The Chinese Mission without Jesuits: The Suppression and Restoration of the Society of Jesus in China

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Abstract

Since 1582 there has been a continuous presence of Jesuits in China, except for the suppression period and its aftermath (which corresponds to the years 1775–1842). This period without Jesuits may provide various challenging insights. It shows that Chinese Christian communities and their leaders played a pivotal role in the continuation and vitality of Christian life. The three events of the suppression, absence, and restoration of the Society of Jesus in China illustrate the contribution of these Christian communities and their leaders.

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On the eve of the suppression of the Society of Jesus, Jesuits were present in different places in China. Macao was both a safe haven and transit place for them; in Beijing, Jesuits continued their service at court as astronomers, painters or technicians in the hope of protecting Christian life elsewhere in China; in the provinces throughout the country Jesuits were mainly involved in underground pastoral work. On the whole, the situation of the Church was rather precarious. After the prohibition of Christianity in 1724, the expulsion of missionaries in the 1730s, and various persecutions in the 1740s and 1750s, much of the life of the Christian communities had gone underground and pastoral activities were carried out secretly. In general, missionaries hid during the day, often in boats on the lakes, rivers, and canals, and carried out their ministry at night. Christians were afraid of receiving them into their homes, because those who did so were frequently discovered, arrested, and tortured. As the number of Jesuits diminished to ca. 40 on a total of 135,000 Christians with a population of already more than 225 million Chinese, those who remained carried on as long as they could and continually welcomed new members into the Church. This was partly due to the efforts of the Chinese Jesuits who constituted one third of the total number of Jesuits. The others were mainly Portuguese Jesuits, belonging to the Chinese vice-province which fell under the Portuguese Padroado, and French Jesuits, forming a separate entity and belonging to the French Mission, the members of which were sent with the approval of the French King. As if persecution from outside the Church were not trouble enough, dissensions within the Church and within the Society hampered pastoral work and discouraged the faithful. Disputes broke out regarding fields of activity, claims of jurisdiction, and the interpretation of the harsh decisions that continued to come from Rome regarding the Chinese rites. Jesuits had their share of fault in these sad events, as pointed out by Ed Malatesta.1 Such disputes continued during and after the suppression and took a new turn after the restoration.

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DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE SUPPRESSION (1762, 1774–1775)

The suppression of the Society in China was carried out in two different phases, first as the result of the events in Portugal, next in response to the suppression brief by the Pope.2

The first phase concerned the Jesuits in Macao, who fell under the Portuguese authority. The King of Portugal signed a decree on January 19, 1759 ordering the confiscation of all Jesuit property and the confinement of all members of the Society to their houses, but it took nearly three years before it was put into effect in Macao. At first, the Viceroy of India, Manuel de Saldanha e Albuquerque (1712–1771), who was the highest Portuguese authority in the whole Orient, was told that the Jesuits of China should be left alone, since “they conformed to the rites and ceremonies of the Chinese” and conducted themselves “more like gentiles than like religious.”3 Yet, on July 5, 1762, when the Governor of Macao received the order to put the decree into practice, all Jesuits living in the city, belonging to both the Japanese and Chinese vice-provinces, were arrested. In November 1762 they were taken aboard a ship which took them first to Goa and next, via Brazil, to Lisbon where they arrived on October 17, 1764. Of the seventeen Jesuits belonging to the Chinese vice-province (fifteen Portuguese, one Italian, and one Chinese) three died at sea, two in prison, nine were exiled to the papal states in Italy in 1767, and three were liberated in 1777. There were also three French Jesuits belonging to the French Mission: two died at sea and one spent two years in prison, was exiled to France in 1766, went back to Canton, but was not allowed to stay and had to return to France. After 1762 no more Jesuits resided in Macao.4

The second phase was the execution of the brief Dominus ac Redemptor by Clement XIV (July 21, 1773), which abolished the Society of Jesus. The Roman Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith

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2 This section is based on Joseph Krahl, China Missions in Crisis: Bishop Laimbeckhoven and his Times, 1738–1787 (Roma: Gregorian University Press, 1964), 127ff, 209ff; and the summary by Malatesta, The Society of Jesus and China, 10ff.
3 Krahl, China Missions in Crisis, 129.
4 Ibid., 130–132.
(Propaganda Fide) had the responsibility of publishing the brief in mission territories. It carried out this task by informing the bishops in these areas of the papal decision and instructed them that former Jesuits should be permitted to continue their pastoral work on the condition that they accepted and obeyed the papal brief. After some confused reports, reliable news of the suppression first reached Beijing on November 12, 1774, but the official document itself did not arrive in the capital until almost a year later. In the meantime, disputes and confusion arose among the concerned parties. The survivors of the French Mission claimed dependence on the King of France, while those of the Portuguese vice-province professed allegiance to the Padroado. There were serious disagreements about jurisdiction between Gottfried Xaver von Laimbeckhoven, S.J. (Nan Huaiyin 南懷仁, 1707–1787), bishop of Nanjing, whom Policarpo de Souza, S.J. (Suo Zheneng 索智能, 1697–1757), bishop of Beijing, had designated as administrator of the diocese of Beijing before he died on May 26, 1757, and the new bishop of Macao, Alexandre da Sylva Pedrosa Guimarães (1727–1799), who arrived in Macao on August 23, 1774. Finally, arguments about policy and about the distribution of the assets that had once belonged to the Society flared up among the ex-Jesuits, and between the ex-Jesuits and the missionaries of other orders.

In Macao, the first action of Guimarães, the new bishop, when he took possession of his see in August 1774, was to publish a lengthy pastoral letter on the suppression of the Society of Jesus.5 Because after the deportation from Macao in 1762, there was not a single Jesuit living in the city, the bishop had to look across the border to find someone to whom he could make known the brief. These were the Jesuits in Canton, which belonged to his diocese. There were only two of them, and both Jesuits accepted the brief without opposition.6

In the center of the country where most Christian communities were located, the brief of suppression was already forwarded by Propaganda Fide to the bishop of Nanjing, G. X. von Laimbeckhoven, on January 20, 1774 with the order to publish it in his diocese and through his delegate, in the Diocese of Beijing. Yet, it was not delivered to him until June 17, 1775. Thereupon, in his capacity as a Jesuit, von Laimbeckhoven and five Chinese Jesuits signed the submission to the decree, while one Portuguese Jesuit, who, having partially lost the use

5 Ibid., 215.
6 There were also three newly arrived French Jesuits in Canton destined for Beijing at that time. Ibid., 215n10.
of reason through long illness, refused to sign. The other Jesuits working in the provinces (Jiangxi and Huguang) were officially notified about the brief of suppression by their respective ordinaries. All of them, four French, three Portuguese, and two Chinese, signed the statement of submission.7

The Jesuits in Beijing in the north of the country dealt with the news of the suppression differently. Some, as soon as they received the informal assurance in November 1774 that the Society had indeed been suppressed, immediately declared themselves no longer Jesuits, arguing that according to normal Roman practice, papal decisions have universal validity once they have been promulgated in Rome. Critics argued that they wanted to be free from the yoke of obedience and to live a more independent life.8 Other Beijing Jesuits argued that they remained Jesuits until the papal brief was officially published in Beijing. This official publication itself was a matter of controversy. The Jesuit vice-provincial, José Espinha (Gao Shensi 高慎思, 1722–1788) and the bishop of Macao, Guimarães, devised a strategy whereby they would take over the administration of Beijing and disregard the legitimate authority of von Laimbeckhoven, bishop of Nanjing and administrator of Beijing. Guimarães ordered that the Jesuits send their oath of obedience to the Pope and to him as their diocesan bishop, and their pledge of loyalty to the King of Portugal. From his side, the Carmelite Joseph Maria Pruggmayer (Giuseppe Maria a S. Teresa, Na Yongfu 那永福, 1713–1791), vicar of von Laimbeckhoven, promulgated the brief in November 1775, after which members of the French Mission and two members of the Portuguese mission signed. Moreover, in 1777 the former Jesuit superior François Bourgeois (Chao Junxiu 晃俊秀, 1723–1792) received the brevet of King Louis XVI appointing him as the new person in charge of the missionaries and administrator of the French Mission in Beijing.9 In the absence of a superior whom all

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7 Ibid., 220–222.
8 Ibid., 227.
would respect, the ex-Jesuits disputed over property and the amount of pension to be allocated to each member, while the successors of von Laimbechhoven (who died in 1787) disputed the jurisdiction. The situation degraded to the extent that by 1785 almost all the missionaries of Beijing had been excommunicated for one reason or another by one of the parties. It was the new bishop, Alexandre de Gouveia Tosf (Tang Shixuan 湯士選, 1751–1808), who absolved the excommunications, offered a solution to this schism, and finally established peace.

After the suppression of the Society, several attempts were made to reestablish a Jesuit presence in Beijing, especially via Russia. In response to multiple demands, Pius VII granted the last former Jesuits readmission to the Society: on November 1, 1806, the French ex-Jesuits Louis de Poirot (He Qingtai 賀淸泰, 1735–1813) and Joseph de Grammont (Liang Dongcai 梁棟材, 1736–1812?), and the Italian Brother Giuseppe Panzi (Pan Ruose 潘若瑟, 1734–before 1812) thus renewed their vows in Beijing. In 1813, however, the last one died.11

THE AFTERMATH: CHINA WITHOUT JESUITS (1775–1842)

The more than 60 years between 1775 and 1842 during which Jesuits were absent in China are among the least studied periods in the history of Christianity in China, though fortunately it has been the object of

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10 Krahl, *China Missions in Crisis*, 268.
research in recent years, with the research by Lars Laamann or Huang Xiaojuan.\textsuperscript{13} During this period, especially in the years 1784–1785, 1805, and 1811, there were some serious persecutions which greatly affected the Christian communities and the (foreign) missionaries. While relatively little information about daily Christian life is available in either European or Chinese primary sources, the extant information throws light on an increasingly imbedded Chinese church, with the further development of Christian communities largely in the hands of the Chinese themselves.

The increase in the number of Chinese clerics during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was one of the most noteworthy changes for Christian communities during that time.\textsuperscript{14} We know little about them, but they played a crucially important role in maintaining the vitality of local Christian communities. Except for the Christians living in Beijing or its environs, who in much of the eighteenth century still enjoyed the freedom to attend liturgical services in the major churches in the city, most Christian communities in China were deprived of the opportunity to attend mass and other ritual practices in a public space. And those who wished to maintain the minimal liturgical life had to invite priests to visit their communities.\textsuperscript{15} Around 1800, there were in total around 75 priests in China, of whom 50 Chinese and 25 foreigners. In 1810, out of ca. 113 priests in China, only ca. 35 were foreigners. The number of foreign missionaries began to increase rap-
idly during the 1830s and 1840s and by 1865 exceeded again the num-
ber of Chinese priests.16

Yet at the center of Christian life were the Christian communities
and they reveal some essential characteristics of Chinese religiosity:
they were very lay oriented, had lay leaders, and women played an
important role as transmitters of rituals and traditions within the family;
there was a service-oriented concept of priesthood (travelling priests
present themselves only at important feasts or celebrations); the doc-
trine was expressed in a simple manner (recitative prayers, simple and
clear moral principles); there was belief in the transformative power of
rituals (patterned in accordance with a liturgical calendar with feasts
and yearly gatherings).

Communities gradually began to function on their own. An itinerant
priest (in the early period a foreigner, but in the eighteenth century
predominantly Chinese) would visit them once or twice a year, some-
times even less. Ordinarily the leaders of the community (huizhang 会
長) brought the members together once a week and presided over the
recitation of the prayers, which most members knew by heart. The key
difference between Christian prayers and other prayers employed in
Buddhism, Daoism, or Qing court ritual was probably that they were
not strictly the domain of trained specialists: many lay Christians knew
some prayers by heart (including the prayers of the official prayer
book, Shengjiao rike 聖教日課).17 Community leaders also read the
sacred texts and organized religious instruction. These leaders tended
to be older, male, literate, and married or widowed. They were also in
charge of finances, collecting monies to pay the priests and catechists,
to support the works of charity, and to help the poor. In some places
there were confraternities, including confraternities for women with
women in charge. Moreover, there were (itinerant) catechists (xiang-
gong 相公 / xiansheng 先生) who instructed the children, catechumens
and neophytes. They would go out to baptize moribund infants on the
streets. At times, they were full-time employees, sometimes required to
be celibate, who were paid for their living and traveling expenses. In
the absence of a priest, these leaders administered baptism, preached,
and distributed various Christian writings, such as basic catechisms and
prayer books. The priest, during his annual visit of a few days, con-

16 Ibid., 164; Standaert, Handbook of Christianity in China, 303; and Tiedemann,
Handbook of Christianity in China, 222: In 1840 there were 84 Chinese priests, 31
Europeans, and 303,000 Christians.
17 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 57.
versed with the leaders and members, received news from the community, inquired about ill people and catechumens, etc. He heard confessions, celebrated the Eucharist, preached, baptized and prayed with the community. After his departure, the community continued its common practice of saying the rosary and litanies, and the observance of fasting and abstinence on the required days. The ordinary Christians therefore only met the priest once or twice a year. The real center of Christian life was the community itself with its leaders and catechists as the major link.

Women also played an important role in these communities. There was a long tradition of consecrated Christian virgins in China. Early in the history of the mission, several Christian women felt a vocation to make vows of chastity in the Dominican missions in Fujian. In the eighteenth century, their tradition was continued in Sichuan where the priests of the Missions Etrangères de Paris organized these individual women into an Institute of Christian Virgins. These women contributed primarily to the vitality and growth of the Christian communities. Although at first they apparently restricted themselves to a contemplative life, in the 1770s, they readily accepted a mission of evangelization and social service. They took on the duty of teaching girls, training catechumens for baptism, baptizing dying infants, engaging in famine relief and medical care. The most lasting contribution they made was teaching in schools for girls. By 1800, virgins in other areas of China were at times entrusted with the task of custodian of church property when government officials expelled the Western missionaries and even indigenous clergy. In some villages they were the actual leaders, directing the prayers in the church, guiding the devotional readings, and reprimanding the delinquents. As one foreign priest remarked in 1840: “They are not only the singers in the choir, but deaconesses, and even more powerful deaconesses than in Christian antiquity.”

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In short, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Christian communities developed into small but solid centers of transmission of Christian faith and practice. Because of the absence of priests, the community members, that is, the catechists, virgins, and other lay leaders, had taken control of everything from financial administration to ritual practices.

RESTORATION (1814–1842)

The central role of Christian communities in the Chinese Church was also greatly instrumental in the return of Jesuits to China after the restoration, though it still took about thirty years before the first Jesuits arrived. Some recently published Chinese documents,20 investigated by David Mungello (Meng Dewei 孟德衛) and Huang Xiaojuan, especially shed new light on this episode.21 After Pius VII re-established the Society (August 7, 1814), the Chinese communities explicitly and repeatedly asked for Jesuits. The early requests date from the 1810s and 1820s, but multiplied in the 1830s. These requests came from different regions in China, but the Catholics in the Jiangnan region in the center of the country (including cities such as Shanghai and Songjiang) were especially nostalgic for their return. With around 48,000 Christians,22 Jiangnan hosted the largest concentration of Christian communities in China.

In the nearly fifty years of absence of Jesuits (the last ex-Jesuit in this area was John Yao [Yao Ruohan 姚若翰] who died in 1796), the church in Jiangnan was mainly served by Chinese priests (in 1841 there

20 For the Chinese documents of this debate, see CCT ZKW: Nicolas Standaert 鍾鳴旦, Ad Dudink (Du Dingke 杜鼎克), Huang Yi-long (Huang Yinong 黃一農) and Chu Ping-yi (Zhu Pingyi 祝平一), eds., Xujiahui cangshulou Ming Qing Tianzhujiao wenxian 徐家匯藏書樓明清天主教文獻 [Chinese Christian Texts from the Zikawei Library], vol. 5 (Taipei: Fujen daxue shenxueyuan 輔仁大學神學院, 1996), 2027–2119.
21 The following paragraphs are adopted from Huang, “Christian Communities,” and from David E. Mungello, “The Return of the Jesuits to China in 1841 and the Chinese Christian Backlash,” Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal 27 (2005): 9–46. See also Tiedemann, “Indigenous Agency,” 213ff. The first to point at these events, mainly on the basis of Western sources was Servière, Histoire de la mission du Kiang-nan, 91ff.
22 Servière, Histoire de la mission du Kiang-nan, 21; see also Huang, “Christian Communities,” 121–122: 40.000 to 50.000.
were 11 priests, with only two foreigners). These Chinese priests were the impetus behind the return of Jesuits to China. Two of the leaders in the effort were Zhang Shaotai 张绍台 C.M. (who received the Western name Simon Perez; 1789–1843) and Wang Ruowang 王若望 (with the Western name John de Spina). In September 1834, the Christians of the Jiangnan mission sent a petition to the Pope, lamenting the neglected pastoral circumstances in their mission. This appeared, among others, from the fact that the Portuguese bishop of Nanjing, Cajetan Pirès-Pereira C.M. (Bi Xueyuan 黄学源, 1769–1838) was based far to the north in Beijing, and his two vicars-general resided far to the south in Macao. In order to save the situation in Jiangnan, the petition requested that Jesuits should return. When the bishop learned of the petition, he sent a scathing pastoral letter to the Jiangnan Christians, defending the rights of the Portuguese king and the Portuguese Lazarists, while denying the possibility that Jesuits could return to Jiangnan. Led by Frs. Zhang and Wang, the Jiangnan Christians were not afraid and in 1835 sent a second appeal to the Pope. It was signed by fifty-one Christians who represented the lay leadership of the Jiangnan Catholic church. General Jan Roothaan (1785–1853) was forced to send a negative reply to these Christians. For instance, in 1835, he wrote: “They ask us for China, but how can we satisfy the request? We are already overwhelmed with the requests from Europe and elsewhere.” Still, the petitions in the 1830s by Chinese Christians, mainly from Beijing and Jiangnan, did have some influence on the decisions of the Propaganda Fide, and in some ways helped to bring Jesuits back to China. A first step was that in response to these appeals, Gregory XVI sent a good friend, Ludovicus de Bési (Luo Leisi 羅來思, ?–1871), as a Propaganda missionary to China in 1833. A few years later, after the death of bishop Pirès-Pereira and after new letters by the Jiangnan Christians asking the Pope to name a bishop for Jiangnan and to send Jesuit missionaries, de Bési became administrator of the Nanjing diocese. De Bési himself then proceeded to replace the

26 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 116.
Lazarists in Jiangnan with Jesuits. Roothaan finally consented and assigned Jesuits to China in 1840.  

In 1842, the first three French Jesuits, Eugène Martin François Estève (Ai Fangji 艾方济, 1806–1848), Benjamin Brueyre (Li Xiufang 李秀芳, 1810–1880), and Claude Gotteland (Nan Gelu 南格禄, 1803–1856), the new Superior of the Jesuit mission, finally arrived in China. Two years later, five more French Jesuits arrived. Later in 1846, another twelve European Jesuits joined them in serving the Christian communities in Jiangnan.

CONFLICT WITH THE “NEW JESUITS” (1845–1846)

After having waited for decades and made such a great effort in bringing back Jesuits to Jiangnan, those who had played a major role in launching the petitions were very excited to see the Jesuits finally arrive in Jiangnan. Yet some Jiangnan Christians soon began to realize that those “new Jesuits” were nothing like the “old Jesuits” that they had expected. Prompted by some of the reforms initiated by Mgr. de Bési and the newly arrived Jesuits, a serious conflict broke out in 1845. This eventually led to the resignation of de Bési in 1847 and a division in the Christian communities in Jiangnan that lasted for more than 10 years. Ironically, as pointed out by Huang Xiaojuan, just as they requested that Jesuits return to Jiangnan, some Jiangnan Christians launched another round of petitions against the newly arrived Jesuits. This time, not only more Christians from Beijing, Guangdong, and Huguang were involved in the collective action, the second round of petitions to Rome and Lisbon was much better planned and organized than the one in the 1830s.

These conflicts reveal some contrasts between the “old” and “new” Jesuits, partly due to the existing organization of the local Christian

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27 For the manuscript letters (in Chinese) by the Chinese Christians to Roothaan, see ARSI (Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Rome), Jap. Sin. 186, box 1, 13 (1831 and 1839) and 15 (1851).
29 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 119.
communities. On the one hand, when the new zealous missionaries arrived in Jiangnan, they were pleasantly surprised to find that despite having been neglected and sometimes even persecuted for such a long time, quite a number of Christian communities had survived thanks to the great effort and enthusiasm of Chinese Christians themselves, especially the Christian virgins and community leaders. On the other hand, the new Jesuits also strongly felt that, because of the insufficient pastoral instruction and doctrinal education, many Chinese Christians seemed ignorant of the most basic Christian teachings. They also noticed the tendency of some to follow what they considered “superstitious” or “pagan” customs. In addition, they felt that the (public) behavior of Christian virgins did not correspond to their status. For these newly arrived missionaries, almost everything, from the sacraments to everyday religious practices, needed to be “rectified.”

Moreover they soon entered into conflict with community leaders and virgins who had acquired a quasi-independency and were very reluctant to submit to the authority of the new Jesuits. These new Jesuits coming to China during the early 1840s appeared to have had very different mentalities compared to their predecessors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Church in Europe had gone through the phases of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the Enlightenment and was in search of a new identity, which insisted more on uncompromised uniformity in thought and practice. With the shift from “sinophilia” to “sinophobia” in France and other European countries, the French and Italian Jesuits tended to have a less positive opinion about Chinese culture and society. In addition, their arrival went hand in hand with the colonial expansion. The timing of the first three Jesuits’ trip to China notably overlapped with the first Opium War between Qing and Britain (from June 1840 to August 1842), which has influenced the Sino-European relations until today.

The conflict between the local Christian communities and the new missionaries started with the pastoral instructions launched by Mgr. de Bési. With the arrival of new European missionaries around 1845, the vicar apostolic felt more confident and ambitious and was ready to start a reform of the local communities. Sometime in 1845, he issued a series of pastoral instructions regarding the sacrament of marriage, the prohibition of working on Sundays and on other major feast days, and

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31 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 123.
32 Ibid., 121; Tiedemann, “Indigenous Agency,” 213.
the regulations about collective praying in churches and chapels. Apparently, Mgr. de Bési wished to “rectify” some practices that had probably been long prevalent among Jiangnan Christians. He probably never realized how much resentment and disturbance these instructions would cause.33

It appears that a Chinese catechist with the name Shen Xizhi 沈席之,34 who had been dismissed by the Jesuit François Estève, first composed a pamphlet entitled Zhaoran gonglun 昭然公論 (Open Letter), in which he severely criticized the newly arrived Western missionaries, Mgr. de Bési and his vicar-general, the Jesuit Gotteland, in particular.35 The pamphlet, originally signed by thirty Christians in 1845 (the second version was dated Ash Wednesday 1846), was printed and widely circulated among Christian communities in Songjiang and its environs. It revealed the voice of a Chinese church that had seldom been heard. Rather than being intimidated by the European priests, the Chinese voiced blunt criticisms of the manner in which the new-comers had been administering the Catholic churches in Jiangnan. The 38-page pamphlet grouped the complaints under ten headings: missionaries (chuanjiao 傳教), spiritual works or sacraments (shengong 神工), issuing mandates (chuyu 出諭), catechists (xiansheng 先生), sermons (daoli 道理), chanting (nianjing 念經), church building (zaotang 造堂), evangelization (guangchang 廣場), foundlings (yuying 育兒) and the Rainbow Bridge Incident (Hongqiao 虹橋).

Not surprisingly, de Bési and Gotteland were quite unhappy in the face of the harsh critique and open challenge from the Jiangnan Christians. When the Open Letter began to circulate in Jiangnan, Mgr. de Bési was in Hong Kong conferring with the Propaganda procurator. In his absence, Gotteland responded by writing a point-by-point refutation (a 41-page essay) and had it translated into a Chinese text, entitled Wubang lun 譴讒論 (On Slander).37 Gotteland is totally uncompromising and notes that even after two printings and wide dissemination of the Open Letter, the authors had still failed to win many church

34 Name identified by Huang Xiaojuan.
35 CCT ZKW, 5:2039–2077. For these texts, this section follows the analysis of Mungello, “The Return of the Jesuits,” 28ff; and Huang, “Christian Communities,” 129ff.
36 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 129.
37 CCT ZKW, 5:2079–2119.
members to their point of view. What he does offer them is forgiveness for their sins, if they make genuine repentance.

These conflicts were evoked by a local situation, with very concrete groups (of Chinese Christians) supporting or opposing the vicar apostolic and the Jesuits, and the multitude of documents in European and Chinese languages gives insight into the complexity of the different points of view. Yet, they also reveal the tensions, differences in mentality, the alleged abuse of power and authority between “old” and “new.” These documents in particular confirm how Christian communities with their own traditions and leaders had become the center of the Church in the China mission without Jesuits and that with the decades-long absence of Western missionaries, the Chinese themselves had taken responsibility of the communities. Three examples of the controversial issues may illustrate this.

In section five of the *Open Letter*, dealing with doctrine, the writers complaint that Mgr. de Bési and Gotteland discouraged Chinese Christians to read Chinese Christian texts, and did not allow them to deliver sermons in churches. Part of the problem was due to the Europeans’ lack of proficiency in Chinese. The *Open Letter* noted that the attempts by the Jesuits to explain doctrine were incomprehensible to the Chinese, that these priests hardly understood what the Christians were saying during confession, that unlike the old Jesuits, they were ignorant of the contents of the Confucian classics and histories, and that they could not even appreciate the works translated into Chinese by the former Jesuits. In addition, the authors point out that Gotteland was afraid that the sermons of a few Chinese Christian literati might be preferred to those delivered by foreigners, as those literati Christians had read a great number of Chinese religious works and thus were able to explain the doctrines more elaborately and more convincingly. To counter this reproach, Gotteland responded that it was certainly not Mgr. de Bési himself who had come up with such regulations: it was the standard regulation of the Roman Church that only bishops and ordained priests were permitted to deliver sermons in churches. Also, for Gotteland, the act of questioning the creditability of the bishop and himself already constituted in itself an unforgivable challenge to the absolute sacred power of the apostolic see.

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38 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 130; *CCT ZKW*, 5:2053ff.
39 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 132; *CCT ZKW*, 5:2099.
Another matter of conflict was the role of women in the liturgy. For instance, when praying in churches or small chapels at home at the occasion of religious gatherings, it was usually the virgins and other Christian women who led the prayer and who prayed aloud. However, after Mgr. de Bési had come in 1840, he considered this manner of prayer extremely improper and demanded that both men and women say the prayers aloud together.\textsuperscript{40} The Christian virgins were very attached to the long prayers that they chanted in unison. De Bési felt that the recitation was more an exercise in theatrical elocution than an act of piety. In the last months of 1845, he issued an order that prohibited the women from monopolizing these prayers and instead insisted that the prayers be recited by the entire church body, sung in two choruses, with men and women alternating. His order created a tempest in the parishes around Shanghai, and particularly Songjiang, where Mgr. de Bési’s action was viewed as an unwarranted interference in the Chinese custom that strictly prohibited public interaction or conversation between men and women.\textsuperscript{41}

The Open Letter also reveals the changing relationships within the local communities. Community leaders often came from wealthy, elite families and enjoyed privileges and respect in local Christian communities. It was possibly for these reasons that some of them felt somewhat reluctant to obey the newly arrived Western missionaries. They were certainly loath to give up the autonomy that had developed as a result of infrequent or non-existent priestly supervision. In particular, the \textit{huizhang} clashed with the missionaries over the question of local financial control. In addition, in order to facilitate their ministry, these missionaries often ended up hiring catechists and helpers from barely literate Christians and with a much more modest socio-economical background, such as tailors, carpenters, and sometimes even boatmen. This action greatly upset the more literate Christians who believed that they alone were qualified to be addressed as \textit{xiansheng}.\textsuperscript{42}

Due to all these conflicts, several Chinese priests requested that Mgr. de Bési be recalled and replaced by a Portuguese Lazarist. Also the relations between de Bési and the Jesuits deteriorated, regarding matters of money, property, and especially authority to which de Bési

\textsuperscript{40} Huang, “Christian Communities,” 127; \textit{CCT ZKW}, 5:2057ff.
The Chinese Mission without Jesuits was very much attached, not allowing the Jesuit superior to give missions to his own men. In 1847, Mgr. de Bézi felt the need to go to Rome in order to defend himself against the mounting criticism. He laid the cornerstone for the cathedral in Shanghai on November 21, 1847 and on the very same day departed for Europe.43 At that time there were already sixteen European Jesuits in Jiangnan and more were to follow, especially Italians in order to counterbalance the French Jesuits. The complaints from China were too loud for Propaganda to allow de Bézi to return: his authoritarian attitude towards both the Jesuits and the local Christian communities and priests had made the situation of the Church unviable. In 1848, he resigned as vicar apostolic and in the same year Gotteland’s term as superior of the French Jesuits came to an end.44 Some Jiangnan Christians involved in this incident were eventually punished, including a few Chinese priests who had lent their support. Yet the conflicts between the missionaries and Chinese Christians were far from being resolved.45 In the nearby Suzhou, relations between foreign priests and local Christians had not improved ten years later. The congregation barely disguised its hostility toward Europeans when a French Jesuit arrived there in 1857 to reassert missionary control, following the death of the last of the Chinese priests who had been in charge of the Christians since the dissolution of the Society.46

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to get a comprehensive view on the basis of these controversy texts. They show that the new Jesuits encountered a Church that was already becoming Chinese with living Christian communities imbedded in Chinese culture and in the hands of the Chinese. Insufficiently aware of the attitude of the old Jesuits and of the achievements of the Christian communities during the period without Jesuits, they imposed a new type of Church that was opposed by the local tradition. According to Jean-Paul Wiest, these foreign missionaries

45 Huang, “Christian Communities,” 127.
succeeded in planting the church institution, but they—deliberately or not—repeatedly blocked the emergence of the local church. Indeed, by unduly retaining control over leadership, finances, and forms of religious expression, many foreign missionaries prevented the church from sinking its roots into the surrounding Chinese context and from being nourished by it.⁴⁷

It is remarkable that about one hundred years later, when missionaries were expelled from China by force, Chinese priests, lay-leaders and women showed again enough plasticity to take over the responsibility for the essential functions in the communities and safeguarded the continuation of Christian faith and practice, in the same way as their predecessors had done during the period of absence of Jesuits. The memory of these events may open up our understanding and imagination regarding the role of local Christian communities in the Church today.