CHRISTIANITY AND TRANSFORMING STATES

Mapping Varied Christian Experiences and Responses

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FORTRESS PRESS
MINNEAPOLIS

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CHINESE CHRISTIANS AND POST-MAOIST POLITIES

Michel Chambon

This chapter explores the ways Chinese Christians, Catholics, and Protestants have responded to coercive polities deployed in post-Maoist China. While international attention has widely focused on the split between Chinese Christians who accept supervision by the state and those who refuse (Patriotic and underground Catholics, Three-Self and House Church Protestants), this chapter argues that the range of Christian anti-coercion responses is neither binary, static, nor homogenous across the country. Chinese Christians are not a single minority but a diversified body of ecclesial traditions, business networks, and clan-based identities. Furthermore, the nature and intensity of coercive polities have evolved over time and space. While the post-Maoist state had gradually loosened its control over religious groups, church-state relations tightened again under Xi Jinping's leadership. However, depending on the local religious landscape and the ways local officials implemented state policies, Chinese Protestants and Catholics, who make a little less than 10 percent of the total population, have deployed various strategies to respond to oppressive administrative measures. Yet, competition among Christian networks and with other religious movements, which are unequally active across the country, have also impacted their way of collaborating with local officials and accepting state supervision. Therefore, Chinese coercive polities and anti-coercion responses are complex and changing, calling for constant re-investigation.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

To explore this spectrum of Chinese Christian responses, this chapter is divided into four sections. Each covers one decade of the past forty years. During each period, specific religious dynamics emerged and forms of continuity existed. Religious, political, and economic events also reframed the ways the state had defined and implemented coercive polities. Similarly, Christian communities and networks adjusted their social, religious, and political positioning. Thus, I argue that the past four decades each had their own specificities. Distinguishing them helps a better understanding of the variety of Christian responses and the diversity of factors behind these specificities.

Data presented in this chapter are based on two primary sources. First, I elaborate on personal observations collected during the past twenty years. From September 2003 to June 2006, I worked as a seminarian and pastoral worker for the Catholic diocese of Hong Kong, where I learned Cantonese and collaborated with the French Paris Foreign Missions. As my Chinese improved, I regularly visited various parts of China, especially Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. While I have continued to visit China almost every year since then, I lived in Taiwan from September 2009 to February 2011, where I learned Mandarin and researched local Christianity. Then, with the help of Dennis Balcombe, an influential Pentecostal missionary based in Hong Kong, and as part of my PhD program in anthropology, I lived in a Three-Self Protestant Church in Nanping, Fujian Province from January 2015 to June 2016.[1] I conducted systematic ethnographic fieldwork among the six local Christian networks.[2] This in-depth engagement with Chinese registered and non-registered Christian networks was an opportunity to pay recurrent visits to Christian communities along the Fujian and Zhejiang coasts, as well as to the cities of Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing. My second source of information and insights is the ever-growing scholarship produced by sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists researching Chinese Christianity and religion in China. Although I do not pretend to summarise their increasingly nuanced work, I am deeply indebted to Elizabeth Allès, Cao Nanlai, Jean Charbonnier, Antony E. Clark, Vincent Goossaert, Huang Jianbou, Ji Zhe, Eugenio Menegon, Pan Juliang, Chloé Staar, Nicolas Standaert, Benoit Vermander, Robert Weller, Yang Fenggang, and many more.

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[1] Michel Chambon, *Making Christ Present in China, Actor-Network Theory and the Anthropology of Christianity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[2] Michel Chambon, 'How Do Chinese Christians Draw Boundaries among Themselves? Reassessing the Question of Chinese Christianities', *Religions* 13 (2022): 258.

Before discussing what happened in the 1980s, one must briefly summarise the political background from which Chinese Christians of that time emerged. After decades of war against Japan as well as civil war, the Communist Party seized power over all of China, Manchuria, the Tarim Basin, and Tibet. On 1 October 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China. Chinese Christian networks and communities knew that things would become more complicated for them. Within a few years, all foreign members were expelled and heavy bureaucratic control was imposed upon religious activities. In line with the Communist agenda, all private and often Christian schools, dispensaries, and hospitals were nationalised. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all religious activities and publications were strictly prohibited. By the late 1960s, Christianity had disappeared from the public space of the People's Republic of China.

Nonetheless, Chinese Christians had developed various ways to adjust their religious commitment to this new socio-political situation. Catholics, who have had a few centuries of experience on how to survive under large-scale state persecutions, let their faith withdraw within the privacy of their families. Where Catholicism had a long historical presence, family clans became the guardians of the faith. At night, relatives gathered discreetly, recited traditional prayers like the rosary, and waited for better days. Consecrated women (*beatas*), who have been less targeted by the state than priests and bishops, went back to their families and helped to supervise religious education, devotional practices, baptism, and funerals.[3] The lived realities of Catholicism became a family-based religion hidden from the public sphere and under the strict protection of the kinship group. This response to communist persecution helped to transmit a certain form of Catholicism to the next generation but not to other social circles and happened without clerical participation.

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[3] Michel Chambon 'Chinese Catholic Nuns and the Organization of Religious Life in Contemporary China', *Religions* 10 (2019): 447.

On the Protestant sides, things were different. While pastors and leaders were often targeted by the state, Protestantism had more difficulties in withdrawing within family circles. Chinese Protestantism was a more recent Chinese religion. It gave more importance to individual choice and education, and it was deeply associated with countless schools and hospitals. In most regions, kinship groups with their codified mechanisms of mutual support were less a Protestant resource. Yet, many individual Christians, often women, maintained their faith privately.[4] They continued to chant Christian hymns, usually alone at home, and kept a life of prayer. During the worst years of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), they were also more lenient to share their faith with acquaintances in distress. They believed that their God could help with physical health and national salvation. Furthermore, in regions where Protestantism had stronger roots, families were more likely to identify with Christianity and to become the collective shelter of the Christian faith. In poorer regions of the country, Protestant families were more inclined to support each other and, therefore, to attract neighbours.[5]

While it seems that the number of Chinese Catholics stagnated—or even declined—during the Maoist period, Protestantism had indeed begun to attract converts in some regions of the country. The two Christian traditions have lost their political influence, their clerical apparatus, and most of their social footprint, but Maoism has also transformed the way they differ from each other. It is from this unique socio-religious context that Chinese Christians emerged at the end of the 1970s.

THE REBIRTH: 1978–1989

With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the politico-economic reforms instigated by Deng Xiaoping in 1977, the whole country began to look for new modes of production without questioning its political order. Rural populations, where Catholics were better established, were the first ones to benefit from this partial opening. They began to cultivate their own crops, to sell their products, and to have cash-based income. This was a revolution at that time. With the entrepreneurial mindset encouraged by the state, they invested in the production of basic manufactured products and began to build small merchant networks.

While the Chinese economic landscape was rapidly changing, the state also reduced its pressure against religion. After decades of unsuccessful ideological eradication, the government opted for administrative control and legal containment. The goal was not anymore to eradicate all religions but to control them until the time when prosperity and modernity would make them irrelevant. Old sites of worship were gradually returned to religious communities as long as they had a properly registered religious leader. The state started to pull Christian priests, bishops, and pastors out of labour camps to put them in charge of specific churches. Despite a certain return of Christianity, the state was still eager to monitor Christian networks and communities in order to prevent any political activity.

In a rapidly changing society, however, where the social support and safety provided by socialist organisations and work-units were collapsing, Chinese citizens looked for alternative resources that could provide moral values, mutual support, and a sense of purpose. Soon, numerous people began to return to temples, and religious practices reappeared at an unexpected scale.[6] In this context, rural Catholics began to practise their faith more publicly. Their new income, the support of their whole clan, and the broader religious fever affecting Chinese society encouraged them to make their religiosity more public. During the following two decades, their priority was to give visibility to their family God and to erect churches.

Yet, most Catholics distrusted the religious policy of the state and did not value legal recognition. In line with anti-communist Catholic movements of the 1950s, they usually remained underground while becoming more publicly visible and socially confident. In larger cities, however, the social footprint of Catholicism was weaker and city governments more determined to maintain full control. Through the careful reopening of specific churches, the administration imposed its regulation upon urban Catholicism and forced Catholics to choose between Rome and Beijing. In order to reassign a cathedral or a church to Catholic worship, associated priests and bishops were forced to join the patriotic association controlled by the Chinese administration. Soon, the split between patriotic and underground Catholics re-emerged.

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[4] Kao Chenyang, 'Reassembling Christianity: Fuzhou Protestantism under China's Cultural Revolution from the Perspective of Life-History Research', *Sino-Christian Studies* 31 (2021): 7–44.

[5] Nanlai Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[6] Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

For Protestants, the 1980s marked a period of rapid numerical expansion. In line with China's religious fever, Chinese Protestants were eager to share their own spiritual resources with friends and acquaintances. Many citizens were curious about the teaching of Christ associated with the wealthy and healthy West. Christians and non-Christians would gather at home to hear stories and tales about Christianity, pray, and sing while building informal fellowships. Without yet generating very distinct structures and churches, Protestantism spread across interpersonal relations and touched numerous people. Remaining informal, Protestant Christianities circumvented anti-religious policies.

Chinese socio-economic transformations also generated new forms of social inequalities. The work-units of large cities were losing their competitiveness. Soon, urban and more educated populations felt that they were disadvantaged compared to rural populations. By May 1989, public protests broke out in several cities of the country and called for further reforms. After weeks of hesitation, the state decided to send the army and to reassert its firm political control, opening a new page in Chinese history.[7]

FINDING LANDMARKS: 1989–1999

After the events of Tiananmen on 4 June 1989, the Chinese Communist Party reaffirmed its monopoly over the society while encouraging the economy to continue its expansion. With an impressive growth rate, the entire country became a gigantic factory, with millions of people migrating to new industrial zones and Maoist socio-economic structures collapsing. Meanwhile, Chinese families and traditional kinship networks lost their capacity to stand as a site of collective identity and support. In this economic boom combined with brutal social changes and strict political control, Chinese citizens were left alone in their competition for economic survival.

Not surprisingly, the Chinese religious fever became even stronger. New religious movements and syncretic cults that had appeared during the preceding decades gained wider influence and pushed the state to readjust its religious policies.[8] Monitoring the slow disappearance of religion was an outdated approach, a remnant of Maoism that needed urgent updates. For Chinese officials, it was time to counter 'evil cults' that could challenge the leadership of the party. Since eradicating religion had proved to be impossible, discriminating between religious traditions that could be socially useful and those that could be politically dangerous became essential. With the help of their growing revenues, local administrations began to work at re-establishing formal religious institutions that could monitor and channel religious aspirations of the population. New registration systems were systematised, and Christian leaders were encouraged to have more formal and explicit leadership of their fellow Christians.

On the Catholic side, priests and bishops were no longer in charge of a specific religious venue, but territorialised parishes and dioceses were revived, updated, and systematised. In the eyes of the administration, it was time for religious leaders to cover clearly defined territories. Even though suspicion against the Vatican and foreign influences remained high, the Chinese administration wanted a clear and systematic cartography of the Chinese Catholic Church. Administrative control that was stronger in urban centres became more generalised across the country, especially in Catholic rural strongholds. The imposition of administrative regulations renewed tensions between the state and underground Catholics. On several occasions, the state forced a priest to become a bishop without papal approval, a breach of Catholic canon law unacceptable for most Catholics. The split between patriotic and underground Catholics became even deeper. In places where new and illicit bishops were notoriously immoral, Catholics would refuse to join their religious ceremonies or make donations. Rejected by local churchgoers and the Vatican, these

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[7] Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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[8] David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Catholic leaders as well as state officials behind them found themselves in a difficult situation.

At the same time, significant numbers of younger rural Catholics were migrating toward large industrial hubs. Away from their hometown, working endless hours, and exposed to a new lifestyle, their religious practice shifted. Some maintained some forms of regular piety, but most waited for their annual Chinese New Year vacation to receive the sacraments at their hometown. However, to overcome the moral ambiguities of their new socio-religious lifestyle, they also sent donations to their home church to help with the renovation or construction of impressive buildings. With this new influx of money, rural Catholic communities gained confidence and resisted even more the intrusion of the state.[9] Through family ties and financial incentives, they worked at convincing at least one local administration (the police, the united front, or the office for religious affairs) that Catholics were not dangerous or subversive citizens. With new allies within the administration, Chinese Catholics organised their activities more publicly and expanded their churches. In the 1990s, although urban Catholicism was fairly weak and unable to resist state control, Chinese rural Catholicism was at the peak of its socio-religious influence.

On the Protestant side, Christian networks began to take a more formal shape. In front of the theological challenges raised by syncretic cults claiming a Christian identity while worshipping, for instance, the female reincarnation of Jesus Christ, a new generation of better-trained leaders emerged. These younger pastors believed that Chinese Protestantism needed a more defined theology rooted in the Bible and systematic study. Often, they were willing to work with state officials as long as their administration was willing to give recognition to Christian communities. This gave even more visibility and stability to a rich network of Protestant churches across China.

Yet, in growing industrial zones where large proportions of the population were made of young migrant workers without a local residency permit, many Protestant leaders did not see the need for an ambiguous administrative support. Aware of the atheist agenda of the communist state, many Christian communities preferred to remain unregistered. Their priority was to believe in Jesus, nourish their faith, and help each other. Spending hours at banquets with state officials and engaging in bribes appeared as a waste of time and as a betrayal of their moral aspirations.[10] Although the 1990s urban and rural Protestantism was expanding rapidly, internal distinctions and competition between registered and unregistered communities became sharper.

The more the state wanted to localise Christian communities and to rule them through the administrative unit they geographically belonged to, the more Protestant evangelists looked for trans-local connections. As a way to resist the state, but also as a participation in the entrepreneurial and risk-taking mentality promoted by the state during the Reform era, numerous Protestants were eager to circulate across prefectures and provinces to learn from various churches and share Christian materials. Zealous and confident, these new Christian leaders built far-reaching networks and social capital. Through various organisational patterns, Chinese Protestantism expanded in all directions, and anti-religious policies had less impact on it than on Catholicism, which remained more localised.

THE GOLDEN AGE: 1999–2008

After two decades of rapid economic growth and socio-religious changes that came on the heels of the tormented Maoist era and war against Japan, Chinese leaders and society began to look for more stability. For years, the whole country was a gigantic construction site. The search for endless profits, the massive air pollution of the late 1990s, and the widespread presence of corruption and prostitution affected all sectors of society. The side effects of the one-child policy were also becoming palpable and social cohesion was under threat. In some sense, in the midst of rapid economic growth, the country was facing a moral and identity crisis.

Voices began to advocate for a return to the socio-cultural roots of Chinese society. During the first years of the new millennium, Confucianism, a politico-religious ideology that modern China has fought hard, made its great return. The teaching of the old master Kong and its interpretations by his disciples appeared as a valuable resource to stabilise the country, encourage morality, and rejuvenate the nation.

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[9] Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[10] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

This ideological experimentation was also a potential resource to channel religious forces. Under a Confucian reinterpretation, Catholicism and Protestantism could appear as respectable traditions contributing to the moral edification of the universalist and inclusive Chinese civilisation. Furthermore, Confucianism allowed a variety of Chinese scholars to express their interest in the teaching of Christ while cultivating an intellectual approach to its subsequent traditions. These academic figures did not ask for baptism and did not formally convert to Christianity. Rather, they claimed to be 'Cultural Christians', a new kind of Chinese Christian able to resolve tensions between Chineseness and foreignness, denominational Christianity, and church and state relations.

Chinese Protestantism had to address other issues as well. The large number of converts, the challenging proselytism of Korean missionaries, and the multiplication of syncretic movements pushed mainstream denominations to strengthen their institutionalisation and theology.[11] Even though the anti-religious sentiment of the state remained real and its intrusive policies constant, Protestant leaders were more frequently willing to collaborate with officials. They wanted to secure construction permits for much-needed larger churches or to be able to report aggressive preachers of millenarian movements proselytizing at the footstep of their worship venues.

In line with the Confucian revival, Protestant communities were also willing to establish homes for the elderly. Because of massive migrations toward cities and growing individualism, elderly people were often left alone in the countryside. The state was looking for ways to outsource the cost of this social problem and Christian churches appeared to be an accommodating partner. During the entire decade, the number of Christian homes for the elderly multiplied. Church leaders allocated a growing proportion of their income and human resources to this social issue. This provided not only social and political merits but also helped numerous non-Christian families to approach the Christian faith. Homes for the elderly implicitly helped to address administrative pressures and traded social services for religious visibility.

Non-registered Protestant communities were also evolving. With more believers interested in their collective support and fellowship, house churches saw their financial resources and social footprint increase. They began to rent larger venues, such as multifunctional rooms in commercial buildings or reception halls in hotels. These venues were convenient for Sunday services with numerous worshippers.[12] It also made Protestant house churches look even more modern and appealing. Unlike gatherings in private apartments, this kind of Sunday gathering attracted less attention from local authorities. House churches would rotate between a few venues where landlords turned blind eyes to the religious but lucrative nature of these meetings.

To cope with state surveillance, house churches were also easily willing to split into smaller entities. Instead of becoming mega-churches that would attract the concern of state officials, they preferred to establish small, independent, and flexible networks of Christian fellowships. This organisational pattern allowed them to remain under the political radar. Young neo-urban settlers who were seeking strong social bonding and friendship were also more attracted to this kind of organisation. These small networks allowed more Christian leaders to stand up and take responsibility.[13]

It was also during the first decade of the twenty-first century that Wenzhou churches became a national phenomenon. These Protestant communities were rooted in the religious and economic history of Wenzhou, a coastal city of Zhejiang province, which was poor during the Maoist period. Wenzhou churches have a specific way to combine Christian values, ecclesial structures, and entrepreneurial goals. In these Protestant networks, churchgoers were also co-workers and economic salvation was a collective issue.

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[11] Jie Kang, 'The Rise of Calvinist Christianity in Urbanising China', *Religions* 10 (2019): 481.

[12] Fenggang Yang, 'Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44 no. 4 (2005): 423–441.

[13] Li Ma, *Religious Entrepreneurism in China's Urban House Churches: The Rise and Fall of Early Rain Reformed Presbyterian Church* (London: Routledge, 2020).

Therefore, Wenzhou churches operated as a corporation of co-workers moderated by a team of elected members. For their Sunday services, they hired a visiting preacher and avoided having a stable and unique pastor.[14] Although these churches and business networks appeared in the 1980s, they became extremely strong and wealthy in the early 2000s. Able to demonstrate their economic success to local officials, they built massive and numerous churches across the region of Wenzhou and beyond. Those buildings were often the headquarters of their combined economic activities and oversaw trading networks across all of China and beyond. In a period giving priority to economic success, but marked by identity and moral crisis, Wenzhou churches had powerful leverage to subjugate state officials.

Meanwhile, Catholic communities were also benefitting from the rapid socio-economic changes of Chinese society and the relative relaxation of religious control that characterised the early 2000s. During this period, even though state suspicion against the papal religion remained high, urban communities became the driving force of Chinese Catholicism.[15] In the countryside, despite the newly rebuilt churches, young churchgoers were migrating toward large cities with no desire to come back. In these new urban centres, migrant Catholics began to have stronger revenues and social connections. Gradually, they decided to keep their children with them in order to give them better education opportunities. This new family dynamic, combined with the Chinese identity crisis of that time, encouraged neo-urban Catholics to reclaim their religious heritage and to translate it into their new urban realities. To create places of worship where they could immerse their children into the ritualist and devotional apparatus of twentieth-century Chinese Catholicism, factory owners converted a room of their workplace into a private chapel. There, urban Catholics could gather for daily rosary and prayers. Similarly, some private apartments became venues for daily and weekly collective devotions. Those places remained extremely discreet and centred on the recitation of prayers. However, they allowed migrant Catholics to reclaim their religious heritage and to modernise it.

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[14] Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*, 2011.

[15] Michel Chambon and Antonio Spadaro, 'Urban Catholicism in China', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, English Edition 3 (2019): 26–38.

Both patriotic and underground communities also networked more actively with visitors coming from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and elsewhere. After two decades of efforts to implement the ecclesiological and liturgical norms of Vatican II, the priority started to shift toward new ways to educate children into the Catholic faith; visitors from outside of China were a precious source of inspiration. Despite the suspicion of the state and police controls, Catholic communities generalised the organisation of summer youth camps during which young Catholics were exposed to alternative ways to envision and experience the faith. Initially, camps were mostly organised in the countryside where things were economically and politically easier to handle. Urban and young Catholics would return to their hometown to attend these camps. This illustrates how, in the early 2000s, urban and rural Catholicism were still deeply intertwined, collaborating, and interdependent. To circumvent state control as well as practical difficulties, churchgoers, religious practices, and financial donations circulated back and forth between urban and rural Catholicism.

In the 2000s, nonetheless, modernizing cities started to become the beating heart of Chinese Catholicism. Although the anti-Catholic sentiments of some state officials and the ups and down of the Sino-Vatican relations continued to impact and sometimes harm relations between underground and official communities, Chinese Catholics found ways to move forward and to not focus exclusively on the coercive polities of the state. In rural and urban China, priority was given to training a new generation of Catholics and clergy members.

In sum, the early 2000s was the period during which the coercive polities of the state were the least intense. Even though some Catholic priests were ordained bishops by force and some Protestant leaders were put under arrest, Christian communities grew and evolved quickly. In many ways, Protestant networks were the most successful at escaping state control, building strong networks across the country, and attracting new converts.[16] Tensions between registered and unregistered communities decreased and various forms of collaboration appeared discreetly to foster the numerical growth and religious maturity of Chinese Christianity. However, this decade of Christian growth and institutionalisation soon had to face a new political climate triggered by economic changes and political rivalry at the global scale. This is what the next and final section discusses.

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[16] Francis Khek Gee Lim, *Christianity in Contemporary China Socio-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Carsten T. Vala, 'Negotiations and Diversifications of China's Christianities', *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 1 (2019): 1–4.

THE RETURN OF THE CLOUDS: 2008–2019

By the end of 2007, with the collapse of major hedge funds in the USA and economic signals suggesting a major financial crisis on the horizon, China faced a serious challenge. For decades, its political stability had been built upon the ability of the Chinese Communist Party to deliver economic growth and channel social change. Despite intense tensions at home and abroad, the party did boost the Chinese economy, maintain national unity, and tackle inequalities. To address the Great Recession of 2008, which revealed the unsustainability of the Chinese economic model and its political risks, the Chinese leadership decided to reset its political agenda and economic strategy. In late 2008, it introduced the largest stimulus package in the world to encourage domestic consumption, develop infrastructure, and upgrade China's industrial and high-tech capacities. Similarly, facing growing security issues at home (protests in Tibet and Xinjiang) and abroad (Arab Spring, colour revolutions, Snowden revelations), the party decided to tighten its socio-political control. Over the next few years, a new political leadership emerged to coordinate and embody this drastic shift, which has allowed China to not only continue its tremendous economic growth but also to reinforce its national security, strengthen its political resilience, and challenge the global order.

Under the renewed leadership of Xi Jinping, Confucianism was not selected as the driving force to secure national cohesion and socio-economic progress. Instead, it was nationalism combined with centralisation of power, reaffirmation of socialism with Chinese characteristics, anti-corruption policies, and a global projection of China. For an entire decade, China implemented the Chinese dream of President Xi. In this new socio-economic and political environment, religious groups were also forced to comply with state priorities. During this period, the intensity

and systematic nature of coercive polities imposed upon Christian groups increased constantly.

Still, the state did not return to the anti-Christian persecutions and anti-religious ideologies of the Maoist regime. Rather, the Xi Jinping administration imposed growing regulations upon all sectors of society, including the Christian ones. Like major companies being partially nationalised and co-opted by the party, all religious groups saw the growing presence of the state invading and constraining their daily functioning. From the late 2000s through early 2010s, national and international attention was caught by the highly publicised destruction of some Wenzhou churches that officially did not have the proper construction permits. This campaign was symbolised by the systematic removal of the extremely large red crosses found at the top of most Wenzhou churches. This campaign mostly aimed at decoupling the religious and financial facets of these networks in order to limit the scope of Christian churches.

Under this renewed political pressure, which forced Chinese congregations to clarify the nature of their activities, the majority of Christian networks did gradually accommodate and looked for ways to show their love of the nation.[17] Once it became clear that the Chinese Communist Party was not going to reduce its control over Christian churches, Wenzhou churches began to hire properly trained and ordained pastors. Under the threat of destruction, they also found ways to differentiate between economic activities and religious fellowship. Large Three-Self Protestant Churches, which had invested funds in private sectors, reoriented them toward charitable purposes like Christian homes for the elderly. Some house churches that had built a formal church registered their organisation under the relevant administration.

Still, many house churches found ways to escape what they perceived as an increasing intrusion of the state. In addition to the various anti-coercive strategies already mentioned in this chapter, house churches amplified their use of digital media and the internet. Following the rapid digitalisation of Chinese society, they learned to use social media and websites to spread religious material. They also established small chat groups to allow their members to virtually gather and pray on a regular basis. For instance, numerous micro-groups would meet every morning for 30 to 45 minutes while members were commuting to work. Sitting or standing anonymously on the subway, they put their headphones in their ears, read sections of the Bible together, and listened to Christian hymns and sermons while sending emojis to each other.[18] Without much visibility, Christianity became virtually present everywhere.

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[17] Carsten T. Vala, *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China: God Above Party?* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

For Catholics, the situation was more paradoxical. A key factor to explain this was the new leadership of Pope Francis and his persistent efforts to reset dialogue with Chinese leaders. Instead of letting numerous clerical voices and prelates share their views about how the Vatican should approach Beijing and whether anti-communist resistance should be encouraged, Pope Francis reduced the number of people directly involved in diplomatic dialogue with the Chinese administration as well as the number of questions to negotiate. In the eyes of the new bishop of Rome, it was necessary to work with the Chinese administration and build mutual trust. For this purpose, he asked clergy members to refrain from interfering with these negotiations. On 22 September 2018, the Holy See and Beijing announced that they had reached a provisional agreement on the appointment of Chinese bishops. Several excommunicated Chinese bishops were included within the communion of the Catholic Church and the territories of some Chinese dioceses were formally recognised by the Vatican. In the eyes of the Holy See, and despite remaining difficulties, China had only one Catholic Church and all its bishops were in communion with the pope. Under these circumstances, all Chinese Catholics were called to honestly collaborate with local authorities—yet, without giving up what they considered morally right. The Vatican made clear that no one was expected to join the problematic patriotic association imposed by the Chinese Communist Party.

Nonetheless, as the good faith of the Chinese administration became increasingly unclear, various Chinese and non-Chinese Catholics began to openly disagree with the new policy of the Vatican. To challenge the imposed and coercive nature of Pope Francis's approach, opponents like Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong gave numerous interviews to the international press.[19] The Holy See was accused of being played by Beijing while Chinese Catholics faced increased control and discrimination. Pope Francis was rarely directly attacked. The blame was usually oriented toward his administration, but complaints and critical views became more public and recurrent during the late 2010s.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After more than a decade of growing coercive measures and administrative control upon Christian circles, China and the rest of the world met a new challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2020, medical reports about an unknown disease began to circulate on the web. Soon after, most of China went into lockdown, followed by three years of zero-COVID policy. Travel to China became almost impossible and information coming out of Chinese churches became difficult to verify; it is still impossible to analyze the exact impact of the pandemic upon Chinese Christians and their coercive environment.

However, as I write the final version of this chapter, numerous protests against the zero-COVID policy imposed by Xi Jinping have broken out and the Chinese administration has suddenly lifted all travel and medical restrictions. Once again, and despite alarmist claims in global media, the Chinese socio-political situation seems neither entirely fixed nor under control. Thus, one must emphasise the capacity for change and resilience of the two main actors studied in this paper, the Chinese communist regime and Chinese Christian networks.

Over the past forty years, the Chinese administration has continuously adjusted its approach to Christian networks. Although coercive measures have always been present, the religious policy of the state has been constantly evolving and often accommodating. Similarly, the social scope and religious nature of Chinese churches have unceasingly changed—and so has the entire Chinese religious landscape. Consequently, the Chinese Christian minority has deployed a variety of responses to the coercive polities of the state. These Christian responses were neither simply antagonistic nor homogenous across the country. They have and will continue to evolve.

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[18] Jinrui Xi, 'Christian New Media in China', *Asian Survey* 59 (2019): 1001–1021.

[19] Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun and Pierre G. Rossi, *For Love of My People I Will Not Remain Silent: A Series of Eight Lectures in Defense and Clarification of the 2007 Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in the People's Republic of China* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).

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CHRISTIANS AS A RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN MODERN ISLAMISING PAKISTAN

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Historically in Pakistan religious parties were never able to establish a government, yet the country remains deeply religious. Pakistan was formed using Islamic symbolism, Muslim identity, and 'yet disclaiming any ideas of a theocracy'.[1] The application of the law of blasphemy has been particularly grim for minorities. Christians have been prosecuted under this law for years. The misuse of the law of blasphemy has been widely recognised by the judiciary, government, and even Muslims of Pakistan but nothing significant has been achieved to reduce the violence. The roots of this problem lie in the past, but my aim here is to discusses how the protection of the citizens of Pakistan, especially from religiously motivated violence, has become a crucial issue today and how it splits those who want reform of the law (especially laws passed between 1980 and 1986) and those who oppose all reforms.

CHRISTIANS AND PROTESTS

On 9 March 2013, over 175 houses, a church including religious books, and all the belongings of the Christian community were torched by a mob over a blasphemy accusation. The matter went to the Supreme Court and the

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[1] Iftikhar H. Malik, 'The State and Civil Society in Pakistan: From Crisis to Crisis', *Asian Survey* 36 no. 7 (1996): 676.