the house churches and comparable bodies in other religions. Clearly this would not include private shrines such as those in Tibet, but only those which serve as the focus for communal meetings.

There may well be unseen restrictions even in the official temples, mosques and churches. One Tibetan, writing in a bitterly anti-Chinese journal, denounces

the reform and simplification of the Chinese characters as "probably the single most deadly blow to the communication of religious thought in China." This seems a strange argument to me, since the simplification of the characters can only help literacy among the masses. He is perhaps on safer ground in believing that many young people are curious about religion but circumspect in taking steps to find out:

Even if they should wish to ask questions, in practically every temple there are certain functionaries who may or may not be in the guise of monk, and whose duty it is to report activities in the temple to the government. Although residents generally know who these people are, the prevailing atmosphere in most temples is one of intimidation and caution. Despite the current well-publicised relaxation, experience has shown that party policy may change tomorrow. [10](#)

The allegation that some "monks" are government agents in disguise is perfectly credible, though I have no direct experience to confirm it, and it is also quite possible to be both a monk, *imam* or priest and a government worker. The writer is certainly right that experience shows people that the government line is subject to change.

Another important restriction on religious freedom is that the Constitution says nothing about the right of propaganda and it explicitly rules out interference with the state's educational system. It appears to me most

unlikely that the Chinese government will be allowing the reintroduction of grass-roots religious educational institutions in the near future, and it will be doing what it can to prevent the growth of any unofficial religious schools. There have been reports of harsh measures taken against those who tried to propagate their religion. For instance, in May 1982 twelve Christians in Henan province were beaten and imprisoned for trying to spread their faith, according to one report."[11](#) The CCP knows quite well that, if it is to win all the people over to its persuasion in the long term, it must dominate and even monopolize the education and propaganda systems.

The comment in Article 36 against religious activities which impair the health of citizens refers to those many quasi-religious superstitions of the past which dictated certain injurious measures as necessary for health. The folk religions of the Han abounded in taboos concerning pregnant women. The shamans of certain minority nationalities functioned also as doctors and their recipes were as likely to hasten death as to prevent it, notwithstanding which they enjoyed high prestige among their own people.

The examples raise the general issue of just where religious freedom leads into quackery or harmful influence in societies where religions were woven into everyday life so totally that it was difficult to

distinguish what was religion and what was not. The whole issue of custom and religion is a vexed one. The minority nationalities provide good examples to illustrate this point. There were at the time of liberation some religious practices which were clearly harmful. The Wa people used to sacrifice a human being every second year and place the head on a pole in the belief that the blood would bring a good harvest. Nobody would disagree with the CCP's decision to suppress the practice. The Moslems traditionally allowed four wives for a husband, whereas the PRC Marriage Laws of 1950 and 1980 both outlaw polygamy. Again most people would probably support the CCP's decision to suppress anybody who used an argument from Islamic tradition to break the law.

There are customs which are equally easy to determine on the other side. Thus, nobody could possibly object to the Moslem refusal to eat pork. Even at the height of the Cultural Revolution the CCP allowed this custom. Most festivals are connected in some way or another with religion, but nobody has suggested stopping them for that reason.

Other cases may be difficult to decide. Should Moslems be allowed to force women to wear the veil, which the CCP considers degrading to women? The religion of several southwestern nationalities in China encourages premarital sexual freedom at festival time,

whereas the CCP is very prudish in such matters. In practice, the revival of religions has resulted in the return of such practices. Although I did not myself see any Islamic women publicly wearing the veil in China, I learned that it happens in parts of Xinjiang.

An interesting stipulation in Article 36 of the 1982 Constitution is that which outlaws any foreign domination for any religious body or affairs. Coupled with the restrictions on religious propaganda, this clause appears to put paid to any large-scale reintroduction of foreign missionaries of any persuasion into China. The CCP remains convinced that many foreign missionaries of the past functioned as agents for overseas governments against them.

One of the problems with some religions, at least as far as the Chinese authorities are concerned, is their political ramifications. Islam is an excellent case in point. Several nationalities in Xinjiang, such as the Uygurs and Kazakhs, cling to Islam for political as well as religious reasons, because it is a vital characteristic separating them from the dominant Han Chinese. It is a mark of identity and thus precious. Currently the Chinese government is prepared to accept such reasoning. But were a foreign government, such as that of a Soviet republic on the other side of the border, to use religion to try, or even seem to try, to turn the Uygurs or Kazakhs against the Han or stir up

any other trouble, then the Chinese authorities would quickly move in with force.

The problem possibly takes its most obvious and specific expression with the Catholic Church. The Chinese government has always been determined that no foreign power shall make appointments in China. The Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association has always insisted on making its own appointments, a fact which led to rupture between Rome and the Chinese church in 1957 and formal excommunication of the Association by Pope Pius XII in 1958. There has been no change in the position. In September 1984 an Amnesty International report revealed that the Bishop of Shanghai, Ignatius Kung, was still in prison for wishing to defy the Patriotic Association and refusing to renounce the Pope. The report, which claims that the 94-year-old bishop has been in prison for twenty-nine years, cites evidence "that the Bishop refused an offer of release if he admitted the Government was justified in jailing him."[12](#)

In 1981 the Vatican appointed Dominic Tang (Deng Yiming) as Archbishop of Guangdong province. Deng had been imprisoned in the 1950s for "counterrevolutionary offences" and released in June 1980 because he had "shown repentance" and was anyway in frail health. The reaction of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association to his appointment was swift and sharp. It declared that "Chinese bishops

should be elected and ordained by Chinese clergy and congregations." It went on to denounce the Vatican for having "rudely interfered in China's internal affairs, encroached on the sovereignty of the Chinese church" and flouted the "spirit of Jesus Christ's establishment of the church and apostolic propagation of the gospels." It accused the Vatican of wanting to bring the Chinese church again under its control."[13](#)

In June 1982 Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang predicted that any resolution of the conflict between the Vatican and the Chinese Church would take time because Rome still maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan. For China this is a central political issue in dealings with all countries. It highlights how political and religious questions intertwine, and especially in China.

In March 1982 Pope John Paul II called on the Catholic Church all over the world to "pray for the persecuted Chinese Catholics". Not surprisingly, the Patriotic Association again reacted quickly and caustically. It was particularly angry at the Pope's suggestion that the Catholics in China were undergoing a persecution comparable to that suffered by the Christians of the first century. "This is a vicious slander based on false testimonies", it declared.[14](#)

Late in October and early November 1984 Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila made a visit to China. He discussed with the Bishop of Beijing, Michael Fu Tieschan, such central issues as the Vatican's diplomatic relations with Taiwan and the appointment of bishops. The two got on well together and their meeting can only have done good. Nevertheless, despite Cardinal Sin's good intentions, he did not go as a formal diplomat to China, nor did he undertake any duty to repair the breach between the Vatican and the Chinese Catholic Church. The impression remains that each of these two sides is still more interested in provoking the other than resolving the issue. So reunion between the Vatican and the Chinese Catholic Church is not in the offing.

The CCP remains opposed to religions of all kinds. It still believes, as did Karl Marx, that religions are "the sigh of the oppressed" and "the opiate of the people". On the other hand, it has been forced to reconcile itself to the fact that religions are not about to disappear. A Han Chinese Marxist social scientist writes as follows:

Religions follow rules of production, development and disappearance. The existence of religions has a deep source in consciousness and society, so as long as the sources on which religions depend for existence still have not been eradicated, religions cannot disappear. Consequently, we must adequately and clear-headedly come to terms with the long-term

nature of the problem of religion under conditions of socialism. [15](#)

What this says in its Marxist terminology is that the CCP itself must bear part of the blame for the persistence of religions. It has failed to eradicate the social sources of religions which, in its view, are poverty, backwardness and superstition. So successful modernization should be detrimental to religions and weaken them automatically, but this will not happen for a long time. Whether actual experience in other countries gives grounds for these predictions is a moot point.

Family, Population

In the field of religion the CCP's hopes and plans for the future show much continuity with the 1950s, but with a sombre recognition that change has not been nearly as great or deep as it had expected when it rose to power in 1949. Generally speaking, the same observation would hold true for family life. Yet change in the family could well be quite rapid over the coming decades because of the one-child-per-couple policy. The attempt to control population growth is the single most important political, economic and social, not to mention demographic, fact in contemporary China.

The principle of family planning is included in Article 49 of the 1982 state Constitution which states that the duty to practise it rests with both husband and wife. Other factors relating to family matters contained there are that the state protects marriage, the family and mother and child; that parents must bring up and educate minor children, but that children who have come of age "have the duty to support and assist their parents"; and that the freedom of marriage is inviolable. Under the preceding Article 48, "the state protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principal of equal pay for equal work for men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women". Equality between the sexes is a clearly guaranteed constitutional right, and the family holds a high priority as a social institution.

One of the main aspects of the new society the Deng leadership is trying to create is a properly constituted and implemented legal system. The fairly serious failures in human rights exposed by Amnesty International should not detract attention from the important advances made since legal reform began early in 1979 from a shockingly backward base at the time of the Cultural Revolution. One of the laws introduced has been the Marriage Law, adopted by the National People's Congress in September 1980. Apart from provisions similar to the Constitution's, such as free choice of marriage partners, equality between

husband and wife, and a duty on both partners to practise family planning, it lays down minimum marriage ages at 22 for men and 20 for women and encourages late marriage. It allows divorce "in cases of complete alienation of mutual affection", and forbids a husband to apply for divorce when his wife is pregnant or within a year after the birth of a child, but specifically waives this restriction for a pregnant wife. The law bans infanticide and any discrimination against children born out of wedlock. Article 8 states that after marriage, "the woman may become a member of the man's family, or the man may become a member of the woman's family", as the couple agrees.[16](#)

Courting patterns have changed drastically over the last few years, at least in the cities. Love, courtship and marriage are talked about in the press more than at any time in the past, with the possible exception of the liberal 1915-1920 period. On many issues, debate is very intense, but young Chinese, especially men, tend to tie love to the practicalities of furthering their own, and their family's, interests. The point is well illustrated by a cartoon in the newspaper *Chinese Youth News* which shows a young man with a piece of paper in his hand reading "three-part melody"; he has jumped from an oval called "good work unit" to another entitled "good job" and is finally, through a larger leap, landing in a third bearing the words "good girl".[17](#)

On the other hand, to marry without love merely for social or material advancement will nowadays arouse disapproval in Chinese cities. One young female correspondent of *Chinese Youth News* had fallen much in love with a man living in a different city, but been persuaded by her parents to marry someone else whom she did not love so that she could register the marriage and be allocated housing, for which there is always a long waiting list in overcrowded Chinese cities. Then her first love had unexpectedly come to live in her city. Since she was not yet living with her registered husband she sought advice on whether she should break it off with him and instead marry the man she really loved. She received a public stern rebuke from the editor, who accused her of rashness in having married just to get housing and of a frivolous and selfish attitude towards a serious matter.¹⁸ What she did in the end is not reported, but it does appear such manipulations as hers are not acceptable for men either, and that love, or at least serious mutual affection, competes with convenience as a real factor in urban Chinese marriages.

This fact leads to the question of who actually decides on marriage partners for young people. Is there in fact freedom of choice as both the Constitution and the Marriage Law declare there must be? A researcher who interviewed 300 women in two cities and four rural communes in 1980-1981 found that urban

people in general do indeed choose their own spouses according to the law. However, in the countryside change has been far less rapid and thorough. Her finding was that only 27 per cent of the recently married rural women had chosen their husbands themselves, 55 per cent had had them chosen by parents, and in 17 per cent of cases the choice was a dual one, that is made both by the woman herself and her parents. Equally, perhaps even more, telling was the fact that only 38 per cent of the rural women married since 1950 had known their husbands before becoming engaged to them, 29 per cent met them only after becoming engaged, and 33 per cent did not meet them until their wedding day.¹⁹ To be fair, this is an enormous advance since the days when rural women were never even consulted about their spouse, but it falls far short of the real freedom of choice in marriage which the CCP has been trying to put into effect. As a factor in deciding on a marriage partner family convenience is much slower to yield to love or other factors in the countryside than in the cities.

The same researcher found that the age of women at marriage had been rising steadily since 1950 in the cities and in 1980-1981 stood at just over 25. In the countryside, however, it was not until the 1960s that the age of women at the time of their marriage began to go up significantly, and had reached about 23 by 1980-1981. This latter mean is three years higher than the

minimum legal age for women under the 1980 Marriage Law. Another interesting finding is that newly-wed men are about four years older, on average, than their wives in Chinese cities and about three in the countryside. Both these figures have fallen substantially in recent years.²⁰ One implication of this is that the number of young women married off to much older men has fallen drastically. It appears that the family as an institution is considerably stronger in its impact on the lives of individuals in the countryside than in the cities, where changes have been greater and deeper. In other words the CCP's attempts to wrest control over the lives of people from the family have been far more successful and thorough-going among urban than rural Chinese. This observation may not be surprising, but it is extremely important all the same.

The years since the early 1980s have probably strengthened the family as an institution in the countryside even more because the commune system has collapsed. As a result, the authority of the CCP has declined markedly with the family stepping in to fill the partial power vacuum created. It is not an exaggeration to see a return of familism in the last few years in the Chinese countryside. I define the term familism to mean an urge towards power and cohesive spirit of the family as an institution, especially its senior male members.

Another question which bears on the importance and power of the family within society is household composition. The ideal in the past was the extended family, which includes parents, married children and their children as well under one roof. The more married children there were, the greater was the prestige which accrued to the family. In practice, few could afford to implement this ideal, which endowed great authority to the patriarch.

A survey carried out in 1936 by the famous Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong in a Chinese village showed 10.3 per cent of families were extended, 38.4 per cent stem (that is, parents, an only child and his or her spouse and children), 23.7 per cent nuclear (parents and unmarried children only), and 27.6 per cent other. An urban and rural survey, each carried out by Chinese scholars in 1982, showed a drastic increase in the proportion of nuclear families, and a decline in both the other types. The findings are shown in the following table: [21](#)

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Percentage in Urban Survey</i>	<i>Percentage in Rural Survey</i>
Nuclear family	74.8	67.7
Stem family	22	31.7
Extended family	3.2	0.6

The extended family in this survey has all but disappeared. Ironically, a Western survey, based admittedly on a very small sample in 1980-1981, reached the conclusion that despite the strong growth of the nuclear family in the cities, it was actually declining in the countryside, where a rapidly rising standard of living and housing provisions was leading to a reassertion of traditional family patterns.[22](#) The explanation for such contradictory evidence probably rests in varying conditions in different parts of the country. What does seem clear is that in urban China the nuclear family is becoming overwhelmingly the norm, but the rural situation is much more problematical.

The extended family will probably disappear within a couple of decades simply because of the policy of one child per couple.

In traditional times many sons were the ideal. The famous Confucian philosopher Mencius (371-289 B.C.?) stated that the most unfilial of all acts was to die without posterity. The function of children, especially sons, was to carry on the family line and to look after parents if and when they reached old age. So to have a family became a kind of insurance policy. Mortality rates were high and low standards of living with periodic famines were taken for granted for all but the

elite, so controlling population growth never became high priority in government policy.

In recent years, however, mortality rates have fallen greatly, according to official PRC statistics from 20 per thousand in 1949 to 6.6 in 1982.^{[23](#)} The relative prosperity and stability since 1949, and the much improved health delivery system, have resulted in a population explosion on a scale never seen before in China. The number of people in China in 1982 was considerably more than double what it was when the PRC was established in 1949.

Moreover, as mortality rates have fallen, average life expectancy at birth has risen greatly and for the same reasons. Whereas it was only about 35 years before liberation,^{[24](#)} the official census figures for 1981 show life expectancy at birth for Chinese females at 69.35 years, for males 66.43, and for the population as a whole 67.88.^{[25](#)} These figures are very impressive for a country as poor as China. By way of comparison, I add that mid-1980 United Nations figures put India at 51.5 years and South Korea at 62.5. In 1980 life expectancy in the USSR was 69.6 and in the US 73,^{[26](#)} so China is only about five years short of the world's richest country. Obviously the number of old people has risen greatly and is likely to go on doing so.

For some periods of the PRC, the government under Mao's influence ignored the problem posed by the rising population. Mao appears to have considered that a large population was beneficial to the nation as a whole because the socialist system could provide for the people's needs, he believed. During the early Cultural Revolution years there were but few checks on rapid population growth, and it reached a peak of about 2.5 per cent per year in the early 1970s. The government then decided on a policy of controlled population growth, which has become more and more strict since then. Early in 1978 Hua Guofeng described family planning as "a very significant matter" which "benefits the people where production, work and study are concerned".[27](#) Soon after, a family planning leading group was formed with the task of finding ways to curb population growth. In September 1980 the National People's Congress put forward a general call for "one child only per couple" and in reporting to the same body in November 1982 Premier Zhao Ziyang declared:

We must take effective measures and encourage late marriages, advocate one child for each couple, strictly control second births and resolutely prevent additional births so as to control population growth. Otherwise, the execution of our national economic plan and the improvement of the people's living standards will be adversely affected.[28](#)

The measures to which Zhao Ziyang refers are mainly economic incentives of various kinds. There have, however, been many well-based reports of forced abortions, infanticide and others. Unlike infanticide, a topic to which I return later, abortion is not illegal in China. Indeed, one of the Chinese quarrels with the Vatican lies in precisely this area. Recently the official *People's Daily* "described the Vatican as 'an obstinate citadel' which has relegated to 'forbidden zones' the questions of genetic engineering, abortion and planned parenthood". [29](#)

Up to now the policy of population growth control has brought clear results in numerical terms. The growth rate fell consistently and sharply throughout the 1970s and reached a low point of 1.16 per cent in 1979. [30](#) In the 1980s it has fluctuated somewhat and reached a low point of 1.15 per cent in 1983. [31](#)

Only one section of the population has been exempted from the one-child-per-couple policy, namely the minority nationalities. This is part of the CCP's recent emphasis on making autonomy a reality, but the fact is that the government would run a grave political risk of alienating many of the most significant minorities were it to start ordering them to restrict each married couple to one child. For the 6.7 per cent of the total population that the minority nationalities represent, the economic gains are just not worth the

political risk. The result is that population growth rates are far higher among the minority nationalities than the Han. The 1982 census showed that the former had grown in number by a total of 68.4 per cent since 1964, as against 43.8 per cent for the Han.

It may be that the government will eventually withdraw its exemption from the one-child-per-couple policy from the minorities. Already there are signs that at the grass roots some officials are demanding its implementation among the less sensitive politically or more advanced economically of the nationalities. CCP members are supposed to set a good example everywhere, meaning that even those of the minorities should restrict the size of their family to one child.

My impressions coincide with those of the Australian Ambassador in China from 1980 to 1984, Professor Hugh Dunn, who stated in a public lecture at Griffith University early in October 1984 that he had never met a Chinese who liked the population policy nor one who did not concede its necessity. The extent to which it will succeed is a moot point. Up to now the government is introducing tight quotas and stringent economic incentives against any couple's producing more than one child. It is doing its best to raise educational and sophistication levels, which should bring about the effect of making the people want fewer children anyway. The raised minimum marriage ages of

the 1980 Marriage Law may result in a long-term reduction in the population growth rate. I am in little doubt about the determination of the government to succeed in curbing population growth, even if they fail in their stated target of keeping it within 1.2 billion by the end of this century.

Very serious problems remain. One of them is the concept that children, especially sons, are an insurance policy against old age. The counter to this is better pensions which are already good in the cities, but very poor in the countryside where four-fifths of the people live.

Another factor is the ancient economic notion that a son is a labour unit and thus contributes to family wealth, and so the more the better. This point is even more serious than the previous one because the collapse of the communes, the regrowth of familism in the countryside and the new policies of the Deng leadership have been accompanied by a return to family farming, which is already strong and strengthening. This means that the rural system itself favours a plurality of sons from the individual family's economic point of view, even while policy forbids more than one in the interests of the nation as a whole.

It is important to note that it is sons, rather than children, that are so desirable to the peasants. There

is an ancient preference for sons in China and, despite heavy educational pressures to change this attitude in government propaganda, it is likely to remain strong for a long time to come.

There are important economic reasons why this should be so. One is the perception that males are muscularly, if not physically, stronger than females and hence more effective labour units. A second, and far more significant, factor is the ancient and in the past nearly universal tradition by which it was a woman who married into the husband's family and not the other way around. It will be recalled that the 1980 Marriage Law specifically allows either men or women to marry out, but in the Chinese countryside it is still overwhelmingly the females who do so. What this means is that the heavy investment which parents make to bring up a daughter brings dividends not to their own family, but to her husband's. On the other hand, a son will grow into a labour unit bringing dividends to his own family, and in addition he will probably attract a productive woman as well. A son thus repays the cost of his own upbringing handsomely, whereas a daughter does not.

It is thus hardly surprising that the great majority of peasants wish the only child allowed to them to be a son. Directly as a result of the combination between the preference for sons over daughters and the policy

allowing only one child per couple there has been recently a resurgence of the ancient practice of female infanticide, especially in the countryside. It is of course illegal, as noted earlier, but appears to have become quite widespread all the same. Of course, the Chinese government has not released figures showing the precise scale of this crime. However, sampling from the 1982 census showed that the sex ratio at birth in that year was 107.66, in other words there were on average 107.66 live male births for every 100 female. In the province of Anhui the sex ratio at birth was 111.12.^{[32](#)} "Normal" sex ratios at birth vary according to circumstance, but are approximately 105. So a birth rate of 107.66 does not prove female infanticide, but does suggest it, while 111.12 is so high that even the Chinese authorities have made no attempt to cover up the reason.

The real tragedy is that the restrengthening of the family as an institution favours infanticide. In the past it has been the CCP, not the family, which has stamped out this evil practice. When the Confucian family system was in charge in the past it did nothing for the baby girls and overall sex ratios rose as high as 120. It was the CCP which succeeded in putting an end to these murders not long after liberation.

Government spokesmen, like Premier Zhao Ziyang, have called on "judicial departments" resolutely to

"punish ... according to law" any person guilty of female infanticide or the related crime of maltreating women who fail to produce a son.^{[33](#)} No doubt many such criminals are punished. But the trouble is that with the regrowth of familism, the criminal and relevant lawyer are quite likely to be either the same person or relations with an axe to grind in protecting each other, because the lawyers are chosen from among the senior male members of the local powerful family. Moreover, no young woman is likely to find much support, either for herself or her daughter, from her parents-in-law. On the contrary, for the latter the daughter-in-law's primary function is to produce a grandson for the family.

The 1982 census showed the overall population of China to be 48.5 per cent female and 51.5 per cent male, an overall sex ratio of 106.3, somewhat lower than the figure of 108, found in 1929-1931, the early years of Chiang Kaishek's government.^{[34](#)} Unless female infanticide is stamped out, the sex ratio will rise again over the next few decades.

The long-term result would be many bachelors and a likely increase in homosexuality. Prostitution, which the CCP all but eradicated after 1949, has already made a small return and will certainly flourish once again if the overall sex ratio climbs high. Ironically, the long-term result of the resurgence of female

infanticide could also be to solve the population problem, since it is the female cohort which determines the size of the succeeding generation, not the male.

As for the one-child-per-couple policy as a whole, it is already breeding a nation of only children with results which are not yet quite clear from a social point of view. If hardly any Han baby can have a sibling now, the next generation will be more or less entirely without cousins. Under these circumstances the family as an institution cannot fail to decline and so will its power. The resurgence of rural familism which I have argued is so harmful will probably turn out to be temporary.

Running through all this discussion on family and the population question is the implication that, contrary to the declaration of the Constitution, women are not equal to men in China. Yet to be fair it is necessary to point out some real recent gains. As of 1982 the proportion of cadres, that is administrators or people in decision-making positions of various kinds, who were female was 26 per cent,^{[35](#)} incomparably higher than when the CCP took power. Women are entering the professions and the work force in the cities to a large extent and excellent child-minding facilities encourage them to do so. As seen earlier, urban women enjoy far more freedom than in the past in all sorts of family matters such as the choice of their

own husbands. The one-child-per-couple policy will help those women who want a career equal to men to achieve their aim.

There are also signs pointing in the opposite direction. They were clearly pointed out by Kang Keqing, then head of the Chinese Women's Association, in an interview she gave to China's English-language daily:

Not a few factories and schools required higher standards or imposed harsh terms on women applicants in recruitment; competent women were often ignored when it came to promotion; women were still beaten, and female infanticide remained a serious problem. Illiteracy was the main obstacle to genuine equality between men and women, Kang said. Out of 235.82 million illiterates and semi-illiterates in the country, 70 per cent were women. "Illiteracy means powerlessness," she warned. [36](#)

Of course she is right, and the female illiterates are mostly rural. As Kang makes clear through her reference to factories, discrimination against women survives in the cities, but the real problem is in the countryside. It appears from the material on freedom of women to choose their own husband that the advance towards equality was always much slower than the CCP wanted. I know of a case from a close friend of a rural young woman who is being treated as a social pariah by her family and village because she dared to fall in love with a young man of whom her father disapproved, and

her situation is probably not isolated. Personal tragedies of this sort, and especially the regrowth of female infanticide, suggest very strongly that the status of the female sex in the Chinese countryside has actually fallen in recent years. Almost certainly this trend has not only followed, but resulted directly from, the recent changes in rural policy, including the collapse of the commune system. It is a section of the female sex who are paying the price for the rural prosperity of which the Chinese media, quite properly, speaks with such pride. A relatively small number of rural females are the sacrificial lambs to the prosperity of the great majority.

Conclusion

There are some important links connecting the trends outlined above in religion and the family. An important one is a partial return to traditional values which is manifested throughout Chinese society today. It can be seen not only in the resurgence of religions like Islam and Buddhism and in the return of familism, but in the appreciation of traditional arts of all kinds. It is crystal clear that the Chinese no longer care for revolution as they understood it in the decade 1966-1976. Instead the CCP at the Sixth Plenum of June 1981 officially redefined the idea of revolution in such a way as to allocate top priority to economic modernization.

What this shows is the failure of Mao's vision to take root among the Chinese masses. The narrowness, the puritanism of the Cultural Revolution, Mao's desperate attempt to push it through no matter what the human cost, have backfired in a big way to produce a new period in which the people aspire to totally different values. This period is not without human cost either, but it is more acceptable to the Chinese people, in part because it is closer to their tradition, brings greater hope of material prosperity, and allows for a greater degree of intellectual freedom.

It is ironical in the extreme, though not peculiar to China, that a policy of modernization should bring a return to traditional values in its wake. The Chinese leadership has seen a measure of free enterprise and competition, coupled with an open door to the outside world, as part of the key to a successful modernization. A slackening of government and Party controls on social institutions has followed. Former power-holders have seized the opportunities offered.

One of the results is a widening of certain forms of inequality. Of these the most disturbing is that between male and female. The Islamic revival has not helped women's rights and the strengthening of rural family power appears to have harmed the status of the female sex.

In my view it is the population policy which is the decisive factor in China's economic and social future. If it succeeds it will break the resurgent familism and assure a reasonably smooth modernization, but it is necessary to add that the criteria for success include not only reducing population growth rates, but raising educational levels, undermining the power of the "labour unit" mentality through technology, greatly reducing the power of the family as an institution, and closing the inequalities between male and female. The fact is that China's population is unmanageably large and the control of its size is part and parcel of modernization. Should this daring attempt fail, the result will be famine and poverty on an unimaginable scale, especially in the countryside, and inequalities even greater than those seen up till now. In that eventuality, the response of whatever leadership exists will be tyranny, as always happens in such cases.

It is no doubt clear that I find much that is admirable and much that is deeply disturbing in Chinese society since Mao. I agree with the opinion Hugh Dunn attributes to the Chinese; I do not like the population policy, but believe it to be necessary. Despite the problems the Chinese currently face, it would be very easy to imagine scenarios far bleaker than the present one.

It is obvious that I have feelings about the Chinese and what they do. As an outsider, I clearly have a right to a view. Yet my primary aim in this lecture has been to analyse and explain developments in Chinese religion and family since 1976, not to cast judgments on the Chinese.

NOTES

1. See *Beijing Review* XXV, 52 (27 December 1982), p. 16.
2. *Zhongguo baike nianjian 1983 (Chinese Encyclopedic Yearbook)*, Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, Beijing, Shanghai, 1983, p. 54.
3. See *Zhongguo tongji nianjian (Chinese Statistical Yearbook 1983)*, Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, Beijing, 1983, pp. 113-114.
4. Calvin Greenham, "A Church of Survivors Faces a New Form of Attack in China", *Far Eastern Economic Review* CXXIII, 10 (8 March 1984), p. 70.
5. See *People's Republic of China Year Book 1983*, Xinhua Publishing House, Beijing, Evergreen Publishing Company, Hong Kong, 1983, p. 990.
6. *Zhongguo baike nianjian 1983*, p. 677.
7. See Jing Wei, "Tibet: An Inside View (V)", *Beijing Review* XXV, 51 (20 December 1982) pp. 36-8.
8. Greenham, "A Church of Survivors", p. 70.
9. Quoted *ibid*, p. 71.
10. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Buddhism in China Today", *Tibetan Review* XIX, 6-7 (June-July 1984), p. 11.
11. Greenham, "A Church of Survivors", p. 71.
12. Mark Baker, in *The Courier-Mail*, 26 September 1984, p. 4.
13. See the statement reported by the New Chinese News Agency as quoted in *Asian Recorder* XXVII, 35 (27 August-2 September 1981), p. 16188.

14. *People's Republic of China Year Book 1983*, pp. 987-8.
15. Wang Gudong, *Minzu wenti changshi (General Knowledge on Nationality Problems)*, Ningxia Renmin chubanshe, Yinchuan, 1982, pp. 77-8.
16. See the text of "The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China (1980)" in *Pacific Affairs* LVII, 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 266-9.
17. *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 23 September 1982, p. 4.
18. *Ibid.*, 5 September 1982, p. 8. Gail Hershatter considers the questions of courtship in "Making a Friend: Changing Patterns of Courtship in Urban China", *Pacific Affairs* LVII, 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 237-51.
19. Margery Wolf, "Marriage, Family, and the State in Contemporary China", *Pacific Affairs* LVII, 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 227-8.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 222-5.
21. See Guo Xuan, "Changes in Chinese Family Structure", *Australia-China Review* 17 (August 1984), pp. 3-4. The article was reprinted from *Women of China* (May 1984).
22. Wolf, "Marriage, Family, and the State", pp. 231-2.
23. *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* 1983, p. 105.
24. "Average Life Expectancy Doubled", *Beijing Review* XXIV, 10 (9 March, 1981), p. 7.
25. "Mortality Rate, Life-Span Computed", *Beijing Review* XXVII, 14 (2 April 1984), p. 12.
26. *Far Eastern Economic Review Asia 1981 Yearbook*, Far Eastern Economic Review, Hong Kong, 1981, p. 44.
27. Hua Guofeng, "Unite and Strive to Build a Modern, Powerful Socialist Country!", *Beijing Review* XXI, 10 (10 March 1978), p. 29.
28. Zhao Ziyang. "Report on the Sixth Five-Year Plan", *Beijing Review* XXV, 51 (20 December 1982), p. 18.
29. Mary Lee, "Return of the Native", *Far Eastern Economic Review* CXXVI, 45 (8 November 1984), p. 46.
30. *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* 1983, p. 105.
31. State Statistical Bureau, "Communique on Fulfillment of China's 1983 National Economic Plan", *Beijing Review* XXVII, 20 (14 May 1984), supplement p. XI.

32. "Sex Ratio of China's Newborns Normal", *Beijing Review* XXVI, 18 (2 May 1983), pp. 9, 13.
33. Zhao Ziyang, "Report on the Sixth Five-Year Plan", pp. 18-19.
34. The 1929-31 sex ratio is that given by John Lossing Buck in his *Land Utilization in China*, Paragon Book Reprint, New York, 1968, p. 375.
35. See *China Daily*, 7 March 1983, p. 1.
36. *Ibid.*