

CHRISTOPHER MARSH:

Religion and the State in Russia and China.

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Church–state relations have long been a historically thorny issue, but particularly so for Marxist authoritarian states where ideological precepts of class struggle and revolution leave little room for faith commitments that are contrary to the imperatives of the party-state. This comparative study of religion and the state in Russia and China examines the effects of shared ideologies and historical parallels on the processes of suppression, survival and revival of religion. The author begins with a useful examination of the critique of religion imposed by the Marxist party-state. Suggesting that a thorough review of Marxist theory is a step towards taking “the critique of religion seriously as an exercise in theology” (p. 18), the author invites us to appreciate that the suppression of religion in Russia and China was driven by a fundamental ideological commitment to socio-economic transformation. Historical circumstances – particularly the association of religion with the political arrangements of capitalism and colonialism – added further vigour to repressive sensibilities.

In light of these contexts, the author then examines the pattern of repression, survival and revival of religion. In Russia forced secularization was a process of gradual restriction: Lenin began with an approach of relative tolerance that gradually yielded to more severe repression, which Stalin continued. Yet religion survived. The author depicts the experiences of a number of religious practitioners such as Anatoly Levitin-Krasnov and Fr. Alexander Men, who managed to survive (for a time at least) despite the forces of the party-state arrayed against them. The policies of *Perestroika* under Mikhail Gorbachev included not only the opening up of socio-economic life, but also relaxation of religious repression. The freedoms associated with Gorbachev’s policy of *Glasnost* (openness), allowed for the re-emergence of religion (primarily Christianity, but also Islam) in post-Soviet Russia. While Russia remains a secular state, revisions to laws on religion and constitutional provisions have provided a greater space for religious expression. The primary beneficiary of this has been the Russian Orthodox Church which, the author suggests, “stands next to the state as its own equal” (p. 140).

Turning to China, the author depicts a similar pattern of suppression, survival, and revival of religion. Beginning with what he terms “China’s third opium war”, the author examines the Chinese Communist Party’s official policies of repression of religion. China’s three great religious traditions (the Sanjiao) – Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism – were closely associated with Chinese traditions against which the Communist revolution was aimed. Religious traditions such as Islam and Christianity which came to China from abroad (as did Buddhism), created further tensions around issues of foreign intrusion. This historical treatment provides essential context for understanding Party policy on religion in the PRC (although the author might usefully have examined the extent to which both Buddhist and Taoist social movements were a frequent source of resistance to Imperial authority, and thus a focus of significant anxiety for China’s newly established communist rulers).

The author notes that PRC policies on religion were not simply rote copying from the Soviet Union, but in fact expressed greater confidence that religious loyalties would gradually fade away as the revolution progressed. The policy of cautious and controlled tolerance was consistent with limited tolerance of other traditional features of Chinese society in the early years of the PRC. Indeed the author’s account would have been strengthened by an effort to draw parallels with the PRC’s tolerance on matters such as private business, education, and arts and culture – sectors that would later come

to be suppressed more vigorously. Against this background, the PRC regime gradually intensified control of religious activities. The author suggests this began in the early 1960s, but repression was evident in the late 1950s during the anti-rightist campaign. By the early 1960s, the regime had indeed become more vigorous in its suppression of religion but, as with the Soviet Union, religious life in Communist China persisted. The author uses case studies of religious leaders such as Cardinal Ignatius Kung (Gong Pinmei), Venerable Master Xu Yun, and the XIV Dalai Lama to illustrate the continued power of religion in the face of regime repression.

A key element in the survival of religion under Maoism (and one that the author notes in differentiating PRC from Soviet policy), was the extent to which religion in China remained largely decentralized and unorganized. This made complete suppression difficult, as there were few institutions to attack; Chinese people practised their faith traditions despite the absence of formal organizations. The relative relaxation in PRC policy on religion in the post-Mao era has seen a flowering of religious adherence and behaviour. In depicting China's religious revival, the author covers familiar ground, providing useful additions through survey research on attitudes about religion. Yet the regime's antipathy towards religious groups that challenge the supremacy of the party-state (such as the underground churches and Falun Gong) has continued, matched by unremitting hostility to religious activity deemed to be in support of separatism (whether Islam in Xinjiang or Buddhism in Tibet).

As the author notes, despite parallels of ideology and history, the specifics of religion policy in Russia and China remain distinct. Soviet repression was always more systematic and committed, while the PRC's policy on religion was (as with many policies in China) more subtle and long range. While the author provides a great service in comparing religious policy in Russia and China in light of ideology and history, the study tends to overlook the critical importance of local socio-cultural dynamics. Although we have hints of this in the attitudinal survey data which the author provides, more analysis of causal implications and the role of local conditions on implementation of religion policy would be helpful. That said, the author provides useful detail on the dynamics of suppression, survival, and revival of religion in Russia and China, which can be applied to our understanding of state-religion relations elsewhere in the world. This volume will be a useful read for anyone interested in comparative religious policy.

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JAEHOON YEON and LUCIEN BROWN:

Korean: A Comprehensive Grammar.

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Yeon and Brown have written an excellent grammar for those who are learning Korean, but this book will also be of use as a reference grammar for those involved in general Korean studies. A book such as this will be welcomed by both students and researchers who are learning Korean or engaged in the study of the Korean language. Potential readers will need to be familiar with Korean script, but other than that no background in the Korean language (or linguistics) is required to follow the text. Most of all, *Korean: A Comprehensive Grammar* is based on colloquial