

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC)

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Chinese Catholicism called **Tianzhu Jiao** has a long and complicated history. Christianity has existed in China in various forms since at least the Tang Dynasty in the eighth century A.D.

### A) Historical Background

#### A1) Yuan (1271-1368) Dynasty

- ❖ Medieval Roman Catholic Missions in China
- ❖ European Roman Catholic missionary priests first entered China in the 13th century.
- ❖ In 1294 Italian Franciscan priest John of Montecorvino arrived in Beijing.
- ❖ In 1299 he built a church and in 1305 a second opposite the imperial palace.
- ❖ He studied Chinese and translated the New Testament and the Psalms.
- ❖ By 1300, converts range from 6,000 to 30,000.

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- ❖ In 1307 Pope Clement V sent Franciscan bishops to consecrate Fr. John as Archbishop of Beijing.
- ❖ The three who survived the journey did so in 1308
- ❖ They succeeded each other as bishops of Zaiton which Bishop John had established.
- ❖ In 1312 three more Franciscan bishops arrived from Rome to aid Bishop John until his death in 1328.
- ❖ Some success during the rule of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, but ultimately shrunk.
- ❖ Six centuries later, Bishop John's attempt at the translation of the Bible inspired the Venerable Gabriele Allegra to go to China.
- ❖ In 1968, he completed the Chinese translation of the Bible.

## A2) Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties

- ❖ Jesuit China missions
- ❖ During the Catholic Reformation's explosion of missionary efforts particularly in Asia, Jesuit and other Roman Catholic missionaries attempted to enter China but they had mixed success at first.
- ❖ Eventually have a strong impact, in inter-cultural scientific and artistic exchanges, among the upper classes of China and the imperial court.
- ❖ In 1601 Matteo Ricci established permanent missions.
- ❖ The Emperor and the Chinese authorities were opened to learn western technology.
- ❖ Ricci reconciled Christianity with the Classic Confucian, but hostile Taoism and Buddhism.
- ❖ Ricci died in 1610.
- ❖ The Jesuit mission became an important part of the Imperial civil service, right into the eighteenth century.

- ❖ In 1644 a German Jesuit, Adam Schall von Bell, was appointed Director of the Board of Astronomy.
- ❖ Jesuits were also given posts as mechanics, musicians, painters, instrument makers, and in other areas which required a degree of technical expertise.
- ❖ The Jesuits' accommodation of Confucianism was led to conflict with the Dominican friars.

## B) People's Republic of China

- ❖ Pope Pius XII and the Church in China
- ❖ For centuries, access to the people of China was difficult for the Catholic Church.
- ❖ As a Church, not recognize local Confucian customs of honoring deceased family members.
- ❖ To the Chinese, this was an ancient ritual, to the Vatican, it was Catholic dogma.
- ❖ As a result, the Church made little progress in China.
- ❖ Within month of his election, Pope Pius XII issued a dramatic change in policies.
- ❖ On December 8, 1939, the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of Faith issued at request of Pius XII new instruction, by which Chinese customs were no longer considered superstitious, but an honorable way of esteeming ones relatives and therefore permitted by Catholics.
- ❖ The Government of China established diplomatic relations with the Vatican in 1943.
- ❖ The Papal decree changed the ecclesiastical situation in China.
- ❖ The Church flourished.
- ❖ Pius established a local ecclesiastical hierarchy, and, received the Archbishop of Beijing, Thomas Tien Ken-sin SVD, in to the Sacred College of Cardinals.
- ❖ After WWII, about four million Chinese were members of the Roman Catholic Church.

- ❖ This was less than one percent of the population but numbers increased dramatically. In 1949, there existed:
  - ❖ 20 archdioceses,
  - ❖ 85 dioceses
  - ❖ 39 apostolic prefectures
  - ❖ 3080 missionaries
  - ❖ 2557 Chinese priests
- ❖ With Mao Zedong's communist regime in 1949, these early advances were on hold and led to the persecution of thousands of clergy and faithful in China.
- ❖ Clergy were subject to oppression, including long imprisonments as in the case of Cardinal Kung and torture and martyrdom as in the case of Fr. Beda Chang, S.J.
- ❖ A Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was formed.
- ❖ The losses in the following years to the Roman Catholic Church were considerable.
- ❖ For example, in 1948, the Catholic Church operated some 254 orphanages and 196 hospitals with 81628 beds.
- ❖ Catholic clergy experienced increased state supervision.
- ❖ Bishops and priests were forced to engage in degrading menial jobs to earn their living.
- ❖ Foreign missionaries were accused of being foreign agents.
- ❖ The Holy See reacted with several encyclicals and apostolic letters, *Cupimus Imprimis*, *Ad Apostolorum Principis*, and *Ad Sinarum Gentem*.
- ❖ Since 1949, after the founding of People's Republic of China, the status of Roman Catholicism as an institution was highly ambiguous.
- ❖ While the Roman Catholic Church is officially banned in the country, the Chinese government demands that all Chinese "Catholics" must be loyal to the State.
- ❖ Worship must legally be conducted through State-approved churches belonging to the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

- ❖ Catholics are pressured to break communion with the Holy See by renouncing the primacy of the Roman Pontiff.
- ❖ Catholics loyal to the Pope currently worship clandestinely, out of fear of imprisonment.
- ❖ The Communist Party is a secular organization also reserves the right to appoint priests.
- ❖ Chinese citizens' activities must not face interference or influence by external powers.
- ❖ The government does not differentiate between temporal and spiritual loyalty.
- ❖ Thus, it does not recognize that a Catholic can be loyal to his/her own government, while still listening to the Pope in matters of faith and morals.
- ❖ Two-thirds of China's registered Church bishops are now recognized by the Vatican.
- ❖ More significant, during the summer of 2005, the Vatican and Beijing agreed upon the appointment of an Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai.
- ❖ Major impediment to the re-establishment of relations has been the issue of who appoints the bishops.
- ❖ Pope Benedict XVI invited four Chinese bishops, to the October 2005 Synod on the Eucharist.
- ❖ Beijing ultimately denied the four bishops the right to attend the meeting.
- ❖ It is estimated there are 8 million Catholics following the underground church still loyal to Rome and 5 million people following the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.
- ❖ The Chinese government, in its ambiguous relationship with the Holy See, still persecutes and imprisons underground Catholics, especially priests.
- ❖ The Roman Catholic Church in China is still considered illegal.
- ❖ Roman Catholics themselves are forbidden to become citizens or even visit as tourists.

- ❖ On May 27, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a letter to Chinese Catholics "to offer some guidelines concerning the life of the Church and the task of evangelization in China."

- ❖ In this letter (section 9), Pope Benedict acknowledges tensions:

*As all of you know, one of the most delicate problems in relations between the Holy See and the authorities of your country is the question of episcopal appointments. On the one hand, it is understandable that governmental authorities are attentive to the choice of those who will carry out the important role of leading and shepherding the local Catholic communities, given the social implications which – in China as in the rest of the world – this function has in the civil sphere as well as the spiritual. On the other hand, the Holy See follows the appointment of Bishops with special care since this touches the very heart of the life of the Church, inasmuch as the appointment of Bishops by the Pope is the guarantee of the unity of the Church and of hierarchical communion.*

- ❖ An "underground" bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar (northeastern China) released a two-page pastoral letter in July 2007, asking his congregation to study and act on the letter of Pope Benedict XVI and naming the letter a "new milestone in the development of the Chinese Church.
- ❖ In September 2007, a coadjutor bishop for the Guiyang Diocese was jointly appointed by the Vatican and the Chinese official Catholic Church.

## C) Hong Kong and Macau

- ❖ The Roman Catholic Church is allowed to operate freely in Hong Kong and Macau.
- ❖ In fact, Donald Tsang, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, is a Roman Catholic.
- ❖ However, Pope John Paul II was denied a visit (deemed "inappropriate") to Hong Kong in 1999 (the Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, in office 1997-2005).
- ❖ The two territories are organized into the Diocese of Hong Kong and the Diocese of Macau.
- ❖ Diplomatic relations with the Vatican
- ❖ The issue of Sino-Vatican relations has been a highly contentious one.
- ❖ The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) is a division of China's Religious Affairs Bureau, and has oversight over China's Catholics.
- ❖ However, China's Catholics, including its clergy and religious sisters, are no longer required to be members of the CCPA.
- ❖ By 2007, the Vatican had indicated numerous occasions its desires to establish full diplomatic relations with China.
- ❖ Vatican would be willing to move its embassy from Taiwan to mainland China if necessary.
- ❖ However, a major obstacle between the two sides has been that only the Pope can appoint bishops of the Church.
- ❖ Currently, bishops in the CCPA are government-appointed.
- ❖ In recent years, this issue has proved a frequent aggravating factor in Sino-Vatican relations.
- ❖ Some, including "outspoken" Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, see the progress between Vietnam and Vatican officials towards re-establishing full diplomacy as a model for Sino-Vatican normalization of relations.
- ❖ By late 2004, prior to the death of Pope John Paul II, Vatican and Chinese government representatives were in contact.

- ❖ In late 2004, John Paul II received a "quasi-official" Chinese delegation in the Vatican.
- ❖ These overtures continued after the installation of Benedict XVI as Pope.