

# The Challenges of Religious Freedom in Post-Transition Hong Kong

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## Introduction

In its campaign to become the capital of Asia, Hong Kong has undergone rapid economic development. Banking systems have been modernized while competitive businesses have attracted large sums of foreign investment. But despite this growth over the past several decades, certain civil liberties remain underdeveloped in Hong Kong. Religious freedom, which measures the strength of democracy and the rule of law, is under particular strain. When Hong Kong was reclaimed by Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997, it became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of a nation that has been highly suspicious of large organized groups, which are typically established by religious institutions.

The authoritarian leadership of the People's Republic of China (PRC) regards religion as "superstition" and has a global reputation of discouraging spiritual groups like the Falun Gong, whose millions of members around the world blend Buddhism and Taoism in a unique meditative practice.<sup>1</sup> The Department of Public Security of the PRC's central government imposed a strict ban on the Falun Gong on July 22, 1999, nearly three months after some 10,000 members of the group – mostly housewives, retirees, and government bureaucrats – staged a non-violent protest at the Zhongnanhai, the home of

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<sup>1</sup> Falun Gong, which means "law wheel" in English, is the popular name for a set of physical and moral qigong (self-improvement) principles known as Falun Dafa. The physical aspect of Falun Dafa consists of a number of slow-motion exercises that supposedly promote good health. Since the moral aspect of Falun Dafa includes Buddhist and Taoist ideas, the spiritual group is fundamentally different from other Chinese meditative practices like Tai Chi. Falun Dafa handbooks teach readers how to attain a life of "truth, benevolence, and forbearance," and under these three decrees, members of the practice have developed strong beliefs about politics, the environment, medicine, and money. (Hongzhi, *Falun Dafa*..., p. 2) Falun Gong began in 1992 under the direction of Li Hongzhi. Today, less than one percent of Hong Kong's population is comprised of Falun Gong members.

the communist leadership. Chinese authorities fear that a group capable of staging the largest protest in Beijing since the 1989 pro-democracy movement can mobilize their peaceful cause to another purpose. For instance, President Jiang Zemin's administration claims that the Falun Gong, which outnumbers all 64.5 million members of the PRC's communist party, gathers international anti-China support that undermines national unity and destabilizes socialist control. (Nordlinger) However, spokespersons for the Falun Gong insist that tens of thousands of adherents have been detained and tortured in labor camps and mental hospitals for "re-education." The group also says that by July 2002, over 430 members have been killed in police custody. ("Falun Gong Followers Protest...")

Although Beijing's ban on the Falun Gong is what the U.S. State Department describes as "the largest crackdown since the Cultural Revolution," the spiritual group is not illegal in Hong Kong. (U.S. Department of State) It is critical that the SAR government is not pressured by the mainland's ban and continues to allow the group to operate freely under a "one country, two systems" policy. The framers of Hong Kong's Basic Law expected spiritual groups to easily adapt to the socio-political systems after the Sino-British transition, but a number of factors are limiting religious freedom and making it difficult for individuals to publically practice their beliefs.

In this article, I first describe the religious climate in Hong Kong before 1997. I then discuss some historical aspects of Chinese rule and the current religious policies of Hong Kong's new atheist leadership. I examine how repression on the mainland is making religious activity unpopular in Hong Kong, especially for the Falun Gong, as well as the ways in which the SAR is impacted by political pressure from the PRC, anti-cult

legislation, and even the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. I also discuss why economic and social pressures in the SAR are correlated with religious groups' concerns that their protests for greater freedom have fallen onto deaf ears. Finally, I evaluate Hong Kong's prospects for attaining unlimited religious freedom under a "one country, two systems" policy.

### **Hong Kong Religions Before 1997**

Before the 1997 handover, laissez-faire policies in Hong Kong permitted San Jiao (the triad of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism) to co-exist with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity. Within this eclectic cultural structure, western denominations like the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches managed schools and hospitals that were financed by the colonial government. (Chunwah, p. 50) The Christian churches operated about 70 percent of secondary schools before World War II and continued to be a chief partner with the government until 1985. (Chunwah, p. 150) In the years leading up to Hong Kong's reunification with China, the Christian churches' role in education began to wane, but they still provided about 20 percent of the region's medical care facilities. (Chunwah, p. 157) With these social welfare programs in place, British leaders looked to the churches to establish a moral society in Hong Kong. Thus, Christian organizations had a pronounced voice in social reform before the transition. They even became watchdogs of the mass media. (Chunwah, p. 170)

However, the Christian churches have been anxious about their future under Chinese rule. Historically, China has regarded Christianity as an alien ideology and has been unfavorable to its assimilation into society. For instance, the Three-Self Movement in the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s sought to expel Christian belief

from the country. Thus, before 1997 many Hong Kong Christians were unwilling to identify with Communist China. A 1983 survey by the Chinese University of Hong Kong showed that Christians in Hong Kong emphasized their Christian identity most, then their Hong Kong identity, and thirdly their Chinese identity. (Chunwah, p. 145)

Among the five hundred thousand people who had left Hong Kong before the handover, some 20 percent were Christians. (Chunwah, p. 131)

On the other hand, adherents of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism – ancient Chinese traditions – approached 1997 with an optimistic sense of being reunited with a nation that has integrated their ethics and rituals into local culture. Unlike Christianity, San Jiao declared that colonialism was a “national shame” that needed to be shed; members of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian sects believed that they did not have equal opportunities in education and lacked public recognition of their cultural festivities, such as Buddha’s birthday. (Chunwah, p. 140)

### **After the Handover: Religions under China’s Jurisdiction**

#### **Religion and “Superstition”**

Civil unrest in China dates back about 2200 years to the Ch’in dynasty (221-207 B.C.); yet over this great span of time, countless uprisings have generally seemed to follow a similar pattern. (Chesneau, p. 21) The tradition of revolt in China has been characterized by: 1) large-scale operations, 2) an overthrow of the established ruling class, 3) a struggle for autonomy, and 4) an emergence of religious movements which replace a declining socio-economic system with an alternative. (Chesneau, pp. 9,67)

One of the most famous anti-establishment revolts was the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-64, when a charismatic Christian missionary declared himself evangelical king of hundreds

of thousands of businessmen, rural folk, and peasants who sought relief from population pressure and imperial Manchu control. (Gray, p. 59) Buddhist and Taoist factions executed the egalitarian ideals set forth by nationalist banners bearing a slogan that was capable of mobilizing the discontented masses: "Restore justice in the name of Heaven!" (Chesneaux, pp. 16, 44) It took 14 years and millions of lives to suppress the revolt; but thousands of subversive sects, known as secret societies (like the Triads or the Elder Brother Society), still remained powerful towards the end of the nineteenth century. (Chesneaux, p. 44) Their sheer numbers – often united by the belief in spiritual salvation – posed a serious threat to the established order.

Insurrection continued into the twentieth century. Sun Yat-Sen and counter-revolutionary groups like the Chinese Youth Party, the National Salvation Movement, and the Third Force all sought to overthrow established regimes. (Chesneaux, p. 45; Tianshi, p. 271) As the 1950s approached, Chinese citizens protested the collapse of capitalism and rallied international support for a pluralistic form of government. (Chesneaux, p. 79; Tianshi, pp. 270-71) The pro-democracy movement, which culminated in the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, was no doubt driven by memories of past insurrection; it mirrored the student protests against the Beijing government during the 1919 May Fourth Movement. From 1989 to 1990, labor organizations, students, state-sponsored newspapers, and even staff of PRC-owned businesses rallied against communism under the auspices of the Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China.

This long history of mass revolt has created an atmosphere of permanent insecurity in China. (Chesneaux, p. 20) As a result, the Chinese government has grown

increasingly suspicious of large, organized groups of people. Labor unions and student movements pose a significant threat to authoritarian stability, so they have been curtailed. Likewise, the central government has tried to protect itself from religious institutions that are able to unite and mobilize the masses. The PRC's 1982 revised Constitution subjects religious groups to licensing, a technique that manages any organization in a position to challenge the government.

A religion is licensed under Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution only if government cadres decide that it raises social responsibility and spreads patriotic and socialist awareness. In addition, the Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Civil Affairs can license and register a religion if it is a discipline or an ideology that can be named as one of the universal faiths: Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, or Taoism. ("U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom")

However, an approved religion is strictly supervised by local government officials. For instance, every religious institution must have a distinct set of texts, which can be collected, and cadres must be able to count all of its adherents. The financial records of any acceptable religious group are open to the government, its contacts with other religious institutions are restricted, youth activities are prohibited, evangelical worship is criminal, and religious materials and education are censored. ("U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom") Religious practices cannot be a part of everyday life, and rituals that include the burning of incense and praying before statues of gods are deemed illegal. (Feuchtwang, p. 168)

If these legal requirements are not met, then a religious group is denied registration and its members are criminalized. The Chinese Criminal Code of 1979 says

that supporters of unregistered religions undermine national unity because their unlicensed beliefs may be under the control of foreign countries and used for “counter-revolutionary purposes,” including the disruption of public order, health, and education. (Feuchtwang, p. 167) However, in the case of the unregistered Falun Gong, millions may be practicing their beliefs underground, where Chinese authorities are unable to detect them.

To discourage religions that are not officially recognized, Chinese authorities have been referring to unapproved religious beliefs as “superstitions.” The Cultural Bureau, which promotes Chinese festivities that contribute to the economy, is responsible for shutting down religious activities – no matter how economically beneficial they may be – if they attract large crowds for “superstitious” practices. (Feuchtwang, p. 169) Nevertheless, religious popularity continued to grow during the democratic movements of the late 1980s. Uncontrolled reconstruction of mosques, monasteries, temples, and churches that were destroyed during Mao’s Cultural Revolution prompted the State Council to release the Notice on Further Tackling Certain Problems of Religious Work, which officially declared that religious freedom cannot justify illegal activities. (Feuchtwang, p. 168) The government notice also set in motion the drafting of a new Criminal Code. The new set of laws, issued in 1997, contain a number of regulations regarding unregistered religions and public order. Article 300, for example, prohibits “superstitious sects, secret societies, and evil organizations” from sabotaging state laws or harming or cheating others. Similarly, Article 105 is an anti-subversion law that protects national socialist unity. (Feuchtwang, p. 171) Local cadres decide whether or not a group is disrupting public order, and their decisions are strongly influenced by the

political climate in Beijing. (Feuchtwang, p. 168) Because the central government felt that the Falun Gong was disobeying these national security laws, the entire group was outlawed as a superstitious cult in 1999.

### **Political Pressure from Beijing**

“One country, two systems” prohibits mainland lawmakers from implementing communist policies in Hong Kong, but there is an emerging congruity between the ways in which the PRC and Hong Kong are approaching human rights. A week before the handover, Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong’s chief executive, delivered a speech comparing the policies of Hong Kong and the PRC in which he said, “If it is good for Hong Kong, it is good for China; if it is good for China, it must be good for Hong Kong” (As quoted in Chunwah, p. 119). Accordingly, while the PRC has been using public order laws to exert control over certain religious activities, Hong Kong has shown increasing interest in a provision of the Basic Law that deals with counter-revolutionary affairs. This provision, known as Article 23, was conceived by a 59-member Basic Law Drafting Committee of the National People’s Congress in April 1988, and was originally intended to protect the Hong Kong government from subversion (overthrowing the government by force). However, by the time that the article was promulgated in 1990, “subversion” was expanded to include other forms of national disunity. Article 23 reads:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies. (Hong Kong Basic Law)

Although the 1988 version of the article was modified, the four security statutes – treason (aiding national enemies), secession (breaking off from the PRC to declare an independent state or allegiance to another state), sedition (inciting insurrection against the government), and subversion – remain broadly defined. In addition, “subversion” and “secession” are not covered by common law. (“Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor”)

There is plenty of leeway for the chief executive to propose national security laws under Article 23 at any time. One possibility is a current project that the SAR government refers to as an “anti-cult law.” Donald Tsang, Hong Kong’s Chief Secretary, has said that officials are studying a French law which outlines the way cults are punished. The French anti-cult law, passed in May 2001, is two-fold: it gives the French judicial system the right to dissolve new religious groups when their leaders are convicted of a crime, and it outlaws brainwashing.<sup>2</sup>

An anti-cult law is a form of licensing, and if burgeoning spiritual groups like the Falun Gong are required to be certified and licensed, they will have to contend with state supervision. (Beckford, p. 284) Like many of the PRC’s licensing laws, which strictly monitor large numbers of people in organized religions, legislation under Article 23 would allow the SAR government to control new religious movements by granting government officials the capacity to distinguish acceptable movements from those that incite national disunity. Officials have said that Falun Gong members upset public order when they conduct their slow-motion exercises in public parks and stage public protests

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<sup>2</sup> French citizens are not allowed to distribute messages that intentionally or unintentionally exploit a person’s psychological or physical well-being. There is a significant penalty for knowingly taking advantage of “the weak, ignorant, or vulnerable” due to their age, illness, or disability. Along these lines, it is also an offense to influence an individual by using “repeated pressures” or “techniques likely to alter judgement.” Penalties are more severe if the *de facto* leader of a cult violates one of the statutes of the anti-cult law. (French Anti-Cult Law)

outside of state offices. These activities allegedly have, among other minor offenses, disrupted the flow of traffic.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that the freedom to adopt a religion of choice can be restricted by laws specifically aimed to “protect public safety, order, [and] national security.” (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) Because Article 23 signifies elevated government control, intervention, and monitoring of public security, the central and SAR governments can use it to justify that a crackdown on religious groups is within legal bounds of international policy. For example, on April 21, 1999, China’s Public Security Bureau detained 71 members of Men Tu Hui, a religious sect, because the devotees were accused of using heresy to spread rumors and insurrection. (U.S. Department of State)

Beijing has also justified its campaign to impose national security laws under Article 23 by citing Articles 13 and 14 of the Basic Law, which state that the central government is responsible for protecting civil order from foreign infiltration. Even though the Basic Law states that the SAR shall enact laws “on its own,” Hong Kong’s Security Chief, Regina Ip, told members of the Legislative Council that Hong Kong would “exchange views” with China on Article 23. Regardless, in the current political scheme, anti-cult legislation would be made by a SAR council whose members were hand-selected by Beijing rather than democratically elected in Hong Kong (direct elections will not take place until 2007). Moreover, mainland politicians have rejected public input as Article 23 was being revised because the citizens of Hong Kong supported

the 1989 student protests in China.<sup>3</sup> This lack of open legislation suggests that the SAR is under political pressure from Beijing to adopt laws coinciding with those in the PRC. In effect, Article 23 bridges the PRC's paranoia of large organized groups to Hong Kong's domestic legal system by way of a yielding chief executive.

### **Evil Rhetoric**

While the SAR government was studying the French anti-cult law, it accelerated its public denouncement of the Falun Gong. In the PRC, political leaders have been referring to the illegal Falun Gong as "an evil cult" since banning the group in 1999. Tung began toeing Beijing's line in February 2001 when he declared that Falun Gong had "characteristics of an evil cult." He said they needed watching. Regina Ip branded Falun Gong a "devious organization" responsible for "heretical views," echoing Beijing's sharp bombast. (Alfredson) As the Falun Gong continued to protest China's harsh treatment of the group, the SAR government became more and more pressured by an apprehensive Beijing. On June 14, 2001, the chief executive explicitly told the Legislative Council, "The Falun Gong is in no doubt an evil cult." He described the Falun Gong as a tightly organized political group with abundant financial resources. (Li)

According to Martin Lee, the leader of Hong Kong's Democratic Party and a member of the Basic Law Drafting Committee, Tung's broad-based comment reveals an intolerance of many religions. Lee said, "If Mr. Tung can say this of the Falun Gong in

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<sup>3</sup> In the days leading up to the June 4 Tiananmen Square massacre (which prompted PRC public order laws in the first place), over one million Hong Kong citizens held pro-democracy marches and rallies with the Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China. (Chan, "Decolonization without Democracy...", p. 167) The pro-democracy movement was a paradigm of what Beijing now calls national disunity, and the central government may have a legitimate fear that a free Hong Kong can buttress anti-government sentiment once again.

Hong Kong without any justification whatsoever, he could say exactly the same thing about the Catholic Church or the Protestant Church tomorrow.” (As quoted in Li)

Equally important is the way in which Tung’s rhetoric represents “rule *by* law” rather than “rule *of* law.” While Article 141 of the Basic Law allows “*religious* organizations to maintain and develop their relations with religious organizations elsewhere,” Article 23 prohibits “*political* organizations from establishing ties with foreign political organizations.” (Hong Kong Basic Law) Tung specifically defined Falun Gong as a political organization, thereby eliminating its ability to maintain ties with the hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong groups scattered all over the world. Meanwhile, because Articles 13 and 14 of the Basic Law ambiguously state that the PRC is responsible for handling the foreign affairs and defense of Hong Kong, the central government can target Hong Kong-bound religious beliefs that have not been officially registered with the Religious Affairs Bureau. This way, religious groups in Hong Kong may be prohibited from associating with their overseas counterparts. (Chunwah, p. 145) By the time that Tung had made his “evil cult” remark, the SAR government was ordering immigration authorities to bar incoming foreign Falun Gong supporters based on a blacklist supplied by Beijing. (Lam, “Freedom under Fire...”) Detainment of blacklisted people was heightened during May 2001 to curb numerous protests at a Hong Kong-based international economic forum.

Once an organization is re-defined as a politically motivated cult, the government is able to implement Article 23 against it. The crackdown on the Falun Gong is one of many examples where Chinese authorities have “cult-ized” a group capable of subverting the established rule. In fact, China has a substantial history of branding religious sects as

cults, and there are even a number of cases where the government has used the 1999 anti-cult law that banned the Falun Gong to persecute other religious parties that are not officially approved. One recent example deals with the “cult” labeling of the Shouters, an evangelical Protestant sect claiming 500,000 members, who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. Over a two month period in 2001, a Hong Kong resident tried to ship over 45,000 copies of an unauthorized version of the Bible to the underground Local Church of the Shouters, and was initially indicted on charges of "using a cult to subvert the law," a crime punishable by death in China. (Pan) This case reveals the non-democratic implications of associating a religious group with cult activity. It especially shows that *any* activity becomes illegal when it is affiliated with a group believed to be subverting the Chinese government. (“Hong Kong Human Right Monitor”) Tung’s use of the “evil cult” language shows that the SAR government is beginning to adopt the kind of authoritarian clout that criminalized the Shouters. It is expected that much of the pressure to use the cult label in Hong Kong is not arbitrary; influence will come from Beijing and be directed against religious organizations that refuse to worship in state-run churches on the mainland. (Pan) Such conditions do not encourage the growth and independence of religions in Hong Kong.

Organizations that are similar in nature to the Shouters and that may soon be targeted by the “evil cult” rhetoric include the Supreme Master Ching Hai International Association (Guanyin Famen), the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Sukyo Mahikari, and the Church of Zion. The possibility of cult labeling would also injure other self-improvement groups including Go Gong, Chi Bei Gong, Benevolence Practice, the Guan Ying School, and

Zhong Gong. (Schloss and Poon) With the exception of Zhong Gong, a meditation and exercise group claiming 20 million members, the major distinction between these groups and the Falun Gong is size. Falun Gong was singled out for political attack because, unlike the smaller spiritual groups, its immense membership allows it to pose a substantial challenge to the government's authority.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S., Tung took his "evil cult" rhetoric to the next level; he began to call the Falun Gong an "evil cult with a terrorist nature" at the same time that Beijing was rallying support for an anti-terrorism law. China already has a list of alleged terrorist groups, which includes the Xinjiang Muslim separatist organization; but in November 2001, the central and SAR governments wanted to draw up a new anti-terror program. (Sin-mi Hon) Regina Ip has accepted a proposal to penetrate terrorist groups and activities (in addition to those declared by the United Nations) by legalizing a ban that would freeze terrorist assets.

Tung justified his "evil cult" rhetoric by citing a January 2001 incident in Tiananmen Square, where a small group of unidentified individuals set themselves on fire. Even though Falun Gong denies any affiliation with those involved, the event gave Tung the opportunity to make implicit links between Falun Gong and cult activity. Knowing that a dangerous cult (like the Branch Davidians or Heaven's Gate) is commonly led by a single charismatic male, the central and SAR governments contend that the suicides in Tiananmen Square were orchestrated by *Asiaweek's* 2001 choice as "the most influential man in Asia:" Li Hongzhi, the founder and world-wide leader of the Falun Gong. Tung has also cited the immolation incident because destructive cults typically engage in mass suicides. (Robinson)

In addition to the public suicides, Chinese authorities maintain that the group kills its own membership when unhealthy Falun Gong followers reject traditional medicine in favor of their own supernormal abilities. In a Falun Gong handbook, Hongzhi tells his disciples that “some illnesses are quite serious and exceed the confines of this world, rendering hospitals incapable of curing them.” (Hongzhi, *Falun Gong*, p. 14) According to the handbook, a “Third Eye” that exists in various shapes at the center of a member’s forehead can diagnose disease more clearly, conveniently, and directly than a CAT scan. The eye is believed to be so powerful that it not only “observes the inside of a human body,” but also detects objects thousands of miles away. (Hongzhi, *Falun Gong*, p. 15) The handbook also states that illness is eliminated during intense slow-motion meditation when the energy of the universe is channeled into a Falun Gong emblem that “automatically spins ceaselessly in the practitioner’s lower abdominal area.” (Hongzhi, *Falun Gong*, p. 15) The spinning emblem supposedly creates a shield around the body so that “illness will be unable to invade again.” (Hongzhi, *Falun Gong*, p. 15)

Arguing against Tung’s rhetoric relies on an important fact: people belonging to a destructive cult generally live together in a location that is isolated from society so that they may practice a self-contained system of assumptions or teachings. (Beckford, p. 81) The Falun Gong is not isolated at all since members frequently stage their exercise sessions in public parks. The government’s accusation that they are disturbing public order is an indication of the group’s integration in Hong Kong society.

### **The Olympic Bid**

Since 1997, when the Chinese State Council published a White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in China, the central and SAR governments have been trying to

convince the world that China's record on human rights has improved dramatically since its modernization movement began in the 1970s. In an apparent effort to show that religions in China are tolerated within the law, Tung recently told U.S. President George W. Bush that religious freedom was "alive and kicking" in Hong Kong. (Torode) But in September 2000, the U.S. Congress outlined a set of eight criteria regarding human rights that were to be met before Permanent Normal Trade Relations would proceed in China. As Congress's statement read, "China will not be selected as a host to the Olympic Games until human rights improve." ("U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom") U.S. Democrat Tom Lantos warned that an Olympic season in Beijing would be like the 1936 Olympics in Germany where Hitler used the international attention of the games to gain support for himself and his cause. Similarly, human rights groups claimed that an international honor should not be awarded to a communist nation that represses spiritual groups like the Falun Gong. So when Beijing was bestowed the Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee in July 2001, Chinese Vice-Premier Li Lanqing declared that his government had scored "a great victory over the Falun Gong." ("China Draws Get-Tough Message")

The contract between the International Olympic Committee and the Beijing Bid Committee stipulates that the host will lift all restrictions on the mass media during the Olympics. Chinese reporters usually fear arrest when they write about the Falun Gong, democracy activists, and labor camps; but Wang Wei, the Secretary-General of Beijing's Olympic committee, has said, "We will give complete freedom to the media to report. We have made guarantees to the bid committee." (As quoted in O'Neill)

In order to avoid anti-government Falun Gong protests during the Olympics, which would diffuse through international news services, Li Lanqing has told the country that it needed to “redouble its efforts” in the “long-term struggle” against the spiritual group. (Lam, “China Set for Long Battle...”) Part of this effort included the conception of the Leading Group on Combating Cults, headed by Li Lanqing. Under this agency, officials in Beijing are hastening a Maoist attack on Falun Gong; government cadres will be either demoted or fired based on the level of Falun Gong activity in their district, and schools will be required to include anti-cult lessons in their curriculums. (Lam, “China Set for Long Battle...”) Alleged attempts at re-education, detainment, reform through labor, and even torture have reduced the number of Falun Gong protests, but authorities feel that they need to accelerate their campaign because the group still remains strong underground.

### **Economy, Order, and Public Perceptions**

Lee Kuan Yew, a Neo-Confucian ex-Prime Minister of Singapore, has formulated a set of guidelines to help modern leaders operate within a strictly ordered Confucian social structure. His work, known as the Lee thesis, says that economic growth is attenuated by the maintenance of civil and political rights. People must put aside their freedoms like voting, protesting, and criticizing to maximize authoritarian efficiency. As Lee has said, “The right of an individual to behave or misbehave as he pleases has come at the expense of orderly society.” (As quoted in Chunwah, p. 114) A country’s sense of traditionalism usually determines the degree to which the Lee thesis is exercised, but because Hong Kong is the hotbed of Asian modernization, it would seem that the region would be an unlikely advocate of Lee’s ideas.

However, in a public speech to the Journalists' Conference on June 2, 1997, Tung said that "Lee is an idol politician." (As quoted in Chunwah, p. 115) Hong Kong's chief executive has already exhibited compliance with Lee when he said that Singapore's models for education and housing would become the new models for Hong Kong. (Chunwah, p. 123) Democratic activists fear that Lee's views on civil liberties will be adopted by the chief executive, too. An alliance between Tung and Lee would show that religious freedom, among other freedoms, may be compromised for economic development.

Exacerbating this issue is the idea that human rights are not major concerns in Hong Kong. (DeGolyer) A number of socio-economic facets of the region reveal that political reforms – including an anti-cult law – may be adopted without much public interference. For instance, as Hong Kong has set out to become a key financial center of the world, a money-driven lifestyle has weakened public consciousness of religious affairs. Since the business boom in the 1970s, Hong Kong has helped sustain the economic development of China, and now that the region is under Chinese sovereignty, its economic performance will be under increased scrutiny. (Pierce) In addition to this emphasis on the national economy, citizens of Hong Kong are more concerned with employment, health, housing, and pollution than religion and human rights, according to a poll by the Hong Kong Transition Project. (DeGolyer) Hong Kong currently has no active pro-religion campaign because the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law both declare that religion is legal and guaranteed. Hong Kong has already achieved – at least in writing – the social autonomy pursued by other Chinese regions like Tibet

and Xinjiang.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in a June 2001 public opinion poll by the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance Party, 55.4 percent of those surveyed feel that the Falun Gong causes social disorder. Where has the public received this negative image of the meditation group? According to Falun Gong members, newspapers are transmitting false messages to the Chinese population. For example, in an apparent link to Tung's "evil cult" defamation, state-run PRC newspapers accused Falun Gong members of self-immolation. Beijing also reported that the *Cable News Network* was involved with the suicides, an implication that backs Zhu Bangzao of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, who has been trying to convince the Chinese people that the Falun Gong garners dangerous international support.

### **Where Freedom of Religion is Headed**

The drafters of the Basic Law believed that the fundamental values of colonial Hong Kong would be maintained after the 1997 transition. For instance, Article 141 says that "religious organizations may, according to their previous practice, continue to run seminaries and other schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and to provide other social services." (Hong Kong Basic Law) Laissez-faire social policies are still intact,<sup>5</sup> but ironically, the religious forces that have played a significant role in stabilizing social order before the transition are now in danger of being perceived as challenges to communist authority and threats to public security. Although there has been a resurgence of religious activity in China since the Cultural Revolution, the reunification of Hong

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<sup>4</sup> In Tibet and Xinjiang, the Chinese government's acts of religious suppression have incited movements for greater autonomy, independence, and a separate state. (Feuchtwang, p. 172)

<sup>5</sup> Chief Secretary Donald Tsang has said, "[Hong Kong] is dealing with the Falun Gong by not dealing with the Falun Gong." (As quoted in Tsang)

Kong with an atheist state may prove to be especially difficult for religious groups in the upcoming years.

In order for communist China to be successfully reunited with Hong Kong under “one country, two systems,” the Chinese leadership must strengthen its acceptance of social pluralism and democracy. To become comfortable with the idea of democracy, Zemin and his administration must recognize that reformed democracies such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, and the former Soviet Union are capable of stabilizing their political and economic systems. (Shaozhi, p. 230) There must also be a balance between the number of political reformers and conservative hard-liners; but as long as Beijing has the power to override direct elections and universal suffrage, this possibility seems remote. (The resignation of Anson Chan, a SAR leader known to oppose Beijing’s intervention in Hong Kong affairs, is a sign that the political balance is being tipped in Beijing’s behalf).

Some political scientists believe that non-cooperation with Chinese authorities sustains the democratic cause. In November 2001, 35 Falun Gong members from 10 different countries staged a non-violent protest in Tiananmen Square. This demonstration against China’s crackdown was the largest protest by Westerners in the Square’s revolutionary history. (“China Expels Falun Gong Protestors”) Nevertheless, the number of Falun Gong protests in Tiananmen Square and the rest of the mainland have declined since the 2001 anniversary of the July 1999 ban. (“Protests Mark Falun Gong Anniversary”) This drop may indicate that Beijing’s crackdown is working. Consequently, over the next few critical years, there may be a marked migration of protestors to someplace nearby where they can act without fear. An ideal setting would be a democratic Hong Kong. However, with new anti-subversion and anti-cult legislation

under Article 23 of the Basic Law, protestors may find themselves packing their bags for a place that is outside of China's jurisdiction.

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