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A turbulent story

The status of the Catholics in the People's Republic of China

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Chapter 1
Introduction

> Religious organisations do not exist in a vacuum, and they cannot therefore be studied in isolation from their sociocultural environments.[1]

That religious groups must be studied in the context of the society of which they are a part really is a "generally accepted truth". Therefore, scholars studying Christianity in a Chinese context increasingly emphasise the need to view that religion from the perspective of its interaction with the state. In the context of China, religion and the state are, in fact, closely interconnected. Unlike in the West,[2] rulers in China once had "unipolar" authority, encompassing both civil and religious power. Until the 20th century, religion was linked to the sphere of politics and social life because the Chinese emperor had the power to permit or ban any religious group.[3] The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has simply carried over this principle and strives to monitor the religious life of the People's Republic of China (PRC).[4] I therefore believe that Christianity must be examined within the context of dynamic processes of dialogue among the various social, political, and cultural forces within China's authoritarian society.

Although the number of Christians in China has been undergoing rapid growth since the 1990s, and at present (2025) in the PRC there are approximately 10 million Catholics[5] and 38 million Protestants,[6] Christianity is viewed as an "alien" religious system brought in by "colonial powers".[7] In fact, even today some Chinese people

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1 Stark, Rodney and Finke, Roger. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 35.

2 Here, "the West" is not a purely geographical designation. Instead, it refers to the geopolitical territory of Euro-American cultural influence.

3 Goossaert, Vincent and Palmer, David A. 2011. *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 27–33.

4 Ibid., 317.

5 Tripod 2024: Editorial Committee. 2024. Year 2023: Statistics and Major Events of the Catholic Church in China. *Tripod* 204, 143–191, here 143.

6 Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina. 2024. Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People's Republic of China – Update for the Year 2023. *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* 14(3), 35–56, here 47.

7 For more information, see Tamney, Joseph B. 2005. Introduction. In Yang, Fenggang and Tamney, Joseph B. (eds.). *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*. Leiden: Brill, 1–17.

speak of Christianity as *yangjiao* 洋教, a term meaning "foreign religion".[8] Therefore, for many people in Chinese-speaking societies,[9] conversion to Christianity can still be highly problematic. The adopting of a foreign system can mean a violation of the norms of family life and can damage relations with other family members.[10] Christian clergy and missionaries living in a Chinese context are well aware of these problems and must react to them.

We also should not forget that although Christianity is often seen as a religious tradition of the West,[11] it is a non-Western system both in terms of its origin and thanks to extensive evangelisation outside of Europe and North America.[12] Moreover, today we find more Christians in non-Western countries than in the West. Therefore, when studying Christianity, we should not take an ethnocentric view assuming Western hegemony, with ideas about the "true" and "correct" form of Christianity shaped on the basis of European experience.

In this book, I am dealing with the relationship between the Catholic Church and the totalitarian regime of the PRC. However, the story already begins before 1949, when the PRC was established. The historical development of Catholic missions within the territory of present-day China has also influenced the present situation of Catholics in the PRC. Therefore, the narrative begins with an overview of the initial missions. In the context of the historiography of Christian missions in Asia, current scholarship draws attention to problems associated with the first missionary efforts, and specifically the links between missionaries and efforts towards colonisation, for which the Catholic Church is still being criticised in China to this day (2025). Postcolonial criticism is very important because it shows that local non-European

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8 The character *yang* 洋 stands for "foreign" or "Western"; *jiao* 教 means "teaching" or "religion". Although the word yang simply means anything Western, already during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), it was often used in a pejorative sense as a derogatory designation for Christian groups. For example, Christians (Catholics and Protestants) were called *yang guizi* 洋鬼子– "foreign/Western devils". For a detailed analysis of discourse demonising Christians, see Klain, Thoralf. 2014. The Missionary as Devil: Anti-Missionary Demonology in China, 1860–1930. In Becker, Judith and Stanley, Brian (eds.). *Europe as the Other: External Perspectives on European Christianity*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 119–148.

9 Here, I am referring to "Chinese-speaking society" in a broader sense, referring to the whole population under Chinese cultural influence, whether historical, ethnic, linguistic, or geographical. The term therefore refers both to the People's Republic of China and to Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the global Chinese diaspora.

10 For discussion of issues of conversion to Christianity in Chinese-speaking societies, I recommend Swanson, Allen. 1986. *Mending the Nets: Taiwan Church Growth and Loss in the 1980s*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.

11 The most important monotheistic traditions of the West include not only Christianity, but also Judaism and Islam. Those traditions have strongly shaped Euro-American civilisation.

12 Frykenberg, Robert E. 2003. Introduction. In Frykenberg, Robert E. and Low, Alain (eds.). *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500, with Special Reference to Caste, Conversion, and Colonialism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1.

histories have, in fact, often been reconstructed by the use of materials written by Western representatives of a dominant foreign culture, such as missionaries, for example. In this book, however, I reject an approach describing foreign missionaries in Asia as being merely a part of the dominant colonial culture. Instead, we should see them as an important part of local history, as some other scholars also propose.[13] Rather than promoting a model depicting colonial history in terms of dominance and repression, we ought to study Christian missions with the use of a "conversational model". Despite their links to colonial structures, missionaries were pursuing the communication of their own message to local populations. Communication is not a one-way process, so what was occurring was at least partially a bilateral exchange of ideas and values from one culture to another. The theological teachings of missionaries were constantly undergoing reconstruction and reshaping. Christian missionaries therefore were not just agents of a dominant foreign culture. They also provided their converts with access to prestigious circles of the colonial administration and of foreign trade. Often, they became intermediaries between foreign powers and local Christians who, in turn, gained a better negotiating position.[14] We also should not forget that missionaries played many roles, and if some of them were tolerant and open towards the local population, many others were intolerant, ethnocentric, and often truly racist.[15] The study of Christianity in Asia is unavoidably influenced by our present-day knowledge and ideas, but we should remember that the missionaries were the product of the society in which they were living, and their ideas and values were inseparable from their socio-political context.[16]

Many scholars criticise the pressure of the Chinese government on the church, and they focus their research mainly on the resistance of selected churches against the government. In this book, I would instead like to draw attention to the increasing orientation of current research on the unilateral relationship of church and state, and in particular the promoting of an image of the conflict between religious groups and the government. Moreover, quite a few of these studies tendentiously favour Christianity.[17] In this respect, I regard the overlooking of various processes of negotiation between Christian groups and the government as constituting the most

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13 Frykenberg, Introduction..., 8.

14 Robert, Dana. 2009. *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 49–50.

15 Young, Richard Fox. 2002. Some Hindu Perspectives on Christian Missionaries in the Indic World of the Mid Nineteenth Century. In Frykenberg, Robert E.; Brown, Judith and Low, Alaine (eds.). *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India's Religious Traditions*. London: Routledge Curzon, 37.

16 Van Die, Marguerite. 2012. Growing up Presbyterian in Victorian Canada: Childhood Influences and Faith Formation. In Forsberg, Clyde R. (ed.). *The Life and Legacy of George Leslie Mackay: An Interdisciplinary Study of Canada's First Presbyterian Missionary to Northern Taiwan (1872–1901)*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 21–42: here 41.

17 See e.g. Yang, Fenggang. 2017. From Cooperation to Resistance: Christian Responses to Intensified Suppression in China Today. *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 15, 79–90.

important problem. After all, conflict is far from the only aspect of the relationship arising between China's totalitarian government and Christian society in China. To the contrary, despite tighter control and increased persecution, many groups are attempting to cooperate with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or at least to survive under China's totalitarian regime. This publication's goal is therefore to show the complexity of relationships between churches and the Chinese government, covering both cases of persecution and various forms of coexistence or even cooperation.

The publication now before you not only attempts a concise description of events, but also aims to draw attention to the diverse resources and strategies available to the Catholic community for its mission activities. The book primarily answers the following questions: How has the relationship between the Catholic Church and the People's Republic China developed? How are various church representatives trying to protect and promote their interests in the totalitarian regime of the PRC? The main thrust of the argument is that representatives of the Catholic Church (officially permitted and underground) face at least two kinds of pressure in the authoritarian environment of present-day China, namely (1) the demands of the state regime and (2) societal or cultural pressure requiring an attempt at intentional assimilation to the given environment. One of the chief interest of Catholic Church representatives is to create a successful mission and a stable congregation. The subject matter of this book is how this is being attempted and with what success.

1.1 Sinicisation is not always sinicisation

Current research on Christian churches in the People's Republic of China (PRC) often emphasises the question of the "sinicisation" of religion. But what is "sinicisation", really?

If we take as our departure point the assertion of the American sociologist Anthony Gill that "[o]ne of the primary goals of most religious organisations is the maximisation (or retention) of parishioners",[18] we may assume that successful missions are an important component of Christianity. In order to fulfil this ambition (maximising the number of believers) in Chinese society, the Catholic Church has also had to adapt to the local environment, meaning it has had to create a local community that is attractive for local believers. We may also assume that religious groups have to interact and negotiate with the government to achieve their goal of establishing themselves permanently in the given milieu. Religion specialists in China's authoritarian environment must face two main pressures: the demands of the authoritarian government and social pressure, which demands that they conform to the local culture. Today, the adapting of

18 Gill, Anthony J. 1998. *Rendering unto Caesar: The Roman Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 66.

religious ideas and activities to a local culture, or "inculturation" (*jiaohui bendihua* 教会本地化), remains a topic of urgency for Catholic society in China. The word *bendihua* (本地化) can be translated as "localisation", "accommodation", or "adaptation".[19] It involves the broader social process of the deliberate transfer of a system of ideas and values from one culture to another. It represents the process of maintaining long-term, influential contact between differing cultures. Every culture is a system containing elements that are transformed during such contact. During this process, one culture typically "borrows" certain elements from another, and culture transfers are not equal. With this kind of communication, during which ideas and values are deliberately transferred, the ideas and values have to be changed and adapted for them to influence the other society or culture. Unlike the broader process of acculturation, which is spontaneous and not conscious, "inculturation" is an intentional process, i.e., a strategy.[20] It is a process begun by the church, a strategy employed with the goal of making Christianity more attractive for the local environment.

In the context of China, another term in use is "sinicisation" (*zhongguohua* 中国化).[21] It was Christian missionaries who first used the word *zhongguohua* at the end of the Qing dynasty and at the beginning of the period of the Republic of China. It was originally used with the same meaning as "inculturation", i.e., as a description of the process of making Christianity "more Chinese", and thereby more attractive for potential Chinese converts. However, in the present-day People's Republic of China, the word has a different meaning. Since 2015, the government of the PRC has been emphasising the need for (political) sinicisation of religion[22] (*zongjiao de zhongguohua* 中宗教的中国化). This is a component of the policy introduced by President Xi Jinping 习近平 (*1953) within the framework of his vision for a new China. It is the official policy on religion imposed by the communist government on religious groups, which must adapt their teachings and activities so as to be permitted by the government of

19 For discussion of the difficulty of translating the term *bendihua*, see Wesoky, Sharon R. 2016. Politics at the Local-Global Intersection: Meanings of Bentuhua and Transnational Feminism in China. *Asian Studies Review* 40(1), 53–69: here 55.

20 Gallo, Antonio. 2003. Introduction: Hermeneutics and Inculturation. In McLean, George F.; Gallo, Antonio, and Magliola, Robert (eds.). *Hermeneutics and Inculturation*. Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1–16: here 8–9.

21 Here, there is a reference to the Chinese expression *zhongguohua*, which is not identical to the Chinese word *hanhua* 汉化, also routinely translated as sinicisation. However, *hanhua* has a different meaning; it applies to a cultural or ethnic context, referring to the process of Chinese cultural assimilation of non-Chinese ethnicities under the direct influence of the Han ethnic group. The sinicisation of religion does not apply to ethnic groups that are not Han Chinese. In the context of religious policy, the sinicisation of religion is mainly focused on the Han population.

22 For references to sinicisation in the current political context, I always add the adjective "political" to the word "sinicisation". Wherever the reference is not to the original Chinese term, I am adding this adjective to emphasise the political context, when the word sinicisation does not mean merely making something "more Chinese", but instead means complete submission to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

the PRC and to comply with the official policy of the Chinese Communist Party. In this context, the political sinicisation of the church does not mean its localisation or making it more attractive for the local environment. To the contrary, in the present context, the word sinicisation has a political subtext involving compliance with the state's dictates and the direct promotion of Chinese Communist Party ideology through religion. The term is therefore not sociological, but political, involving a new political discourse initiated by the Chinese Communist Party.[23] Political sinicisation is thus becoming an aspect of relations between the church and the state, according to which the church must react to the state's official demands for the localisation of belief and must obey the state's commands. Therefore, today the term *zongjiao de zhongguohua* is not, in fact, interchangeable with inculturation (*jiaohui bendihua* 教会本地化).

1.2 The problematic state of research on contemporary Christianity in the People's Republic of China[24]

In the introduction to this book, I also reflect upon the current state of research on Christianity in a Chinese context in general. This reflection will subsequently become a stepping stone for understanding the situation faced by Catholics in China. Therefore, we will first familiarise ourselves with two opposing currents of academic opinion in relation to Christianity in China: (1) one that is widespread in Chinese academic circles, and (2) a second that is promoted by certain prominent scholars from the American academic milieu. These two lines of discourse represent opposites: while academic rhetoric in the PRC promotes an image of harmony with official state propaganda, the other dominant current of opinion depicts Christians in the PRC as a group facing extreme persecution.[25]

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23 For more information about the question of sinicisation, I recommend Vermander, Benoît. 2019. Sinicizing Religions, Sinicizing Religious Studies. *Religions* 10(2), 1–23; Chang, Kuei-min. 2018. New Wine in Old Bottles: Sinicisation and State Regulation of Religion in China. *China Perspectives* 2018(1–2), 37–44. The word *Bendihua* has a different connotation in the context of Taiwan, and along those lines I recommend Chun, Allan. 2012. From Sinicization to Indigenization in the Social Sciences: Is That All There Is? In Dirlik, Arif, Li, Guannan and Yen, Hsiao-pei (eds.). *Sociology and Anthropology in Twentieth-Century China: Between Universalism and Indigenism*. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 255–282.

24 The following discussion draws in part from a text already published by this book's author. Cf. Rychetská, Magdaléna. 2020. Negotiations between Christian Communities and Authoritarian China: Some Comments on the Current State of Scholarship on Christianity in China. *Religio: revue pro religionistiku* 28(2), 165–183.

25 E.g. Jason Kindopp and Carol L. Hamrin raise the question in their book: "To what extent have China's Catholics and Protestants adapted to, resisted, or rebelled against state demands?" The formulation suggests that churches are being subjected to influence from above by the government without anything approaching mutual discussion. See Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol L. (eds.). 2004. *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church State Tensions*. Washington: Brookings Institution

1.2.1 The Chinese model propagating harmony

The Chinese government urges its scholars to promote China's image as a traditional yet modern country and to "demonstrate its excellence",[26] i.e., to portray China and its government in a positive light. For this reason, large numbers of Chinese scholarly articles on religion repeat the same assertions that we find in official state propaganda. Because the scholars monitoring religious life in China are under government control, they are not impartial. One of their roles is to assist with state monitoring of religion and with promoting what the government regards as "normal religious activities" (*zhengchang de zongjiao huodong* 正常的宗教活动). The state even requires that Chinese scholars take part in the training of religious clerics. This teaching then focuses on the training and political indoctrination of religious specialists:

> For the Chinese state, such professional training aims to produce "politically reliable" (*zhengzhishang kaodezhu*) and "religiously literate" (*zongjiaoshang youzaoyi*) clergy who are expected to play leadership roles not only in the five official religious associations but also in China's political consultation system.[27]

Many of the scholars in Chinese (state) research institutions are not, in fact, objective.[28] We should not, however, fail to mention that it is often impossible for them to be objective. They are more closely monitored than Western scholars because it is more important to the state for their research to have utility for government purposes; likewise, it is very unlikely that they will express any sharp criticism of the Chinese Communist Party. In the case of Christianity, their interpretations differ greatly from the interpretations of scholars outside of the PRC. Chinese scholars from institutions in the PRC tell a story of harmonious cooperation and coexistence between Christian churches and the Chinese government (but generally ignore any underground churches or house worship). Of course, their position is influenced by

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Press, 13. The results and conclusions of this tendentious research have already been criticised in the past. For more information about criticism of this approach, see Cao, Nanlai. 2018. The Rise of Field Studies in Religious Research in the People's Republic of China. *The China Review* 18(1), 137–163; Cao, Nanlai. 2018. Chinese Religions on the Edge: Shifting Religion-State Dynamics. *The China Review* 18(4), 1–10.

26 Froissart, Chloé. 2018. Issues in Social Science Debate in Xi Jinping's China. *China Perspectives* 18(4), 3–9: here 6.

27 Cao, The Rise of Field Studies..., 140.

28 This primarily involves research focusing on politically sensitive topics. Among the Chinese researchers studying Christianity to whom this criticism does not apply, I must mention, for example, Kang Zhijieho from Hebei University, or Professor Wei Xionga from the Central Normal University in Wuhan. Neither, however, is dealing with political topics and faith. See e.g. Kang, Zhijie. 2015. Chinese Catholic Folk Songs and the Localization of Faith. *Logos and Pneuma – Chinese Journal of Theology* 43: 267–288; Wei, Xiong. 2024. The Historical Tradition and Contemporary Legacy of Catholic Religious Education in China. *Catholic Historical Review* 110(2), 312–338.

censorship and the fact that in mainland China it is de facto impossible to publish critical research. The problem, however, is that in recent years, their research has also been printed by important international academic publishers under the influence of Chinese "soft power".[29] One example is an article by Zhou Xiaowei printed in a journal issued by the prestigious publisher Routledge.[30] In it, among other things, the author makes the uncritical assertion that there has been religious freedom in China since the founding of the PRC, and that religious freedom is constantly expanding and developing.[31] Carrying over official lines of discourse of the Chinese Communist Party into foreign academic publications is highly problematical, and attention should be drawn to this issue.

1.2.2 The American model of highlighting conflict

Among American scholars studying Christianity in China, a new theoretical project has emerged in recent years with the goal of solving the problem of the ambivalent and often unclear category of religion in a Chinese context. The American sociologist Yang Fenggang has proposed that religion in China should be studied in the theoretical framework of an economic approach to religion. The economic approach to religion or the economy of religion originates with *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) by Adam Smith (1723–1790) and the later works of Max Weber (1864–1920) and in particular his book *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*[32] (1905). However, the new paradigm shift towards the economy of religion has been connected with an academic movement, with which the economy of religion has merged as something new beginning with the early works of the American sociologists Peter Berger (1970s/1980s), Rodney Stark, Robert Finke, and many others (1980s/'90s) and of the economist Laurence Iannaccone (late 1980s).[33] The economic approach to religion appeared in the 1990s in the American milieu as a reaction to secularisation theories, which presupposed the gradual loss of importance of religion in society. Instead of

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29 Soft power is a term used in recent years in the field of international relations. It refers to a specific component of power relating to the ability of a state to influence the preferences of others with the goal of achieving a nation's strategic aims. It covers a variety of ideological and cultural activities without the use of any means of coercion like bribes or threats ("hard power"). For more information about soft power, see e.g. Lee, Shin-wha. 2011. The Theory and Reality of Soft Power: Practical Approaches in East Asia. In Melissen, Jan and Lee, Sook Jong (eds.). *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in East Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 11–32 or Nye, Joseph. 2011. *The Future of Power*. New York: Public Affairs.

30 Zhou, Xiaowei. 2021. Localisation of Christianity in China: difficulties in and possibilities of achieving harmonious cultural integration. *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 43(3), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2021.1969206.

31 Ibid., 2.

32 Weber, Max. 2002. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

33 Obadia, Lionel and Wood, Donald C. (eds.). 2011. *The Economics of Religion: Anthropological Approaches*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing, xv.

viewing religious faith as being in decline as a consequence of advanced modernity, the economic approach attempts to explain these changes by proposing a new paradigm using a market metaphor.[34] The approach proposes the idea that religion can be viewed in the same way as the economies of commerce and markets.[35] Lionel Obadia and Donald C. Wood explained the main innovation of this approach as follows:

> Modernity and globalization are supposed to have dramatically changed the religious landscape of societies … The shift from (Bourdieu's) "religious field" to (contemporary, and especially, American sociology) "spiritual supermarket" is a major conceptual shift.
>
> In Bourdieu's terms, people are passive agents, determined by processes of religious "capitalization", while these new actor-figures rest upon another conception of social agency, in which the individual is a much more "free" and "active" actor in his/her relationship with religion.[36]

This gives rise to a religious economy or a spiritual marketplace where all religious activities and ideas are "goods" that religious organisations offer to potential believers ("buyers") with the goal of attracting their interest, and to existing believers for the purpose of maintaining their support.[37] The economic approach to religion attempts to offer an explanation for religious changes.[38] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke propose the following hypothesis: "To the extent that (religious) pluralism or (religious) regulation are adequate inferential measures of (religious) competition, the overall level of religiousness will be higher where pluralism is greater or where regulation is lower."[39] Religious pluralism thus increases religious competition and creates a marketplace with greater variability, where believers can navigate more easily between various religious faiths. One of the consequences is the new demand on Christian clergy to be more sensitive to church members' current needs. This is also where the need to adapt faith to the local environment fits in.[40]

In accordance with this model, it is assumed that an authoritarian regime (such as communist China) should theoretically lead to religious opposition to the totalitarian

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34 Yang, Fenggang. 2012. *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 12.

35 Yang, Fenggang. 2006. The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China. *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, 93–122: here 94.

36 Obadia and Wood, *The Economics of Religion*..., xviii–xix.

37 Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*... 193.

38 Froese, Paul and Pfaff, Steven. 2001. Replete and Desolate Markets: Poland, East Germany, and the New Religious Paradigm. *Social Forces* 80(2), 481–507: here 481.

39 Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*..., 279.

40 Examples include the use of the local language for Mass or the adaptation of iconography, such as depicting the Holy Family with Asian facial features etc.

state because the clergy should be motivated to defend the interests of church members harmed by the repressive regime. However, without religious competition, the need for change is not necessarily (according to the model) sufficiently strong to cause religious leaders to defy the regime, thereby losing at least part of their government support.[41]

Yang Fenggang comments that the economic approach to religion has had its greatest following in the cultural context of America[42] and Europe,[43] where Christianity is predominant, and he also points out that the religious environment of China differs from that in the West. Therefore, he proposes a change to the theoretical model of the religious market in China as follows, preferring the creation of a model with a triple market:[44] "a red market (officially permitted religions), a black market (officially banned religions), and a gray market (religions with an ambiguous legal/illegal status)"[45]

The red market includes all religious organisations with legal standing. According to this approach, these organisations should consent to the restrictions of the communist regime, and their religious narrative and ceremonies should be in alignment with government rhetoric. The black market, then, is the opposite of the red market, encompassing all illegal religious groups, which are not permitted and often oppose China's government. Finally, the grey market includes those activities and individuals where a determination of legality or illegality is difficult; the grey market also includes religiosity that is not institutionalised. Using this triple market model, Yang tries to overcome the limitations arising from the overlooking of non-institutionalised religiosity by the original model proposed by Stark and Finke. However, the approach promoted by Yang faces the same criticisms as the economic approach in general – for example, some proponents of the economic approach reject the view that conceives the market as a metaphor, instead seeing the market as a biological part of human nature.[46] That assertion, however, is quite problematic and is unproven. More importantly for us, despite this approach's attempt to propose a new explanation for religious activity in the authoritarian environment of the PRC, it leads at the same time to the neglecting of certain aspects of negotiation between religious groups and the state. The model generates the narrative of the state supressing the church, and

41 Gill, Rendering unto Caesar..., 48–58.

42 See e.g. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*...; Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar*...; Stark, Rodney and Finke, Roger. 1992. *Churching of America, 1776–1990*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

43 See e.g. P. Froese and S. Pfaff, Replete and Desolate Markets...; Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1995. Risk, Rationality, and Religious Portfolios. *Economic Inquiry* 33(2), 285–295.

44 For more about this triple market approach, see Yang, The Red, Black, and Gray Market...; Yang, Fenggang. 2018. *Atlas of Religion in China: Social and Geographical Contexts*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.

45 Yang, The Red, Black, and Gray Markets..., 93.

46 McKinnon, Andrew M. 2011. Ideology and the Market Metaphor in Rational Choice Theory of Religion: A Rhetorical Critique of Religious Economies. *Critical Sociology* 39(4), 529–543: here 530.

it leaves the church no bargaining chips, and this necessarily fails to correspond to reality. Furthermore, it leads to the overlooking of religious organisations on the red market because they are regarded as not being problematic. Therefore, scholars often devote little attention to them because they do not support the narrative of a conflict between the church and the state.

Many current studies focus largely on the relationship between churches and the state with respect to societal resistance to the state's dominant standing. These studies generally use the model of the triple marketplace and concentrate on the black and grey markets. The Chinese scholar Cao Nanlai points out that much research is telling an oversimplified story of opposition between the totalitarian state and resisting local religious communities, or in this context, between the one-party state and Christianity.[47]

1.3 The approach used in this publication

This book follows a diverse group of Catholics found within the territory of the People's Republic of China and belonging to the officially state-recognised Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (*Zhongguo tianzhujiao aiguo hui* 中国天主教爱国会; CPCA), and also believers belonging to the "underground church" (*dixia jiaohui* 地下教会), which is not permitted by the Chinese authorities. Instead of using the market approach, I insist on the necessity of confronting both of the main directions mentioned above with empirical data. What I see as the pitfalls of the narrative presented by scholars in the PRC is rather clear. The surprising thing, however, is that even scholars from democratic countries are inclined towards tendentiousness. That does not, however, mean that the research of those scholars is entirely wrong or not useful. To the contrary, their work is used in this publication, and many of their findings are pivotal for understanding the present situation of Catholics in the PRC. When reading the results presented by important scholars, one must remember that the data are always interpreted by a particular scholar, so it is appropriate to approach the data with caution.[48] In order for me to demonstrate that their approach is problematic, let us examine the official CPCA through the optics of the triple market model. Yang characterises the CPCA as belonging to the red religion marketplace, supporting the communist government. The dioceses affiliated under this organisation are often overlooked by researchers because they are regarded as not being "problematic", so they do not correspond to the narrative of Christians being persecuted by state officials

47 Cao, Nanlai. 2010. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 11.

48 The same applies to research presented in this publication. Readers should take a critical approach to it, and it is my hope that their conclusions will turn out to be the same as those presented here.

in the way that certain persons like to describe one-sidedly. I believe, however, that the "officially" permitted Catholic church (or any other religious group belonging to the "red" marketplace) is also deserving of our attention, not only because it adds to the complicated picture of what is going on in China, but also because the choice of cooperation instead of opposition is not without problems. The variety of processes of negotiations between religious groups and the government should also be included in research.

Rather than imagining Christianity as a monolithic group with one set of unchanging goals and tasks, we can look at Christianity as a "glocal phenomenon",[49] but one that is based on a number of local manifestations and specifics. The shift of methodology towards studying Christianity as a "glocal phenomenon" suggests that there are many different kinds of Christianity (ignoring denominational differences in this case): there is not a single, monolithic Chinese communism; rather, we can speak separately about Christianity in Zhejiang, Christianity in Wenzhou etc.[50] Christianity should not be investigated as a single, universal, glocal religion; local differences must be taken into consideration. The primary goal is not just to differentiate various denominations, but also to observe various historical, political, and social influences and differences. Calling Christianity a glocal phenomenon is an attempt to suggest that different Christian groups each have their own specific characteristics, i.e., that the message of Christianity is spread among people with sharply different cultural and political backgrounds. Scholars should therefore be focusing less on identifying specific features of Chinese Christianity as such, and instead should devote more time to observing the dilemmas faced by various local churches during their attempts at evangelising. In this way, we would avoid the oversimplification that asserts that all Christians in China share the same experience – this contradicts the empirical data, which clearly do not support either of the two presented scholarly narratives. Therefore, they should instead be studying the strategies and resources that individual local communities have at their disposal. Scholarship needs to go beyond the boundaries of the schematic dichotomy of relations between the church and the

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49 On this topic, I recommend Robert, Dana. 2002. The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement between the World Wars. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26(2), 50–67; Beyer, Peter. 2003. De-centring Religious Singularity: The Globalization of Christianity as a Case in Point. *Numen* 50(4), 357–386.

50 In this example, Zhejiang is a Chinese province, while Wenzhou is one city in that province. Not all groups of Christians in Zhejiang are having exactly the same experiences. They have similar cultural and historical roots, but their social and economic conditions are different. In addition, the religious policies that apply generally in the province Zhejiang do not necessarily apply in Wenzhou because Wenzhou has far more Protestant Christians than the rest of the towns in the province. Wenzhou is even called the "Chinese Jerusalem". For this reason, the local government is stricter with the Christian groups in Wenzhou. For more details about the Christians in Wenzhou, see Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*...

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