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Nationalism and Chinese Protestant Christianity: From Anti-imperialism to Islamophobia

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Introduction

Chinese Christianity is often associated with Western ideology in China because its historical development is inevitably tangled up with Western political and economic expansion.¹ Although Christianity in China had trodden an uneven path before the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as in the Chinese Rites controversy between the Qing Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1661–1722) and the Holy See, the major conflict was not between nation states on an equal basis but between the centralized authority of the Chinese Empire and Catholic religious organizations (Xu 2007). The Western imperial encounter with China facilitated the spread of Christianity in the Empire as an important part of the Treaties with Britain after the two Opium Wars (respectively 1839–1842 and 1856–1860), which permitted missionaries to enter China. At the same

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time, this permission aroused and sharpened the cultural and political collision between Chinese tradition and Christianity as representing Western ideology. Such encounters not only aroused Chinese patriotic sentiments, as seen in the Boxer Rebellion of 1899–1901, they also significantly stimulated a painful transformation in the Chinese world view, including its self-identification from a proud ancient universal concept of China as Tianxia (under heaven) to acceptance of the Western concept of the nation state. In this process, China was forced to confront and resist Western political ideology and power, while consciously or unconsciously imitating the Western political and economic model of modernization and state formation.

This ambivalent and perhaps contradictory experience vis-à-vis the West can be seen in the historical trajectory of Chinese Protestantism, which has often been regarded as a foreign religion imbued with Western ideology and in conflict with Chinese identity and tradition. The foreignness and conflictual nature of Protestantism are evident in the saying ‘one more Christian, one less Chinese’. Yet, from the early twentieth century until the present, the Western-derived concepts of nationalism and patriotism have always been of great concern to Chinese Protestant Christians, who, as shown in the next section, were actually foremost among the early nationalists.

Western modernity theory often sees nationalism and religion in terms of a dichotomy between modern secularism and backward tradition. However, an increasing number of scholars challenge this view by examining the intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism (van der Veer 2013; van der Veer and Lehmann 1999; Brubaker 2012; Smith 2003; Spohn 2003; Walsh 2020; Nedostup 2009). Following Walsh and Nedostup, who draw attention to the religious elements in the formation of the Chinese secular nation state, this chapter looks at how religion engages with and takes part in the formation of the nation state and the construction of nationalism. The ongoing transformation of Protestant Christianity can be regarded as a process of nationalization in so far as it serves the need for a perceived foreign, specifically Western, religion to be acknowledged by the Chinese state. Echoing historian Prasenjit Duara’s understanding of nationalism, the chapter further illustrates its continuing transformation through the lens of the historical development of Protestantism. Unlike Gellner and Anderson, who view ‘nationalism’ as

expressing a unified and homogenized identity, Duara regards nationalism as a fluid, discursive concept confronting and in debate with different 'nation-views' (Duara 1995: 10). In analysing the historical development of Chinese Christianity in this chapter, I argue that nationalism is not a static concept but has in fact constantly been constructed and re-interpreted. Chinese Christians have demonstrated their manifold patriotism in different political and economic contexts. From the early twentieth century until the 1950s, their nationalism took the form of anti-imperialism, inspiring the independence movement and the emergence of indigenous Chinese House Churches. Following the assumption of political power in 1949 by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chinese Protestant Christians fell into two groups because of theological differences. The patriotism promoted by early Three-Self Church leaders was intended to support the CCP and cut the church off from Western influence. In contrast, the pioneering House Church leaders preferred to transform society through individual salvation. Since China's 'opening up' in 1979, the country has experienced an unexpected Christian revival. In addition to the impact of rapid urbanization, it is plausible to say that the exponential growth of urban Christians results from deep patriotic sentiment substituting for the desire for political reform that has seemingly been unattainable since the suppression of the Tiananmen students' movement of 1989.

While early Christian patriotism was harnessed to the state's nationalist aim of ridding the country of the control and oppression of Western imperialism and transforming it into an independent nation state, since 2010 a new wave of nationalist sentiment has emerged to construct an alternative negative otherness—namely Islam, whose followers Chinese Christians believe they are called by God to convert. In both periods, patriotism is generated among Chinese urban Protestant professionals who are well educated and socio-economically well placed not only for fitting into but also partly for leading mainstream Chinese nationalism. Thus, each phase has its respective opponent. While the opponent of early Christian nationalism was political, namely Western imperialism, the current missionary movement has constructed Islam as its religious opponent.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. Starting with the period from the early nineteenth century until the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the first section shows how the patriotic sentiment of Chinese Protestants of the early independent church movement laid the ground for reducing the influence of Western missionaries and thence expressing support for the state's anti-imperialism. The second section depicts both the founding of the Three-Self Church and the emergence of House Churches in the 1950s. It describes the convergence of Christians' expressed love of China and their caring concern for its people, despite their first theological and later political differences. The third section focuses on the rise of urban Christianity between 1980 and 2000. It looks at three Christian groups that share similar nationalist aspirations for China's rise and prosperity despite differences in agenda and mandate. The fourth section examines the missionary movement of Chinese House Churches since 2000, which are giving voice to a new wave of nationalism among House Church Christians. This narrative centralizes the role of ethnic Chinese and constructs Islam as the new religious enemy, thus inadvertently converging with the state's attitude and policy towards Muslims.

The chapter is largely based on material collected during eighteen months of participant observation in dozens of churches in various cities and villages in Shan Dong province and Beijing between 2010 and 2019. During fieldwork, I conducted nearly a hundred interviews and attended sermons, Bible study groups and their training programmes. I also subscribed to relevant WeChat groups and analysed messages that were important to my research.

Chinese Protestantism and Anti-imperialism (Before 1949)

Peter van der Veer (2013: 657) rightly argues that '[r]eligion has to be nationalized in the modern period'. Ryan Dunch vividly shows how Fuzhou Protestants were deeply involved in building the new Chinese nation state and its citizenry. It was Protestants in the Fuzhou area who

initially used some important Chinese nationalist symbols as national flags and anthems in Protestant churches (Dunch 2001). In the early twentieth century, the main concerns of both Protestants and secular nationalists were to save China from colonial and imperial invasion, construct a strong nation and strengthen the moral education of Chinese citizens. As Dunch points out, after the 1911 revolution the new popular nationalist movement had an ambivalent view of Western nations. On the one hand Western political, social institutions and technology were greatly admired by the Chinese, while on the other hand Westerners' encroachments on Chinese politico-economic sovereignty aroused strong resentment among non-Christian Chinese, as well as among Christians (Dunch 2001: 49). Chinese Protestants were therefore motivated by Christian moral standards and norms in nation-building while opposing the intrusiveness of Western Christian nations.

As part of the nationalist movement, an independent Chinese Christian church movement started in the early twentieth century with the aim of setting up indigenous local Chinese churches as separate and independent of Western missionary control and influence. The movement involved a strong nationalist sentiment determined on saving 'China' as its central theme. Most major Chinese Christian leaders at the time made explicit their intention that the Chinese church should completely disengage from Western missionaries. For instance, the founder of the 'Little Flock' movement, Watchman Nee, promoted an anti-missionary, anti-clerical, anti-institutional movement which publicly rejected Western missionary-based denominations. Based on their unpleasant experiences of working with them, some Christian leaders took a strongly antagonistic view of missionaries. An example of this was John Sung Shang Chieh, an influential evangelist and a leading figure in the revival movement in China and Southeast Asia during the 1920s and 1930s. In his diary, he expressed his strong dissatisfaction with Western missionaries, who he referred to as *xi ren* (Westerners) or *xi jiaoshi* (Western missionary). 'The financial power of the Chinese church [at that time] has been taken by the hand of *xi jiaoshi*. Those who don't listen to them will be dismissed ... regardless of right or wrong. All instructions given by *xi jiaoshi* have to be followed. Thinking of these, [I am] in tears with deep sadness for Chinese preachers' (Song 1995: Chapter 3 (12)). Sung especially disliked the

relative luxury or comfortable lifestyle of Western missionaries, which strongly contrasted with the wretched condition of the mass of their poor Chinese followers. He regarded them as lacking a ‘sacrificing spirit’: ‘the hospitals, schools and churches founded by *xi ren* were the biggest obstacle to church revival’ (Song 1995: Chapter 3(12)). Like the communitarian church of the Jesus Family founded by Jing Dianying, Sung Shang Chieh had the same idea of ‘building an evangelizing village with all preachers living together like a big family. [We] cultivate and farm and preach all together.’ One of the reasons for wishing to build such a Christian utopia was to separate it completely from Western missionaries. Besides, he understood that his calling was indeed to convert the Chinese. On his return to China after a study trip to the USA, he saw Chinese people smoking opium and engaged in gambling. He heard a foreigner remark that ‘a Chinese is no better than a dog’. He recorded the effect this had on him: ‘I have made the decision that I will preach in China even unto death, as long as my countrymen will be saved. I am willing to die for them’ (Song 1995: Chapter 2). Thus, Sung’s object of evangelizing was to save the Chinese through Christian belief. It was his patriotic love for his countrymen that fired this nationalist feeling.

As Dunch states, ‘[t]he 1911 revolution and the Protestant influence in the new Republic sparked great optimism. ... Protestants expressed a confident hope that China would soon also become a Christian nation’ (Dunch 2001: xix). Although the hope was not realized, their love for China as a nation was a central concern of Chinese Protestants that led them to abandon Chinese popular religion, resist ‘Western invasion’ and become actively involved in the revolutionary movement before 1949.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the Emergence of the House Church (1949–1979)

On taking power at the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party needed to unite religious groups, democratic parties and ethnic minorities in support of the new

government, while also requiring the means and time to regulate religion. Chinese Protestant church leaders had both fears and hopes for the newly established Chinese nation and Communist Party. On the one hand, like the vast Chinese population, Christians were pleased with the unification of China and optimistic about the new government, especially in the early 1950s, when it still supported 'religious freedom'. On the other hand, aware that Communism was ideologically atheist, they were worried that the clergy might be persecuted and the churches closed as had happened in the Soviet Union. Wu Yaozong, a Protestant Christian leader, countered this threat by visiting many churches in various cities in 1950 and proposing to reform them by eliminating Western imperialist influence through self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. Thus came into being the 'Three-Self Patriotic Movement'. As its name suggests, patriotism was central to the movement. However, the patriotic sentiment shifted its focus from a spiritual concern to 'save China' to a focus on the anti-imperialist revolution and nationalist loyalty to the Communist government. While the former asked an open-ended question resolvable through internal interrogation of beliefs and ideology, the latter left no other alternative but to support and obey the new Communist government. Besides, Wu Yaozong had been in favour of Communism since the 1930s; rather than viewing the two movements as contradicting each other, he believed that Christianity and Communism had 99% in common (Wu 2010). He nevertheless held that major social conflict was caused by capitalism as instituted by the Chinese Nationalist Party, so in 1951 he refused to work for it. Wu's son Wu Zongsu published an article entitled 'While the falling flowers pine for love, the heartless brook babbles on'. The message in these words was that the fact that his father was actively involving himself in the Three-Self movement was derived from his theological understanding, particularly his deep patriotic and then nationalist sentiments. This involvement was expressed in the words 'falling flowers pine for love'. However, his efforts did not win the trust of the government, which persecuted the Christian church, referred to as the 'heartless brook babbles'. It seems that in the early 1950s, patriotism was not only the driving force for Wu Yaozong founding the Three-Self movement, it also drove many Christians to follow him and sign 'the Christian Manifesto'² declaring that Christian churches should follow and obey the

new government. It was a love of China that led the vast Chinese population, including many Christians, to believe deeply that only the Communist Party could save China, which gave them great expectations and hope in the new Communist government.

Although the Three-Self movement politically mobilized many Christians, Wang Mingdao, the leading figure in the indigenous Chinese Christian church since the 1930s, and some other Christians refused to join the Three-Self Church. The reason behind their refusal was originally not political but theological: most of the founding members of the Three-Self movement were 'theological modernists' opposed to the fundamentalist thinking of the new indigenous church. Wang (1997: 53) claimed: 'I totally cannot join the Three-Self movement, because some people among them don't even believe in God. How could I be with them?' In 1955, he published an essay in the journal *Spiritual Food Quarterly* (*Ling shi jikan*) entitled 'It's for our faith' (*women shi wei le xinyang*), in which he sharply criticized modernist self-proclaimed Christians as '*bu xin pai* (an unbelieving faction)'; in his view, they did not believe in fundamental Christian doctrine. It was obviously unacceptable for Wang to follow a '*bu xin pai*'-led movement. He claimed, 'The Three-Self movement, being led by people against God, is in effect a tactic to eliminate Christianity from the internal church' (Wang 1997: 39). That said, we should note that the conflict between modernist and fundamentalist Christianity in China actually dates from the 1930s, long before the Three-Self movement. Wang Mingdao himself first used the term *bu xin pai* in 1929 in his essay entitled 'How long will you be double-minded' (Li 2003) and followed it with a series of essays criticizing the modernists in the 1930s.³

The theological differences thus developed into a political conflict between the pro-government Three-Self Church and non-cooperating Christian groups. The latter were the predecessor of the House Churches, with Wang Mingdao being called the 'Dean of the House Churches' (Harvey 2002). Wang Mingdao believed that the Church's most important task was to evangelize rather than engage in social reform, since 'Men cannot build a heaven by themselves'.⁴ He regarded himself as the 'Jeremiah of China' whose divine mission was to be 'a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze wall against the whole land' (Lin 1982). Jeremiah was also known as the 'weeping prophet'⁵ for his absolute patriotism and

deep love of Israel and the Jewish people. Because of his love for his nation, he wept at the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Holy Temple while condemning the sins of the people of Israel. Like Jeremiah, Wang Mingdao's love of China was evident in his devotion to converting Chinese to Christianity rather than relying on any secular political power. The reason for his non-reliance was his deep disappointment with what he saw as a totally corrupt society and associated institutions, including the Communist government. His political views influenced many Christians in the House Church movement who have long been apolitical.

The theological differences between the Three-Self and House Church movements and their opposed theological approaches to engaging with society resulted in a deep division between them over how to interact with the Communist government. For Fundamentalist or House Church leaders, individual salvation is the only way to save the society, while modernist, Three-Self leaders believe a good society will produce good individuals. Therefore, while Three-Self church leaders tend to be actively involved in social work, political reform and aim to change society, early House Church leaders keep their distance from politics and focus on evangelization and the transformation of one's life through Christian faith. The former are often keen to cooperate with the government; in contrast, the latter resist any form of collaboration with the government, to which they are not only religiously but also politically opposed while stopping short of political confrontation. Moreover, the Modernist, Three-Self Church's theological emphasis on love and unity is seen as more compatible with the state's discourse on national unification and the construction of a harmonious society, while the Fundamentalist House Church movement emphasizes a separation between God, the Church and His people, and a world portrayed as being ruled by Satan.

Despite their opposed approaches and different theological understanding, both churches share a primary concern to care for China and the Chinese people, just as both, together with the Chinese Communist Party, opposed Western imperialism in the early 1950s. However, the conflict between the Three-Self Church and House Church movement since then has intensified as an internal division within the Christian church. It has resulted in two types of Protestant church in China—the government-registered Three-Self Church and the unregistered House

Churches. Historically, we can see that it was not the intention of the House Church group to oppose the Communist government directly but to seek autonomy and independence from any government control, including the Three-Self Church, the official China Christian Council and the Bureau of Religion. Although the Chinese Communist government has tolerated the existence of the House Churches to some extent, it sees their independence as a challenge to the principle of government control. House Church leaders are aware of their semi-illegal status and their political experience of surveillance, suppression of their activities and occasional persecution rather than toleration and religious freedom. Generally speaking, however, most House Churches aim to evangelize rather than challenge government. This situation helps us understand the House Church group's later development of a wish to minister to and missionize among Muslims, for, in attempting to reduce the presence of Islam, they are sharing an aim of state-promoted nationalism.

Communism, Patriotism and Christianity (1980–2000)

Chinese Protestant Christianity has grown surprisingly exponentially in the last few decades (Start and Wang 2015; Yang 2012, 2016; see also note 1). Along with China's recent political and economic global expansion, the powerful development of Chinese Christianity has led to the creation of its own global network in which personnel and financial resources flow extensively, and religious knowledge and values are disseminated rapidly. As the country rapidly urbanized, mass conversions started in rural areas in the 1980s. From the 1990s onwards, conversion also spread to the cities (Fulton 2015; Kang 2016; Leung 1999; Huang 2014). The rural Christian church has continued the Chinese fundamentalist tradition of focusing on suffering, repentance, individual salvation and miracles of healing and exorcism in Chinese villages. Although Christians in villages prioritize kindness and reliability in social interaction, they have limited education, and their rural status marginalizes them politically. The distinction between the Three-Self Church and the

House Churches is consequently blurred in rural areas (Kang 2016). Despite their distance from politics, House Church adherents' deep patriotic love for China is vividly evident in the song 'China's five o'clock in the morning', composed by a Chinese Christian peasant, Xiaomin.⁶ This lyric clearly shows the Chinese Christians' affection for China and their concern for its well-being and protection.

*China's five o'clock in the morning, rising [to] the sound of prayer.
 May God bring peace and prosperity, unifying and triumphant,
 China's five o'clock in the morning, rising [to] the sound of worship.
 Everyone gives sincere love and one's whole heart for China.
 China's five o'clock in the morning, rising [to] the sound of prayer.
 Leap over thousands of mountains and rivers, melt cold hearts.
 Never have bonds and never have wars,
 May [God] bless China to have a harvest again by having changed fate.*

Before the 1990s, therefore, the revival of Christianity was mainly a rural phenomenon. For instance, there was no Christian group or leading figure involved in the urban June the Fourth students' movement of 1989. Having lost faith and hope in the Communist government, many students and intellectuals attempted to find an alternative belief system or ideology. This may explain the subsequent mass conversions in urban China, including of former leaders of the June the Fourth students' movement and the emergence of so-called cultural Christians among Chinese intellectuals. The year 1989 is perhaps the turning point when the belief in Communism ideology was uprooted among many if not most young Chinese, who instead started either focusing on economic pursuits or turning to other belief systems. Communism as an ideology had lost its power to attract and mobilize the Chinese people.

As more urban churches consisting of university-educated students and middle-class professionals had been established since the late 1990s, the main distinction between the House Church and Three-Self Church in cities has shifted from a purely theological difference to one concerning the question of registration. The Three-Self Church and House Church have in reality been working completely separately and, with the passing of the early generation of House Church founders, the previously

hostile attitude has gradually disappeared. The Three-Self Church is no longer the enemy of the House Church. In fact, as I observed during my fieldwork, in addition to the state-sanctioned Three-Self Church, there are now three types of Chinese Christian groups operating, each with its own nationalist expression and mode of political and religious opposition.

1. House Church Christians with an evangelizing mandate act very cautiously with regard to the government and do not oppose or challenge the state's authority. They respect the Communist government as God-given and therefore as legitimate. Their focus is on Christian ministry inside and outside China, the safety of the Church and its followers being their priority, which it protects by conforming to central and local government rules and regulations. As shown in the next section, this group of Christians may not believe in Communism, but it does accept the Communist Party as the political organization governing China. As such this group refrains from taking an antagonistic position to the government. Ironically, despite being subject to strict government control and surveillance, it welcomes the state's nationalist stance, as is evident in their support of the House Churches' territorial 'back to Jerusalem' missionary movement, which has generated similarly strong nationalist sentiments among Chinese Protestants.
2. House Church leaders and followers with a political mandate, such as Pastor Wang Yi⁷ and the Beijing Shouwang Church, take a more active, sometimes provocative stance towards government. They regard themselves as 'the city on the hill' and 'the light on the stand' that should not be hidden. Their direct conflict with the state often starts when their religious activities are banned, and the government curtails the pursuit of religious freedom and protective legal arrangements. Significantly, since some of the church leaders in this group—for instance, Wang Yi—have an educational background in law, they try to change society through reform of the legal system. Despite being the object of government criticism and attack, most in this Christian group do not aim to overthrow the Communist regime but seek rather to implement social reforms creating more 'healthy' political and legal institutions, especially regarding the regulation of religion. However, their stance is not supported by most House Church

leaders, perpetually worried about government crackdowns. In other words, this activist group is a small minority of the wider House Church membership. However, it attracts considerable attention in the international media.

3. Apart from the two afore-discussed groups, a third, broader group consisting of overseas Chinese Christians in the USA and churches in Hong Kong and Taiwan is explicitly antagonistic towards the Communist Party. Many leaders of the June the Fourth students' movement have converted to Christianity in the USA over the last thirty years. Some of them, such as Zhang Boli, Xiong Yan and Yuan Zhiming, became influential pastors.⁸ Pastor Yuan Zhiming founded the 'China Soul for Christ Foundation' and made a series of historical documentaries (from 2000 onwards) about China from a Christian perspective. One example of this is 'China's confession', a reference to Shenzhou, a poetic name for China translated as 'Divine Land'. In 2002, Fu Xiqiu founded an international non-profit Christian human-rights organization, 'China Aid', which aims to promote religious freedom in China by exposing abuses and encouraging the abused to defend their faith and freedom.⁹ This Christian group is critical of the Chinese Communist government and believes that only through conversion to Christianity will 'democracy and freedom' be achieved in China. According to Zhang Boli, 'Now we are evangelizing the gospel and spreading the Christian message. As soon as one believes in the Lord, he/she definitely will no longer believe in Communism.'¹⁰

Although the three groups have different political and religious agendas, they are united under the patriotic umbrella and name of 'China'. On 7 December 2008, 'The Consensus in San Francisco' organized a 'Gospel for China' conference, which was attended by more than 300 mainland and overseas Chinese pastors and preachers comprising the three groups. The Consensus contains a strong patriotic sentiment shading into Chinese nationalism, with a focus entirely on China and the Chinese people. The starting point of the Consensus is to delineate Chinese identity, despite the fact that many of its participants have lived in the USA or other countries for many years. 'We are a group of Christians from China gathering in San Francisco and participating in a

meeting witnessed by a generation.’ The text claims that ‘China is undergoing an unprecedented radical transformation’ which is ‘different from the past three thousand years. It is a transformation of the cross.’ A prayer for Chinese political authority is included in the hope that the government will transform society into one of harmony and peace. The Consensus ends with a further focus on the Chinese people: ‘We pray, may God be kind to the Chinese, that they prosper, that the Chinese people become the blessing of all humanity.’¹¹

The Consensus has been criticized by some Christians, who claim that ‘patriotism’ was the leading theme of the entire conference. ‘Patriotism has obsessed the heart of Chinese Christians. Loving the country has surpassed love of the Lord. Therefore, one cannot see the Lord for China’ (Xiaoguang 2011). Regardless of its correctness or otherwise, the strong patriotism manifested in the Consensus evidently inspired the love of many Chinese Christians for China.

It might not be a coincidence that the Consensus was agreed in 2008, right after the Beijing Olympic Games, when patriotism reached its highest point in China since 1989. Chinese Christians, especially the former leaders of student movements abroad, might then have hoped that the Chinese government would carry out political reforms. Perhaps on the back of this patriotism, state-promoted nationalism has continued to increase over the last ten years. But political reform has become if anything even less likely. Ironically, the global and domestic expansion of Chinese political and economic power has unintentionally reinforced and supported the missionary aims and movements of Chinese Christians.

So far, the chapter has illustrated the changeable features of a nationalism that is embedded in and delineates the major phases in the development of the Chinese Protestant churches and their relations with politics.

In the section that follows, I focus on recent the missionary ambition to convert Muslims to Christianity, an ambition reinforced by the churches’ strong nationalist emphasis on the role of China and ethnic Chinese in combatting the alleged rise of Islam.

Chinese Missionary Movement and Nationalism (2000–Present)

During the last two decades, Chinese Protestant Christian House Churches have embarked on a great and widespread mission to convert Muslims to Christianity. It has become the sacred calling of Chinese Christians to undertake the ‘great mission’ of evangelizing among peoples who are the most difficult to reach and persuade. It is believed that Jesus will come again once the gospel is sent back to Jerusalem. The movement has been given the name ‘Back to Jerusalem’, which means proselytizing from China to Israel and the Middle East, thus covering an area where the three religions of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism have their strongholds (Hattaway 2003: xii). Chinese Christians, who share the divine mandate of Christian Zionism in the US (Durbin 2019), believe that returning the gospel back to Jerusalem is the sign of the end of time and of Jesus’ second coming. They thus act upon the mission by actively involving themselves in missionary work among Muslims. The theological continuity between American and Chinese Christians in linking the end of time with returning the gospel to Jerusalem and Jews may be transmitted through the work of Korean missionaries who impart theological education to Chinese Christians.

It is believed that Chinese Christians have certain advantages in seeking to convert Muslims. First, because of their own experience of working underground in China, they can make contact with Muslims surreptitiously, hidden from the government’s political surveillance. Second, since the sheer number of Chinese equals the global Muslim population, it is believed that they are numerically better able than other nationalities to make contact with the latter. Third, in comparison to the West China’s relations with Muslim countries are generally better, and Christians believe it is less likely that Chinese missionary work will be targeted or banned. This reasoning may be over-optimistic, but it sustains the missionary zeal. Converting Muslims is regarded as Chinese Christians’ ‘burden’. For instance, every year the Chinese church holds thirty days of prayer for Muslims during Ramadan and organizes prayers alongside the Silk Road. Some WeChat¹² prayer groups have been set up to disseminate

news or reports of missionaries in Islamic countries such as Pakistan. A major Chinese Christian missionary meeting has reportedly planned to train and send out 30,000 Chinese missionaries by 2030. Moreover, Chinese House Churches and their missionary movement have been greatly influenced by the Korean Church, including their missionary tactics. While visiting a Korean church with a Chinese House Church delegation in 2010, for the first time I heard a Korean pastor expressing the view that the Korean church was ‘the match that lit the torch’ of Chinese Christianity, which would ‘bring light’ to Muslim areas in China and to Muslim countries in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The recent mission movement is active largely among the Chinese House Churches with an evangelization mandate and has established a huge network, both nationally and internationally. It has also become financially strong enough to support and send missionaries at a time of China’s rise both economically and politically. Most House Church leaders involved in the missionary work keep a low profile and stay underground. As noted earlier, they do not oppose the authorities and keep their distance from the government. This Christian group has sent missionaries to work in selected villages of Xinjiang, Ningxia and other Muslim-majority areas. While doing missionary work, they often run small businesses. Their working assumption is that doing business or teaching always provides good protection for Christians in early missionary work. Investing in companies or farms in Muslim areas is another common strategy for evangelizing and at the same time making contact with the local people by providing them with more job opportunities. Like Wenzhou Boss Christians (Cao 2011, 2012), the recent missionary movement is closely linked to business operations, including Chinese economic expansion to neighbouring countries, as well as African and Islamic countries in the Middle East and East Asia. Some churches have promoted a training programme called ‘business for the mission’.

As Brandner (2009: 322) points out, domestically the movement focuses on ethnic Chinese. The vision of converting Muslims is regarded as the ‘special and most difficult inheritance to the people in China’. It has given meaning to the suffering endured by the Chinese people over the last hundred years and provided a new understanding of Chinese history. In particular, China’s recent rise politically and economically is seen

to have a spiritual purpose (on which, see below). The Chinese have become the 'chosen people' entrusted with the task of fulfilling God's master plan of salvation, which was given first to Israel, then successively to Rome, Europe and North America. The Chinese Christian groups believe that earlier Christian nations, such as those of Europe and even America, have lost their Christian tradition and values. They attribute this loss to the prevailing environment of theological liberalism, political correctness and secularism. For Chinese Christians, God's hand has left those people, and now He blesses China. Thus, it is China's turn to save the entirety of humanity by converting the most difficult obstacle in the history of the Christian mission, that is, Muslims.

Moreover, the missionary movement seems to be driven by the spirit of 'martyrdom'. In June 2017, two Chinese citizens were killed by ISIS in Pakistan. The Chinese state-controlled newspaper *Global Times* blamed this on Korean missionary groups recruiting young Chinese to carry out missionary work in dangerous places, including the Middle East. The news drew enormous public attention in China. There had also been a lot of debate among Chinese Christians about whether young Chinese Christians should do missionary work in such dangerous places. However, asking individual Christians about this in various churches in China, I was often told that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'. 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12:24). Becoming a 'martyr' is honourable and highly regarded. To die for Jesus and His church is deemed to be God's special grace, which only a few people could ever acquire. As shown in a Chinese popular Christian song, 'Unless a seed', scarifying one's life like a dying seed for the sake of the Christian ministry is desirable; therefore it generates great passion among Chinese Christians to go on missions to the world's most dangerous places. It may explain why two young Christians were willing to be sent to such a dangerous place and eventually die there, as the lyric of 'Unless a seed' shows:

*Unless a seed consents to fall into the field,
Though all time can pass in waiting,
The seed remains alone;
If it consents to be used up, its life to yield*

*For the new life it's creating,
Soon a harvest is grown!
It's my desire, Lord, I desire,
To be a seed that falls into the field,
Giving up my life to live anew!
It's my desire, Lord, I desire:
All of my rights and my pride, I will yield
To obey Your word and follow You.*

Moreover, unlike the antagonism felt towards Western missionaries in the 1950s, Chinese House Church Christians have adopted a positive and affirmative view of them since 2000. Western missionaries have become role model among Chinese Christians by being prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the gospel. I am often told that 'Chinese Christians are indebted to Western missionaries for the Gospel'. In 2016, Pastor Yuan Zhiming and the China Soul for Christ Foundation produced a three-episode historical documentary series, *Missionary: A Historical Study of Gospel in China*, which has been widely disseminated among Chinese Christians. In the documentary, Western missionaries are greatly praised for their contribution to the Chinese Church, education, health and medical care, women's liberation, charities and so on. By acknowledging the contribution and sacrifice of Western missionaries, Chinese Christians are empowered to follow them and to enter foreign lands for the sake of the gospel. It is thus now China's turn to repay the debt of the gospel by sacrificing their lives carrying out missionary work in dangerous places.

China's Rise as God's Blessing

In many ways, the revival and transformation of Christian churches is coterminous with China's social and political transformation over the last three decades. Chinese Christians point to the apparent fact that every major policy change in China has unintentionally led to the major growth and transformation of Christian churches in China in the following respects:

- The policy of opening up the country from 1979 onwards resulted in greater mobility for Christians, the expansion of the Christian ministry in China and the growth of rural churches.
- The policy of rapid urbanization from the 1990s resulted in educated young people converting to Christianity and contributing to the growth of the urban church, with a focus on theology as a discipline, the professionalization of church leaders and rational discussions taking the place of emotional appeals.
- Economic growth from the 2000s led to the urban churches acquiring wealth and being able to support various training programmes and missionary work.
- An easing of travel restrictions and the rise of tourism in and from China facilitated missionary work outside China.

Cao Nanlai vividly shows how spiritual nationalism as an ‘alternative form of nationalism’ (2012: 28) has emerged among Wenzhou Christian businessmen who passionately promote ‘God’s China vision (*Zhong guo yi xiang*)’ by integrating the Christian faith into China’s political and economic development. It is believed that the rise of China has occurred not only in the economic and political sphere but also ‘in the spiritual realm and [that China] will transform itself from a missionary-receiving country to a missionary-sending one’ (Cao 2012: 27).

The most recent example of the rise of China’s political influence internationally is the ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative, which allowed Chinese Christians to further their great mission of converting Muslims from about 2010 onwards. In his book *Back to Jerusalem*, Hattaway (2003) notes that Jerusalem and China were connected through the Silk Road 2000 years ago. Ten years after the publication of Hattaway’s book, in 2013, the Chinese government initiated its ‘Belt and Road’ policy with the explicit objective of expanding trade and increasing China’s political power and influence. Chinese Christians claim that this is a sign that God has opened the door for Chinese churches to enter Islamic countries through implementation of this trade policy. China’s model of state-led global expansion is not only opening the most difficult door for Chinese Christians and unblocking the hardest routes into regions where the

gospel has not yet reached, it also helps legitimize Christian missionary identity through trade and work in the receiving countries.

Thus, for Chinese Christians, God's hand is behind China's rise, which is therefore based entirely on the Christian faith. The Chinese Communist government and its top leaders have become an instrument of God's work and of support for the Chinese mission, including God's master plan for China to convert the world's Muslims. This is all regarded as evidence of God's great sovereign plan to facilitate the Back to Jerusalem mission.

Constructing (a New?) Otherness

Since the July 2009 riots in Urumqi, and especially after the 2014 attack in Kunming, a general, nationwide distrust of Islam has grown up among non-Muslim Chinese.¹³ This is evident on media WeChat, where Muslims are seen as a potential threat to national security and are often linked to terrorism. House Church Christians express distrust of Islam in the same way as non-Christian Chinese do. Anti-Muslim sentiment has grown and become prevalent among those Christians who are worried about the expansionary tendency of the 'Lü hua 绿化', or Islamization of the world, especially in Europe, and potentially in China as well after the 'One Belt One Road' policy has been implemented.

I follow Gottschalk and Greenberg's basic definition of 'Islamophobia' as 'social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures' (2007: 5). While the concept is widely used and debated among Western intellectuals and media, it is discussed less in China. Fear of Islam and Muslim culture is nevertheless evident among Han Chinese, though with differences. Ahmad points out that 'Islamophobia is indeed constitutive of western liberalism', for Islam is seen as 'a betrayal of the west's liberalism' (Ahmad 2013: 248). While Western Islamophobia thus largely arises out of an ideological conflict with Western liberalism, Chinese Islamophobia rests on a concern for the Chinese state's sovereignty and unity. While the US and European countries are opposed to the political authoritarianism of Muslim-majority countries, the Chinese state finds common ground with them and may collaborate with them in its own ideological conflicts

with the West. Moreover, Western (European and American) Islamophobia is a fear, first, of Muslim jihadist physical violence and, second, of being overwhelmed by Muslim migration, lifestyles and ideology. The Chinese state also fears violence, such as that committed by Muslim separatists attacking Chinese territorial sovereignty and thereby questioning the authority of the Communist Party. An example is the physical attacks on Han Chinese by Uygur separatists in Xinjiang, whose goal is to establish a separate state of East-Turkestan that would be independent of China. However, Western and Chinese Islamophobia both share the same concern for the security of the nation state. As Ahmad rightly points out, the concept of “nation-state as home” ought to be pivotal to our understanding of the hostility to and fear of Muslims’ (2013: 37).

Unlike the Chinese state, however, Chinese Christians’ Islamophobia is more a fear that people will convert to Islam instead of Christianity. It is not so much fear of Muslim jihadist violence (which is secondary) that exercises them, but more of a loss of Christian religious followings in China, its bordering countries and beyond. Therefore, it is argued that Christians must urgently carry out missionary work to prevent the alleged global Islamization, for instance, of France and England. An essay entitled ‘Realizing the true face of Islam’, written by a Christian, drew an analogy between ‘the Muslim and the wolf in sheep’s clothing’. The author claims that ‘in fact, if we read carefully the Islamic doctrine, one realizes that every Muslim is an extremist, unless he/she has been secularized or is not faithful’. Chinese Christians often take a positive view of the government’s tight control over the Muslim Uygur, as it is resulting in a decline in their religious activities and identity. They claim that this is therefore the perfect time to convert the Uygur to Christianity.

Moreover, most Han Chinese, including Christians, take a negative view of refugees from Islamic countries and point to the supposedly adverse effects of Angela Merkel’s refugee policy to allow a massive number of Islamic refugees into Germany. Interestingly, German far-right political views have been translated into Chinese and spread via WeChat and the internet. For instance, an article on ‘the rapid rising of Neo-Nazism in Europe: the ghost of Hitler is gradually reviving’ has recently been widely disseminated on WeChat and other Chinese websites.¹⁴ Starting with the introduction of Thilo Sarrazin’s recently published book

Hostile Takeover: How Islam Impairs Progress and Threatens Society, the article depicts terrifying scenes of an Islamized Europe in which Muslims are rapidly replacing white Europeans and Christianity will disappear in the near future because of the prevalence of political correctness. The reason behind the rise of Neo-Nazism, the popularity of Trump and the emergence of Populism is that ‘people need a way out and a saviour who does what people don’t dare to do’. This view is strongly supported by Chinese Christians, who often circulate similar messages within their WeChat groups and networks, with Western society often being portrayed as secular and losing its Christian values. Because of ‘political correctness’ and the encouragement of (religious) pluralism, tolerance and freedom, specific biblical values have been undermined. Fuelling the fear of Islam is the apparently rapid growth of global Islam through the migration of Muslims, including refugees, to European countries.

Despite similar antagonism towards Islam by both Chinese Christians and the Han Chinese population, they differ in terms of their actions. While most Chinese generally rely on the Communist government to take action in dealing with Muslims, Chinese Christians are actively involved in the missionary movement to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Conclusion

The distinction between nationalism and patriotism is often unclear (Backhouse 2013; Brubaker 2004). Some scholars differentiate a person’s relationship with their ‘country’ from their relationship with their ‘nation’ (Vincent 2002). The former is seen as ‘patriotism’ based on pure love and affection for one’s country, sometimes embedded in the concept of a benign state. ‘Nationalism’, conversely, presupposes more than love but also loyalty to a particular nation, to be defended against or sometimes imposed on other nations through state organization. This gloss portrays patriotism as an inclusive, positive and ideologically ‘pure’ sentiment that is generally unconcerned with foreign subjugation. But both concepts are essentially similar in appealing for legitimacy on the basis of common language(s), history and culture (Backhouse 2013: 5), differing only in how these common elements are used in relation to other countries or

nations. The well-known German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was regarded as a staunch Christian patriot for his opposition to Nazi nationalism. He was killed by the Nazis at the end of World War II. He had expressed his patriotism passionately in the language of land, tradition and culture, as did the Nazis, who did not, however, couch their nationalist language in the idiom of Christianity. This blurring of nationalism and patriotism also applies to China, especially in the context of Christianity. I see patriotism basically as 'love of and devotion to one's country', referring not necessarily to a sovereign state but sometimes to a socio-cultural, territorially defined region. A patriotic sentiment celebrates the customs and values (culture) of a region. We can think of it as primarily an inward-looking sentiment. However, if forced to defend its values against outside threats and forces, patriotism may move in the direction of 'nationalism'. Nationalism, as the term suggests, refers to a sentiment and sometimes actions, which exalt or pitch one nation over and against other nations. It is more exclusionary than patriotism and looks out beyond itself for comparisons with other nations and nationalities. Under conditions of rivalry and conflict between nation states, however, nationalism may harness patriotic sentiments and use them to express such competitiveness.

Thus, underlying the Chinese government's emphasis on inclusive patriotism and its avoidance of blatant nationalism, the focus remains on 'Love the Country, Love the Party'. This slogan appeals to both inclusive patriotism and communist political affiliation. Moreover, since Xi Jinping came to power, the Chinese government has vigorously conducted the propaganda of 'Patriotism Education (*ai guo zhu yi jiao yu*)', which promotes the Chinese Communist Party's achievements and contribution to the country's efflorescence. The slogans 'The People have faith; the country has strength; the nation has hope' and 'Remain true to the original [communist] aspiration and keep our mission firmly in mind' prevail everywhere in China. However, in not following this government propaganda, Chinese Christians' sentiments of nationalism and patriotism do not extend to the love of the Communist Party. They do share in the government's rhetoric of China as a proud, resourceful and beautiful land with a long history and abundant culture, hoping for the revival and flourishing of the great Chinese nation, including its tradition of repelling external threats by excluding outsiders, such as, formerly, the agents

of Western imperialism and now those seeking to expand radical Islamism. The key difference is that, while the core of nationalism and patriotism promoted by current Chinese political authority is Communist ideology and the glory of the CCP, Chinese Christians have as their core interpretations of patriotism-cum-nationalism drawn from the Bible and Christian doctrine. In regarding China's global rise as the work of God and as benefitting their own expansionary missionary ambitions, as well as in sharing a common antipathy towards Islam, the theological stance of Chinese House Church Christians' in effect tacitly supports the Communist Party and the Chinese state. The theological and political thus inadvertently merge.

Notes

1. As the title suggests, the chapter focuses on Protestant Christianity. Catholicism has a longer history in China than Protestantism. Though remote from the Vatican, it is still controlled by and dependent on the Vatican. Catholicism's limited family and community bases in China have resulted in its slow growth compared with Protestantism, which has flourished by independently meeting the challenges of the country's rapid urbanization in the last three decades. Demographically, the proportion of Catholics in the Chinese population has remained under 1% since 1949, when their number stood at 3 million. In contrast, the percentage of Protestants has increased from less than 0.2% (800,000) in 1949 to currently about 4.3% (60 million). See Madsen (2020: 439).
2. 'Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China', commonly known as 'The Christian Manifesto' or 'The Three-Self Manifesto', was published in 1950 (Tze Ming Ng 2012: 174).
3. See the essay 'It is for our faith' <http://www.jonahome.net/files/wmd/wmd9/chapter03.html>.
4. Wang Mingdao in *Spiritual Food Quarterly* (*Ling shi jikan*), issue 17.
5. Jeremiah was the prophet of Israel and the author of the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations. He proclaimed many prophecies of the God of Israel, including Jerusalem's destruction from 626 BC to 587 BC. His ministry was unwelcome and rejected by the people, and he was therefore persecuted.

6. Without any theological or musical education, Lü Xiaomin has composed many Christian songs 'through the work of the holy spirit'. Her works are widely known and extremely popular not only on the mainland but also in Taiwan and among overseas Chinese. In 2016, Canaan Hymns (Jianan shi xuan) published 1682 songs composed by her (Jianan shi xuan 2001).
7. Wang Yi was a public intellectual in China and the pastor of a House Church, the Early Rain Covenant Church, in Chengdu. He and over a hundred church members were detained in December 2018 because of his provocative attitude towards the government regarding the June the Fourth students' movement and religious freedom.
8. See the article 'Where are the leaders of the June Fourth Democratic Movement now? 民运领袖六四叱咤风云, 今在何方.', <https://www.voachinese.com/a/a-21-w2009-06-03-voa69-61401672/1031288.html> published on 03.06.2009. Accessed on 14.05.2019.
9. See the website of the ChinaAid organization. <https://www.chinaaid.org/>.
10. See the article in footnote 8.
11. See <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%97%A7%E9%87%91%E5%B1%B1%E5%85%B1%E8%AF%86> accessed on 16.05.2019.
12. WeChat (Chinese Weixin) is a multifunction mobile app which is the most popular social media platform, with vast numbers of active Chinese users. Because of its all-in-one multifunctional feature, WeChat is called a 'Super app' that can be used to send various types of messages (text or voice messages, pictures or videos), payments and broadcast messaging similar to Western Twitter and Facebook.
13. The tensions leading to violence in Xinjiang province resulted from some Uygur seeking a separate state against the wishes of the Chinese state. For instance, on 1 March 2014, a group of Uyghur separatists attacked passengers with knives at Kunming railway station, with the loss of 31 civilian lives and injuries to 140, while on 5 July 2009, according to the state's official report of 18 July, a series of violent riots broke out in the provincial capital Urumqi in which a thousand Uyghur allegedly targeted Han Chinese, killing 197 and injuring 1721. The state justifies its so-called correction centres as a necessary response to the violence.
14. See <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-worldlook-1862334-1.shtml> accessed on 20.05.2019 and http://k.sina.com.cn/article_5471517814_14620bc7601900gwb3.html?from=mil accessed on 20.05.2019.

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