

Religion and Society: the challenge of multiple identities

*a workshop for further understanding between Europe and China
and for our common challenges,
Four days: 3 to 6 of October, 2008 in Sweden*

The idea of this workshop has grown out of the workshop held during the China-Europa Forum in Brussels in October 2007, with the theme “The Place and Role of Religion in a Harmonious Society” (WS11). Some participants in that workshop felt the need for a deepened discussion on certain issues that came up during the meeting in Brussels. We also see a possible future continuation of such workshops to continue the dialogue on religious matters between China and Europe.

Theme – Religion and Society: the challenge of multiple identities

The theme reflects the important **issues of religion and identities in contemporary society**, and how these questions relate to each other. The rapidly changing societies of China and Europe face similar challenges with multiple identities and the role of religious faith for social involvement, and only through inter-religious and –cultural dialogue can we learn from each other.

Challenges arise from the tensions between our basic identities defined by ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and religious faith. *What does it mean to belong to a religious minority in a dominantly Christian Europe? What does it mean in a dominantly non-religious state like China? How can immigrants from outside Europe and ethnic minorities in China participate in civil life ?* Another basic question to be discussed is whether there is a kind of hierarchy of identities. Who decides what goes first? Here we need to take into the account **the role of the government and its control of or interference with religious groups.**

In Europe public universities arrange for religious (theological) training and in that way draws the religious (theological) discourse into the wider academic discourse. This is at least partly in contrast to the US model. *Would this be possible in China? How can we make sure that the authenticity and legitimacy of the faith-based voices? How can religious groups introduce their services and their critical insights into the wider community without themselves claiming superiority?* These and many other issues can be derived from the **overall theme of multiple identities.**

Stockholm, 20 April 2008

Fredrik Fällman
Chinese Department
Stockholm University
Sweden