

**CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA  
ROUNDTABLE**

**“CHINA’S POLICIES TOWARD SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS”**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

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**JUNE 18, 2010**

**DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING 628**

The roundtable host, the CECC, asks that “what factors influence the Chinese government's policies toward spiritual movements and drive its treatment of members of spiritual groups. The Chinese government has allowed space for some spiritual movements to operate in China, but has banned other groups, such as Falun Gong. Why does the Chinese government consider some spiritual movements a threat?”

The above questions touch the root of Chinese political-religious culture. Through an analysis on the origin of the traditional political concept of the Mandate of Heaven and its modern applications, and the case of severe persecution of the Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng because of his defending the religious freedom of Falun Gong movement, we may gain more understanding of the rationale of the current Chinese political-religious culture.

## **I. “The Mandate of Heaven” in Traditional Chinese Political Ideology**

When the Zhou king’s advisors persuaded him to attack the Shang dynasty (1766-1045 B.C.) he refused saying, “you do not know the Mandate of Heaven yet,” but he launched the invasion after he heard Shang king did horrible things to his people as a tyrant because that showed the disapproval of Heaven of the Shang king, and Heaven began to support the Zhou king to replace the former.<sup>1</sup>

After the conquest, the Zhou dynasty (1045-256 B.C.) issued a number of proclamations, preserved in the Classic of Documents, persuading the Shang people to submit to their conquerors in the name of Mandate of Heaven. Zhou rulers argued that:

“Heaven, charged certain good men with rulership over the lineages of the world, and the heirs of these men might continue to exercise the Heaven-sanctioned power for as long as they carried out their religious and administrative duties with piety, rightness, and wisdom. But if the worth of the ruling family declined, if the rulers turned their backs upon the spirits and abandoned the virtuous ways that had originally marked them as worthy of the mandate to rule, then Heaven might discard them to elect a new family or lineage to be the destined rulers of the world.”<sup>ii</sup>

The later historians such as Sima Qian and thinkers such as Confucius and Mozi interpreted the Mandate of Heaven as a justification to overthrow evil rulers and start a new dynasty.<sup>iii</sup> Therefore, the concept proved to have lasting influence and fit neatly into the later scheme of the Chinese dynastic cycles, “because it justified all successful overthrows just as it justified all dynasties that clung to power.”<sup>iv</sup> In this theoretical frame, many historical events are judged as the outcome of Divine favor or disfavor including natural signs and disasters.<sup>v</sup>

In Chinese history, the emperors may hold different religious faiths personally, such as Buddhism, Daoism or even Nestorian/Catholic Christianity, but the Mandate of Heaven stayed as an unchangeable law in political ideology to justify their governance.

In modern Chinese history, the great revolt against Qing Dynasty by the Christian sect “*The Kingdom of Heavenly Peace Movement*” (1850-1864) was led by Hong Xiuquan who viewed himself as “the second son of God” and “the younger brother of Jesus Christ” sent by God to eradicate demons and demon worship and “the overthrow of the Manchu would help bring in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.”<sup>vi</sup> Sun Zhongshan (*Sun Yat-sen* 1866-1925) was a Christian and the first president of the Republic of China (1912-1949). He was a founder of the Guoming Party and in his process of overthrowing the Qiang dynasty referenced the book of Exodus in the Bible and spoke of Jesus as a liberator who motivated him as he said “Moses did that, I can too,” and “Jesus is a revolutionary, so am I”, etc.<sup>vii</sup> He also claimed that “God sent him to struggle with evil for the Chinese...and liberating Chinese from bondage.”<sup>viii</sup> He also said “I am a Christian having fought demons more than forty years...”<sup>ix</sup> The concept the Mandate of Heaven has even survived into the Communist China. For example, during the 1989 student movement which led to the Tian-an-men Square massacre, “many commentators remarked that the Communist Party has lost the Mandate of Heaven.”<sup>x</sup>

Because of this spiritual feature of the political concept, spiritual or religious movements in Chinese history make it easy to challenge ruling of dynasties through spiritual moral approaches, thus Chinese governments are sensitive to the political-spiritual touch and are not tolerant of any spiritual movements shaking their ruling authority before the Chinese people. In addition, Chinese governments have tended to keep state and religion separated through promoting non-religious Confucianism throughout much of their history, and that is an efficient way to keep religious or spiritual movements out of politics.

## **II. An analysis of different degrees of freedom and suppression of current spiritual-religious movements in China, and the persecution case of Christian Lawyer Gao Zhisheng**<sup>xi</sup> (Refer to CECC Submission 1, 2: Story of Gao Zhisheng)

“The legal existence of the religious complexities totally relies on the co-operation and the acceptance of the leadership with the government, and the government grasps the very final right to choose the partnership.” (*Ding*, August 1995. Volume 15, No. 88)<sup>xii</sup>

Though the Chinese Communist government is strongly atheist without believing in any spiritual things they are still sensitive to any spiritual movements that touch on politics being seen as a way of challenging their authority. On the other hand, the government tries hard to leave more room for those spiritual religions that respect their authority and abide by the religious policies, mostly in a way of promoting patriotic nationalism today. For instance, the Protestant Christian House Churches and Catholic Christian Underground Churches are persecuted, but the Protestant and Catholic Churches in the official Three-self Patriotic System (or TSPM) enjoy more freedom. Tibetan Buddhism is under suppression because of its feature of religion-politics combination, but Buddhism and Daoism in other parts of China enjoy comparatively much more freedom because they touch no politics. Islam among Uyghurs is under suppression because of the Xinjiang political problem, but Islam among Hui enjoys more

freedom. This is true, not only inside same spiritual traditions, but also if we compare government treatments among different spiritual movements or religions in China.

Similarly, the Qi-gong Movement has many branches. Some were suppressed but others are allowed more freedom. A Qi-gong branch, the Zhong-gong, was also suppressed and its leader Zhang Hongbao before his death in 2006 established a shadow-government of China in the U.S. Falun Gong, another branch of Qi-gong Movement, in its siege of the Party headquarters in Beijing on April 25, 1999 by more than 20,000 Falun Gong practitioners, was the main factor for the Chinese government to crackdown against the Falun Gong.<sup>xiii</sup> The large number of public protest challenges to the government touched on politics seriously. One of Falun Gong's protest slogans after they went abroad is "Heaven Eliminates Chinese Community Party" which is an interpretation of the concept of the Mandate of Heaven.

Among human rights Christian lawyers in China Gao Zhisheng received the most serious inhuman persecution because he was an attorney defending the religious freedom and human rights of some Falun Gong practitioners. The Falun Gong movement was suppressed more than other spiritual movements in China as CECC has pointed out. Therefore, when Gao Zhisheng did not give up representing the Falun Gong members in China, the government attack of revenge on him has become severe.

At this roundtable, CECC also asks: "what does the Chinese government's treatment of spiritual movements mean for the future of religious freedom in China?"

The sociologist Yang Fenggang proposes a Triple-color Market Model to analyze the religious situation in contemporary China: "**a red market** (*officially permitted religions*), **a black market** (*officially banned religions*), and **a gray market** (*religions with an ambiguous legal/illegal status*). *The gray market concept accentuates non-institutionalized religiosity (2006, Purdue University).*" His three propositions are: *to the extent that religious organizations are restricted in number and in operation, a black market will emerge in spite of high costs to individuals; to the extent that a red market is restricted and a black market is suppressed, a gray market will emerge; the more restrictive and suppressive the regulation, the larger the gray market.*"<sup>xiv</sup>

This model can be applied to conditions in China today by stating that a red market means that religions or spiritual movements which do not touch on politics have the most freedom (e.g. non-Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism); a black market means that banned ones (such as Falun Gong) which do touch on politics in a way of challenging the Communist government authority suffer the most suppression. A gray market ambiguous in their political interest, such as non-institutionalized Protestant House Church Christianity (Catholic Underground Church is closer to the black market because of its political feature extended from the Vatican), will continue to grow larger as others are encouraged or suppressed.

### **III. Conclusion with a speculative analysis on the role of Christianity for future of religious freedom in China**

Chinese governments through the history have not tolerated spiritual or religious movements which “touch on politics” because the moral claims they hold make it easy to powerfully challenge the authority of the government through the concept of the Mandate of Heaven when a government does not benefit all the people or is seen as corrupt.

Interesting to note, Christians in China see in the Bible the mandate to pray for the government to prosper so that they may prosper also.<sup>xv</sup> While the Protestant Christian House Churches maintain spiritual and moral standards of behavior and its church setting teachings emphasize “we do not touch politics,”<sup>xvi</sup> “blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness” or even “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:10,44)” as the followers of Jesus Christ, they are not a direct political threat to government and seem to have a bright future in China even under attempts of the government to restrict or suppress them. One important reason for the tighter restriction and suppression is the lesson learned by Chinese government from Eastern Europe’s Communist regimes which collapsed with Christianity playing an indirect role.

The founder and president of ChinaAid Association with the mission of help the persecuted churches and promote religious freedom in China, Bob Fu, a pastor and theologian, pointed out that “House churches which are committed to the sole headship of Christ in the church and to evangelism must operate as illegal groups conducting so-called ‘illegal religious activities,’ and consequently must suffer the administrative penalties inflicted by the state.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Together Christianity in the gray market House Church and the red market TSPM Church is transforming the condition of religious freedom in China through the “new non-institutionalized religious citizen community”<sup>xviii</sup> established in the whole nation. (Refer to CECC Submission 3: *2009 Annual Report of ChinaAid Association.*)

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<sup>i</sup> Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire, a history of China to 1600*, (New York-London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 40-41.

<sup>ii</sup> Compiled by WM. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, *Source of Chinese Tradition, Volume I, from earliest times to 1600*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>iii</sup> Valerie Hansen., 41.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Richard Hooker, *Ch'ing China: The Taiping Rebellion*, <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CHING/TAIPING.HTM>

<sup>vii</sup> Wang Zhongxin, *Sun Zhongshan and Christianity, Christianity and China*, Volume IV, (The Blessings Foundation, Inc. CA, USA), 15.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>x</sup> Valerie Hansen., 41.

<sup>xi</sup> More information on [www.freealim.com](http://www.freealim.com)

<sup>xii</sup> cf. Bob Fu, *God and Caesar: Church and State Relations in Communist China*, Professor in Religion and Philosophy at Oklahoma Wesleyan University for the 2003-2005 academic years.

<sup>xiii</sup> James W. Tong, *Revenge of the Forbidden City: The Suppression of the Falungong in China, 1999-2005*.

<sup>xiv</sup> Fenggang Yang, *The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion In China*, *The Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006) 93–122 © 2006 Midwest Sociological Society.

<sup>xv</sup> Jeremiah 29:7 “Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it proper, you too will prosper.” See also, Romans 13:5-6 “Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. . . for the authorities are God’s servants . . .”

<sup>xvi</sup> When Bob Fu was arrested and interrogated in Beijing 1996 because his leadership of a house church, he answered the police after he was put in the jail: “I didn't preach anything about politics in our church, because I believe the separation of the church and state.” The police answered: “I want you to know that you must talk politics everywhere.” That meant the government wants the house church to support the communist politics everywhere.

<sup>xvii</sup> Bob Fu, *God and Caesar: Church and State Relations in Communist China*.

<sup>xviii</sup> ChinaAid Association, 2009 Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China, Part V 1. *Church as a Corner Stone of Chinese Citizen Society*.

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## SUBMISSION FOR THE RECORD #1

### Excerpt from [www.FreeGao.com](http://www.FreeGao.com)

“Christian human rights Attorney Gao Zhisheng was seized by a dozen police officers and last seen in public on February 4, 2009. Gao has been repeatedly kidnapped, arrested, imprisoned and tortured by Chinese authorities for defending the persecuted. He has been an unyielding and iconic advocate for justice in the Chinese courts and was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008.

On January 21, 2010, the Chinese government publicly acknowledged Gao Zhisheng to be in their custody, for the first time since his abduction more than 365 days ago. In response to a reporter's inquiry, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu said: "The relevant judicial authorities have decided this case, and we should say this person, according to Chinese law, is where he should be." Mr. Ma then added, "As far as what exactly he's doing, I don't know. You can ask the relevant authorities."

The Ministry's comments brought a glimmer of hope to Gao supporters around the world. Since December 2009, rumors of Gao's death from torture in prison have spread uncertainty. Just one week before Mr. Ma spoke to the media, Gao's older brother, Gao Zhiyi, was informed by a police officer that Gao Zhisheng had gotten “lost and went missing while out on a walk” in September, 2009. The news of his death, then alleged disappearance, devastated Gao's wife and children.

Finally, on January 20, 2010, an Australian newspaper reported from an inside source that “Gao is still alive at present ... he's not missing.”

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**SUBMISSION FOR THE RECORD #2**

**Excerpt from ChinaAid's newsletter, distributed by ChinaAid on May 10, 2010 via email**

“ChinaAid thanks you for your continued support of Gao Zhisheng. We have learned that Gao was last seen on April 15-16 visiting his in-laws in Xinjiang. He did not return to his Beijing apartment the following week, as he was scheduled to according to the family. He has not been seen or heard from him since.

ChinaAid is actively searching for Gao and news of his condition and whereabouts. With no news in over three weeks, we fear Gao Zhisheng has been forced to disappear again. We will continue to press for information, and keep all Gao supporters updated with the latest confirmed news. We thank you for your continued prayers and support for Gao Zhisheng, and will not relent until Gao has been released, and is able to reunite with his family in the United States.

As we continue to press for Gao Zhisheng, ChinaAid remains committed to defending other persecuted faithfuls in China. Hundreds of thousands suffer persecution for their faith, and in extreme cases, like that of Uyghur Christian Alimujiang Yimiti, it takes a global effort to call for justice.”

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## SUBMISSION FOR THE RECORD #3

### **Excerpt from the 2009 ChinaAid “Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China” Part V, Section 1. Church as a Corner Stone of Chinese Citizen Society**

“In his classical book *Citizenship and Social Class* (1964), T. H. Marshall defined modern citizenship as “*a personal status consisting of a body of universal rights, i.e. legal claims on the state, and the duties held equally by all legal members of a nation-state* (Marshall; Brubaker 1992).” He also defined three basic rights of modern citizenship: **civil rights, political rights and social rights.**

Many scholars agree that the legal requirements for an emergent capitalist society were chiefly responsible for the birth of modern citizenship rights and that “*the struggle to extend citizenship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was carried on primarily by English working class through such important democratic movements as Chartism, the Factory Movement, and trade unionism,*” yet Margaret R. Somers argues that the “*social and political movements of those tumultuous industrializing epochs were built primarily on the efforts, political identities, and social activities of rural industrial working peoples in the pastoral regions* (Somers 1993, Michigan University).” For Somers, “varying patterns of institutional relationships among **law, communities and political culture** were central factors in shaping modern citizenship rights,” and she argues that citizenship as **an instituted process** rather than a status.”

To apply the above theories to China, we should admit that Chinese society is just starting to evolve into a citizenship society. Based on the 2009 report of persecution on House Church Movement in China, we also need to add religious rights, which were not such a concern for 19th and 20th century Christian Europe, to the three citizenship rights listed above. Then, to apply these four central rights theory we can see three major elements in the institutional process contributing to the construction of a Chinese citizenship society based on the emerging national capitalism since 1979. In the last 20 years these have been: the **Western Law infrastructure borrowed by China, a Church Movement Community**, as well as **traditional symbolic political culture originating in Communist ideology, Confucianism and other ideas**, which have stimulated needs for citizenship (Shan Chunahang, 2008, Boston University, with an acknowledgment to Dr. Nancy Ammerman). The community used to be in the three major elements formula was an intellectual one but it faded away from the instituted process after 1989’s brutal suppression and replaced by church movement community.

The Christian communities (mostly House Church Movement and Three-Self Church) in China grew fast in an invisible model because of persecution, yet it emerges as a new social and spiritual block in society, through **not giving up meeting together**. Beijing Shouwang, Shanghai Wanbang, Chengdu Qiuyu zhifu and Guangdong Liangren house churches were all typical examples in 2009 of churches that did not give up meeting

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together under severe pressure from the government. Christian communities, similarly to the pastoral regions of Europe in 19th and 20th centuries, can also shape powerfully a Chinese citizenship society with a possible future “plausibility structure” (Peter L. Berger, 1966, Boston University).