

Review Article

Socio-Historical Notes on Lutheranism in China: 1807-2017

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Abstract

The Lutheran Churches have a history dating back to 1517 since their founding by Church Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546). In this essay the focus is on China, where his theological teachings as well as his ethical and sociological views were unknown. I will position the Lutheran Church in China and wider Asia, against the background of the tumultuous regional history, which despite ups and downs, today shows signs of acceptance. The meaning of religion in present-day China is discussed in relation to the context of modernity: sociology, ideologies (communism and Confucianism) and internet technology.

Keywords: China; Martin Luther; Anthropology; Protestant Missions; Religion; Social History

Introduction

The history and teachings of the Lutheran Churches of Europe and America have been highlighted in recent books, in part to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther's life and works. Here the focus is on China, where the theological teachings of Maarten Luther (马丁路德, Mading lu de, 1483-1546) such as the 'Ninety-five Theses' (九十五条论纲 Jiushiwutiao lungang), Repentance (悔改, Huigai), Justification by faith only (Sola Fide, 因信称义, Yin xin cheng yi) as well as his ethical and sociological views and many other subjects were unknown. Luther's famous hymn 'Ein feste Burg, ist unser Gott' [Luther c. 1527, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", 神是我们坚固堡障 Shen shi women jianggu bao zhang] [1] had long been only heard in Lutheran family homes in remote China, before it was translated and could spread, whereas today all Lutheran classics are available in Mandarin, the principal language of China [2]. In this essay I will position the Lutheran Church in China and wider Asia, with Western roots, against the background of its tumultuous regional history which despite ups and downs, today shows signs of hope for the future.

The European situation after 1800

In the early 19th century, Western colonial expansion occurred at the same time as an evangelical revival, rooted in Pietism (敬虔主义, Jingqian zhuyi). This spiritual awakening, between 1790

and 1840 throughout the English-speaking world, lead to increased missionary activity and the period became known as 'The Great Century' of modern religious missions [3]. It is the English missionary Robert Morrison (马礼逊, Ma lixun, 1782-1834, Figure 1), who is regarded as the first missionary in China of modern times, sent there by the London Missionary Society. He arrived in 1807 and created a mission, initially against the laws of the Qing Dynasty (清朝代, 1644-1912), which at that time only allowed some Roman Catholic monastic orders, such as Franciscans and the Benedictines to enter China.



Figure 1: Robert Morrison (1782-1834).

Morrison, who was a sinologist, translated the Bible (1823) and had it printed [4] Soon other protestant missionaries entered China, although they were restricted to the cities of Canton (Guangzhou, 广州), and Macau (澳门, Aomen) in the delta of the Pearl River (珠江, Zhujiang).

Early Missions 1831-1847

The first Lutheran missionary to China was Karl Gützlaff (郭士立, Guo Shili, 1803-1851, Figure 2) [5,6]. He worked after 1823



Figure 2: Karl Gützlaff.

Gützlaff in his efforts to find money for the mission, made some questionable decisions and his methods later earned him some criticism. However, he opened up China for missionaries, especially Lutherans. What then was the situation in China? There were many active anti-foreign powers of a religious nature. The 'Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement' (太平天国运动, Taiping Tianguo Yundong) was active between 1851 and 1864 with elements of a Christian millenarian movement, with 'a younger brother of Christ' as its leader. Together with the anti-Muslim Dungan Revolt (同治陕甘回变, Tongzhi Shangan Hui Bian, 1862-1877) and Panthay Rebellion (杜文秀起义, Du Wenxiu Qiyi, 1856-1873), these 'guerrilla' groups seriously devastated the peoples of Western and Central Asia and annihilated some 20 million people. In spite of these disasters, under the Tongzhi Restoration (同治中兴, Tong Zhi Zhongxing) of the 1860s, Han Chinese elites rallied to the defense of the ideas of Confucius (孔夫子, Kong Fuzi, 551-479 BC) and the Qing Emperors, thus confirmed their 'Mandate of Heaven' (天命, Tianming), the ancient philosophy that formed the basis for government.

in the service of the Netherlands Missionary Society (荷兰传道会, Helan chuandao hui) in Java, an Island in Dutch Indonesia and after 1828 went to Thailand, Singapore, and Korea. Only in 1831 could he enter China. In Tianjin (天津) he distributed Christian pamphlets and tracts, and founded the Chinese Evangelization Society which later sent out James Hudson Taylor (戴德生, Daidesheng, 1832-1905, Figure 3), who in 1865 established the successful China Inland Mission (中国内地会, Zhongguo neidi hui, CIM), which harmoniously cooperated with the Lutherans [7].



Figure 3: James Hudson Taylor.

Opium Wars, 1840-1860

In the Nanjing Treaty which ended the First Anglo-Chinese war (第一次鸦片战争, Di yi ci yipian zhanzheng or "Opium War" 1839-1842), missionaries were granted the right to live and work in five coastal cities, i.e. Canton, Amoy, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai, while Hong Kong became a crown colony of Britain [8]. The Treaties of Tianjin ended the Second Anglo-Chinese War (第二次鸦片战争, Di er ci yipian zhanzheng, 1857-1860) and it was agreed that France and Britain could open up the entire country to missionary activity, though these treaties were deemed 'unequal'. For that reason the 'Self-Strengthening Movement' with Western tendencies (洋务运动, Yangwu yundong), c. 1861-1895, initiated a period of institutional reform during the late Qing rule [9]. From then on, a Chinese church leader later explained, Christians recognized the importance of starting an independent movement in which Christianity was no longer referred to as an 'alien religion,' thus enabling it to develop within a Chinese context. A real challenge.

The Door Ajar, 1847-1890

Notwithstanding these laws, three Lutheran mission societies from Germany soon arrived in China: The Rhenish Missionary Society (礼贤会, Li xian hui); the Berlin Missionary Society (巴陵会, Ba ling hui) and the Basel Mission (巴色会, Ba se hui). On March 19, 1847, four missionaries arrived in Hong Kong and under Gützlaff's guidance began working in different areas of Guangdong province [10]. They founded the Chongzhen Church (崇真会, Chong zhen hui) and the Rhenish Church (礼贤会, Li xian hui) respectively. The Berlin Missionary Society sent its first missionary to China in 1851 to that same province and eventually extended its work to the Mandarin speaking people in Jiangxi and Shandong province, founding the Yuegan Church (越赣会, Yue gan hui) [11].

American and Scandinavian missions, 1890-1907

Soon a number of Lutheran mission societies established a presence in Chinese provinces: The American Lutheran Mission (1890) in Henan and Hubei; Hauge's Synod Mission (1891) in Hubei, which joined (1917) the American Lutheran Mission; the Norwegian Lutheran China Mission Association (1891) in Hubei, Henan and Shaanxi; Danish Lutheran Mission (1896) in Manchuria; Kiel China Mission (1897) started in Guangdong, and joined the Schleswig-Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission (1921) to rather independent church settlements. The Finnish Missionary Society (1901) in Hunan and Hubei, American Lutheran Brethren Mission (1902) in the Henan and Hubei border region; the Norwegian Missionary Society (1902) in Hunan; and the Augustana Synod Mission (1905), in Henan, Hubei and Jiangxi. Altogether an amazing number of men and women flocked into the many corners of China to spread the gospel and Luther's legacy [12].

Expansion, 1892-1900

The Lutheran mission exploded over the next few decades. From 50 missionaries in China in the 1860s, the number grew to 2,500 (wives and children included) in 1900. Fourteen hundred missionaries were British, 1,000 American and 100 European, mostly Scandinavian. Protestant missionary activity peaked in the 1920s and thereafter declined due to war and unrest in China. At the end of the nineteenth century, after severe droughts and political unrest, the Chinese peasant population rioted against the increasing power of foreigners, especially of Christians and supported the Qing co-regency of the Empress Dowager Ci Xi (慈禧太后, Cixi Taihou, 1861-1881). Their (Taoist-inspired) 'Militia United in Righteousness' (义和团运动, Yihetuan yundong), also called 'Boxers' because of their fighting skills, swept over North-Eastern China, between 1899 and 1901. They even occupied Beijing, the capital, for 55 days. An 'Eight-Nations Alliance' (八国联军, Baguo Lianjun) i.e. Japan, Russia, the British Empire, France, the United States of America, Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary, reclaimed the treaty ports and legations seen as synonymous with foreign

dominance by the Chinese and defeated the Boxers [13]. During this period atrocities were perpetrated by both sides and among those killed were 189 (foreign) missionaries and their families, later named 'the China Martyrs of 1900' and commemorated in the 1907 Conference celebrating one hundred years of missionary activities in China [14].

A festival year, 1907

The China Centenary Missionary Conference (中国百年宣教大会, Zhongguo bainian xuanjiao dahui) was held in Shanghai, April 25 - May 8, 1907 [15]. This conference had speeches, public and devotional talks, including a survey of the century by Arthur Henderson Smith (明恩溥, Ming en pu, 1845-1932, Figure 4).



Figure 4: A.H. Smith, co-chairman of the 1907 conference.

The Anglican Bishop Handley Moule (1841-1920) [16] delivered the centenary sermon and Rev. T.W. Pearce lectured on Robert Morrison (see above); all these speeches were delivered in the Town Hall and in the Martyrs' Memorial Hall in front of 1,170 delegates. The overall ethos was positive, notwithstanding the recent developments in China and the perception that there was still much to be done [17]. In a memorandum the Conference commented on China's restrictions on Christians coming to China while favoring Chinese Christians under the terms of the Treaties. However, plans for united action in mission work between the diverse protestant missions focusing on educational and medical work, had not been effectuated. No remarks in the conference's reports on awareness of 'colonialism' in the church's activism in

China was noticed (yet).

The early books on 'Protestant missions in Modern China' (新教传教士与近代中国, *Xinjiao chuanjiao shi yu jindai zhongguo*) such as that of Donald MacGillivray mention eleven mission societies with hundreds of missionaries made up of individuals all with strong convictions [18].

The Fall of the Qing government, 1911

The Qing dynasty, in fact a Manchu (满族) domination, maintained the ancient institution of Imperial Examinations (科举, *Keju*) to recruit people for government positions. The Rulers also continued the ideals of the 'Imperial Chinese Tributary System' (中华朝贡体系, *Zhonghua chaogong tixi*) in international relations based on a strong identification with 'The Middle Kingdom' (中国, *Zhongguo*) which finally could not hold up under the stress of the modern era. Lutz's report on the anti-Christian movements of 1920-1928 is very clear about the tangle of tensions [19].

Re-evaluation of Missionary work

Despite all these major events at the turn of the century, shortly afterwards the Lutheran church expressed its faith in the China Mission with the words: 'White unto harvest' based on Isaiah 49:12 and Matthew 9:37-38 [20]. The study of the names of God, such as T'ien (Heaven 上帝 *Shang ti*, cf. Ricci); 天 *Tian* (Heaven; *JHWH*), or 天主 (*Tian Zhu*) in the Protestant missions in that period shows the impact of Christianization (基督教, *Jidujiao*) on the Chinese [21,22]. The foreign missionaries' enterprise, thanks to the self-sacrifice and the example of religious zeal they set, as well as (early) scientific interest (e.g. in missiology, cultural-anthropology and linguistics) opened up the isolated world of many ethnic groups and promoting socio-economic change in undeveloped communities was regarded as their great gift [23].

After World War II in Lund, Sweden, in 1947, the Lutheran World Federation was founded, to provide a forum for discussion on theological and organizational issues and to assist in philanthropy, missionary activity, as well as to exchange students and professors [24]. A key leader was Executive Secretary Sylvester C. Michelfelder (1889-1951) [25]. Among the participants was the Chinese theologian Peng Fu, Head of the Lutheran Church of China Synod, who made noteworthy contributions to the Assembly [26]. However, after a while articles on China in magazines such as *The Lutheran*, *Luther League Review* and the *Lutheran Herald*, ceased and it was a long time before reports of Lutheran missions reappeared [27].

The Collapse of the Mission to China, 1949 till 1953 and its rebirth 'Chinese style'

After Mao Zedong (毛泽东, 1893-1976, Figure 5) had ended the Chinese Civil War (国共内战, *Guo-Gong Neizhan*), the Peoples' Republic of China (中华人民共和国, *Zhonghua Renmin*

Gongheguo, PRC) was founded. Atrocities in this war resulted in the annihilation of 1,8 to 3,5 million people when communism got hold of China and by 1953 all the Protestant missionaries had been expelled by the Communist Party of China (中国共产党, *Zhongguo Gongchandang*, CPC). 'All of a sudden the church lost all its resources and after that we understood the standing of the church in China,' a Chinese church leader later remarked. A new period for China and the world began. The Maoist era marks one of the darkest pages of church history in China and Chinese Christians were begging the world to recognize the sacrifices of holy men and women in the name of their faith. During the disastrous Cultural Revolution (文化大革命, *Wenhua dageming*, 1966-1976), all churches were closed. However, the Communist Party (CP) realized – after pressure from the West and China's own church communities, both Catholic and Protestant – that the church could play a positive role in the re-establishment of China as a nation.



Figure 5: Mao Zedong.

In order to transform and stabilize Protestant Churches in China, two organizations (两会, *Lianghui*) were created in 1980: the 'China Christian Council' (中国基督教协会, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Xiehui*, CCC), and the 'Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM)' known as the Three-Self Church (三自教会, *Sanzi Jiaohui*) [28]. While the Protestant churches took on this concept, the Catholic church took another direction under Rome's guidance which is not discussed here [29]. For an interesting comparison with non-Lutheran churches, see Wickeri [30]. In around 1950, when there were approximately 700,000 protestants in China, the Lutheran Church of China (中华信义会, *Zhonghua xin yi hui*, LLC) was organized into four levels [31], i.e. National Assembly, Synod,

District and Congregation. Drastic changes within the LCC were necessary to bring down the barriers between denominations in line with CCC/TSPM's requirements. So, on January 25, 1951, an extraordinary Council meeting in Hankou was organized under the leadership of Yu Jun, the National Vice-President, during which it was agreed to reorganize the LCC into five geographical zones and Yu Jun replaced Peng Fu as National President. The rules of CCC/TSPM were now enforced and the links with (British) Hong Kong missions disrupted, resulting in students no longer being sent to the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong [32].

Although the LCC only lasted 30 years as an organized

entity in China, its legacy in the development of Lutheranism in East Asia has been substantial. Many Lutheran Churches in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore began with the work and missions of the LCC (see further).

In the new 1950s approach, Wu Yao-tsung (吴耀宗, 1893-1979, Figure 6) and K. H. Ting (丁光训, Ding Guangxun, 1915-2012, Figure 7) set up plans for the transformation of Western religions in China, which were accepted by the CP as ideologies alongside Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism (resp. 佛教, Fojiao; 道教, Daojiao; 儒学, Ruxue). Wu founded Tien Feng (天风, Lit. Days of wind) which became the official magazine of Chinese Protestantism as well as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement [33].



Figure 6: Y.T. Wu.



Figure 7: K.H. Ting.

During the early 1970s as the American President Richard Nixon (1913-1994, Figure 8) [34] prepared to visit the PRC to normalize political relations, he contacted E.G. Blake, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (普世教会协会, Pu shi jiao hui xie hui, WCC) before visiting Beijing in 1972 [35]. This signalled *post aut propter*, the policy of opening up China, the 'Open Door policy' (门户开放政策, Men hu kai fang zheng ce) which developed further under the rule of Deng Xiaoping (邓小平, 1904-1997) and the process of (re)developing the churches began [36].



Figure 8: Mao meets Nixon in 1972.

During memorable talks with the U.S. President Jimmy Carter (b.1924), Deng confirmed that Bibles could be printed in China and churches reopened but no new missionaries could be sent. In 1948 the China Bible Society (圣经公会, Sheng Jing gong hui) in Guangzhou had moved to Hong Kong but afterwards the (China) Bible Society of CCC/TSPM opened a printing house in Nanking in 1986 [37], cooperation began with the Amity Foundation (爱德基金会, Ai de ji jin hui) [38], a faith-based social service provider. Among others, the Rev. Bao Jiayuan was one of the zealous workers. Now Chinese Christians have a Revised Chinese Union Version of the entire bible (和合本修订版, Hehe benxiu ding ban) which was completed in 2010 (Figure 9) [39].



Figure 9: Headquarters of CCC and TSPM, 219, Jiujiang Road, Shanghai.

Persecution of Christians

Following in Mao's footsteps, Deng continued to persecute Christians, even after the 1950s when the churches of TSPM/CCC were authorized. At the 4th National Christian Conference, Shanghai, 1981 it was stated, 'To be anti-TSPM is to be anti-government, for religion must be organized and controlled.' The government supervised all the Protestant churches in China via CCC/TSPM, including buildings, church services, pastors, and every activity. The Public Security Bureau closed all meetings of non-authorized churches, arrested their leaders and itinerant evangelists. Other churches were considered to be a threat to the CP. During the 1980s, the CCC implemented the 'Ten Don'ts,' e.g. young people under eighteen were neither allowed to attend worship services nor night time gatherings, nor could they receive overseas Christians. Preaching from the book of Genesis (创世记, Chuang shi ji) and Revelation (启示录, Qi shi lu) were forbidden, due to an assumed intrinsic conflict with CP ideology. Bibles could be published only within limited annual quota. The international program 'Bibles for China' (圣经佐中国, Shengjing Zai Zhongguo) tried to help but the restrictions continued even after Deng's death in 1997 [40]. Thus the pastor Zhang Shaojie (张少杰) from Henan Province was put 12 years in jail in 2014 for his campaigns [41].

Christianity in China today

Ever since the relaxation of the CP's suppression of religious practice in the late 1970s, Christianity has flourished in China. This was a much hoped for, but unexpected, outcome. During this period, despite the CCC, 'house churches' (also called 'family churches' (家庭教会, jia ting jiao hui), or 'underground churches' (地下教会, di xia jiao hui) or 'underground heavens' (地下天国, di xia tian guo), small groups of worship in family homes, grew in popularity. Initially widespread among the peasantry, Christianity then extended to the cities. This 'third church' developed with an emphasis on self-identity (自我认同, Zi wo ren tong), which was a relatively new idea in China. Its members are China's newly privileged, highly educated, cosmopolitan, middle or even upper class of urban professionals. All this will change the face of China's Church for two reasons [42]. Firstly, the Chinese have found Christianity to be a stabilizing ideology in a changing socio-economic landscape, which had its previous religious traditions crushed by Maoism and its values questioned after Tiananmen Square [43]. Secondly, with its obvious western (colonial) heritage, the rise of Christianity is linked to a subconscious attack on the ideological values espoused by the CP. However, what is most surprising is the CP's recent policy of actively funding and supporting state-sponsored Christian belief in China, 'so that it should respect and protect religious belief.'

There are now around 23 million official Protestants in China (in TSPM) and Christianity is enjoying its best period of growth in China. CP suppressed the 'spiritual movement' Falun Gong (

法轮功) in the 1990s, and tries to bring house churches under the auspices of the state as well [44]. However, any suppression of Christian groups risks provoking the ire of the West, with ‘freedom of religion’ as a major issue in the wider context of human rights human rights in China (中国人权, Zhongguo renquan) [44]. The recommendations of a prominent Chinese economist, Zhao Xiao (赵晓, b.1967), that socio-economical ideas (read: prosperity and happiness for everybody) benefit from active religious groups seem to have been adopted by the CP leadership [45]. In late 2007 President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛, b.1942) confirmed this by announcing ‘the knowledge of religious people must be harnessed to build a prosperous society.’ On its current trajectory and with state backing, as the former Chief of Time Magazine Beijing notes, ‘within three decades there may be nearly 400 million Christians in China. The future of Christianity may well lie in the East.’

The churches in Mainland China have now entered a post-denominational period. Differences in theological or liturgical schools are dealt with on a basis of mutual respect (相互尊重, Xiang hu zun zhong). The pastoral work of the Chinese churches has been expanded over the last twenty-five years and lay training, theological education and Bible distribution are among the top priorities of the CCC. There are currently 22 theological seminaries and Bible schools and hundreds of lay training centres throughout China. At the national level the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (金陵协和神学院, Jin ling xie he shen xue yuan, Figure 10), was the result of a fusion of 11 pre-50s seminaries.



Figure 10: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, old building.

Links with The Past and New Developments

From an anthropological point of view among the many socio-religious trends I mention first that the revival of Confucian morality, promoted by Xi Jinping (习近平, 1953-) actually President for life of the PRC, has not yet happened at a grand scale, despite much effort put into worldwide Confucius’ Institutes and funding of Temples. Yet this all sits rather uneasily with a regime

based on Communism, a philosophy with atheism as its key dogma, and (moderate) despotism with a ‘social credit system,’ (社会信用系统, Shehui xinyong xitong) as its practice, based on the newest big data-analyzing technologies, Artificial Intelligence (人工智能, Rengong zhineng), and financial market motives, attacking (Confucian as well as Christian) family values and undermining trust in society and the ‘Other’ as a person [46].

The fusion of Western churches might give a picture of ‘a united church’ but in China the non-denominationalisation process of churches has not had much effect and the link with the historical founders has been lost. At the start of the 21st century there are still three distinct branches of Protestant Christianity. Firstly, there are the official, state sanctioned, and registered TSPM churches, often in colonial buildings such as the Moore Memorial Church (沐恩堂, Mu En Tang) in Shanghai [47]. This church established by American missionaries in 1887 and expanded in 1931 to seat more than 1,000 worshippers, has built up a local membership of thousands [48]. Or the Lutheran Qingdao Protestant Church (青岛基督教堂, Qingdao ji du jiao tang, Figure 11), built in 1910 which reflects the period of Germany’s imperial hegemony, equally in Qingdao province and in the international scene [49]. Its current restoration confirms its major position in sino-christian history. Deng Xiaoping said: ‘Seek truth from facts’.



Figure 11: (Former Lutheran) Protestant Church in Qingdao.

Secondly there is the network of house churches, mentioned above. Thirdly, there are other groups called ‘Sects’, outside the TSPM, although the doctrines are in line with ‘Protestantism’ (基督教新教, Jidujiao xinjiao) e.g. Eastern Lightning, Mentuhui, Beili Wang, The Shouters, the Total Scope Church, the Fangcheng Fellowship, the China Gospel Fellowship and the Meeting Hall, which are not detailed here. Lately, Christianity in China has seen the proliferation of mega-churches, whose charismatic leaders are ‘entrepreneurs’ who prefer to go alone, managing their churches as private businesses and which have proved a challenge to CCC/ TSPM. In this regard the government reports ‘Fifty percent of the

population is uneducated and very easily led, so it's very dangerous as a means of control and brainwashing.'

The CCC and TSPM work closely together to support the ministries of Chinese Christianity and to strengthen contacts with Christian councils at every level through communications, exchange of experience, study and consultation on relevant issues. CCC/TSPM advocates theological renewal and the sinicization of the Chinese church to build up theological thinking which is biblically grounded, rooted in Chinese culture and encapsulates the special experience of the Chinese church, able to provide a sound explanation of Christian faith in a modern Chinese context. The CCC/TSPM has eight commissions (Church Administration, Theological Education, Bible Publication, Church Media, Social Service, International Affairs, Women and Youth Ministry, Rural and Ethnic Minority Church Ministry) and seven departments (Theological Education, Media, Domestic Church Ministry, Research, Social Service, Overseas Relations, and Administrative Office). "The government wants to use us as an agency to promote unity and a 'Harmonious society' (和谐社会, He xie she hui) [50]." They want to work together with all religions," a member of CCC remarked.

One sees growth in every sector today. Within the legal churches there is a well-organized body with the Chinese Union Version Bible, the Chinese New Hymnal book, the education of pastors through seminaries and new churches. Despite state control the illegal (bigger) house churches can have a Pentecostal or charismatic aspect, or even folk religion elements, and this leads to restrictions (meeting times, location, buildings etc.), and some overt persecution reported in the press. They even have mission activities in China and abroad [51].

New projects for the Protestant (Lutheran) Church in wider China

The Lutheran World Federation was founded in 1947 and its First General Secretary was Sylvester Michelfelder (in office 1947-1951), and after that growth was continuous. The worldwide community of Lutheran Churches comprised the Church of the Missouri Synod, Churches in Malaysia and Singapore, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, America, Canada, the Evangelical Church in Germany and in Hong Kong, after 1997 in the 'one country, two systems' model [52]. The active Lutheran Church-Hong Kong Synod has existed for 40 years and has over 8,000 members, with activities in Asia and either a direct presence or via missions, and an active outreach.

The community has orthodox elements with a traditional, faithful understanding of Lutheranism within the worldwide church community but the style of worship ranges from historic to contemporary; ecumenical elements are found in accord with Scripture and the interpretations set out in the Lutheran Foundational

Documents (The Book of Concord). The church works with those (Asian) church bodies with whom theological cooperation is possible [53]. The question is whether Chinese CCC/TSPM suits this ideology. In the many countries with active Lutheran Christian churches and theological schools, Chinese students from PRC, but also from the diaspora 离乡背井聚居的族群 (lixiangbeijing juju de zu qun) of the ethnic Chinese worldwide, in the 'China Towns', of Europe, Asia, Australia and the Americas, who have come and then reached out to their communities and mainland China thus sowing the seeds of (Lutheran) Christianity again [54]. A few examples will make this clear.

The International Chinese Biblical Seminary in Europe (国际欧华神学院, Guoji ou hua shen xue yuan) in Catalonia, Spain, offers a three-year post-graduate program to equip students for full-time ministries in Chinese churches, mainly in Europe. Its Mission Statement: 'To provide one pastor for each Chinese Church in Europe; to equip each pastor in Europe with evangelical beliefs [55].' In the 'China town' El Sobrante (Bay Area, California) a new church was opened in 1995 by Rev. R.S. Yuen of ELCA in the Calvary Christian School with services in Cantonese and Mandarin. Later they moved to a church in Richmond, San Francisco CA. The China Lutheran Seminary-Hsinchu, Taiwan (中华信义神学院, Zhong hua xin yi shen xue yuan, CLS) was visited by an Evaluation Team on behalf of the Asia Theological Association (ATA) of the Philippines in 2015 [56].

This underlines the international cooperation within the Asian Region. The 'Christian Aid Mission' which was established in 1953, and Bob Finley (from Youth for Christ and /InterVarsity Fellowship student movement) was one of the first to go to China to seek support for indigenous missionary ministries worldwide and spread the gospel and plant churches among unreached people, as in China [57]. The Norwegian Lutheran Missionary Karl L. Reichelt (1877-1952) started in Hunan in 1904 with his work among Buddhists, later he moved to Hong Kong. There he founded the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre to encourage interfaith and cultural exchange and dialogue. The missiologist Knud Jørgensen worked at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong, as Director of the Scandinavian mission foundation Areopagos, and Dean of Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong. He was the co-author of some books on missiology. 'Missionary activity is not the work of the church but the Church at work,' and 'Escaping from the Prison of a Westernized Gospel,' were some of his challenging notions.

Conclusions

I have given an outline of the role and position of the Lutheran church against the historical background in China, with its many anti-religious episodes. Today it seems vanished in a 'state church' under CP policy. As Christianity continues its rapid rise in China, the numbers pose problems for communists/atheists or believers in traditional Chinese religions. Recent reports mention oppression

and persecution. Crosses have been removed from churches, and there have been acts of demolition, in order to remove prominent signs of Christianity in the public and even private sphere [58]. This underlines a basic dilemma and confirms the strong regime of the government. Furthermore, many Western churches are still struggling with the problem of the credibility of the CCC/TSPM church and tends to support illegal 'home churches,' supposedly more authentic.

During a visit of the residing Episcopal Bishop in 2012 to meetings in Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing, where she met with the minister Wang Zuo'an of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA 国家宗教事务局, Guojia zongjiao shiwu ju) in 2018 to be taken over by CPC's Central United Front Work Department (中共中央统一战线工作部, Zhonggong zhongyang tongyi zhanxian gongzuo bo), she mentioned the care of church buildings and communities. 'The Marxist government will protect the rights of Christians, but they have to set a good example of morality,' was the answer. What is the religious environment in China like at the moment? Open communication will give us a more nuanced view. The government's viewpoint on religion has changed greatly. In the past, the government thought religion was as 'the opium of the people' which prevented society's development but beginning with the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 2007, (中国共产党第十七次全国代表大会, Zhongguo gongchandang Dishiqici Quanguo Daibiao Dahui, 2007) the party stated that "religion could make cultural, social and economic contributions and since that time the emphasis has been on the positive role that religion can play. Talking of 'religious freedom' is now outdated and frightening for the China's collectiveness or the idea of existence maximum, and we should talk about making a positive contribution to society." To understand the position of Christianity in China today requires much historical study. Why has Christianity throughout so many centuries, remained alien to the Chinese an outsider unable to integrate in the fabric of Chinese life? A Sino-Nordic conference in 2003 showed a need for exchange of missionary values based on the Chinese cultural identity [59]. Cavell argues that this has two roots: its foreign connections and its foreign message. What was preached? How? Why did it fail? I have put a focus on the contextuality as significant theme in contemporary world mission studies. Recently Liu and White reported about a necessary re-evaluation of the early mission activities. Understanding the historical background is the only way other Christians can relate to Chinese Christianity, either in the PRC or in the Chinese diaspora, in line with Dubois, who said about Manchuria: the social, political, and geographic development of the country either shaped or was shaped by religion [60].

The challenges for the church in the twenty-first century are about the functioning of the church as a communion of Christians, keeping biblical truth, contributing to society as a whole and taking a share of responsibilities in all the speeches on the freedom of

religion, human rights, social inequality and ethics, whenever they are questioned [61].

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