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CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA: PAST, PRESENT AND CHALLENGES

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Christianity is on the list of the legitimate religions in modern China. The past several decades have witnessed a wide spread and rapid development of the Christianity across the country. As an important world religion which had first emerged in the West Asia and which has to a certain extent been idealized as the symbol of the Western culture, or the democracy in specific, Chinese Christianity has been attracting attentions both from within and without, especially the scholars. Unlike other religions such as Buddhism and Taoism, the existence and development of Christianity in China are often attached to special dimensions such as politics and ideology which go beyond the religion per se. In the expectation of many Westerners and Chinese, the Chinese Christianity, especially the Protestantism is the hope for the Western democracy. What does it mean for China in particular and for the world in general for the upsurge of Christianity? Although there are various researches, an agreement is far from being reached. This short article tries to trace in concise the past and present of Christianity in China, the challenges it is facing, and to provide some thought on its history. A short caveat is necessary before we proceed further.

Several Chinese terms related to Chinese Christianity should be clarified. Like its Western counterpart, Christianity in China is divided into different

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denominations. Traditionally, the Chinese term tianzhujiao (literally “religion of the Lord of heaven”) is used to refer to the Catholicism. The term jidu jiao (literally “Christ’s religion”) is used to refer to the Protestantism, while dongzheng jiao (literally “eastern orthodox religion”) refers to the Orthodox Church or the Eastern Orthodox Church. But when the term jidu jiao is used in Chinese context, it may refer either in general to all followers of Christ regardless of denominations, or in particular to the Protestantism. In the strict and legal meaning, jidu jiao is the formal Chinese term for Protestantism. More often than not, this tradition of naming and usage causes confusion or misunderstanding even among Chinese readers, let alone the foreigners who do not know Chinese or Christian history in China. Though some scholars have been trying to avoid the confusion by using jidu zongjiao (literally “the religions of Christ”) to refer all Christian denominations, it seems that it is not very successful. As this article is concerned, when Christianity is used, it is in the general meaning, and when specific denominations are concerned, Catholicism, Protestantism or Eastern Orthodox Church are used respectively.

Past

Christianity first came to China in the Tang Dynasty. In the year 635, a Nestorian priest named Alopen who was warmly welcomed by the prime minister (zaixiang) Xuanling Fang on behalf of the Emperor Taizong, arrived at the capital city Changan. As a heresy to the mainline Christianity, Nestorians are the first Christians to China, though it is alleged that the Apostle Thomas had arrived at China shortly after the founding of the Church. According to the inscriptions on the stele of Nestorianism built in the late 8th century and unearthed in 1625 in the suburb city Zhouzhi of Xi’an, the Nestorian monks lived and preached across the country, and built temples (si) in hundreds of cities. The monks were accommodated in a temple in the capital by the emperor and funded by the government. Probably both missionaries and traders, the Nestorian monks provided advanced technical service to the court and won the favor of many officials. They also had intimated relations with the Emperor and other high level officials, often discussing theological questions in the court. It is also believed that the Bible had been are translated at least partially, which are not extant. Mostly taken as a branch of the Buddhism,
the Nestorians were called and governed in accordance with the Buddhist monks. It is also believed that the Nestorians provided services mainly to the Nestorian foreigners in China, and few native Chinese converted.

The prosperity of the Nestorian Church came to an abrupt end in the middle of the 9th century when the Emperor Wuzong launched a campaign to smash the Buddhism in 845, in which the Nestorianism, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeanism, etc. also failed to survive. It hadn’t been preached in China again until the 13th century when the Mongolians invaded the whole China and set up the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). As the once suzerain of an international Empire, the Yuan Dynasty has a huge population including Nestorians, Catholics and Orthodox followers. It is natural for the Nestorians to have the lion’s share since the patron empire in China has intimate political and matrimonial relations with the Ilkhanate empire in Western Asia, the headquarters of the Nestorianism. In the late 13th century, Catholicism also came to the capital city hanbali (now Beijing). Franciscan and Dominican friars were dispatched to China on the alleged request of the emperors of the Yuan to preach Gospel. They built churches, converted followers, translated the Bible, set up the bishoprics and enjoyed a quite successful career both in cities and rural areas, though hindered and pressed by the Nestorians. The second sojourn of Christianity in China ended with the overthrow of the Yuan Dynasty in the late 14th century. It has to wait for about two more hundred years for its third adventure.

With the new tide of enthusiasm for mission of the Catholic Europe headed by the Jesuit Society founded in 1534, the Jesuit monks arrived at South China via India in the middle of the century and tried to preach into the mainland. This illegal activity was further enhanced in 1557 when Macau was borrowed to the Portugal government as the transitory station for the merchants. With this headquarters, it is more convenient for the missionaries to preach and stay inland when the Ming Dynasty enforced the policy of ban which forbids the foreigners to stay overnight in the mainland. In 1582, the Italian Jesuits Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) arrived at Macau. He was invited by the governor of the zhaoqing fu to live in the city in the next year for his skill in mathematics and cartography, where he had stayed until 1589 as a Buddhist monk and had preached Gospels to Chinese people. It is from this time on that native Chinese Catholicism began to take root and developed slowly. In 1673, the first native Chinese bishop Luo Wenzao was ordained.
According to the statistics, there were more than 215000 Catholics in 1800 (Gu 2003: 333). In the early nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries also came to China.

The success of Christianity in China is indispensable to the religious feelings and psyche needs of Chinese on one hand, and to the eminent missionaries such as the Jesuit Matteo Ricco on the other. As the cause of Catholicism is concerned, Matteo Ricco is the key figure for its acceptance by the court. He began the policy of Chinese Rite by accommodating traditional Chinese ideas or practices, which made it easier for Chinese people to join the church without being isolated from families and local society. At the same time, he also gave up the assigned role of monks from the government, taking off the costume of the Buddhist monks, putting on the dresses of the Confucian elites to complement Christianity, learning the Confucian classics, and making friends with the Confucian elites. Matteo Rico who was welcomed by the elites arrived at Beijing in 1601 and was allowed to live in the capital, where he was allotted a piece of land by the emperor to build a church to preach. The success of Matteo Ricco earned not only the permission of the government, but also the coming of other mendicant Orders, laying the foundations for Catholicism in China.

The acceptance of the missionaries by Chinese is also related to their personal quality, especially the knowledge in science and the training in technology. When the Jesuits arrived at China in late 16th century, the Ming Dynasty has passed its zenith and has been in crisis both within and without. The government was in great need to enhance its military force so as to suppress internal revolts and to defend external invasions. Well trained both in theology and science and technology of the day, the Jesuits are good technicians or engineers who can provide great help in the field of weapon-making and military training. The Julian calendar which has just been reformed by the Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 is also more accurate than the traditional Chinese lunar calendar based on the shoushili of the Yuan Dynasty which often caused confusion in solar term and agricultural activity because of its less scientific calculating methods. The superiority of the Jesuits in these fields was soon appreciated by the emperors and the elites of the court. They were employed to direct the manufacturing of the weaponry, the training of the military, the drawing of the maps, and the reforming of the calendar. To a great extent, the Jesuits in China were regarded as experts rather than
purely missionaries whose missionary works were a sideline or a kind of reward from the government for their accomplishment. This orientation continued when the Manchurian occupied Beijing and permitted the Jesuits to live in the inner city in 1644. Under the reign of the Qing Dynasty, Jesuits provided wide-ranging services to the royal family and the government. Even the controversy of the Chinese Rite and the later ban on Catholicism could not preventing from their employment. From the late 17th century to the middle 19th century, Jesuits were permitted to stay in the capital to work for the government and to practice Catholicism by themselves preconditioned by obeying the Route of Matteo Ricco and no preaching.

The outbreak of the Opium War destroyed the relatively equal cultural exchanges between the West and China based on the integrity of sovereignty. China was forced firstly to open port cities to the West after the Sino-British Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, and then to lift the ban on Christianity three years later under the pressure of France. Foreigners are free to rent land or build churches in the five ports to preach Christianity. After 1860, under the pressure of the Western countries, the Qing government was forced to give Chinese people the freedom to believe in Christianity. From this time on, Christianity in China ushered in a rapid development guaranteed by law. Catholic missionaries came to China to preach in swarms. The Protestantism which was first brought to China in 1807 with the arrival of the British missionary Robert Morrison dispatched by the London Mission Society at Canton, also took root in the coastal areas. After the Second Opium War, Christianity was further freed to preach in the inner provinces of China which resulted in a new tide of missionary works and conversion headed by the China Inland Mission.

The burst of Christianity in China in this period inevitably encountered the resistance or hostility from the majority of Chinese people. On one hand, the sovereignty of China has been loosing day after day which fell to the bottom in 1900. China was forced to open its door to the West on all kinds of unequal treaties which had incurred aversion and hatred of the Chinese people. On the other hand, many missionaries who were worrying about the sluggishness of the gospel spreading and who were frustrated at the unwillingness of the Chinese to convert had participated actively in the invasion of the West to China, hoping and even advocating to conquer and convert China with coerce. Missionaries had been also partial to Chinese Christians when civil disputes between the latter and non-Christian Chinese
occurred, which ignited the anti-foreign feelings of the Chinese including officials and gentry. Hundreds of religious cases (jiao’an) pinnacled at the Boxer Uprising in 1900 in which alone more than two hundred missionaries and foreigners and more than 23 thousand Chinese Christians were killed. According to the statistics of the Canadian Presbyterian missionary Donald MacGillivray, 23000 Chinese Christians including 18000 Catholics and 5000 Protestants, 188 Protestant missionaries and 53 Catholic bishops and priests were slaughtered (Wang 2007: 175). According to the estimation of Latourette, 32 thousand Catholics, 47 foreign clergy including bishops, priests, nuns and Marists, 1912 Protestants, 186 or 188 Protestant missionaries including children, 200 to 400 Orthodox Church followers fell victims to the tragedy (Latourette 1929: 512-513, 516-517, 518).

The event of the Boxer Uprising blew seriously to Christianity, but it also marked a turning point after which the churches in China enjoyed a fast and peaceful development. Both Protestantism and Catholicism began the movement of indigenization or contextualization (bense jiaohui) which aimed to get rid of the monopoly of the missionaries for independent churches and transform Christianity from a foreign religion (yangjiao) to the Christianity as a Chinese religion with indigenous rites. Under this background, native Chinese priests and ministers are ordained to build and lead the native Chinese churches, Chinese culture is used to interpreter Christian thought and theology, a voluntary organization to unite various of the Protestant branches into one non-denomination church was also founded in May, 1922 (National Christian Council of China). In the mean time, native churches who are the predecessors of the house churches also emerged under the influence of the Evangelism, especially the Pentecostalism in many provinces.

Though the development of the Chinese Christianity was interrupted to some extent during the Anti-Japanese War and the civil war, it is fairly right to say that the churches in China moved forward steadily and slowly. On the eve of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, there are 700 thousand Protestants and 3 million Catholics (SARA 2012).

The birth of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 marks a turning point for and ushers in the independence of Christianity. The outbreak of the Korean War accelerates this inevitable trend. Politically, the western countries have sustained the foreign relations with the government of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) and have been hostile to
the New Republic. So did the churches who are hostile to atheism and communism. With the emergence and development of the national anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism patriotic movement which neither Protestant nor Catholic churches can stand aloof, the stance of the Chinese Christians is predictable. Contacts and relations with foreign churches are severed totally so as to proclaim the sovereignty of communist China. Foreign missionaries were dispelled, churches were put under the governance of Chinese Christians. The dimension of national sentiment also plays a role during the process. Although the indigenization movement and the anti-Christianity movement in the 1920s had changed the power structure of the churches to some extent, the churches were controlled in general in the hands of missionaries or foreign mother churches, with which most Chinese Christians were dissatisfied. On July 28, 1950, Chinese Protestant leaders represented by Wu Yaozong published the Christian Manifesto to build the Chinese church on the principle of “self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation” and to “endorse the anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism and antibureaucratic capitalism” policy of the government, foretelling the birth of the three-self church. On Dec. 30, 1950, more than 500 hundred Catholics in the Guangyuan county in Sichuan province under the lead of a priest named Wang Zuoliang published jointly the Manifesto of the Self-dependence and Reform Movement of the Catholics in Guangyuan which advocates to “build a new self-governance, self-support and self-propagation church”. The Three-Self Movement gave birth to the independent Chinese churches. In July, 1954, the Protestant Patriotic Three-Self Church Movement was established, and Wu Yaozong was elected the president. On August 2, 1957, the China Patriotic Catholic Church Association (CPCA) was established, and the Archbishop Ignatius P’i-Shu-Shih was elected president. With the joint worship of the various branches in 1958, the Protestant church in China have stepped into the age of post-denomination. At the same time, other native evangelical churches are also required to merge into the Three-Self Church which caused some trouble and disturbance to the cause of Protestantism. The Three-Self Church and the CPCA were delegated to administrate the religious issues of the respective churches under the leadership and guidance of the central government.

Like other religions, Christianity in China had been in hard times from the late 1950s to the middle of the 1960s, coming virtually to a halt during the
Culture Revolution, a ten-year comprehensive havoc in the history of China, although the first Constitution in 1954 has guaranteed the right of the citizens’ freedom of religious faith.

Present

The smash of the Gang of Four and the ending of the Culture Revolution in 1976 saved China from degenerating further and brought it back to the normal track including religion. The subsequent Reform and Opening Up policy speeded up the resumption of the religions which had halted for more than a decade. The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question During Our Country’s Socialist Period, well known as the Document 19, issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on March 31, 1982, frames the viewpoints and principles of the Party on religion. It reclaims and reconfirms in theory its Marxist atheistic outlook on religion. Nevertheless, it also recognizes that religion will continue to exist in Socialist society so long as its root, the oppressive system and its oppressor class sustains. As an inevitable phenomenon in class society, lawful religious faith and activities should be protected and fitted into the general route and policy of the socialist construction so as to make their contribution. Together with the freedom of religious belief given to citizens in the Constitution, it has buttressed the revitalization and upsurge of the religions including Christianity ever since the early 1980s.

With the advancement of the reform and the dramatic change of the society, the administration and the policy of religion has been updated to date. On one hand, the Party and the government have been attaching more and more importance to religious issues. Regulations on the Administration of Sites for Religious Activities was promulgated by the State Council of the People’s Republic of China on January 31, 1994 to regulate the administration. A new Regulations on Religious Affairs was in effect on March 1, 2005. The Religious Affairs Regulations Draft Revisions (Deliberation Draft) proclaimed in September 7, 2016, is open to the public for suggestion now. On the other hand, the government issued official papers on religion to introduce the history and the present conditions of Chinese religions to the world such as the Freedom of Religious Belief in China issued in 1997 and the An Overview
of the Chinese Religions updated on the website of the State Council in 2012. The Annual Report on Religions in China or the Blue Book of Religions has been published since 2008. In general, the government of China administrates its religious issues on the principle of “protect the legal, curb the illegal, suppress extremism, resist infiltration and attack crime”.

Under the guarantee of the new religious policy of the Party and the government, Chinese Christianity has rejuvenated itself ever since the early 1980s. The Three-Self Church was restored in 1980 and the China Christian Council (zhongguo jidujiao xiehui) was also founded in the same year. These two institutes, generally called the “two organizations” (lianghui), form the leading power of the Protestants. The 1980 also witnessed the restoration of the CPCA and the establishment of the Bishops Conference of Catholic Church in China, which becomes the administrating institutes with the CPCA, colloquially called “one association and one conference” (yihui yituan). The Churches and worship stations reopened, followers boom yearly, seminaries established to train the clergy and ministry, Bible and theological works published to meet the requirement of Christians. According to the statistics of the Catholics, there are 97 dioceses or bishoprics, more than 6000 churches and stations, 12 monasteries, nearly 100 congregations of religious sisters, 8 eight theological schools and seminaries, more than 60 bishops, 2000 priests, 5000 nuns until 2012 in China. More than 1500 priest are trained and ordained after the Reform and Open Up. About 50 thousand people are baptized every year, and more than 3 million copies of Bible have been published so far. The Chinese Catholic Church also engages actively in relations and exchanges with foreign Catholic churches, and participates in the service to the society in the field of social works and charity (SARA 2012; Liu 2009: 13). According to the statistics of the SARA, there are more than 50 thousand churches and stations, nearly 4000 pastors, 37 thousand ministry and 150 thousand volunteers in the Protestant Church. There are 20 seminaries and Bible schools, publishing more than 58 million copies of Bible (SARA 2012). The development of the Protestants is especially fast. According to the report of the Three-Self Church, 2400 thousand baptized, 5195 churches built or rebuilt, 3 theology seminaries established, 1057 pastors, 482 ministers (associate pastors) and 1443 elders ordained from 2008 to the end of the 2012 (Tang, Duan 2014: 102). 74.3% of the Protestants believe in or convert after 1993 (RGIWR 2010: 192).
The upsurge of Christianity naturally means the increase of the Christian population. How many Christians are there in contemporary China? It is perhaps the most controversial question in modern Chinese Christian studies. According to a national household survey on the Protestants conducted by the Institute of World Religions in the Chinese Academy of Social Science in 2008-2009, there are in 23,050,000 Protestants (baptized and unbaptized) which amounts to 1.8% of the population (RGIWR 2010: 191). According to the survey published by the State Administration of Religious Affairs of PRC in 2012, there are 5,500,000 Catholics which amount to 0.42% of the whole population (SARA 212). Putting the above figures together, there are altogether 28,550,000 Christians, amounting to 2.2% of the whole population. The survey conducted by the Pew Research Center has quite another story. According to its Global Christianity: A report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population released in 2011, there are 67,070,000 Christians in China, about 5% of the whole population. Among the Christian population, 58,040,000 are Protestants, about 4.3%, and 9,000,000 are Catholics, about, 0.7% (Pew Research Center 2011: 97 ff.). The figure from the China Partner Statistics in 2007 is 39,000,000 for Protestants. For Lambert in 2006, more than 50,000,000 Protestants. Some scholars even estimate that the figure is more than 100,000,000, 150,000,000 or even 200,000,000 (Yang 2011: 537-539). For the Catholics, a survey conducted by the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies in Shijiazhuang in 2009 shows that there are 5,714853 Catholics in China, about 0.44% of the whole population (Wang 2010: 98). According to Fang Xingyao, the president of the CPA, it is 6,000,000² (Fang 2009: 15). Wang Meixiu’s estimation is no less than 6 million (Wang 2010: 98).

It is obvious that every survey or statistic is unique and has different figure. It is understandable that they disagree with each other because of their different methodology and counting standard. Though an academic question in terms of research, the motive for exact figures is far beyond purely academic. Political, religious or ideological ones are involved. For example, the official figures have been doubted by many scholars. Some scholars think that they are not true and are less than the real population of Christians because the Chinese

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² Figure for Chinese Catholics varies even among leaders of the CPC. According to Bainian Liu, the honorary chairman of the CPC, there are more than 5,600,000 (Liu Bainian 2009: 13), while for Fang Xingyao, it is 6,000,000 (Fang 2009: 15).
government do not wish or is afraid of its rapid development. The figures from churches both Protestant and Catholic are often under the suspicion of exaggeration for promoting or propaganda. For quite a lot foreign scholars or Christians, a higher Christian population means the prosperous future of the Gospel in China or the weapon to fight against the atheist communism. So, the rapid increase means the twilight of democracy for them.

Though disagreeing on exact figures, scholars are more in agreement that Christians in China have been progressing rapidly within the past three decades, and this trend will continue in the future. Some scholars even predict that China will surpass the USA to have the biggest Christian population in the world in 2030 (Yang 2015). Such optimism may have reliability to some extent. Nevertheless, further considerations may also remind the readers to be cautious. In the first place, most scholars failed to notice that the fast development of Chinese Christianity in the past several decades is in fact quite abnormal. It benefits partly from the reopen of the churches after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution and partly from the Reform and Open Up policy of China. Dramatic changes of China from pre-modern to modern even to post-modern society and various social and moral problems also contribute the dividends to the upsurge. The past thirty years is unprecedented in the history of China. It is not unreasonable to say that the normal religious need of the people which had been suppressed or forbidden in 60 years has been compressed to release within three decades. With the formation of new society and the consolidation of the reform, it is doubtable how long will this dividend effect sustain. Secondly, many scholars take it for granted that the growth rate of Christian population will progress steadily and unlimitedly. This assumption cannot get evidence either from history or practice. The Christian population increases, so does the whole population of China. There are about 3,700,000 (700,000 Protestants and 3,000,000 Catholics) on the eve of the People’s Republic of China, about 2% of the whole population. Compared with the above mentioned 2.2%, it can be said that there has been no substantial growth after more than 60 years, which means the development of the Chinese Christianity is substantially stable. It has also been pointed out by some surveys or researches that after the rapid development of late 1990s and early 2000s, the growth rate of Christianity in China has slowed down yearly and tends to stabilize, about 500,000 baptized Protestants and 100,000 Catholics every year (Tang, Duan 2014: 102; Fang 2014: 5).
The survey for the Protestants also indicates that among the 23,050,000 Protestants, 67.5% have been baptized, 32.5% unbaptized. 69.9% Protestants are female, and 30.1% male. Although the educational level of the Protestants is higher than it used to be, especially in cities, more than half is below the elementary school, among others, 54.6% elementary school, 37.2% middle school, 10.1% high school, 2.6% college and university. Ages between 35 and 64 amount to more than 60% of the followers. The general education level of the Catholics is lower that the Protestants since its domain is mainly in the rural areas. Though people believe in Christianity for various reasons, it is worth noting that 68.8% join the churches because of illness of themselves or family members, 15% on account of family traditions. 44% followers get in touch with Christianity through family members and relatives, while 46.5% through other followers or friends. Protestants participate all kinds of religious activities actively, among others, 57.8% frequently, 38.2% sometimes, 3.9% never. 67.9% Protestants worship in the registered churches or places, 20.2% in the unregistered, 26.7% in the houses of their friends, 22.4% in their own houses. The Eastern China and the Yangtze River valley host 77.7% Protestants (RGIWR 2010: 191-193).

It is obvious that the Christianity in China inherits some traditions, such as women majority, converting on account of illness and for health and a good next life, family and relatives oriented channels for conversion. Another feature for the Chinese Christianity is its folklorization and localization, a topic which has consumed quite energy and time of the scholars both internal and external. Catholicism in practice has long admitted and merged into its thought and rites traditional Chinese cultural elements such as the filial piety, ancestral affiliation and abiding to special festivals to keep its popularity among Chinese people. It has long been criticized by some missionaries to be heretic. Some scholars even consider it a folk Chinese religion which vitalized Catholicism in China from point view of bottom-up (Madsen 2001: 233-249). The same question also exists for the Protestants, which has occasioned the interests of the scholars and has been considered as an alternative to folk religion. Hymns are sung with the tune of traditional folk art or modern popular songs. Traditional filial piety is planted into the Decalogue. Doctrines of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are also merged in to persuade people to do good works for better reward. Christ is considered as jipusa (Christ-Buddha) (Tao, Duan 2014: 103-116). The attitude of the Protestants
towards other religions is fairly tolerate, in which 17.8% think that “as good as” Christianity, 47.5% “not as good”, 8% “some of them are good”, 2.3% “not good” and 24.3% “never think about that question”. Most Protestants do not oppose to visit ancestors’ tombs in the Qingming Festival. 52.9% Protestants consider it a traditional custom and 57.0% a remembrance to the deceased (RGIWR 2010: 205-209).

Major challenges

The Chinese Christianity is also facing many problems or challenges. Theoretically, it is in tension with the communist party and the government of China. After all, China is governed ideologically by the atheistic communism who considers all religions which are products of class inequality and exploitation will vanish once human society enters into communism. It will abolish religion in the long run at least in theory, though the latter is necessary to exist and develop for a long time because its basis still exists. At the present, religions including Christianity are admitted to survive and develop according to the regulation of the laws to adjust themselves to the cause of socialist construction in China. Practically, theological indigenization or contextualization, the organization construction of the churches, clergy training and religious education, social engagement and adjustment, internal division, church and state relation, etc., are all under consideration by both the churches members themselves and the academia (Duan: 2003). The booming also makes it necessary to reinforce the theological construction of the Chinese Christianity, which is far from meeting the requirements of the followers and church developments. Nevertheless, among these challenges, two are of great importance.

The first is the internal conflicts within both Protestant and Catholic churches. The challenge for the Protestants is mainly the conflict and struggle of different branches. After the founding of the PRC, various of Protestant denominations united together into an independent non-denominational church under the leadership of the China Protestant Patriotic Association in 1958. As the administrative institute of the Chinese Protestants, the Three-Self Church is delegated by the government to administrate the issues related to Protestantism, especially its ordinary practices and worships. According
to the regulations of the government, native and local churches and the newly organized Protestant communities should merge into or register to the Three-Self Church to engage in lawful gatherings or worships. But, due to the historical and theological reasons, some branches or sects would not comply with this policy, especially those based on Evangelism that came to China in the early 20th century. As Evangelicals, most of these sects prefer a loosely non-institutional congregations based on the teachings of the New Testament. They pay not so much to the social work and engagement of the mainline Protestants as personal salvation or soul. Itinerary preaching and gathering, independent worships and local churches, these sects insist on the fundamentalism based on the Bible. They not only refuse to register to and join the three-self church, but also criticize the latter to be a false church. According to their understanding, a true church should not cooperate with the government or secular power. Traditionally, these Protestant sects are called the “house church” (jiatingjiaohui) in China because most of them are small groups centered on or based on family gatherings, though not exclusively. Most of them are in the big cities and the coastal areas where the level of the economy is high. In the past two decades, with the rising of domestic or foreign missionary works in China, the house churches also experienced rapid developments which clashes sometimes with the government or the Three-Self Church, attracting the attention and concern of the world. Although illegal in theory, the worships and other religious activities of the house churches are not forbidden by the government in effect, only if they obey the law. It is written in the Document 19 that, house worships are not permitted in principle, and are persuaded to stop rather than forbidden by force (CCCP 1982).

Another dimension in the Protestantism is the “evil cults” (xiejiao). Most sects of these evil cults have evolved from the Evangelism, especially Pentecostalism. Speaking in tongues, practicing miracle, believing in divine healing, shouting in worships, propagandizing the impending eschatology and overthrow of the government, these sects appear and take root mostly in the rural areas. More often than not, they borrow freely from traditional

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3 The “House church” is generally used to refer these groups outside of the Three-Self Church in China, though “underground church” is also used alternatively. Academically, the underground church is used to refer the Chinese Catholics who refuse the CPCA and are loyal to the Roman Curia. Both these Protestant and Catholic groups are illegal in terms of law, though sound in theology. Strictly speaking, they are non-registered church.
indigenous cults, beliefs or religions, transforming or even distorting the Christianity. Among these sects, the Established King (beiliwang), the Lord God (zhushenjiao), the Narrow Gate in the Wildness (kuangye zhaimen) or the Disciples (mentuhui), the Three Grades of Servants (sanban puren), and the Lightning out of the East (dongfang shandian) are notorious (Bays 2012: 193-197). One distinctive feature is the charismatic worship in which the founders of the sects proclaim themselves to be prophets, Saviour or God. Some even have female prophets or Christ. Take for example, the Lightning out of the East. It has a female Christ who has fulfilled the Second Coming and whose authority surpass the Bible. These evil cults have drawn crowds of people and organized into hierarchical inclusive or secret societies, controlling and exploiting the followers physically, economically and spiritually with coerce. Followers are induced to do violence to themselves and others, among others, kidnapping, suicides, homicides or polygamy, which infringe upon the universal ethics of mankind. One of the latest example is in the county of Zhaoyuan in Shangdong province, where five followers of the religion of the Omnipotent God (quannengshen jiao) beaten up a strange woman to death in a restaurant on May 28, 2014 because the latter refused to give them her phone number. The victim was killed as a demon by the visionary fantasts on the self-acclaimed decree from the God. Inheriting from some traditional Chinese folkloric cults which had cultivated peasants’ political rebellions in history, these sects also mingle themselves with political ambitions. One doctrine of the religion of Omnipotent God teaches that the government under the Communist party is the Evil Dragon which should be smashed. The Disciples are encouraged to revolt and to kill all officials in order to build the Kingdom of Christ under the leadership of its founder. The existence and booming of these evil cults endanger not only the purity of Christianity but also the order of society, disturbing tremendously the healthy operation of politics, economy and society.

Division also exists inside the Catholic Church. The founding of the CPCA in 1957 also breached the Catholic Church into two hostile camps with the followers of the CPCA on one hand and the Catholics loyal to the Vatican whose organization is traditionally called the “Underground Church” on the other. Ardently opposing the self-election and self-consecration policy and with the strong support from the Vatican, the underground church does not accept the authority of the CPCA to run the Church, accusing the latter
of heresy or falsifying the church. It set up the church of its own, proclaimed itself the representative of the true church, and was even given the privilege from the Vatican to ordain priests. As the agent of Vatican to fence the CPCA and the government, the underground church has developed in many places independent of the latter. Internal conflicts for power and authority also accompany the history of the underground church. The existence of the underground church not only endangers the welfare of the Catholics, but also hinders the Sino-Vatican relations.

Another challenge that Christianity in China is facing is the relationship between China Mainland and the Vatican. The key issue is the sovereignty which can be explained from the following two dimensions.

The first is the sovereignty in terms of politics. Contacts between China and the Vatican were once in stagnation during the first half of the Chinese Rite Controversy. After the first Opium War, Roman Catholicism also benefited from the religious clauses in the unequal treaties shared by the Western powers for enlarging missionary works in China. Catholic missionaries headed by the Jesuits of the Paris Foreign Mission Society settled in many provinces, building churches or stations. The Roman Curia also wanted to engage more directly in the religious issue of China by curbing the Protectorate of Portugal in the first and France in the second. When the Protectorate was abolished at the end of the nineteenth century, the schedule for Vatican to set up institutions to administrate the religious affairs on one hand and the political relations with China on the other is on the way. The founding of the Republic of China in 1911 accelerates the process. In 1922, Celso Benigno Luigi Cardinal Constantini (1876-1958) was sent to China as the delegate of the Curia. As the representative of the Pope, Cardinal Constantini was also responsible for administrating the religious affairs of the Chinese Catholic Church. In 1946, the delegation was updated to formal diplomatic relations and Constantini became the ambassador. During the civil war between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, Cardinal Constantini practiced a pro-CNP and anti-CP policy as he had done during the anti-Japanese War stemming from the inherent anti-communism ideology of Catholicism. With the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Constantini was dispelled from China Mainland and settled in Taiwan in 1951, where he had kept the formal relations to the CNP. The China Mainland’s return to and the expulsion of Taiwan from the UN in October, 1971 didn’t affect the Vatican’s foreign policy to China. It still
keeps the formal relation with Taiwan which is in conflict with the One China Policy of the People’s Republic of China. During the past several decades, Vatican has tried to formalize its relation with Mainland China, but wouldn't give up its relation to Taiwan. This barrier was further enlarged on Oct. 1, 2000 by the so called canonization event when the Curia canonized on the Jubilee 120 missionaries and Catholics from the Chinese rite controversy to 1936 including the Jesuits Auguste Chapdelaine and Bishop Pierre-Marie-Alphonse Favier who had participated in invading China. The event hurt seriously not only the feelings of Chinese, but also the tendering beginnings of the diplomatic consultant between Vatican and PRC.

The issue of sovereignty is also reflected in the administration of the Catholic Church. The contextualization or indigenization of Christianity in China made it necessary that native Chinese be ordained to build native churches for bettering the cause of Christianity. As the Catholic Church is concerned, the Roman Curia claims the power of ordination of the clergy according to the tradition, especially priests and bishops, which was not opposed by the Chinese National Party. It also set up the Holy Hierarchy in 1946 in China which was divided into 20 dioceses, 20 archbishoprics, 117 bishoprics. The organization and practice were put in danger when Cardinal Constantini continued the anti-communist policy after the founding of the PRC. The encyclical letters Cupimus Imprimis in 1952 and Ad Sinarum gentem in 1954, in which the government of China is accused as the persecutor of the church and the Catholics are apologized to be loyal to the pope have worsened further the fragile relationship. With the implementation of the independent and autonomous religious policy of China and the re-organization of independent Catholic Church, the right of ordination came to the front. The founding of the Catholic Patriotic Church in 1957 was seen as a disloyalty of some Chinese Catholics and a persecution from the government by the Vatican. In order to keep running, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Church decided to elect and consecrate the Chinese Catholics priests and bishops by themselves. In March, 1958, Qingguang Dong and Wenhua Yuan were elected bishops respectively by the Bishoprics of Hankou and Wuchang, which initiated the self-election and self-consecration (zixuan zisheng) history of Chinese Catholic Church. This action was denied and condemned by the Vatican who considers it a violation of the spiritual power belongs exclusively to the Pope. The Pope Pius XII criticized in the Ad Apostolorum principis (29 June 1958)
on one hand that the Association is “simply an attempt to execute certain well defined and ruinous policies”, “primarily at making Catholics gradually embrace the tenets of atheistic materialism”, and reclaimed on the other, the monopoly on the right of the bishop’s appointment and “an excommunication reserved specialissimo modo to the Apostolic See has been established which is automatically incurred by the consecrator and by anyone who has received consecration irresponsibly conferred” (Ad Apostolorum principis). The pope excommunicated both the consecrators and the consecrated in the CPCA. But the excommunication failed to stop the independent policy and development of the church. And nowadays there are nearly 200 bishops (52 before the Cultural Revolution and more than 170 ever since 1979) consecrated by the Chinese church itself without the agreement of the Vatican (Fang 2014: 5). The breach also resulted in the division of the church into two hostile camps with the followers of the CCPA on one hand and the Catholics loyal to Vatican whose organization is traditionally called the “Underground Church on the other”. The division has been continuing with the ardent opposition of the underground church members to the administration of the CCPA.

This dilemma has been somewhat softened ever since 2007, when the new Pope Benedict XVI published an open letter on May 27 to the Chinese Church in which he advocated all Catholics to pray for China. Other positive information also presented itself in the letter, such as making no comments on the priests and bishops consecrated by the opposing parties inside the underground churches and acknowledging as a matter of fact the validity of those bishops appointed by the China’s Bishop Conference, though illegitimate (Pope Benedict XVI 2007). The up to date information which has not been confirmed officially comes from Cardinal John Tong Hon, head of Hong Kong’s Catholics, who has published an article in the Kung Kao Po (Gongjiaobao) on August 7, 2016. Titled as “The communion of the Church in China with the universal Church”, it discusses not only the history of the Catholicism in China, but also the Sino-Vatican relations and bishop’s selection and ordination. This article had been interpreted by some people as a signal that a preliminary agreement has been reached between Vatican and the government of China on bishop’s selection and ordination since it argues that the pope has the right to choose candidates from the list recommended he considers as most suitable and the right to reject the candidates recommended by a bishop’s conference and the bishops in a province under it (Cardinal
John Tong Hon 2016). In general, the Sino-Vatican relations are running on a positive track. But, unless Vatican severs the formal diplomatic relationship with Taiwan, there will be no possibility for formalizing the relationship between Vatican and China Mainland, even if both have the desirability of roundabouts or comprises on the issue of ordination.

**The Orthodox Church in China**

Some remarks on the status quo of the Eastern Orthodox Church in China may be not unbeneficial to the readers who are interested. Nowadays in China, the Eastern Orthodox Church is not on the list of the legitimate religions recognized by the government of China. The reason for this result lies mainly in tradition rather than ideology or religion per se, though not exclusively. Traditionally, the Orthodox Church has existed and developed as a dependent organization of the secular power in the Eastern Roman Empire. It not only engages in but also plays an important role the secular politics. Unlike the western Latin Church who proclaims its independence to secular powers and who establishes its popes by the internal election of the cardinals, secular rulers are vital to the appointment of the higher clergy of the church, especially patriarchs, which made it susceptible to political changes or turbulence. A short explanation from its history in China can make reasonable sense.

The Eastern Orthodox Church was brought to China in the second half of the 17th century as a by-product of diplomacy between Russia and the Qing Dynasty. Before 1860, the Russian Orthodox missionaries in China are the diplomatic employees of the Russian Government. In addition to diplomatic services, learning Chinese and conducting sinology researches in terms of information occupied much of their work (Dai 2004: 39). As their religious mission is concerned, they only provide divine services to the Albazinians, or the captives in the campaign of Yaksa (Albazino) who were later settled in the capital by the emperor Kangxi, and the visiting Russian merchants. As governmental diplomats, the missionaries were not required to proclaim and were not interested in proclaiming Christianity to the Chinese people. Followers of the Orthodox Church in China had long been confined to the Russians in China or the descendants of Albazinians. It
hadn’t changed until 1860, when the Russian government appointed the first diplomatic plenipotentiary and when the mission detached itself from the government and subordinated only to the Holy Synod. Gospel works among the Han Chinese and Manchus progressed along the border areas and in great cities like Beijing and Tianjin, though very slowly on account of insufficient funding and less enthusiasm of the missionaries.

The fatal blow of the Boxer Uprising in 1900 and the subsequent initiative of closing the mission from the Russian government indicated its less good fortune during the peaceful development of Christianity in China in the 1910s. There were 6200 Orthodox Christians in China in 1917, clerics, bishoprics and major centers also developed (Bays 2012: 212). Unfortunately, the outbreak of the October Revolution in Russia and the subsequent founding of the Soviet Republic which split the Russian Orthodox Church changed its trajectory in China. Not only were the Church divided into two hostile camps, but its focus switched back mainly to the divine services to the flooding Russian immigrants and refugees, which influenced deeply the prosperity of the Orthodox Church. Bishops and priests who control the church are generally hostile to the new Soviet. It was only in 1944 when Viktor Svyatin, bishop of Shanghai, decided to reconcile to and get support from the government. With the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the fortune of the Orthodox Church in China tottered once more. According to the order of the Patriarch of Moscow and the trend of the indigenization and independence of the Christianity in China, bishop Viktor had started the transference work ever since 1950. First Chinese Bishop ordained, governance of the Church passed on to the Chinese clergy, Russian clergy evacuated, property partly transferred, the independent “Chinese (Autonomous) Orthodox Church” (Zhonghua Dongzhengjiao Hui) founded and been recognized by the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1957. In the same year, after destroying the church and its library in the embassy in Beijing, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China was formally closed according to the decision made by the Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1954.

Though the Chinese (Autonomous) Orthodox Church had been founded, it failed to finish the organizational work partly due to its internal disputation and contradiction. Thus, when China promulgated in 1982 the Document 19 which guides its religious issue and policy, the Orthodox Church was not mentioned. Though not a legitimate religion in China, followers of
the Chinese Orthodox Church do survive in provinces of Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang, and cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and their worships or congregations are not forbidden. There are about 13000 Orthodox Christians in now days China (Xiao 2009: 731). In the early 21st century, with the building of a friendly new relationship between China and the Russian Federation, the legalization of the Orthodox Church in China has been put on the list of dialogue. It is worth noting that the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia visited China in May, 2013 and had a talk to President Xi Jinping. The newly published white paper on the religious conditions in the Xinjiang Province in June, 2016 also releases the information of the Orthodox Church which has two churches (congregation stations) and one clergy (SCIOPRC 2016). All in all, an optimism for the future of the Orthodox Church in China is plausible.

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