

Christendom and its Manifestations in China Today

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Preliminaries

Christendom,¹ or – according to today’s Chinese terminology – Jidu-zongjiao 基督宗教, i.e., the Religion of Jesus Christ, has tried several times to gain a foothold in China in order to settle there institutionally in the form of different Christian Churches and denominations. Since the first encounter of the Eastern Syrian Church (Nestorianism) with China in the seventh century, Christendom has had various manifestations, and we might actually speak of different “Christendoms” in the “Middle Kingdom” (Zhongguo 中国). This is evidenced by the fact that the four missionary attempts (the Nestorian in the seventh century, the Franciscan in the thirteenth century, the Jesuit in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox attempts in the nineteenth century)² were carried out quite independently from one another, as well as by the terms attributed to the historical forms of Christendom in the course of Chinese history: Jingjiao 景教 – the “Teaching/Religion of Light” for Nestorianism, i.e., the Eastern Syrian Church; Tianzhu-jiao 天主教 – the “Teach-

¹ Here, I use the term Christendom intentionally as it seems to better embrace all the Christian phenomena, e.g., the Christian civilization rather than an institutional “churched” religion (not only) in China. Christendom “stands for a polity as well as religion, for a nation as well as for a people. Christendom in this sense was an ideal which inspired and dignified many centuries of history and which has not yet altogether lost its power over the minds of men”. (Urquhart 1908, p. 699)

² For the history of these attempts, see especially Latourette and Standaert 2001. There are, of course, numerous studies on the history of each of the forms and aspects of Christendom in China. For a bibliography, see Standaert 2001.

ing/Religion of the Lord of Heaven” (Tianzhuism),³ also called *jiujiao* 旧教 (the “Old Teaching”) for Catholicism; *Jidu-jiao* 基督教 or *Yesu-jiao* 耶稣教 (the “Teaching/Religion of Jesus Christ”) called also *xinjiao* 新教 (the “New Teaching”) for Protestantism; *Dongzheng-jiao* 东正教 (the “Orthodox Eastern Teaching/Religion”) for the Orthodox Church. Since the times of the Jesuits, Christianity was also called “Western teaching/religion” (*xixue* 西学).

Document 19 (“The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period”) of the Communist Party of China from the year 1982, which is still effective today, lists five officially-recognized religions in China: Buddhism (*Fojiao* 佛教), Daoism (*Daojiao* 道教), Islam (*Yisilan-jiao* 伊斯兰教), Catholicism (*Tianzhu-jiao*), and Protestantism (*Jidu-jiao*).⁴ Thus, Christendom in China today, from the point of view of religious policy, is not regarded as *one* religion, but possesses two officially recognized (orthodox, *zheng* 正) manifestations: Catholicism, exclusively represented by the Catholic Patriotic Association (*Zhongguo Tianzhu-jiao Aiguohui* 中国天主教爱国会), and Protestantism, represented by the Protestant Patriotic Three-Self-Movement (*Zhongguo Jidu-jiao Aiguo Sanzi Yundong* 中国基督教爱国三自运动). The Russian-Orthodox Church (*Dongzheng-jiao*) is not officially recognized as a religion; rather, the believers of this Church are ascribed to minorities (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族, especially, the Russian minority in China).⁵ It might be remarked here that also in traditional China, the imperial state had the prerogative to determine – according to any criteria whatsoever – which teaching/religion (*jiao* 教) was to be classified as “orthodox,” i.e., officially recognized by the state, and which was to be regarded as an “evil teaching/religion/cult” (*xiejiao* 邪教).⁶

In contrast to the political point of view, the *Zongjiao cidian* 宗教词典 (*Dictionary of Religions*), published in 1981 in Shanghai, characterizes Christendom (the “Religion of Christ,” *Jidu-jiao*) rather more accurately as follows (p. 936f.):

Jidu-jiao (Religion of Christ): Common expression for all religious groups which recognize Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world. The

³ Erik Zürcher describes the Christianity of the Ming and Qing periods as “Tianzhuism.” See Zürcher 1994, p. 50.

⁴ See MacInnis, pp. 8–26.

⁵ For the Orthodox Church in China today, see Pozdniaev 1999a and 1999b.

⁶ See, among others, Malek 1989.

Christian religion comprises the Catholic, the Orthodox, and the “new” religion (*xinjiao*, Protestantism) as well as a number of smaller groups. The Christian religion, Buddhism, and Islam together are called the three big world religions. Christendom developed in the first century in Palestine and slowly spread within the whole Roman Empire. It believes that Shangdi 上帝 (the Supreme Ruler on High, i.e., the Protestant name for God) or Tianzhu 天主 (the Lord of Heaven, i.e., the Catholic name for God) has created and directs the world; it assumes that mankind has sinned beginning with its progenitor and that it suffers miserably in sin and may only be redeemed through faith in God and his son Jesus Christ. It regards the collection of the books (taken over from the Jewish religion) of the Old and the New Testament as the Holy Scripture.

In general, Christendom in China – in which manifestation whatsoever – may be characterized as a “marginal” “foreign religion” (*yangjiao* 洋教).⁷ Until today, Christians form a very small minority of approximately only two percent of the Chinese population, and exercise – seen from the socio-cultural point of view – only a small amount of regional influence. From the religio-political point of view, however, the Christian Churches form units which, due to various reasons, are being suppressed or at least controlled – as was also the case in traditional China. In contrast to Buddhism, which in the first century C.E. also came to China as a “foreign religion” but was able to strike roots in Chinese culture, Christendom has never become regarded as a “Chinese religion.” Generally speaking, in China, Christendom was and is seen as “Western Christendom,” a “Western religion.” This refers to the Christian reality in all its manifestations.

Historiography shows that the various manifestations of Christendom in China were closely connected with the various changes that took place in Chinese society. Only in the last 150 years (i.e., after the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion) has Christendom unfolded many faces and played different roles in China. For instance, it was first – consciously or not – an important factor in modernization. It then became more and more marginalized, criticized, fought, and eliminated from social life. Despite this, it has surprisingly become a spiritual force and has again been a factor in the process of modernization in today’s Chi-

⁷ Regarding the question of “marginality” of Christendom in China, which cannot be explored here in more detail, see especially Zürcher 1993a, 1993b and 1997. With regard to the category “foreign religion” within the Chinese context, see, among others, Seiwert 1987.

na. On one hand, these alternating roles mirror the changes that have taken place within Chinese society; on the other hand, they also reflect changes in Chinese Christendom.⁸

In addition, since the last missionary encounter between Christianity and China at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, within Chinese and Christian traditions important events have occurred. Such events include the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the adoption of Western Marxism in the 1920s, the “Liberation” of 1949, the ecumenical movement, the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the dialogue of religions, efforts towards in-culturation and contextualization, China’s opening to the West, modernization endeavors, as well as many others. A general understanding of Christian history and ideas has started to grow within Chinese society, helped by research and publications on Christendom being carried out in China itself. A totally new, changed situation has developed which poses the question of religion (*zongjiao wenti* 宗教问题) and Christendom in China in a new way. After both the Chinese and the Christian traditions have been sifted through a sieve of criticism and changes, they no longer seem to radically exclude one another. Among other reasons, this has led to the fact that also outside the Churches, more and more people are becoming interested in Christendom from a historical, philosophical, artistic, or ethical point of view. Outside of the Chinese state and party structures, a constant decrease in negative attitudes towards Christendom can be observed. At the same time, it seems to gradually lose its character as a “Western religion” and become (as Buddhism did), while still “foreign,” an in-cultured (*bendihua* 本地化, *bensehua* 本色化) tradition – as some Chinese experts in religious studies have remarked.⁹ Due to quite strong local roots and, at the same time, the isolation of the Catholic communities from their “non-Christian” environment, Catholicism in some regions in China is regarded not only as a religion (*zongjiao* 宗教), but also as an ethnic group (*minzu* 民族).¹⁰

⁸ Cf. Gao 2000 and 2002.

⁹ See, e.g., Xi Wen 1995, pp. 1–5.

¹⁰ See the remarks of the sociologist Richard Madsen, (Madsen 1998, esp. p. 53): “Rural Catholicism is less a chosen faith than an ascribed status. ... A Chinese rural Catholic community is formed by bonds that for most practical purposes cannot be broken unless one leaves the countryside. ... Chinese Catholicism ... is a kind of ethnicity.” Cf. also Madsen 2001, pp. 233–249.

In this new context, Christendom in China has unfolded various and rather independent manifestations. In China today, we can distinguish in principle two main manifestations of Christendom: (1) the Church(ed), i.e., institutionalized Christendom and, (2) the “non-Church(ed),” i.e., non-institutionalized Christendom.

(1) The Church(ed), institutionalized manifestations of Christendom in China include the Catholic and the Protestant Churches in their three independent forms: (a) the official Church recognized by the State; (b) the unofficial Catholic Underground Church and the Protestant House Churches not recognized by the Chinese Government; and (c) various forms of new religiosity, the so-called “Christian sects or groups” which also belong to these institutionalized manifestations of Christendom. Due to the reasons mentioned above, the Russian-Orthodox Church is not considered here. Anthony Lam from the Holy Spirit Study Center in Hong Kong proposes the following categorization of the Christian Church(ed) groups (with special regard to the Catholic Church): (a) Underground extremists who refuse to cooperate with any government-sanctioned system; (b) underground sectors registered with the government; (c) Open Church sectors registered with the government; (d) Open Church sectors registered with both the government and the Patriotic Association.¹¹

(2) Included in the “non-Church(ed),” non-institutionalized manifestations of Christendom in China are, especially, (a) the so-called Cultural Christianity or the Cultural Christians, and, as well, (b) Christendom as an subject of academic research, i.e., as an academic discipline at universities, academies, and institutes. Here, Christendom can in a positive sense become a subject of academic research and teaching, but also an object of (not only Marxist) criticism.

According to Chinese academics, these main manifestations of Christendom might be subsumed under two other categories, namely, that of “folk Christianity” or “popular Christianity” of the majority of believers, and that of “elite Christianity,” which also includes “cultural Christians.”¹² “Folk (rural) Christianity” has especially developed in the countryside and often takes on fundamentalist or syncretistic traits.¹³

¹¹ Lam 2000, esp. p. 21.

¹² See Zhuo 1998; Zhuo 2001.

¹³ For the rural manifestations of Christendom in China, see, among others: “A Study of the Religious Faith of Fishing People in Qingpu County,” in MacInnis 1989, pp. 272–283; Litzinger 1996; Liang 1999; Sweeten 2001.

“Elite Christianity” has mainly developed among intellectuals and is understood as a *weltanschauung*, a system of values (i.e., an *ideo[theo]logy*) and not as a Church(ed) form of Christianity.

From the above remarks it is apparent that when speaking about “Christendom” this contribution neither exclusively nor primarily refers to the Christian Churches and the theology of the Christian Church, but rather is examining the Christian religion or teaching with its numerous historical and ideological facets.

A quite different level is presented by Christendom as an object of the government’s religious political control, for which analysts often use the category *orthodoxy/heterodoxy* (*zheng/xie* 正/邪).¹⁴ According to this scheme, three types of religiosity in China can be distinguished: (1) orthodox or legal religion(s) or teaching (in traditional China – and practically until today – represented exclusively by Confucianism or the currently dominating State doctrine); (2) unorthodox but legal religions (in the PR China, the five “recognized religions,” including Catholicism and Protestantism); (3) heterodox and illegal religions (all unregistered “sects” and groups, new religious movements, and Underground or House Churches).

This contribution tries, phenomenologically, to sketch the main manifestations of Christendom in China today (PR China), e.g., of Catholicism and Protestantism in their official and unofficial forms, the new Christian religiosity (the so-called Christian sects) as well as the so-called Cultural Christianity and Christianity as an object of criticism and research. Excluded here are the manifestations of Christianity in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

The Church(ed), Institutional Manifestations of Christendom in China

The Church(ed), institutional manifestations of Christendom in China include the Catholic and Protestant Churches in their three forms: (a) the official Churches recognized by the Chinese Government, sometimes erroneously called “Patriotic” or “National”; (b) the unofficial, “illegal” Underground or House Churches not recognized by the Chinese Government; (c) various forms of new religiosity, the so-called Chris-

¹⁴ See Yang 1961; Malek 2001; Zürcher 1997, esp. pp. 615–622.

tian sects, which must also be included in institutionally-structured Christendom.

(a) The Official Churches, Recognized by the Government

Each officially recognized and registered religion in the PR China must be represented by a Patriotic Association. In this way, Christendom in China today officially only exists within the framework of the Patriotic Associations, i.e., the Patriotic Association of the Chinese Catholic Church and the Protestant Patriotic Three-Self-Movement. All manifestations of Christendom that are not officially recognized and are not registered with these Patriotic organizations are considered illegal (*feifa* 非法) or heretical (*xie* 邪), and are persecuted; they can only exercise their activities in the so-called Underground.

The Patriotic Associations (“mass organizations”) of the Churches, which were founded in the 1950s, are based on the Three-Self-Principles (or Autonomies) formulated already in the 1930s by Chinese theologians: 1. Self-support (*ziyang* 自养), i.e., having financial independence and not accepting foreign aid; 2. Self-propagation (*zichuan* 自传), i.e., propagating the Gospel solely with the help of local Chinese personnel; 3. Self-management (*zizhi* 自治), i.e., administering the Church in China independently, without foreign influence.¹⁵ Patriotism (*aiguo* 爱国) is the first condition for positive treatment of the Christian Churches by the Communist state. This means at least outward consent with the current ruling orthodoxy (i.e., the leadership of the CCP and the role of the Three-Self-Principles). The statutes of the Patriotic Associations formulate these principles explicitly.¹⁶ The subordination of the Christian Churches under the Patriotic Associations, and of the Associations under the leadership of the Party through “cooperation” with the State Council’s Bureau for Religious Affairs, until today remains a fundamental condition for the public (official) activity of the Christian Churches.

¹⁵ For the Patriotic Association and Three-Self-Movement, see “La vraie nature de l’Association Patriotique des catholiques chinois,” in: *Eglises d’Asie. Dossiers et documents* 1994/4, pp. 1–35; Malek/Plate 1987; Wickeri 1988; Malek 1990; Malek 1996. For a critical analysis of these principles, see Chang 1999.

¹⁶ See, for example, the statutes of the Catholic Patriotic Association in: *China heute* 1987, pp. 39–41; “Neue Satzungen der katholischen Gremien in der VR China,” in: *China heute* 1992, pp. 162–164; “Constitution of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (1997),” in: *China Study Journal* 13 (1998) 1, pp. 60–66.

The official Churches, as a rule, follow the regulations of the Party and Government and do not accept “interference” from abroad, even though today there are broad contacts with Churches outside of China. The administration of the Church follows the policy of independence and autonomy. On the Catholic side, this autonomy is especially emphasized by the fact that the Patriotic Association elects and ordains its own bishops. These are, in most cases, recognized by the Holy See despite the non-existent diplomatic relations between Beijing and the Vatican. These independent ordinations cause an incomplete *communio* between the Chinese Catholic Church and the Universal Church. In the past, the official Church, due to the political pressure of the Communist Party, expressed a certain hostility towards Rome and the Pope. Later, however, this attitude became more and more moderate. Today, even the official Catholic Church publicly recognizes that the Primate of the Pope is part of the Catholic faith.

To a large extent, the internal situation of the Church(ed) manifestations of Christendom is known. It is, however, much more complicated than we can glean in official reports or than is commonly thought. To characterize the present situation of the Churches in China comprehensively, we may name four aspects which more or less represent today's situation: (1) The complexity of the ecclesiastical situation (depending on the confession, denomination, place and/or, e.g., the diocese) and the increasing non-transparency with regard to the so-called Underground Church or the Protestant House Churches. They show a simultaneous development of extensive “gray areas” between the Underground and the official Church;¹⁷ (2) a very intensive religious (sacramental) life and innumerable activities that are not proportional to the personnel and the financial possibilities of the Churches; (3) still-existing needs in both theological and material matters; (4) a dramatic irreconcilability among all the groups within the Christian Churches.¹⁸

Through many decades – taking Protestant Christians as one example – the Patriotic Three-Self-Movement was the only legal organization

¹⁷ Jean Charbonnier remarks in his article “The ‘Underground’ Church” that “quite a number of analyses carried out in recent years all agree as to the existence of an intermediate group – actually comprising a majority – that is neither underground nor patriotic. These members of the faithful practice their religion openly, and refuse to reject the authority of the pope.” (Charbonnier 1993, p. 53.)

¹⁸ For details, see Malek 1995a.

of Chinese Protestantism.¹⁹ This organizational standardization had socio-political and historical reasons. In the meantime, however, Chinese Protestantism has developed a nearly inestimable organizational variety.²⁰ In the meantime, the so-called post-denominational situation (the building-up of only one united “Church of Jesus Christ” under the leadership of the Three-Self-Movement), which at the end of the 1950s was imposed on the Church, seems no longer to exist.

The social conditions in China today (especially, poverty in the countryside) has led to specific characteristics regarding the membership structure of the Protestant (and also Catholic) Churches in the countryside: Among their members are many old people, many women, and many illiterate persons. This situation has improved somewhat over the last decade, but, all in all, these characteristics are still valid.²¹ It is understandable that Christians in the countryside attach more importance to ritual activities than Church dogmas. It is also understandable that due to their living conditions they do not care much about theology, and that their main focus is on their real interests. Many Christians, for example, regard the difference between being Christian and non-Christian as being the most important distinctive feature. This fundamentalism results in the fact that in the Chinese villages there is a sectarian thinking and a strong tendency towards a kind of “Christian folk religion.”

In the cities, the Church(ed) Christendom has developed differently from the countryside. As more and more intellectuals and young people come to the Churches, the structure of Christendom in the cities has changed significantly, which without any doubt has had positive effects on the marginalized situation of Chinese Christendom as a whole. On the other hand, however, the rising number of intellectuals among Christians leads to increasing demands towards the Churches.²² At the

¹⁹ See, among others, Hunter/Chan 1993, esp. pp. 72–80.

²⁰ For the institutions of the Protestant Church in China, see Hunter/Chan 1993, pp. 53–65, and Wickeri 1988, esp. pp. 146–153.

²¹ For statistical data on the Christians in the countryside, see, for example: He/Liu 1989; Li 1994; Luo 2001; Zhao 2001.

²² According to Sun Li (*Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 1995, pp. 20–24), in 1990, there were more than 100,000 Protestant Christians and 23 churches in Shanghai. Among the Christians, 27% were between 18 and 40 years of age, 26% between 41 and 59, and 47% over 60. In the context of the history after 1949, the author then analyzes the motivations and contents of the faith of the age group 18 to 40, and refers to the fact that recently there are many educated Christians (*you wenhua de jidu-*

moment, the Churches in the Chinese cities still come up against many limiting factors, and the contradiction between the spiritual needs of the believers and the lack of Church service is very noticeable. It can be said, however, that since the 1980s the Church(ed) Christendom in China has changed significantly. After the Cultural Revolution, Church life was allowed again and the Churches initiated various activities. They increased their contacts with foreign Churches and broadened the range of these contacts. The Chinese Churches have become active in the field of emergency aid and other social services, as the examples of the Protestant Amity Foundation in Nanjing and the Catholic Beifang Jinde 北方进德 in Shijiazhuang show.²³

Between 1980 and 1990, the number of Protestants nearly doubled, from about three to more than five million. The general inadequacy of Chinese statistics and varying definitions of Protestant “Christians” (registered, not registered, baptized, sympathizers, followers of Christians groups, etc.), however, impede statistical data. An unpublished report of the Bureau for Statistics of the PR China counts 63 million Protestants. A report in the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日报) published in 2001 estimates that there are 67 million “illegal” Protestants organized in “House Churches.”²⁴

(b) Unofficial, Underground or House Churches, not Recognized by the Chinese Government

The somewhat vague terms “Underground” or “House Church” refer to Churches that, due to the political situation, perform their activities clandestinely or – from the viewpoint of the State – illegally, not officially. Three conditions, according to Anthony Lam, “must be present for an underground phenomenon to take effect. Firstly, the government must forbid its existence; secondly, it must be organised and active within a

tu) in this group, this to a great extent characterizing the image of Christianity in Shanghai. Cf. also Wu 1993. Wu writes (p. 15): “Although the number of Christians in Beijing is too small to reflect the whole situation of the Christian believers in mainland China, they are better educated and they represent the major tendencies in the development of Christianity on the mainland.”

²³ For Amity Foundation, see Whyte 1988, pp. 420–422, *Amity Newsletter* (Nanjing), and *Amity News Service* (Hong Kong). For Beifang Jinde, see “*Beifang jinde: Erste katholische sozial-karitative Einrichtung.*” In: *China heute XX* (2001), pp. 11f.

²⁴ For the question of statistics on Christians in China, see, among others, Hunter/Chan 1993, esp. pp. 66–71 (“Reporting statistics”); “How many Christians are there in China?” In: *China Study Journal* 10 (1995) 2, pp. 15–18.

given society; and thirdly, its structure must run parallel to the one that has authorised government approval.”²⁵ In China, this unique ecclesiastical phenomenon is not new: it did not develop only after the Communist takeover in 1949, but already in the 18th century. After the imperial ban on Catholic missionaries, clandestine communities existed, as the example of the life and work of the Austrian Bishop of Nanjing, Gottfried F.X. Laimbeckhoven S.J. (1707–1787), illustrates,²⁶ and as the research of Robert E. Entenmann verifies.²⁷

Within Chinese Protestantism, there are distinctions between (a) the official Church of the Three-Self-Movement, (b) meeting places belonging to the Three-Self, (c) the half-independent Churches in the countryside, and (d) the so-called House Churches.²⁸

- (a) The official Church of the Three-Self and its meeting places are legal, registered, and public religious meeting sites. They are distinct in that the official Church of the Three-Self has its own church buildings, especially in the cities, and – usually – full-time ministers.
- (b) In smaller cities, small market towns, or in the outskirts of cities there are also Three-Self meeting places. These are fixed and registered meeting places, but, they are not required to be church buildings. They seldom have ministers who receive a regular formation.²⁹
- (c) With regard to the half-independent Churches in the countryside, most often these have been founded by lay people and are in remote rural areas. Some of them are not registered with the government and their relationship with the Three-Self-Movement is also quite complicated. Some of these Churches accept financial help from the Three-Self-Movement, even though they do not belong to the Three-Self. Others refuse any contact with the Three-Self. The most obvious common characteristic of such groups is a “charismatic leader” at the top.

²⁵ See Lam 1999. Regarding the *Problematik* of the Underground Church, see further Charbonnier 1993, pp. 52–70; “Lettera pastorale della Conferenza episcopale cattolica (non ufficiale) ai fedeli della Cina,” in: *Asia News* 1995, No. 3, pp. 28–31.

²⁶ For his clandestine itinerant life and work, see Krahl 1964; Malek 2000.

²⁷ See Entenmann 1996 and 1987.

²⁸ For these divisions of the Protestant Church in China, see Hunter/Chan 1993, *passim*.

²⁹ For Protestant meeting places, see Ying 1996.

(d) House Churches have developed due to many different reasons. Some are the result of very specific regional and denominational traditions, others are the result of having dissociated themselves from the Three-Self for political or even simply practical reasons. The term “House Churches” includes all Christian communities in China other than those which are under direct jurisdiction of the Three-Self and Christian Council (the so-called *Lianhui* 联会, i.e., the official Protestant Church). They form communities through personal networks and are characterized, among other things, by lay preachers and the spiritual-emotional character of their services.³⁰ They are, as Zhong Min and Chan Kim-Kwong have observed, “vibrant in faith, evangelistic in outreaching, fundamentalistic in doctrine, pious in devotion, informal in liturgy, spontaneous in development and flexible in structure.”³¹

The Chinese authorities, likewise, do not make a blanket judgment of the Underground groups, but distinguish between five different “underground forces:” (1) those groups that support the government and the Patriotic Associations, but have not been recognized by the government; (2) those that do not want to belong to Patriotic Associations, whose activities, however, are not opposed to the country’s laws and regulations on religions; (3) those who dissociate themselves from the Patriotic Associations, not out of political reasons, but due to religious and “sectarian” thinking and differences; (4) those who do not want to join the Patriotic Associations, because they have suffered under the “extreme Leftists” in the past and their wounds have not yet healed, or because their persecutors still hold offices within the Patriotic Associations; (5) a small minority of truly “hostile elements” that use religion to carry out “illegal and criminal” activities. The first four groups – according to Party documents – are different from the last with regard to their situation and nature. Although they should be understood as groups of believers who are not subject to the leadership of the Patriotic Associations and are not registered within religious venues approved by the State, they cannot be treated as hostile or opposition groups.³²

³⁰ For a characterization of the Protestant groups, see Hunter/Chan 1993, esp. pp. 81–88.

³¹ Zhong/Chan 1993, p. 251.

³² See “Bewertung und Analyse der gegenwärtigen religiösen Situation Chinas,” in: *China heute* XII (1993), pp. 12–19 (transl. from *Dangdai zongjiao yanjiu* 當代宗教研究 1991/1).

The Catholic Underground Church can be considered as a case in point for the “underground force” that quite representatively illustrates unofficial manifestations of Christendom in China today. The division within the Catholic Church in China began in 1957, when the Patriotic Association of the Chinese Catholic Church came into being, which in the same year brought about the first episcopal consecrations without the approval of the Holy See. A small group of bishops, priests, and lay people emerged who joined the Patriotic Association; at the same time, however, an opposition to the Association and the new Communist state arose.³³ Following the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the so-called opening of China, the gap between the two groups within the Catholic Church not only became more clearly visible, but deepened more and more. Decisive for this development was, among others, the document of the *Propaganda Fide* from 1978 (*Facultates et privilegia sacerdotibus fidelibusque in territorio Sinarum degentibus concessa his perdurantibus circumstantiis*), as it allowed the small number of legitimate (“loyal to Rome”) bishops who had not joined the Patriotic Association to perform ordinations of bishops and priests without prior formal approval of the Holy See; it allowed the priests who did not belong to the Patriotic Association to administer the sacraments in all of China.³⁴ These privileges contributed to the fact that the group “loyal to Rome” became more active than before the Cultural Revolution. It remained, however, unrecognized by the government. At the same time, the official Church was newly formed with the help of the government. This made the contrast still more obvious and conflicts inevitable. Furthermore, in 1989 an independent underground Bishops’ Conference was founded.

The activities of the Underground Church in China are not completely clandestine. As its bishops, priests and nuns do not have governmental permission to work, they cannot exercise their ministry publicly. The characteristic of the Underground Church, therefore, is its illegality with regard to the State and not an “existence in catacombs.” The bishops and priests, as well as their activities, are regarded as illegal according to the State’s law; according to the Church canon law, however, they are legitimate, as they keep the full communion with the Pope. In the beginning of the division, the loyalty to the Pope (the so-called loyalty

³³ For the history of the Catholic Church after the “Liberation” of 1949, see R. Malek, “Der Neuaufbau der katholischen Kirche in der Volksrepublik China,” in Malek/Plate 1987, pp. 27–68; Tong 1993.

³⁴ For the text of the *Facultates*, see Chan 1987, pp. 438–442.

to Rome) was the main characteristic of the Underground Church. Today, however, after the majority of the official bishops have been recognized by the Pope and the name of the Pope may be mentioned publicly, not only in prayers, “loyalty to Rome” is no longer a criterion of differentiation. Since, however, a formal connection with the Pope and the Holy See, which does not recognize the PR China, is not possible and any activity in this direction is interpreted as being hostile to the State, the Underground Church remains clandestine. The existence of the Underground Church is today, therefore, rather due to restrictive religious policies and the non-recognition of the PR China (and the recognition of the Republic of China in Taiwan) by the Vatican.³⁵

The official and unofficial Churches have parallel structures, meaning that the Catholic diocesan bishop’s sees that were set up in 1946 are often occupied twice.³⁶ Both parts of the Catholic Church have their own Bishops’ Conference. Neither is, however, recognized by the Holy See. Both groups exist without direct connection to the Pope. The Catholic Underground Church in China, claims to be the only true Catholic Church in China. Due to these and other reasons, the gap as well as the irreconcilability between the two groups within the Catholic Church in China is growing. Thus, the reconciliation of the two groups remains of urgent concern to the Chinese Church as well as to the Universal Church.³⁷

According to government statistics, there are more than five million Catholics, over 5,000 church buildings, more than 2,000 chapels, 70 bishops, and nearly 2,000 priests in the PR China. Since the opening of China, especially, after the so-called *Document 19* of 1982, twenty theological seminaries (with more than 1,000 seminarians) as well as numerous convents have been opened. Non-governmental estimates, however, maintain that there are approximately 10 to 15 million Catholics in China, with the Underground Church becoming stronger. The Catholic Underground in China has approximately 60 “clandestine”

³⁵ For other causes of clandestinity, see Charbonnier 1993, esp. pp. 55–57 (“To understand the causes of clandestinity, we must refer to its historical genesis”).

³⁶ With regard to the Catholic hierarchical structure of the Church in China today, see Lam 2000, esp. pp. 19f. and 21f. Lam speaks in this context about the “duplication of authority.”

³⁷ For these questions, see Tang 1993; Heyndricx 1993; Anon. 1992.

bishops, more than 1,000 priests, over 1,000 nuns, and most probably 5 to 7 million believers.³⁸

c) *Christian Groups and Sects*

In addition to the official and unofficial manifestations of Christendom in China in the last decades, innumerable Christian groups and sects have been revived or have newly arisen.³⁹ They constitute the third institutional manifestation of Christendom in China. Within this constantly growing “new Christian religiosity,” which, as yet, has remained both little explored and noticed (except by the controlling authorities of the PR China), we can distinguish diverse contents and manifestations. More detailed material exists about sixteen of such groups or “sects.”⁴⁰ They bear curious names, and include: for example, the “Shouters” or “Yellers” (Huhanpai 呼喊派), founded in 1967, with ca. 200,000 members in the Provinces of He’nan, Fujian, Zhejiang, Anhui, Hebei, Shaanxi, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang; “The Established King” (Beiliwang 被立王), founded in ca. 1987 in Anhui, with more than 100,000 members in Anhui, Hunan, Guangdong;⁴¹ “The Teaching of the Supreme Deity” (Zhushenjiao 主神教), founded in 1993 in Anhui, with more than 10,000 members in 22 Provinces; “The Eastern Lightning” (Dongfang Shandianjiao 东方闪电教), founded in 1990 in Zhengzhou (He’nan), with an unknown number of members in He’nan, Shandong, Shanxi, Heilongjiang; “The Way of Resurrection” (Fuhuodao 复活道), founded in 1990 in He’nan, with today more than 10,000 members in more than 20 counties and towns/cities in the Provinces of He’nan and Anhui; “The Teaching of Reincarnation” (Chongshengpai 重生派), founded in 1968 in He’nan, with, it is said, three million followers in He’nan, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hubei, and other provinces; “The Community of Disciples” or “Disciples Sect” (Mentuhui 门徒会), founded around 1989 in Shaanxi, with more than 500,000 members.⁴²

³⁸ There is no exact statistical data on the Catholic Church in China, but see, for instance, “Catholic statistics 1996,” in: *China Study Journal* 12 (1997) 1, p. 33, “How many Catholics are there in China?” in: *ibid.*, No. 3, pp. 48f. See also the statistics in *China heute* XX (2001), pp. 18f.; *ibid.*, XXI (2002), pp. 21f.

³⁹ For these and other details, see Malek 1995b.

⁴⁰ See, among others, Kupfer 2001, *passim*; Yu 1999.

⁴¹ See Luo 1998.

⁴² See Lu 1998.

In present-day China, these groups enjoy a growing number of followers. They are characterized by charismatic leaders,⁴³ complex and flexible organization, as well as teachings that deal with salvation and redemption. They take up the indigenous forms of Protestantism that arose in the 1920s and 1930s under the influence of a Western charismatic renewal and Pentecostal movements. Such a consciously constructed connection with former Christian groups serves as a legitimization to attract new members. In a certain sense, they also stand in the tradition of the Chinese folk religious sects and represent not only a major challenge for the Chinese State, but also for institutionalized Church(ed) Christendom.⁴⁴

Most groups are based solely in the countryside. Data about membership and geographical distribution are only “guesstimates.” Membership figures vary from a thousand to several hundred thousand, or even “several ten thousands.” Ye Xiaowen 叶小文, former Director of the National Bureau of Religious Affairs, quotes the Ministry for Public Security, which mentions 15 groups with about 500,000 followers.⁴⁵ According to estimates from Hong Kong (*Associated Press*, 9 December 1999), ten of these Christian groups have altogether three million members.

The geographical extension of these groups seems enormous. Usually, they are spread out over several provinces. The “Teaching of the Supreme Deity” and the “Community of Disciples” have the largest trans-regional sphere of activity in China. The first was established in towns or cities and in counties of 22 Provinces and has formulated a clear strategy for development that is reminiscent of the guerilla tactics of the Communist Party during its formative period: from the villages to the cities, from the peasants to the Party cadres, intellectuals, and other high strata of society. Its members are supposed to get acquainted with management law, cadres, and similar political affairs.

⁴³ According to Kupfer (2001), biographical data on the founders or leaders of groups inspired by Christianity is rare. The data presented in most cases emphasizes a poor or peasant background and minimal or hardly-existent education. The writings of the communities present the life of their leaders in a very mystical and glorified light. It is remarkable that most of the founders have already lived in a Christian context. Influenced by family members or friends, they also became members of Protestant, mostly unregistered, House Churches.

⁴⁴ For Christian and other “sects,” see Harrell/Perry 1982; Deng 1996; Lambert 1998; Liang 1999.

⁴⁵ See Ye 1999.

The membership structure of these groups reflects the whole range of a clan or a village: children, juveniles, adults, and the elderly. The percentage of young women with a middle-school degree is relatively high. Students and young people also form a large group.⁴⁶ Party cadres being members of these groups inspired by Christianity, in contrast to the Falungong 法轮功, does not seem to be a problem of regional or national scope.⁴⁷

Protestant communities, especially the “House Churches,” often serve as recruiting centers for new members of these groups. The main reason for much of the attraction is, above all, a lack of knowledge about the Christian doctrine. Apart from spiritual promises, some groups also offer material incentives to potential members. The members, however, are required to offer material property to the leader as a “gift” or “sacrifice”, thus investing into one’s own salvation and eternal life.

The Christian groups are characterized by a hierarchical, nation-wide organizational structure, with fixed competences, rights, and duties. The leader of a community possesses absolute authority. Besides a complex organizational structure, norms for behavior, disciplinary measures and sanctions are important elements of these groups. In order to strengthen the internal organization, the “Community of Disciples,” e.g., has a very exclusive marriage policy: Members of the group may only practice intermarriage. With the help of a ban on newspapers and other reading materials as well as a ban on television, the connection to the outside world is supposed to be cut, and the loyalty towards the group assured. To what extent these groups exercise

⁴⁶ In Hunan province, about 95% of the members of the “Teaching of the Supreme Deity” are young people; more than 60% of them have had at least a middle school education. There are hardly any statistics on the socio-economical background of the members. Furthermore, we cannot assume that the descriptions we have access to have selected representative cases. Daniel L. Overmyer’s statement on Buddhist folk religion in traditional China is also valid for today’s situation: “The fact that the membership of many groups consisted primarily of peasants doesn’t really prove anything, because from 70 to 80 percent of the population itself were peasants” (Overmyer 1976, p. 18).

⁴⁷ According to an investigation about the membership structure of the “Community of Disciples” in one county in Sichuan Province, about 5% of its members were Party members. Furthermore, in some of the villages, former Party officials joined the “Community.” In one county in Shaanxi Province, in 1995 about 100 Party members and 80 representatives of the Peoples’ Congress of that province were members of the local “Community of Disciples.”

psychological pressure (“brain washing”) on the members, can only be circumstantially evidenced.

A central characteristic of the Christian groups is the phenomenon of spiritual healing: Illness is regarded as an expression of somebody’s being possessed by an evil spirit or demon, or as a result of sinful behavior. Regular medical treatment and, especially, Western medicine are rejected.⁴⁸ Prophecies regarding the “Last Judgement” in connection with redemption form another aspect of the teachings. The teachings of the known groups always include salvation and apocalyptic ideas.

Besides a widely branched organizational network, many groups practice a community life in their headquarters. Many activities take place during the night. One main activity during the assemblies is “glossolalia,” described by the groups themselves mostly as “communication with God” or “the revelation of God.”

The spreading of the teaching, i.e., the recruitment of new followers, is one of the main activities of all communities. Most of the groups make use of various publications – brochures, books, and other media – in order to spread their teaching, e.g., at train stations, in trains, or in villages, etc. There is not much known about the number of copies of the distributed materials. Some groups organize special classes, in which members are prepared for missionary work. They often use business activities in order to be able to do their missionary work in a concealed way: hairdressing salons, car repair shops, restaurants, and *wushu*-schools are regarded as discreet and unsuspecting meeting points. To what extent the groups are really motivated by the aim of reaching political power is not clear.

All the groups mentioned here refer to the Bible and to Christian ideas, which have developed in China under the inclusion of folk religious traditions. There is always a latent syncretism present. The existence of the groups is well known, but their organizational structures and teachings are only partly known. Therefore, a typology or classification of these groups is difficult. The characteristics “subversive” and “heterodox” are political classifications according to the State’s religious policy and not analytical categories, and therefore not helpful.⁴⁹

The challenge of the above-mentioned Christian groups for the Chinese Government and also for the Churches is very strong. Moreover,

⁴⁸ For this phenomenon among Chinese Christians, see Währisch-Oblau 1999.

⁴⁹ Regarding the classification of new religious movements, see Barker 1987.

the emergence and growth of interest in religion in the last decades (since ca. 1980) indicates a growing desire for spiritual-religious support. This need is also visible with the non-Church(ed) institutional manifestations of Christendom in China.

The Non-Church(ed), Non-Institutional Manifestations of Christendom in China: “Elite Christianity”

(a) “Cultural Christianity”

The phenomenon of the “cultural Christians” (*wenhua jidutu* 文化基督徒) or “cultural Christianity” (*jidu zongjiao wenhua* 基督宗教文化) is regarded as the most distinctive manifestation of the non-Church(ed), non-institutional Christendom.⁵⁰ Following Acts 18,24–28, the “cultural Christians” are also described as “Apollos” or “Nicodems” of China.

The “cultural Christians” are intellectuals who, mainly through the study of Western culture and religions, have developed a certain affinity for the Christian faith or theology. However, they opt to stay outside of the Churches, which, according to their opinion do not possess a genuinely theological power, as they either follow the State too closely or – as with the Underground – seem to be too “sectarian”. Therefore, they are (and remain) non-baptized and “non-Churched.” They are “cultural Christians,” and their influence on the intellectual climate of the Chinese society seems to be more distinct than that of the Churches. It is a phenomenon that moves the relationship between Chinese culture and Christianity (and religion in general) into a totally new perspective.

For these “cultural Christians” Christianity is – if it is permitted to say so – an “ideo(theo)logy” that does not necessarily lead to baptism and a life according to the faith. Only with reservations, the writings of these Christians may be described as theological (in the sense of the Church). A prominent academic, Liu Xiaofeng 刘小枫, who also belongs to the “cultural Christians,” says that they only accept and defend Christianity as a cultural conception, as a *weltanschauung*. Insofar, they are not “true Christians,” because somebody “who accepts the Christian

⁵⁰ This term goes back to the Anglican Bishop K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun 丁光训) who, when answering the question whether persons like the painter Ding Fang, the writer Sun Xiaoling, or the philosopher He Guanghu are Christians, described them as “cultural Christians” and said that this was a cultural “expression of being a Christian.”

creed only as a cultural conception indeed cannot be called a Christian. [...] Only a small percentage of the intellectuals interested in Christianity have also made a decision to profess this existential experience.”⁵¹ Liu Xiaofeng continues that in China perhaps we cannot help but distinguish between Christians outside of the denominations and the members of the Christian Churches. Here, he refers to the interpretational models of Ernst Troeltsch, Jürgen Moltmann, and the controversies that Dietrich Bonhoeffer triggered off with his idea of “*religionsloses Christentum*.”⁵²

This interest in Christendom outside of the Churches, especially, among intellectuals, is, without any doubt, a theological challenge for the Chinese Churches. This new understanding of Christendom, opines the historian of religion, Zhuo Xinping, gains its force not so much from inside the Chinese Church with all its traditional attachments, but above all from a totally new generation, namely, that of the experts in religious science, philosophers, theologians, writers, poets, artists, and other scholars who are very much interested in Christian culture and try to use it in order to reshape and preserve the traditional Chinese culture. They regard the Christian culture as one of the significant developmental tendencies in world history; they consider it a strong impulse for their own thinking, with its two extremes, the Confucian and the Daoist or Buddhist *Lebensanschauung*. They see the cultural value of Christendom not only in the Occident, but also for China. This, concludes Zhuo Xinping, is meant by the so-called cultural understanding of religion in general and Christendom in particular.⁵³

The “cultural Christians” see their main task in enriching the Christian coloring of Chinese culture and fostering the spread of the Christian spirit of culture, the humanities, and education. In the PR China, there are a large number of books, journals, articles, and conferences

⁵¹ Liu 1993, p. 3.

⁵² Liu 1993, p. 3f. Similar objectives are also known from Christian Europe, e.g., with the “*Protestantenverein*” and the “Cultural Protestantism” (*Kulturprotestantismus*). The “*Protestantenverein*” was aiming at the reconciliation of religion and culture, and postulated Protestantism as the moral foundation of culture and state. Thus Christianity did not realize itself within the Churches, but in the transformation into a Christian world. The idea was to form the Protestant culture, to establish Protestantism as cultural factor or as a cultural force. In this context, however, later on, an accelerated decline of denominational Christianity into a cultural Christianity was diagnosed. See, among others, Graf 1992.

⁵³ Cf. Zhuo 1998, p. 197f.; Wu 2000.

on philosophy, theology, and the history of Christianity⁵⁴ that verify the hypothesis that this “cultural Christianity” has in the meantime become a cultural “force” within Chinese society, especially through its close connection with academic research on Christendom in the PR China, which, in my opinion, is the fifth important manifestation of Chinese Christendom.

(b) Christianity as an Object of Academic Research

Research on Christendom in China during the last two decades has experienced some significant changes, often described as a change of paradigms.⁵⁵ A very special aspect of this change of paradigms is the academic and non-Church research on Christendom by Chinese scholars in the PR China, as well as the presence of Christianity as an academic discipline at universities, academies of science as well as their institutes. Since I have described this academic manifestation of Christendom in detail elsewhere, I will limit myself here to some remarks only.⁵⁶

First of all, we have to emphasize the fact (or, as some put it: the phenomenon) that numerous intellectuals in the PR China – philosophers, historians, scholars of literary and religious studies and other disciplines – study Christian thinking and expect from it a stimulation of Chinese spiritual life and a moral-spiritual counterbalance to the materialism that is spreading everywhere in China. They are interested in a modern, “enlightened” Christendom. They do research on the history of Christendom in China as well as in the West; they devote themselves “theoretically” to the many aspects of Christian thought. Similar to the time of the May Fourth Movement – as has been explained by Liu Xiaofeng⁵⁷ – in China today we have once again a “competition of ideas.” Socialism and Communism in China, however, have fundamentally changed the relationship between the Chinese and Christian cultures: The former tensions between the foreign (Western) Christianity and the indigenous tradition of the orthodox Confucianism have turned into tensions between Christianity and the new orthodoxy, namely, Marxism-Communism (also stemming from the West), i.e., into an “internal” or “domestic” tension between cultural ideas from the West on Chinese soil.

⁵⁴ See Malek 1995c.

⁵⁵ Nicolas Standaert gives a detailed survey of this topic. See Standaert 1997.

⁵⁶ See, among others, Malek 2002.

⁵⁷ Liu 1996.

Here it is, of course, not possible to present the whole spectrum of the current research on Christianity in the PR China in detail. I once again refer to other publications,⁵⁸ and limit myself to some interpretations proposed by Liu Xiaofeng.

The academic research on Christendom, according to Liu Xiaofeng, is a “cultural-theoretical type of Christian thought” that does not consider and transmit the denominational dogmatics, but simply a “Christian science” (“*Christentumswissenschaft*”). In this way, i.e., by the incorporation of this “*Christentumswissenschaft*” into the universities and institutes, Christendom becomes a “structural element” of Chinese culture. This means that today’s cultural system of the PR China enables the blending of Christian and Chinese cultural thought (i.e, a specific “inculturation” of Christendom). From the viewpoint of cultural anthropology this also means that the academic research on Christendom will eventually become *Chinese* Christian thought. Liu Xiaofeng is furthermore convinced that alone due to the modernization of China, Christendom as a “cultural good” has already penetrated Chinese culture. The relation between Chinese culture and Christendom as a “foreign religion,” therefore, is no longer a dialogue between cultures, but an existential dialogue: “The development of Chinese Christendom, from a form influenced from the outside to a form of it’s own, does not only ... change the traditional relationship between Chinese culture and Christendom, but also the direction of the future development of Chinese culture itself,” says Liu.⁵⁹ The traditional division within Christendom, too, which was imported by the missionaries into China and harmed the development of Christendom in China, has nothing to do with China itself. According to Liu, the phenomenon of “cultural Christianity” is ecumenical and corresponds to the universality of Christendom.⁶⁰

Following Ernst Troeltsch, who in his *Soziallehren* saw Christendom holding a threefold social shape – as Church, sect, and mystics – Liu Xiaofeng divides the various manifestations of Chinese Christendom into similar types. According to his typology, the Catholic and Protestant official Churches as well as the Protestant movements that are independent from the West may be regarded as the “Churches” of present-day China. “Their attitude towards society, government, and nation as well as their tendency to be connected with the State power, clearly

⁵⁸ Cf. Malek 1999.

⁵⁹ Liu 1996, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Liu 1996.

demonstrate these characteristics.”⁶¹ The unofficial groups, especially the Protestant “House Churches,” may be regarded as “sects” due to their structure as well their nature. However, the Catholic Underground Church is, according to Liu, an exception. The “cultural Christianity” and Christendom as an academic discipline (*Christentumswissenschaft*), according to Liu Xiaofeng, due to their nature and form, belong to Troeltsch’s type of “mystics.” He stresses three characteristic points of these “mystics”: (1) the definite individual character of faith and the distance to institutional forms; (2) the emphasis on the cultural dimensions and meaning of Christendom; (3) the spontaneous tendency towards an academic and reflected religiosity, i.e., towards a “theology,”⁶² which I term “ideo(theo)logy,” in contrast to the theology of the Churches.

The Churches in China today do not recognize the “cultural Christianity,” the “sects” reject it. The “cultural Christians,” on the other hand, regard the form of faith of the “sects” incomprehensible. Liu Xiaofeng believes that the lack of a Chinese “systematic theology” has serious negative effects on Chinese Christendom. If, however, “cultural Christianity” in China really gains a foothold and is able to foster the development of a “systematic theology” and a Christian philosophy (Liu speaks about a “cultural theology”), it could be path-breaking for the whole Chinese Christendom, formally as well as with regard to the doctrine.⁶³

The question, however, remains unanswered: Will the non-Church and non-institutional Christendom in China spread more vividly than the Church Christianity? Will the “cultural Christianity” become a dominant future manifestation of Chinese Christendom?

Concluding Remarks

Even though Chinese Christendom in all its manifestations still is regarded as a “marginal” “foreign religion,” today, it seems to lose its Western character and has become a growing – howsoever characterized – sinicized socio-cultural force.⁶⁴ In China, today, there is a dis-

⁶¹ Liu 1996, p. 6.

⁶² Liu 1996, p. 7.

⁶³ Liu 1996.

⁶⁴ Wu Xinming writes in this context: “Although Christianity cannot yet compete with Buddhism in the matter of sinicisation, contemporary scholars have already begun to use the expression ‘Chinese Christianity’ instead of ‘western Christianity

course on a “religious culture” (*zongjiao wenhua* 宗教文化), on the “religious spirit of the culture” (*wenhua zongjiao jingshen* 文化宗教精神), and, in this context, also on a “Christian culture” (*jidu-jiao wenhua* or *jidu zongjiao wenhua* 基督宗教文化) as in integral part of the Chinese socio-cultural life.⁶⁵ Since 1995, the journal *Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 世界宗教文化 has been published in this spirit.

The present spiritual situation in China is often compared to the situation around the May Fourth Movement in 1919. As in the May Fourth Movement, the credibility of the Confucian tradition began to falter; at present, the credibility of the Marxist-Communist ideals is swaying. According to Liu Xiaofeng, the discrediting of the given ideology, i.e., the “crisis of faith” (*xinyang weiji* 信仰危机) demands a remodeling of the cultural ideas, values, and ideals. Through the politics of “Opening to the West,” an assimilation of various Western ideas and a search for a new cultural orientation has begun already in the 1980s. Due to this search, various, even contrasting, tendencies of thought have developed and at the moment, none of them is prevailing. The Christian orientation, though small, still is – as Liu Xiaofeng says – a conspicuous and amazing sound in the “cacophony of the cultural rearrangement.”

The revival of religiosity in China today, including the diverse manifestations of Christendom, evidences that what is called religion or religiosity is truly alive and propagating itself – despite the restrictive religious policy and despite the Marxist predictions about the death of religion. In China, certain manifestations of Christendom will surely die out. Other manifestations of Christendom, however, show that they are able to influence the life of the people significantly.

The theologian and philosopher of religion Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) once described religion as the “citadel of hope.”⁶⁶ This description also applies to the role of the resurrecting religiosity being played out

in China’ to describe the Christianity which has grown up in China during the past hundred years, just as for many scholars became accustomed to using ‘Chinese Buddhism’ to describe ‘the development of Indian Buddhism in China.’ Of course, by comparison with the long history of Chinese civilisation, the history of Christianity during the period of China’s development is, after all, very short.” (Wu 2000, p. 13.)

⁶⁵ See Zhang-Kubin 1993, p. 35; Leeb 2000. In this context, D.L. Overmyer’s remark is interesting, namely, that the Chinese scholars often use the term *wenhua* instead of *zongjiao* or *xinyang* in order to avoid possible difficulties with the authorities (see Overmyer 2001, p. 108, n. 9).

⁶⁶ Niebuhr 1932, pp. 60–62.

at least in some segments of today's Chinese society – including various manifestations of Christendom – in the PR China today. Christendom in China, thus, has become a phenomenon with an open future, but – in the words of Wu Xinming – it has “the ability to bring into play the contribution it should make to the way in which Chinese culture engages with other world cultures, for the further enrichment and development of Chinese culture itself.”⁶⁷

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⁶⁷ Wu 2000, p. 13.

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