

The Episcopal Ministry in China

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Abstract: The mission of the Catholic Church is principally evangelization, not only in China, but also throughout the world. Episcopal ministry is not easy at all both in the world and in China. However, throughout the history of the Catholic Church in China, evangelization has neither been forgotten nor neglected by the Chinese episcopal ministry. Indeed, in different periods of history, bishops have faced a wide variety of challenges. According to a Chinese proverb “history is a mirror for the present.” After a period of hardship since 1949, China and the Vatican signed a historic provisional agreement in 2018. Regardless of the future, the survival and development of the Church and the mission of evangelization in China has always been the key consideration of the Chinese clergy. With this historic provisional agreement, it is hoped that the mission of the Church in China, driven by the enthusiasm of the Chinese bishops, will bear more fruit, although there will still be many difficulties.

[摘要] 教會的主要使命是傳教。在中國如此，在世界亦如此。無論在中國或在世界，主教職都並非一項容易的使命。然而，中國的教會史揭示出，中國的主教們從未忘記也未忽略此項使命。的確，歷史的不同時段，主教職所面臨的困難也不同。以史為鏡，無疑可以理解現在。自1949年，在經歷一段時間的艱苦困難之後，中國與梵蒂岡於2018年簽訂了歷史性的臨時協議。無論未來如何，教會在中國生存發展和福傳的使命一直是中國神職人員思考的核心。藉著本次歷史性的臨時協議，希望中國教會的使命在中國主教職的熱情推動下，能夠結出更豐富的果實，儘管仍然會有不少困難存在。

Introduction

In the Catholic Church, episcopacy is the most eminent ministry from the beginning of the Church to the present day. During the Second Vatican Council, the subject of episcopal ministry, like many other topics, aroused various debates and suggestions. This article focuses on the development of the episcopal ministry in China. First, it starts with a short history of the episcopal ministry in China before 1949. Then, it traces the development from 1949 to the Cultural Revolution, including the formation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the statements of Chinese Catholic leaders. After that, it delineates the episcopal ministry after the Cultural Revolution, including both the government-recognized and not recognized bishops. When exploring the structure of the government-sanctioned church community, it will be compared with the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Finally, the provisional agreement between China and Vatican is briefly examined.

1 Short History of the Episcopal Ministry in China before 1949

In order to understand the present, one needs to acknowledge the past. There is a legend that the Apostle Thomas came to China from India and returned to Kerala in India. However, the first catholic bishop, who exercised his episcopal ministry in China, was the Italian Franciscan Friar John of Montecorvino (1247-1328). He set out in the

year 1291 accompanied by a Dominican and a merchant. He went through India (in India the Dominican died), where he remained for thirteen months, baptizing about a hundred persons, and eventually he arrived in the capital of Yuan dynasty, Cambaluc (Peking, modern Beijing) in 1294. He worked alone for twelve years in Cambaluc and built two churches near the gates of the emperor's palace. By the year 1305 he had baptized six thousand persons including the prince of Datong (Tatung), George, a former Nestorian. He also translated the whole New Testament and the Psalter into the language of the Tartars.¹

In 1307 Pope Clement V (1264-1314) appointed John of Montecorvino archbishop of Cambaluc and primate of all the Far East with the authority of a patriarch. Later, three other bishops arrived in China in the year 1308. One of them, Andrew of Perugia, was made bishop of Zaitun (modern Quanzhou, in the province of Fujian). The great figure John of Montecorvino died sometime between 1328 and 1333. One of the Papal legates, John Marignolli (or John of Florence) together with thirty two other friars, arrived in Cambaluc in the year 1342. They remained there for three or four years and returned to Avignon in the year 1353. Since then, more than ten bishops were named successors of John of Montecorvino by the Popes, but none of them

1 For further details, please refer to Columba Cary-Elwes, *China and the Cross: Studies in Missionary History* (New York: Longmans, 1957), p. 58; A.C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), p. 176.

took up their see for various reasons, including war. The Yuan dynasty, ruled by Mongols, was replaced by the Ming dynasty (Han Chinese) in the year 1368. Because they had not adapted to Chinese culture, Catholic communities, including Nestorians, died out completely.²

Almost three hundred years later, two Jesuits, Michele Ruggieri (1532-1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), arrived in China in the year 1583. For some time the whole of China had been under the jurisdiction of the See of Macao (erected in the year 1575). Macao was under the archdiocese of Goa in India. Missionary activities were regulated under the right of “Patronage of Portugal” (*padroado*) given to the kings by the Holy See. To overcome the influence of the *padroado*, which was considered harmful to the missions, the Holy See established the vicariate apostolic of Nanjing in 1660 directly dependent on the Holy See. This was in the Qing dynasty which was established in 1644. On 4 January 1674, the Chinese Dominican Luo Wenzao (also known as Gregory Lopez, 1616-1691) was appointed vicar apostolic of Nanjing by Pope Clement X. After a long and difficult period, he eventually was consecrated on 8 April 1685. Under strong pressure from Portugal, the two important bishoprics of Beijing and Nanjing were established in the year 1690 by

2 Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), pp. 62-65, 73-77; Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. I, *Beginning to 1500* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1992), pp. 443-445, 471-476; Cary-Elwes, *China and the Cross*, pp. 70-72.

Pope Alexander VIII. Two bishops were designated for the two bishoprics. One of the bishops was Gregory Lopez (Luo Wenzao in Chinese).

After 1762 China had six large mission fields of which three were dioceses and three were vicariates apostolic. These dioceses, headed by bishops who were named and supported by the Portuguese crown, were Macao, Nanjing and Beijing. The three vicariates apostolic, which were governed by titular bishops in the name of the Pope, were Fujian, Sichuan and Shanxi. Each of the mission fields covered several Chinese Provinces. Only the vicariate apostolic of Shanxi was supported by the Propaganda Fide, and was administered by Franciscans who were assisted by native priests trained at the Chinese College at Naples.³ Because of the long history of persecution and the expulsion of missionaries, some considered that it would be necessary to have native bishops in China. Propaganda Fide made suggestions, but missionaries felt that the Chinese clergy were not quite ready to assume such responsibility and insisted on the necessity of foreign leadership of the Chinese Church. Therefore, more non-Chinese bishops were consecrated in China. During the first Vatican Council in the year 1870 the secretaries of the Sacred Congregations were asked not to give to the Chinese clergy higher titles. At a meeting in Hong Kong in 1880 the missionaries agreed that

³ The other two vicariates apostolic were under the care of Spanish Dominican and the French missionaries of the Society of Foreign Missions.

until circumstances changed, they themselves should be in charge of the Chinese clergy.⁴ Between the years 1840-1900 the bishops' ministry was mainly supported by foreign funds. During the Qing dynasty, except for Bishop Luo Wenzao, who had been raised to the episcopate in 1685, the Church was almost completely under the direction of foreigners.

From 1685, when Luo Wenzao became a Bishop, until nearly two and a half centuries later, there was no Chinese bishop until 1926. Shortly after the foundation of the Republic of China, in the year 1919, the encyclical letter *Maximum Illud* was issued by Benedict XV.⁵ This document urged the heads of missions to find candidates for the priesthood within the local people, in order to let the native clergy assume the government of its own people, and to create an indigenous hierarchy. After the arrival of the apostolic delegate, Msgr. Celso Costantini (1876-1958), in China in 1922,⁶ two Chinese priests were appointed as apostolic prefects immediately in the year 1924.⁷

In May 1924 the first plenary council of the Church in China was held in Shanghai. Of the sixty delegates

4 B. Willeke, *Imperial Government and Catholic Missions in China during the Years 1784-1785* (New York: the Franciscan Institute, 1948), pp. 163, 206.

5 Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter *Maximum Illud*, 30 Nov. 1919, *AAS* 11(1919): 440-455.

6 He was appointed on 12 Aug. 1922 as apostolic delegate in China. Cf. *AAS* 14 (1922): 556.

7 Mgr. Odoric Cheng on 21 March and Mgr. Melchior Suen on 15 April. Cf. *AAS* 16 (1924): 245.

presented at the first plenary council there were only two apostolic prefects as Chinese. They were not yet bishops. On 3 December 1924, 41 ecclesiastic districts were raised to the status of *vicariatus apostolicus* at the same time.⁸ The most significant event was that in the year 1926 six Chinese priests were raised to the episcopate. The Pope personally consecrated them in St Peter's Basilica. Although they were bishops, they were called apostolic prefects, which means that the bishops acted in the name of the Pope. In the year 1939, 24 out of the 138 ecclesiastic districts were administered by local Chinese ordinaries. In the year 1946 the hierarchy of the Chinese Church was established by the constitution *Quotidie Nos*. In the same year Thomas Tian Gengxin (Tien Ken-sin) became the first Chinese Cardinal. With the establishment of the hierarchy in China in the year 1946, there were 20 ecclesiastical provinces (Taipei in Taiwan was raised to metropolitan see in the year 1952). There were 93 archdioceses or dioceses, 29 prefectures apostolic, 1 apostolic administration (Ha Erbin), 1 apostolic exarchate for Russians of the Byzantine rite (Ha Erbin). Three metropolitan sees (Beijing, Guangzhou, Mukden) of 20 were administered by Chinese ordinaries. Twenty dioceses of 93 and 7 prefectures apostolic of 29 were under a Chinese local ordinary.⁹

8 Decree *Mutatur denominatio vicariatuum apostolicorum Sinensis regionis*, 3 Dec. 1924, *AAS* 17 (1925): 23-25.

9 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. III (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1967), p. 599.

2 Episcopal Ministry from 1949 to the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76)

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the episcopal ministry was caught in a dilemma: "either to obey Rome's policy to undermine the building up of the New China which would lead to the risk of committing treason, or to follow the direction of the communist government for helping the socialist construction of the New China which would lead to the risk of being excommunicated by Rome."¹⁰ Nevertheless, some leaders of the Chinese Church tried very hard to seek common ground in the face of the two contradictory policies.

On July 1, 1949 the Holy Office issued an order to all Catholics in China instructing them to resist and to boycott any Communist influence. The Chinese Church hierarchy, headed by the inter-nuncio Archbishop Riberi, followed the instruction of the Holy See. According to the Chinese newspaper *People's Daily*, the bishops in China issued explicit orders and regulations to prohibit Chinese Catholics from reading government publications, attending government schools, and joining the military service. The Catholics were charged with not attending the anti-American imperialism movement. Those who yielded to the authority of Rome

10 Chan Kim-Kwong, *Towards a Contextual Ecclesiology, the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China (1979-1983), its Life and Theological Implications* (Hong Kong: Phototech System Ltd., 1987), p. 451.

were regarded as traitors of the nation, counter-revolutionary elements, and unpatriotic people.¹¹ Therefore, according to these newspapers, the bishops in China took their stand in opposition to the establishment of the New China.

A group of Catholics, under the leadership of a Chinese priest in Guangyuan, Sichuan, Wang Liangzuo, issued a manifesto.¹² Later, similar statements were issued by Catholics in other areas, such as Guangzhou, Kunming, Hangzhou, Baoding, Zhangjiakou, Tianjin, Nanchang. Nevertheless, the manifestos avoided mentioning the words “Vatican”, or “Holy See”, or “Pope”.¹³ These statements were all denounced by the inter-nuncio Archbishop Riberi. The Holy Office also cited a decree warning those who supported these statements, stating that excommunication would be the punishment for their disobedient actions. Until this time, there was no bishop in China involved in these actions of manifesto.

In February 1951, a pamphlet, entitled “The Church in China: Declaration of Principles,” was issued by the bishops

11 *People's Daily* (人民日報), 29 October 1951; *Xinhua Daily* (新華日報), 22 December 1950; *Shanghai News Daily* (上海新聞日報), 14 September 1955.

12 For the Chinese text, please see *People's Daily* (人民日報), 12 December 1950. For the English text please see *China Missionary Bulletin* (February 1951): 149.

13 Chan Kim-kwong says that “these publications (should) be interpreted in the light of their political context. Sometimes what they avoid saying is more significant than what they actually say.” See Chan, *Towards a Contextual Ecclesiology*, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

in China. This pamphlet was circulated throughout China to Catholics as well as to government officials. This declaration gave the understanding of bishops on the “three autonomies” (self-government, self-support and self-propagation in the Church in China). However, this understanding on the “three autonomies” was not acceptable to and criticized by the Chinese newspapers. The pamphlet restated the traditional Catholic position that Catholics who “willingly separate themselves from the Holy See, also separate themselves from Jesus and from the Catholic Church.” No initial attempts to reform the Church succeeded up to now because the Chinese Church was still firmly controlled by foreign missionaries and by Chinese clergy who were following the direction of bishops.

At the beginning of the year 1951, the expulsion of foreign missionaries including some foreign bishops began. This meant that 80 percent of all Catholic bishops or ordinaries and two-thirds of all priests in China had to gradually leave the country.¹⁴ The inter-nuncio Antonio Riberi was placed under house arrest on 26 June 1951 and was finally expelled from China on 5 September 1951.¹⁵ During the period from the year 1949 to 1955 about

14 In 1950, there were 114 foreign ordinaries versus only 25 Chinese ordinaries, and 3,046 foreign priests versus 2542 Chinese priest, in the Chinese Church hierarchy. See Agenzia Internazionale Fides, *Le missioni cattoliche dipendenti della Sacra Congregazione 'De propaganda fide'* (Rome: Opera della propagazione della feda, 1950), p. 288.

15 Tsing-sing Wei, *Le Saint-Siege et La Chine, de Pie XI a Nos Jours* (Paris: Editions Allais, 1968), pp. 156-157.

eighteen Chinese bishops were quickly appointed by the Holy See.¹⁶ However, 80 percent of the dioceses in China were vacant since the foreign ordinaries of the dioceses had left China. At the end of August 1954, there were only 121 Catholic foreign missionaries remaining in China: 5 bishops, 72 priests, 4 brothers and 40 religious, and 23 of these were in prison.¹⁷ In July 1955, the government launched a national anti-counterrevolutionary campaign to suppress the non-cooperative political elements. On 7 September 1955, Bishop Gong Pinmei of Shanghai, 21 priests and 200 to 300 Catholics were arrested. He was arrested as a counterrevolutionary element hidden in the Catholic Church. Later, other Catholic personnel were arrested in different places around China. Gradually, some Chinese bishops changed their attitude and supported the government.

Bishop Gong Pinmei of Shanghai diocese was arrested on 7 September 1955. In March 1956, the clergy of Shanghai diocese elected Fr. Zhang Shilang as vicar capitular. The Holy See issued a decree to invalidate the ordinary power of the vicar capitular Fr. Zhang Shilang. This decree also granted extraordinary faculties to the clergy of Shanghai, so that they could function without a bishop.¹⁸ This action provoked

16 For the list of these bishops, see Anthony Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China – Through Darkness and Light* (Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Centre, 1997), p. 28; Chan, *Towards A Contextual Ecclesiology*, pp. 435-437.

17 Wei, *Le Saint-Siege et La Chine*, p. 161.

18 Wei, *Le Saint-Siege et La Chine*, p. 104; *China Missionary Bulletin* (October 1957): 533; Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp. 22-23.

complaints from the Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly held in Beijing in July 1957. At that time, 80 percent of the diocesan sees of the Chinese Church were *sede impedita*. Then, Fr. Li Xiying of Chengdu diocese, Sichuan province, was elected bishop on 16 December 1957, but the consecration did not take place before the two Franciscan consecrations, Dong Guangqing and Yuan Wenhua, in Wuhan. The episcopal consecrations of elected candidates were held in Wuhan on 13 April 1958.¹⁹ The two elected episcopal candidates, chosen by their respective diocesan consultors, telegraphed the results of the election to the Holy See and asked for ratification.²⁰ The Holy See's immediate reaction was disapproval of the election. The Holy See invalidated the election, ordered the two elected candidates to withdraw from the consecrations, and cited a decree that if there was no papal mandate of an episcopal consecration, both the consecrator and the consecrated would be *ipso facto* excommunicated.²¹ Nevertheless, the consecrations went ahead by Bishop Li Daonan of Puqi, Hubei province, who was appointed by the Holy See on 10 May 1951. By the end of 1963 there were more than fifty self-elected bishops consecrated without prior approval of the Holy See.²²

19 *People's Daily* (人民日報), 2 August 1957; *Sichuan Daily* (四川日報), 18 December 1957; *Hubei Daily* (湖北日報), 14 April 1958.

20 *Agenzia Internazionale Fides* 1376 (3 May 1958): 151.

21 *AAS* 43 (1951): 217.

22 For the list see Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp. 226-229.

3 Formation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association

Three preparatory meetings, leading up to the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA),²³ were held. The first meeting, attended by 38 representatives from 23 dioceses, was held in Beijing from 19-25 July 1956. Four bishops, 11 vicars general or vicar capitular, 11 priests and some lay persons participated.²⁴ The second meeting with 55 representatives was held in Beijing from 12-16 February 1957. These included one archbishop (Pi Shushi of Shenyang), 4 bishops, 15 vicars general or vicar capitulars, 18 priests and 19 lay people.²⁵ The above two preparatory meetings were titled Preparatory Meeting of Zhongguo

23 The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was originally called Zhongguo Tianzhujiaoyou Aiguohui, which literally means “the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics.” In January 1962, the second national conference of CCPA changed the title to Zhongguo Tianzhujiao Aiguohui, the term *you*, which literally means “member” or “friend,” was deleted. This change is significant. In Chinese, the term *Tianzhujiaoyou* means Catholics or members of the Catholic Church. This term does not bear the notion of “the Church.” Whereas the term *Tianzhujiao* simply means “the Catholic Church.” For its significance, see Chan, *Towards a Contextual Ecclesiology*, p. 214.

24 The four bishops were bishop Wang Wencheng, Nanchong Diocese of Sichuan Province; bishop Zhao Zhensheng, Xianxian Diocese of Hebei Province; bishop Li Boyu, Zhouzhi Diocese of Shaanxi Province, and bishop Yi Xuanhua, Xiangyan Diocese of Hubei Province. Cf. *People's Daily* (人民日報), 27 July 1956. Also Peter Barry, “The Formation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association,” *Ching Feng* 24 (1981): 119.

25 L. Triviere, *Bulletin Missions Etrangeres de Paris* 110 (February 1958): 135-141.

Tianzhujiaoyou Aiguohui. However, the third meeting was called the Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly. This meeting with 241 representatives, representing more than 100 dioceses, was held in Beijing from 15 July to 2 August 1957. In this meeting it was decided to set up the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (Zhongguo Tianzhujiaoyou Aiguohui). In January 1962, the second meeting of CCPA was held in Beijing with 256 participants. Because at least 42 Chinese bishops had been ordained without prior approval from the Holy See, a number of bishops attended this meeting.²⁶ This was the last meeting of CCPA before the Cultural Revolution started in the year 1966.

4 *Modus Vivendi* — the Statements of Chinese Catholic Leaders

The statements, issued by Chinese Catholic leaders before the Cultural Revolution,²⁷ suggested that loving,

26 Barry, “The Formation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association,” p. 125. The Statistic comes from the Fides News Service on 3 February 1962.

27 The first manifesto issued under the leadership of Fr. Liangzuo Wang. For the Chinese text, please refer to *People’s Daily* (人民日報), 12 December 1950. For the English text please refer to *China Missionary Bulletin* (February 1951): 149. Similar manifestos see *People’s Daily* (人民日報), 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24 January 1951; *China Missionary Bulletin* (Feb. 1951): 149f. See also the pamphlet issued by bishops in China in February 1951, entitled *The Church in China: Declaration of Principles*, the Chinese text and English translation see *China Missionary Bulletin* (May 1951): 383-388. It was first appeared in the *Guang Ming Daily* on 17 March 1951. The statement of first CCPA in *People’s Daily* (人民日報), 3 August 1957.

protecting and supporting the country was a duty of the Christians. The closing statement of the CCPA in the year 1957 proposed that priests and faithful had the duty to participate in the socialist construction of the country, to participate in various anti-imperialism and patriotic movements.²⁸

Some leaders of the Chinese Church did not admit that the Church had any connection with imperialism and not all foreigners were imperialists.²⁹ In later statements the leaders tried to make clear that “imperialists have tried by all possible methods to use the Church as a forerunner of aggression” and now the Church has “decided to break off all relations with imperialist countries.”³⁰ The closing statement of the CCPA in the year 1957 also applied this declaration. The statement only declared that the Church must free herself from the control of foreign imperialism. It should be recognized that during this period the whole population of China was taking part in the movement of anti-imperialism.

28 One archbishop, ten bishops, four apostolic vicars, fifty-eight vicars general, eighty-one priests and eighty-four lay persons attended the meeting. See *People's Daily* (人民日報), 31 July 1957; 3 August 1957.

29 A speech given by Fr. Weiguang Li on 27 December 1950, in *China Missionary Bulletin* (March 1951): 149f. And also the pamphlet issued by bishops in China in February 1951, entitled *The Church in China: Declaration of Principles*, the Chinese text and English translation see *China Missionary Bulletin* (May 1951): 383-388. This pamphlet was first appeared in the *Guang Ming Daily* on 17 March 1951.

30 The first manifesto by Fr. Wang Liangzuo. The Chinese text see *People's Daily* (人民日報), 12 December 1950. English text see *China Missionary Bulletin* (February 1951): 149. See also *People's Daily* (人民日報), 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24 January 1951; *China Missionary Bulletin* (February 1951): 149f.

In the early manifestos there was no mention of the relationship with the Holy See or the Pope. Later statements, as Chan Kim-kwong pointed out, seemed “to consciously avoid commenting on the rejection of the Pope as the religious leader of Catholicism. Instead, these publications try to underline that the Chinese Church has rejected only the political, and not the religious dimension of Rome. In this way, they hope that they can both fulfill the government’s political demand, and justify their claim to Roman Catholicity.”³¹ Fr. Li Weiguang in the year 1950 clearly stated that “we do not look on the Pope as a political leader but as our leader in faith and morals, for he is the head of the Church and the Vicar of Jesus Christ. We have no political relations with him, no relations at all except in those things which concern our supernatural faith.”³² The closing statement of the CCPA in the year 1957 also declared that “the Catholic Church in China must walk the road of independence, freedom and autonomy. On the condition that it does not oppose the country’s profit and the dignity or independence of the country, the Church can remain in a pure religious relation with the Vatican. We shall obey the Pope in regard to religious doctrines to be believed and ecclesiastical regulations to be practiced. However, we must break off the political and financial relation with the Vatican.”³³

31 Chan, *Towards a Contextual Ecclesiology*, p. 118.

32 A speech given by Fr. Li Weiguang on 27 December 1950, in *China Missionary Bulletin* (March 1951): 149f.

33 *People’s Daily* (人民日報), 3 August 1957.

In the early manifestos, Chinese Catholic leaders used the word of “three autonomies” without any clarification of its meaning.³⁴ Following the declaration of “three autonomies”, the manifestos added that “we will not allow the Holy Church to be soiled by imperialist filth” or “in order to fight for an independent, democratic, unified strong New China”.³⁵ The pamphlet, entitled *The Church in China: Declaration of Principles*, issued by the bishops in China in February 1951, explained the understanding of bishops on the “three autonomies”. This pamphlet stated that “we know that our holy mother the Church has always practiced self-government, self-support and self-propagation of the faith,” and “it is wrong to expound the meaning of self-government, self-support and self-propagation contrary to” the understanding given by the pamphlet. According to this declaration, self-government meant that “the gradual assumption of control of religious affairs by native bishops according to the ecclesiastical regulations, and the

34 For instance, “We are determined to build up a new church which practices self-government, self-support and self-propagation. We will not allow the Holy Church to be soiled by imperialist filth.” See “Manifesto on Independence and Reform” given by Fr. Wang Liangzuo on 30 November 1950, the Chinese text see *People’s Daily* (人民日報), 12 December 1950. English text see *China Missionary Bulletin* (February 1951): 149. Or “We Catholics have decided, for love of our country, to stand united and firm with the viewpoint of the People, to support the Common Program, to realize self-government, self-support, and self-propagation of the Chinese Catholic Church, in order to strengthen the lasting peace of the world, and to fight for an independent, democratic, unified strong New China.” See *China Missionary Bulletin* (February 1951): 150.

35 Ibid.

establishment of a native hierarchy”, self-support meant that “the non-acceptance of any subsidy having political implications from foreign or home countries; only the money offered to the Church by Catholics of every country can be used for the building up of the churches, and the local churches, meanwhile, as far as is possible, must try to support themselves”, and self-propagation meant “that foreign missionaries will propagate the faith in the interests of local churches and not work for the interests of foreigners, and that they should strive to foster native vocations so that these may propagate the faith independently.”

According to the closing statement of the CCPA in the year 1957, the meaning of independence had several elements.³⁶ Firstly, to be independent meant that the Church in China must be managed by Chinese clergy and faithful. Secondly, to be independent meant that the Church must break off the political and financial relation with the Vatican and oppose its intervention in the internal affairs of the country. Thirdly, to be independent did not mean to totally reject the Pope since the Chinese Church should remain in a purely religious relation with the Vatican and should obey the Pope in regard to religious doctrines to be believed and ecclesiastical regulations to be practiced. Fourthly, the Church in China should free itself from the control of imperialism and be independent since the New China was independent and the Church must have the same status in the country.

36 *People's Daily* (人民日報), 3 August 1957.

5 Episcopal Ministry after the Chinese Cultural Revolution until the Provisional Agreement

When the Chinese Cultural Revolution broke out in the year 1966, all churches were gradually closed, and many of them were demolished. All religious activities, at least publicly, ceased. Most of the clergy in China were sent to prison or labor camps. Some priests and even bishops married either voluntarily or under duress.³⁷ Therefore, the episcopal ministry completely ceased until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976.

In the year 1978 Deng Xiaoping, President of China, started the so-called “open door” policy. The Catholic communities were again allowed to practice religious activities. At the same time, bishops and priests were gradually released from prison or labor camp and returned to the Church.

On 27 June 1978 a decree, issued by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, granted a number of exemptions to the Chinese clergy so that religious life could be practiced without following the Canon Law of the Church.³⁸ Most of the exemptions concerned the canonical regulations on the celebration of the sacraments. The faculties, granted by the decree, were not limited to individual dioceses. The decree also granted bishops

37 Many bishops and priests who married took sisters as their wives. See Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, p. 48.

38 Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp. 247-251.

permission to ordain priests without priestly formation in a seminary. According to Anthony Lam, this decree provided a legal basis for the existence of a non-recognized group in the Chinese Church.³⁹ Two groups led by two groups of bishops and priests emerged: one was recognized by the government and the other was not.⁴⁰

5.1 The Ministry of the Government-recognized Bishops

The constitution of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (Zhongguo Tianzhujiayou Aiguohui) was passed on 2 August 1957 by the Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly (CCRA). Until the present time there were nine versions of the constitution of CCPA.⁴¹ The 1957, 1992, 1997, 2004, 2010 and 2016 constitutions were passed by the CCRA. The 1962, 1980 and 1986 constitutions were passed by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association's Representatives Assembly. All these nine versions stated that "this organization is a mass organization formed by Chinese clergy and lay people to promote love of country

39 Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp. 123-124.

40 For the appearance of the two groups, see Edmund Tang and Jean-Paul Wiest, eds., *The Catholic Church in Modern China* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 7-27; 28-42; 52-70; 135-141. Also see Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp.123-184.

41 For 1957, 1962, 1980 versions of the constitutions, see *Catholic Church in China* 1 (1980): 19. For 1986 version of the constitution, see *Catholic Church in China* 1 (1987): 12-13. For 1992 version of the constitution, see *Catholic Church in China* 4 (1992): 19f. For 1997 version of the constitution, see *Catholic Church in China* 6 (1997): 7f.

and of church.” The purpose of this organization, as stated by its constitution, was to unite the clergy and Catholics to manifest a spirit of patriotism, to observe the government’s laws and policies, to actively participate in the socialist motherland’s construction, to safeguard world peace and to cooperate with the government in implementing the policy of religious freedom. From the 1987 constitution onwards another purpose of this organization, according to the later constitutions, was specified. The newly added purpose was “to cooperate with the Church in carrying on the principle of independence of the Chinese Church.”⁴² The aim of serving the legitimate interests of the Church only appeared in the 1992 constitution.

The 1957, 1992 and 1997 constitutions of the CCPA stated that the highest power structure of the CCPA was the Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly. The constitution of the CCPA, according to 1957, 1992 and 1997 as well as other versions, must be passed by the CCRA. According to the constitution of 1992 and 1997 as well as the versions after, chairman, vice-chairmen and secretary general should be elected by the CCRA.⁴³ However, the 1962, 1980 and 1986 constitutions stated differently that the highest power structure of the CCPA is the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association’s Representative Assembly. Therefore, according

42 1992 constitution of the CCPA, in *Catholic Church in China* 4 (1992): 19f.

43 The 1957 constitution empowered the Association’s committee to elect its chairman, vice-chairman and secretary general.

to the 1962, 1980 and 1986 version, the constitution of the CCPA should be passed by this assembly. According to these three versions, chairman, vice-chairmen and secretary general of the CCPA had to be elected by the Association's committee. During the time of the Cultural Revolution there was no CCRA, but only the CCPA.

Article 7 of 1980 and 1986 constitution of CCAC simply stated that the purpose of the BCCCC was: 1) to study and explain the doctrines to be believed and the rules to be observed; 2) to exchange pastoral experience; and 3) to engage in relations with outside churches. However, in the 1992 BCCCC constitution, there are more details regarding its purpose. According to this constitution, the conference was the leading national structure for church affairs of the Chinese Church. Its general principal was to be in accordance with the Bible and based on the traditional spirit of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Its purpose was: 1) to study and explain the doctrine to be believed and the rules to be observed in the church; 2) to examine and approve the election and consecration of diocesan bishops; 3) to establish pastoral guidelines; 4) to organize and unite all the clergy and laity to observe the Constitution, laws, regulations and policies of the country; 5) to implement the principles of independence, self-government and administration according to the situation in China. The constitution added one important element: it represented the Chinese Catholic Church outside of China. In the 1998 constitution, as well as in subsequent constitutions of the BCCCC, the following three elements

were added: 1) The BCCCC had the power to divide and adjust dioceses;⁴⁴ 2) the BCCCC was to set up pastoral offices, giving pastoral regulations; and 3) the BCCCC was to train clergy and personnel for consecrated life.

Article 7 of 1980 and 1986 constitution of CCAC and article 3 of the BCCCC stated that the conference consisted of all diocesan bishops, coadjutors and auxiliary bishops as well as advisory bishops.⁴⁵ Therefore, according to the constitution of BCCCC, only those who were consecrated bishop (including the retired ones) could be the members of the conference. Those who are equivalent to them in the dioceses in China did not have this right.⁴⁶

According to article 7 of 1980 and 1986 constitution of CCAC, the chairman, vice-chairmen and secretary-general of the BCCCC were elected by all members of the Bishops' Conference. This was in accordance with the 1983 Code of Canon Law (below "1983 Code").⁴⁷ However, article 4 of the constitution of BCCCC in 1992 changed this position. According to this constitution, the Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly was to elect the chairman, vice-chairmen, secretary-general and standing committees of the

44 Article 3 of 1998 constitution of the BCCCC. Cf. Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law*. Latin-English Edition. Latin version from *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1983 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1989), art. 373-374.

45 Regarding the membership 1998 constitution of the BCCCC has changed nothing. Cf. *Catholic Church in China* 1 (1998): 27.

46 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, art. 450, 368, 427.

47 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, art. 452.

conference.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, according to the 1983 Code, each episcopal conference is to elect a president for itself.⁴⁹ The newest constitution of BCCCC in 2016 kept this regulation in article 8, but it states in the constitution that “the conference upon the faith and evangelization works, according to the mission conferred by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Apostles and the power granted by the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, to fulfil the mission of pastoral ministry, upon the believing and observing of doctrine and canons, maintain the communion with the successor of Peter the primate of the Apostles.”

The constitution of the conference expressly stated that the Chinese Catholic Administrative Committees of each province, autonomous region, municipalities and each diocese had the duty to obey and carry out the resolutions and decisions of this Conference.⁵⁰ This statement did not concur with the 1983 Code. According to the 1983 Code, if neither the universal law nor a special mandate of the Apostolic See had been granted to the conference of bishops, the power of individual diocesan bishops remained intact. Therefore, neither the conference nor its president might act in the name of all bishops unless each and every bishop’s consent was given.⁵¹

48 This statement was same in the later constitution of BCCCC of 1998.

49 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, art. 452.

50 Article 9 of the constitution of the BCCCC in 1992, in *Catholic Church in China*, 4 (1992): 20. The 1998 constitution of the BCCCC kept this same principle.

51 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, art. 455.

According to the constitution, the bishops' conference was accountable to the Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly.⁵² This assembly had the right to formulate or revise the constitution of the bishops' conference, to evaluate the work reports of the conference, to discuss and adopt important resolutions and decisions regarding the BCCCC. However, according to the 1983 Code, the constitution of conferences of bishops throughout the world took effect only upon the review (*recognoscenda*) of the Holy See.⁵³

5.2 The Bishops Not Recognized by the Government

The group of bishops who were not recognized by the government appeared and developed rapidly during the eighties.⁵⁴ In the year 1981, Bishop Fan Xueyan, who had returned in 1979 from prison to Baoding,⁵⁵ consecrated three bishops without pre-notification to the Holy See since he justified that the Holy See would understand his decision. When the news of these consecrations reached the Holy

52 Article 4 of the constitution of the BCCCC in 1992, in *Catholic Church in China*, 4 (1992): 20. The 1998 constitution of the BCCCC remained this same principle.

53 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, art. 451.

54 Anthony Lam has given a good analysis regarding the reasons of appearance of the non-government-recognized group. 1) the faculties and privileges on the Chinese clergy given by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 1978; 2) the open door policy of the government; 3) the returning of clergy from prison; 4) married clergy in charge of the government recognized group, etc. See Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp. 123f.

55 He was named bishop of Baoding by the Pope on 12 April 1951.

See, the Holy See was inclined to recognize those bishops.⁵⁶ Having obtained acknowledgment from the Holy See, Bishop Fan continued to consecrate more bishops until he was jailed for a third time in the year 1983. Some of bishops, consecrated by Bishop Fan, in turn, consecrated bishops throughout the country. At the same time, some bishops who were appointed by Pius XII in the year 1949 to 1952, also privately consecrated some bishops. The estimated number of secretly consecrated bishops from the year 1980 to 1993 is over 80. By the end of 1996, not counting those who died or joined the government recognized group of bishops, the number of bishops not recognized by the government was over 60.

Before the year 1989, the bishops not recognized by the government and their priests were working independently of each other. They trained priests by using the method of teacher-disciple relationship. After two or three years the candidates were sent to the bishop for examination and ordination. In some areas, bishops set up a more stable seminary for training priests. Some bishops, if it was impossible to establish a seminary, sent their seminarians to the governmental recognized seminaries.⁵⁷

56 According to an article by Shi Fanjun, entitled “A Solemn Remembrance of Archbishop Fan Xueyan”, the Holy Father himself agreed with Bishop Fan’s decision. See *The Catholic Weekly* (Taipei), 16 January 1994.

57 In 1988 the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples issued an *Eight Points Directive* which made this possible.

In November of 1989 this group of bishops set up their own bishops' conference. Their first meeting took place on 21 November in Sanyuan, Shaanxi province. The participants of this meeting included several non-recognized bishops, four priests and some lay persons. In this meeting they decided to establish a bishops' conference to be called The Chinese Bishops' Conference on Mainland China.⁵⁸ Two honorary chairmen, Cardinal Gong Pinmei and archbishop Deng Yiming, were chosen and bishop Fan Xueyan was elected chairman. However, immediately after the meeting the bishops and priests were arrested. At the beginning of the year 1993 they were finally released. Nevertheless, according to the government officials, the new episcopal organization did not exist at all.⁵⁹ Therefore, most of the time the bishops not recognized by the government were carrying out their ministry individually.⁶⁰

6 The Historical Provisional Agreement between China and Vatican

58 *UCA News*, 9 March 1990.

59 It was said that the director of the Overseas Chinese Office in the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples said that the Congregation had asked the planners of the Sanyuan meeting not to set up a bishops' conference. See *UCA News*, 28 March 1990. However, the church leaders in Taiwan supported the new organization. See *The Catholic Weekly*, 26 April 1990.

60 It was said that on 30 July 1993, there was a paper entitled *A Proposal of the Chinese Bishops Conference* from the non-government recognized bishops. However, it could not be considered as a really group action since it had only three bishops involved in making this proposal. See Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China*, pp. 177, 180.

China and Vatican announced at the same time on September 22, 2018 the provisional agreement on appointment of bishops. Although we do not know much about the specific content of the agreement, and many people still have doubts, the agreement as a historical milestone obviously far exceeds this “provisional” meaning. This agreement will surely influence the episcopal ministry of the Catholic Church in China. After the signing of the agreement, all the bishops of the local churches in mainland China have been accepted into open and complete communion with the successor of St. Peter, the Pope. Needless to say, this is only a small step in the historical evolution of the episcopal ministry in mainland China. But it is an important step forward. As Pope Francis has said, this was due to the efforts of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, and from my observation, it also involved the time and effort of China’s leaders. And we should not forget the effort made by the Catholics (clergy and laity) especially in China mainland. Following this step, the episcopal ministry in China needs to follow the words of the initiator of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII, “but the common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*”⁶¹

It is evident that the provisional agreement will not solve all problems and challenges. It is clear that there are

61 John XXIII, encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram* (on Truth, unity and peace), June 29, 1959, no. 72.

more challenges lying ahead on the road for the Chinese episcopal ministry though they might be different from earlier times. Nevertheless, unity could be the main challenge for the episcopal ministry in China. It is needless to say that unity is necessary both in the particular church and with the universal church. The necessary unity must be strengthened not only for the Catholic Church in China herself but also her unity with the universal Church. At this stage, it may take time for the mainland bishops to share the responsibility of active evangelizing and serving society in one reasonable and legitimate bishops' conference. However, this should not be a serious obstacle to the common episcopal mission. Even if there are still unspoken difficulties, the bishops in the same region are still responsible for jointly exercising "certain pastoral functions for the Christian faithful of their territory in order to promote the greater good which the Church offers to humanity, especially through forms and programs of the apostolate fittingly adapted to the circumstances of time and place, according to the norm of law."⁶² Therefore, the bishops of the mainland churches who share the same episcopate must try various ways to jointly shoulder certain pastoral responsibilities in the region, especially to jointly explore ways and plans for evangelization in the present environment and work together to implement them. The responsibility of the bishops in the mainland churches to jointly serve in the mission of evangelization cannot

62 cf. *Code of Canon Law*, art. 447.

be avoided. After the mainland bishop were all accepted to be openly and completely in communion with Peter's successor, the mentality and habit of the past when "everyone cared only for oneself" needs to be completely changed. Therefore, we need recall what Pope Saint John XXIII wrote in his first encyclical regarding the issue of religious controversy: "The Catholic Church, of course, leaves many questions open to the discussion of theologians. She does this to the extent that matters are not absolutely certain. Far from jeopardizing the Church's unity, controversies, as the noted English author, John Henry Cardinal Newman, has remarked, can actually pave the way for its attainment. For discussion can lead to fuller and deeper understanding of religious truths; when one idea strikes against another, there may be a spark."⁶³

Another big challenge for the Chinese episcopal ministry could be pastoral love in exercising the threefold-office. Bishops are to serve humbly and support each other. "And that duty, which the Lord committed to the shepherds of His people, is a true service, which in sacred literature is significantly called *diaconia* or ministry."⁶⁴ It is in this sense that bishops are the servants of Christ and the shepherds of the flock. They are not the CEO of a community, not the boss of a factory, not the "big boss" of a community, not someone who is obsessed with power.

63 John XXIII, encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram* (on Truth, unity and peace), June 29, 1959, no. 71.

64 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 24.

On the contrary, Vatican II sees it as “For it is the duty of all bishops to promote and to safeguard the unity of faith and the discipline common to the whole Church, to instruct the faithful to love for the whole mystical body of Christ, especially for its poor and sorrowing members and for those who are suffering persecution for justice’s sake.”⁶⁵ It is with joy, “Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing.”⁶⁶ In this ministry, Vatican II told the bishops that “in exercising their office of father and pastor, bishops should stand in the midst of their people as those who serve.” It is relatively easy for younger clergy and the faithful to recognize the paternal role that bishops of older generations play in the mainland churches, with their age, wisdom, and special grace. Of course, the “father” mentioned in the Council does not mean age, but rather the expectation that bishops would be like “true fathers who excel in the spirit of love and solicitude for all.”⁶⁷ Kind words, good advice and good deeds are the proper expressions of this care and love. In other words, they are the fathers of care and love, the fathers of pastoral love in the whole church. They are to serve humbly and support each other.

65 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

66 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 20.

67 *Christus Dominus*, no. 16.

7 Conclusions

From the struggle of the Chinese episcopal ministry in the Chinese context, one learned that Chinese churches, represented by the Chinese bishops, have never totally cut off their ties with the universal Church, represented by the Pope, St. Peter's successor. Nevertheless, episcopal ministry is always a difficult mission, not only in the Chinese context but also in other parts of the world and in the Church's history. Yet, Jesus Christ has told his disciples, "I have told you this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world." (Jn 16:33) Thus, the episcopal ministry is not a secular governmental office though there are some similar elements. Without this perspective and vision, one can never understand the episcopal ministry. "And so, I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." (Mt 16:18) With these words of Jesus Christ in mind, regarding the reception of the Second Vatican Council, especially the *Christus Dominus*, the words of its initiator, Pope John XXIII, should be always be kept in mind: "but the common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*"