

Becoming Chinese—
How Christianity and China
are Transforming Each Other

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“One more Christian is
one less Chinese.”

Due to a unique historical context, Christianity was brought to China along with gunboats as part of the “Western domination” and “imperialism” in the late nineteenth century. Christianity was perceived as a foreign religion.

Mission-led Christianity and its contribution to China

- Christian missionaries established China's first hospitals and schools, translated bibles, brought in modern technology, and contributed to charity.
- China's first sixteen colleges were all established by Christian educators. These colleges and their graduates were instrumental in China's modernization.

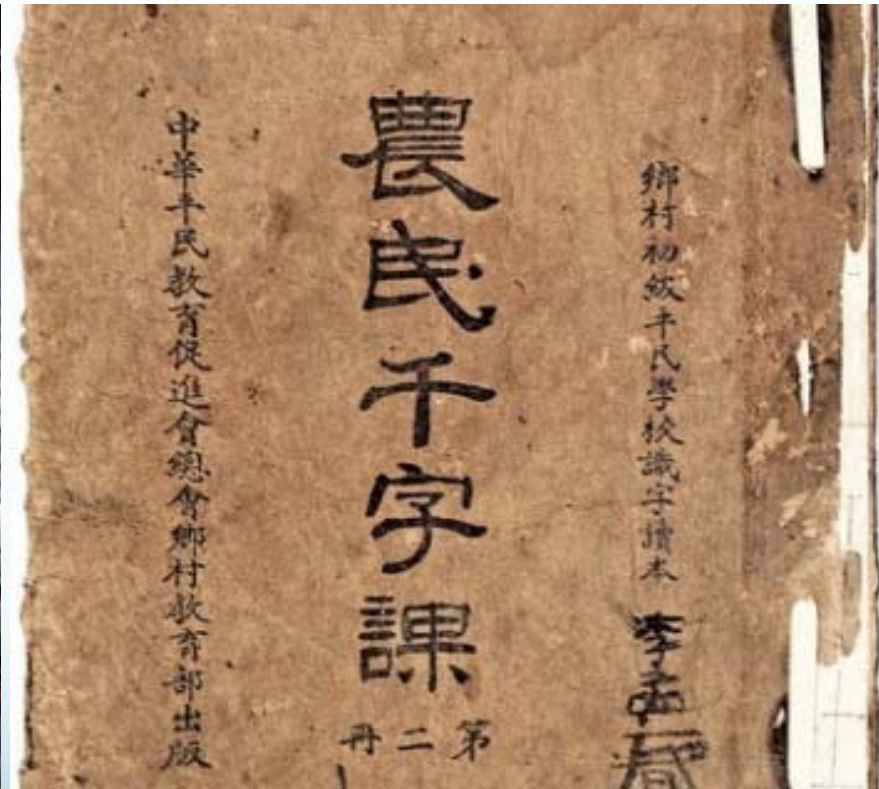
Christianity's indigenous grassroots transformation in China

- Under widespread anti-foreign sentiment and rising nationalism, Chinese were searching to indigenize Christianity, completely apart from foreign influence.
- Three notable Chinese groups emerged: the True Jesus Church, Watchman Nee's Assembly Hall Church movement, and the China Inland Mission.
- Pentecostalism, marked by miracles, healings, and speaking in tongues, accounted for the primary growth of the independent Chinese churches.

Chinese Christian elites and their
desires to reform China with their
newfound faith

Yan Yangchu (晏阳初) – Reformer with a heart for China's countryside

The Mass Education Movement



Ma Yingbiao (马应彪) – Pioneer of Chinese modern businesses 先施公司 (The Sincere Co. Ltd)



Wu Yifang (吴贻芳) – China's first female university president



Shi Meiyu (石美玉) – Founder of China's nursing profession



Political oppression after 1949
inadvertently accelerated
Christianity's process of
indigenization.

Breaking the Christianity-“foreignness” association



Christianity in Contemporary China



Comparing perceptions of Christianity and Buddhism in China today

	Christianity is a Western religion, thus is not suitable for Chinese	Buddhism is an Indian religion, thus is not suitable for Chinese
Agree	21%	16%
Disagree	52%	60%
Don't know	25%	22%
Refuse to answer	2%	2%
N	6894	6894

Data Source: Spiritual Life Study of Chinese Residents Survey (2007)

“Are you willing to let people know that you are a Christian?”

Yes, I'm willing	83.1%
No, I'm not willing	13.6%
I don't care	3.3%

Data comes from a 2003 Beijing religious status survey, conducted by Dr. Gao Shining.

- Respondents who were 55 years or older were the most willing to reveal their Christian identity.
- Respondents who were 45-54 were the least willing to admit their Christian identity.
- 70% of atheists reported having no problem accepting a family member or a friend converting to Christianity.

The policy-current reality disconnect

Despite great acceptance of Christianity in Chinese society, the CCP religion policy reflects authorities' distrust toward Christianity.

This distrust is based on the outdated assumption that Christianity is a foreign religion, and thus is susceptible to foreign infiltration.

Buddhism or Taoism is encouraged to serve society through charity, but Christianity's engagement in civil society is still limited.

Chinese Christianity and China's Global Influence

- China's history has shown that once given the social space, Christianity can be a positive and progressive social force to advance civil society.
- Instead of being a victim of “foreign infiltration,” China is positioned to play a larger role in leading and engaging with the global religious community.
- China has always been a religion *EXPORTING* country, not just a religion *IMPORTING* country.
- Chinese Diaspora studies show that becoming a Christian is often linked to becoming “more Chinese.”