

THE TURNING  
OF  
THE TIDE

RELIGION IN CHINA TODAY

*Edited by*  
JULIAN F. PAS

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## PREFACE

*Like many organisations in present day Hong Kong, the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch, is pondering the future. Hopes and fears attend the impending return of the territory to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and the establishment of the promised highly autonomous Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in that year. We believe that reliable information about what is happening in China today is vital to shaping the policies that will assist in producing a satisfactory outcome in 1997, for individuals and associations as well as for our future government.*

*This book is about one aspect of the national life: religion in China today. It has been produced by scholars who are acquainted with the contemporary scene, some of them Chinese by residence as well as race. Between them, they have provided a first-hand and as far as possible accurate, in depth account. They are mindful of the incomplete nature of their work, its limited geographical cover, and of the fast changing, unfolding nature of current developments in this field. However, they feel, as we do, that an authoritative statement at this time will be of value to many people, especially those belonging to religious groups in Hong Kong.*

*Their account enables us to see how religion has been affected by, and is responding to, the modernisation policies and more outward looking stance of the present leadership of the People's Republic. Its handling by the authorities is a reflection, in part, of the human rights situation in the country. In this wider context, it provides a yardstick by which to measure China's progress towards modernisation, and even more, its intentions towards the individual and non-government agencies in a Communist, turning socialist, country.*

*The fact that the text takes us only up to 1985 or thereabouts is, to my mind, of considerably less importance than the light shed upon these opening and in some ways formative years of the resurgence of overt religious activities in mainland China, and the less tangible spiritual movements underlying them. In this respect, it is hoped that this book of essays represents a benchmark that will assist others to assess the events and developments of the intervening period in this important field, and to interpret those occurring in the years immediately to come. Indeed, our editor and some of the contributors are already talking of another volume! Surely, this is all for the good.*

*It was for these reasons that the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch, decided to finance the publishing of this work. However, publication would not have been possible without a grant covering half the cost from the Chinese General Charities Fund. This was made available by courtesy of the Chinese Temples Com-*

mittee, a statutory public body serviced by the City and New Territories Administration of the Hong Kong Government. The application to the Committee was made in the belief that the work will be of benefit to Hong Kong, as well as to the much wider group of persons outside Hong Kong with an interest in the subject. The RAS Council wishes to record its great appreciation of this help, so timely given.

The Council also wishes to express its appreciation to the President's publication fund (University of Saskatchewan) for a grant in aid to assist the editor in the editorial work.

Finally, a special word of appreciation is due to the editor. Dr Julian Pas is a member of the Hong Kong Branch, Royal Asiatic Society and a contributor to our annual Journal. He conceived the idea of this volume a few years ago following one of his visits to China, and has been tireless in making all the editorial arrangements leading to completion of the finished typescript. Without his enthusiastic and infectious leadership I doubt whether the project could have been realized.

Hong Kong, March 1989

JAMES HAYES  
President, Hong Kong Branch,  
Royal Asiatic Society

## POSTSCRIPT

Since these words were written, momentous events have taken place in China. Their impact has made itself felt world-wide, but it is still impossible to forecast the outcome in China itself. If anything, they have enhanced the value of the contributions to this book, with their part record of the unfolding religious and human rights scene up to mid 1989.

I have also to record the agreement of Oxford University Press (Hong Kong) to co-publish this work. The assistance of the Press was sought to facilitate publicity and marketing, which clearly would be on a wider basis than anything the RAS Hong Kong Branch might contrive unaided. This is the second time that we have entered into co-publication with Oxford (Hong Kong), and I wish to thank them for their courtesy, consideration and assistance in agreeing to the joint venture at a late stage in our publishing arrangements.

I have also to record our appreciation of our printers, Messrs Yee Tin Tong, who have also handled the last few issues of the Journal of the Branch, and especially their Mr. Henry Law.

Last but not least, I have to thank Timothy Woo, our Member and Senior Assistant Librarian at Lingnan College Library, for preparing the Index. JH.

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China is a country of religious pluralism, beset by many uncertainties. Without doubt the greatest problem facing religion in China today is the fundamentally irreconcilable contradiction between Marxism and a religious world view. Both sides are aware of this problem and it seems that, if these theoretical contradictions can somehow be accommodated, there is a modest hope for the future of the various branches of religious belief in China.

This volume, published by the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, in association with Oxford University Press, presents a collection of essays by an international group of scholars. Their knowledge of different aspects of religious practice makes this a most valuable source for all who seek an understanding of the present state of religion in China.

The editor of this volume, Dr Julian F. Pas, was born in Belgium and studied theology at the University of Louvain. He also studied Chinese languages and culture in Taiwan and obtained his Ph.D. in Asian religions at McMaster University, Canada. Since 1969 he has been teaching at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, where he is a professor of religious studies. He is now a Canadian citizen. He has published a dozen articles on Chinese religion and is now preparing several book manuscripts on Taoism and Chinese popular religions. He is the current editor of the *Journal of Chinese Religions*.

The contributors include scholars from the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Holland, Belgium, and West Germany.

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