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Retrieving the past glory: social memory, transnational networks and Christianity in contemporary China

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Chapter 2

Xiamen History, Society and Christianity

Understanding the lived history of Christianity in modernizing China is impossible without a fuller understanding of the rise of Xiamen, a city that occupies a special position in Christian history of China and the opening of the nation to the outside world. Before exploring the main subjects in more depth, it would be useful to give a brief review of the locality. This chapter begins with a concise introduction to Xiamen as a geographical and an administrative entity, followed by a history and an overview of the structure of contemporary Xiamen society. As the starting point for this research, the historical and social changes on Gulangyu will be elaborated.

Xiamen as a Place

Fujian province is located on China's southeast coast, bordered by Jiangxi to the west, Zhejiang to the north, Guangdong to the southwest and the East China Sea to the east. In China, every province has a single character abbreviation and the character "Min" refers to Fujian. Fujian has many dialects that have never merged the way in which those of other provinces have done over time.¹ They vary so considerably that people cannot understand non-native dialects without actually learning them. The principal dialects are the Southern Fujian dialect, the Fuzhou dialect and the Hakka dialect. Within the Southern Fujian region, the Xiamen vernacular has prevailed, a fact usually attributed to the prosperity of the city since the late imperial period.²

Xiamen, formerly known in the West as Amoy, situated on one of the best deep-water harbors in China, is located on the southeast coast of Fujian, in the estuary of the Nine Dragons River (*Jiulong jiang*). Facing Xiamen Island across the Taiwan Strait are Taiwan and the Penghu or Pescadores Archipelago. Lying between two prefectures on land, Xiamen is surrounded on three sides: to the west it borders Zhangzhou prefecture, and to the east and north Quanzhou prefecture. The three surrounding prefectures constitute Southern Fujian (*Minnan*), a region more prosperous than

1. See Li, *Fujian fangyan*.

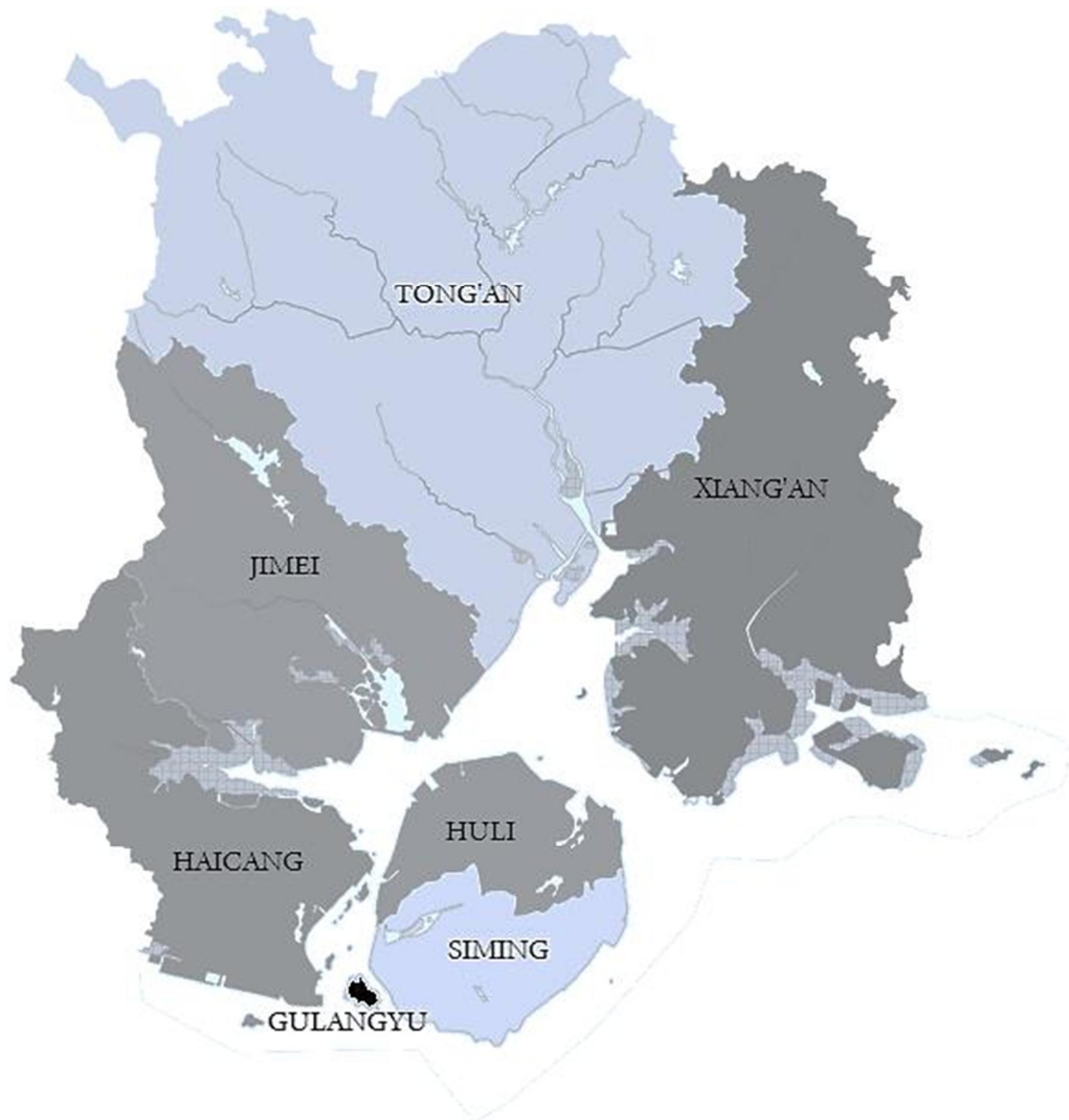
2. See e.g., Chen and Li, *Xiamen fangyan*, 28-31; Zhou, *Xiamen fangyan cidian*, 19.

those of Middle Fujian (*Minzhong*), Eastern Fujian (*Mindong*), Western Fujian (*Minxi*) and Northern Fujian (*Minbei*).



Map of China.

The name “Xiamen” carries two distinct meanings. In the first instance, it can refer to a specific urban area and the suburbs in its immediate vicinity. In this sense, Xiamen City (*shi*) can be regarded as a municipality. Administratively speaking, Xiamen City is currently composed of six districts, namely: Siming, Huli, Jimei, Haicang, Tong’an and Xiang’an. Siming and Huli districts are situated on Xiamen Island itself and the other four are on the Mainland. Gulangyu Island, administered by the Gulangyu Management Committee (GMC), has been affiliated with Siming district since the government restructuring in 2003. In the second instance, citizens often refer to the islands of Xiamen and Gulangyu with a sense of superiority. This attitude derives from the fact that, as the main part of Xiamen these two islands have long been urbanized, but it is only recently that the other districts have been merged into Xiamen City. Even today, a boorish person can be ridiculed as a “Xiang’an farmer.”



The administrative region of Xiamen.

By 2014, the city had a resident population (*changzhu renkou*) of 3.81 million. Of these, 2.03 million were registered household residents (*huji renkou*), and of these 978,200 (48.08 percent) resided on Xiamen and Gulangyu Islands.³ It has a land area of more than 1,573 square km (Xiamen and Gulangyu Islands amount to 141 square km)

3. The *hukou* (or *huji*) system is the official residential identification and control program in China. The purpose of a household registration system is to record and officially identify a person as a resident of a particular area. Although it has ancient cultural roots, the current administration of the system is used by the state to exercise control over the movement of people within the country. Those without *hukou* of a particular city are not eligible to benefit from the city's social security systems, including medical insurance and children education. At present, however, the effectiveness of the *hukou* system as a useful instrument by which to control domestic population mobility is declining.

and a sea area of 390 square km.⁴ Its resident population has enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in China and they are noted for their personal and economic links with the outside world. By virtue of its geographically and politically favorable conditions, Xiamen has become an international seaport city. According to official statistics, in 2014 the city's gross domestic product reached 327.3 billion *yuan* (53.5 billion US dollars according to the 2014 exchange rate), in which the tertiary industry accounted for 53.5 percent, a higher percentage than the secondary industry (45.8 percent).⁵ On account of its municipal infrastructure, neat cityscape and higher standard of living, Xiamen is among the most popular Chinese cities to live in today and it rejoices in the soubriquet of being a "pearl of the sea." Legend has it that countless egrets once made it their home; hence it earned an alternative name, Egret Island. In recent years, Xiamen has been designated a tourist city and attracts millions of tourists each year.

As a second-tier city in China, Xiamen is still less well known in the West. It can be considered less "global" than bigger cities such as Beijing and Shanghai that cater to mass movements of people from across the globe and function as hubs for global financial flows. Nevertheless, as Angela Lehmann demonstrates, in recent years as a "globalizing" city Xiamen has been hosting a growing number of international expatriates.⁶

The ethnographic research for this study was conducted on both Xiamen and Gulangyu Islands and consequently, when necessary, these two geographical areas will be distinguished in the text below. For example, in distinction to Gulangyu Island the designation "Xiamen Island" will be used. Meanwhile, the name Xiamen in general refers to both Xiamen and Gulangyu Islands in this thesis, and Xiamen City means the Xiamen prefecture that is made up of the six districts.

A Brief History of Xiamen

In the distant past, Xiamen was an isolated island remote from the Central Plains (*Zhongyuan*, the term that usually means the central state and dominant Han culture) civilization. There is extremely little pre-Song Dynasty (960-1279) written work about Xiamen.⁷ According to a county gazetteer, in AD 282 the Jin court (266-420)

4. "Brief Introduction to Xiamen," Xiamen Municipal Government, accessed June 26, 2015, <http://www.xm.gov.cn/zjxm/xmgk/>.

5. "Xiamen City's Main Economic Indicators in 2014," Xiamen Statistics Bureau, accessed October 21, 2015, http://www.stats-xm.gov.cn/tjzl/tjsj/jdsj/sjyb/201501/t20150129_25033.htm

6. Lehmann, *Transnational Lives in China*.

7. Zhou *et al.*, *Xiamen zhi*, 1.

established Tong'an county, to which the Xiamen area belonged.⁸ Over a thousand years later, the next substantial change in Xiamen's administrative division occurred. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), troops were stationed on Xiamen Island, giving an indication of the island's military importance.⁹ More people moved to the island in greater numbers and contributed to its economic development and population expansion. In the early years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a city wall was built by Zhou Dexing (?-1392).¹⁰ After this landmark event, the term "Xiamen" (literally meaning "gate of the mansion") was officially adopted replacing its earlier name "Paddy Field Island" (*Jiaheyu*).

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the once flourishing official overseas trade in Southern Fujian began to decline. Thereafter, stimulated by the expansion of the commodity economy, a new type of private overseas trade, centered on Yuegang (in Zhangzhou) and Anping (in Jinjiang) ports, rapidly emerged and the latter two places finally dislodged the leading position of the port of Quanzhou. After these two ports declined in their turn, Xiamen became one of southeast China's most important port cities.¹¹ In 1684, the Manchu Qing government established the Fujian Customs to take charge of managing merchant ships and collecting taxes. The fact that its headquarters were located in Xiamen, rather than the provincial capital Fuzhou, is proof of the prominence achieved by the port.¹² In this era Xiamen gradually established itself as a leading port, initially for both national and international trade. In the year of 1766 during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-95), Liao Feipeng, a noted scholar-official who had had a provincial-level degree (*juren*) conferred on him in the imperial civil service examinations, described Xiamen Port, saying: "There are tens of thousands of ships mooring in the port."¹³ Liao's account fires the imagination of the prosperity of the Xiamen Port. In 1757, the Qianlong Emperor shut down Xiamen's port, along with those in other cities with the exception of Guangzhou, an act that marked the beginning of nearly a century of seclusion. Despite this measure, trade between Xiamen and Southeast Asian (*Nanyang*) countries was not completely severed.¹⁴

Under the Qing Dynasty, Xiamen emerged as the political, economic and military center of Southern Fujian, despite the fact that Quanzhou and Zhangzhou, the two prefectures surrounding Xiamen, still retained their status as the administrative

8. Lin *et al.*, *Tong'an xian zhi*, 41.

9. Zhou *et al.*, *Xiamen zhi*, 79.

10. Xue *et al.*, *Lujiang zhi*. The page with the description of *Lucheng* is unidentified.

11. For the ports for private sea trade in Ming-Qing Fujian, see Lin, *Ming mo Qing chu siren haishang maoyi*, chap. 4.

12. Lin, *Fujian duiwai maoyi yu haiguan shi*, 144-48.

13. Xue *et al.*, *Lujiang zhi*. Page of preface by Liao Feipeng is unidentified.

14. See Lin, *Fujian duiwai maoyi yu haiguan shi*, 164-68.

centers. The expansion in maritime trade under the Qing stimulated the development of an interwoven coastal network centered on Xiamen.¹⁵

Although the dynasty seated itself firmly in the saddle, its authorities were not able to establish all-encompassing governance on the coast. As a long isolated and underdeveloped island, Xiamen had never really been tightly controlled by the successive central states. Consequently, factors like trade or war sweeping in from the sea had constantly played a role in (re)shaping the Xiamen landscape. During the times at which the banning policy was at its most severe, the coastal residents were still not deterred from trying their hand at smuggling or turning to piracy and joining a pirate band, even though they knew they ran the risk of being beheaded. In an effort to diminish, if not banish, the threat from the sea, on two separate occasions maritime trade was forbidden by Ming and Qing emperors. Only a few countries approved by the central government were excepted from this ban. In the years in which the threats were highest, the coastal residents were forced to move inland; even touching seawater could lead to the death penalty. In spite of the severe penalties, the government policies failed to eliminate piracy. In fact, it worsened as numerous bankrupt maritime businessmen and fishermen joined pirate bands, intensifying the problem. Meanwhile, private sea trade thrived and rapidly expanded, especially under the rule of the rebel Zheng Chenggong (also known as *Koxinga*, 1624-62) who claimed loyalty to the defeated Ming court.¹⁶ In 1647 Zheng rebelled against the newly established Qing Dynasty and captured Xiamen and Jinmen Islands, where he set up an administrative body under the governance (nominally at least) of the usurped Ming imperial family. In response, in an attempt to cut off the rebels' connections and keep them isolated the Qing state adopted a policy banning maritime trade. In contrast to the Qing court's strict prohibition on maritime trade, Zheng's group promoted foreign trade through which it was able to supply its military requirements and this trade brought Xiamen increased commercial prosperity. The flourishing maritime trade gave a huge fillip to shipbuilding, commerce and the handicraft industries in Xiamen and the surrounding areas. When the Qing government took over Xiamen, the court attached great importance to its military significance and moved the Fujian naval headquarters there from Fuzhou. Yet another event that forced the Qing government to cede temporary control over Xiamen occurred in 1853, when a secret society called the Small Knife Society (*Xiaodaohui*) revolted against Manchu rule and occupied the island for six months.¹⁷ As Ching Maybo has argued, although in the Ming and Qing periods the power of the state was gradually expanded into South China, its aim being to absorb the region into its empire, it was still possible for people to "evade" the arm of the

15. Ng, *Trade and Society*.

16. See Lin, *Ming mo Qing chu siren haishang maoyi*, 117-26.

17. See Lian, *Fujian mimi shehui*, 137-48.

state.¹⁸ Xiamen on the periphery of the Chinese empire had long remained place with a reputation for “not being governed”; a place in which the state had to struggle to exercise efficient and consistent control.¹⁹

Another factor which was to complicate the center-local relationship between the Qing court and Xiamen was by the intervention of Western forces. Only one and a half centuries after Xiamen had been absorbed into the Qing Empire, the court once more lost full control over the area. The city’s fate was changed completely in the 1840s. Defeated by the British in the First Opium War, the Qing government was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing on August 29, 1842, under whose terms Xiamen was opened up as one of five treaty ports, the others being Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai. It is at this point that our study of Protestant Christianity in Xiamen begins.²⁰ In the following century, Xiamen was to be controlled by the late Qing government, the *Kuomintang* government and the Japanese invaders respectively, before reverting to Nationalist rule in 1945.

On October 17, 1949, the Communist-led People’s Liberation Army took over the islands of Xiamen and Gulangyu. The People’s Government was established shortly thereafter. As one of the final battlefields in which war was waged against the KMT troops, Xiamen was “liberated” by the Communist army, but at a high cost. The next problem which presented itself was that the local officials, many of whom had overseas ties, especially with KMT-ruled Taiwan, were considered potentially disloyal to the new regime. Therefore, upon the capture of the city a large number of key positions were filled by demobilized military officials. Later, in the 1950s, “politically loyal” young students recruited from Shanghai and Zhejiang were sent to Xiamen to strengthen the Party’s leadership.²¹ In the aftermath of the Communist victory, a series of political events took place that unleashed a continuous transformation in the social structure of Xiamen as well as that of the whole country. Chronologically, these encompassed land reform, a campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries, cooperation, the introduction of collectivization, the de-privatization of commerce and industry, the Hundred Flowers Campaign, the Anti-Rightist Movement,²² the

18. Ching, “Guojia ruhe ‘taoli.’”

19. Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*.

20. Catholic missionaries had been penetrating the area since the late Ming. It is said that a Catholic church was built in Zengcuoan, a fishing village. However, this site has not be located and no remains have ever been found. See Gong, “Xiamen Tianzhu tang.”

21. Interviews with retired Communist Party cadres.

22. The Anti-Rightist Movement launched by Chairman Mao was a reaction to the Hundred Flowers Campaign. It was a series of campaigns to purge alleged “rightists” (*youpai*) that lasted from roughly 1957 to 1959. Who and what a “rightist” was not always clearly and consistently defined. Although the term of disapprobation could also include critics to the left of the government, its official use was to identify and stigmatize those intellectuals who

Great Leap Forward, the Four Cleanups (or Socialist Education Campaign), the Cultural Revolution, and finally de-collectivization and re-privatization of commerce and industry.²³ Just as in other parts of the country, the overseas relations of Xiamen were largely cut off under the rule of Chairman Mao.

In the light of the openly hostile political confrontation between the Communists and the Nationalists during most of the period between 1949 and 1978, Fujian was assigned the military and political mission of confronting Taiwan. A task it was to accomplish by building itself into a significant military fortress. Fighting across the Strait broke out around the off-shore islands of Fujian throughout the 1950s. Xiamen in particular, the nearest place to KMT-ruled Jinmen Island, had to bear the brunt of heavy bombardments. Peaceable cross-strait exchanges were not resumed until 1987, when the KMT government in Taipei announced the lifting of martial law and permitted the war veterans to visit their hometowns in Mainland China.

In 1979, the top-level reformers departed radically from the path marked out by their predecessors by proposing the use of foreign investment to promote exports and stimulate the domestic economy, and this goal required setting about raising managerial and technological levels. In the framework of the state's Reform and Opening-Up Policy, in 1980 Xiamen was designated one of five Special Economic Zones (SEZ, *jingji tequ*) that it was hoped would attract investment and new technology, mainly from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese. Another breakthrough for Xiamen came in 1984. The boundary of the SEZ was extended from the original area of 2.5 square km in present-day Huli district to cover the whole of Xiamen Island (Gulangyu included). Consequently, significantly greater scope for encouraging foreign investment by introducing lower enterprise tax rates was created. Over the past three decades, Xiamen City has witnessed a rapid rise in prosperity and industrialization. The most salient factor in the trajectory of Xiamen's development has been the special policy privileges granted by the central state.²⁴

Several bridges over the channel and the Xiang'an Harbor Tunnel have been built in the past few decades. Nowadays, it takes only a few minutes to drive to the Mainland from Xiamen Island. An international airport was inaugurated in 1983 and gives easy access to other cities at home and abroad from Xiamen. Nowadays Xiamen Island is just a topographical concept, and the channel is no longer a barrier to the top-down state control it had been in the imperial era.

appeared to favor capitalism and oppose collectivization. The campaign involved the persecution of half a million people.

23. There have been a number of anthropological and historical works on these socialist movements. For a detailed account of these processes in Xiamen, see Huang, *Spiral Road*. The village in which Huang Shu-min conducted his research has been urbanized since the early reform era.

24. Howell, "Xiamen Special Economic Zone."

The Structure of Contemporary Xiamen Society

It seems many entertain a fixed belief that the color of the civilization of China is yellow, reflecting the hue of the thick loess earth that covers the Yellow River Valley, where the earliest Chinese civilization is said to have been conceived and born. This ignores the fact that China also possesses vast expanses of sea and people seldom associate the gorgeous blue of the ocean with Chinese civilization. Fujian has been described as “eight-tenths mountains, one-tenth water and one-tenth fields” (*bashan yishui yifentian*). The entire province is very mountainous terrain, dotted with many plateaus but possessing few plains; arable land *per capita* falls far short of the national average. In the northwest, Fujian is encircled by mountain ranges and it has a long sea border in the east. Although the barriers created by the mountains and the sea did to some extent confine the people within a narrow world, the geographical boundaries did not prevent them from being inspired by an intense eagerness to explore the outside world. Partially on account of the limited arable land resources in Fujian and the concomitant increasing population pressures, in the course of time the people of Southern Fujian turned to the sea and established quite elaborate maritime networks for overseas trade and migration.

As an important *qiaoxiang*,²⁵ Xiamen has a historical tradition of a large number of its people immigrating to Southeast Asia and other countries.²⁶ From the 1840s to the 1890s, the emigrants who departed from the port of Xiamen numbered around a substantial 390,000. However, from 1890 to 1930, the city experienced its peak of emigration with numbers reaching nearly 1.36 million (including contract laborers).²⁷ Not only did the huge number of emigrants send home a large amount in remittances, in their new places of residence they also established strong personal overseas ties that they used to promote regional development, trade relations, modern education and transnational religious networks. Although Xiamen never did develop into a major industrial base, overseas Chinese capital nevertheless did play a significant part in the regional development there in the early decades of the twentieth century.²⁸ The wealthy and influential overseas Chinese involved themselves in the fields of business, finance, transportation and real estate. Besides these commercial activities, they also promoted

25. *Qiaoxiang* usually refers to a person's home village or district, depending on which place a particular person identifies as their place of origin. Researchers of the Chinese diaspora have extended the use of this term to indicate “a sojourner's village or hometown.” See Douw, “Introduction,” 3.

26. For further information, see Xiamen huaqiao zhi bianweihui, *Xiamen huaqiao zhi*, 32-46.

27. Dai, *Quyuxing jingji fazhan yu shehui bianqian*, 310-11.

28. See Cook, “Bridges to Modernity”; Dai, *Quyuxing jingji fazhan yu shehui bianqian*; Li and Zhao, “Xiamen,” 227; Yu, “Remaking Xiamen.”

modern infrastructural construction, as well as establishing education, medical services and charitable facilities for the common people. One good example is Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961) who established the Jimei primary/middle school and college campuses and Xiamen University. More importantly perhaps, the overseas Chinese inculcated a vision of modernity.²⁹ Since 1979, Xiamen's extensive ties with overseas Chinese have been an enormous boost to local economic development. These overseas Chinese have been an important source of capital for Xiamen in particular and Fujian in general. Very much aware of this important resource, local governments have offered the families of overseas Chinese incentives to encourage them to utilize the capital and information provided by their relatives abroad to open factories and run businesses.

In the era of reform, as well as economic growth, the Southern Fujian region has also witnessed a revival of local traditions.³⁰ Kuan-Pearce's study in Anxi county reveals that, far from just contributing to economic development of the *qiaoxiang*, the "moral economy" that binds the overseas Chinese to their ancestral lands has also led to a religious revival.³¹ For centuries, the cultural landscape in the *qiaoxiang* has been heavily shaped by overseas Chinese.³² Although many of these contributors had their roots in its surrounding areas rather than Xiamen proper, they have tended to make investments in or contributions to Xiamen rather than their true ancestral lands, presumably responding to Xiamen's prosperity and reputation at home and abroad.

In 1988, Xiamen gained the status of "a city with a separate listing in the plan" (*jihua dan lie shi*). This elevation meant that the mayor of Xiamen was placed on an equal footing with the deputy-provincial governor which has granted it more room to maneuver with both the central and provincial governments. The highest-ranking officials in Xiamen City are the Party secretary and city mayor, who report to the provincial Party secretary and governor respectively.³³ Their ranking is that of deputy provincial level (*fushengji*); a status even higher than their counterparts in Fuzhou, the provincial capital. On the next lower level (six urban districts) are the chief and deputy department-level ranks (*tingji* and *futingji*) occupied by the chief and deputy district Party secretaries and district administrators.

29. Cook, "Reimagining China."

30. See Tan, *Southern Fujian*.

31. Kuah-Pearce, *Rebuilding the Ancestral Village*.

32. Li, *Fujian Qiaoxiang*; Zheng, "Guojihua yu difanghua."

33. The Chinese state is functionally divided between the Party that provides ideological guidance and the government that handles the administration. Organs of both coexist at all levels of the state with the Party having authority over the government at the same level. The Central Committee is the highest level of the Party, whereas the State Council is the highest level of the government. The overwhelming majority of officials are CCP members.

The religious governance agencies include the United Front Work Department (UFWD), the Party organ responsible for uniting non-CCP elements in society, and the RAB of the government on various levels. The former is responsible for formulating religious policies and rallying religious leaders around the Communist Party; whereas the latter runs the day-to-day administration of religious affairs. On provincial, prefectural and county levels, the RAB is sometimes combined with the Ethnic Affairs Commissions. The person who is the provincial- or lower-level RAB chief is frequently also a deputy director of the UFWD on the corresponding level. In Xiamen, the official name of this bureau is the Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Xiamen. In this research this is shortened to Xiamen Religious Affairs Bureau. The dual handling of religious and ethnic affairs by the local Religious Affairs Bureau was promoted in the 1980s and 1990s in an effort to consolidate administrative activities. The same personnel deal with both religious and ethnic affairs. The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and lower-level RABs usually exercise their control through what are known as patriotic religious associations. Two Christian organizations are sanctioned by the state. The first of these is the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM, *Sanzi aiguo yundong*). It was founded in the 1950s as a non-denominational Protestant organization. Its three founding principles are “self-governance” (*zizhi*), “self-supporting” (*ziyang*) and “self-propagation” (*zichuan*). The TSPM functions as a liaison organization between the state and registered (and therefore officially recognized) churches. The second government-acknowledged Christian organization, the China Christian Council (CCC), was established in 1980 as a partner to the TSPM, its task being to oversee theological activities and train church leaders. The leaders and missions of these two organizations have often overlapped. On account of their close relationship, they are referred to as the *Lianghui* (literally meaning “two committees”).³⁴ The provincial-level *Lianghui* is vested with the power to approve the ordination of ministers, although no one can be ordained without the prior approval of the provincial RAB. In the restructuring of government functions, the Siming RAB, originally a deputy division-level (*fuchuji*) agency, was promoted to the chief division level (*zhengchuji*). Under the Regulations on Religious Affairs which came into effect in 2005, a religious body is required to report to the RAB on the county or district level of the place in which it is located. In Xiamen City, however, the four major churches (the New Street Church, the Bamboo Church, Trinity Church and the New District Gospel Church) are directly administered by the RAB on the city level rather than that on the district level. For example, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of

34. The two organizations do not always hold the same position. In July 2015, for instance, Zhejiang Christian Council publicly appealed to the authorities to cease the “absurd removal of crosses which damages the relations between the Party and the masses,” whereas the Zhejiang TSPM did not stage any public protest.

Trinity Church in October 2014, an official from the Xiamen RAB was invited to attend; however, no one from the Siming RAB was invited.

Social Change on Gulangyu Island

Gulangyu in the late Qing and Republican periods

Modern Xiamen people tend to over-glorify the past of Gulangyu. Although they might look back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with romantic nostalgia, the historical texts left by missionaries depict a somewhat different picture. The Reverend Philip Wilson Pitcher (1856-1915), a missionary of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), known as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (of America) until 1867, paints a word picture of early twentieth-century Xiamen/Gulangyu that contrasts starkly with the rosy vision in the imagination of contemporary local people.

A city! But not the kind of city you have in mind. There are no wide avenues, beautiful private residences, magnificent public and mercantile buildings. All is directly opposite to this condition of things. The streets are narrow and crooked, – with the sewer underneath and plainly in sight thro[ugh] the chinks of the uneven flagstones, – ever winding and twisting, descending and ascending, and finally ending in the great nowhere...There is no street either straight, or one even called “Straight” in Amoy. Then in addition to the crookedness, they must add another aggravation by making some of them very narrow.³⁵

Pitcher was extremely depressed and could not stop lamenting about the inconceivably bad reality.

There are streets in Amoy so narrow that you cannot carry an open umbrella...The streets are alive with a teeming throng, and the unwary pedestrian is liable to be hustled about and shouted at unceremoniously. Here every aspect of Chinese life passes before you, presenting grotesque pictures. Here goes the motley crowd, from the wretched beggar clothed in filthy rags to the stately mandarin adorned in gorgeous array. On beholding such sights we stop and question ourselves if this is all real or whether it is not the working of our imagination. Men almost nude, hatless and bootless, go hurrying by, giving a grunt of warning for people to clear the road as they go struggling under the weight of some ponderous burden, while still others are bearing on their shoulders the sedan chair. What does it all mean? Have men turned themselves into “beasts of burden?” Indeed they present a sad phase of human life. But

35. Pitcher, *In and About Amoy*, 16.

perhaps the beggars show a more wretched state of existence than these “heavily laden” ones.³⁶

This negative impression of Xiamen at that time was not confined to one person’s experiences. Pitcher’s accounts are confirmed by the written records left by other foreigners. For example, Cecil A. V. Bowra (1869-1947), the then commissioner of customs, once wrote that: “Amoy City is a hotbed of every form of disease, among which plague and cholera are prominent. The causes are the filthy state of the town, and the fact that the civilization of the people has not advanced to the point at which the advantages of hygiene is realized.”³⁷

Neither Xiamen Island nor Gulangyu Island was considered much of a “paradise” when foreigners first took up residence there in the early 1840s. In fact, the conditions in latter were so bad it was considered even unhealthier than the former on account of all its squalor and filth. When British troops were stationed on the island in 1841, hundreds of them were stricken with fever. Hence the island initially held no attraction for either missionaries or merchants. However, from the 1860s, they did begin to take up residence here very comfortably in well-built houses offering sea views on all sides; the majority situated at vantage points on higher elevations. Gulangyu slowly evolved into an ideal residential area, a reputation that has persisted until recent times. In the wake of China’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894, Taiwan was ceded to the rising state of Meiji Japan by the Qing court. Concerned about the threat of having to make more territorial concessions, the Qing government decided to seek “international protection” for Xiamen to prevent it also being seized by Japan. In 1903 the island was officially declared an international settlement, on which thirteen countries, including Great Britain, the United States, the Netherlands, France, Japan, Germany, Spain and Portugal, could enjoy extra-territorial privileges and set up their consulates.³⁸ Gulangyu at that time was under the control of an international board of managers known as the Kulangsu Municipal Council (KMC, *Gongbuju*). The KMC, founded in 1903, was independent of the Qing government. Its Board (elected annually) took care of the day-to-day running of the settlement.

The first Municipal Council was elected in January 1903 and began to exercise its authority on May 1 of the same year. The first KMC Board was composed of six non-Chinese members, plus one Chinese representative appointed by the Xiamen governor (*daotai*).³⁹ A set of resolutions similar to those that prevailed in the Shanghai

36. Pitcher, *In and About Amoy*, 17.

37. Bowra, “Amoy,” 816.

38. Gulangyu and Shanghai were the only two places in all China to have an international settlement.

39. As of 1926, the number of Chinese representatives was increased to three, and their foreign counterparts were decreased to four. Zheng *et al.*, “Gonggong zujie shiqi de Gulangyu,” 27. For the organizational system, see Appendix 2 of *Xiamen wenshi ziliao*, vol. 3 (1980).

International Settlement was adopted by the residents of the island and subsequently ratified by the Qing court. It can be said to have formed the KMC Regulations and Byelaws (*Gongbuju lilǐ*) by which the International Settlement was governed. After the adoption of these regulations, Gulangyu was transformed into a sort of “paradise” for foreigners, as Pitcher describes in his book. All the major business houses and banks were located on the Xiamen side of the harbor. Besides the foreign residences on the island, Gulangyu was the preferred location for the schools and higher educational institutions of the three major missions, the Hope Hospital and the Union Church in which services in English were held every Sunday. It also contained foreign consulates, several post and telegraph offices, two club houses with reading rooms and libraries, two hotels and several pharmacies. Gulangyu boasted one of the finest recreation grounds along the coast. Here foreigners could pursue their sporting activities and indulge in healthy exercise, playing tennis, cricket and field hockey.⁴⁰ Nor were foreigners the only people to live on the island; it was also home to native Chinese.

As Gulangyu was managed peacefully as an international community, growing numbers of upper-class Chinese or returned overseas Chinese from Southeast Asia, and those fleeing from Taiwan under the Japanese rule (1895-1945), settled down on the island. In the mid-1870s, the incumbent Xiamen governor conducted a census that revealed 2,835 Chinese inhabitants and 252 foreign nationals on Gulangyu.⁴¹ According to a report of the Xiamen Customs, in 1911 the total population on the island was approximately 12,000, including 300 foreign nationals.⁴² Only twenty years later, the number of residents had almost doubled. A Republican dossier reveals that around 1930 it was home to over 567 foreigners and 20,465 Chinese residents.⁴³ Long-suffering China had torn by war for decades. As a peaceful island under its KMC governance, Gulangyu attracted people who sought stability and wanted to ensure their wealth was secure. A large number of laborers also settled on the island and made a living serving the wealthy. A complete social structure gradually emerged. Although the population soared, the island remained a haven of law and order, with the exception of the period during which it was occupied by the Japanese. Japan launched a comprehensive invasion of China in July 1937 and shortly afterwards occupied Jinmen Island. Subsequently Xiamen found itself under attack by Japanese fighter planes and warships. When Xiamen Island fell to Japanese on May 10, 1938, approximately 43,000 refugees fled to Gulangyu in search of shelter. Gulangyu's status

40. For the impact of the Gulangyu International Settlement on the development of modern Xiamen, see He, *Gonggong zujie Gulangyu*.

41. See Giles, *Short History of Koolangsu*, 14-15.

42. See Xiamen shi zhi bianweihui & Xiamen haiguan zhi bianweihui, *Jindai Xiamen shehui jingji gaikuang*, 356.

43. See Gulangyu guanweihui, *Zhongguo shijie wenhua yichan yubei mingdan shenbao wenjian*, 2-81.

as an international settlement offered it a temporary reprieve from the ravages of war. However, after the outbreak of the Pacific War, Japanese troops swiftly occupied the island from December 8, 1941, until the end of the war in 1945.

By and large, Gulangyu had enjoyed a century of comparative peace, during which the Western-style modern education system from primary to college levels produced a number of educated people, many of whom earned nationwide fame in medicine, education, science and the arts. The foreign nationals and overseas Chinese of Southern Fujian origin initiated the Western modernization of Gulangyu and introduced a Western lifestyle to this island. Gulangyu earned the reputation of being an “islet of pianos” because the number of these instruments found there. Hundreds of revamped Western buildings constructed in a colonial Southeast Asian style were built and even today the island is still noted for its international architecture.

Gulangyu in post-1949 state projects

Since October 1949 when the Communists assumed power in Xiamen, Gulangyu has never been detached from state control. The island was designated a “scenic wellness area” (*fengjing liaoyangqu*) in the 1950s and a couple of sanitariums were established there for Communist cadres and army and navy officers affiliated with the Fuzhou Military Region of the People’s Liberation Army. The official overall plan for Xiamen City clearly stated that the population size of the small island had to be strictly controlled by a household registration system based on the principle of “moving out allowed, moving in forbidden.” Moreover, no industry or factories unconnected with tourist enterprises were allowed to move there or be built. In 1982 Gulangyu was re-designated a “scenic tourist area” (*fengjing lüyouqu*) and the number of permanent residents dropped to fewer than 20,000. In 1988 Gulangyu was recognized as national-level scenic area and in 1995 it was announced that all factories had to move out and the number of permanent residents was to be limited to no more than 15,000.⁴⁴ People who wanted to obtain permanent residence on the island were subjected to a thorough investigation and had to grapple with exhausting and cumbersome approval procedures.

All this had a detrimental effect. Gulangyu used to be a fully functional residential community with a population of over 20,000, well supplied with hospitals, schools, factories and it was run by various administrative organs. When it was designated a specific tourist area, the function of the island as a residential community had to take a back seat. Factories were moved away and with them job opportunities vanished. Hence people have increasingly had to look for work on Xiamen Island and commute

44. For the official planning of Gulangyu, see Xiamen shi difangzhi bianweihui, *Xiamen shi zhi*, vol. 1, 382-83.

between the two islands on weekdays. As the population shrank, the Second Hospital of Xiamen (whose antecedent was Hope Hospital founded by the RCA) also moved out, causing the residents considerable inconvenience. It was said that two pregnant women who could not wait to be sent to Xiamen Island gave birth at the ferry terminal. The death because of a delay in treatment of a renowned calligrapher by the name of Gao Huai (1914-2007) came as a shock to those natives who insisted on remaining on the island. The residents now complain bitterly: "There is no maternity ward in which to give birth; there is no mortuary in which to die." Schools, including the noted Gulangyu Piano School and the high school division of the Number Two Middle School of Xiamen (formerly known as the church-run Anglo-Chinese College, established in 1898), have likewise been moved to Xiamen Island because of the decreasing number of students. The moving out of schools and hospitals and the general overall inconvenience of life on the island has eventually forced many residents to leave. As millions of tourists land on the tiny islet each year, the living conditions of the residents have been rapidly "deteriorating." Growing numbers of residents are now seeking to transfer their *hukou* to, or are at least residing, in Xiamen even though their *hukou* is still valid on the island. Not until the launch of the world heritage status application in 2009 did the authorities become properly aware of the problem caused by the reduction in the number of natives. Realization dawned too late. Gulangyu is now stuck in a vicious circle. According to the official data in 2010, there were 13,777 residents who had their *hukou* on the island. However, although 5,953 of them had retained their *hukou*, they were living elsewhere.⁴⁵ Another thorny issue is that, while Gulangyu has been losing its young, educated and wealthy residents, the aged, illiterate and poor natives who are incapable of finding work or less likely to be able to earn a good living in Xiamen, an increasingly expensive city, stay put.

Keeping pace with the rapid rise of tourism, more than 3,000 non-residents, mainly businesspeople and laborers, have come in as new "residents."⁴⁶ The new residents, in particular those laborers from rural areas who are generally known as "migrant workers" (*nongmingong*) in China, do not have Xiamen *hukou* and in most cases cannot benefit from the city's social security systems, such as medical insurance and children's education. They usually leave their families in their native villages and strike out to make a living alone on Gulangyu. Therefore, their residence on Gulangyu is less likely to increase the birth rate on the island. In the locals' eyes, these "outside" (*waidi de*) laborers from poor inland provinces are not as "civilized" as Gulangyu residents, and will never become sophisticated "islanders" with high quality (*suzhi*). *Suzhi* has become a keyword in contemporary Chinese society and has inspired a wide range of

45. See Gulangyu guanweihui, *Zhongguo shijie wenhua yichan yubei mingdan shenbao wenjian*, 4-13.

46. "Introduction to Residents with *Hukou*," People's Government of Siming District, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.siming.gov.cn/smgk/nj/2014/html/05-0100003.htm>

socio-political practices during the reform era.⁴⁷ It marks one's sense and sensibility of value and worth in the market economy, and the governing elite's view that improving the *suzhi* of China's vast population is vital if the country is to become a competitive player in the field of global capital.⁴⁸ Consequently, the notion of *suzhi* is often used pejoratively by the post-Mao state and by educational elites to refer to the peasantry and rural migrant workers. As the islanders quip: "As the people wearing leather shoes left, those with slippers arrived; as the piano players moved out, the dray laborers came in."⁴⁹ The strict control of the inhabitants has drastically altered Gulangyu's population and class structure.

Coasting on its architecture, sandy beach and its reputation as an islet of pianos, Gulangyu enjoys a romantic image. Every year, the island attracts millions of domestic and international tourists. During the peak tourist seasons, approximately 70,000 visitors land on the tiny islet in a single day. As tourists walk through the alleys in the dense shade of trees, enjoying the views that are rare in modern cities, they have a chance to conjure up the glorious past of the island and probably admire the present residents. However, the locals' sentiments are far more complicated. In the new century, as some of my respondents have said, Gulangyu has quickly "deteriorated into a resort island full of seafood restaurants, barbecue stalls and souvenir shops." As the Xiamen citizens frequently sigh: "Gulangyu is dead." As far as they are concerned, Gulangyu is no longer that beautiful, clean, civilized and romantic island of the past. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, among many of the local people there has been a rise in a burgeoning nostalgic sentiment that views Gulangyu through rose-colored spectacles as the "heaven that never disappears" (*yongbu xiaoshi de tiantang*). By dwelling on an idealized past of Gulangyu, for a moment or two residents can disengage themselves from the unsatisfactory present. As Peter Nosco writes: "When one is dissatisfied with one's immediate situation, it can be a comforting exercise to imagine and construct a more pleasing idealized environment."⁵⁰ A respected senior scholar who grew up on Gulangyu once commented harshly on such nostalgic sentiments: "Those who are longing for and have an attachment to Gulangyu do not have memories that reflect a true image of the island's glorious past. The only thing it allows some of them is to give full vent to the emotions aroused by these dilapidated buildings and the 1,200 existing historical houses...Nevertheless, faced with reality, no

47. References to *suzhi* are used to justify the formation of all manner of social and political hierarchies. People with "high" *suzhi* are seen as having a natural right to more income, power and status than those people with "low" *suzhi*. See Kipnis, "Suzhi."

48. Yan, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism."

49. On Gulangyu any kind of motor vehicle (storage battery cars are used for police patrol or tourists) are forbidden. The carrying of goods relies on a large number of drays and laborers, the majority from Anhui and Henan provinces.

50. Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 4.

praise or repair can return the past and all the sadness or outpouring of feelings are nothing but a sense of loss.”⁵¹

As an officially recognized National 5A Scenic Area,⁵² Gulangyu was formally put on the agenda of the application for UNESCO world heritage site status in 2009.⁵³ Prompted by their affection for Gulangyu, the locals were making an attempt to recover its past glory from the destructive trends of tourism. Some of them regard their efforts as a form of assisting the official application.

Christianity in Modern Xiamen

When Christianity first entered China remains a matter of some debate, even dispute, among students of Christianity in China and ancient Chinese history. But a nine-foot high limestone stele with a text in both Chinese and Syriac that was unearthed in the Xi'an region in the 1620s adds concrete visual evidence of an early (if not the very beginning of a) Christian presence in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The stele (erected in 781), named “Memorial to the Propagation of the Daqin (Syrian) Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom” (*Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei*), tells a remarkable story. According to the inscription on the stele, in 635, 600 years before the coming of the first European friars, a delegation of Nestorians (*Jingjiaotu*)⁵⁴ arrived in the cosmopolitan capital of Tang China, Chang'an (now Xi'an), after months of trudging along the ancient Silk Road. Three years later, the Taizong Emperor (r. 626-49) issued an edict permitting the group of Nestorians to build the first Christian church in China. The story told on the stele says that, Christianity had been established in China and had flourished there for over 150 years at least.⁵⁵

51. Niu, Hezhi (pseud.). “Gulangyu: huozhe haishi siqu?” [Gulangyu: Dead or Alive?] on Gulangyu cultural community's website, accessed August 29, 2015, <http://www.cn-gly.com/Html/?1184.html>.

52. In the evaluation system of tourist attractions, 5A-class is on the top level recognized by the China National Tourism Administration. Gulangyu was selected in 2008.

53. According to a Gulangyu official, the municipal leadership considered the plan as early as the late 1990s. It was shelved for over a decade because of the notorious smuggling case involving Lai Changxing and his Yuanhua Group, in which numbers of central and local government officials became entangled.

54. From a historical point of view, the term “Nestorian,” as S.P. Brock has argued, is misleading not to say incorrect. The ancient oriental church in the early period called itself “the Church of the East.” Today a fuller designation “the Assyrian Church of the East” is widely accepted in scholarship. See Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church.” However, the term “Nestorian” is still used in the Chinese context.

55. For more information concerning Nestorianism in ancient China, see Zhu, *Nestorianism of China*.

In 845, when the Tang court launched a campaign of anti-Buddhist persecution, Nestorian Christianity was also implicated and almost disappeared from the public scene. Nestorianism survived among some ethnic minorities in China's northwest frontier, especially among the Mongolian tribes. When the Mongols seized power in China and established the Yuan Dynasty, Nestorianism was brought to the Central Plains again. The official relationship existed between the Mongols and the Church of the East.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the Franciscans and the Dominicans had also sent missions to China where these orders established churches in Khanbaliq (also called Dadu, present-day Beijing). Regardless of its internal denominational differences, Christianity was referred to as *Yelikewen* (the Chinese phonetic transcription of the Mongolian word "Erkegun").

As Daniel Bays has argued, "In the Mongol period, despite the Roman church joining the Church of the East in missionary work in China, the elements of Christianity present seem to have been so closely tied to the foreign presence that there was almost no influence on indigenous persons and institutions."⁵⁷ *Yelikewen* prospered only among the privileged Mongols and other specific non-Han Chinese ethnic peoples, and consequently this religion failed to take deep root in Chinese society. Upon the demise of Mongol rule in 1368, *Yelikewen* again almost disappeared from the Central Plains as the Mongols retreated north.

During its third advent in the sixteenth century, Roman Catholic Christianity did take root and became a part of Chinese society. When European Jesuits came to China in the late Ming, the spread of the religion in China flourished. Among the China missionaries Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who insisted on a "policy of accommodation," in many ways epitomizes all that was good in the Jesuit attitude toward missions and with a deep interest in Chinese culture.⁵⁸ Despite this diplomacy, under the Ming and Qing regimes the China mission experienced many vicissitudes. In the early Qing, for instance, papal condemnation of Chinese rites angered the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722) and elicited a complete prohibition on missions by the state that lasted over one hundred years. The imperial state's repressive measures did not really eliminate Catholicism, but perhaps unexpectedly forced it underground where it became deeply embedded in the fabric of rural communities. This history has shaped the present Catholic landscape.⁵⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church entered China during the early Qing period, but it presented a comparatively low profile on the public scene.

56. A Syriac text published by the Father Paul Bedjan in 1888 offers a meticulous account of the official relationship between the Mongol rulers and the Church of the East. See Murre-van den Berg, "The Church of the East."

57. Bays, *History of Christianity in China*, 14.

58. Bays, *History of Christianity in China*, 21-24.

59. See e.g., Harrison, *Missionary's Curse*; Zhang, *Guanfu, zongzu yu Tianzhu jiao*.

In the nineteenth century, the Christian scene in China grew more complex when the first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison (1782-1834), came to Guangzhou in 1807, a time at which missionary activity was still under strict prohibition by the imperial state.⁶⁰ Under the protection of the British East India Company, Morrison translated the Bible and conducted missionary work clandestinely. Although Morrison only converted a very small group of Protestants, his arrival signified a new era in Christianity in China.

The first Protestant missionary to settle in Xiamen was David Abeel (1804-46) who brought the gospel on a British warship on February 24, 1842, six months before the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing.⁶¹ Abeel pioneered the RCA mission in China. Shortly after the entry of the RCA, the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Presbyterian Church of England (PCE) followed suite in 1844 and 1850 respectively. The forced opening of Xiamen as a treaty port had made it a region quite independent of the Chinese state and hence a comparatively relaxed space in which the acceptance and spread of Christianity could take place.

In contrast to the RCA's traditional view that any churches and associations of churches organized by its missionaries abroad should be consistent with those in the United States in all essential matters, its missionaries in China had rather different ideas. They believed that Chinese churches should be established as one denomination and a close association with other missions was necessary. As John Van Nest Talmage (1819-92), an RCA missionary, stated churches in Xiamen should unite and form one denomination.⁶² After a long debate, the missionary view prevailed and a formal partnership between the RCA and the PCE was finally established in 1862. The union allowed each mission to maintain an identity of its own, while permitting them to coordinate their activities. Nevertheless, it did allow for a degree of denominational independence by allowing each mission to keep its financial matters relatively separate and allowing the missionaries to act under commissions of their own denominational boards. Furthermore, the union enabled the missions to join forces in such common pursuits as medical and educational work, publishing and relief of the poor. This collaboration allowed the missionaries, Chinese pastors and the converts of the various churches to consider themselves as belonging to one single church rather than two competing ones and they felt they could meet together to discuss their common

60. For Morrison's missionary activity in China, see Morrison, *Life and Labors of Robert Morrison*. The Dutch trading company the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) brought Protestant Christianity to Taiwan and Dutch Protestant missionaries established missions to convert the Taiwanese Aborigines as early as the seventeenth century. In this part, the historical discussion is confined to Mainland China.

61. De Jong, *Reformed Church in China*, 13.

62. Fagg, *Forty Years in South China*, 192.

problems.⁶³ In the achievement of such a union, a major facilitating factor was denominational compatibility. Specifically, both the RCA and PCE missions were adherents of Reformed/Calvinist theology and Presbyterian polity. The shared tradition explains the fact that the two missions were able to share liturgical forms.⁶⁴ As Talmage writes:

[The two churches] hold to the same doctrinal standards, and they explain them in the same manner; they have the same form of church government and their officers are chosen and set apart in the same way; they have the same order of worship and of administering the sacraments; all their customs, civil, social, and religious, are precisely alike, and they love each other dearly.⁶⁵

The denominational factor strengthened the RCA-PCE intimacy, but did not result in the alienation of the LMS. The LMS later joined the union that worked towards the establishment of an indigenous Chinese Christian church. The efficient cooperation of the Three Missions (*San gonghui*) was illustrated at an early stage by the agreement known as the “comity of missions.” Under this agreement, the Southern Fujian region was divided into three approximately equal parts: the RCA had most of the western area plus a small amount of territory to the north, the PCE the south and part of the east, and the LMS the north and the remainder of the east.⁶⁶ The agreement was designed to avoid duplication of missionary activities and unnecessary expense. The headquarters of the Three Mission bodies were initially built on Xiamen Island and later moved to Gulangyu. They displayed a high degree of harmony and cooperation and later joined the Church of Christ in China (*Zhonghua Jidu jiaohui*), a decision that characterized the denominational background of the Xiamen church. This body did not include such minor denominational churches as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Christian Assembly and the True Jesus Church. In 1958 the Communist state instigated united worship (*lianhe libai*) that forced Christians to unite and worship under the same roof regardless of their denomination. Despite the fact that both the state and the official Protestant church have declared that Chinese Christianity has entered into a “post-denominational” era,⁶⁷ in Xiamen the denominational differences have never been eradicated.

In recent years, a growing number of Christians in Xiamen have professed their denominational background to be the Church of Christ in China or the Three Missions. Since the 1990s there has been a resurgent interest in Calvinism among the

63. De Jong, *Reformed Church in China*, 76-77.

64. See Cheung, *Christianity in Modern China*, 288-93.

65. Fagg, *Forty Years in South China*, 192.

66. De Jong, *Reformed Church in China*, 62-63.

67. E.g., Ding, *Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting) wenji*, 18.

well-educated in the big cities of eastern and central China.⁶⁸ This growth in interest is largely attributable to the influence of overseas Chinese Christian leaders, among them Jonathan Chao (Zhao Tianen, 1938-2004), founder of the Chinese Church Research Centre and China Ministries International in Hong Kong, and Stephen Tong (Tang Chongrong), an evangelist from Indonesia who was born in Xiamen. In Xiamen although many educated Christians might describe themselves as adherents of Calvinist teaching, very few of them, including the clergy and lay believers, can elucidate the connections between Calvinism and their faith. Calvinism, the theological foundation of the Three Missions, helps the local Christians to understand the close cooperation of the early missionary societies and to retain their identity as a united denomination. Other minor churches are naturally excluded from this process.

In 1848, the RCA built a Protestant church for local worshippers in Xiamen, the New Street Church (*Xinjie tang*), reputed to be the “First Holy Church in China” (*Zhonghua diyi shengtang*). Its title, conferred by the National Federation of the Church of Christ in China in 1935, has been instrumental in locating the position of the New Street Church and that of Christianity in Xiamen in China’s Christian history. Hence Xiamen has been proclaimed the birthplace of China’s Protestantism. Although this title is rather exaggerated or contrived, it is a useful peg for officials keen on promoting tourism and the city’s international reputation.⁶⁹ Actually, as early as 1807, the LMS missionary Robert Morrison settled in Guangzhou where he secretly conducted church services. More recently, the locals have begun to insist that Xiamen, the second city in Mainland China entered by Protestant Christianity, was the first place where missionaries preached openly.⁷⁰

The development of indigenous Christianity continued to be a contentious issue in China from the mid-nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. The prototypical indigenous Chinese churches had already been formed in Xiamen area around the 1850s. According to David Cheung, by the early spring of 1856 when the combined church membership of the RCA-affiliated New Street Church and Bamboo Church (*Zhushu tang*) had reached 110, the missionaries held the first election of Chinese Christians as church elders (*zhanglao*) and deacons (*zhishi*).⁷¹ Two Chinese church workers named Luo Jiayu (1826-70) and Ye Hanzhang (1832-1912) were chosen by the churches and ordained as pastors on the morning and afternoon of March 29, 1863, respectively. Contemporary Xiamen Christians are still proud of being the pioneers of the independent movement in China’s native church. They also

68. Chow, “Calvinist Public Theology.”

69. White, “Harnessing the Church.”

70. See e.g., Sanyi tang, *Sanyi tang bashi nian*, 13.

71. Cheung, *Christianity in Modern China*, 13.

claim that in the nineteenth century the Xiamen church had already adopted the “Three-Self” principles, nearly a century before the religious policy of the CCP.⁷²

Hundreds of Western missionaries served in Xiamen up to the 1950s. Their work was not restricted to evangelization; they also became involved in health care, education, newspapers and other public undertakings. In the early missionary era, the provision of medical facilities proved to be a valuable instrument of evangelism. It did much more than relieve the sick of their pains, and was particularly helpful to the poor who were unable to afford cures. As Abeel writes:

The gratuitous practice [has] made a good impression on all classes of the community. The number of cases treated during the past year has been about 5,000; and everywhere we learn how the hearts of the people are opened by the good done to their bodies. They see that foreigners can come with disinterested motives, as well as for the sake of gain. In this way, gratitude is won and confidence gained. The people are induced to respect us as friends, and are prepared to bear more readily the truths that tend to the healing of the soul.⁷³

Whereas medical services were the magnet that attracted a large number of poor people, the missionaries’ knowledge of the world was what interested members of the upper class. Western science appealed to the educated and opened them the door to enlightened opinions. Although the missionaries had very few opportunities to discuss religious matters with the members of the upper class, special efforts were made to cultivate good relations. They later realized that they would have to begin their proselytizing among “the lower orders and rise by degrees to the higher.”⁷⁴ It was a strategic shift that showed that Christianity was no longer a religion of the needy, but also of the upper class. Chris White’s historical research shows that Christianity in Xiamen successfully attracted those who were prominent and influential in local affairs.⁷⁵

After the establishment of the first primary school on Gulangyu by the LMS missionary John Stronach (1810-88) in 1844, church school education mushroomed on this island. The gamut of the mission schools extended from the primary department, through middle and vocational school, and on to a theological seminary. The teaching in these schools was not restricted to the propagation of the Christian doctrine; it was also the vehicle for the introduction of Western science and technology to the local people. The church-run institutions that featured a Western-

72. In seeking an explanation of the concept of “Three-Self,” many scholars would like to go back to the time of Henry Venn (1796-1873) who advocated that the native church “should potentially be a church of the country, a church that could become self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending.” See Warren, *To apply the Gospel*, 26.

73. Quoted from De Jong, *Reformed Church in China*, 16.

74. De Jong, *Reformed Church in China*, 30.

75. White, *Sacred Webs*.

style education or training provided converts with important routes to social mobility. As Ryan Dunch has argued that, although the first generation of converts in Fujian often originally came from the bottom of society, for example, under-educated villagers, their offspring rapidly moved on to professional jobs in urban areas.⁷⁶ The Shao family of Tong'an origin is a very good example. Shao Zimei, the first convert of the family, was driven out of his home village by his lineage members who were hostile to his conversion. As he moved to Gulangyu, his children were able to receive Western schooling. In just the next two generations, there have been ten school, college and seminary principals. The Shao family consequently exerted great influence on Xiamen society.⁷⁷

Of these schools, some like the secondary-level Anglo-Chinese College (*Ying Hua zhongxue*) and Talmage College (*Xunyuan zhongxue*) established a notable reputation. Church-run schools offered children from poor families the chance to enjoy an education. Even for those from wealthy families, these noted schools that supplied Western-style education presented an attractive proposition.⁷⁸ Many outstanding graduates were recommended by missionaries for study abroad, in particular in the United States and Britain, and later became famous scholars, scientists and musicians. There is a long list of noted graduates of the pre-1949 Anglo-Chinese College, including several academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE), the top two national research institutions of China, among them Huang Zhenxiang, Gu Maoxiang, Zhuo Renxi, Hong Boqian and Wang Yinglai who received his doctorate from Cambridge. Its alumni also include the archaeologist Zheng Dekun who received his PhD from Harvard and taught at Cambridge, Zhu Xiaoping who finished his doctoral study in Cambridge and became a professor there, as well as the economist Wu Xuangong and the biochemist and theologian Chen Weizhong. Talmage College also trained a group of outstanding students, like the world-renowned writer Lin Yutang who studied at Harvard and Leipzig and had a Nobel Prize nomination for literature, the astronomers Yu Qingsong and Dai Wensai who obtained his PhD from Cambridge, the horticulturist Li Lairong who received his doctoral degree from Pennsylvania State University and the marine biologist Zeng Chengkui who studied at the University of Michigan and was elected an academician of the CAS. Apart from these notable figures, the church schools also produced many excellent graduates in medicine and physical education, including Lin Qiaozhi and Ma Yuehan (John Ma).⁷⁹ These educational institutions have exerted important long-term effects. Many elderly residents of Xiamen today are still appreciative of their education in Christian schools prior to the establishment of

76. Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*, 32-47.

77. Huang *et al.*, "Shao shi jiazu."

78. He, *Gonggong zujia Gulangyu*, 117-27; Zhu, "Jiefangqian Gulangyu de jiaoyu gaikuang."

79. For stories of some of these scholars, see Hong and Zhan, *Gulangyu xuezhe*.

the People's Republic. Graduates of mission schools, who were often Christians, gradually became elites in all walks of life and greatly enhanced the image and status of Christianity.

Another important aspect to be considered is that the missions' focus on musical ministry contributed to the cultivation of Gulangyu's artistic temperament. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Gulangyu had begun to enjoy a reputation for music and almost all church-run schools offered music lessons and founded choirs or brass bands. As mentioned above, it was at that time melodies played on the piano were to be heard in every corner of the island, and Gulangyu consequently earned a reputation for its number of pianos. The musical tradition continued during the Republic and in Communist period when a number of pianists and music educators, like Zhou Shu'an and Xu Feiping, grew up on the island.⁸⁰

From the 1840s until the Communists took over the city, most of the Western medical services in the Xiamen region were supplied by missionaries. In 1898, John Otte opened Xiamen's first modern Western hospital on Gulangyu. Medical missionaries trained the first group of Western-style medical doctors, including Chen Tianen and Huang Dapi. The Xiamen church also launched a series of social movements that protested against opium, infanticide, women's foot-binding, slave girls and so on.

One major obstacle that confronted the missionaries in their efforts to combat Xiamen's illiteracy was the Chinese writing system that is radically different from the phonemically based Latin alphabet used in most of the Western world. This difficulty stimulated the missionaries to use the letters of this Latin alphabet to represent a romanized form of Chinese characters. In 1852, Talmage published the 15-page *Tn^g-oē Hoan-jī Chho '-ha 'k* (*Tanghua fanzi chuxue*, literally *Introduction to Amoy Alphabet*) to help locals read the Bible that had been translated into romanized Xiamen colloquial. Two decades later, the *Chinese-English Dictionary of the Vernacular or Spoken Language of Amoy* (*Xia Ying da cidian*), compiled by the Scottish missionary Carstairs Douglas (1830-77), was published. The romanization of the dialect significantly reduced the amount of time needed to learn to read and also facilitated the learning of the Chinese language by later arrivals.⁸¹

In the early years of missionization, Xiamen was regarded as a paragon of effective evangelism. In the 1870s the LMS described the thriving mission in these words: "In direct result, mission work in the Amoy [Xiamen] district will compare favorably with that carried on in any part of China. In the number of converts, the organization of churches, in evangelistic effort, and in contributions for the spread of the Gospel, the records of the Amoy mission afford conclusive evidence that the grace of God has not

80. See Peng, *Xiamen yinyue mingjia*.

81. See Fagg, *Forty Years in South China*, 106-107.

been received in vain.”⁸² Xiamen enjoyed a high reputation in Christian circles as an area of pioneer activity, aptly illustrated by its hosting of the third General Conference of the Church of Christ in China.⁸³ Despite its importance as an early center of Christian activity, in the twentieth century Southern Fujian began to lose its prominence among the missions. As more areas in China were being increasingly evangelized, mission centers were moved to larger and more influential cities, mainly Shanghai and Beijing. Despite this alteration, Xiamen continued to be recognized as an area of pioneer activity. Right up to 1949, Christianity constantly affected secular life in Xiamen and became deeply embedded in the local cultural and social structure.

Despite the fact that the Xiamen church played an important role in the historical development of Christianity in China, it has not attracted much academic attention. Leaving aside the early missionaries’ autobiographical works, few historical studies have been undertaken. Among these, David Cheung’s research focuses on the origins of Protestantism in Southern Fujian (in particular in Xiamen). He delves into the development and progress made by the churches that pioneered the very important processes of indigenization and ecclesiastical union in China in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ Gerald de Jong’s study specializes in the history of the RCA mission to Southern Fujian from the beginning to its closure in 1951.⁸⁵ Chris White explores the lives of Protestants in Southern Fujian (mainly in the Xiamen region) in the late Qing and Republican periods and argues that the new faith did not deracinate Christians; instead, they embraced and utilized both their Chinese and Christian identities. White specifically addresses the topic of such elite Christians as Xu Chuncao (1874-1960) who were influential on a local level and interacted actively with society at large.⁸⁶

Lineage ties constitute an important feature of the social structure of Fujian.⁸⁷ In the early missionary years of Catholicism in rural Fujian, the conversion of some local lineages explains why the gospel succeeded in taking root and developing during the Ming and Qing dynasties.⁸⁸ Ever since the introduction of Protestant Christianity to Xiamen, the family tradition has also been utilized in missionary activity. The Christian tradition of marrying people of the same faith has promoted intermarriage

82. LMS, *Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, 220.

83. This body held its first general conference in Shanghai in 1927 and the second in Guangzhou in 1930. The third general conference took place on Gulangyu in 1933.

84. Cheung, *Christianity in Modern China*.

85. De Jong, *Reformed Church in China*;

86. White, *Sacred Webs*.

87. There are many studies of Fujian lineage. See e.g., Chen, *Fujian de jiazhu shehui yu wenhua*; Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeast China*; Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society*; Lin, *Golden Wing*; Zheng, *Ming Qing Fujian jiazhu zuzhi yu shehui bianqian*.

88. Zhang, *Guanfu, zongzu yu Tianzhu jiao*.

between families with different surnames. The upshot is that in the Xiamen Christianity community today, it is not easy to clarify the complicated family relations.

The Xiamen church suffered under Mao. Widespread criticism of missionaries was evident in many of the political movements of the city. In the 1950s, all remaining Western missionaries left Xiamen of their own accord or were expelled. Instead of being expelled immediately, some missionaries were obstructed from leaving until after they had suffered public accusation or humiliation. Hence at that time the heritage left by the Western missionaries was fading fast. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), all churches were closed. On one occasion church workers were forced to kneel inside a circle of fire and watch the destruction of Bibles and faith-related books. One of the workers jumped from a building shortly after this event, the first suicide of the Cultural Revolution in Xiamen.

Not until 1979 were churches reopened and worship could recover. The New Street Church and Trinity Church were among the first group of churches to be restored. In contrast to the Maoist dogmatism, the reformist policy sought to provide room for divergent ideas allowing a greater freedom of expression. Along with these changes came a form of freedom of religious belief. This is particularly demonstrated in the noted 1982 directive entitled “*The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period*,” more commonly known as “Document 19.” It provides a basic protection of religious belief but gives atheism preferential treatment.⁸⁹ Currently, there are forty-four officially-sanctioned churches and gathering points (*juhuidian*). Besides, there are dozens of unregistered churches or congregations. Among these, two major groups have a large congregation of more than 1,000 members each. There is no reliable figure that indicates the present number of Xiamen Christians. A leading pastor of the prefectural *Lianghui* conservatively estimated 30 to 40,000 Christians, who constitute 1.5 or 2 percent of the city’s registered inhabitants. However, a preacher of an unregistered church gave me a number double that of the *Lianghui* pastor immediately after he had heard the pastor’s estimate from me.⁹⁰

Southern Fujian and the neighboring regions (for example, Putian) have vibrant communities of Buddhists, Daoists and followers of various popular religions, all of which have attracted extensive academic attention.⁹¹ In Southern Fujian, most of the

89. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi zonghe yanjiuzu & Guowuyuan zongjiao shiwuju zhengce faguisi, *Xin shiqi zongjiao gongzuo wenxian xuanbian*, 54-73.

90. Researchers who have interests in the numbers must bear in mind the methods used to compile these figures, and have a good insight into why different agents release and insist on their versions of statistics. See Huang and Zhai, “Zhongguo Jidutu renshu zhi zheng de xueli yu ‘zhengzhi.’”

91. E.g., Ashiwa and Wank, “Politics of a Reviving Buddhist Temple”; De Groot, *Religious System of China*; Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults*; Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*; Dean

families have carved wooden shrines placed in the most prominent places in their living rooms. People usually worship several deities who belong to different categorized religions simultaneously. In a typical shrine, can be found statues of Buddha, the Goddess of Mercy (*Guanyin*), the Heavenly Empress (*Mazu*), the Great Emperor Who Preserves Life (*Baosheng dadi*) and the Earth God (*Tudi gong*), all enjoying the burning of red candles and incense sticks at the same time. At present, compared to the large number of adherents of other religions, Christians constitute only a small part of Xiamen's religious population. Statistically speaking therefore, Christianity is definitely a minority religion. Nonetheless, Christianity is certainly considered part of the local culture and history. Today as we wander the streets of the city, the legacy of Christianity consisting of old churches, hospitals or school buildings are prominent landmarks. For the people of Xiamen, Christianity is an integral part not only of the city landscape but also of their everyday life.

Since the 1980s, the overseas ties of the church have been resumed, in particular those with the Chinese diaspora church of Southeast Asia. Members of the Xiamen church who fled abroad prior to October 1949 have created a bridge with overseas Chinese Christian communities and contributed huge amounts to the Xiamen church during the financially tough times. For instance, in the construction of the New District Gospel Church (*Xinqu fuyin tang*) in the mid-1990s, one million *yuan* (120,000 US dollars according to the 1995 exchange rate) came from local contributions, but seven million (840,000 US dollars) were donated by Chinese diaspora churches in Southeast Asia. In recent years, financial contributions have decreased, as the more elderly overseas members of the Xiamen church have died and with their passing the transnational connections have weakened. Nevertheless, as more foreigners are now working and residing in Xiamen, the church community has established new kinds of transnational connections (see Chapter 6).

The fact that serves as a starting point for this research is that Christianity on Gulangyu Island, the former center of the Three Missions that saw the glory time of Christianity, was doomed to decline because of the state-led commercialization driven by the development of tourism on the island. The center of gravity of Christianity has shifted to Xiamen Island that has subsequently experienced an upsurge in the number of Christians.

and Zheng, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain*; Feuchtwang and Wang, *Grassroots Charisma*, part 1; Kuah-Pearce, "Worship of Qingshui Zushi"; Tan, "Chinese Religious Expression"; Watson, "Standardizing the Gods."