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## CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

### INTRODUCTION

This article is an attempt to answer the questions: When and how did Christianity reach China? What was its role in 21st-century China?

China had its own beliefs, still coming from the Paleolithic, then animistic practices, the cult of heaven, dragon, etc. However, ultimately, they were permanently dominated by three religious and philosophical systems: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. They were professed syncretically and had the greatest influence on the formation of Chinese culture over the centuries. However, they are not understood as “religion” in the Western sense.<sup>1</sup> So how did it happen that a highly organised civilisation with its mythology and a well-developed social and philosophical system opened up to Europeans? How come that a civilization that has a longer history than the Christian world opened up to evangelization? How did the Chinese, who have always been a practical and pragmatic nation, deal with dogmatic and theological issues?

China is a country whose constitution provides for religious freedom only in theory. Although the Chinese government stresses that human rights are respected in the People’s Republic of China, in practice the state controls all religious activities. Nowadays, the term “Christianity” is used by the Chinese mainly to refer to Protestantism, but in this paper the term is used to denote the Catholic Church, present here since the eight century.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Anna MIERZEJEWSKA, “Jan Paweł II w dialogu z religiami Chin,” *Nurt SVD* 48, no. 1 (2014): 306–20.

Today, five religious organizations (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism) are officially recognized in China, while all others and those opposed to the government are illegal. Membership in any of the religious groups, registered or not, may be subject to repression by the state. Why, then, is the number of Christians in China constantly growing, and why, is Christianity still developing there despite the persecution of the faithful?

To answer these questions, we need to look a little closer at the history of Christianity in China, which is the cradle of one of the oldest civilizations in the world, a civilization that had lasted continuously for four thousand years, retaining many of its original elements, but also constantly evolving. Learning about the fate of Christianity in China from its beginnings and signs in the Middle Ages to the present day will enable us to better understand this issue.

## HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

### THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

According to Jesus Christ's command: "Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), missionary activity has been one of the main tasks of Christianity since its beginnings. It is not surprising that the missions finally reached Asia as well.

The first information about Christianity in China comes from the 8th century. It appears on the Xi'an stone table, which is evidence of the activity of Bishop Alopen—one of the first known Christian missionaries in China. He was known to have come to Chang with a Nestorian mission, and at the request of the current Tang Dynasty Emperor (who at the time was sympathetic to Christian missions). He translated Christian writings into Chinese. The tolerance edict issued by Alopen, written on the stele, underlines the fact that, there were also other twenty-one Christian monks in China at that time. Simultaneously, Nestorian Christianity was spreading in Central and South Asia, largely because the missionaries used concepts related to Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in their teachings. In this way it was easier to reach out to the Chinese and help them understand the Gospel. Nevertheless, Nestorians did not survive the persecution and there were no evangelistic missions in China for some time. In the 13th century, Franciscan missionaries

came to China. But they did not succeed there, failing to root Christianity in China. For some time, Chinese Catholicism ceased to exist. It was the subsequent missions of the Jesuits in the 16th century that established a permanent Christian presence in that area.<sup>2</sup>

#### FR. MATTEO RICCI AND HIS INCULTURATION ATTEMPT IN CHINA

An important role in promoting the Christian faith was played by Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit missionary who wanted to inculturate the Gospel and made an attempt at missionary accommodation (i.e., adapting missionary activity to the mentality and culture of the community). Initially, he became known as a “Western sage,” a scientist and discoverer. This won him the approval of Chinese intellectuals. According to Ricci, in order for the Christian religion to be adopted in China, it had to be adapted to the Chinese realities. The key to Ricci’s success was his good knowledge of the Chinese language and culture. In addition, Ricci dressed like locals and used a Chinese name. He also believed that the worship of ancestors, which was being exterminated by other circles in the Catholic Church, was not at all a manifestation of paganism, but only an expression of respect and commemoration of the ancestors. These unique intellectual views aroused the interest of Chinese philosophers.

Thanks to the missionary activity of the Jesuits, the first Chinese priest was ordained in 1654 and by 1720 the number of Catholics in China was about half a million.<sup>3</sup>

Pope John Paul II said on October 25, 1982, at the Pontifical Gregorian University, that by being rooted in Chinese culture “Father Matteo Ricci, with the help of his Chinese collaborators, managed to accomplish a work that was considered impossible, that is to say, to develop Catholic theological and liturgical terminology in Chinese and thus create the conditions for knowing Christ and incarnating the Gospel and the Church in the context of Chinese culture.”<sup>4</sup>

In his missionary ministry, Matteo Ricci avoided everything that could in any way offend people who had been accustomed for generations to a certain

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<sup>2</sup> Piotr POPIOLEK, “Stela z Xi’an,” accessed March 10, 2020, <http://christianitas.org/news/stela-z-xi>.

<sup>3</sup> Wojciech KLUIJ, “Ewangelizacja Chin,” *Misyjne drogi*, no. 6 (2003): 17–19.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted after Justyna SPRUTTA, “Matteo Ricci. Misjonarz intelektualista,” *misyjne.pl*, accessed March 12, 2020, <https://misyjne.pl/misja/matteo-ricci-misjonarz-intelektualista>.

way of life and thus creating a lasting bridge between the Church and Chinese culture.

#### ACCOMMODATION DISPUTE

With time, more religious congregations began to settle in China. These were above all mendicant orders — Franciscans and Dominicans — which did not recognize the Jesuit methods of evangelization. This led to an accommodation dispute over the methods of Christianization as well as the nomenclature used for elements of the Christian faith. The conflict intensified and in 1645 it reached the Holy See. The Chinese emperor's response was also categorical: he forbade the further promotion of Christianity by expelling all missionaries from the country. As a result, Christianity was completely banned, and the missionary work was now illegal. The accommodation dispute turned out to be tragic as the religion that had been successfully spreading in the area was effectively thwarted and became the object of years-long persecution.<sup>5</sup>

This situation lasted until 1839 when the first opium war broke out. As a result of the Britain winning the war, the Treaty of Nanking was signed in 1842. Its provisions included making five major ports available to the Crown and granting extraterritorial rights to the British. Similar treaties were also signed with France and the USA. In addition, the French obtained permission to carry out missionary activities in China and by the end of the nineteenth century missionaries were re-sent to China. Despite the unfavourable political situation, missionary activity developed, and the number of Christian believers increased. Below is an example of missionary activity from that period, which has survived to this day:

Evangelization reached Sheshan in 1844. The missionaries built a house there with five rooms, one of which served as a chapel and the other for their needs. In 1864 a religious brother of Chinese nationality built a hexagonal gazebo on top of this hill, where he placed a picture of the Virgin Mary painted by him and venerated under the invocation of "Helper of the Faithful." Since then, the cult of the Madonna of Sheshan, Helper of the Faithful has spread extensively throughout the area and every year, May 24 is a very solemn celebration. There are numerous channels around Sheshan. Many of the fishermen who live on boats (barges) are mostly zealous Catholics. Every year, in May, they go on a pilgrimage to the shrine, uniting there with pilgrims from

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<sup>5</sup> KLUJ, "Ewangelizacja Chin."

different parts of the country. During the Year of Mary, the pilgrimage continued uninterrupted for all months.<sup>6</sup>

We can say that to Chinese Catholics the Sheshan Sanctuary is as important as the Jasna Gora sanctuary to Poles, and on the side of the road leading to the top of the hill there are stations of the Way of the Cross and two chapels dedicated to the Heart of Jesus and to the Virgin Mary. To commemorate the Madonna of Sheshan, May 24 was chosen by Pope Benedict XVI as a day of prayer for the Church in China.

By the 19th and 20th centuries, the Church did not want missions to be political in nature and to separate itself from the influence of politics on its functioning, and Catholic schools and universities started to be established. The first Chinese bishops were consecrated. Twenty Chinese metropolitan areas and more than 100 dioceses were created. In 1918, the number of Christians in China was almost 2 million,<sup>7</sup> and 30 years later it rose to over 3 million.<sup>8</sup>

## CHRISTIANITY IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

### THE SITUATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AFTER 1949

The situation of Christianity, which had been blossoming in China, changed significantly in 1949 after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China. Revolutions and political changes brought decrees which also affected the Catholic Church. Missionaries were arrested and some had to leave the country (some emigrated to Taiwan); all Catholic institutions were nationalized. By 1957, the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics, otherwise known as the Patriotic Church, was established. These are so-called registered churches, which are fully subject to the Chinese government. However, during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976, all churches were closed down across China — only the Cathedral in Beijing was opened to foreigners.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Madonna z Sheshan” (my translation), accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.sinicum.pl/index.php/24-maja/madonna-z-sheshan>.

<sup>7</sup> Rodney STARK and WANG Xiuhua, *A Star in the East* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015), 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39

<sup>9</sup> Antoni KOSZORZ, Introduction in *Chrześcijaństwo i Kościół w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej* by Georg Evers et al., ed. Antoni Koszorz (Warsaw: Verbinum, 2003), 5.

The previously mentioned temple in Sheshan was closed and devastated. The stained-glass windows, paintings and the figure of the Madonna were destroyed. It was not until 1981 that the basilica was restored and returned to the Shanghai diocese.

In this period, many Christians, especially clergy and missionaries, were struggling with persecution, which China called “dealing with criminal elements.” These included: confiscation of Church property, changes in the functioning of the Church in China without the Pope’s consent, breaking up Catholic families (denunciations of Catholic family members), mass arrests, deportations to labor camps, detention in unknown places (especially for clergy), torture, and even murder.

One of the first victims was Father Beda Chang, a Jesuit from China. He first studied in Shanghai, then in Paris, where he did his doctorate, and after returning to China he worked at the Shanghai Aurora University, founded and maintained by the Jesuits. During one of the conferences he attended, he was asked by the communists to prove his patriotism by denying his ties with the Vatican. Father Chang refused and after a few months he was arrested, thrown in jail and tortured to death. He was declared a martyr.<sup>10</sup>

Today, it is no longer possible for a foreigner to fulfil openly his missionary functions in China. There are still many priests and nuns of other nationalities in the PRC; however, they are usually employees of, for example, universities or schools. It is illegal for priests to serve as priests, but sometimes they still do it and they can be punished for this, for example, by being forbidden to enter China. This occurred a few years ago when several priests were not even allowed to leave the airport. They were forced to fly to another country as soon as possible.

Currently, according to the Chinese constitution, the citizens can enjoy religious freedom, but the government constantly ensures that no religious practices interfere with national unity. This means that only activities carried out within state-controlled organizations are considered legal (registered churches) and all other activities are considered illegal and prosecuted under criminal law.<sup>11</sup> In response to these actions, the faithful, who wanted to remain under the Pope’s authority, established illegal underground churches—membership in them is still punishable by imprisonment and sometimes also by torture.

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<sup>10</sup> STARK and WANG, *A Star in the East*, 52–53.

<sup>11</sup> Georg EVERS, “Wolność religijna i prawa człowieka a Kościół Katolicki w Chinach,” in KOSZORZ, *Chrześcijaństwo i Kościół*, 9–12.

The Chinese state actively promotes atheism by reminding citizens about “serving the nation” and putting the community above the individual, claiming that religion is “a futile and wrong human response to one’s sense of powerlessness in the face of natural and social forces.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, all religious activities are to be limited to places of worship only (temples, monasteries, churches).<sup>13</sup> According to the constitution, the state is also to protect “normal religious activities,” and any state interference in religious activities is treated as a precautionary measure to maintain public order.

#### THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN (2018–2022): INCULTURATION AND SINICIZATION

In 2015, the Secretary General of the Communist Party in China, Xi Jinping, announced that the sinicization (from the Chinese language “zhongguohua”) of religion, not only Catholic, but also of other faiths in the PRC, will be a priority for the Chinese government. A five-year plan was drawn up for 2018–2022, which in the case of Christianity aims to apparently strengthen the independence of the Church and show its positive impact on the economic and social development of China, but in fact to adapt Catholicism to the realities of socialism with a Chinese face, for example persuade clergy to implement and promote socialist values, maintain discipline and support the Communist Party of China. Sinicization according to Xi Jinping presupposes conscious political identification—acceptance of the authority of the Communist Party of China over the Church, forced recognition of the primacy of the Chinese culture over the Christian one and the Church’s service to Chinese society, which argues that it is the duty of every Christian to love his homeland and obey state power.<sup>14</sup>

The foregoing explains the difference between the inculturation first used by Matteo Ricci—which assumed the rooting of Christianity in China by adapting methods such as using Chinese or transforming the Chinese culture while preserving authentic Christian values—and forced Sinicization and adaptation to the Chinese culture, which may result in a re-evaluation of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>13</sup> Roman MALEK, “Meandry religii i polityki w Chinach,” *Znak*, nos. 638–39 (July–August 2008), accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/638-6392008roman-malek-svdmeandry-religii-i-polityki-w-chinach>.

<sup>14</sup> Zbigniew WESOŁOWSKI, “Plan pięcioletni mający na celu przyspieszenie i ugruntowanie sinizacji katolicyzmu w naszym kraju (2018–2022),” *www.Sinicum*, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://chinydzisiaj.sinicum.pl/index.php/9-artykuly/9-plan-piecioletni-majacy-na-celuprzyspieszenie-i-ugruntowanie-sinizacji-katolicyzmu-w-naszym-kraju>.

Christianity, as well as its understanding and functioning in the PRC. For Xi Jinping, Sinicization seems to be a tool to make ignorant believers useful in the hands of ruling communists and to create an ideal opportunity for the government to control the Church and use it to strengthen the power of the Communist Party of China.

#### RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN

The Catholic Church in China poses an additional difficulty because it has no official ties or relations with the Holy See. The Vatican is one of the few countries in the world that still recognizes the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan and it is on the island and not in mainland China that the Apostolic Nunciature is located. The difficult relations between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China together with the Vatican's recognition of the Taiwanese government pose problems in establishing contact between the Church in China and the Holy See. Any attempt made by the Chinese Church is understood by the PRC as contact with the "enemy," since a country that does not recognise the PRC is considered an enemy. In turn, contacts from the Vatican are considered by the Party as infiltration and "meddling in China's internal affairs," since, according to the Chinese Constitution, religious matters cannot be controlled by any foreign organizations or forces.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Pope has no influence on the situation of the Church and Christians in China, nor is it possible to make a pilgrimage to China.

However, during John Paul II's pontificate the Vatican's relations with the PRC were quite tense. The Pope could not make a pilgrimage to China, but in November 2011 the relics of the late Pope were placed in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Hong Kong. The hair of the Saint Pope is a kind of symbolic fulfilment of his desire to visit China. Today, the faithful from mainland China have the opportunity to pray before the relics of John Paul II, who respected China and the Chinese and recommended them in his prayer.

The next pope, Benedict XVI, somewhat improved the relations between the Holy See and China. He emphasized the unity of the Chinese Church with the whole Catholic Church, and in his letter to the Church in China—which aimed to show Chinese Catholics the manifestation of "fraternal closeness"—he wrote that despite the difficulties that still stand in the way of the Catholic

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<sup>15</sup> MALEK, "Meandry religii."



Church in China today, it shows great fidelity to Christ and the whole Church.<sup>16</sup>

Currently, during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the Vatican is negotiating with China to resume diplomatic relations. One of the conditions of the Chinese authorities is the possibility for the regime to appoint Chinese bishops. By denying the Vatican the right to investiture, the Chinese government ensures that it continues to control the Catholic Church in China. The Holy See agrees to these concessions, as evidenced, for example, by the annulment of the ordination of two bishops from underground Chinese Churches and the recognition of bishops imposed by the Communist Party. It is estimated that after the Vatican made concessions to the PRC within a few months the negotiations could be concluded.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE PRESENT STATE AND FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

##### WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY TO THE CHINESE?

Christianity arrived in China relatively late. China is a country with its own philosophical-religious systems that differ significantly from Christianity, and yet Christianity has won a large group of followers. Over the years, this religion has followed a genuine “Way of the Cross”; everything, then, portended its extinction; however, it is estimated that today there are about 12 million Catholics in China.<sup>18</sup> How come that, then, that Chinese Christians remain faithful to the Church despite the risk of repression?

Christianity has not been accepted by all Chinese from the beginning. Locals were often afraid of missionaries and the clergy in general. They were presented in a bad light; terrible stories of vampire nuns, missionary mur-

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<sup>16</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China, *vatican.va*, accessed May 20, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china.html).

<sup>17</sup> Paul HUANG, “As Pope Francis Capitulates to Chinese Regime, Its State Media Defends the Pope and Attacks American Catholics,” *The Epoch Times*, February 7, 2018, accessed May 6, 2020, [https://www.theepochtimes.com/as-pope-francis-capitulates-to-chinese-regime-its-state-mediadefends-the-pope-and-attacks-american-catholics\\_2435918.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/as-pope-francis-capitulates-to-chinese-regime-its-state-mediadefends-the-pope-and-attacks-american-catholics_2435918.html).

<sup>18</sup> Notker WOLF, “Czy Kościół w Chinach działa w sytuacji wyjątkowej?” in KOSZORZ, *Chrześcijaństwo i Kościół*, 64.

derers, monsters from the West were invented. They were referred to as “foreign imperialists who enslaved the Chinese nation.”<sup>19</sup>

However, it is true that Christianity has opened a window to the world and Western culture for many Chinese. Especially in rural areas, where people did not have many opportunities for education or even proper access to medicine, Christianity has brought about many changes. It was the Christian missionaries who established and continue to manage schools, orphanages, nursing homes; they have been helping the poor, even providing medical treatment.

In his press columns, Liao Yiwu describes many stories of people who decided to become Catholics for various reasons. One of these stories tells the story of a man, born in 1944, who as a child fell ill with night blindness and began to lose sight. The Chinese doctors did not give him any chance to be cured, so the family decided to consult the Christian missionary living nearby. The boy was healed for free (the missionary said he worked in the name of God) and regained sight. This event was celebrated as a miracle among the local people. Unfortunately, when the family wanted to meet the missionary again and get more salutary drops, it turned out that all the foreigners, including the Christian missionaries, were displaced from the area. The Chinese specialists did not find the right cure at that time, so the boy started losing his sight again after a while. According to a local historian, there was a cod-liver oil in the drops, and the drops created on its basis at that time helped many Chinese with sight problems.<sup>20</sup> This shows that, thanks to Christian missions, Western medicine also developed to some in some degree, considerably improving the quality of life of some Chinese. Perhaps the aid and development that Christianity brought with it is the reason why it has survived in those areas and gained in relevance.

There are also people who have found in Christian teaching and Bible study answers to life that they lacked in the message of Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism. In difficult moments, they drew peace from Christianity and found the support they were missing in it. Very often in moments of illness and doubt in the sense of life it was the Christian teachings that turned out to be the ones giving hope for a better tomorrow or for salvation and happiness after death. I think that this aspect is also very important for the rooting of Christianity in China. As the Chinese journalist Pan Yue wrote in one of his

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<sup>19</sup> LIAO Yiwu, *Bóg jest czerwony. Opowieść o tym, jak chrześcijaństwo przetrwało i rozkwitło w komunistycznych Chinach*, trans. Barbara Gadomska (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2014), 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 208–16.

articles: “Religion exists because man reaches limits in his thinking.”<sup>21</sup> People need comfort and hope especially in difficult times, and Christian religion has become ideal material for this.

Today’s China is becoming an economic powerhouse, its position in the world is constantly growing. The development of technology, the pace of life and its material side, consumerism, cult of money are often the only trend among young people, all leading to workaholism and corporate slavery. It is work that brings material benefits, but the pressure of time consequently leads to burnout, stress, depression. People can afford a lot of pleasure, but their lives are reduced to material things. Are they able to fill a whole life and give satisfaction? Where is the boundary between freedom and “camouflaged enslavement”?<sup>22</sup> In one of his apostolic exhortations John Paul II noted that in Chinese society there is a growing interest in “the spiritual and transcendental dimension of the human person, which leads to an interest in religion, especially Christianity.”<sup>23</sup>

Why, then, do the Chinese choose the Christian religion? Perhaps this is due to its universal dimension and fundamental principles, which are also determinants of morality, as well as to its timeless evangelical content, which “transcends the boundaries of nations and cultures.”<sup>24</sup> Chinese intellectuals who study the Bible draw attention to the following elements that may be relevant to the process of Christianization:

1. The Christian idea of sin, which is lacking in Chinese philosophical and religious systems like Confucianism, according to which all people are inherently good. So the question remains where does evil come from? The idea of sin can lead to self-reflection, as well as on the social situation of the Chinese, and such critical thinking can result in conversion.

2. Faith in salvation through Christ. It does not threaten to destroy Chinese culture and identity, while giving motivation for a proper conduct.

3. The concept of a transcendent God, which does not exist in Chinese religious traditions. A big problem in Chinese society is the recognition of human deities, for example, the cult of Mao Zedong, which resulted in ruthless dictatorship.

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<sup>21</sup> PAN Yue, “Nowa pozycja religii w ChRL,” in KOSZORZ, *Chrześcijaństwo i Kościół*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> “Uniwersalizm chrześcijański w wizji zjednoczonej Europy u Jana Pawła II,” *teatrnn.pl*, accessed May 18, 2020, <http://teatrnn.pl/scriptores/universalizmchrzescijanski-w-wizji-zjednoczonej-europy-u-jana-pawla-iiabp-prof-jozef-zycinski-pat-kul>.

<sup>23</sup> MALEK, “Meandry religii.”

<sup>24</sup> “Uniwersalizm chrześcijański.”

4. The eschatological dimension in the Christian religion, emphasizing the importance of spiritual values and their superiority over materialism and consumerism, which may prove extremely important in Chinese society.

5. Christian ecumenism, which can link China, which considers itself to be a “state of the middle ground” with the rest of the world, is important and probably inevitable in the age of globalisation.

6. Emphasizing the love of neighbour and the love of Jesus Christ—unconditional and selfless—helps to understand what human dignity and rights are.<sup>25</sup>

The above-mentioned elements of the Chinese vision of Christianity show that China is constantly interested in this religion, pointing to the aspects that are important for it on many levels— social, political, and ethical. They point to the most important role of Christianity as that of fostering morality that could contribute to the renewal of society, the development of democracy, respect for human rights, and freedom— even in a global context.

Therefore, the adoption of the Christian religion, which is not universal in China and not commonly or fully accepted by the atheistic Communist Party, may be a manifestation of rebellion against the government and regime. Feeling anger and disappointment with the Party, people may simply want to oppose the orders of the Chinese government, but they may also seek reassurance and rebirth in the Church.<sup>26</sup> Despite the risk of being arrested for activities in illegal house churches, there are people who still want to fight for true religious freedom and the defence of Christian values, believing that this is a new and better way.

#### THE STATISTICS

The current political situation in China makes it difficult to access reliable and verified statistics on the number of Christians or clergy in the area. In many cases, they are false, sometimes research is not reliable enough or performed on an insufficient number of inhabitants; other times it is hard to divide the church into legal and the one operating underground, because the latter is difficult to research.

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<sup>25</sup> MALEK, “Meandry religii.”

<sup>26</sup> LIAO, *Bóg jest czerwony*, 194.

Table 1 shows the statistical number of vocations in the years 1920–2009, but it should be mentioned that the figures for each year come from different sources.<sup>27</sup>

Table 1. The statistical number of vocations in 1920–2009.

VOCATIONS IN 1920–2009					
Year	1920	1930	1948	1991	2009
Priests	946	1,441	2,690	100	3,270
Nuns	2,000	2,835	5,112	2,200	5,451
Seminarians	656	858	524	800	628
Students of minor seminaries	1,650	2,732	?	?	630
Lay people (millions)	1.99	2.49	3.27	3.60	5.71

Despite the uncertainty concerning the accuracy of these data, it should be noted that the number of Christians, both lay and clerical, is increasing in China.

Research has also been conducted to predict how the number of Christians (Catholics and Protestants) in China will change between 1980 and 2040. This also showed an upward trend of 7% per year. With this assumption, by 2040 there will already be nearly 580 million Christians in China.<sup>28</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that Christianity has come a long way to establish itself permanently in China. The contemporary Catholic Church is slowly but steadily developing. Despite the division into the official and underground Church, the number of priests, nuns and seminaries is growing in both groups. In addition to ordinary sacramental ministry, various Bible courses and formations are being created, retreats and evangelical programmes for children and youth are held. Each year, more and more Christians are arriving in China, making Christianity even more deeply rooted in Chinese culture. At the same

<sup>27</sup> Paul HAN, “Kościół w Chinach potrzebuje ducha i postawy papieża Franciszka,” *Sinicum*, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.sinicum.pl/index.php/materialy/artykuly/115-kosciol-w-chinach-pilnie-potrzebuje-ducha-i-postawypapieza-franciszka>.

<sup>28</sup> Rodney STARK and WANG Xiuhua, *A Star in the East. The Rise of Christianity in China* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015), 115.

time, with the seemingly flourishing Christianity in those areas, the Communist Party continues to exert a huge impact on society and all areas of life, including the Church.

Suffice it to say that the government still has a great deal of control over the activities of Catholics, and even, contrary to the Constitution on Religious Freedom, it restricts them. This is particularly true of the unofficial Church, which opposes the Chinese regime and recognises the authority of the Holy See. It is shocking that because of their religion many people in China face punishment and persecution. Sometimes clergymen have to undergo forced training, and in some cases they are sent to prison, a work camp or they simply disappear. Seminars, churches, and nursing homes run by friars are being closed. Nor is it possible for foreign missionaries to operate legally. This situation will probably continue as long as the Chinese government interferes in all spheres of citizens' lives. Only the fact that the situation of the Church in China will begin to improve can inspire optimism and hope that Christianity — thanks to the values it promotes — is attracting more and more Chinese people despite the difficulties it encounters, thus growing in strength.

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## CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

## Summary

Christianity reached China relatively late — the earliest confirmed information about the presence of Christianity in this area dates back to the 8th century AD. For centuries, Chinese culture has been shaped by other philosophical and religious systems, so Christianity has not always been understood and accepted in China. Nevertheless, it has survived and is gaining more and more followers.

The article presents the history of the appearance of the Christian religion in China and the way Christianity has fared there over the centuries. It also shows the plight of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China. The article shows what made Christianity survive and put down roots in China, how it found itself in Chinese culture, the number of its followers, and the role Christianity plays for them. The author also reflects on the future development of Christianity in a country where religions are understood differently than in Western culture.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church; China; Chinese culture; Christianity; religion.

CHRZEŚCIJAŃSTWO W CHINACH  
– PRZESZŁOŚĆ, TERAŹNIEJSZOŚĆ I PRZYSZŁOŚĆ

Streszczenie

Chrześcijaństwo dotarło do Chin stosunkowo późno – najwcześniejsze potwierdzone informacje świadczące o obecności chrześcijaństwa na tym terenie pochodzą z VIII w. n.e. Od wieków kulturę chińską kształtowały inne systemy filozoficzno-religijne, chrześcijaństwo nie zawsze było więc rozumiane i akceptowane w Chinach. Mimo to, przetrwało i zyskuje coraz licznější grupę wyznawców.

Autorka przedstawia w artykule historię pojawienia się religii chrześcijańskiej w Chinach i drogę jaką chrześcijaństwo przeszło tam na przestrzeni wieków. Ukazuje również trudną sytuację Kościoła Katolickiego w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej w czasach współczesnych. Artykuł pokazuje co sprawiło, że udało się zakorzenić chrześcijaństwo w Chinach, jak odnalazło się ono w chińskiej kulturze oraz ilość jego chińskich wyznawców i roli jaką odgrywa dla nich chrześcijaństwo. Autorka zastanawia się również nad przyszłym rozwojem chrześcijaństwa w kraju, w którym religie i wierzenia rozumiane są inaczej niż w kulturze zachodniej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Chiny; chrześcijaństwo; Kościół katolicki; kultura chińska; religia.