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Xi Jinping's *Zongjiao Zhongguohua* (Chinazation of Religion) and the Christian Idea of Inculturation

Zbigniew Wesolowski SVD

Abstract

In this article, the author endeavours to compare Xi Jinping's religious policy of zongjiao Zhongguohua (Chinazation of religion) with the Christian idea of inculturation. For this goal, he first provides some terminological explanations and then shows the core statements of Xi Jinping concerning his religious policy. Afterwards, he points to a possible origin of Chinazation of religions in the present-day atheist Communist China. Subsequently, he explains a Christian idea of inculturation. Finally, he compares Xi Jinping's religious policy of zongjiao Zhongguohua with the Christian idea of inculturation in three points: the difference in the source of authority; the difference in the way of implementation of the Christian idea of inculturation and Xi Jinping's policy of Chinazation; and finally in their ultimate objectives.

Introduction: From Terminology to the Present-day Political Situation of China

I have chosen the unusual – and even for me as a foreigner – somewhat awkward English translation “Chinazation of Religion” for the Chinese expression *zongjiao Zhongguohua* 宗教中国化 in order to stress its difference with another English word “sinicization” (American English; British English: sinicisation) – here “sinicization of religions” which is normally used in this context. I have also come across the wording “Sinolization of Christianity.”¹ Actually, there is yet another word like “sinification,” which I came across in the context of Buddhism.² In “Wikipedia” I have found also “sinofication” and “sinonization.”³ All these words consist of the prefix “sino-” which means “Chinese” or “relating to China.”

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1 Asher 2018, pp. 57–65.

2 E.g., the title of a conference “Historical Mirror for the Contemporary World: International Conference on the Sinification of Buddhism through the Perspective of World History and Globalization” (<https://frogbear.org/historical-mirror-for-the-contemporary-world-international-conference-on-the-sinification-of-buddhism-through-the-perspective-of-world-history-and-globalization/>, accessed April 5, 2022).

3 Cf. “Sinicization” in “Wikipedia” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinicization>, accessed April 5, 2022).

They all describe a process in which “non-Chinese societies come under the influence of Chinese culture, particularly the culture, language, societal norms, and ethnic identity of the Han people – the largest ethnic group of China.”⁴ Chinese words for this process were traditionally *Hanhua* 漢化 or *Huahua* 華化.⁵ For me, they are suitable to be used for the cultural influence of China towards its neighboring countries in its history before the rise of the Republic of China in 1912 and the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In order to stress the specificity of *Zhongguohua* of religion in Xi Jinping’s new era socialism with Chinese characteristics, I translate *zongjiao Zhongguohua* in English as “Chinazation of religion(s).”

All these words mentioned above bring one very important fact of Chinese culture to our knowledge which has been proven by its history. Chinese culture occupies a special place and unique rank among the advanced civilizations of mankind in that it has grown and is still growing in unbroken, continuous development through at least four millennia. It is not the oldest of all cultures, but the one with the longest continuous existence up to now.⁶ This unbroken cultural continuity of traditional China brought about the historical, or rather the historicizing consciousness among the gentry (*shi* 士) and Chinese officials (scholarly officialdom: *shidafu* 士大夫) in the empire, in which above all the notion of how the Chinese wanted to understand themselves came to bear, and then exerted a tremendous effect in traditional China: history as such and the consciousness of it gained an unparalleled authority here.⁷

Here one has to mention the existential crisis of Chinese culture in the 19th–20th centuries. Since the first Opium War (1840–1842) and the peace treaty of Nanjing, which finished it and through which the English dictated their conditions and required from the Chinese absolute obedience, there started a colonial invasion of Western powers in China. Until then the Chinese had lived in a Sinocentric and self-sufficient world (as the Westerners had lived in an Eurocentric, colonialist and imperialistic one), and now were forced to look outside their own borders and face the Western challenge with its military superiority. Deep changes due to this Western encroachment and the clash between China and the West left the Chinese in the long run with no other choice than to try to understand – not without opposition and hesitation – Western culture and civilization. From that time on, Chinese culture itself has become a problem, and understanding it has no longer been an easy task. We can say that from that time on China has been living “with fevers,” “feverishly.”

4 Cf. “Sinicization” in “Wikipedia” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinicization>, accessed April 5, 2022).

5 *Hua* 華 points to China or Han people, i.g., *Huaxia* 華夏 or *Zhonghua* 中華.

6 This traditional Chinese culture with Confucianism at the surface and Daoism and Buddhism was in the 17th-century China a “cultural imperative” for Christian (Catholic) accommodation. This idea was first stressed by Erik Zürcher, who emphasized the deep structure in Chinese religious life in late-imperial times. Thus, no marginal foreign religion could expect to take root in China (at least at a high social level) unless it conformed to a pattern that was more clearly defined than ever. Cf. Zürcher 1994, pp. 31-64.

7 See Trauzettel 1984, pp. 77-90, and Ng – Wang 2005. In the past, Chinese traditional institutions and culture were idealized and the Chinese Empire was often depicted as a monolithic cultural and political entity.

Until today the Communist propaganda likes to use the term “the century of humiliation” (Chinese: *bainian guochi* 百年國恥),⁸ which was an important component of China’s international relations and continues to shape China’s perception of its role today.⁹ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) always tried to use China’s century of humiliation, in which China was exploited by various other nations (from the West and Japan), as a legitimization of its rule in China. Abuses by foreigners led to China being disadvantaged in unequal treaties, impoverished by outrageous compensation payments, and territorial losses (e.g., parts of Shandong to the Germans, Hong Kong to the British, Taiwan to Japan) and violations of its sovereignty. The reference to the century of humiliation and China’s refusal to be controlled any longer was intended to inspire and motivate the Chinese people to national pride under the leadership of the CCP. In recent years, the influence of the national humiliation narrative has become increasingly evident in China’s international actions. The CCP has aggressively responded to perceived offenses by foreign organizations, whether governments or corporations, with public criticism and mobilization of Chinese Internet users. The rhetoric of the century of humiliation¹⁰ has been both the driving force in China’s quest for higher status and a means to further Chinese foreign policy goals, the results of which are visible around the world. China’s rise demonstrates how the legacy of China’s humiliation continues to have far-reaching consequences as China plays a larger role in our lives.

Since the time of the Open-Door Policy, which Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) initiated in 1978 as a new economic policy, whereby China was once again open to foreign companies wishing to invest here, there has been fairly steady and large growth in the Chinese economy. This policy set in motion the economic transformation of modern China. Admittedly, there were always major or minor setbacks in between. For example, corruption and increased inflation intensified discontent and contributed to the 1989 wave of student protests in Beijing’s Tian’anmen Square, and a conservative backlash ousted several key reformers and threatened to reverse many of Deng’s reforms. Thus, we see a continuity of CCP political power which began at the birth of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In July 2021, Communists in China celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the founding of their party, which was established in Shanghai.

As the CCP has pushed Chinese society toward more state-sponsored ideological conformity to create a lasting foundation for authoritarian party rule, it also desires greater ideological control from abroad. Despite increased efforts to limit the “infiltration” of values and ideas from the outside, Chinese had increasing access to Western news, content, and culture. The CCP believes that “as China continues to ‘open up’ to reap the ben-

8 The term originated in 1915 in the atmosphere of rising Chinese nationalism that opposed the Japanese government’s Twenty-One Demands and their adoption by Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916), with the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and the CCP later popularizing the characterization.

9 Weatherley – Zhang 2017, pp. 27–53.

10 CIGH Exeter, “How the Century of Humiliation Influences China’s Ambitions Today” (published on July 11, 2019; <https://imperialglobalexeter.com/2019/07/11/how-the-century-of-humiliation-influences-chinas-ambitions-today/>; accessed May 1, 2022).

efits of a more central role in the global economy,”¹¹ it must “sanitize” the external information environment to ensure that such opening does not lead to ideological challenges for CCP control. Chinese authorities, since Xi Jinping’s 习近平 (b. 1953) assumption of power in 2012 and subsequent centralization of power, have stepped up efforts to limit foreign influence in the cultural, entertainment and educational spheres within China. The Communist government has tightened already significantly expanded restrictions on foreign media access in China to create a wall of regulation against the “infiltration” of external values and ideas. Otherwise this development could threaten CCP’s preferred narrative. The measures taken include cutting imports of children’s cartoon books and limiting the percentage of foreign broadcasts on public TV channels. Regarding the education system, the role of English in the national university entrance exam has also been reduced somewhat.¹²

Xi Jinping’s centralization of power, however, has been an accelerant rather than the main driver of China’s more assertive influence efforts. Rather, it is the CCP’s obsession with maintaining its dominance – a theme that preceded and enabled Xi’s rise to power in 2012 – that fundamentally drives China’s growing influence in the developing world. The growing threat of CCP control has preoccupied Chinese Communist leaders since the beginning of this century as they have sought a deeper understanding of the core factors that characterize China’s reform era – relative political stability, ideological openness, and rapid economic growth. While the CCP’s primary focus remains on domestic issues such as corruption, which is central to its legitimacy, Chinese leaders have focused on aspects of relations with developing countries that are believed to enhance the CCP’s strength amid potential turmoil.¹³

China’s present-day main domestic issues that will be major challenges in the coming years, analyzed in a series of reports, journal articles, and conferences, are: 1) political reform and the future of the CCP; 2) corruption and local unrest (repressive policies in Tibet and Xinjiang); 3) human rights and religious freedom; 4) demographic challenges; 5) social policy: education (excessive restrictions on academic freedom), health, and a social safety net; 6) environmental problems; and 7) China’s legal reform.¹⁴

Since the rise of the PRC in 1949, its religious policy was Marxist-Leninist and nationalistic, the peak of restrictions was during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Afterwards there was a period of loosening the grip of Marxist-Leninist policy. Since the rise of Xi Jinping’s power, the religious policy in China tends more to be a socialistic-Sino-centric orthodoxy (a socialist theory of religion with Chinese characteristics, *Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi zongjiao lilun* 中国特色社会主义宗教理论) with its controlling and re-

11 David O. Shullman (January 22, 2019), “Protect the Party: China’s Growing Influence in the Developing World” (www.brookings.edu/articles/protect-the-party-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-developing-world/; accessed May 20, 2022).

12 See *ibid.*

13 See *ibid.*

14 See “China’s Domestic Challenges” (www.csis.org/programs/freeman-chair-china-studies/past-projects/chinas-domestic-challenges; accessed April 20, 2022); and David Dollar – Huang Yiping – Yao Yang, “China’s Long-term Success Will Depend Primarily on Addressing Its Internal Challenges” (June 2022; www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2021/06/the-future-of-china-dollar-huang-yao.htm; accessed September 14, 2022).

strictive character. In imperial China since Emperor Wu 武 of Han 漢 (156–87 BC),¹⁵ it was Confucian-Sinocentric orthodoxy which had prevailed in China up to 1911. On the whole, one – so for example Roman Malek (1951–2019)¹⁶ – can gain the impression that a present-day socialist-Sinocentric orthodoxy has replaced the traditional Confucian orthodoxy of imperial China. This continuity of Chinese religious policy with regard to Chinese Communists since the rise of the PRC, he called “eine frapierende Kontinuität” (a striking continuity)!¹⁷

In 2015, Xi Jinping officially stated for the first time the need for a consequent continuation of *zongjiao Zhongguohua* – “Chinazation of religion” with regard to all religions in China. This refers to the five religions that are constitutionally allowed: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism.

Xi Jinping and *Zongjiao Zhongguohua* (Chinazation of Religion)

As mentioned above, it was on May 15, 2015 that Xi Jinping officially began the campaign of “Chinazation of religion.” By then, he had already served as General Secretary of the CCP (2012) and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (2012), as well as President of the PRC (2013), becoming the “supreme leader” (*zuigao lingdaoren* 最高领导人). He said at the Central Conference on United Front Work among other things:

*Religious work is essentially the work of the masses, we must fully implement the Party's policy of freedom of religious belief, manage religious affairs in accordance with the law, adhere to the principle of independence and self-management, and actively guide the adaptation of religion to socialist society. In order to actively guide the adaptation of religion to socialist society, we must adhere to the direction of Chinazation, must improve the level of religious work under the rule of law, must see the social role of religion dialectically, must value the role of personalities in religious circles, guide religious efforts to promote economic development, social harmony, cultural prosperity, national unity, the unification of the motherland services.*¹⁸

15 Emperor Wu adopted Confucianism as the state philosophy and an official code of ethics for his empire. He began to teach future administrators the Confucian classics. These reforms had an enduring effect throughout the existence of imperial China and an enormous influence on neighboring nations.

16 Cf. Malek 1987, 1989, and 1996.

17 Malek 1996; there is the section: “Eine frappierende Kontinuität: Religion(en) und Religionspolitik in der Volksrepublik China” (A striking continuity: religion(s) and religious politics in the People's Republic of China: pp. 197–202). Much earlier, Roman Malek had already brought up this pithy expression, see Malek 1987, “Theorie und Praxis der chinesischen Religionspolitik, eine frappierende Kontinuität” (Theory and Practice of Chinese Religious Politics, a Striking Continuity).

18 “习近平：巩固发展最广泛的爱国统一战线” (Xi Jinping: To Consolidate and to Develop the Broadest Patriotic United Front): “[...] 宗教工作本质上是群众工作，要全面贯彻党的宗教信仰自由政策，依法管理宗教事务，坚持独立自主自办原则，积极引导宗教与社会主义社会相适应。积极引导宗教与社会主义社会相适应，必须坚持中国化方向，必须提高宗教工作法治化水平，必须辩证看待宗教的社会作用，必须重视发挥宗教界人士作用，引导宗教努力为促进经济发展、社会和谐、文化繁荣、民族团结、祖国统一服务” (www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/20/c_1115351358.htm, accessed April 9, 2022). All translations are done by the author of this article, if not otherwise stated.

On April 23, 2016, Xi Jinping, being the first CCP General Secretary since 2001 to attend the annual National Religious Work Conference, called for the CCP members and religious work officials to consolidate its United Front with religious communities and to actively adopt religion to socialist society with the help of the program of “Chinazation of religion.” “[...] in order to achieve the ‘Two Centenaries’¹⁹ goal and realize the Chinese dream²⁰ of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (为实现“两个一百年”奋斗目标、实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦而奋斗).²¹

Since then, the annual reports of the CCP Central Committee and the National People's Congress, or the National People's Political Consultative Conference, have repeatedly emphasized the need for the Chinazation of religions in China. And at the same time, all religious authorities and institutes in China have been vigorously tackling the implementation of the Chinazation campaign. Indeed, the United Front and religious departments have conscientiously held study and discussion workshops and energetically implemented pilot projects all over the country in cooperation with religious representatives and in accordance with the guidelines on “adhering to the Chinazation course of religions,” so that a broad consensus has been emerging between the United Front department of the CCP and the national religious organizations in China on the Chinazation campaign. Wang Zuo'an, vice minister of the CCP's United Front Department and director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA, Guojia zongjiao shiwuju 国家宗教事务局), repeatedly stressed that Chinazation is “the most important mission of the CCP's religious work” in the new era (*xinshidai* 新時代).²²

The CCP administers and regulates religions in China with the help of three functionally different institutions:²³ 1) at the center – the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Tongyi zhanxian gongzuobu* 中共中央统一战线工作部), 2) the SARA, and 3) patriotic associations of the five religions, constitutionally sanctioned by the PRC (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protes-

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- 19 This phrase of “Two Centenaries” points to a set of goals pronounced by CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping following the 18th National Congress of the CCP in 2012. This is the basic foundation for achieving the “Chinese Dream,” another phrase advanced by Xi Jinping to hallmark his time in power. The first centenary (July 2021) is the founding of the CCP in 1921. The second is the founding of the People's Republic of China which will be celebrated in 2049. Cf. Lu Ding 2020, pp. 203-207.
- 20 The “Chinese dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) is a term chosen in reference to the “American Dream.” It was first used officially by China's President Xi Jinping during a tour of the “Road to Revival” exhibition at China's National Museum on November 29, 2012. Xi Jinping said that the realization of a great revitalization of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation since modern times.
- 21 “习近平: 全面提高新形势下宗教工作水平” (Xi Jinping: Comprehensively Improve the Level of Religious Work under the New Situation) (www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/23/c_1118716540.htm, accessed April 9, 2022).
- 22 Wang Zuo'an, “Religionspolitisches Strategiepapier der chinesischen Regierung,” February 26, 2020 (Wang Zuo'an: Den Sinisierungsprozess der Religionen stabil weiterführen, in: *Zhongguo Minzu Bao* [China Ethnic News], March 26, 2019, p. 5), translated from Chinese into German by Isabel Friemann, December 3, 2019 (www.chinainfostelle.de/aktuelles/religionspolitisches-strategiepapier-der-chinesischen-regierung, accessed April 9, 2022). The phrase “the new era” refers to “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想 (abbreviated in English as “Xi Jinping Thought”) which is a collection of policies and ideas gained from the writings and speeches of Xi Jinping, first officially mentioned at the 19th National Congress of the CCP in 2017 and then at the First Session of the Thirteenth National People's Congress on March 11, 2018 included in the preamble of the Constitution of the CCP.
- 23 Chang 2018, p. 38.

tantism).²⁴ These three institutions work at every administrative level of this party-state.²⁵ The United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee takes care of research on the religious questions and affairs and helps the CCP Central Committee with setting up religious policy making. It communicates with religious leaders of the state-sanctioned five religions and coordinates between state organs and the five patriotic religious associations. SARA²⁶ enacts religious policies and manages regular religious matters. Due to the party-state dual system in China, a head of the Bureau of Religious Affairs at each level of the government is to be appointed from among the members of the local United Front Work Department. This personnel dual system is, of course, a way to guarantee that the CCP control over implementation of religious policy will be ensured.

Xi Jinping's new era socialism with Chinese characteristics has still another interesting dimension. It is his conviction that China's socialist culture is rooted in the "fine traditional Chinese culture" (*Zhongguo youxiu chuantong wenhua* 中国优秀传统文化).²⁷ At the beginning of this contribution, we have mentioned an historically special status of Chinese culture among the world cultures with its existential crisis in the 19th–20th centuries. Xi Jinping shows his confidence in the power of the national culture of China, developed – traditionally attributed to the Chinese – in the course of five thousand years of history:

*We have strengthened Party leadership over ideological work and explored new ground in advancing Party related theories. The importance of Marxism as a guiding ideology is better appreciated. Socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese Dream have been embraced by our people. Core socialist values and fine traditional Chinese culture are alive in the people's hearts. Initiatives to improve public etiquette and ethical standards have proved successful. Public cultural services have been improved; art and literature are thriving, and cultural programs and industries are going strong.*²⁸

Thus, Xi Jinping's political ambition of a new era socialism with Chinese characteristics goes beyond China:

*It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.*²⁹

24 Chang 2018, pp. 27–44.

25 The Constitution of China basically provides for four levels: 1) provincial level, 2) prefectural level, 3) county level, and 4) township level. Here I would like to stress that CCP commands, controls and integrates all other political organizations and institutions in China. The party-state under Xi Jinping, or his "partocracy," totally determines China's present-day political reality.

26 Under Xi Jinping, it was announced in 2018 that SARA would be incorporated and subordinated to the United Front Work Department and its functions would be integrated into the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee. To me, it is also a sign of more and more developing "partocracy" in China.

27 Cf. "习近平提出, 坚定文化自信, 推动社会主义文化繁荣兴盛" (Xi Jinping Proposed to Build a Strong Cultural Confidence and to Help Socialist Culture Flourish) (www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/18/c_1121820800.htm, accessed April 12, 2022).

28 Xi 2017a.

29 *Ibid.*

As we see in this citation, Xi Jinping wants to set up his new era socialism with Chinese characteristics as an alternative model to the Western world!

As to core socialist values, they are a set of new official interpretations of socialism with Chinese characteristics promoted at the 18th National Congress of the CCP in 2012. The 12 values, written in 24 Chinese characters, are: 1) the national values of (1) prosperity (*fuqiang* 富强), (2) democracy (*minzhu* 民主), (3) civility (*wenming* 文明), and (4) harmony (*hexie* 和谐); 2) the social values of (1) freedom (*ziyou* 自由), (2) equality (*pingdeng* 平等), (3) justice (*gongzheng* 公正), and (4) rule of law (*fazhi* 法治); and 3) the individual values of (1) patriotism (*aiguo* 爱国), (2) dedication (*jingye* 敬业), (3) integrity (*chengxin* 诚信), and (4) friendship (*youshan* 友善). Are these core socialist values really typically socialist? They seem to have a universalistic thrust and some of them sound typically Confucian.³⁰

The current direction of development of Sino-Marxism³¹ in China is techno-authoritarianism (IT-backed authoritarianism; also called: digital authoritarianism or digital dictatorship).³² For example, with the help of technical instruments and equipment, China's domestic police authorities are able to collect an extraordinary amount of data on people, and their activities, so that so-called troublemakers can be identified in advance and eliminated. Particularly suffocating is the state surveillance of Uighurs in Xinjiang, where authorities use mobile apps, biometric recording, artificial intelligence, and mass data, among other tools, to control 13 million Turkic Muslims.³³

Upgrading and promotion of traditional Chinese values must be largely seen as a response to the challenges of Western ideas. As the CCP has pushed Chinese society toward more state-sponsored ideological conformity to create a lasting foundation for authoritarian party rule, it also desires greater ideological influence on other countries in the world. Despite increased efforts to limit the "infiltration" of values and ideas from outside, Chinese have increasing access to Western news, content, and culture. Chinese authorities, since Xi Jinping's assumption of power in 2012 and subsequent centralization of power, have stepped up efforts to limit foreign influence in the cultural, entertainment, and educational spheres within China and have tightened already significantly expanded restric-

30 Thus Pieke (2016, p. 24) who understands these values as Confucian values void of any specifically socialist content.

31 Von Senger describes Sino-Marxism as "a driving force of Chinese economic boom." According to him, Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) were both Marxists who tried to sinicize the Marxist doctrine so that it could be better adapted to Chinese conditions (Von Senger 2018, pp. 105–294, here especially p. 137).

32 Since 2014 China has been building up respective structures under the so-called "Social Credit System" (*shehui xinyong tixi* 社会信用体系). The Western and Chinese approaches to social control offer two fundamentally different philosophical and experiential perspectives. Most Chinese have no problem with this system. While in the U.S. and EU, individual rights are of paramount importance and an extremely active formalized legal system responds to these needs, the Chinese have taken a very different approach. The hallmark of Chinese social control is the preeminence of society or the social collective (traditionally starting with the family), and there is a marked aversion to formal law or any legal system. The core of Chinese social control is based on Confucian social ethics with its stress on meritocracy, which emphasizes self-discipline and subordination to the family and the state. Cf. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/social-control-peoples-republic-china-0> and Twitchett 1976.

33 Doffman 2019 (www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/04/25/huawei-xinjiang-and-chinas-high-tech-surveillance-state-joining-the-dots/; accessed April 12, 2022).

tions on foreign media access in China to create a wall of regulation against the “infiltration” of external values and ideas, which could threaten the CCP’s preferred narrative.³⁴

The first example suits Islam in China, the second – Christianity. Thus, Chinazation of religions is a result of strategic thinking of Xi Jinping and his comrades.

We will fully implement the Party’s basic policy on religious affairs, uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society. [...]

*We must rigorously protect against and take resolute measures to combat all acts of infiltration, subversion, and sabotage, as well as violent and terrorist activities, ethnic separatist activities, and religious extremist activities. [...]*³⁵

Actually, *zongjiao Zhongguohua* (Chinazation of religions), according to the literal meaning, might refer to inculturation (accommodation, adaptation, or indigenization) of religious beliefs, practices, and religious rites within Chinese culture and society. For President Xi Jinping, the “Chinazation” of religions in China is primarily politically and ideologically motivated.³⁶ As a government policy, it establishes three CCP priorities for the supervision and administration of religions in China. Administratively, it realizes state supervision and control over religions with constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and over their “normal” activities which are subjected to arbitrary sovereignty of interpretation by the CCP. Ideologically, it seeks to revive the influence of CCP ideology (e.g., the above socialist core values) over religious belief and practice. Legally, it provides the legal framework to monitor the growth of religions and control their influence in China.³⁷

Chinazation of Religions in China: Its Possible Origin and Consequences for Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism)

It seems that the recent issue of Chinazation of religions was initially more a result of academic investigations of the rapid spread of Christianity in China, especially from the 1980s to the mid-2000s.³⁸ In the context of this “Christianity Fever,”³⁹ which reached its peak in China from 1995 to 2005, another intellectual-social phenomenon appeared, called “cultural Christians” (*wenhua jidutu* 文化基督徒). Cultural Christians mainly included intellectuals such as university lecturers and professors, artists, lawyers, etc. The cultural

34 Shullman 2019 (www.brookings.edu/articles/protect-the-party-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-developing-world/; accessed April 12, 2022).

35 Xi 2017a.

36 “Sinicization’: A New Ideological Robe for Religion in China” (posted on 21st December 2020 by Tom Harvey; www.oxfordhousereseach.com/sinicization-a-new-ideological-robe-for-religion-in-china/; accessed May 18, 2022).

37 See, for example, (in German) Chinesische Katholische Patriotische Vereinigung – Chinesische Katholische Bischofskonferenz 2018, “Fünfhjahres-Arbeitsplan für das Vorantreiben des Festhaltens des Katholizismus unseres Landes an der Ausrichtung auf Sinisierung (2018–2022),” pp. 220–228.

38 Chang 2018, pp. 39–41.

39 Cf. Malek 1995, pp. 808–822, and Fiedler 2010, pp. 71–109.

Christians usually lived in cities. They usually did not join any Church congregation, but are involved in Christianity themselves and identify with its human values with essential ethical statements of Christianity.⁴⁰ Thus, Christianity as the fastest growing religion in the biggest and one of the last Communist-run countries of the world: This phenomenon the PRC has been viewed by some Communist Chinese scientists of religions as a kind of pathology. The fast and steady growth of Christianity in China has been diagnosed as “an unbalanced religious ecology resulting from the destruction of indigenous religious traditions, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religions that occurred in the first few decades of Communist rule.”⁴¹

Benoît Vermander in his article “Sinicizing Religions, Sinicizing Religious Studies”⁴² gives us a broader perspective of the development of religious studies in China in recent years. The topic of religious ecology (*zongjiao shengtai* 宗教生态), which I understand as one of the most instrumental to the emergence of the religious policy of Xi Jinping’s “Chinazation,” is also one of the many trends discussed there. Especially, the name of one female expert for the history of Christianity in China, Duan Qi 段琦 with her “religious ecological imbalance theory” (*zongjiao shengtai shiheng lun* 宗教生态失衡论), must have become very important. Based on field research data, she pointed out that the so-called “religious ecology” refers to the social existence of different religions, similar to natural ecology, and that their normal state should be to limit each other in order to achieve an overall equilibrium, i.e., each religion has its place, provided there is a market that meets the faith needs of different groups of people. However, when inappropriate artificial interventions are made, their balance is destroyed, causing some religions to develop disproportionately fast in some areas while others wither away. According to them, the rapid development of Christianity after reform and opening up is related to an imbalance in the religious ecology.⁴³

This way of thinking was a productive inspiration for further research in this direction. Here I want to mention only Zhang Zhigang’s 張志剛 article: “Jidujiao Zhongguohua’ sansi” (“基督教中国化” 三思, Some Thoughts on Chinazation of Christianity, 2015).⁴⁴ Zhang is Professor and a doctoral supervisor in the Department of Philosophy and the Department of Religious Studies of Beijing University, Dean of the Institute of Religious Culture, and Vice President of the Chinese Society of Religious Studies. In his short article, Zhang Zhigang predicted that the quick and excessive spread of Christianity in China would lead to a number of undesirable consequences: First, he said, it furthers the efforts of foreign hostile forces to gain a foothold and expand their influence in China and plays into the hands of their strategy to promote a constantly increasing Christianization of China. As a result, there will be a struggle between control on the side of the state and anti-control as the reaction to it. Conflicts and even confrontations between socialist beliefs and other traditional beliefs in China will consequently undermine the stability and har-

40 Fällman 2013, pp. 153-168, and Chow 2018.

41 Chang 2018, pp. 39-40.

42 Vermander 2019, pp. 1-23, here pp. 8-9.

43 Duan 2009, pp. 143-144.

44 www.aisixiang.com/data/83049-2.html (accessed April 19, 2022).

mony of society, according to Zhang. A second consequence, he said, is the development of a Christian movement, much of which is underground, where the quality of doctrine and faith practice in dealing with believers cannot be clearly improved. The orthodoxy of the faith could not be guaranteed which would lead to sectarianism of Christian groups. Moreover, it would be difficult to communicate normally with society. There was a variety of church organizations that were not part of known “normal” Christianity and were beyond any control. Such congregations and churches can easily be used by various negative social forces and are not conducive to the “healthy” development of Christianity under the banner of patriotism. A third consequence and danger, according to Zhang Zhigang, is that national pride and awareness of one’s Chinese culture would be destroyed, which would also damage the value system of Confucianism. The people-oriented, self-improving, virtuous, benevolent, and harmonious national spirit created by Buddhism and Daoism would be threatened by a Christian doctrine, which, in its origin as monotheism, claims exclusivity and aggressively fights other religions.

Thus, it is easy to think on the side of the CCP:

To combat the West’s effort to christianize China, Christianity in China should be sinicised by reforming its beliefs and practices, especially by eliminating its proselytism and discarding its teaching that salvation is possible through Christ alone, a belief viewed as incompatible with pluralistic and harmonious (duoyuan tonghe 多元通和) Chinese religious traditions. Above all, the Chinese Christians must fulfil their national consciousness, as well as their duty as citizens and as members of a community of shared destiny by rejecting all Western ideas and influences.⁴⁵

The focus on the religious ecology let the concept of Chinazation of religions in China apply to all five constitutionally accepted religions, i.e., Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. In view of both Catholic and Protestant Christianity, we see at first its political use and the selectivity of religious tolerance in China, i.e., excessive control and restrictions. Among all the religions in present-day China, Daoism is the only indigenous, i.e., truly Chinese religion. Chinese popular religion (Chinese folk religion) is still officially forbidden, although it is nowadays not only tolerated, but in view of the “fine traditional Chinese culture” it will be refined to “civilized” folklore. What could Chinazation mean for Daoism? From the complaints of the Communist cadre, we learned the criticism of superstition connected with it. In China, e.g., divination has a tradition that goes back thousands of years (beginning with oracle bones in the Shang dynasty, c. 1600–1064 BC). Chinese fortune telling (*suanming* 算命) and *fengshui* 風水 practice have applied many varying divination techniques throughout dynastic periods. There are various methods still in practice in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Chinese-speaking regions like Malaysia and Singapore today. In this context, there are also accusations of commercialization of the religious activities in view of both Daoism and Buddhism. In contemporary China, there is a tendency towards an increasing marketization of religion.⁴⁶

45 Chang 2018, p. 40.

46 Palmer 2011, pp. 569-594.

As to the details of the status quo of Chinazation of religions in present-day China, we point to the following: All five religions in China have already published five-year plans for the Chinazation: Protestantism (March 2018),⁴⁷ Catholicism (May 2018),⁴⁸ and Islam (January 2019);⁴⁹ the Chinese Daoist Association also submitted a “Jianchi daojiao Zhongguohua fangxiang wu nian gongzuo guiha gangyao (2019–2023)” 坚持道教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要 (2019–2023年) (Outline of the Five-Year Work Plan for Adhering to Daoism's Orientation to Chinazation [2019–2023]), which was posted on its website on November 11, 2019.⁵⁰ The “Jianchi fojiao Zhongguohua fangxiang wu nian gongzuo guiha gangyao” 坚持佛教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要 (2019–2023) (Outline of the Five-Year Work Plan for Adhering to Buddhism's Orientation to Chinazation [2019–2023]) was already approved by the Standing Administrative Council of the Chinese Buddhist Association on July 24, 2019, but was not posted on its website until November 14.⁵¹

Like the plans of the other religions, the Daoist document on Chinazation contains a great many CCP-oriented demands and formulations. A first look at the document, however, also shows that considerable interference is apparently planned in the teachings and practices of Daoism. Traditional Daoist precepts (*daojiao jielü* 道教戒律) are to be arranged, provisions not in keeping with the times are to be corrected or deleted, and contemporary rules of conduct are to be added (item 8). The dress of Daoist religious officials should be standardized (item 10), Daoist practices (*fawu huodong* 法务活动) should also be standardized, practices not in keeping with the requirements of the times should be simplified or abolished (item 11). The Daoist classics are to be arranged and the modern construction of a system of Daoist teachings is to be actively pursued (items 13 and 14).

Of course, Buddhism should be also under the CCP ideological operation of Chinazation. Buddhism in China is as old as Christianity itself – two thousand years old!⁵² The Sinicization of Buddhism as the Chinese metamorphosis of core Indian cultural elements,

47 “Quan wen: Tuijin wo guo jidujiao Zhongguohua wu nian gongzuo guiha gangyao (2018–2022)” 全文: 推进我国基督教中国化五年工作规划纲要 (2018–2022) (www.tyjdj.org/page1000611.html?article_id=1176&pagenum=1, 5 pp.; accessed April 20, 2022).

48 “Tuijin wo guo tianzhujiao jianchi Zhongguohua fangxiang wu nian gongzuo guiha – quan wen” 推进我国天主教坚持中国化方向五年工作规划—全文 (<https://cccn.org/other/2018-08-10/65043.html>; accessed April 20, 2022).

49 “Jianchi wo guo yisilanjiao Zhongguohua fangxiang wu nian gongzuo guiha gangyao (2018–2022)” 坚持我国伊斯兰教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要 (2018–2022) (Outline of the Five-Year Work Plan on Adhering to the Orientation towards Chinazation of Our Country's Islam [2018–2022]. The text of the “Outline” was published in the Chinese Islamic Association's [Zhongguo Yisilanjiao xiehui 中国伊斯兰教协会] journal *Zhongguo musulim* [China Muslim] 2019, No. 1, pp. 5–8).

50 “Jianchi daojiao Zhongguohua fangxiang wu nian gongzuo guiha gangyao (2019–2023)” 坚持道教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要 (2019–2023年) (www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=5209&p=%E2%80%98%E2%80%98; accessed April 20, 2022).

51 “Jianchi fojiao Zhongguohua fangxiang wu nian gongzuo guiha gangyao” 坚持佛教中国化方向五年工作规划纲要 (2019–2023) (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=40672; accessed April 20, 2022). It is significantly longer than the five-year plans of the other religions. Among other things, it plans to “enrich and develop the thought of humanistic Buddhism.” Its origins and lines of development are to be further explored, overseas experiences are to be incorporated, and wrong thinking and actions are to be resisted. The establishment of a system of humanistic Buddhism (人间佛教) with doctrine, canonical scriptures, spirituality, rules, and liturgy is to be explored. Another future task envisioned by the document is to bring forth interpretations for the doctrine and precepts of the Tibetan and Theravāda traditions of Buddhism that are in line with China's contemporary development and exquisite traditional culture.

52 Cf. Zürcher 2007, Chèn 1973, and Wright 1959.

occurred in several areas of culture, including philosophy, religious practice, and the building of Buddhist institutions. During the migration from its South Asian homeland to China, Buddhism retained many core teachings, such as the teachings of the Four Noble Truths⁵³ and the threefold training in discipline.⁵⁴ Especially when it comes to the exegetical traditions that interpreted and translated the many Indian sutras, the process of Sinicization is evident. In the early days, Chinese Buddhists digested Indian concepts by awkwardly relating them to native Chinese concepts. Even later, when Chinese Buddhists developed sophisticated insights into the nature of reality as ultimately unconditional, they could not suppress a strong urge to integrate Indian elements into Chinese systems of thought, especially by blending Buddhism with Confucian and Daoist teachings. The Chinese phrase *san jiao heyi* 三教合一 (the three teachings / religions are harmonious as one, i.e., Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) has been in practice since the 4th century in China.⁵⁵ China's syncretism is one of the characteristics of Chinese religious life.

The reason Buddhism was able to take such deep roots in China – and remember that China was the source of the Buddhist teachings after the seventh century in the neighboring kingdoms like Korea and Japan – has to do with a mutual attraction that linked the teachings of Indian Buddhism and Chinese culture. The latter molded the former in accordance with its philosophy, culture, and institutions, creating a form of Buddhism that had innumerable Chinese characteristics. One of the most conspicuous features of Chinese Buddhism is, e.g., that it has become a polytheistic religion in China. And nowadays? In 2018, for example, the famous Shaolin Temple – an ancient Buddhist temple where the martial art *gongfu* 功夫 is said to have originated – raised the Chinese Communist flag for the first time in its 1,500-year history as part of a government campaign to demonstrate patriotism. Carsten Krause, a Research Fellow of Numata Zentrum für Buddhismuskunde (Numata Center for Buddhist Studies) in Hamburg, in his conclusion:

Sensitive is and remains especially the question to what extent the politically forced “(further) development” and indispensable interpretative sovereignty over Humanistic Buddhism in the People’s Republic of China will be brought into a direction acceptable for both sides of the Taiwan Strait. It will be necessary to watch more intensively than in the past three to four decades of Buddhist reconstruction (“revivals”) in which direction Buddhists in China “develop” themselves or their system further as a result of this positioning of the Buddhist Association of China.⁵⁶

53 There is the noble truth about suffering; the noble truth about the cause of suffering; the noble truth about the cessation of suffering (Buddhist glad tidings); and the noble truth about the path of practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.

54 *Trīṣikṣā* (Sanskrit, “threefold training”), the three types of learning required of those who wish to attain enlightenment. Arranged in a progressive order, the three are: (1) *śīla* (moral conduct), which enables the body and mind to concentrate, (2) *saṃādhi* (meditation), where concentration of the mind is a prerequisite for attaining a clear vision of truth, and (3) *prajñā* (wisdom), which is understood not as a collection of empirical knowledge but as an intuitive experience of ultimate reality attained in the state of *saṃādhi*.

55 Brook 1993, pp. 13–44.

56 Krause 2021, p. 48: “Sensibel ist und bleibt besonders die Frage, inwieweit die politisch forcierte ‘(Weiter)Entwicklung’ und unabdingliche Deutungshoheit über den Humanistischen Buddhismus in der VR China in eine für beide Seiten der Taiwan-Straße akzeptable Richtung gebracht wird. Es wird intensiver als in den vergangenen

The Chinazation of religions propagated by Xi Jinping now seems like a combination of all such aspects, like a collective term whose common denominator is the dictate to place all religions, regardless of their provenance, under the unconditional leadership of the CCP in the service of the so-called all-Chinese nation. That is, all religious people in China are now to become “useful tools” for the strengthening of the CCP and the Sino-Marxist motherland China!

What Is the Christian Idea of Inculturation?

The inculturation of Christianity into other cultures, i.e., its spread outside Jewish culture, above all into Greco-Roman culture, has taken place since apostolic times. Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his disciples to spread his teachings to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18; Marc 16:15). Saint Paul's address to the Greeks at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-33) can be considered one of the first conscious attempts at inculturation. When Alopen (Aluoben 阿羅本), the first historically recorded Christian missionary of the “Nestorian Church” (*jingjiao* 景教), arrived in the Chinese capital Xi'an (then Chang'an) in 635 with a group of his monks and found there the acceptance of the second emperor of the cosmopolitan Tang dynasty (618–907), Taizong 太宗, the inculturation of Christianity in China began.

When one speaks of the term “inculturation,” one must first think of what culture is. Because inculturation refers first of all to an encounter of Christianity with different cultures. We can broadly understand the term “culture” as a totality of the characteristic spiritual, artistic, and civilizational achievements created by a specific human community in a specific area during a specific epoch. The concept of culture is also used a lot in the Catholic Church, e.g.: Culture in the sense of Vatican II exists wherever there is man; it is given wherever man develops his spiritual and physical endowments and where he shapes the world through his activity. Article 53 of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965) already speaks about culture in detail and comprehensively:

Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are quite intimately connected one with the other.

The word “culture” in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.

drei bis vier Jahrzehnten des buddhistischen Wiederaufbaus ('Revivals') hinzuschauen sein, in welche Richtung Buddhisten sich bzw. ihr System in China in Folge dieser Positionierung der CBV weiter 'entwickeln.'” English translation by the author.

*Thence it follows that human culture has necessarily a historical and social aspect and the word “culture” also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense. According to this sense we speak of a plurality of cultures. Different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of laboring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridic institutions, of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty. Thus the customs handed down to it form the patrimony proper to each human community. It is also in this way that there is formed the definite, historical milieu which enfolds the man of every nation and age and from which he draws the values which permit him to promote civilization.*⁵⁷

This description of culture underlines two important aspects:

1. It avoids the distinction or even separation of culture, civilization, and nature. This excludes the misunderstanding that there are peoples without culture (as seems to be expressed in the collective term “primitive peoples,” which arose more than a hundred years ago to designate all historical, ethnic groups that lived outside or before the beginning of industrialized civilization, or that culture is only a matter of the educated, or only a by-product of wealth and idleness;

2. The mention of the historical and social aspect of culture establishes and justifies the diversity of cultures and their historical change. This also provides, at least indirectly, a reason and justification for the diversity of liturgical forms and for their change, not only in the past but also for the future. For no culture realizes all human and religious values, nor does it always remain the same. Therefore, no particular liturgy of a particular epoch can be considered perfect and unchangeable. Thus, it is necessary that the meaning of culture be properly understood as a multi-layered and diverse reality, wherever people live, work, express, create, and celebrate together. Actually, worship is an integral part of this culture. In it, the central insights and attitudes concerning human life, its origin, meaning and purpose, find their symbolic expression. Revelation, in which God communicates Himself through the Old and New Testaments and especially through the person of Jesus, is also embedded in the culture of Israel. The same is true for the Church today:

*[...] living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful.*⁵⁸

Here we come close to the theme of inculturation.

With regard to the neologism “inculturation,” one should first think of the American cultural anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits (1895–1963), who already in the 1930s spoke

57 *Gaudium et spes* 53 (www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; accessed April 23, 2022).

58 *Gaudium et spes* 58 (www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; accessed April 23, 2022).

of the English term “enculturation” within anthropology.⁵⁹ Herskovits used this term to describe the entry of an individual into a culture and his ability to express himself within it, and applied it analogously to the entry of the Church into a culture. In the process, the term changed on the move via the Latin translation (*inculturatio*) to “inculturation.”⁶⁰ In 1962, the Belgian missiologist and Jesuit Joseph Masson (1908–1998) introduced the term “diversely / multiformly inculturated Catholicism” (“*vielgestaltig inkulturierter Katholizismus*”).⁶¹ Here inculturation is understood as a term to describe the process by which the rooting of the Christian message in non-Christian cultures is being realized as a kind of implementation.

Vatican II did not use the term “inculturation,” but it had the matter very much in mind when, for example, it calls “accommodated preaching of the revealed word” as the “law of all evangelization” and ascribes to each people “the ability to express Christ’s message in its own way” (*Gaudium et spes* 44). It also emphasizes the mutual enrichment of churches and cultures (*Gaudium et spes* 58) and the task that spurs theological reflection in every socio-cultural metropolitan area (*Ad gentes* 22).⁶² In ecclesial usage, the term first emerged in the document adopted at the First Plenary of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in Taipei on April 27, 1974: “The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated.”⁶³ Thus, here was spoken of a “church indigenous and inculturated.”

In 1990, Pope John Paul II explained the meaning of inculturation in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* 52:

The process of the Church’s insertion into peoples’ cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation “means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.” The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church’s reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult

59 Hödl 2006, p. 25.

60 Sievernich 2002, p. 267.

61 *Ibid.*

62 “The seed which is the word of God, watered by divine dew, sprouts from the good ground and draws from thence its moisture, which it transforms and assimilates into itself, and finally bears much fruit. In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.(5)

To achieve this goal, it is necessary that in each major socio - cultural area, such theological speculation should be encouraged, in the light of the universal Church’s tradition, as may submit to a new scrutiny the words and deeds which God has revealed, and which have been set down in Sacred Scripture and explained by the Fathers and by the magisterium” (www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html; accessed May 3, 2022).

63 Rosales – Arévalo – Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences 1992, p. 14 (Statement of the General Assembly No. 12).

*process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.*⁶⁴

Through inculturation, the values of the Gospel come alive in each culture by positively receiving what is good in each culture and renewing them from within.

The term “inculturation” has been part of the theological vocabulary since the 1970s. It is about the relationship between faith and cultures and the question of how this relationship is to be determined. There are also other terms that try to specify this relationship clearly. These terms are also often found in literature, some of them appeared already since the beginning of the 20th century. They are the terms like *assimilation*, *accommodation*, *adaptation*, *acculturation*, *enculturation* and *interculturalization*, the short descriptions of which point to different horizons of understanding and approaches. Here, these synonymous terms must first be explained briefly, then it will be clear why the term “inculturation” finally sets itself apart from those.

Normally, one thinks that what the term “inculturation” denotes has always been a part of the history of Christianity as we see it grow and spread throughout the world. Yet this way of thinking seems too simplistic. Alfons Fürst, for example, states:

*Nevertheless, inculturation is, strictly speaking, an inappropriate term for the process of spread and growth of Christianity in antiquity. It evokes the idea of a fully formed religion called Christianity, which would have taken possession of the ancient world as if it had been foreign to it. In the two points things are different [...].*⁶⁵

Therefore, it is important that we try to understand the different terminology surrounding the concept of inculturation in its conceptual-historical context.

In sociology, the term “assimilation” refers to the process of integration of an individual or group to the distinctiveness of another group, another people.⁶⁶ It usually refers to a process in which people adapt to a new environment, give up some or all of their old identity, and adapt completely to a new society. This includes, for example, people learning the language of the native population and adopting its traditions and moral values. This term comes from sociology and is derived from the Latin word *similis* meaning “similar.” In terms of mission, Thomas Ohm says, “Assimilation is the incorporation of the knowledge and values peculiar to the pagans into the Christian possession of truth and values.”⁶⁷

64 www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html; accessed May 3, 2022.

65 Fürst 2014, p. 45: “Gleichwohl ist Inkulturation für den Ausbreitungs- und Wachstumsprozess des Christentums in der Antike streng genommen ein unpassender Begriff. Er evoziert nämlich die Vorstellung einer fertig ausgebildeten Religion namens Christentum, die von der antiken Welt Besitz ergriffen hätte, als wäre diese ihr fremd gewesen. In den beiden Punkten liegen die Dinge anders [...]” English translation by the author.

66 “Assimilation is the process whereby persons and groups acquire the culture of other group in which they come to live, by adopting its attitudes and values, its patterns of thinking and behaving – in short, its way of life” (www.sociologydiscussion.com/sociology/assimilation-in-sociology-definitions-and-aids-to-assimilation/2216; accessed May 3, 2022).

67 Gruber 2013, p. 29: “Assimilation ist die Aufnahme der den Heiden eigenen Erkenntnisse und Werte in den christlichen Wahrheits- und Wertebesitz.” English translation by the author.

The term “accommodation” is derived from the Latin word *accomodatio*. It means adaptation or consideration. In the opinion of Thomas Ohm (1892–1962), accommodation is “the adaptation of the missionary subject, with all that he/she has to impart to the pagans, to their peculiar features.”⁶⁸ Accommodation proceeds from the notion of a normative essence of Christianity that distinguishes between essential and non-essential elements. Certain adaptations to other cultures, for example in the area of liturgy, religious customs, or ecclesiastical architecture, are possible; however, the essence remains unchangeable. Thus, accommodation of the Christian message into another culture does not necessarily lead to a deep understanding of Christianity, since essential elements remain foreign. Despite accommodation, Christianity remains the Western, European religion.⁶⁹

The term “adaptation” is derived from the Latin word *adaptare* (to adapt) and has been widely used in French sociology. There it means adaptation of man to the social environment.

*Functionalist thought, from Comte onwards, has looked particularly towards biology as the science providing the closest and most compatible model for social science. Biology has been taken to provide a guide to conceptualizing the structure and the function of social systems and to analyzing processes of evolution via mechanisms of adaptation. Functionalism strongly emphasizes the pre-eminence of the social world over its individual parts (i.e. its constituent actors, human subjects).*⁷⁰

In the sense of missionary work, adaptation is roughly equivalent to accommodation. For their part, the two terms mean only one aspect of what inculturation expresses. For they do not imply the rooting of Christianity or the liturgy of the Church in a foreign culture, but rather the attempt at an approximation to that culture, e.g., in the manner of a native Bible translation, a liturgical mother tongue, or a “cautious adoption of native forms of expression in the area of gestures, dress, music, architecture.”⁷¹

The term “acculturation”⁷² is a term coined as early as 1935 by the American Social Science Research Council and refers to a process of mutual adaptation or transmission between cultures as a result of cultural contact.⁷³ This normally results in a mutually new mixed culture or the adoption of certain elements of the foreign culture.⁷⁴ In the Christian missions, acculturation can only cover a partial aspect of what happens, or is supposed to happen, when Christianity is rooted in a new culture; for although the message and

68 Gruber 2013, p. 29: “die Anpassung des Missionssubjekts mit all dem, was es den Heiden zu vermitteln hat, an die Eigenart der Heiden.” English translation by the author.

69 Üffing 2017, pp. 175–176.

70 Giddens 1993, p. 88.

71 Meyer 1983, p. 7: “[...] vorsichtigen Übernahme einheimischer Ausdrucksformen im Bereich der Gesten, der Kleidung, der Musik, der Architektur.” English translation by the author.

72 “Acculturation is a process of cultural contact and exchange through which a person or group comes to adopt certain values and practices of a culture that is not originally their own, to a greater or lesser extent. The result is that the original culture of the person or group remains, but it is changed by this process” (www.thoughtco.com/acculturation-definition-3026039; accessed May 5, 2022).

73 Meyer 1983, p. 6.

74 Roest Crollius 1997, p. 18.

the worship of the Church inevitably first appear and are conveyed in a certain cultural context of the original culture, this context can be distinguished from it or indeed can be again removed from it.⁷⁵

The term “enculturation”⁷⁶ refers to the growing of the individual into the culture of the society that surrounds him or her. It enables the individual, by entering a culture, to acquire skills and express himself in that culture.⁷⁷ This is part of the socialization process and helps with education. Nevertheless, enculturation is shaped by the particular power relations that strongly influence the culture at hand.⁷⁸ The individual appropriates and becomes a part of the elements of culture that appear powerful to them. This concept can be also considered a partial aspect for the Christian mission in the foreign cultural area.⁷⁹

The term “interculturalization,” according to the Jesuit Francis X. D’Sa (b. 1936) from India

*[...] has to do, first and foremost, with the perception of the osmotic and symbiotic interactions between cultures and then with the apprehension of the resulting changes. Interculturalization is a phenomenon that works in the background, without regard to human intentionality. Only later does interculturalization make itself felt, usually when a negative interaction takes place. The peculiar result of interculturalization is precisely that it makes us aware of what happens without our doing and willing. No matter what people intend in their actions, the action develops from its own momentum.*⁸⁰

To sum up, the terms mentioned above, for their part, mean only a partial aspect of what inculturation in our understanding wants to express. For this reason, since the 1970s the term “inculturation” already dominated as the central conceptualization regarding Christianity meeting other cultures.⁸¹ In the process of enlivened discussions, the terms such as *incarnation, contextualization, indigenization* faded into the background. The neologism “inculturation” was introduced into the missiological and ecclesiological vocabulary by the 32nd General Assembly of the Jesuits and a Synod of Bishops that emerged from it in 1977. It quickly prevailed over other terms and has become a basic missiological concept of our times.⁸²

75 Meyer 1983, p. 6.

76 “Growing up in any culture, all humans go through the process of enculturation. This process is the way in which we obtain and transmit culture. It describes how each individual comes to terms with the already set ideals that their culture has established, and how each person adapts to prohibited behaviors and beliefs, which are ‘proscribed’, versus encouraged behaviors and beliefs, which are ‘prescribed’” (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/culturalanthropology/chapter/enculturation/>; accessed May 5, 2022).

77 Roest Crollius 1997, p. 18.

78 Hödl 2006, p. 26.

79 Cf. Collet 2000, pp. 337-353.

80 D’Sa 2007, p. 73: “Interkulturalisation hat zunächst und vor allem mit der Wahrnehmung der osmotischen und symbiotischen Interaktionen zwischen den Kulturen und dann mit der Feststellung der daraus entstehenden Veränderungen zu tun. Interkulturalisation ist ein Phänomen, das im Verborgenen wirkt, ohne Rücksicht auf die menschliche Intentionalität zu nehmen. Erst später macht die Interkulturalisation sich bemerkbar, meistens wenn eine negative Interaktion stattfindet. Das eigenartige Ergebnis der Interkulturalisation besteht gerade darin, dass sie uns darauf aufmerksam macht, was ohne unser Tun und Wollen geschieht. Egal was die Menschen bei ihren Handlungen intendieren, entwickelt sich die Handlung aus Eigendynamik.” English translation by the author.

81 Cf. Üffing 2017, p. 174.

82 Meyer 1983, p. 7.

Giancarlo Collet defines the concept of inculturation as follows:

*Inculturation describes the mutual relationship between the Christian message or Gospel and the diversity of cultures. As a missiological “programmatic,” inculturation refers to that ongoing process in which the Gospel is given voice in a particular socio-political and religio-cultural situation in such a way that it does not merely express itself with elements of that situation, but becomes its inspiring, determining and transforming force, and thus at the same time an enrichment for the universal Church.*⁸³

What is special about this definition is the fact that it expresses the twofold dynamic of inculturating the Gospel into a concrete cultural and socio-political situation, which requires a certain adaptability of the Gospel, and at the same time transforming society through the prophetic power of the Gospel. This is not only a hermeneutical challenge,⁸⁴ but in view of present-day Sino-Marxist China, it ultimately seems to imply the biggest danger to the CCP. Of course, the ideal state of inculturation of Christianity would be when evangelization and missionary work could encompass a mutual reciprocal partnership between religious and non-religious cultures in order that the Gospel can transform them to reveal God’s vision for humankind. This vision is manifested for Christians in the Reign of God.

As to the topic of Christianity in China and its history of inculturation, there is an inscrutable multitude of available books and articles. The author of this contribution also wrote a small article: “Christentum in China. Ein mühsamer Weg der Inkulturation” (Christianity in China. The Arduous Path towards Inculturation) in 2017.⁸⁵ As a Divine Word missionary who has been over 45 years a member of the Society of the Divine Word and over 35 years a member of the Monumenta Serica Institute which takes Sinological interest in China and her culture, he looked back at Christian missionary commitment in China which started with the arrival of Alopen and his companions in 635. Up till now it is already the fifth stage⁸⁶ of evangelization of China, and each stage of the previous four periods of mission was a cumbersome path towards inculturation of Christian faith in

83 Collet 1996, p. 504: “Inkulturation beschreibt das wechselseitige Verhältnis von christlicher Botschaft beziehungsweise Evangelium und der Vielfalt von Kulturen. Als missionstheologische ‘Programmatik’ bezeichnet Inkulturation jenen dauernden Prozess, in dem das Evangelium in einer bestimmten soziopolitischen und religiös-kulturellen Situation so zur Sprache kommt, dass es sich nicht bloß mit Elementen dieser Situation ausdrückt, sondern zu deren inspirierender, bestimmender und transformierender Kraft wird und damit zugleich eine Bereicherung für die universale Kirche darstellt.” English translation by the author.

84 “Chinese Communists Rewrite the Gospel: Jesus Actually ‘Killed’ the Woman Taken in Adultery” (<https://mercatornet.com/chinese-communists-rewrite-the-gospel-jesus-actually-killed-the-woman-taken-in-adultery/66854/>; accessed May 6, 2022). The story in John 8:1-11 is presented to Chinese students as one where the Saviour waits for the Pharisees to leave, and then stones the adulterer himself, saying: “I, too, am a sinner. But if the law could only be executed by people without the least blemish, the law would die” (我也同样是个罪人。但如果法律只能由毫无瑕疵的人执行的话, 法律就只会死亡; see <https://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/49976/did-a-chinese-ethics-textbook-say-jesus-stoned-a-woman-to-death>; accessed May 7, 2022). Hopefully, it will not become the trend to re-write the Bible according to the principles of Chinaization.

85 Wesołowski 2017, pp. 71-88.

86 The first stage was Nestorianism in China – *jingjiao* 景教 (ca. 635–930); the second – Catholicism in China during the Mongol period (1279–1368); the third – Catholicism in China from the End of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911); the fourth stage is Christianity in China in the 19th and 20th centuries.

China. At the time of writing this article, the author was still hopeful of more inculturation of Christianity in China, which is now an officially atheistic and secular Communist state, with the help of social-caritative engagement of the Church in Chinese society. This way of inculturation under Xi Jinping's Chinazation of religions in China is no longer possible.

Conclusion: A Comparison between the Christian Idea of Inculturation and Xi Jinping's *Zongjiao Zhongguohua*?

Now we are ready to make some basic conclusions:

1. The difference in the source of authority (in whose name human beings speak): Christianity understands herself as a revealed religion (next to e.g., Judaism and Islam) which takes its origin in the Triune God: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"⁸⁷ (Matthew 28:19). "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father"⁸⁸ (*Ad Gentes* 2). "But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!"⁸⁹ (Acts 4:19).

The CCP with more than 90 million members celebrated its centennial in July of 2021. Its source of authority is Communist revolution and the seizure of political power in 1949. Its claim to autocracy is enshrined in the constitution. But to maintain its power, the CCP operates an enormous apparatus of repression and censorship – and a propaganda machine that was running hot for the anniversary. Demonstratively, State and Party leader Xi Jinping took the oath of allegiance to the CCP once again in mid-June – together with about 50 leading cadres of the CCP, in a history museum in Beijing. Xi Jinping's centralization of power, however, has been an accelerant rather than the main driver of China's more assertive influence efforts. Rather, it is the CCP's obsession with preserving its dominance – a theme that preceded and enabled Xi's rise to power in 2012 – that fundamentally drives China's growing influence in the developing world. All in all, the CCP is ultimately a man-made product. Of course, we can admire the CCP for its preservation of political power to this day in contrast to the Soviet Union.

2. The difference in the way of implementation of the Christian idea of inculturation and Xi Jinping's policy of Chinazation:

The inculturation of Christianity – or any other religion (we have now three so-called world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam) into other cultures, i.e., its spread outside Jewish culture, was a natural process since apostolic times. Of course, with the course of history, the Church has been developing methods and

⁸⁷ <https://biblehub.com/matthew/28-19.htm> (accessed May 7, 2022).

⁸⁸ www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html (accessed May 7, 2022).

⁸⁹ <https://biblehub.com/acts/4-19.htm> (accessed May 7, 2022).

policies of her missionary work, even the academic discipline missiology (mission studies) was developed in order to facilitate the mission of the Church.

Chinazation is the result of the recent development of the religious situation in Communist China and the reaction of the CCP to it. Here the direction of Sino-Marxist religious studies also helped, because its interpretation of the religious ecology within the present-day religious situation in China led Xi Jinping to apply the concept of Chinazation of religions to all five constitutionally accepted religions, i.e., Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

3. The difference in the ultimate objective:

The ultimate objective of inculturation is that all the peoples of the world will become disciples of Jesus Christ, i.e., mission work aims at the realization of “Thy (God’s) kingdom come.”

The ultimate objective of Chinazation is to keep a balance of religious ecology within the religious situation of the atheistic and Communist China in order to better use the strength of all religions to help stabilize the power of the CCP and contribute to the flourishing of the Sino-Marxist motherland China. This means a direct and very conscious direction of religions and strict control of all religions which nowadays leads to individual persecution. This can, of course, also mean to erode the religious content and characteristics of respective religions because of the application of Marxist methods of interpretation of religious matters, like a new translation of the Bible, etc. In 2018 it was announced that the SARA was officially dissolved and its functions taken over by the United Front Work Department. This means that the religious affairs are now directly under the control of the CCP which is not a good development for religions in China.

China’s techno-authoritarianism, applied in its domestic police agencies, collects an extraordinary amount of data on people and their activities, so as to identify and eliminate so-called troublemakers in advance. It is widely believed that China’s success is based on a uniquely Chinese “third way,” a political and economic model that is situated between capitalism and socialism. According to this interpretation, China is successful because the State continues to play an important role in the Chinese economy. Until now China not only enjoys the domestic success of economic reforms, but she has also elaborated the global project “New Silk Road” (*Xin sichou zhi lu* 新丝绸之路). This is a global infrastructure development strategy that was adopted by the Chinese government in 2013, bringing together nearly 70 countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe. It is considered the centerpiece of China’s foreign economic policy under Xi Jinping. The official Chinese name for the project is “Yidai yilu” 一帶一路 – (literally: One Belt, One Road), from which the English name of this mega-project “Belt and Road Initiative” is derived. The initiative was incorporated into China’s constitution in 2017.

According to my conviction, most Chinese in Mainland China are still “apolitical” so far as “everything is going well for my family and me” and do not care much about the color of political power. Only the acute, long-term economic crisis and hunger could lead to confusion and concern of Chinese citizens and to an undermining of confidence in the present-day Sino-Marxist system in China.

I would like to end my contribution on “Xi Jinping’s *Zongjiao Zhongguohua* (Chinaization of Religion) and the Christian Idea of Inculturation” against the background of China in the present world with two important questions, which go beyond the question of religions in China and the answers to which we can only know adequately in the future:

1. Will Communist China remain a peacemaking power in the world?
2. Will China insist on its own world order (Sino-Marxism, techno-authoritarianism with Chinese characteristics) and want to actively export its values worldwide?

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