

**Asia Research Institute
Working Paper Series No. 235**

The Philanthropic Turn of Religions in Post-Mao China: An Interactional Perspective

Keping Wu
Harvard-Yenching Institute, USA

kepingwu@gmail.com

March 2015



The **ARI Working Paper Series** is published electronically by the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.

© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each Working Paper.

ARI Working Papers cannot be republished, reprinted, or reproduced in any format without the permission of the paper's author or authors.

Note: The views expressed in each paper are those of the author or authors of the paper. They do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the Asia Research Institute, its Editorial Committee or of the National University of Singapore.

Citations of this electronic publication should be made in the following manner: Author, "Title," ARI Working Paper, No. #, Date, www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm. For instance, Smith, John, "Ethnic Relations in Singapore," ARI Working Paper, No. 1, June 2003, www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm.

Asia Research Institute Editorial Committee

Michelle Miller – Chair

Eli Elinoff

Fiona Lee

Eric Kerr

Joshua Gedacht

Tharuka Maduwanthi Prematillak

Valerie Yeo

Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

469A Tower Block #10-01,

Bukit Timah Road,

Singapore 259770

Tel: (65) 6516 3810

Fax: (65) 6779 1428

Website: www.ari.nus.edu.sg

Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

The Philanthropic Turn of Religions in Post-Mao China: An Interactional Perspective

This essay explores recent policy changes of the Chinese government toward religious philanthropy and the impact on religious groups and individuals. How has the attitude of the Chinese state toward religious organizations' involvement in philanthropy since the 1980s? How do the religious groups adjust and redefine themselves when philanthropy was increasingly highlighted by the state as the "positive function that contributes to the society"? Based on longitude fieldwork in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces from 2006 to 2014, I argue that despite the seemingly more relaxed policies toward religions through philanthropy, the state also inflict more regulations on the religious groups who respond to such state callings. In contrast to previous studies that demonstrate a "resistance model" of religions in China¹ that emphasizes agency, this paper argues for an interactional model that shows both sides of state and religious organizations transform in this process. On the one hand, the state asserts its authority less through direct repressive means but more through legal and financial means. Using Buddhist and Protestant cases studies, I show that this leads to increasing bureaucratization and professionalization of the groups. On the other hand, there appears a more assertive laity who subscribes to a discourse of universal love.

By religious philanthropy², I mean both monetary donations and delivery of social services by religious groups and organizations. It involves planning, volunteering, decision-making and sometimes research³. Sometimes these are formal institutions set up in association with or under a religious organization, such as the FBOs mentioned in McCarthy's recent study (2013). Sometimes they are independent of any particular religious group, such as the Amity Foundation mentioned in this article. In other cases, a religious group might provide ad hoc social services without having a formal institution. In any case, involvement in philanthropy leads to intensified interactions between religious leaders, volunteers and the religious groups they belong to. Thus, religious organizations that participate in philanthropy are likely to be shaped in this process, instead of merely adding charity to their daily agenda. This transformation may be fundamental to some groups than others and the differences between religious organizations involved in philanthropy and those who are not may be bigger than what we expect.

I draw on two major concepts to help us understand interactions between the state policies and religious philanthropy in contemporary China. The first one is "adaptive governance" discussed by Elizabeth Perry and Sebastian Heilmann in their historical-institutional analysis of the Chinese state's ability to maintain its status quo.⁴ The authors argue that the CCP's flexible policymaking process is the key to the resilience of

¹ Such as the works by Adam Chau (*Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), Susan McCarthy ("Serving Society, Repurposing the State: Religious Charity and Resistance in China." *China Journal* 70 (2013): 48-72) and Kenneth Dean ("Ritual and space: civil society or popular religion?" Pp. 172-92 in Timothy Brook and B. Michael Frolic (eds.), *Civil Society in China*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997. "Local communal religion in contemporary South-East China." *China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 338-58).

² Sometimes distinctions are made among charity, philanthropy, welfare, public good, etc. In this article, I will use "philanthropy" as a general term for any kind of giving (money or service) to the needy without expecting anything in return. Only when the specific words "charity" (慈善) and "welfare" (福利) is used by informants, I will use those terms to indicate the specificity.

³ Some religious philanthropic organizations have separate research departments that are devoted to the research of specific projects. Examples are Linshan Cishan Foundation and Amity Foundation.

⁴ Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty: Guerrilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China", in Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.), *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 1-29.

China's authoritarian state. Through local experimentation, the government is able to find the most effective solution that is replicable in other regions. Perry finds that the similarities between Hu Jintao's "Socialist Countryside Program" and Maoist mass campaigns in that both utilize "test points" and local initiatives to install successful propaganda.⁵ If "adaptive governance" is "seeing like a state", Robert Weller's concept of "blind-eye governance" is more of a bottom-up approach. He argues that since 1989, the state has adopted "a 'don't ask, don't tell' attitude toward many social forms that lie outside the law but are nevertheless mostly tolerated."⁶ Both religious and environmental groups have expanded their spaces as a result of "the state choosing to accept a convenient fiction by ignoring inconvenient details."⁷ Drawing the link between the "responsive authoritarian regime"⁸ and a "responsive religious field", this essay asks how religious groups and individuals are affected when the state increasingly encourages and regulates religious philanthropy at the same time. These two concepts are helpful in allowing us to see the transformations on both sides of religion and state.

Since the 1980s, Chinese religious groups have tried to find ways to survive, revive, and thrive. One interesting feature of this revival is that religious groups "hitchhike" on various other developmental attempts such as medicine⁹, tourism¹⁰, cultural heritage¹¹, or the "Chinese classics movement" (国学运动), etc. I would argue that philanthropy is another important strategy religious groups adopt to make room for their development under the current regime. This essay is divided into four major parts. First it suggests that religious groups in Post-Mao China have initiated philanthropy twenty years before the government responded with policy changes. Then it reviews the transformations in the religious policies of the Chinese state and argues that though religious philanthropy is more visible the control over religious groups has not loosened. Only the method has changed from down right oppression to co-option and regulation through means of finance and accounting. Thirdly, it shows the bureaucratization and professionalization religious philanthropy has undergone. The last section describes the laity as a force in philanthropy and the emergent religiosity shaped by more organized participation in philanthropy as a religious activity.

RELIGIOUS-GROUPS INITIATED PHILANTHROPY

In 2006, when I interviewed the officials at the Religious Affairs Bureau (hereafter, the RAB) in Jiangsu province, their response toward religious philanthropy was: "Our government should be the sole provider for social welfare in China. We need to be cautious of other social groups, NGOs and religious groups [that try to replace the state by sharing the responsibilities]." They went on to explain that ideologically NGOs and religious groups are incompatible with the Socialist ideals of development and

⁵ Elizabeth J. Perry, "From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: Constructing a New Socialist Countryside", in Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.), *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 30-61.

⁶ Robert P. Weller, "Responsive Authoritarianism and Blind-Eye Governance in China", in Nina Bandelj and Dorothy J. Solinger (eds.), *Socialism Vanquished, Socialism Challenged: Eastern Europe and China, 1989-2009* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 83.

⁷ Ibid, p. 91.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ David Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Tim Oakes and Donald S. Sutton (eds.), *Faiths on Display: Religion, Tourism, and the Chinese State* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

¹¹ Liang Yongjia, "Turning Gwer Sa La Festival into Intangible Cultural Heritage: State Superscription of Popular Religion in Southwest China", *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2013), pp. 58 – 75.

therefore, they are intrinsically dangerous to the Socialist nation-building. Things changed dramatically in just a couple of years.

In May 2008, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck Sichuan and shook all of China. Suddenly religious groups and NGO's disaster relief efforts are reported even on the mainstream media, including the state news provider *The China Daily*¹². The "religion sector" (宗教界)¹³ alone has reportedly donated over 200 million RMB (around 32.5 million USD) to the Sichuan Earthquake. In February 2012, the State Administration for Religious Affairs of P.R.C. (SARA)¹⁴ issued an "Advice on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Sector's Participation in Philanthropic and Charitable Activities" ("Advice" hereafter)¹⁵. **This was the first state regulation on religious charity by the current regime.** In March 2012, SARA launched an annual nation-wide "Religious Charity Week" campaign, which was mandatory for the five official religions, Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Catholicism and Christianity (Protestantism) to participate in.¹⁶ Supervised by provincial and municipal RAB officers, the five official religions are expected to join hands in public funding raising events and offer social services collectively.

These changes suggest that the political environment for religious groups to participate publicly in philanthropy is becoming more "open". The officials I spoke to in 2006 clearly demonstrated that the position of the state was on the defensive side, but by 2012, the subject has received much more positive attention from above. Nevertheless, the year 2012 definitely should not be regarded as the beginning of religious philanthropy in post-Mao China. During the 1991 Flood in Southeastern Provinces 华东水灾, religious groups' involvement in disaster relief first became visible to the general public. This was the first time the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, the CCP) called for international aid in disaster relief. The Taiwan based NGO Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (hereafter, Ciji) entered mainland China for the first time and established their office there in 1992. In the religion sector, the Buddhist Association of China (hereafter, BAC) alone donated 5 million RMB¹⁷ to the government bureau for disaster relief.

Long before the top-down political policies toward religious philanthropy "opened up" in the past few years, individual religious leaders have already been engaged in sporadic philanthropic acts since the 1980s. For instance, the former abbot of the Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai, Master Zhenchan (真禅), had been donating to the Children's Welfare Association since 1984. In 1988 he became the honorable head of the association and founded the "Master Zhenchan Children's Welfare Foundation". The lay associates in the temple's charity program told me, "Before 2008, a temple or a church could not do charity in the name of the temple or church. So the old abbot had to do it under his own personal name. After 2008, things can be done in the name of a temple." This was not entirely accurate on the policy

¹² Pu, Chengzhong, "Breaking Rules to be Compassionate: A Real-life Application of 'Skilful Means' in the 5/12 Great Earthquake Rescue" (Paper presented in the conference "Salvage and Salvation: Religion, Disaster Relief, and Reconstruction in Asia", Asia Research Institute, November 2012).

¹³ Adam Chau, "The Rise of the Religion Sector (Zongjiaojie) in Modern China," unpublished manuscript.

¹⁴ SARA can be understood as the state level RAB.

¹⁵ Five state departments participated in the making of the policy: the State Administration for Religious Affairs of PRC, The United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC, Ministry of Finance of the PRC, State Administration of Taxation.

¹⁶ The Chinese government uses Christianity to mean Protestant Christianity and distinguishes Catholicism and Christianity as two separate religions.

¹⁷ Xu, Sunming. 2009. The Trend of Chinese Buddhism in the 21st Century (Ershiyi Shiji Zhongguo Fojiao Zouxiang). In *Buddhism Studies* (Fojiao Yanjiu), http://www.fjnet.com/fjlw/200903/t20090310_112071.htm. Accessed 12 September 2013.

level but other religious leaders also noted the significant transition the 2008 earthquake brought. In June 2008, the Jade Buddha Temple established the charitable foundation Juequn Ci'ai Gongdehui (觉群慈爱功德会) to handle all the charitable affairs of the temple. Now it accepts donation in all major foreign currencies. After the 2012 "Advice" was published, many more religious charitable foundations are being established all over China.

Since the founding of the first Protestant-initiated NGO Amity foundation¹⁸ in 1985 and the first legally-registered Buddhist non-profit social organization (非营利社会团体) Shaolin Cishan Fuli Jijinhui (少林慈善福利基金会)¹⁹ in 1994, religious philanthropy in Post-Mao China has come a long way²⁰. What is certain is that the state's pro-philanthropy policies are twenty years behind the religious groups' initiative in providing social services. It also shows that the engagement in philanthropy was not a top-down process, but rather, a result of interaction between the top-down policies and bottom-up grassroots efforts from religious groups and individuals who have been pushing the boundaries all along. These non-state-directed philanthropic engagements were either motivated by individual religious figures or propelled by theological concerns. However, this was only possible when the state has "one eye open and one eye closed" to such matters. The success of early experiment with religious philanthropy by innovative religious actors should be partly attributed to the blind-eye governance.

The Chinese state, on the other hand, has also transformed significantly since the 1980s, especially in terms of its attitude toward religious philanthropy. Typical of "adaptive governance," it uses the important events such as the flood in 1991 and the earthquake in 2008 as "test points" and when local responses are positive, it makes relevant policy changes accordingly but slowly. Highlighting the social function and contribution of religions is the major policy anchor for the post-2008 Chinese state²¹. The following section will examine these policy changes in detail.

TRANSITION OF RELIGIOUS POLICIES IN POST-MAO CHINA

One of basis upon which the Chinese state makes up religious policies is that religions are competitors of Socialist ideologies. That religions will be tolerated until they "naturally dissolve" in the course of social evolution is still clearly stated in the Constitution. Under this guiding principle, however, the "adaptive governance" of the CCP can be seen in a series of religious policies it has issued since the 1980s. In "Document 19" published in 1982, which was often regarded as the first statement of religious freedom in Post-Mao China, the state was mainly guarding its territory against the expansion of religious groups. It specifically states that the freedom of religion not only means the freedom to believe certain religions but also the freedom not to believe in any religions. This was mainly set out to prevent proselytization.

¹⁸ Founded by Bishop K.H. Ting, the Amity Foundation started as a *minjian tuanti* (civil organization) printing Bibles and sending English teachers to China. Though not officially a Protestant organization, it is definitely influenced by Christian values and does most of the fundraising among Christian organizations and individuals overseas and inside China.

¹⁹ It was founded by Shaolin Temple's abbot Shiyongxin.

²⁰ Historically, religious and non-religious grassroots organizations in China have long been active in offering social services and various charitable activities. This paper limits the discussion to the Post-Mao period. However, for detailed historical studies of benevolent halls, please see Fuma Susumu's *Zhongguo Shantang Shanhui Shi* [History of Chinese Benevolent Halls and Associations] (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan 2005), Angela Leung's *Shishan yu Jiaohua: Mingqing de Cishan Zuzhi* [Charity and Jiaohua: Philanthropic Groups in Ming and Qing China] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001) and Joana Handlin Smith, *The Arts of Doing Good* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) for Ming and Qing charitable organizations.

²¹ Of course the Chinese state is multifarious, instead of a homogenous entity. But here I use the "Chinese state" to mean the central policies of the party-state, especially toward "religions."

The 1994 document on the “Regulation on Governing Venues for Religious Activities” further limits the religious activities strictly to certain physical sites. The 2004 “Regulations on Religious Affairs” mention religious groups’ contribution to public good for the first time, but the point of protecting the rights of the non-religious is reiterated. During my field work in 2006, the RAB officials at the municipal and county level mentioned to me multiple times that “religious freedom” meant that atheists’ freedom should not be violated. The religious groups, on the other hand, obviously interpret “religious freedom” differently. In the eyes of the government, however, religious groups should stay within the boundaries the state has carved out for them. Any “spilling” out is dangerous and subject to containment. And the Chinese government has evolved in their methods of containment – from tactless crushing to demands for accountability.

This view of the religious groups as competitors explains the slogan “Loving the nation, loving the religion” (爱国爱教), the principle guideline and requirement for religious groups and individuals. It is worth pointing out that loving the nation comes before the religion. That sets the parameters for members of religious groups. As a result, religious leaders have to engage in constant “demonstration of their positions” (*biaotai*)²² in public speeches or writing. For instance, right after the new slogan “China Dream” was brought up by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the leaders of the five official religions are demanded to demonstrate how their religions can contribute to the building of the “China Dream” in the overseas edition of *China Daily* in order to collectively show that the “compatibility of religious tradition and Chinese modernity.”²³ Most people think of this as empty performance²⁴, but this public expression allows the religious groups to frame their participation in philanthropy as a form of patriotism. It is a clever way of turning political control into opportunities. Slogans are often used by religions as shields from political suspicion or persecution in China. Susan McCarthy, drawing on the Catholic Jinde Foundation and Buddhist Ren’ai Charitable Foundation argues that FBOs in China “repurpose” the state and expand the space for “spiritual practices” through philanthropic activities. However, this kind of “repurposing” is limited. As will be mentioned below, the state only sanctions a limited number of “social services.” Other services, especially those with political content are often forbidden. For instance, religious groups can organize garbage recycling but cannot support demonstrations against the building of a nuclear power plant²⁵.

Furthermore, the government tries to make sure that the credit goes to the state, instead of the religious leaders, organizations or the deities they espouse, though the services are delivered by religious groups. One of the lower level public security officers in charge of religious affairs thus cautioned me in 2010, “Although our government now encourages religious groups to contribute – they have so much wealth anyway, otherwise they get corrupted – it’s not good if the religions are doing too much. [That way,] they are winning the hearts of the people who may look up to the gods made of mud or religious leaders

²² *Biaotai* 表态, literally means expressing one’s attitude. It is a heavily politically loaded term, often used by Chinese political actors to mean declaring their political positions.

²³ Susan McCarthy, “Serving Society”, p. 56.

²⁴ It is precisely on this point that the underground churches differentiate themselves from the official churches. They claim the official churches are not spiritual because they pledge allegiance to a government that ideologically condemns religions in general. But for most official churches, they regard this as merely showmanship and their public *biaotai* does not connote a preference for Communist ideology over Christian theology. Please see Carsten Vala, “Protestant Reactions to the Nationalism Agenda in Contemporary China” in Francis Khek Gee Lim (ed.), *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 59-77.

²⁵ This is in contrast to the cases in Taiwan as shown in Robert Weller’s *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 105, where a spirit medium gets possessed by Guanyin to openly object the construction of an oil refinery in the neighborhood.

– who are only human – as the providers! Because people are simple-minded, they do not realize that our government is making it possible for them to live the lives they have now. And we work so hard in order to make sure they are safe and provided!”

The Chinese government clearly regulates what kinds of services religious philanthropy should provide. In a speech delivered at the “Workshop on Religions’ Roles in the Construction of Harmonious Society in Jiangsu Province” (2007), the vice-chair of the RAB actively encouraged religious groups to participate in areas of “disaster relief, poverty and disability relief; scientific, cultural, medical and sports enterprises; environmental protection and public infrastructure building; and other public and social welfare issues that contribute to social development.” Specifically, he encourages religious groups to provide more in areas of disaster, education (helping students go back to school or building “Hope Schools”), and poverty relief (the elderly, the mentally or physically disabled people)²⁶. In the recent conference organized by the Chinese Philanthropy Research Institute in Beijing Normal University, Jiao Ziwei, the associate chief of the Policy and Regulations Department in SARA was quoted as saying, “Religions are not floods or monsters²⁷. We don’t have to be afraid of them, but they are also not [innocent] youth. They are complicated and we need to harness them.”²⁸ This was interpreted by the conference organizers as a sign that the Chinese government is opening up to religious philanthropy. However, it also suggest that “harnessing” it is still the main attitude of the regime toward religion.

In the 2012 “Religious Charity Week” campaign launched by SARA, all levels of religious associations and organizations were required to contribute to philanthropic causes. All five religions raised 260 million RMB during one week, making this the largest donation from the “religion sector” since the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008. This was very state-regulated and some of the religious groups I talked with complained profusely about the so-called “charity week” campaign. To them, it was merely “a show” and a channel through which the government extracts funds from the religious groups. Other religious personnel regard this as a sign that the state allows more room for religious groups’ public roles and they were excited that this gesture signifies a positive turn in the public presentation of religions in China: from feudal superstition to modern partnership. No matter how mixed the feelings are, one thing is certain, that the state now commands the “religion sector” to play a more active role in social service delivery.

Besides these periodical campaigns, the Chinese government further regulates religious groups on two fronts: legal and financial. The 2004 “Regulations on Religious Affairs” clearly states that RABs at the county level and above have the legal and administrative rights over the management of religious affairs (chapter 1, no. 5). Every year every legal representative (法人代表 *faren daibiao*) of each registered venue of religious activities is required to participate in the study sessions in which they are tutored in the religious policies and regulations. Starting from 2012, SARA made the month of June the “Religious Policies and Regulations Study Month”, focusing on “Religious Ethics Building” (教风建设 *jiaofeng*

²⁶ http://www.jsnzj.gov.cn/art/2008/11/7/art_304_4036.html, accessed on 12 September 2013.

²⁷ Zonjiao bushi Hongshui Mengshou 宗教不是洪水猛兽. Ironically this expression shows that religion was indeed floods or monsters in the minds of many government officials.

²⁸ <http://gongyi.people.com.cn/n/2012/1113/c151650-19565091.html>, accessed on 12 September 2013.

*jianshe*²⁹). “Why should monks attend study sessions on empty rules that do not mean anything in the religion?” complained one Buddhist monk. In fact the same monk also lamented that the Sangha needs to better implement its *Dharma* and *Vinaya*, doctrine and discipline, citing some monks’ bad public behavior as examples of how Buddhism needs to be rescued from the current state of corruption. Nonetheless, in his view, this needs to come from inside religious groups, instead of from government regulations. The fact that the government offices are promoting “correct code of behavior” for religious specialists demonstrates that the state’s political control over religious groups.

In order to do philanthropy, the religious group needs to have good a source of income. The financial strength of a religious group often indicates the level of public support or mobilizing power. In the eyes of the state, this may pose a threat to state power. Therefore, religious philanthropy has been a thorny issue for the Chinese government. It is not surprising that religious leaders reacted strongly in different ways toward the 2012 “Advice” that regulates religious philanthropy. Some of them regard the policy as giving green light to the forming of religious charitable foundations. Others feel stricter legal, accounting and auditing constraints.

As early as 2005, the Ministry of Finance issued “Regulations on the Accounting System of Non-governmental Non-profit Organizations.” The regulations apply to any registered social organizations, foundations, non-governmental non-businesses, as well as Buddhist and Daoist temples, mosques and churches (Article 2). But as far as my research in 2006 showed, very few religious venues were using an accounting system that followed these regulations. The famous Lingyan Shan Temple of Suzhou was proud for the fact that the abbot did the accounts himself. Master Mingxue (b. 1921) is probably the only first generation religious leader who still oversees the daily affairs of a religious institution. Most of them have either passed away or retired. My field notes thus recorded:

When I went to see him, Master Mingxue was keeping the books. ... He laid out a small exercise book on the table. It contained all the information about donations made to the temple, arranged by dates. He handwrote each receipt carefully, stroke by stroke, addressed to each individual, and put them in envelopes that were going to be mailed back to the donor.

Abbot Mingxue was probably old school, but religious sites of this scale rarely had a specialized person in charge of the financial aspect of the organization. Retired school teachers often serve as volunteer book keepers for small churches and temples. Many small churches post the income and expenses on the blackboard at the entrance of the worship halls for all the members to see. The old level of “transparency” by posting the numbers on blackboards or based on the trust out of respect for the old abbot is no longer satisfactory because that is internally responsible for the members of the religious groups. The state demands “transparency” as in modern accounting systems that can be audited. This “corporatist model [of governance] ... assumes a social world separate from the state”³⁰ and demands

²⁹ The word *feng* literally means wind or atmosphere. It has become a very loaded term in the Communist political campaigns to mean correct behavior following the correct ideology. It is closely related in the minds of the Chinese to the (zhengfeng yundong 整风运动) in the Communist Party history. In 1942, Mao launched the first Rectification Campaign, in which he secured his ruling position within the party and made sure that Arts and Letters should serve the Communist ideology. From then on, the party has done many rounds of Rectification Campaigns. Moreover, *feng* was since often used to refer to a political campaign: such as changfeng 厂风 (the code of behavior for a factory), xiaofeng 校风 (code of behavior for schools), xuefeng 学风 (right attitude in studying), dangfeng 党风 (code of behavior for party members), wenfeng 文风 (correct style of writing). The use of jiaofeng 教风 (correct way of adhering to a religion), therefore, in the party’s vocabulary mainly means a religious person needs to be abide by state laws and regulations.

³⁰ Robert Weller, “Responsive Authoritarianism”, p.98.

religious groups to be “upwardly responsible” to the government instead of “downwardly responsible” toward the disciples.

In 2008, the vice-chair of the RAB of Jiangsu Province urged the religious venues to implement the “Regulations on the Accounting System of Non-governmental Non-profit Organizations” during a policy briefing:

By May 2008, 39 religious venues in Nanjing³¹, such as temples and churches, have implemented the new accounting system, except the Shigu Catholic Church, Doushuai Buddhist Temple in Pukou, Hongjue Buddhist Temple in Jiangning. ... In the Regulation on Religious Affairs, an entire chapter (8 articles) is devoted to regulate property of religious organizations and venues. It both increases the protection of such property, and strengthens the regulations. It clearly states that religious organizations and venues need to regulate its financial situation. ... The non-profit organizations throughout the world are required to use at least 50% of their income on philanthropic enterprises. Religious groups in developed countries, including those in Hong Kong and Taiwan, also spend more than half of their income on philanthropy. ... To better regulate accounting system is to better manage the funds, caution against extravagance, promote frugality, and accumulate more funds on social charitable and philanthropic enterprises³².

From this speech, we can see that there is an increasingly top-down demand for religious groups to be “accountable” financially. As Dillon notes in her study of the voluntary sector in China, the implementation of the regulations is more important than the regulations themselves in shaping the organizations.³³ Among the ten fresh graduates recruited by SARA in 2013, two of them are accounting majors; one will be working for the Buddhist Association of China and the other working for the Daoist Association³⁴. It shows that this state is successfully enforcing their policy of accountability by urging the religious groups to hire experts or professionals to be in charge of the finances.

To summarize these changes, religious leaders first became involved in philanthropy in the mid-1980s under the “blind-eye governance.” Since then, the state has exercised “adaptive governance” and shifted its policies step by step to meet the demands from below and to fit strategic changes in other areas³⁵. Less than thirty years later, the state policies regarding religions have changed dramatically, from direct and tactless oppression to selectively promoting certain aspects of religious groups, such as philanthropy, cultural heritage, or moral education³⁶. By emphasizing the social function of philanthropy, the state demands more contribution from the religion sector, mostly in financial terms. Even though religious groups may partner up with the state in service provisioning, the latter never regards the former as a partner. Instead, as shown above, “religion” is still something to be harnessed.

³¹ The capital of Jiangsu province.

³² http://www.jsnzj.gov.cn/art/2008/12/6/art_300_4019.html, accessed on 12 September 2013.

³³ Nara Dillon, “Governing Civil Society: Adapting Revolutionary Methods to Serve Post-Communist Goals”, in Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.), *Mao’s Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 138-64.

³⁴ <http://www.sara.gov.cn//xxgk/gsgg/30713.htm>, accessed on 12 September 2013.

³⁵ These changes include economic and voluntary sectors, as well as reformations in the state system itself.

³⁶ Such as recognizing certain popular religious practices as “intangible cultural heritage” while trying to eliminate its “superstitious” elements and using Confucianism to promote a certain kind of moral order.

The Chinese state is not an un-changing entity that is solely repressive. Encouraging religious philanthropy is both a smart way of outsourcing government's responsibility and a dangerous business of playing with floods and monsters. On the other hand, religious groups also develop "adaptive strategies" to fine-tune their ways of organization and outreach in various directions facing such "adaptive governance". In this dialectic process, one of the outcomes is an increasing bureaucratization and professionalization.

RELIGIOUS PHILANTHROPY – A MODERN IMPERATIVE FOR BUREAUCRATIZATION AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

What are the effects of the state policies and regulations of religious philanthropy on religious groups? I suggest that there is a deepening process of bureaucratization and professionalization that go together. On the one hand, these two processes meet the state demand for accountability and transparency. When the state demands accounting books, financial reports and written briefs, etc., it requires a professional team organized into institutional forms to accomplish. On the other hand, the demand is also from within the religious philanthropies that are expanding their operation through which they have more public visibility. Through bureaucratization and professionalization, religious groups can generate more efficiency and trust from the devotees who contribute money and services.

According to Weber, the characteristics of modern bureaucracy include: "rules, laws and administrative regulations," "office hierarchy" and the need for "written documents".³⁷ Furthermore, bureaucracy often goes hand in hand with specialization and the education of experts.³⁸ A senior member of the Buddhist Association in Suzhou commented on this urgent need for more "professionalized" Sangha in an interview in 2008:

We are in dire need of talents within the Sangha. We need to train our monks to be accountants, human resources experts (*gongguan rencai*), art historians, temple managers, environmentalists. Without this modern professionalism³⁹, we have gigantic temples that are built without any sense of aesthetics. Or sometimes we may have very bad management of a temple, in which capable monks are not well placed⁴⁰ but relatives of the abbots may occupy powerful positions. As a result, decision making cannot optimize the outcome... In a word, we need to work on raising the quality of the Sangha, by improving their educational levels, their knowledge about all aspects of Buddhism, including art and culture, as well as innovative abilities (*chuangxin nengli*).

This rationalized way of managing a temple is increasingly upheld as a trait of modern Chinese Buddhism. Indeed, the two most famous Buddhist philanthropies in Jiangsu province, Lingshan Compassion Foundation (LSCF)⁴¹ and Hehe Cultural Foundation (和合文化基金会) from Hanshan Temple⁴² have

³⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978 [1956], p. 956.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 998-1001.

³⁹ *Xiandai zhuanke zhishi*, modern professional knowledge 现代专业知识

⁴⁰ *Buneng renren weixian*, unable to hire people based on their merit 不能任人唯贤

⁴¹ Lingshan Compassion Foundation (Linsan Cishan Jijinhui) 灵山慈善基金会 was originally named Lishan Ciji Jijinhui 灵山慈济基金会 in 2004-2006, although their website does not have this information any more. When I interviewed them in early 2006, they were still named Lingshan Ciji Jijinhui, explicitly modeling itself after the Taiwan-based Ciji Buddhist Foundation.

undergone processes of bureaucratization and professionalization. Both are registered under the Civil Affairs Bureau of Jiangsu province. Both have very clearly stated rules, office hierarchy and a professional team that are in charge of various departments within the organization.

Before the founding of Hehe Cultural Foundation in 2011, the Hanshan Temple Charity Center (寒山寺慈善中心) has become the most notable success story of local Buddhist philanthropy in Jiangsu province within a temple. Venerable Master Xingkong (b. 1922) became the deputy of Hanshan Temple in 1963. He was forced to go to the labor camp in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution and asked by the United Front officers to rebuild the temple in 1978 when Japanese tourists started flooding into the temple. Master Xingkong became the abbot in 1984 and started donating to orphans and the elderly in the city as a personal act of charity. In 1996 he established a Hanshan Scholarship in the local university for poor students. He conceived the idea of a Charitable Supermarket which was implemented by his successor Master Qiushuang (b. 1967) who became abbot in 2004. First of its kind, the Charitable Supermarket gave 200 low-income households in Suzhou monthly coupons (worth 60 RMB each) with which they can purchase daily necessities in the 250-square-meter supermarket behind the Hanshan Temple. In five years, it expanded to multiple locations in three districts (*Jinchang, Canglang, Gaoxin*) and one prefecture-level city (*Taizhou*), serving four hundred and two low-income families. In 2009, the Charitable Supermarkets changed its operation model. It collaborated with a major supermarket chain Darunfa and established Hanshan Temple Charity Center Supply Bases in their branches. In 2010, according to its official website, the Hanshan Temple spent a total of 289,440 RMB on this project alone⁴³. The volunteers applauded this shift, because they have met difficulties in delivering coupons to some of the families who feel a loss of face in shopping in a “Charity” supermarket. With this new arrangement, they feel more at ease shopping in a regular market as what other people do.

Hanshan Temple Charity Center is an example of working closely with the state⁴⁴. While it does seem that they have expanded their space of legitimacy, they have also limited their vision to what a state enterprise would look like. First of all, the temple obtains the list of the low-income households from the city government as the target of their charitable supermarket. Second, monks and officials from the RAB sit on the board of the Charity Center and make decisions together about programs that are carried out by lay volunteers under the supervision of monks. This is very reminiscent of the administrative and party lines working hand in hand in state enterprises, with the party always overruling the administrative units. Third, the Hanshan Temple’s annual report also resembles that of a state enterprise. Its 2010 annual report included 6 parts: Ideology Building (思想建设), Organizational Building (组织建设), Cultural Construction (文化建设), Members (会员风采), Research (调查研究) and Charitable activities (慈善公益), which is divided into disaster and poverty relief, medical support, elderly care, environmental protection and social care. There was no mentioning of building the *sangha*, theology or ritual services.

Lastly, the way it expands demonstrates institutionalized planning. Since 2003, Hanshan Temple has acquired Chongyuan Temple as its subordinate temple and made it into their education and training center after its completion in 2007. Since the founding of the Hehe Cultural Foundation it acquired

⁴² The Hanshan Temple Charity Center (寒山寺慈善中心), founded in 2004, is part of the temple and therefore under the leadership of the RAB. It is membership-based and mostly in charge of the Charitable Supermarket and other smaller scale charitable activities. Hehe Cultural Foundation (和合文化基金会), founded in 2011, is a Public-funding agency that allows the temple to collect donations in the entire Jiangsu province. It is registered with the Civil Affairs Bureau of Jiangsu Province.

⁴³ <http://www.hanshansi.org/cishan/shiye/2011/327.html>, accessed September 21, 2013.

⁴⁴ Keping Wu, “Negotiating the ‘Gray Zone’: Buddhist and Protestant Philanthropies in Contemporary Southeast China”, in Robin Bush, Philip Fountain, Michael Feener, eds., *Religion and the Politics of Development*, (Palgrave, forthcoming).

another Baihe Temple outside the city and stationed its Old Age Home (和合安养院) as well as a female Buddhist college there in 2012. What is interesting is that the original Baihe temple sits on a small hill called Gaojing Shan. There used to be many small temples devoted to the Lord and Lady of Gaojing Shan and other local deities. These “popular faith” (民间信仰) temples had to give way to the expansion of Baihe Temple. Hanshan Temple decided to aggregate all seventy to eighty statues of various deities and store them in rooms several levels beneath the main Buddhist Hall. When I visited the Baihe temple that was still in construction in December 2013, it was hard to see if the locals were still worshipping them. Besides the “No Burning Incense” signs, there were no incense burners in front of the statues and the robes the deities wore seemed to be covered with dust. The fact that the local deities were stored underneath a Buddhist Temple is a physical sign that institutionalized Buddhism has overshadowed popular faith in this case.

If Hanshan Temple provides a clear case of bureaucratization, the professionalization is even clearer in the case of the Lingshan Charitable Foundation (LSCF). The current Wuxi Lingshan Tourism Co. Ltd⁴⁵ started with a state economic development plan in the early 1990s to build a Taihu lakeside resort around a Xiangfu Temple, in a peninsular town Mashan half an hour outside of Wuxi. Zhao Puchu, the lay Buddhist head of the Buddhist Association of China then, made a decision to build a gigantic Buddha statue on the site. The Wuxi Tourism board appointed the entrepreneur Wu Guoping to be in charge of the construction of the resort and the statue. When the construction completed, Lingshan Dafo (Lingshan Big Buddha) became a hugely successful tourist site, charging a high entrance fee⁴⁶. Besides admiring the 88-meter Buddha statue, most tourists also burned incense in the Xiangfu Temple enclosed inside the 300,000-square-meter (74 acres) compound. The company and the temple had separate finances. All the income from the entrance tickets went to the company and the money in the donation boxes in the temple belonged to the temple⁴⁷. However, the company helps the renovation and maintenance of the temple structure⁴⁸. Wu has taken refuge (*guiyi*) in Buddhism years after he was in charge of the construction of Lingshan Buddhist resort. As the president of the Lingshan Group, he is also now the representative in the National People’s Congress and deputy secretary general of the Buddhist Association of China. Like Master Xingkong of Hanshan Temple, the abbot of Xiangfu Temple Master Wuxiang also began disaster and poverty relief as a personal mission much earlier on. He was especially known for the schools he built in poor western regions of China. However, with the founding of the LSCF, what was the personal calling of a renowned Buddhist master has transformed into a nation-wide NGO. From its very start, the LSCF was recruiting university graduates from department of philosophy and religious studies to take part in the program design, media publication and other organizational matters. For projects that involve close collaboration with the state or commercial companies, they also recruit students from sociology, business management and administrative management. The Lingshan Group now is a gigantic company with 7 subsidiary companies and 14 administrative units, including the LSCF office, the financial administration office, the actuary office, the Party administrative office, and human resources office, etc⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ The company has a multi-million dollar business that includes construction, real estate, resort, hotel, publications, a vegetarian food brand, a souvenir and religious goods brand, etc.

⁴⁶ As of 2013, the entrance was 210 RMB/person, around 34.5 USD/person.

⁴⁷ This did not include the funding of LSCF.

⁴⁸ This model has increasingly become the practices for temples in a scenic area. For instance, the Longquan Temple in Beijing sits in the Fenghuangling Park outside of Beijing. The Fufeng County government in Shanxi province built a 215 acre scenic resort around the 1,700-year-old Famen Temple outside of Xi’an.

⁴⁹ For detailed information, please see <http://www.chinalingshan.com/jtzc/ComeLingShan/Management/index.aspx>, accessed on September 13, 2013.

LSCF's operation is program-based. There are mainly three sections of their work: youth, community-service and nation-wide service. The youth program includes scholarship programs to high school and university students throughout China. The Chunhui Youth Charity Development Forum (春晖青年公益发展论坛) holds volunteer-training programs for hand-picked young people by the most active philanthropic actors and NGOs in China and internationally. The community service focus on providing social service programs such as poverty relief, environmental preservation campaigns and free medical check-ups, to the neighborhoods of Wuxi. Nation-wide services include three more foundations. The Aiyi Foundation (爱艺基金) helps disabled people to engage in handicraft making. The De Foundation (德基金) aims to propagate ideas of philanthropy through Chinese classics (公益国学) education to big corporations, families, schools and communities. The Smile Foundation (微笑基金) is mainly in charge of building libraries for children and youth across China.

The China Philanthropy and Charity website did a study on the transparency of philanthropy foundations throughout China. According to them, only 33 (2.4%) public foundations post their donation records online in a timely fashion. When LSCF reported this, they stated the following along with this information⁵⁰:

LCSF creates its team, research and operation of projects around the word "professionalism". We strictly follow "Policies on Management of Foundations". ... Regulated, transparent and professional are three guiding principles that contribute to the rapid development of LSCF in 2013 and will also be an important component of our future work.

So far my discussion has mainly focused on Buddhist cases. A look at Protestant groups will show that they oddly resemble the Buddhist cases. Founded in 1985, the Amity Foundation was initiated by the Protestant elites in China to serve the needs of people and to "glorify the name of Jesus." It started with Bible printing and sending English teachers to China. Today it is the largest and only legally registered publically funded NGO with a Protestant background and remains the only legal Bible printing organization in China (and the largest in the world). The founder Bishop K.H. Ting, who passed away in November 2012, remained the President of the Board of the Amity Foundation till his death. The general secretary who is in charge of daily decision-makings, Mr. Qiu, did not get baptized until around 2008. In an interview in 2006, he said, "I am of course sympathetic towards Christian ideals, especially their concern for charity," he says. "However, I am not baptized and I think that has made my work easier, since I have to deal with many government officials as part of my job. ... Also, we are not registered as a religious organization, but as an NGO." He and quite a number of other employees of the foundation are of university professor backgrounds, who claim to be sympathetic non-Protestants. Since his baptism, Mr. Qiu was able to act as the standing member of the Christian Association in China and vice-chair of the Christian Association of Jiangsu Province, as well as standing committee member of the National Political Consultative Council.

The Amity Foundation works on many areas, such as rural development, blindness projects, migrant workers, orphans, environment, education, disaster relief, rehabilitation, clinics for the poor and mentally challenged, etc. In terms of their source of income, it used to be heavily (99%) based on international Christian organizations, but according to the general secretary, domestic and local fund raising projects are successful enough to make the organization less and less reliant on the international funding.

50

http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5Mzk0MzI0NA==&mid=200047947&idx=1&sn=876218e0c6a0f5867dc1a6f33655d092#rd, accessed February 18, 2014.

In its daily operation the Amity Foundation is like any other NGO. It has a very specialized bureaucracy – under the general secretary, there are five departments, in charge of fund raising, programs, research and development, social services and administrative management. I interviewed some volunteers from universities in Nanjing. Most of them did not know that it had a Protestant background. Most of the program officers are also not baptized. As a matter of fact, a former Amity Foundation Protestant employee complained that he felt the organization was increasingly “secularized” (turning away from its Protestant roots), which made him to leave the foundation. However, according to the head of the research and development office, Ms. She, the transformation mainly lies in the increasingly rationalized organizational structure in order to meet more specialized and professional needs of today’s society, especially various collaborating agencies, the government offices as well as international donors.

One of the program officers speaks of her experience working in a Muslim community on women’s health issues. She says, “We need professional knowledge, not only medical expertise but also professional social scientists who can make us understand women’s situation in a Muslim community which is different from our previous work on women’s health in a Han community. Therefore, specialization and professionalism is increasingly important to us... Of course there is the report writing stage. We also need a certain understanding of the western donors’ expectation so as to write reports that make sense to them (in a professional manner)!” The cases of Amity and LSCF suggest that the Buddhist and Protestant organizations end up looking similar if they go through this route. Sometimes their “religious messages” get diluted.

This demand of professionalism from the donor’s side is even more crucial to smaller organizations that try to deliver social services. A very successful Xuzhou Protestant nursing home can illustrate this point. Founded by a retired pastor Ms. Wang and a few lay members of Xuzhou churches, this nursing home was independent from any churches. Ms. Wang explained:

We started with 6,000 RMB of donations from Protestant brothers and sisters. The churches refused to support us because they said that spiritual life and worship (属灵生活) was more important than taking care of old people. So we sought funding from the Amity Foundation, which gave us 50,000 RMB and the Social Service Department of the joint committees of Chinese Christian Council and Three-self Patriotic Movement of the Christian Churches (基督教两会)⁵¹ helped us a bit. Later we connected with the United Christian Nethersole Community Health Service (UCN) in Hong Kong through the joint committees. They paid us a visit and donated medical appliances since most of our elderly need in-house medical assistance. We were very appreciative of them for paying us a visit since we do not know how to write applications for funding. And they were very lenient with us on the report since we do not have the personnel to do it properly. But with other foundations, they all require reports on the personnel, especially medical personnel and training of the nurses. All of our twenty-some nurses came from very poor Protestant families in rural Jiangsu. They were extremely devoted and it was hard enough to train them in taking care elderly properly. It is their faith and love of God that support their work, not expert medical knowledge. Only three of us work here full time as administrators, but we are all volunteers. We have three doctors (also volunteers) who can use the medical appliances. It is very hard for us to take care of over 70 elderly, write reports and conduct training for the volunteers.

⁵¹ The *Lianghui* 两会 often have overlapping personnel and joint annual conference together.

She continued to tell me that some of the nurses tried to run away because a few confused elderly sometimes abused them or because they admired migrant workers' lives in the cities. But they were able to come back to the nursing home due to the calling of their faith and continue to serve the nursing home in order to glorify Jesus. None of this would be considered appropriate for a modern philanthropic organization. Therefore, for this small Protestant nursing home, the inability to meet the modern demand for professionalization in philanthropic enterprises is the major impediment in their work. In this sense, all small scale religious groups face the same problems.

Two Buddhist temples and one Protestant church I studied have had difficulties obtaining licenses for their old age homes. They are all small community-based entities, unable to meet professional management and auditing criteria. Worse still are the popular religious practitioners who are unable to perform this institutionalized demand of philanthropy, for instance, spirit mediums, fortune tellers, and various Zhengyi⁵² Daoists who normally do not belong to any temples. Restrained by limited financial resources or the lack of a professionalized management team, none of them can "contribute to the Socialist development" through philanthropy as the state demands. Therefore, through promoting a certain kind of religious philanthropy, the state further alienates popular religions and less institutionalized religious forms.

To conclude, this section argues that religious groups experience deepening bureaucratization and professionalization once they join the state's call for philanthropy. Granted, bureaucratization happens in all religious institutions when they expand. My argument is that engaging in philanthropy accelerates this process from both state pressures of being more accountable and internal push to be more efficient. Since the 2008 earthquake, philanthropy seems to be the most legitimate way through which religious groups claim a public presence without being stigmatized as superstitious or corrupt. In this process, community-based and popular religious groups that do not have the financial and administrative capacities are left out of this "benevolent" public image of religion. Though they are not entirely sidelined, they are tolerated if they do not claim political clout⁵³ or cultural heritage.⁵⁴ However, this bifurcation⁵⁵ it does not mean that large foundations or religious groups are not under state restrictions. Besides the aforementioned auditing and accounting regulations, the public foundations are required to spend over 80% of its annual income and private foundations are required to spend at least 8% of its annual income. Both of them have to keep their operational cost below 10% of their total income. This means that foundations such as Hehe Cultural Foundation have to rely on the Hanshan Temple to subsidize its operational cost. Otherwise it will not be able to meet these criteria.

Moreover, local governments often pressure religious foundations to take on certain projects, in order to share their burden of providing social welfare, regardless of those foundation's capacities or focuses. Sometimes the interference comes as monetary benefits. The local RAB, Civil Affairs Bureau, or even the United Front might want to collaborate with the religious group to provide old age care, by providing favorable policies such as land or subsidies, but in exchange, the management of the Old Age Home will have to conform to the state requisites. As a result, one temple in Jiangsu province I had studied fought a ten-year war with the local government in order to have its own Old Age Home, independent from the state. Therefore, I am not arguing that religious groups are forced to do philanthropy. On the contrary, as stated earlier, religious groups were doing philanthropy at least twenty years before the favorable

⁵² Zhengyi 正一 Daoists can get married and stay at home. Quanzhen 全真 Daoists cannot get married, have to be vegetarians and cannot drink. They are required to live in a temple.

⁵³ Adam Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.

⁵⁴ Selina Ching Chan, "Temple-building and heritage in China." *Ethnology* 44, no.1 (2005): 65–79.

⁵⁵ Yanfei Sun, "Popular Religion in Zhejiang: Feminization, Bifurcation and Buddhification," *Modern China* 40, no. 5 (2014): 455–87.

policies from the Chinese state. However, by plunging into the philanthropic trap set by the state, those religious groups experience bureaucratization and professionalization. This may end in further bifurcation among religious group due to different capacities and attitudes toward state-ascribed concept of philanthropy.

LOVE UNITES ALL: THE CREATION OF NEW RELIGIOSITY THROUGH PHILANTHROPY

Besides a top-down shaping effect of state regulated philanthropy on religious groups, there also emerges a new religiosity among volunteers who are mostly⁵⁶ members of a particular religious group or disciples of a particular religious leader. The last section deals with religious groups and this section explores the other side of the coin of the changes brought to religions through philanthropy by investigating how religious philanthropy transforms religious subjects who volunteer in such causes. In a word, there is a universalizing narrative of “love” permeating across religious denominations. In *Habits of the Heart*⁵⁷, Bellah et al. argue that the language Americans use to express themselves is constrained by radical individualism, even though they do not necessarily behave as such. Similarly, religious subjects use the language of universal love instead of traditional narratives of extended filial piety (“taking care of my kinsmen”), moral cultivation (*jiaohua*), or a Socialist narrative of “doing good deeds” (*zuo haoshi*) to frame their volunteering experience in religious groups.

One of the former Amity administrators related:

Sometimes older people in the neighborhood hear about volunteering opportunities in Amity and they want to participate. However, they don't take it seriously and do not behave in a professional way. They are loud and noisy and ignore the orders. Later on some of our Protestant volunteers have to come and re-do some simple tasks they are assigned to do... I find it much easier to work with brothers and sisters within the faith. They understand that it is out of God's love that they are doing this. Therefore, they listen to the orders much more carefully and perform the tasks as directed.

The Protestant theologian K. H. Ting has made “love” a central concern for Chinese Protestants in order to co-exist harmoniously not only with Confucianism but also Communism⁵⁸. If love to Christianity was nothing new, “love” to the Buddhists in mainland China is more of a recent invention. A lay Buddhist old age home in Southern Jiangsu once invited a lay disciple of Master Jingkong to speak on compassion. The female lay teacher, of Taiwanese origin but a resident of California, concluded her teaching by inviting all members of the audience (mostly females above 50 years of age) to loudly repeat “I love you” after her, in order to drive home the point that love should be an important part of being a Buddhist and the driving force of their charitable old age home. The disciples, who had never uttered these three words in their entire lives, were blushing but gradually joined the speech acts. The lay leader of the temple, a retired female cadre, scolded some of the giggling participants and led the collective in the same zeal as she were propagating party policies.

⁵⁶ Not all volunteers are religious. NGOs with Protestant backgrounds, such as Amity and YMCA often have non-Protestant volunteers, especially university students. Volunteers at Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, on the other hand, are mostly Buddhist or partial to Buddhist values.

⁵⁷ Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life: With a New Preface* (University of California Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ Gerda Wielander, “Beyond Repression and Resistance – Christian love and China's Harmonious Society.” *The China Journal*, No. 65 (January 2011), p.129.

This narrative of love, therefore, has taken over as the dominant voice of religious philanthropy. As Wielander argues, “There is perhaps no other term that transcends religious, political and cultural boundaries in quite the same way as ‘love’.”⁵⁹ I would add to this observation by pointing out that love can transcend these boundaries precisely because it is a vague concept that is interpreted differently by different communities. For the Buddhists, it is similar to universal compassion without being overtly Buddhist, thus expanding its appeal. For the party leaders, this can mean the same sentiment as patriotism, which is translated into “love for one’s country”.

Joy is the wife of a successful businessman in Suzhou. Their only son just graduated from college. She used to pray in any temple she could find for his son’s well-being and for the success of her husband’s business. I first met her in the bookshop of Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation’s Suzhou Branch⁶⁰ in 2010. Dressed very stylishly, she was buying a large quantity of Buddhist teaching books, tea and vegetarian cookies that are beautifully wrapped but outrageously expensive for regular Chinese. We started talking and she expressed the interest in Buddhism. She came into contact with Pure Land Buddhism through Master Jingkong’s booklets⁶¹. While in Tzu Chi, she made inquiries about volunteering but was put off by the “arrogance” of the Taiwanese volunteers. Later, Joy took refuge at Buddhist temple outside of Suzhou. There, she acquainted herself with other lay Buddhists and started participating in sutra chanting and animal releasing rituals. Soon she began to volunteer as a facilitator of ritual services in that temple and gradually abandoned the teachings of Master Jingkong. In 2012, a fellow Buddhist brought her to the Mother’s Day Charitable Contribution in Tzu Chi. She was really moved and told me, “I joined the big family of Tzu Chi. You should come too! We practice Big Love (da’ai) here and I have never known love can be so powerful!” Since then, she became actively involved in almost all the programs in Tzu Chi: the hospital, vegetarian cooking, library committee, child care during the summer camps and environmental education. She was very proud of the fact that ever since her volunteering in Tzu Chi, she showed more love toward her son and less resentment toward her husband. All this was because she “came to know the power of love.”

Joy’s experience has become typical of many lay Buddhists I encountered in urban Southeast China today. They often start with a quest for prosperity and protection for their families. Gradually they become interested in Buddhist teachings and further involve in the ritual communities. Sometimes they become permanently associated with a volunteer identity that is phrased around the concept of universal love. Many volunteers in Tzu Chi have taken this journey that often made themselves feel “powerful” and “loved”.

Auntie Yao, a former volunteer in a different temple, found refuge in Tzu Chi as well. For her, the volunteer team in the other temple had too much bickering and resentment and there was a lack of civilized (*wenming*) behavior. Instead, she found being a “Tzu Chi Person” (*Cijiren* 慈济人) – a certain way of walking, sitting, talking, smiling, nodding, etc.⁶² – more civilized, respectable and acceptable. The emphasis on “love”, more than anything, appeals to Auntie Yao, who, as a retired civil servant, comes

⁵⁹ Gerda Wielander, p. 133.

⁶⁰ Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation is a Taiwan-based global Buddhist NGO founded by the Venerable Cheng Yen. It has branches in 41 countries (as of December 2013) and its mainland China headquarters is in Suzhou. It is the only international NGO that is legally registered with the Chinese government. For a detailed study of Tzu Chi, see C. Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁶¹ Master Jingkong 净空法师 of the Pure Land School was originally from Taiwan, but his booklets and DVDs have been widely circulated in China among lay Buddhists since the 1990s.

⁶² Adam Yuet Chau, “Religious Subjectification: The Practice of Cherishing Written Characters and Being A Ciji (Tzu Chi) Person”, in Chang Hsun ed, *Studies on Chinese Popular Religion: Integrating Fieldwork and Theory* (Academia Sinica, *Forthcoming*).

from an affluent urban background. Her husband is a retired engineer and their son, an engineer working for a foreign-enterprise, lives in an expensive apartment in Shanghai. She tries to distinguish herself from their “superstitious” peers in their approaches to Buddhism in other temples, “In Tzu Chi, we are performing Big Love (da’ai). Shangren (Venerable Cheng Yen) has lots of love. Before I came to Tzu Chi, I had very limited understanding of Buddhism and Big Love. Now I find myself on the right track.” Like Joy, she took refuge under three Buddhist masters around Suzhou and was an active volunteer in quite a few temples before settling in Tzu Chi. However, it was the right behavior that is consistent with one’s inner heart (内心) that confirms Auntie Yao’s determination.

This universal love also emphasizes consistency in terms of one’s behavior and one’s religious devotion. One of the Taiwanese leaders of the activity complained:

Some of the local volunteers really lack training. We have to remind them to always smile whenever we are educating or serving the community. Every time a Tzu Chi volunteer appears, we represent what Tzu Chi embodies and we need to have certain ways of carrying ourselves. We should not be too loud, and we should always remember it is a public presentation of who we are as Buddhists.

However, not everybody feels the same level of comfort with this narrative of love and the consistent bodily conduct. Two female laid off workers in their early fifties who were new to the Tzu Chi volunteer team complained about the hierarchy within the organization:

There is only one Suzhou woman who wears the blue dress (which is a sign of higher level volunteer). Everyone else in the blue dress is a Taiwanese. The local Suzhou volunteers are sometimes scolded by the Taiwanese. They think they are superior to us, but they are all housewives! We mainland Chinese women work all our lives to support the family and contribute to the society. They talk about love but they don’t even have to work!

What they imply is that the discourse of love is empty to them, if the basic responsibility of contribution to the family is ignored. Indeed, there is a sense of moral higher ground⁶³ in the love-centered religiosity in comparison to rural and less membership-based, less theologically-concerned individuals and communities. For instance, the legal representative (in this case, a Zhengyi Daoist) of a rural temple was very annoyed when I asked him if his temple was involved in any charitable deeds. He answered, “Oh you are one of those! What is a temple? A temple is provided by its people and in turn the temple protects them. You ask for charity. Does protecting the well-being of a region (保一方平安) count? The religious bureau comes and asks me for donation, we cannot donate as much as the big famous temples. But that is completing a task (完成任务). We perform rituals for the dead and living; people come and get their wishes granted. Why is this superstition and getting all the money from people and donate to the government charity?” Certainly he is not so “loving” in this speech, but he speaks for many smaller religious groups. If the religious groups cannot donate to the philanthropic causes initiated by a formal religious association or government office, their religious leaders and subjects are often at the risk of being branded as backward, corrupt or superstitious.

Therefore, universalizing discourse of love and the consequent bodily discipline of the religious subjects in the process of doing philanthropy further marginalize other types of religiosities in China, especially those that are geared toward the well-being of immediate communities, such as kinsmen, fellow villagers or members of its own church.

⁶³ Compare Nanlai Cao, “Raising the Quality of Belief: *Suzhi* and the Production of an Elite Protestantism”, *China Perspectives*, No. 4 (2009), pp 54-65.

The dominance of “love” religiosity, therefore, is related to the bureaucratization and professionalization of religious philanthropy. First, religious philanthropies that try to appeal to a larger public instead of their own communities need to find a message that is easily accepted by all. The discourse of love points toward a universalism, which appeals to recipients who may not be religious or follow the particular religion that gives the aid. Second, the love religiosity allows a vague cover term to create an apparent narrative unity that may brush over internal differences among religious denominations and levels of governments. Furthermore, love even creates a vague discourse fully compatible with the state with its propaganda programs that are centered on the love for the country and the party (爱国爱党). The Daoist quoted above obviously did not see the necessity for religious groups to embrace philanthropy and a religiosity centered on a universalizing discourse of love. However, for many religious subjects, love not only bridges the gap between different stakeholders but also connects their religious cultivation and volunteering experience in a vague but convincing way.

CONCLUSION: PHILANTHROPY AND RESHAPING OF CHINESE RELIGIOSITIES

Religious groups’ involvement in philanthropic activities is nothing new. Throughout history, religious groups in China have provided social services to communities both internally to their own members and externally to people who are completely unrelated. However, the Post-Mao China religious philanthropy experienced unprecedented scale. It is the result of both religious groups’ efforts and ability to provide more services and state policies regarding religious philanthropy. Thanks to “blind-eye governance,” grassroots religious charities started sprouting in the 1980s, however in a sporadic and ad hoc manner. Since the 1990s, the state has encouraged religious philanthropy during disasters through its “adaptive governance”, culminating in the 2012 “Advice on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Sector’s Participation in Philanthropic and Charitable Activities.” This essay argues for an international perspective in understanding the dynamic between state policy and religious philanthropy.

The policies and campaigns have pushed for bureaucratization and professionalization of religious groups and the rise of a philanthropic religious subject who embraces a universalizing discourse of love, which matches state narrative structures. As McCarthy notes, “By conspicuously partnering with the state and by modeling civic behavior and ideals alongside religious ones, FBOs demonstrate the compatibility of religious traditions and Chinese modernity, the complementarity of faith and Chinese national identity.”⁶⁴ This further marginalizes smaller-scale, community-oriented and popular religious groups such as village temples and poor rural churches. All of them may only provide for a limited number of people or their immediate community, but they form overlapping and diverse territories that, working together, provide a basis for taking care of the needy.

If the battle between religion and superstition marked the 1980s and the tension between religion and cult marked the 1990s, it was not until the first decade of the 21st century when religious groups had their hands free to contribute to the larger public in a way that may share some burdens of the state. However, in the second decade of the 21st century, the further regulations and supervision of religious philanthropy by the state through various legal and financial means⁶⁵ have led to the bureaucratization and professionalization of the religious groups. The result is further “bifurcation” that has pushed out the myriads of smaller practices.

⁶⁴ Susan McCarthy, “Serving Society”, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Together with other non-religious non-government NGOs and Foundations.

In the first round of religious reform in the 1980s and 1990s, many popular temples or popular religious practitioners in this region had to find a Daoist or Buddhist to take over their temple to escape the fate of being branded as “superstition”. In the second round of religious reform, popular temples with resources either have to embrace a philanthropic cause or they can try to register as cultural heritage sites. The demand for religious philanthropy from the top down further alienates those groups from the category of religion. If the first generation of religious leaders in Post-Mao China rebuilt churches and temples and fought for legitimacy, the second generation of religious leaders faces the challenge of accountability that results in increasing structural and managerial rationalization through philanthropic projects, a fundamental transformation in the nature of Chinese religiosity.