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The survival of Christianity in Communist
China.

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The Communist rule in its desire to establish a new social order, abolished religious traditions and beliefs. Christians were persecuted, as well as believers of other religions, and had to face repression. Though Communism as China's political system has remained unchanged during decades, Christianity not only has survived throughout these years of religious restraint but it has revived and flourished, getting stronger these recent years. Certainly, the survival of a religion against an atheist political regime raises compelling and interesting questions worth a deep analysis.

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I. Introduction

Christianity has persevered throughout history, enduring challenges and adversities worldwide. Its survival in China is a unique tale, full of nuances and contradictions. Since its arrival in the 7th century, Christianity has silently witnessed China's history, observing the rise and fall of dynasties, the Cultural Revolution, and the country's modernization. Despite being persecuted and banned, it has found refuge in the shadows and survived thanks to the perseverance of its faithful. Today, Christianity in China faces new challenges, from growing government pressure to the influence of social media. Nevertheless, its history of survival serves as a reminder that faith can be a powerful force, capable of resisting even in the darkest moments.

Although China has experienced remarkable economic growth over the last decade, current news reports primarily focus on the issue of human rights, an area in which China has a less than favorable record. The freedom of religion is one of the fundamental human rights that have frequently been restricted in Chinese society through measures initially imposed by Chinese emperors and later maintained by the communist government. Initially, Western Christian intellectuals' input in mathematics, astronomy, and science was received with enthusiasm by Chinese scholars and the imperial court. Nevertheless, the disapproval of the Roman ecclesiastical authorities towards ancestor worship caused the Chinese authorities to forbid missionary undertakings (Wilfred et al., 2008).

The relationship between China and Christianity has been fraught with difficulties, despite Christianity's presence in China since the 7th century and significant missionary work during the 16th century. There have been periods when China viewed Christianity positively and appreciated its presence, but at other times, it has been subjected to persecution and suppression. In the 19th century, what distorted the genuine message that Christianity could have conveyed to China was the intimate connection between Christian missionaries and Western colonial and imperial powers (Wilfred et al., 2008).

The Communist campaign to eliminate religion from the world is unparalleled in human history. While Christians suffered under the Roman Empire prior to the Edict of Milan in 313, no other period in history saw religious persecutions on the scale of those carried out by Marxist

regimes in the name of "scientific atheism" and liberation from superstition. Across the Communist world, millions suffered for their faith, from being deprived of their right to believe to enduring torture and confinement as political prisoners or being institutionalized for their "abnormal beliefs" (Marsh, 2011).

Despite a brutal attempt at eradication during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, religion has survived and even thrived in China. The fact that religion has not only survived but flourished under Communist rule raises significant theoretical and practical questions. How much control can the state exert over the growth or decline of religion? Why did attempts to eradicate religion fail? What theory can help us understand the resilience of religion in a society that is home to one-fifth of the world's population? These are important questions that require further exploration (Yang, 2011).

i. Relevance of the topic

In China, the survival and revival of Christianity is a topic of great relevance and significance, echoing across the globe. With over 100 million Christians, China boasts one of the largest and fastest-growing Christian populations in the world. This growth is all the more remarkable given decades of Communist rule and active persecution of Christians during the Cultural Revolution. The resilience of Christianity in China challenges assumptions about the relationship between religion and modernity, as well as the power of state control over civil society.

The Chinese Communist Party's efforts to regulate and control religion raise important questions about the limits of state power and religious freedom. The government officially recognizes only five religions, — Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism — subjecting them to strict regulations and surveillance. However, many Christians practice their faith underground or in unregistered "house churches," outside the purview of state control. The tension between the government's desire for control and the people's desire for religious freedom is an ongoing struggle that has implications not only for China but for the world at large (Martínez, 2015).

The Chinese case offers insights into the role of religion in civil society. Despite the government's attempts to control religion, many Christians have become active participants in social and political movements, advocating for human rights, environmental protection, and other causes. This suggests that religion can play a positive role in fostering social solidarity and promoting civic engagement.

Moreover, the survival and revival of Christianity in China challenges many assumptions about the relationship between religion and modernity. Some scholars have argued that modernization and secularization inevitably lead to the decline of religion, while others have pointed to the persistence and even resurgence of religion in many parts of the world as evidence to the contrary. The Chinese case is particularly interesting because it combines elements of both modernity and tradition, as well as state power and civil society, in complex and dynamic ways (Dunch, 2002).

Studying the survival and revival of Christianity in China can thus shed light on broader debates about religion, modernity, and globalization. It challenges us to rethink our assumptions about the role of religion in society, its relationship to modernity, and its potential to contribute positively to social development. By exploring the resilience of Christianity in China, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing religion in our rapidly changing world.

In sum, the relevance of the topic of Christianity in China lies in its global significance as a center of Christian growth and influence, its implications for religious freedom and state power, its potential to challenge assumptions about religion and modernity, its insights into the role of religion in civil society, and its contributions to broader debates about globalization.

ii. Objectives and Hypothesis.

The main objective of this study is to explore the factors that have contributed to the survival and revival of Christianity in China, despite decades of Communist rule and active persecution of Christians. The unexpected survival and resistance of Christianity in a regime that has been repressive towards religions will be studied through a conception of religion as a marketplace, taking into consideration the social and political changes of the country as

influential factors in the resilience of Christianity. In order to assess this premise, specific objectives must be proposed so that answers can be provided to the questions over which this project pivots;

- i) Analyze the historical, social, and cultural context of Christianity in China, including its introduction, growth, and suppression under Communist rule.
- ii) Evaluate the resilience of Christian communities in China, including the strategies and practices that have enabled them to practice their faith despite government restrictions and surveillance.
- iii) Examine the role of religion in civil society in China, including the contributions of Christians to social and political movements, and the reception of Christianity by the Chinese society.
- iv) Test the hypothesis that the survival and revival of Christianity in China can be attributed to a combination of factors, including social and political factors and analyze it through the depiction of Christianity as a marketplace.
- v) Contribute to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing religion in China and other parts of the world, and shed light on broader debates about religion, modernity, and globalization.

This proposal is based on certain questions that have arisen in the approach to the topic at hand. What historical, social, and cultural factors have contributed to the survival and revival of Christianity in China, despite decades of government repression? How have Christian communities in China adapted to government restrictions and surveillance, and what strategies and practices have enabled them to practice their faith? What role has Christianity played in civil society in China, and what contributions have Christians made to social and political movements? To what extent does the adaptability and flexibility of Christianity as a religion explain its survival and revival in China? How much control can the state exert over the growth or decline of religion? Why did attempts to eradicate religion fail? How does the experience of Christianity in China compare with that of other religious traditions, both in China and

globally? What are the implications of the survival and revival of Christianity in China for our understanding of the role of religion in modern society?

II. State of the art.

As Christianity continues to grow in China, scholars from various disciplines have sought to understand the religion's place in Chinese society. From sociological studies on the rise of Christianity in urban areas, to historical analyses of the religion's complex relationship with the Chinese state, a wealth of literature now exists on this fascinating and multifaceted topic. In this 'State of the Art' section, we will review the most significant theories and findings that have emerged from this body of research, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on Christianity in China.

First of all, it has to be stated that Marxism, with its atheistic foundations, has been and continues to be, albeit with less prominence, the ideological guide of Chinese governments. Marxism, as a socio-political and economic theory, was developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century. Central to Marxist ideology is the understanding of society as being shaped by the dynamics of class struggle and the material conditions of production. According to Marx, religion arises as a response to the alienation and exploitation inherent in capitalist societies. He famously referred to religion as the "opium of the people," suggesting that it functions as a form of false consciousness that pacifies the working class and perpetuates their subjugation. Marx argued that as societies evolve towards communism, religion would gradually lose its significance and eventually disappear. This is because communism, in Marx's vision, would eliminate the economic and social inequalities that give rise to religious beliefs and practices. Religion, in Marxist theory, is seen as a product of material conditions and a reflection of the social structure, rather than an inherent spiritual phenomenon (Marx, 1884).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), under the leadership of Mao Zedong, adopted Marxist ideology as its guiding principle. However, the Chinese context presented some unique challenges and complexities in implementing Marxist theory, particularly regarding religion. As the CCP sought to establish a socialist state, it had to navigate the relationship between Marxism and the religious traditions deeply rooted in Chinese society (Chan, 2003). In the early years of the Chinese Communist revolution, there was a more radical approach to religion,

influenced by Marxist atheism. Under Mao's leadership, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) aimed to eradicate traditional beliefs and institutions, including religious practices, as part of a broader agenda of social and cultural transformation (Goldman, 1986).

Although the official stance of the Chinese Communist Party-State regarding religion is founded on Marxist-Leninist-Maoist atheism, which posits that religion will naturally decline as societal conditions progress. However, religion continues to persist in the present stage of social development. Since the 1990s, the Communist Party-State has acknowledged that religion can have both positive and negative impacts on society. It can contribute positively through charitable services and teachings that offer spiritual comfort and moral guidance to ordinary individuals. However, religion is considered by the Party-State as a form of opium for the people, potentially leading to anti-social beliefs and susceptible to exploitation by opposing forces for political purposes. Therefore, the Party-State maintains that Communist Party members must adhere to atheism, while promoting atheist education through the education system and mass media. Additionally, political control over religious organizations is deemed necessary to safeguard political and social stability (Yang, 2016).

According to Marsh (2011), militant atheism, in particular, rests on the assumption that religion represents a form of false consciousness and contends that people's attachment to religion is eroding in the face of progress and scientific advancements. Notably, secularism and militant atheism differ in their approaches. Secularism maintains a belief that the decline of religious influence is an inherent aspect of societal development, while militant atheism actively strives to expedite this process and shape its trajectory.

A significant portion of recent Chinese research has predominantly focused on the secular dimensions of Christianity in China. Notably, issues related to modernization, education, medicine, and the transmission of scientific knowledge have received considerable attention. Furthermore, the perceived connections between missionary endeavors and foreign imperialism have been explored, whether substantiated or conjectural. However, contemporary scholars are now better equipped than ever before, possessing both conceptual tools and extensive access to printed and archival sources. This enhanced capability allows for rewarding investigations into the religious aspects of the Chinese-Western cultural encounter as well (Standaert, 1997).

Historically, religion held a crucial place in the lives of ordinary individuals. It imbued their existence with meaning and offered hope for the afterlife. Considering the virtually universal presence of religious beliefs and their substantial influence on the lives of common people, it becomes imperative to thoroughly examine the reasons why certain individuals chose to embrace Christianity, foster genuine Christian communities, and provide moral guidance within Chinese society. This calls for rigorous scholarly inquiry (Standaert, 2009).

In the realm of sociology of religion, the intricate connection between religion and modernity has long been a subject of inquiry. Historically, it was widely postulated that religion and modernity were incompatible, and that the advancements of science and progress would lead to the decline of religious influence. However, an unexpected response to modernity emerged in the form of fundamentalism. Fundamentalist movements not only seek to elevate religion to a privileged position in society but also aim to establish a specific religious worldview as the cornerstone of political structures. Concurrently, challenges to religion's role in the public domain have arisen, including secularism and atheism (Marsh, 2011).

Following the studies of Szonyi (2009) about secularization theories in the study of Chinese religions, it can be observed that scholars who reject the theory of secularization commonly argue that it is fundamentally flawed and lacks the potential for a comprehensive explanation of religious change (Stark and Finke, 2000). As an alternative, they explore other avenues to elucidate this phenomenon. One compelling perspective is the concept of a religious economy or marketplace (Yang, 2011) which, although not explicitly categorized as a form of secularization theory, can be seen as a logical and historical extension of it. This approach may be termed post-secularization theory.

Another response to the challenges posed to secularization theory is to confine its applicability to the specific context in which it was originally formulated. According to this viewpoint, secularization is perceived as a phenomenon unique to certain regions of Europe and lacks explanatory power when applied to religious change in other parts of the world (Hervieu-Léger, 2001).

Furthermore, some scholars have sought to address the empirical shortcomings of secularization theory by refining its conceptual framework while still asserting its general

applicability as an explanatory framework for religious change. Dobbelaere (2002) and Casanova (1994), for instance, deconstruct the concept into distinct propositions and evaluate them individually. A fourth approach to the study of secularization emerges primarily from disciplines beyond sociology. This perspective posits that secularization is not solely a descriptive theory but also a political doctrine. Within this framework, the empirical validity of secularization theory becomes less significant, as the focus shifts to exploring the origins, development, and consequences of secularization as an ideology (Szonyi, 2009).

One by one, beginning in the 1970s, sociologists of religion began to abandon secularization theory in the face of mounting evidence indicating that the world was just as religious as it had ever been. Today the debate remains far from resolved, and while the majority of scholars in the social sciences recognize the continued relevance of religion in the modern world, some are still holding out or developing “revised” theories of secularization (Marsh, 2011).

Despite the growing attention given by secular scholars to Christian missions and the study of Christianity in non-Western regions, the predominant focus has often been on the contentious aspects of the encounter between the foreign religion and local society, particularly within the context of Western imperial expansion. In the past, anthropologists who sought to study indigenous peoples in their unaltered state often criticized missionaries for their interference in native customs and practices, as they were seen as agents of social and cultural transformation (Standaert & Tiedemann, 2009).

However, as pointed out by Paul Rule, it is not uncommon for anthropologists and other social scientists to disdain missionaries for disrupting “native” cultures. Yet, when considering the broader picture, anthropologists, acting as advisors to governments, disseminators of supposedly “objective” knowledge, and temporary visitors, have often inflicted more harm upon indigenous societies than missionaries ever have or could have. At the very least, missionaries must face the consequences of their actions, living within the communities they seek to influence (Rule, 2007).

While some scholars are highlighting the interconnectedness between missions, imperialism, and modernity, others are delving into the intricacies of specificity, diversity, individual agency, and the evolution of the Christianizing endeavor over time. Those who view

mission work as a tool of Western colonialism and imperialism have developed influential theoretical frameworks, such as "cultural imperialism" and the related notion of the "colonization of the mind" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; 1997). In recent years, postcolonial theory has gained significant traction among historians of missions.

It is crucial to recognize that the missionary endeavor in China was not a monolithic representation of the Christian faith. On the contrary, significant contradictions existed within the missionary movement itself, including tensions between Catholic and Protestant factions and rivalries among various Protestant groups. In the 20th century, with the arrival of diverse and more radical evangelical missionary organizations, along with the emergence of several indigenous Chinese churches, the broad and sweeping accusation that Christianity was intrinsically aligned with foreign imperialism becomes increasingly challenging to sustain. By employing postcolonial theories and employing the concept of "cultural imperialism" as a method of social analysis, we can critically examine the phenomenon of missionary activities during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This approach allows for a clearer and more balanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play and facilitates a systematic and comprehensive exploration of specific issues. It underscores the nuanced nature of the missionary movement and calls for a more nuanced assessment of Christianity's relationship with foreign imperialism in the Chinese context (Standaert & Tiedemann, 2009).

The theories pertaining to Jesuit missionaries, specifically those concerning their activities in China, predominantly revolve around their methodology of propagating Christianity within a non-European cultural context. Some theories suggest that they sought to accommodate Chinese culture and customs in their missionary work (Aisha, 2018), while others suggest that they went further and actively sought to integrate Christianity into Chinese society (Harvey, 2019). Some scholars criticize the Jesuits for being too focused on intellectual pursuits and failing to engage with the broader population (Creighton, 1974), while others argue that they played a key role in shaping the development of modern Chinese Christianity. The legacy of their work continues to be a topic of discussion and debate among scholars today.

With the waning influence of classical Marxism among Western scholars, there has been a notable shift in academic interests, moving away from politics and economics towards a greater emphasis on culture, mentality, and language. Surprisingly, the records left by the very missionaries who were once portrayed as agents of cultural destruction have now become

valuable sources for contemporary secular studies. This is because these missionaries often demonstrated keen powers of observation and understanding of the cultures in which they were immersed. Furthermore, most present-day Western academics who delve into the history of China missions and Chinese Christianity have managed to resist the allure of dogmatic postcolonial criticism and other preconceived ideological interpretations.

The key to the Jesuits' achievement lies in their status as educated individuals deeply rooted in the tradition of Christian humanism, a factor that proved instrumental in persuading the Chinese of the merit of their mission. Operating within a proud and advanced civilization, the Jesuits' embrace of Renaissance humanism served as a vital advantage, enabling them to successfully appeal not only to the educated elite but also to the broader spectrum of ordinary Chinese society (Fouraker, 2008). From its inception, the Jesuit mission in China embodied a mutual exchange of knowledge and information. European Jesuits played a pivotal role in offering the outside world its first accurate insights into China. In fact, some scholars view the Jesuits as pioneers of "proto-Sinology," laying the foundation for subsequent Western scholarship on Chinese matters. Notably, these early Jesuits undertook the translation of Confucius' writings into European languages, marking a significant milestone. Conversely, the Jesuits reciprocated by sharing translations of Western scientific treatises, along with celestial charts and other astronomical knowledge, thus satisfying the intellectual curiosity of the Chinese people (Mungello, 1989). The historical significance of European Jesuit missionaries in establishing and sustaining their presence in a distant land for over a century and a half has been rightfully acknowledged for its profound cultural impact, in addition to its religious nature (Wang, 2017).

In allusion to those theories which defend an integration of Christianity into the Chinese society, it is relevant to state in first place that, although Christianity met repression in the late 19th century and onwards, the Chinese society has tended to assimilate thoughts and practices from other faiths it has come into contact with. It is common for Chinese people to switch from one belief to another. In fact, this type of religious tolerance is a crucial feature of Chinese society (Edwards, 1926). Over time, certain individuals in China began to reconcile the notion that Christianity and Chinese religions could coexist harmoniously. This shift in perspective stemmed from two key factors. Firstly, the growth and impactful social initiatives undertaken by the Christian Church bolstered its reputation among the Chinese population. Secondly, the Chinese people themselves embarked on a contemplative journey, considering the most

effective ways to embrace the demands of the modern world, which necessitated significant transformations. This psychological phenomenon manifested as a collective inclination to reevaluate Christianity and, consequently, gave rise to a syncretic movement embraced by the broader populace (Wang, 2017).

Last but not least, in recent decades, a significant paradigm shift has occurred in the study of Christianity in China, marking a departure from a predominantly missiological and Eurocentric perspective to a Sinological and Sinocentric approach. This shift reflects a broader recognition of the unique historical, cultural, and religious dynamics at play within China, emphasizing the importance of understanding Christianity within the specific context of Chinese society. Scholars have increasingly turned their attention to Chinese sources, language, and indigenous perspectives, shedding new light on the development and impact of Christianity in China (Standaert, 1997).

The paradigm shift in the study of Christianity in China was characterized by methodological changes, shifts in research subjects, and the backgrounds of historians themselves. Prior to the 1960s, historians primarily focused on the presentation aspect, exploring how missionaries introduced and propagated Christianity in China, their effectiveness, and the influence of Western science and art. Missiology, as a theological discipline, emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, aiming to understand whether the Chinese experience aligned with specific missiological approaches. Western language texts, such as letters and travel stories, were the main sources of information, with Chinese sources receiving limited attention unless authored by missionaries (Standaert, 1997).

Over time, the study underwent gradual transformations and a new perspective emerged. Historians shifted their focus to the reception of Christianity and Western sciences by the Chinese, as well as their reactions toward missionaries. This expanded perspective encompassed not only positive reception but also anti-Christian movements. Chinese texts became the primary source for research, marking a significant change in approach. While some research continued to maintain a missiological approach, it embraced the new perspective by directing its interest toward local indigenous churches (Standaert, 1997).

III. Theoretical Framework

Over the past few years, there has been a notable change in how Christianity in China is studied. This shift is in part due to the significant growth of Catholicism and Protestantism since the 1980s. This growth has led to an increase in the number of monographs and articles that use new theoretical concepts and methodologies to examine the multifaceted nature of how Christianity is propagated, rejected, tolerated, or accepted by Chinese society. Additionally, researchers now have access to more material than ever before, as archives in China and the West are becoming increasingly available for study. (Standaert & Tiedemann, 2009)

The secularization theory, which predicts the decline or diminishing importance of religion in modern societies, was the dominant theory in the sociology of religion for a long time. While the varying definitions of secularization may be confusing to those unfamiliar with the field (Stark and Finke 2000; Swatos and Olson 2000), they all aim to describe how modernization affects religion. The "hard" version of the theory suggests that the primary effect of modernization is the decline of religion (Szonyi, 2009).

Secularization is a multifaceted concept that encompasses social theory, political ideology, and sociological paradigms. Essentially, secularization theory predicts that religious beliefs will decline and that the importance of religion in society will diminish as societies become more modern. Peter L. Berger (1960), a prominent modern thinker and sociologist, polished secularization theory by arguing that religious pluralism fractures the "sacred canopy" of society. As people of different faiths interact in modernized societies, each faith system becomes relativized in their truth claims, leading to a gradual loss of faith and the eventual demise of religion. The political ideology of secularization has used secularization theory as a theoretical basis to combat religious beliefs and remove religion from political, educational, and other social institutions. In some cases, this ideology has taken a violent turn under Communist regimes (David Martin, 1960). The emergence of sociology and modernity occurred simultaneously, leading to a focus on how religion was affected by the changing conditions of modernity and rapid societal change.

Communist governments have used secularization theory as a theoretical basis to justify political campaigns aimed at eradicating religion in the name of social and political progress.

However, these efforts have been unsuccessful, as evidenced by increasing numbers of scholars documenting religious vitality in European societies after the collapse of Soviet regimes. In contrast, Chinese Communist officials and researchers continue to criticize the "religious fevers" they observe spreading in society, despite China's rapid modernization under an atheist Communist Party. The failure of religion to decline in China as predicted by secularization theory, whether Marxist or otherwise, is notable. (Yang, 2011)

In the pursuit of truth and understanding it is essential to recognize and embrace factual information as a foundation for seeking theoretical explanations. The obvious fact about religion in China is that it is not declining, but rather it is resilient. Therefore, a suitable theory is needed to explain this fact. Secularization theory is a theory of religious decline and hence, it does not constitute an appropriate approach for explaining the survival and revival of religion in China under Communist rule. In the 1990s, a new paradigm in the sociology of religion emerged to explain religious vitality in the United States and other countries. Among the various theories within this new paradigm, the market theory of religion, or the economics of religion, appears to be the most promising approach for explaining macro-level religious change in a society (Yang, 2011).

In the endeavor to examine the state of Christianity in China, a nation characterized by its religious traditions and a historical backdrop of religious suppression, we shall employ the Triple-market model as formulated by Fenggang Yang (2006) to provide a theoretical framework for analysis.

The endurance of established Christian churches in Western societies and the emergence of numerous new religious movements serve as evidence that personal religious beliefs and practices need not diminish as societies undergo processes of modernization. This observation underscores the persistent demand for religion, even among individuals residing within contemporary modern societies. By viewing the matter through this lens, a novel theory of religious transformation emerged opposite to the secularization theory, one that depicts a religious marketplace characterized by the interplay between supply and demand, wherein individuals act as rational agents making choices (Szonyi, 2009).

The selection of religious expressions assumes a character akin to any choice made within a marketplace, influenced by the degree of openness or restrictiveness of the market and

the extent of available information regarding the available range of options. Employing this analytical approach can offer potent instruments for elucidating the evolving distribution of religious practices. Additionally, it possesses the advantage of establishing connections with two significant branches of contemporary social scientific theory: rational choice theory and neo-institutionalism (Madsen, 2011). In order to go deeper in the understanding of the religious marketplace theory, Stark and Finke (2000) provide a clear definition;

A religious economy consists of all of the religious activity going on in any society: a "market" of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s). (p. 193)

Religious economies, much like commercial economies, demonstrate a sensitivity to shifts in market structure. One of the most significant factors influencing this structure is the presence or absence of regulation. Regulation, by altering the incentives and opportunities available to religious producers (such as churches, preachers, and revivalists), as well as the viable choices for religious consumers (church members), restricts competition (Finke, 1997:50).

In line with the arguments of Stark and Finke (2000), a religious monopoly enforced through state regulation tends to foster complacency within the clergy, resulting in a less fervently engaged population. Conversely, in a deregulated market or a free market, religious pluralism tends to prevail over monopolistic control. When a religious economy is devoid of regulation, it tends to exhibit a robust degree of pluralism. This means that there will be a greater presence of competing entities or organizations vying for a portion of the market.

Religious transformations in the United States provide compelling evidence supporting the influence of deregulation. Spanning over two centuries since the enactment of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which effectively disestablished religion and deregulated the religious marketplace, there has been a consistent growth in the rate of religious adherence among the US population (Finke and Stark, 1992). Notably, research conducted in Europe yields similar findings, reinforcing the conclusion that deregulation plays a significant role in shaping religious changes.

The idea of regulation is a significant element in economic theories related to religion, but it needs to be clarified. Detractors (Bruce 2000; Beaman 2003) have pointed out that there is no market that is completely free of regulation, and state regulations can either support or oppose religion. To differentiate between the wider and more specific understandings of religious regulation, it is necessary to provide definitions for both. The broader definition encompasses all laws and regulations governing religious affairs, which means that there is no unregulated religious economy. However, allowing unrestricted freedom would be socially unwise (Gill, 2003). Conversely, the narrower definition of religious regulation as stated by Stark and other scholars is based on rules and laws that impose restrictions on certain groups or practices.

Restrictive regulation exists as a variable that exhibits a range of degrees across different societies, spanning from highly stringent to minimal (Chaves and Cann, 1992). At one end of this spectrum, we find instances of complete prohibition or eradication of all religions. Such extreme measures are infrequently implemented and tend to be of short duration, as exemplified by historical cases like Albania and China during periods of radical Communist rule (Gjuraj, 2000). Moving along this scale, we find at one end of the spectrum of religious regulation the extreme of eradication, where all but one religion are prohibited. This form, known as monopoly, has been historically observed in medieval Europe and can still be found in certain contemporary Muslim countries. Monopoly economies are characterized by heavy state regulation that protects the dominance of a single religion. Moving along the spectrum, we encounter oligopoly, where several religions are sanctioned while others are suppressed. This category encompasses the majority of present-day countries. On the opposite end of the spectrum lies the concept of *laissez-faire* or free market, where no specific religious group is singled out for preferential treatment. In this approach, minimal administrative restrictions are imposed uniformly on all religious groups (Yang, 2006).

Therefore, in accordance with the presented argumentative framework, it can be argued that a government inclined to diminish religious aspirations will strive to uphold or intensify religious regulations, given the premise that enhanced religious participation is a direct outcome of government deregulation. The Chinese government, led by the CCP, exemplifies such a regime. Since assuming power in mainland China in 1949, the party and government have implemented measures aimed at limiting, diminishing, and potentially eradicating religious practices. However, despite the presence of suppressive or restrictive regulations,

religions have not only endured but have also thrived. This observation suggests that the conventional approach of heavy regulation alone has proven ineffective. If we consider economic theory, it indicates the presence of hidden market forces at play (Yang, 2006).

Yang, drawing upon market theory, focuses on the notions of demand, supply, and regulation as explanatory factors for various social dynamics, including those pertaining to religious life. Consequently, the author introduces two key concepts for the Chinese context: the triple religious market (red, black, and gray) and religious oligopolies. This model operates on the presumption of stability in religious demand, with the regulation of religion serving as a crucial variable (Martínez, 2015). This model will serve as a tool to subsequently analyze and explain the question concerning the survival of Christianity within a repressive and atheistic regime

IV. Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the resilience of Christianity in China. This approach is chosen due to its emphasis on in-depth exploration and analysis of specific phenomena, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and existing literature related to the topic. The literature review serves as a foundational element, providing the theoretical underpinnings for this study and enabling analysis of relevant academic works on the survival of Christian religion under a communist regime. By utilizing this qualitative research strategy, a nuanced understanding of the perseverance of Christianity in China can be obtained.

The methodology employed involves a comprehensive review and synthesis of scholarly works, research papers, books, and articles that address the topic. By examining and analyzing the available literature, this study aims to provide insights into the factors contributing to the endurance of Christianity in the Chinese context.

The selection of literature for this analysis was conducted through an extensive search using academic databases, online libraries, and relevant research sources. The keywords and search terms used included "Christianity in China," "Christianity survival," "religious landscape in China," and related phrases. The search encompassed both historical and

contemporary perspectives, covering a wide range of publications from various disciplines including religious studies, sociology, anthropology, and political science.

The literature review process involved critically evaluating the chosen sources to ensure their relevance, credibility, and reliability. Key themes and arguments presented in the literature were identified and synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the survival of Christianity in China. The analysis considered various aspects, including the political, social, cultural, and religious dynamics that shape the landscape of Christianity in the Chinese context.

It is important to note that this study is based solely on the analysis of existing literature and does not involve primary data collection or fieldwork. The limitations of this approach include the reliance on secondary sources and potential biases present in the selected literature. However, efforts have been made to include a diverse range of perspectives and scholarly works to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

Overall, this research methodology of analyzing existing literature provides a valuable foundation for understanding the persistence of Christianity in China. The insights gained from this analysis will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject and offer a framework for further exploration and research in this field.

V. Analysis

i. Historical background. Christianity in China through different periods.

The history of Christianity in China is a captivating tale that spans over a millennium, characterized by resilience, adaptation, and a complex interplay of cultural, political, and religious dynamics. From its earliest recorded interactions to its current presence, the survival of Christianity in China has witnessed periods of remarkable growth, suppression, resurgence, and transformation. This chapter delves into the captivating narrative of Christianity's arrival, its encounters with indigenous traditions, imperial rule, foreign influences, and the enduring spirit that has sustained its presence amidst various challenges. By exploring the historical context, key milestones, and influential figures, we gain insights into the multifaceted journey

of Christianity in China, which continues to shape the religious landscape of this vast and diverse nation.

China, along with India, stands as an exceptional entity on the international stage. These countries possess ancient civilizations that span thousands of years, with China's roots dating back to 1500 BCE. It is regarded as a "distinct and unequivocal Chinese civilization" (Huntington, 2019: 50).

The foundations of the Western and Eastern worlds can be traced back to the Roman Empire and the Han Empire, respectively. These were powerful political and military entities that exerted their dominance over expansive territories. However, despite their mutual influence, direct contact between the Roman and Han Empires did not occur due to the presence of intermediate regional powers. Consequently, while both empires shaped their respective civilizations, their paths remained separate and distinct (McLaughlin & Jin Kim, 2021).

These circumstances, however, did not prevent the rulers of both societies from gaining awareness of each other's existence. The earliest references to China in classical sources can be found in the Latin poets of the early Roman Empire. They mention the land of the *Seres*, located somewhere in the far east of the world, whose name was associated with the principal product that reached the Mediterranean from that distant place: silk, known as "sericum" in Latin. However, during that time, there was no clear understanding of the exact location of this country or the method by which this precious product was obtained. Several centuries would pass before the first recorded arrival of Westerners in China from the Byzantine Empire, and it was through the presence of Nestorian Christians (Terol, 2018).

Christianity's attempts to take hold in China spanned over a thousand years, but encountered multiple obstacles. Nestorian missionaries introduced the faith in 635 during the Tang Dynasty, which flourished for over two centuries before facing suppression by Emperor Wuzong in 845. A second attempt by Nestorians occurred during the Yuan Dynasty, but Christianity faded away once again with the rise of the Ming Dynasty. In the late sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries led by Matteo Ricci made a third effort, but faced controversy over their adaptation to Chinese culture. Despite these endeavors, Christianity remained a foreign religion in China and struggled to establish lasting roots (Wood, 1986).

Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish individual hailing from Galilee, emerged during the time of Emperor Augustus in the Roman province of Judea. His teachings, documented by the evangelists and embraced by the Christian community, exerted a significant influence on Roman intellectual discourse. Jesus served as a crucial pillar in the consolidation of Western civilization, heralding the onset of a new era (García, 2021).

Born in 381 AD in Germanicia, the theologian Nestorius preached the acknowledgment of a dual nature and dual personhood (divine and human) in Jesus Christ. His denial of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God contradicted the beliefs held by the majority of theologians in the Empire. Consequently, Nestorius was declared a heretic at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD (Piñero, 2007: 250-251).

The condemnation of Nestorius led to the term "Nestorian" being applied to those who held theological doctrines aligned with those condemned in the council. Henceforth, the Church of the East would be known to the rest of Christianity as the Nestorian Church. Through the Silk Road, this church carried out evangelistic work in Turkestan, Mongolia, and China. It arrived in China during the early Tang Dynasty (618-907), where Nestorian Christianity became known as the "Religion of Light" (Terol, 2018). Meanwhile, the Imperial Court embraced Confucianism as its religious practice, a belief system closely intertwined with the mechanisms of secular governance and the prevailing social structure. In contrast, Christianity was regarded as an institutionalized religion that operated independently from ruling authorities, characterized by its distinct rituals and theological framework (Standaert, 2010: 275). Hence, the Christian influence on the local population remained limited (Franke & Trauzettel, 1982: 176). The Christian adherents were granted some degree of tolerance, but their activities faced complete prohibition in 845 AD by Emperor Wuzhong. Under his reign, a joint campaign was launched to eradicate Buddhism and Christianity (Fuk-Tsang, 2011: 150).

Despite encountering initial challenges, the Society of Jesus — constituted in the year 1534 — successfully penetrated China's cultural landscape, primarily through the endeavors of fathers Miguel Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci. Their missionary work emphasized the practice of inculturation, which involved the adaptation of Christianity to the Chinese context. This strategic approach encompassed three core elements: offering scientific services to gain favor with the Imperial Court, conveying Christian teachings in the Chinese language, and displaying

a respectful acceptance of the rich cultural traditions prevalent in this Asian society (Marino, 2017: 397).

Matteo Ricci's work ultimately remained unfinished, due to the lack of understanding and acceptance of the inculturation method employed by his fellow Jesuits. Furthermore, the arrival of other religious orders in China from 1631 onwards hindered its manifestation in the Chinese world. This led to the extinguishment of any hopes for continuity among the Christian communities, culminating in the final condemnation of these customs by Benedict XIV in 1742 (Sotomayor Muro, 1991). The Catholic side prohibited missionaries from raising new issues and imposed an oath of obedience. Moreover, disagreements within the Catholic Church regarding the use of Chinese rituals had prompted Emperor Kangxi to issue a ban on missions in 1717 (Fuk-Tsang, 2011). Subsequently, in 1724, he ordered the prohibition of the religion itself, resulting in the arrest and expulsion of missionaries, as well as the imprisonment and execution of Christians (García-Villoslada, 1940).

During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, successor to Kangxi, the persecution of Christians intensified, resulting in the execution of missionaries between 1746 and 1748. However, a period of harmony and religious freedom was eventually restored with the signing of treaties with the United States and France in 1844. These treaties granted missionaries the right to reside in open trade ports and allowed Chinese Christians to freely practice their faith regardless of their place of residence. This marked a significant turning point in the pursuit of religious liberty in China (Sweeten, 2020: 5-6).

However, during the following years, Christians in China had to face multiple attacks such as the Boxer rebellion. The Boxers originated as martial arts groups gathering in temples in the Shandong province. By 1900, their numbers had grown significantly, leading them to transform into government-backed militias with the goal of expelling foreign nations, missionaries, and Chinese Christians. Their objective was to resist foreign influence and protect Chinese traditions and beliefs (Harrison, 2013: 92-93).

Moreover, in 1949, when Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China, Christians in China faced significant challenges. The Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao, was officially atheist and viewed religion as a threat to the new government's ideology. As a result, many churches and other religious institutions were closed, and Christians faced

persecution, imprisonment, and even death in the context of the Cultural Revolution that took place from 1966 to 1976. Missionaries were expelled from the country, and the government confiscated church property (Fuk-Tsang, 2011). Following Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the reopening of temples was permitted in 1979 (Ming Ng, 2015: 155).

In 1982, the approval of Document 19, titled "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during the Socialist Period of Our Country," signaled a significant shift in China's approach to religion. This directive rejected coercive measures against believers and acknowledged the continued existence of religion under a socialist regime. The Maoist repression had driven religious communities underground, but the new directive provided a renewed sense of freedom for Christians who had endured years of hostility. Additionally, new converts, including disillusioned former Red Guards, contributed to the revival of Christianity in China (Bays, 2011; Madsen, 2004; Stockwell, 2003).

All in all, christian missionaries played a significant role in fostering international understanding and cultural exchange by introducing Western culture and scientific knowledge. However, their efforts had unintended consequences in China, as the influence of Western political dominance, education, and Christianity became closely intertwined. This combination ultimately contributed to the political and social revolution in China, fueling a resurgence of nationalism. Additionally, as Western education gained prominence, it sometimes led to the use of secular ideologies to criticize Christianity (Wood, 1986).

Despite the strict control exerted by the government over religion in China, there is an observable trend towards more liberal attitudes among the political leadership regarding religious practices. This shift indicates a growing inclination towards openness and tolerance when it comes to matters of faith across the nation (Wood, 1986). The emergence of a religious resurgence in China is becoming increasingly evident, with a notable increase in religious engagement and the expression of religious identities on a scale not seen since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Reports of growing religious freedom and heightened religious activity are readily substantiated, even by those who have made only brief visits to China. These observations highlight a significant shift in the religious landscape of the country (Wood, 1986).

ii. The revival of Christianity.

China is currently experiencing a remarkable resurgence of religious activity, characterized by the revival and reinvention of traditional Chinese religions, as well as the emergence and innovative adaptation of new forms of religious expression. This phenomenon is particularly striking considering that during Mao Zedong's era, Chinese leaders sought to suppress all forms of religious practice, and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) aimed to eradicate religion throughout the country. However, since 1979, when Deng Xiaoping initiated the era of Reform and Opening, which allowed for a limited space for religious observance, religion in its diverse forms has experienced substantial growth and rapid evolution across China, surpassing the constrained boundaries that were initially set. These surprising developments have captured the attention of numerous scholars. Furthermore, the transformations in religious beliefs and practices in China, as well as the emergence of new dynamics between religion and society, are part of global trends. By comparing the religious developments in China with those in other parts of the world, there are valuable opportunities to derive new theoretical insights (Madsen, 2011).

What is the significance of the religious revival for its practitioners, and what factors have led to its occurrence at this particular juncture? One explanation, often preferred by journalists, is that the resurgence of religion can be attributed to a perceived "moral void" created by the decline of Maoist ideology and the rise of morally indifferent market forces (Madsen, 2011). Scholars have observed a significant phenomenon known as the emergence of a discernible spiritual vacuum, which has surfaced in the wake of decades marked by extraordinary economic expansion. As China transforms into a wealthier and better-educated society, there has been a resurgence of interest in religion. Consequently, experts suggest that as the ideological influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dwindles in public perception, both official and unofficial Christian churches appear to be occupying some of the empty space within this context. Adherents, driven by a quest for personal purpose and fulfillment, are not only seeking meaning in their individual lives but also contemplating the future of their nation as China navigates swift transformations within its economy and society (Albert, 2015).

Scholars identify two significant historical events that have played pivotal roles in China's religious resurgence. The first event occurred with the implementation of Deng Xiaoping's policies of opening up and reform in the 1980s. This period witnessed a religious revival, particularly with Christianity spreading through house churches established in rural regions. The second major event that had a profound impact was the crackdown on democracy activists in Tiananmen Square in 1989. This event served as a critical turning point for urban communities, as intellectuals who had initially aspired to promote democratic ideals as an alternative to Maoist ideology shifted their focus towards religious practices. They turned to Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, and eventually Christianity (Albert, 2015).

In parallel with these social and political shifts, China underwent significant economic transformations by departing from traditional Maoist policies and embracing a market economy. This transition resulted in the dissolution of established social structures in both rural and urban areas. Religion emerged as a new form of social organization, primarily through conversion. As China strives to strike a delicate balance between anticipated challenging economic reforms and meeting the evolving needs of its citizens, experts suggest that the Christian revival is likely to persist (Albert, 2015).

The selection of religious expressions can be likened to any decision made within a marketplace, contingent upon the degree of openness or restriction within that market and the level of information accessible to individuals regarding the array of options available. This analytical approach offers valuable tools for comprehending the evolving patterns of religious practices. Moreover, it holds the advantage of establishing connections with two influential branches of contemporary social scientific theory: rational choice theory and neo-institutionalism (Madsen, 2011).

Hence, it can be posited that the endurance of Christianity in China can be attributed to two primary factors. Firstly, the necessity for religion arises as a means to fill the void created by the suppression of religious practices over the years, coupled with the impact of materialistic consumerism, which has left a vacuum of spirituality. Secondly, religion operates akin to a marketplace, offering a range of choices to individuals seeking religious expression.

Beginning with the political economic perspective and according to Yang (2010), the study of religion can be approached by considering it as a subsystem within society, analogous

to the economic subsystem. Similar to the material economy, the religious economy operates through the interplay of demand, supply, and regulation. By employing an economic framework, scholars have gained insights into the dynamics of religious transformation within American and European societies (Stark and Finke, 2000). This approach has also been utilized to elucidate the religious landscape in China.

Countries that have been or are currently under Communist rule have historically implemented stringent regulations on religion. While suppressive regulations may lead to a decline in one aspect of religious expression, namely participation in formal religious organizations, other forms of religiosity, such as personal beliefs and non-institutionalized practices, are more challenging to control. Consequently, heavy regulation does not necessarily result in a reduction of religious activities but rather contributes to a more intricate religious market, characterized by distinct dynamics. This regulated market can be further divided into three segments: the red market, the black market, and the gray market (Yang, 2006).

A *red market* encompasses all legally recognized religious organizations, adherents, and activities, often referred to as the "open market." However, access to this market is not uniformly granted to all religious groups, and officially sanctioned organizations within the open market are required to adhere to the directives of the political authorities. In Communist-ruled societies, the open market bears the "red" label, reflecting the influence of the official Communist ideology. This influence is evident in the discourse of religious leaders, theological discussions, and practices observed within the sanctioned religious groups (Huang and Yang 2005; Yang and Wei 2005). In other economies characterized by monopolies or oligopolies, the open market is similarly constrained by political authorities, although the ideological influence may differ in color or tone.

A *black market* encompasses all religious organizations, believers, and activities that are officially prohibited and considered illegal. These exchanges typically occur underground or in clandestine settings (Yang, 2006).

A *gray market* encompasses religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities that exist in a legal gray area. These groups, individuals, and activities operate in a realm of religious regulation that is neither clearly legal nor illegal, or can be perceived as both. The concept of the gray market is crucial to the triple-market model. However, delineating the

boundaries of the gray market is challenging due to its ambiguous and fluid nature. Broadly speaking, it includes two types of activities: (1) illegal religious activities conducted by legally recognized groups and (2) religious or spiritual practices that manifest within cultural or scientific domains rather than formal religious contexts (Yang, 2006).

While various propositions regarding the triple market of religion can be explored, this paper specifically emphasizes three key propositions that are central to its argument based on Yang's research (2006).

Regarding the first proposition, the emergence of a black market in religious activities is an inevitable outcome when the number and operations of religious organizations are heavily restricted, despite the high costs borne by individuals. This black market is a logical consequence of stringent regulations that both sanction certain religious groups and activities while rendering others illegal. While the primary aim of such regulations is to eliminate unauthorized religious groups, historical evidence reveals the persistence of religious virtuosos who defiantly seek and practice prohibited religions regardless of the circumstances, even resorting to clandestine means when necessary (Sharot 2001; Weber 1948). These dedicated individuals exhibit a profound commitment to their faith, often demonstrating a willingness to make significant sacrifices, including the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. When the state's ban on certain religious exchanges creates an unmet demand for specific religious needs within certain market segments, a black market spontaneously emerges to address these unfulfilled spiritual requirements (Yang, 2006).

Beyond the realm of religious virtuosos, the collective religious needs of a population cannot remain unsatisfied for prolonged periods. Whether consciously or unconsciously, individuals possess an innate inclination to express their religious beliefs and engage in religious consumption. An intriguing example can be observed during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), characterized by the comprehensive prohibition of all religious organizations and the suppression of informal religious practices. Despite these stringent restrictions, the religious fervor of the masses found an unlikely outlet through the Mao personality cult, a form of "political religion" that encompassed broad ideological worship (Zuo, 1991). In the post-Mao era, the phenomenon of *qigong* emerged as a subconscious substitute for Maoism, serving as a conduit for the channeling of religious zeal and devotion.

The second proposition relies on the assumption that the emergence of a gray market is a direct consequence of restrictions placed on the red market and the suppression of the black market. Engaging in religious activities within the black market entails considerable risks and costs. Simultaneously, the red market, consisting of officially sanctioned religious groups, is limited in its availability and accessibility to a significant portion of the population. Moreover, due to the restrictions imposed by political authorities, red market religious groups often experience a "sanitization" or dilution of their religious practices and offerings, resulting in a compromised religious experience (Huang and Yang, 2005; Yang and Wei, 2005). When individuals are unable to find satisfaction within the confines of the red market and are unwilling to bear the potential penalties associated with the black market, a gray market emerges as a middle ground.

In the gray market, individuals turn to informal religious practices and spiritual alternatives as a means of filling the void. Examples include the adoption of alternative forms of worship, such as Mao worship, or the engagement in practices like *qigong*. Additionally, legally recognized religious groups may circumvent regulations by offering illicit religious services that defy established norms and regulations. The gray market serves as a flexible space where individuals navigate between the restrictions of the red market and the risks of the black market, seeking personal fulfillment and religious expression (Yang 2006).

The third proposition asserts that the size of the gray market expands in direct correlation to the level of restrictive and suppressive regulation. The relative proportions of the triple markets are primarily influenced by the extent of regulation and the efficacy of enforcement measures. In economies characterized by minimal regulation, such as the United States, the open market adequately caters to the religious needs of the majority. Conversely, in heavily regulated economies, the high costs associated with the black market attract only a small number of religious virtuosos, while the red market remains either inaccessible or unappealing to a significant portion of the population. Consequently, faced with limited options in both the open and black markets, a considerable number of individuals turn to the gray market as a means to fulfill their religious needs, resulting in a relatively larger gray market (Yang, 2006).

This last proposition challenges common assumptions. Despite the relentless promotion of atheism in Communist-led societies, the resurgence of religiosity in post-Soviet contexts, as

evidenced by various studies (Gautier 1997; Froese 2001, 2004a,b), reveals that the perceived decline in religious needs was largely temporary or illusory. Surprisingly, even self-professed atheists during the Soviet era were found to secretly harbor religious beliefs (Anderson 1994; Tchepournaya 2003). Similarly, in China during the Cultural Revolution, where the red market ceased to exist, the black market was severely suppressed, and various forms of gray-market religion, including popular religion and alternative spiritualities, faced repression, a unique type of gray-market religion thrived. This was manifested through the fervent worship of Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong in what can be described as a "political religion." With hundreds of millions of sincere adherents, Mao was deified as "the great savior of the people" and "the Red Sun" (Zuo 1991).

To sum up, these propositions highlight the dynamic nature of religious regulation and its impact on the religious landscape. Rather than causing a reduction in religion as a whole, increased regulation gives rise to a triple religious market. While formal participation in organized religious institutions may decline, other forms of religiosity continue to exist and may even experience growth. Additionally, in heavily regulated societies, the presence of a sizable gray market adds complexity and instability. This gray market, with its ambiguous nature, poses challenges for religious regulation, making enforcement difficult and ultimately impractical (Yang, 2006).

In an economy characterized by shortages, the limited availability of goods profoundly influences consumer behavior. Individuals within a shortage economy face the constant reality that their purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by the sellers. This experience can lead to frustration, prompting individuals to adapt in various ways. Shortages result in tangible drawbacks and inconveniences for consumers, such as extended waiting periods for supplies, the need to queue up, and often having to settle for alternatives that differ from their initial preferences (Kornai, 1979).

Kornai (1979) offers an illustrative example to elucidate these assumptions. Taking a cue from Kornai's perspective, let us consider the scenario of a woman preparing to purchase beef. Rather than being a simple and straightforward task, her shopping experience unfolds as a complex process involving multiple stages and decisions. When the desired beef is readily available, the consumer's course of action is apparent: she proceeds to purchase it or joins a queue to secure it. However, if the desired beef is not visibly in stock, she may embark on a

search, undertaking one or more trips to locate it. The search would conclude once she locates the intended goods. Alternatively, she may opt for one of the other two alternatives to searching: substituting beef with another meat, such as pork, or ultimately abandoning her intention to purchase altogether by suppressing the desire. If the desired good happens to be a staple food item, the strategies of substitution and suppression may not be sustainable over time. In such cases, the consumer may return to the options of searching or buying if the previously desired item becomes available once more. Drawing upon these concepts of consumer behavior from Kornai's shortage economics, we can apply them to the religious economy in China during the era of Communist rule. It is expected that individuals would exhibit behaviors such as queuing up, engaging in searches, suppressing their demand, and exploring substitutes for religious practices and beliefs.

In an economy characterized by a chronic shortage of supply relative to demand, it is the changes in demand that primarily influence the dynamics of demand and supply under regulatory measures. Empirical evidence, as we will demonstrate later, reveals that it was the persistent demand for religion that compelled the Communist regime to reassess and eventually abandon their ideology-driven eradication policies. Subsequently, during the reform era, when limited tolerance towards religion was granted, the demand for religious practices and beliefs has shown a continuous and significant increase, surpassing the regulated supply. The ongoing phenomenon of "excessive demand" for religion appears to have caught central planners and regulators off-guard, highlighting the challenges they face in effectively managing and accommodating this societal demand (Yang, 2010).

Religious regulations in China continue to be stringent during the reform era. Despite the strict regulations, their intended objectives of reducing and limiting the scope of religion have not been accomplished. Instead, these regulations have given rise to what is known as the triple markets, where numerous religious activities operate in underground or legally ambiguous spaces. Hence, this is one of the reasons behind the resilience and survival of Christianity in the communist regime of China (Yang, 2010).

The revival and endurance of Christianity in China has also been influenced by the economic, social, and cultural contexts of each time. These contextual factors have played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of Christianity's resurgence in the country.

Following Deng Xiaoping's visit to southern China in 1992, the market economy permeated the entire country. This wave of secularism not only impacted the economic and social aspects of life but also had corrosive effects on the spiritual sphere. The advent of the market economy transformed monetary logic into the guiding principle of life, as consumer materialism exerted an unparalleled influence on the everyday lives of the Chinese population (Xu, 2008).

In contrast to European culture, Chinese culture lacks a distinct delineation between the sacred and the secular domains. During the Mao era, the ascetic vision of a revolutionary utopia profoundly influenced the lifestyle of the Chinese people. However, with the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, the absence of spiritual fulfillment created an emotional void, which allowed materialism to surge unchallenged. The traditional values rooted in Confucian thought appeared increasingly out of touch, while the revolutionary idealism of the Maoist era lost its relevance. In the absence of fundamental religious values, the introduction of a market economy awakened primal desires among the populace, leading to the emergence of a soulless and relentless materialism that permeated society, becoming the predominant societal value (Xu, 2008).

China embarked on the path of globalization, aligning itself with the global race. The internal consumerist materialism found immense support in the wave of global consumerism. Inflated desires became the driving force behind social productivity, fostering an unending pursuit of consumerism. Consumerist materialism now reigns as the predominant value in daily life. However, in comparison to religious, philosophical, and ethical values, it suffers from a profound inherent weakness. It lacks the supernatural or sacred attributes necessary to accommodate a comprehensive range of beliefs applicable to constitutions, pedagogy, religion, or civic education. Consequently, while materialism may have garnered public acceptance and shaped prevailing ethical standards, it cannot supplant traditional religions and ethics. The survival of these enduring values transcends mere desires and personal benefits, as people continue to yearn for hope, driven by a fear of an unpredictable destiny and a deep-seated need for a religious or emotional community (Xu, 2008).

Therefore, it is evidenced that the values of consumerist materialism are inadequate when it comes to addressing the profound questions surrounding the meaning of life. In contemporary China, an intriguing phenomenon emerges, seemingly contradictory as society

rapidly embraces secularism: religions are experiencing a notable resurgence, entering an era of rebirth and revitalization. To address this paradoxical phenomenon, a significant number of scholars have identified four key factors that provide insights and potential explanations.

Firstly, following the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy, the government has relaxed its control over religions, and religious freedom has gained its rightful place among the fundamental rights of its citizens. Secondly, as the collectivist socialism advocated by Mao Zedong waned, Chinese society has become increasingly individualistic. With dispersed and atomized lifestyles that lack emotional connections, cultural ties, and spiritual convictions, religions play a significant role in restructuring the community within this increasingly individualized society. Thirdly, the market economy has disrupted the traditional family structure, which had a sense of continuity and future. Intensely competitive structures have left people feeling powerless in controlling their own destinies, leading to a fear of an unpredictable future. Consequently, individuals turn to various gods and spirits to safeguard their lives. Lastly, the loss of fundamental social values has triggered a spiritual crisis. People generally seek security in their values and actions, and the supernatural world presented in religious beliefs provides ultimate values and a clear definition of the meaning of life and ethical standards (Wilfred et al., 2008).

The resurgence of different religions, notably Christianity, demonstrates that the profound societal transformations have not only sparked social needs but also fostered a conducive environment for the practice of religion. As long as the ongoing process of social change persists, characterized by escalating urbanization, globalization, and migration, it is foreseeable that religions will continue to flourish and expand in the foreseeable future.

iii. Government-Religion Relations in China

By examining the intricate interplay between religion and the state in the specific case of China, an area of great scholarly interest, we can gain a deeper understanding of the motivations underlying China's current policy of religious repression.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has officially recognized five religions, namely Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism. The State Administration for

Religious Affairs (SARA) regulates the activities of state-sanctioned religious organizations, overseeing various aspects of religious life such as the appointment of religious leaders, the selection of clergy, and the interpretation of doctrine. In the case of Christianity in China, three major entities play a significant role: The Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the China Christian Council, and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. To operate as a state-sanctioned Christian organization, religious leaders are required to undergo training aimed at adapting their doctrine to align with Chinese thinking and culture. According to Sarah Cook, the senior research analyst for East Asia at Freedom House, spirituality and religious practice have deep roots in traditional Chinese culture. While the Chinese Constitution protects freedom of religion, this protection is limited to what is defined as "normal religious activities." The Constitution explicitly states that religion cannot be used to disrupt public order, jeopardize public health, or interfere with the state's education system (Albert, 2015).

The repression campaigns in China, although lacking consistency, have recently focused on both underground and state-sanctioned churches. These campaigns involve various methods such as the harassment and detention of Christian worshippers, the obstruction of access to places of worship, the disruption of religious gatherings, and even the demolition of churches (Albert, 2015). Within the contemporary context of China, a nation-state governed by an officially atheistic Communist Party, the dynamics surrounding Christianity give rise to discussions, conflicts, and negotiations pertaining to various aspects. These include the distinction between "official" and "unofficial" churches, the interplay between Christianity and Chinese culture, the potential Christianization of China, the impact of foreign Christian groups on national sovereignty, and the role of Christianity in international politics (Khek, 2019).

Since the 1990s, the Communist Party-State in China has acknowledged that religion can serve both positive and negative social functions. On one hand, it recognizes the potential contributions of religion in terms of providing charitable services and offering spiritual comfort and moral guidance to the general population. On the other hand, the Party-State views religion as a potential catalyst for anti-social ideologies and a tool that external forces may exploit for political purposes. To maintain ideological consistency, the Party-State mandates that all Communist Party members must adhere to atheism. Consequently, efforts are made to promote atheistic education through the formal education system and mass media platforms. Furthermore, the Party-State asserts the necessity of maintaining political control over religious organizations to safeguard political and social stability within the country. This control is seen

as crucial for ensuring that religious activities align with the Party's objectives and do not pose a threat to the established order (Yang, 2016).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) considers religious groups as potential threats to national security, social harmony, and core interests. Ye Xiaowen, former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, argued in 1996 that religion had become a tool for dissidents to incite the masses and create political disturbances. The regulation of religious practice by the state tends to follow a cyclical pattern of revival, repression, and resurgence. Despite this, religion in China remains inherently political. In his book "Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule," Purdue University's Yang highlights that faith-based organizations are perceived as one of the most serious threats to the Communist Party. Terence Hallyday, co-director of the Center for Law and Globalization at the American Bar Foundation, points out that "Christianity now makes up the largest single civil society grouping in China. The party sees that" (Albert, 2015).

The loyalty of these Christians lies with the Holy Spirit rather than any earthly authority. It is precisely due to these reasons that such Christian communities can experience rapid and unpredictable growth. This poses a significant threat to the Chinese government, which places a high value on "stability" and predictability (Kupfer 2004; for a journalistic account of the development of Pentacostal-style Christian networks, see Aikman 2003). The absence of a clearly delineated theology or hierarchical authority within certain religious sects in China enables them to assimilate elements of traditional Chinese culture and gives rise to the proliferation of diverse sects. While many of these sects pursue a spiritual salvation devoid of political engagement, there are certain factions within them that espouse extreme ideologies, which can potentially pose a direct political challenge (Madsen, 2011).

The fear and repression of Christianity in China, therefore, stem from the government's concerns over potential challenges to its authority, stability, and control. The intricate interplay between religion and the state in China reflects the government's efforts to strike a balance between allowing religious freedom within defined boundaries and maintaining its grip on power. Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending the motivations behind China's religious repression and the complexities of the government's relationship with religion in the country.

VI. Conclusions

The survival of Christianity in communist China has been a complex and challenging process. The Chinese Communist Party, officially atheist, has viewed religion as a threat to its ideology and has taken measures to suppress religious practices. Christians have faced significant challenges, including persecution, imprisonment, and even death. Missionaries were expelled from the country, and the government confiscated church property. Despite these challenges, Christianity has persisted and even experienced a revival in recent years.

The history of repression and the atheist ideology fostered by the government have posed significant obstacles to the practice of religion. However, Christianity has survived in China due to a variety of factors. One such factor is the influence of social and cultural contexts. As China undergoes rapid economic and social changes, individuals seek meaning and purpose in their lives. Consumerism has led many people to search for spirituality, contributing to the resurgence of interest in religion. This model suggests that religion has emerged as a new form of social organization in response to the dissolution of established social structures in both rural and urban areas. As China's economy transitions from traditional Maoist policies to a market economy, established social structures are breaking down, leaving a void that religion has been able to fill.

Another factor that has contributed to the survival of Christianity in China is explained by the economic model designed by Yang (2011). The case of China serves as a compelling illustration of the significant role played by political factors in the religious economy. The socialist religious economy, rooted in Communist ideology, operates within a scarcity framework where religious demand remains unpredictable. Previous attempts at eradication failed to eliminate religion, while restrictive regulations have proven insufficient to control religious practices in China's reform era. Despite the authorities' imposition of atheist Communist ideology, individuals have sought solace in alternative spiritualities that may not carry a religious label. Despite the government's efforts to establish regulatory procedures and periodically crack down on religious activities, the demand for religion has continued to grow throughout the reform era. This increasing demand has in turn stimulated religious supply and necessitated adaptive regulation and enforcement strategies by the authorities.

The extent to which the state can effectively control religion through regulation is a subject of inquiry. The efficacy of state power in regulating religion has been both overestimated in Western societies, where deregulation was believed to lead to the demise of religion, and in China, where state suppression was seen as a means to eradicate religion. The triple-market theory reveals the influence of market forces, indicating that religious groups and believers may not respond in ways desired by regulators. Heavy regulation does not effectively reduce religion; instead, it complicates the religious market by driving religious organizations and believers into the black and gray markets. Under heavy regulation, the gray market not only becomes sizable but also volatile, providing fertile ground for the emergence of new religious movements. For regulators and enforcers, the gray market presents an unmanageable state of religious affairs.

The manifestation of religion, particularly Christianity, in contemporary China is intricately intertwined with specific social and cultural dynamics, as well as its interaction with local state authorities. This complex and diverse landscape of Christianity in China appears paradoxical within the context of a highly authoritarian political system, where an officially atheistic ruling party has long aimed to exert control over religious practices. Despite the challenges that Christians in China have faced, the resilience and adaptability of religious practice have allowed Christianity to survive and even thrive. The revival of Christianity in China is a testament to the human need for spirituality and purpose, even in the face of adversity. As China continues to undergo rapid changes, it remains to be seen how Christianity will continue to evolve and adapt. But, all in all, the survival of Christianity in communist China thus far serves as a reminder of the power of faith and the human spirit.

The story of Christianity in communist China is a story of both struggle and triumph, of repression and resilience. Against all odds, Christianity has not only survived but has even experienced a revival in recent years, offering hope and inspiration to those who seek to practice their faith in the face of adversity. The survival of Christianity in communist China is a powerful testament to the enduring power of faith, and a powerful reminder of the persistent human need for spirituality and purpose, even in the face of the most repressive regimes.

VII. References

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