

Beijing and the Vatican: Catholics in China and the Politics of Religious Freedom

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Andrew P. Lynch¹

Abstract

As China exerts increasing influence on the world stage and particularly in the Asia Pacific region, the issue of religious freedom will become one of greater urgency. The struggle for religious freedom for China's Catholic population provides a window into the impact that religious pluralism is having on the Chinese state, and the tensions between China's leadership and the Vatican over freedom of religion for China's Catholics provides an important test case for how China negotiates church/state relations within its own society. This article argues that the differing viewpoints on religious freedom found in the Catholic Church's Vatican II documents, and China's 1982 Constitution, are the origin of these tensions. The article then examines Huntington's Third Wave theory of democratization, updated by Philpott, to examine how the tensions between the Chinese state and the Catholic Church, which has a successful history of challenging communist states, are being played out.

Keywords

China, Catholic Church, religious freedom, Vatican II, Huntington

Introduction

On May 22, 2013, Pope Francis, addressing crowds in Rome for his Wednesday audience, called on Catholics around the world to pray for Chinese Catholics in light of the challenges they face (Francis, 2013). Around the same time, Catholics in the Chinese diocese of Shanghai continued to wait for the return of their bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who went into long-term “spiritual retreat” after denouncing the Chinese government's Patriotic Catholic Association, the government-sanctioned Catholic church in China, during his ordination to the office of bishop in 2012 (Phillips, 2013). China, however, has expressed concern about the involvement of religious groups in its internal political affairs. These events are only the latest developments in a dispute over religious freedom that has been underway in China for many decades.

This article will examine the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Chinese government concerning freedom of religion for Chinese Catholics. Yang (2013) and Lian (2013) have made important contributions to the topic of religious freedom in China: Yang setting out a research agenda for further work on the topic, and Lian tracing the efforts of Chinese Protestant intellectuals who have highlighted the need for greater human rights. This article seeks to make a modest contribution to this area of study by focusing on one particular issue—the relationship between China and the Catholic Church. There is emerging evidence of increased tension between the Chinese government and the Vatican over freedom of religion, especially regarding the

appointment of church leaders and the autonomy of Chinese Catholics to practice their faith without surveillance or sanctions from the state. The Vatican and the Chinese government have disparate views about what constitutes religious freedom, and such differing views in a world where religion continues to be of great social and political significance have important repercussions as China asserts its position globally. As will be argued in what follows, the difference in views about freedom of religion, for both the Chinese government and the Vatican, originates from foundational texts on this issue that each refers to. For China, this text is the statements about freedom of religion in its 1982 Constitution, and for the Vatican, it is the Second Vatican Council document *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965 [1965]; English title: “Declaration on Religious Liberty”). As Yang (2012) points out, the current tensions between Beijing and the Vatican go back much further than the publication of these documents, originating in the suppression of Catholicism in 1949 and the Vatican's heavy handed response. However, what will hopefully be made evident in the discussion to follow is that these documents have formalized, for each side, the different views about freedom of religion that are at the core of the debate.

¹University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

Corresponding Author:

Andrew P. Lynch, University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia.
Email: andrew.lynch@sydney.edu.au



As a number of excellent book length studies already cover Sino-Vatican relations since 1949, this article will provide only a brief review of this history before analyzing more recent developments (see Chu, 2012; Leung, 1992; Madsen, 1998). However, another element pertinent to relations between the Vatican and China, which will be examined in this article, is the way in which the Roman Catholic Church has a strong tradition, especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), of supporting freedom of religion. This point has been analyzed by the late Samuel P. Huntington (1991) through his schema of the relationship between religion and democratization, which he investigated in his theory of the “Third Wave” of global democratic movements. More recently, Daniel Philpott (2005) has utilized Huntington’s thesis to show how the Vatican responds when confronted with regimes that seek to limit the practice of Catholicism within their borders. These theories will be examined in greater detail below. Before looking at the contemporary strains between the Vatican and the Chinese government, it is important to contextualize this friction with a concise summary of Catholicism in China.

A Very Brief History of Catholicism in China

The history of Catholicism in China includes a number of milestones that have contributed to the current tensions between the Vatican and Beijing. Matteo Ricci of the Jesuit order wanted to establish Catholicism in the country with his missionary work in the 1600s (Laven, 2011). Ricci attempted to make Catholicism intelligible to the Chinese people through acculturation, which included teaching the Catholic faith using Chinese languages and Chinese cultural idioms. The Jesuit missionaries had some early success. The first Chinese bishop, Luo Wenzao (Gregory Lopez), was installed in 1674, but no new Chinese bishops were appointed until 1926, when Pope Pius XI consecrated six (Lian, 2010; Madsen, 1998). Ricci’s work lost support in Rome, and his cultural approach was criticized by officials in the Vatican who detected a subversion of the faith to serve the ends of evangelization, in what is referred to as the rites controversy (Leung, 1992; Madsen and Fan, 2009). The wider context of Catholicism at this time is helpful for understanding Rome’s nervousness regarding Ricci’s approach. In the 17th century, Rome was still coming to terms with the Protestant Reformation and the widespread transformations in European Christianity, which followed (Laven, 2011).

Furthermore, it was divisions within the Catholic Church that also contributed to the collapse of the Jesuit method of introducing the faith while allowing local Chinese to retain traditional customs. Critics of the Jesuits influenced the decisions of popes, such as Clement XI in 1704, to order a reversal of some of the cultural concessions that the Jesuits had made to Chinese Catholics. This resulted in renewed criticism about the importance of ancestors for Chinese spirituality, a rejection of Confucian teachings, and a reinstatement of

the Mass being celebrated in Latin rather than in local languages. Chinese bible translations were stopped (see Jenkins, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Lian, 2010, for overviews of these developments). Eventually, the Jesuits were asked by officials in Rome to leave China. Jesuit priests did not return to Shanghai until 1842 to pick up the thread of the missionary work left by Ricci and his followers. Until then, Chinese Catholics had sustained their faith through lay apostolic work, including prayer and catechesis (Madsen and Fan, 2009). Prior to this, in the 18th century, the number of Catholics in China was reduced by a program of persecution that had begun in 1724 when the Qing rulers made Catholicism illegal. During this time, Catholicism was viewed by the state as undermining the political and social order (Entenmann, 1996).

The declaration of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 ushered in a time of repression for religious groups in China, and Catholics were no exception. In 1951, the Catholic Church in China was pressured by the Communist Party to desist relations with the Vatican in Rome, which for the most part it did (Tong, 1993). A special department was established in China to administer Catholic affairs, and Catholic organizations were asked to register with this body and accept its rulings concerning how religious activities were to be carried out in the country. Called the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, this body centralized control over Catholic activities in China (Madsen, 1998). It was at this point that the break occurred in the Chinese Catholic Church between a state sanctioned Catholic Church and an underground Catholic Church, which resists state rulings and the members of which swear their allegiance to the pope in Rome (Charbonnier, 1993). This break was also a result of the consecration in 1957 of new Chinese bishops by the Catholic Patriotic Association, consecrations that were conducted without permission from Rome, which is required for valid consecrations under canon law (Madsen and Fan, 2009). There has been much confusion over the years about the position of these churches vis-à-vis Rome. Although the Vatican appreciates the loyalty of the underground church, and supports its call for independence from any state body, Rome has not condemned the legitimacy of the state church, and has given its approval to the valid rites of its bishops, seeing it as an important part of the Church in Asia (see Benedict XVI, 2007).¹ As this brief sketch of Catholicism in China highlights, tensions between the Church and China have a long history, and recent events have seen an intensification of this tension.

The Rise of Modern China and the Impact on Religion

China continues to be one of the world’s fastest growing and most diverse economies, and the nation’s leaders are determined that China will reassert itself globally. According to Shenkar (2005), Chinese leaders situate the current rise of China as a phoenix moment in which China is returning to a

position of influence. After the successes and rich cultural history of the Imperial period, China was exposed to the culture of the West at a time when Western states were enjoying a phase of innovation in technology and an expansion of trade. China's early contact with the West in the 18th and 19th centuries, in which Western powers exerted a great deal of influence over a number of China's provinces, and controlled trade, is considered by some as a period of humiliation for the country (Leung, 1992). An example is the economic activity of France in the Shanghai region from the 1840s, which was backed by French military force (Madsen and Fan, 2009).²

With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China entered a new period of its history, with self-determination a central theme. The policies of Mao aimed to create an industrialized nation based on communist principles.³ However, a number of political errors and planning mistakes were made, including the decisions that led to the famine of 1959 to 1961.⁴ Another problematic period under Mao was the Cultural Revolution beginning in 1966, in which much of the intelligentsia was purged, leaving the nation with an inexperienced and poorly trained leadership for years to follow. Young people were mobilized into the Red Guards to carry out this campaign (Yang, 2012). Religion was targeted during the Cultural Revolution as one of the Four Olds, one of the barriers that needed to be overcome so that communism could be established as the focal point of the nation's economic and ideological identity (see Ashiwa & Wank, 2009). In 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the Party reformed its ideological hold on the production and manufacturing processes of the nation, which are at the heart of China's current economic climb (Hays Gries & Rosen, 2004). The Party has continued to build on a more open economic model, along with increased social development. Deng's reforms also affected religion, and for Chinese Catholics, his reforms have meant a greater measure of freedom. Improvements include the release of prisoners held for the expression of their beliefs and the easing of some of the restrictions on public gatherings for religious ceremonies (Madsen & Fan, 2009).

These improvements notwithstanding, all religious bodies in China must still be registered with state authorities, and the carrying out of religious festivities requires local state approval. Chinese Catholics are no exception to these rules. From 1978, the Bureau of Religious Affairs revived the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and also established the National Administrative Commission of the Catholic Church in China, and the Chinese Bishops' College. Each of these institutions gives the state access to the internal workings of the Catholic Church in China (Lee, 2007). It was at this juncture that the underground Catholic Church emerged. Chinese Catholics who were wary of the state controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association consecrated their own bishops and ordained priests with permission from the Vatican (Lee, 2007).

Since the attempt to bring religious organizations under state control, the Chinese ruling Party and the Vatican have maintained tense relations. As Beatrice Leung (1992) writes, the Catholic Church was viewed by the Communist Party (CCP) as being closely tied to "the imperialist enemy and as being a form of cultural exploitation" (p. 95). However, even with such tensions continuing, the Chinese government and the Vatican arranged for a solution for the consecration of bishops. Under this agreement, Beijing suggested delegates for ordination to the episcopate for the Vatican's approval. This arrangement worked well for some years. Recent evidence, however, shows that the arrangement has been ignored by Beijing. The consecration of bishops, without the authority or even knowledge of Rome, occurred in 2006. Such acts have again heightened the tension between the Chinese government and the Catholic Church. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI requested that civil authorities recognize the status of bishops from the underground church, and he called for closer relations between the underground church and the official church in an effort to smooth out some of the tensions between the Vatican and the Chinese government (see Benedict XVI, 2007; Yang, 2012).⁵ It is unclear whether these requests have had any success. In November 2010, Beijing put forward Guo Jincai for consecration as bishop without consulting the Vatican. The *Economist* ("The Party Versus the Pope," 2010) reported that Vatican-approved Chinese bishops were forced to attend the consecration in an effort to afford it greater legitimacy. The Vatican did not support the consecration.

Recent tensions between the Vatican and Beijing concern the fate of newly ordained Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin. After approval was given for him to be ordained as bishop, Ma announced at his installation ceremony that he was not able to serve both the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) and the Vatican, and that he was resigning from his post in the state church (Jacobs, 2012). His announcement was greeted with applause from his congregation at the Cathedral of St. Ignatius in Shanghai, one of the country's most prosperous Catholic dioceses. It was also videoed and posted on the Internet ("China Investigating Catholic Bishop Who Quit Government-Run Church," 2012). This publicity pressured the CPA to act, and the bishop has not since been seen in his diocese, worshippers being told that he is undergoing a long-term spiritual retreat (Sudworth, 2012). In September 2012, tensions over the issue were still evident, with the Chinese authorities suspending classes at the Sheshan Catholic seminary in Shanghai ("Serving Two Masters," 2012). This situation is yet to be resolved and is a poignant illustration of the ongoing tensions that exist between the Chinese state and the Catholic Church in China, tensions that can be traced to foundational documents that each refers to on matters of religion. The documents of Vatican II and China's 1982 Constitution will be examined in the following section to illustrate the disparate ideas about freedom of religion that each contains.

Freedom of Religion: Catholicism's Second Vatican Council and the Chinese Constitution

A reason for the tensions that exist between China and the Vatican over the status of Catholics in China is the difference of viewpoint that each holds about what constitutes freedom of religion. This section will analyze how each party in the dispute defines freedom of religion, as found in China's 1982 Constitution and the documents of the Church's Vatican II Council. These texts are the rubric that each party uses when freedom of religion is at issue, and as will be made evident, because each of these texts defines freedom of religion in a different way, misunderstandings are all too possible.

The Catholic Church's position on freedom of religion comes from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Vatican II was the catalyst for a change of direction for a church that had been defensive about modernity and the social changes that it had introduced, seeing in the modern condition forces such as individualism, progress, and critical thought, which the Church had, before the Council, viewed as harmful to religious belief. Vatican II was based on the theory of *aggiornamento*, the idea that the Church needed to update its structures and reach out to the world (on the Council, see Faggioli, 2012; Greeley, 2004; Mettepenningen, 2010; O'Malley, 2008; Sullivan, 2007). At the Council, delegates voted with a large majority to implement the document *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Liberty). The declaration was largely the work of the American theologian John Courtney Murray (Berger, 2005; O'Malley, 2008). Murray had, before working on the declaration, written important works on the separation of state and religion in the American context.⁶

Dignitatis Humanae (1981 [1965]) confirms that people have the freedom to believe and engage in the practice of their faith, without the interference of the state:

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others. (p. 800)

Dignitatis Humanae states that these freedoms are not arbitrary or derived from the good will of the state but are intrinsic to human persons and their dignity. They are universal human rights that require protection in all political systems and at all times and places (O'Malley, 2008).

Furthermore, at Vatican II, the Church placed a greater emphasis on dialogue with non-Catholic Christian churches, stressing their commonality. This ecumenical drive was given impetus by the conciliar document *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1981 [1964]), which called for greater

Christian unity. *Nostra Aetate* (1981 [1965]; English title: "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions") continued the theme of ecumenical outreach, and laid a platform for the improvement of relations between the Vatican and other religions, in particular, Judaism. Ecumenism has been one of the success stories of the post-conciliar era. The Church's relationship with the Jewish faith, for instance, has enjoyed a greater level of openness and understanding since the Council, even while the Church has endured criticism about its response to the Holocaust during the Second World War (O'Malley, 2008). The Church's teaching on freedom of religion since the Council has assisted with this dialogue and understanding between the Catholic Church and other faiths, principally through its emphasis that freedom of belief is an intrinsically human right, which should be protected. Since the Council, the Church has actively supported the right to religious freedom, and as we shall see in more detail below, this has led to clashes with regimes that have constrained the rights of their citizens.

In the case of China, the Constitution serves as an instrument for maintaining religious harmony. The Constitution of China (1982, Article 36) states that citizens enjoy the freedom to believe or not believe the religion of their choosing and that they are free to carry out their religious activities. The Constitution also points out that

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.

These points give rise to a degree of tension for Chinese Catholics. The demand that "religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination" is problematic for Catholicism in China, because the Catholic Church's central authority is located in the Vatican in Rome. Freedom of religion as outlined by the Chinese Constitution therefore consists of a double edged process, by which the text states that freedom of religion is supported, but that this support is conditional on religion remaining within the private life of individuals. Once religion enters the public sphere, or affects politics, the constitution can be invoked to restrict religious activity. The difficulty here is that religion and politics have a close relationship, and most religions will involve themselves in political discourse sooner or later. Jürgen Habermas (2006) highlights how the public sphere is a space that cannot be dominated by either a sacred or a secular discourse if it is to remain truly democratic. All voices must be afforded a hearing in the public sphere of democratic and pluralistic societies.

Habermas's argument highlights the issue of democracy, or the lack of it, in China. As Pope Pius XII (1944) emphasized during the Second World War, democracy might not be perfect in all places and at all times, but it is the political system that the Catholic Church is most comfortable with.

The public sphere, where the dissenting voices of a society can be heard, is of central importance to the maintenance of a healthy civil society. Elements of the public sphere include a free press, freedom of expression for intellectuals and artists, freedom of religion, and the protection of human rights. Habermas argues that the voices of those who subscribe to a religious faith also need to be heard in a secular society. As he puts the case,

The liberal state, which expressly protects such forms of life in terms of a basic right, cannot at the same time expect of *all* citizens that they also justify their political statements independently of their religious convictions or world views. (Habermas, 2006, p. 8, emphasis in original)

At Vatican II, with the promulgation of documents such as *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Nostra Aetate*, the Church cleared the ground for a dialogue with modernity. As Alberigo (2006) points out, “dialogue needs public religious freedom and support from law” (p. 111). Habermas’s claim also has relevance for China, where religion has been viewed as a competitor to the state for the allegiance of the population. If the differences in perceptions about religious freedom are, therefore, located in the foundational texts analyzed above, it is important to assess how such differences of viewpoint affect the role of religion in the political landscape of China. As we shall see in the next section, the spread of Christianity in Asia and the southern hemisphere, social change driven by migration, and economic development in China and across the globe have all exacerbated the tensions between the Vatican and the Chinese government regarding freedom of religion.

Political Tensions and Religious Freedom

The situation for Christianity in China has implications for the global religio-political situation. Philip Jenkins (2002, 2006) argues that the sharp rise in the numbers of Christians in the global south will have an impact on the political organization of nations in that part of the world as Christian citizens demand social change that is influenced by scripture and faith. Jenkins examines reasons for why Christianity is moving southward (Jenkins, 2006). He maintains that the Gospel message, originally addressed to impoverished manual workers oppressed by authoritarian political and military regimes, rings true for those in the modern world who work in primarily rural settings in countries where democracy has not been achieved. The Gospel in locations where poverty, underdevelopment, and limited freedom are the norm is proving to be a powerful force, providing a model and motivation for a society based on greater degrees of openness, equality, and participation (Jenkins, 2006). The 2013 election of Pope Francis, formerly Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio from Argentina, is an example of the growing

significance that religion in the global south is having. Although geographically, China is north of the equator, it shares many of the social and political challenges of those nations in the global south that Jenkins is talking about.⁷ If Jenkins is correct, and Christianity continues to undergo a demographic shift toward the global south and also into countries such as China, this will increase the pressure for China to address issues of church–state relations. Furthermore, the role of Vatican–Beijing relations will be of paramount importance for politics and religion in a globalized modernity as Christian and Catholic populations increase in the global south.

China’s handling of religious groups and religious minorities has led to allegations of heavy handedness. Studies on the Falun Gong movement suggest that the Chinese authorities see it as a threat to political harmony because of its challenge to the legitimacy of the state. Vivienne Shue (2004) suggests that the Chinese government maintains its legitimacy not because it presides over a period of economic growth and greater upward mobility for a larger number of its citizens but rather because it is viewed as presiding over a period of peace and social harmony in which such growth, for the nation and for individuals, is possible. The dissent of Falun Gong is therefore not interpreted as an effort to assert its right to freedom of religion, but is viewed by the Chinese authorities as a challenge to social and political harmony. Rather than challenge the state directly, the movement highlights social inequalities, government incompetence, and heavy handed policing, for which it has drawn the ire of the authorities (Shue, 2004, p. 40). Analyzing freedom of religion in China through Shue’s schema is helpful for further appreciating the current misunderstandings between Beijing and the Vatican. What concerns the Chinese government about the status of the Catholic Church in China is not only the intrusion of foreign religious influences, which the Chinese Constitution warns against, but also the potential upsetting of social harmony that the Catholic religion may cause in potential clashes between Catholic beliefs and those of the Chinese communist government.

Another issue faced by Christians, including Catholics, in China is the modernization of China’s society and economy. Internal migration has seen millions of Chinese workers move from rural areas to the cities, principally to find work, and these workers have brought their religious beliefs with them (Madsen, 1998). As Christianity in China was in the past concentrated in rural areas, internal migration has meant that the numbers of Christians living and working in Chinese cities has grown. Hook writes that the number of Chinese Christians has grown as a result of the movement of Christian populations to urban areas (Hook, 2006; also Lee, 2007). One of the many challenges that Chinese Catholics face after moving from the country to the city is that their usual support systems are no longer in place, and without them, “Catholics in urban areas find it difficult to integrate their faith with modernity” (Lee, 2007, p. 292).⁸

What these issues all reveal is that China's security fears are not limited to concerns over border disputes, internal political dissent, or cyber or other sorts of spying and espionage. The ruling Party in China is also well attuned to the importance of *ideas* as potential threats to political and social stability. The Party's crackdown on the Falun Gong movement is an example of protecting citizens from ideas and beliefs that are potential platforms for a challenge to state orthodoxy. There are parallels between the suppression of Falun Gong and the repression of Christian churches and leaders during the early years of the People's Republic in the 1950s and in subsequent decades. Conflict in China over the status of Catholics continues to give rise to tensions between the Vatican and the government. However, as will be addressed in the next section, the Catholic Church has much experience in relations with states where religious freedom is not open to all, which could prove to be a source of greater tensions in the future.

Huntington's Third Wave and Catholicism in China

The Catholic Church is not inexperienced in dealings with regimes that have set themselves against the free expression of religion and human rights. There is evidence to suggest that the Catholic Church played a significant and successful role in weakening Soviet control in countries such as Poland, where it assisted in undermining the credibility of the communist regime. Samuel P. Huntington (1991) has perceptively assessed the important role that the Church played in helping a Catholicism-friendly form of democracy become established in nations in South America such as Brazil. In the Philippines, Catholic leaders were instrumental in the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, entreating the predominantly Catholic population to withdraw their support for him and to support democracy (Quilop, 2011). These events were crucial in the subsequent loss of support for Marcos, not merely by the wider population but by the military as well. The holding of the Church's World Youth Day in Manila in 1995 was a symbolic representation of the Church's success in this instance.

Huntington includes the involvement of the Catholic Church as the second most important factor in what he calls the "Third Wave" of democratic transitions that took place from the 1970s through to the end of the 1980s. Huntington argues that a number of these democratizing nations had large Catholic populations or were countries that had strong Catholic institutions. Vatican II is, according to Huntington, what led these Catholic populations to become mobilized and support democratic movements for change against authoritarian regimes. Vatican II transformed how the Church related to the political sphere (Huntington, 1991). Before the Council, the Church was compliant with the established authority of a nation, to a large degree unmindful of its legitimacy. At Vatican II, however, the Church rethought its own

parameters as an institution, and rather than placing stress on hierarchy and authority, the Church at the Council reinterpreted itself as "the people of God" who, clergy and laity alike, have a duty to uphold the Gospel message of love and fellowship. Such a shift in the Church's own self-evaluation soon became the catalyst for a shift in its relationship to nation states and their political philosophy. Rather than tolerating regimes because they were in power, the Church now questioned their legitimacy, and Catholics were better able to critically assess the record of governments in areas such as social justice and human rights.

As mentioned above, one of the clearest examples of the post-conciliar attitude toward authoritarian regimes was the Philippines in the 1980s. The Catholic Church in that country, under the leadership of Cardinal Sin, withdrew its support for the Marcos regime, which had imposed a state of martial law on the country since 1972. Without the support of the Church in a predominantly Catholic country, the Marcos regime quickly began to break down with such a large scale loss to its legitimacy. Islamic communities in the south of the country, along with communist groups and the political left, also helped to undermine Marcos's regime (Quimpo, 2008). The assassination of Benigno Aquino, the leader of the civil opposition movement, created further unrest in the country in 1983, and after mass demonstrations and a loss of support from the military, Marcos was forced to flee the country in 1986 (Paul, 2010). Although Aquino and his wife Cory (who became president after Marcos had fled) were, along with other political opposition leaders, instrumental in paving the way for democracy in the Philippines, the role of the Church in these events should not be underestimated (Barry, 2006). The Catholic Church in the Philippines was quickly able to marshal national support for the cause, and without it, the struggle for democracy in the Philippines would probably have been much more protracted and bloody.

Daniel Philpott has reexamined Huntington's schema and has shown how the Church has come to see democracy not only as a necessary human right but also as a political model under which Christianity is able to flourish. The separation of church and state, and the free expression of religion "may well foster the health of religion, giving it the very autonomy by which it flourishes" (Philpott, 2005, p. 111). For the Church and other religious bodies in countries such as China, there are incentives to press for freedom of religion, because this in turn helps to establish the best social conditions for churches and other religious organizations to thrive. Philpott also argues that churches that support freedom of religion are more likely to support democracy itself, and in so doing will be organizations through which the legitimacy of a regime is tested. These religious bodies provide openings through which democratic processes are spread, and they are beacons for democratic reform in an otherwise restrictive landscape (Philpott, 2005). According to Philpott (2005), churches such as the Catholic Church "engage in the protodemocratic politics of contesting the regime's legitimacy. From

its differentiated nook, the Church can wield the tools of democracy to bring about a democratic regime” (p. 112). The presence of such churches may be interpreted as threatening to governments that are not democratic and are suspicious of freedom of religion. Huntington and Philpott’s studies provide a useful framework for analyzing the situation for Catholics in China, and the struggle for freedom of religion there. A growing Christian population composed of Catholic and Protestant citizens may prove to be a challenge for the Chinese government if it wishes to suppress freedom of religion. If the Huntington thesis is correct, that religious change, along with other factors such as economic growth, is a catalyst for democracy, and in turn, freedom of religion, then the presence of Christianity in general in China, and the presence of Catholicism in particular, may produce a forceful resistance to the suppression of these rights.

A further issue relevant to the tensions between the Vatican and the Chinese government is the status of China as a communist country. Will China maintain a communist ideology, or will the maintenance of such a system prove to be incompatible with growth and economic development, both of which are central to China’s reassertion as a global power? The answer to this question will have very real consequences for Beijing’s relations with Rome. As the case of Poland illustrates, the Vatican has opposed communist ideology before, seeing in it beliefs and policies that are contrary to religious faith. Huntington (1991) cites Pope John Paul II’s pilgrimage to Poland in 1979 as a turning point for the eventual liberation of Poland from atheistic communism. As Fenggang Yang (2012) writes,

The faith-based organizations are perceived as one of the most serious threats to the Communist Party. For instance, the Chinese Communist authorities regularly reiterate their fear of the Roman Catholic church as a serious threat, even though Catholics make up less than 1 percent of the Chinese population by anyone’s estimate. The authorities have become paranoid regarding the roles that the Roman Catholic church played in the collapse of Communism in Poland. (p. 22)⁹

Although China’s attitude toward religion is not currently as militant as was that of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), it would be reasonable to predict that the Church will continue to see China’s stance on religion as contrary to religious freedom. Furthermore, China’s reforms to support the practice of religion for the sake of modernization and economic development are instrumentalist, and how this approach to religion is viewed by Rome remains to be seen (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009).

It is not within the scope of this article to forecast how the tensions between Christianity and the Chinese state might play out in the coming decades. However, some general observations can be made. China’s government will have to decide whether to repress religions that are active within its borders and challenge its authority, or tolerate them. It should be recalled that Catholics in China do not wish to provoke

the state, but merely want to carry out their religion without harassment. Chinese leaders will need to decide whether they are willing to allow such religions to run their own affairs without surveillance, or to continue with current policy, with religious groups under state authority. If Asia and China become more Christianized in the 21st century, these issues will only become more urgent.

Concluding Reflections

The tensions that exist between the Vatican and the Chinese government have the potential to increase further. This article has argued that these tensions can be located in texts that define freedom of religion for each party in the dispute, and can be analyzed through Huntington’s schema of the relationship between religion and democratization that he investigated in his theory of the Third Wave of global democratic movements. China is greatly influencing the political, economic, strategic, and cultural events of the world as it continues to develop industrially. China’s presence is now being felt more poignantly in the Asia Pacific region as it asserts itself in strategic alignments and financial markets. This is evident in the recent escalation of tensions over groups of islands in the region, including diplomatic clashes with Japan over an island group called the Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Similar issues have taken place over an island that is being contested between China and the Philippines.¹⁰ As a purportedly communist state, China is making its voice heard on issues such as religion and the practice of religious beliefs, particularly when it considers certain religious activities or movements as adversely affecting its national security and internal politics. These issues will be of critical importance for other nations in the Asia Pacific region. Some analysts have commented that China has begun a period of expansionism into the Asia Pacific, which will bring it into closer relations with other states but will also increase the propensity for disputes. China and Asia Pacific analysts have referred to a potential “powder keg” as China clashes with its territorial neighbors over sovereignty issues. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2013) has reminded the global community that China will also have to negotiate with the United States, which has set itself the goal of an increased presence in the Asia Pacific region in the 21st century. As China is a key trading partner with many nations, how it addresses issues including religious dissent will be of critical importance. In particular, the pattern of human rights in China is of interest to democratic nations in the region, including Australia, Singapore, and Japan.

To sum up, the divergent outlooks on freedom of religion held by the Vatican and the Chinese government can be traced back to the Church’s Vatican II documents and the Chinese 1982 Constitution and the different views about religious freedom expressed in these documents. For the Catholic Church, Vatican II was an event that introduced a significant change for the Church regarding religious freedom. At the

Council, the Church promoted religious liberty as being of central importance in the modern world. For China, religious freedom is a political issue. China's leaders are acutely aware of the power that religion has in the maintenance of beliefs and attitudes and their potential for challenging state policies. China also considers religion an entry point for incursions of foreign ideas and values that may challenge the role of the state and state policies. The relationship between the Vatican and China on these points has important repercussions as China becomes a leader in the global economy. As stated above, these issues and how they are negotiated will affect the Asia Pacific region, particularly in the area of human rights, as well as the rest of the world. The points raised here are certainly not the last word on this topic, which would benefit greatly from further research by scholars. However, how China resolves the issues regarding its Catholic population may be a test case for the stance that a global China takes toward religion more generally.

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Notes

1. Pope Benedict XVI legitimated the faculties of those bishops who were consecrated at the behest of the Chinese state and who then contacted the Vatican afterward for its approval. However, those bishops who were consecrated by the state, but who have not sought to have their faculties recognized by Rome, are considered by the Vatican as illegitimate bishops. See Madsen (1998) on the question of the legitimacy of some Chinese Catholic bishops.
2. Another period of humiliation came from the invasion by Japan prior to and during the Second World War. An estimated 30 million Chinese died in this period. The entry into the war by the United States took the pressure off Chinese forces fighting the Japanese imperial army on Chinese soil, but many courageous efforts by Chinese forces bravely combating the Japanese army have been given little attention in the West. During the occupation, Christianity was viewed with suspicion by the Japanese forces who associated it with the nations that they were at war with, a "part of the hegemonic ideology of the Western nations whose power Japan aspired to exclude from

the New Order in East Asia" (Brook, 1996, p. 318).

3. The question of communist ideology in modern China is a complex one, and scholars are presently debating the issue. Richard McGregor has pointed out that many people in the West no longer consider China a communist country, mainly because of the pace of the economic activity that they see there, and the increases in consumption in China's domestic market. However, for McGregor, there is little doubt that the communist party continues to hold a clear ideological view that is communist, and he sees much evidence of this in China's social organization. See McGregor (2010). Dickson (2004) has analyzed how the party continues to enjoy monopoly status and a growing membership, while ruling over a period of economic modernization but no longer representing communist policies. In this view, China's communism has been left to one side as the nation pursues capitalist-style production and consumption. If this is in fact the case, perhaps communism in China will be quietly forgotten or abandoned officially. This debate about the nature of communism in China has implications for its attitudes to religion, religious freedom, and its relations with the Vatican in Rome.
4. During this famine, an estimated 20 million people died from severe food shortages as the result of poorly managed centralized agricultural production. See Short (1999).
5. As highlighted in Note 1 above, Benedict XVI was also emphatic in his letter about his concerns regarding bishops who had received episcopal ordination at the request of the government but without consent first being given by the Vatican (see Benedict XVI, 2007, Section 8). The Pope also commented on the deficiencies evident in the Chinese Bishops Conference, which "is governed by statutes that contain elements incompatible with Catholic doctrine" (Benedict XVI, 2007, Section 8). Finally, the Pope reiterated the request that the Church be able to appoint bishops without government interference, which is a meaningful component of religious freedom (Benedict XVI, 2007, Section 9).
6. There are other documents that also support the centrality of freedom of religion. An example is the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.
7. China can also be situated, in Immanuel Wallerstein's World-Systems theory, in the "semi-periphery," between the richer nations of the "core" and the poorer nations of the "periphery" (see Babones, 2011).
8. The number of Catholics in China is uncertain, varying between studies. The Pew Forum puts the number at an estimated nine million in 2010. See <http://features.pewforum.org/global-christianity/population-number.php>
9. Roberto Guareschi (2013) has argued that the papacy of Pope Francis may have similar repercussions for Latin America, a continent of great inequality of wealth where violence is often used to pursue political and economic interests.
10. This island is called Huangyan in China and Panatag Shoal in the Philippines.

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Author Biography

Andrew P. Lynch holds an M.A. from the University of Auckland, and a Ph.D from the University of Sydney. He teaches and researches in the fields of sociological theory and the sociology of religion.