

## EDITORIAL

The main theme of this issue of *Tripod* is China's new "Regulations on Religious Affairs," signed by Premier Wen Jiabao on November 30, 2004, and which are due to come into effect on March 1, 2005. They will replace the "Regulations on the Management of Venues for Religious Activities," signed by then Premier Li Peng on January 31, 1994. They also summarize and encompass at least 55 sets of regulations issued at the local level by provincial, autonomous regional or municipal governments during the intervening years. The new regulations are spelled out in 48 articles, whereas the old set of regulations contained only 20 articles.

Some commentators detect progress in religious policy in the new regulations, citing the articles where court cases can be filed against religious affairs cadres, who abuse their power or are derelict in their duties. Another example is the article which states that the actual market value must be paid in compensation for church property appropriated by the state for development. Other commentators tend to see the regulations as representing no change in the religious policy, while others still think that the regulations indicate a strengthening of control by the government's religious affairs departments over religious affairs.

We present our own translation of the regulations to our readers, along with some commentaries, and let the readers themselves decide about progression, sameness or regression, when these regulations are compared to past ordinances on religious affairs.

Next we have an article which we have been trying to include for a long time. It is by Prof. Richard Madsen, a professor in the Department of Sociology of the University of California at San Diego. Prof. Madsen's paper, entitled "Religious Renaissance and the Growth of Civil Society in Greater China," was originally delivered at the 20<sup>th</sup> National Catholic China Conference sponsored

by the U.S. Catholic China Bureau at Maryknoll, New York, November 14-16, 2003.

With the author's permission, we present only a condensed version of his paper, which originally was 23 pages long. Our offering will most likely whet the appetites of many of our readers for the longer, original version of the paper. They can set their hearts at ease. We are reliably informed that the Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society of Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong will this year publish the original version as one of its occasional papers.

Dr. Madsen's article describes the unique phenomenon of a resurgence of interest on the part of Taiwan's *nouveau riche* middle class in the traditional religions of Buddhism and Daoism. This "renaissance," as Prof. Madsen calls it, shows itself in acts of charity and compassion towards the less fortunate in society on the part of Buddhist and Daoist adherents. As a research fellow of the Academia Sinica in Taipei, Prof. Madsen carried out his research from September 1999 to January 2000. Thus, Prof. Madsen was present on Taiwan when a devastating earthquake struck the central part of the island in the early morning of September 21, 1999. About 2,400 persons died in the tragedy, and about 100,000 were rendered homeless. He was practically on the scene, then, to record the response of the Buddhist and Daoist organizations to the disaster.

Prof. Madsen describes in his paper the charitable work of four Buddhist or Daoist associations having the following names: "Buddhist Compassion Relief," "Buddha's Light Mountain," "Dharma Drum Mountain," and "Performing Heaven's Business." While each group is mentioned throughout our condensed version of Prof. Madsen's paper, due to lack of space, we concentrate mostly on the activities of the largest organization, "Buddha's Compassion Relief," or *Tz'u-chi*. In conclusion, Prof. Madsen wonders if charitable works as an expression of faith by religious believers in Mainland China can have the same civilizing effect on society as they seem to have had on Taiwanese society.

Author and subject indexes for the years 2003 and 2004 are included at the end of this issue.

Finally, we belatedly wish all our readers good health and happiness throughout the Chinese New Year of the Rooster! (PJB)