

**Sino-Vatican Faith Diplomacy:
Mapping the Factors Affecting Bilateral
Relations**

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**April 2017
Figueroa Press
Los Angeles**

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Published by
FIGUEROA PRESS
840 Childs Way, 3rd Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90089
Phone: (213) 743-4800
Fax: (213) 743-4804
www.figueroapress.com

Figueroa Press is a division of the USC Bookstores
Cover, text, and layout design by

USC Design Studio

Produced by Crestec, Los Angeles, Inc.
Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN-13: 978-0-18-221704-5
ISBN-10: 0-18-221704-3

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Sino-Vatican Faith Diplomacy: Mapping the Factors Affecting Bilateral Relations

Abstract

Sino-Vatican relations have been in gridlock for more than half a century. Most observers believe that the stalemate has been caused by the so-called “Two Factors,” namely China’s “One China” policy and the Vatican’s universal authority over the Catholic Church. The current research proposes that a myriad of other factors also affect this bilateral relationship. The research maps more than fifty factors in seven clusters, including geopolitical factors, bishop-related factors, Chinese Patriotic Association-related factors, Vatican-related factors, Chinese government-related factors, and underground church-related factors. The research concludes that the nomination of bishops, the role of the United States, the growth of the Christian population in China, the active underground church, and Hong Kong weigh heavily in Sino-Vatican relations, while the influence of Taiwan has significantly decreased. In addition, many of these factors are perceived to be unfavorable to it by the Chinese government. Together, they push China towards advocacy instead of accommodation in the Sino-Vatican relations. The research suggests that a mixed model of bishop nomination may best serve the interests of China, the Vatican, and the Chinese Church.

Keywords: *Sino-Vatican relations; Catholic Church, China, underground church*

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Upon taking state power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) promoted the Three-Self Movement (self-government, self-support and self-propagation) in an attempt to “free China’s Catholic Church of imperialist control.” The papal representative in China issued a pastoral letter addressed to the bishops and priests remaining in the country, urging them not to take part in the movement.¹ In response, the CCP expelled the papal representative and foreign missionaries from China. It ordered the Catholic Church in China to break contact with the Vatican and set up as the new authority the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA).² After that point, China and the Vatican made no contact until the early 1980s.

In 1980, the Chinese government released Dominic Tang Yee-ming, who was a titular bishop and apostolic administrator of the Canton (Guangzhou) diocese in 1951. Upon release, Tang was allowed to travel to Hong Kong.³ In February 1981, Pope John Paul II stated that the Vatican was ready for reconciliation with China. He sent Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Vatican’s Secretary of State, to Hong Kong to examine the possibilities of opening diplomatic relations with Beijing.⁴ Cardinal Casaroli conferred with Tang. The Vatican indicated that it would be prepared to acknowledge China’s Three-Self Principles and would consider establishing diplomatic ties. Soon after, Tang visited the Vatican. Pope John Paul II named him Archbishop of Guangzhou without first informing China. The Vatican’s move was denounced by the Chinese government and the CPA for “rudely interfering in the sovereign affairs of the Chinese Church.”⁵

From 1981 onward, there have been many attempts on the part of the Vatican to revive Catholicism and reestablish its diplomatic presence in China. The Chinese government has also shown some willingness toward improving relations with the Vatican. However, in more than thirty years, negotiations between the two have generated little progress. The Chinese

government states that it is willing to build relations with the Vatican on two conditions: First, the Vatican must recognize that there is only “one China”; Second, the Vatican cannot interfere in China’s internal affairs. On the part of Vatican, it has suggested that if China fully acknowledges the supreme authority of the Pope as the head of the universal Church, other issues, including the “One China” problem, can be resolved through negotiations.⁶ The Vatican, the Chinese government, and international observers all seem to agree that these are the two issues (or “Two Factors”) over which bilateral relations have become stagnant.

Although the “Two Factors” indeed significantly affect Sino-Vatican relations, recent events in China and elsewhere indicate that other factors beyond these two have also played an important role in bilateral relations. These include, but are not limited to, China’s domestic political climate and the perceived hegemonic role of the United States.

When Beijing was gearing up to host the 2008 Olympic Games, there was a short period of détente between China and the Vatican.⁷ In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued an open letter to Chinese Catholics that sought to heal the rift between underground congregations loyal to the Vatican and state-approved Catholic churches in China. In May 2008, the China Philharmonic Orchestra performed Mozart’s Requiem with the Shanghai Opera House Chorus for Pope Benedict XVI. At the time, the performance was interpreted as a sign of a thaw in relations between China and the Vatican. But once the Olympic Games were over, relations between the two deteriorated once again.

The United States appears to play an important role in Sino-Vatican relations. In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pope Francis both paid visits to the United States on September 22. Pope Francis capped his visit with a mass for over one million people on Philadelphia’s grandest

boulevard, where he talked about China: "I would very much like to go to China. I love the Chinese people, I love them very much. I hope that the possibility to have good relations exists. We have contacts, we talk, and we're going forward."⁸ Throughout the five days' visit, however, Xi and the Pope did not see or talk to each other. It is hard to know why the Pope toured the United States at the same time when Xi paid his state visit, but one Chinese media outlet suggested that the United States government attempted to use the Pope's visit to overshadow the Chinese President's state visit at a time when Sino-U.S. relations were increasingly competitive.⁹ Some observers suggest that China has suspected that the Vatican might be secretly collaborating with the United States to contain China, as it did during the Cold War to contain the Soviet Union.¹⁰

The above examples indicate that it might be overly simplistic to limit our analysis of Sino-Vatican relations to the "two factors." Below the visible iceberg of the "two factors," there is a myriad of other factors that directly or indirectly affect bilateral relations. They affect the stance each party takes, the intentions with which they engage in negotiations, the way they interact, the connotations they associate with the "two factors," and future scenarios of the bilateral relationship.

Sino-Vatican Engagement as Public Diplomacy

Sino-Vatican negotiations have often been conducted in secrecy. However, public diplomacy also constitutes a significant aspect of the bilateral relationship. First, although the Chinese government states that the diplomatic relationship between China and the Vatican is one between two traditional states, the Vatican regards itself as a theocratic governing body of the world's Catholics, rather than a political state. Therefore, the Vatican does not hold that Sino-Vatican relations fall into the realm of traditional

diplomacy. In fact, it is this perceptual discrepancy that causes one of the core disputes between the two: bishop nomination. Second, as this analysis will show, the conflicts in Sino-Vatican relations are typical in the realm of modern international relations, which involves a myriad of diverse publics, instead of merely the two disputing organizations. The solutions to the dispute, as this research argues, will also depend on the dynamics of the publics. Third, both China and the Vatican have strong public diplomacy motivations when they engage in negotiations. For China, one of its key motivations in talking to the Vatican is to polish its image in the world, more so than seriously seeking to establish diplomatic relations with the latter. For the Vatican, its major concern is to bring Chinese Catholics into its fold, while establishing diplomatic relations with China is only a secondary objective. Lastly, public diplomacy tactics are often used by China and the Vatican in their engagement. The Vatican frequently appeals to Chinese Catholics, and other Catholics from around the world, in its engagement with China. One example is the famous letter from Pope Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics in 2007. Another, as mentioned earlier, is Pope Francis's appeal to China during his 2015 Mass in Philadelphia. China also employs public diplomacy in negotiating with the Vatican. For example, before the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the China Philharmonic Orchestra performed for Pope Benedict XVI, and the Vatican's envoy was invited to attend the opening ceremony of the Games. As such, it is valid to examine Sino-Vatican relations from a public diplomacy perspective.

Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

In a 1946 study, D. A. Binchy notes that the Vatican always seeks a formal juridical relationship with a state through contact with any kind of government. It never denounces a Concordat and never withdraws its nuncio, and it will not break off relations.¹¹ Gerald Chan notes that both

China and the Vatican recognize the existence of the “two factors,” but they differ in their approach towards achieving a possible resolution.¹² Edmond Tang and Jean-Paul Weist’s book includes a series of studies on the Catholic Church in modern China, with topics on the underground church, the CPA, as well as the role of Hong Kong.¹³ Beatrice Leung suggests that the role of the Hong Kong Church in Sino-Vatican relations might be undercut by political divisions in among the Hong Kong church’s leaders.¹⁴ In her 1993 study, Leung suggests that although China needs to mobilize domestic and international support to develop its economy, the benefits of normalizing Sino-Vatican relations would not outweigh the potential resultant weakening of the Party’s authority.¹⁵ In a 2001 study, Leung concludes that China and the Vatican cannot compromise due to ideological incompatibility.¹⁶ In her 2005 work, Leung continues to argue that the difficulty in Sino-Vatican relations rests in the ideological incompatibility between the dialectic materialism embedded in Chinese Marxism-Leninism and the Vatican’s religious idealism.¹⁷

Richard Madsen argues that the Chinese government’s response to the canonizations of Chinese martyrs in 2000 demonstrated an erosion of state power and moral incapacity.¹⁸ A 2002 study by Beatrice Leung and William T. Liu argues that the reason for Catholicism’s failure in China is the lack of integration between a Western religion and Chinese indigenous beliefs, rather than their mutual incompatibility.¹⁹ Peter C. Phan observes a number of important impacts of the Vatican II upon churches in Asia.²⁰ Richard Madsen’s 2003 study observes that the growth of Catholicism in China has been relatively static, and that it faces intense and systematic conflicts.²¹ Laura M. Luehrmann’s study from 2009 notes that the three “pillars” in the Sino-Vatican negotiations are Taiwan, jurisdiction over church leaders, and the management of influence over members of the Chinese Catholic community.²²

Kaitlin Austermilller concludes that the roots of the Sino-Vatican conflict run deep, and that issues which pre-date the People's Republic of China (PRC) need to be addressed before the two sides can reconcile.²³ Johnathan David Bradley finds that improved Sino-Vatican relations would improve the likelihood of reunification of the PRC and Taiwan, but there is a limited time frame for such relations to be of benefit to the CCP.²⁴ Beatrice Leung observes that Beijing has been playing the Hong Kong and Macao church off against each other.²⁵ Using the case of a diocese in Fujian province, Shun-hing Chan observes that factors affecting church-state relations in the diocese include the competition between the open and underground churches, the mediating role of the Vatican, and the pragmatism of local government officials.²⁶

Cindy Chu documents the history of the Catholic Church in China since the country's reopening in 1978. She notes that in the 21st century, Sino-Vatican relations have become increasingly complicated.²⁷ Lan T. Chu's 2013 study argues that although both China and Vietnam have realpolitik motivations to develop relations with the Vatican, there is a big difference in their approaches to the Church.²⁸ Peng Xiaoyu's research in 2014 finds that before 1949, the Chinese Catholic Church showed a strong anticommunist stance.²⁹ Andrew P. Lynch suggests that the different outlooks on freedom of religion held by China and the Vatican are rooted in the Vatican II documents and China's 1982 Constitution.³⁰

Deborah Brown and Tun-jen Cheng argue that both the Vatican and China's party state differ in that the Church is subject to law, unlike the leaders in China; the party state in China is more obsessed with avoiding blame than claiming credit, and is far less ideologically constrained than the Vatican.³¹ Paul P. Mariani studies four Catholic bishops in Shanghai and finds that each of them symbolize different models of dealing with the Chinese government. He argues

that the Chinese government's hard line towards the Catholic Church only increases the resistance of the underground church.³² Beatrice Leung and Marcus J. J. Wang's 2016 study identifies four central issues in the Sino-Vatican negotiations, including: Who has the power to nominate bishops in China? How to unify the state-sanctioned church and the non-official church? What is the relationship between the papal representative in Beijing and the local bishops in the future? And how to move the Papal Nunciature in Taipei to Beijing?³³

In summary, the studies reviewed above provide many insights into Sino-Vatican relations. However, each study focuses on one or a number of particular issues. None of them has made systematic attempts to examine each factor in the bilateral relationship. My research attempts to tentatively map out these factors, inspired by the Contingency Theory of Conflict Resolution.³⁴ Sino-Vatican relations may not fit perfectly within this theory, but some of the theory's key assumptions are very pertinent. For example, according to the theory, an organization's stance in a conflict may range from pure advocacy to pure accommodation, and there are many antecedent, mediating, and moderating factors affecting the stances. It also suggests that an organization may engage in "sham symmetry" in a dialogue, but have no intention of conceding to the other side. Furthermore, accommodation is logically impossible when an organization faces two publics locked in an intractable moral conflict.³⁵ These central tenets of the theory, as the analysis will show, are well-manifested in Sino-Vatican relations. Finally, it is important to note that many of the factors to be mapped are "perceived realities", or "socially constructed realities," whose meanings are subject to interpretation and negotiation.

Given the hierarchical nature of both regimes and the secretive ways in which they engage, it is hard to get access to first-hand data on their negotiations. My research uses publicly available sources of data, mostly English and Chinese

news media, scholarly studies, and public government documents. More than 1000 news stories about Sino-Vatican relations and the Chinese Catholic church, spanning the 1970s through 2016, were analyzed.

Mapping the Factors in Sino-Vatican Relations (See Appendix I)

I. Geopolitical factors

1. The Taiwan issue

If Taiwan was a major challenge for the PRC from the 1950s through 1990s, it has become less so since the 2000s. Its economy has become increasingly dependent on the mainland, and China's diplomatic priority is no longer to isolate Taiwan. In addition, Beijing and Taipei seem to have agreed to stop their money-driven competition for diplomatic recognition. As a result, Taiwan matters less than it used to in Sino-Vatican relations. Some even argue that the improvement of cross-straits relations may mean that incentives for Beijing to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican have decreased, and Beijing could ultimately force Taipei and the Vatican to cut ties.³⁶

On the Vatican's part, it made clear its willingness to abrogate ties with Taiwan. In 2006, it announced that "if religious freedom in China is guaranteed, it is okay to move the embassy from Taipei to Beijing."³⁷ The Vatican's Secretary of State declared that "Our nunciature in Taipei is the nunciature in China and if Beijing agrees, we can move it to Beijing."³⁸ In 2008, when the Pope travelled to Australia for World Youth Day, he ruled out any detour to mainland China or Taiwan. He did not visit Taiwan as it would anger Beijing.³⁹ For the Vatican, the removal of its mission from Taiwan does not represent a break in relations with Taipei, but rather a return to its original home.⁴⁰

Taipei certainly does not want to see the Vatican severing diplomatic relations, because the Vatican is the only European state among the 23 states that recognizes Taiwan. When the Pope's letter to China became public in 2007, Taiwan voiced hope that the Vatican would not forge ties with China at the expense of Taiwan.⁴¹ In the long run, however, a China that has diplomatic relations with the Vatican will be beneficial for Taiwan, because if the PRC shows more tolerance toward religious freedom, it may become less aggressive towards Taiwan. Even if the Vatican severs diplomatic relations with Taipei, the two could still maintain strong cultural and religious relations.⁴² In fact, Taiwan may play a role in Sino-Vatican relations. Taiwan's ambassador to the Holy See reportedly said that the Catholic church in Taiwan could serve as a bridge between the mainland and the universal church. There have already been interactions between Catholic personnel across the strait.⁴³

2. The Role of Hong Kong

The Catholic Church in Hong Kong has more than 230,000 worshippers in the city, including many of its elite upper echelons. Hong Kong's Catholics have built churches and trained priests in the mainland in recent years. Catholic laity in Hong Kong often go to China to share the Catholic experience with their peers.⁴⁴ The Hong Kong diocese has been a hub for analyzing the situation of the mainland church,⁴⁵ and Hong Kong bishops have often functioned as an emissary of the Vatican in Sino-Vatican diplomacy.⁴⁶ The Vatican hopes that Hong Kong will play a positive role in facilitating Sino-Vatican relations. As former foreign minister Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo put it, "The peaceful religious activity of the diocese of Hong Kong...should constitute an example that could break down the walls of prejudice and fear towards the Catholic Church."⁴⁷

However, the Hong Kong Church is often a target of attack by the Chinese government and the CPA. Cardinal Zen of the Hong Kong Church has been very outspoken and critical of the Chinese government. He is an advocate for human rights, religious freedom and democracy. He is believed to represent the hawks in the Vatican who advocate for a hardline approach to China. China has claimed that some his actions "hurt the current efforts to improve relations between China and the Vatican."⁴⁸ Some Catholic civilian leaders of Hong Kong are just as outspoken. For instance, veteran pan-democrat politician Martin Lee Chu-ming is a devout Catholic. The Chinese government sees him as a nuisance, because he has appealed to the Canadian, British and U.S. governments to stand up for Hong Kong's rights and freedoms.⁴⁹

As China tightens its grip on Hong Kong, some civilian leaders there have aligned themselves with the policy of the central government. Back in 2006, then-Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, a devout Roman Catholic, broke Vatican directives by attending a Mass in Kunming celebrated by a bishop ordained without the Vatican's approval. In 2010, Tsang cancelled a private audience he had requested with Pope Benedict, probably for political reasons.⁵⁰

Before Hong Kong was returned to China, Pope John Paul II established a clear line of succession within the Hong Kong diocese to prevent Beijing from installing a bishop of its own choosing there. In November 2011, a lock of hair from the late Pope John Paul II was brought to the Hong Kong Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Millions of mainland worshippers have since visited the city to pray in the presence of the relic.⁵¹ The Vatican, taking advantage of the free speech and religious freedom in the city, may make the Hong Kong Church into a Catholic fortress in Asia.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong has increasingly become a political challenge for the PRC shortly after it was handed over to China in 1997. Citizens of Hong Kong have taken to the streets on numerous occasions to protest against the central government's policies and to demand democracy. The Catholic Church has been a vital force in these protests.⁵² This has made Beijing increasingly suspicious of Hong Kong and its Catholic Church, which may undercut the Vatican's effort to normalize Sino-Vatican relations. Perhaps the Vatican is aware of the situation, and as a result it has started to distance itself from the Hong Kong Church. In its latest round of talks with China, it seems the Vatican did not fully involve the Hong Kong church. As Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun complained, "In recent years the Holy See never consults with us...It does not respect our standing at all. Everything they do is secret and we are kept in the dark."⁵³

3. The Role of the United States

U.S. involvement with Sino-Vatican relations dates back to 1918. In that year, the Vatican selected Joseph Petrelli, Apostolic Delegate to the Philippine Islands, as the new papal nuncio to China. The U.S. government suspected that this selection was due to German meddling in the Far East, and the Department of State expressed its concern to the Chinese government. China succumbed to the pressure and rejected Petrelli.⁵⁴

After the Cold War, China and the U.S. constantly engaged in verbal fights over religious issues. The U.S. government accused China of engaging in systematic and egregious violations of freedom of religion, while Beijing insisted that the U.S. was "ignorant and prejudiced."⁵⁵ China sometimes yielded to pressure from the U.S. religious community on Christian-related issues. In 1998, for example, China allowed a high-profile delegation of American religious figures to take a three-week tour of China to examine the state of religious

freedom.⁵⁶ In the same year, it released an elderly Roman Catholic Bishop from jail under U.S. pressure.⁵⁷ However, when a high-level U.S. government commission involved in monitoring religious freedom planned to visit Hong Kong in 2003, China discouraged it and as a result the visit to the Chinese mainland was canceled.⁵⁸ President George W. Bush made religious persecution a leading issue in Sino-U.S. relations. He invited Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen to the White House in 2007 as a gesture to show U.S. support for religious freedom in the world.⁵⁹ Some U.S.-based Catholic organizations have engaged in promoting Catholicism in China in recent years,⁶⁰ which certainly causes great suspicion on the part of China.

China believes that the Color Revolutions that took place in the former Soviet Republics and the Middle East were sponsored, funded, and directed by the United States, and that the United States has similar plans for China. As a result, it has become very distrustful of the U.S.' strategic intentions in the Asian-Pacific region. The Party's mouthpieces frequently call for "enhancing the ideological security of the country" and "preventing the Western hostile ideological infiltrations."⁶¹ These perceived hostile forces include Western religions. This mentality of distrust and insecurity also affects China's attitude towards the Vatican.

4. The Dalai Lama

To some extent, Sino-Vatican relations are—ironically—related to the Tibetan issue. In its negotiations with the Vatican, China has entertained the idea of the Vietnam model, in which episcopal appointments are announced by Hanoi but follow consultations with the Vatican. But China has stated that it would not completely adopt the model. Some observers believe that Beijing does not want such a model to be used as a template for the selection of "living Buddhas" in Tibet.⁶² The Dalai Lama himself sometimes

becomes leverage in Sino-Vatican interactions. Early in 2007, some newspapers in Europe reported that Pope Benedict would meet the Dalai Lama. As result, a meeting between Beijing and the Vatican was postponed. When the Vatican later announced that the Pope did not have any plans to meet the Dalai Lama, the meeting was resumed.⁶³ In 2014, the Dalai Lama requested a meeting with Pope Francis when he was in Rome. The Vatican declined the request “for obvious reasons.”⁶⁴

5. Macao

Historically, Macao has played a more important role than Hong Kong in the dissemination of Catholicism. The Portuguese set up the first Catholic diocese on Macao in 1576, which became the Church’s first gateway to China. It was responsible for a vast region in East Asia.⁶⁵ The city has a vibrant Catholic community that cherishes its religious freedom. In 1998, one year before it was handed over to China by Portugal, Macao Governor General Vasco Rocha Vieira met the Pope as a gesture to boost religious freedom in the city.⁶⁶ The city may play some role in bridging relations between China and the Vatican. As mentioned earlier, Beijing has been playing the Hong Kong church and the Macao church off against each other to undermine the Hong Kong Church’s influence in the mainland.⁶⁷

II. Bishop-Related Factors

1. *How bishops in China should be appointed*

Candidacy for bishophood has been the core issue of concern for China and the Vatican. The Vatican has insisted that, according to centuries of Catholic tradition, bishops should be appointed only by the Pope. As such, the Vatican does not recognize the CPA and China’s Bishops’ Conference. China argues that the Pope is not the only one who can

appoint bishops; the practice of the Pope installing bishops only started about two centuries ago, and bishops can be appointed by local governments or selected locally. China states that it is willing to recognize the Vatican's symbolic leadership, however, the CPA and the Bishops Conference must retain their power of independent selection when it comes to its own leadership.⁶⁸

When Chinese dioceses select and ordain their own bishops, the Vatican punishes these bishops and their clerics. China claims that its practice conforms to China's national situations and such localized practices are beneficial to gospel preaching in China.⁶⁹ It suggests that if China and the Vatican sign an agreement, the Chinese church should follow the agreement.⁷⁰ China also argues that, historically, the Vatican has made secret religious agreements with many other countries on bishop nomination.⁷¹

As noted earlier, although China hinted that the "Vietnamese Model" could serve as a means of reference, it states that it would not follow the model indiscriminately.⁷² In 2016, Reuters reported that China and the Vatican attempted to iron out a solution under which bishops would be selected by Chinese clergy, while the Pope would have the power to veto candidates, provided that the Vatican provide evidence that the potential bishop is unqualified.⁷³

2. Vacant bishop positions in China

As of 2016, there are 110 bishops in China, most of whom have been sanctioned by the Chinese government. There are about 30 bishops who are part of the underground church and have pledged allegiance only to the Pope.⁷⁴ Many of China's 97 dioceses do not have bishops. Whoever fills these vacancies and the positions currently held by aging bishops will shape the future of China's Catholic Church. This calculation largely motivated China's consecration of

several new bishops without papal approval back in 2006, even though China and the Vatican had tentatively reached an agreement on nominating new bishops. Optimistic observers noted that the young bishops, many of whom were endorsed by the Vatican, were viewed as more likely to promote conciliation with the underground church.⁷⁵

3. Training of clerics

The organizational control of seminaries has been one of the key issues between China and the Vatican. The Vatican wants clerical training to ensure that future Church leaders are completely loyal to Catholic orthodoxy. But China intends to localize and control the training, and to this end, China opened the country's largest seminary in Beijing to train Chinese priests in 2006.⁷⁶ However, one unexpected outcome of the tension over this issue is that the official and nonofficial sectors of the Chinese Catholic Church have been drawn closer together.⁷⁷

As China's Catholic Church has engaged more with the broader Catholic world, more and more clerics are receiving education and training in foreign countries. These clerics may play a role in shaping China's policy toward the Catholic Church.

4. The secret bishops

Since the 16th century, Popes have occasionally appointed secret cardinals ("in pectore") to protect the identity of cardinals living under repressive regimes. John Paul II appointed four secret cardinals, one of whom may live in China.⁷⁸ The potential existence of a secret bishop in China certainly makes the Chinese government uneasy in its relations with the Vatican.

5. *Personal conduct of bishops*

Individual bishops' conduct may cause tension between the Vatican and Beijing. In 2011, for example, Beijing ordained Father Paul Lei Shiyin as the bishop of Leshan, Sichuan province. The Vatican claimed that the priest was unacceptable for "proven and very grave reasons," indicating that he had serious personal conduct issues. Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong called Lei a "rogue public servant" and "scum,"⁷⁹ while Beijing claimed that Lei was "devout," having "both integrity and ability."⁸⁰

6. *Individual bishops' activism*

Sometimes individual bishops' decisions can have serious consequence for Sino-Vatican relations. When bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin was ordained as the Shanghai auxiliary Bishop in 2012, he declared that he was quitting his post in the CPA. The move showed that he did not want to work for the government. Ma was taken into custody as a result.⁸¹ Ma's move caused concern that all of the efforts to promote cooperation and progress between China and the Vatican might be destroyed by his decision.⁸² Reportedly, Ma later regretted his decision and said in a blog that in retrospect, it had been "unwise."⁸³

7. *Conflict between bishops*

The personalities and political beliefs of bishops in Hong Kong and the mainland seem to have played a role in Sino-Vatican relations. For example, in 2006, the head of the CPA, Liu Bainian, accused Hong Kong Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of being under the influence of foreign powers.⁸⁴ In response, Zen accused Liu of considering himself the "self-proclaimed spokesman for the Chinese church" and a scaremonger who feared normal diplomatic ties with the

Vatican, insinuating that Liu was afraid of losing his position in the CPA if relations were normalized. Liu was nicknamed "China's Pope," while in fact he is a top government official.⁸⁵

III. Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA)-Related Factors

1. The CPA as an established interest

As of 2016, the majority of the bishops in the CPA were nominated by the Chinese government. Their futures may be jeopardized if China recognizes the Vatican's authority. As such, some bishops in the CPA may not be willing to aid in the normalization of Sino-Vatican relations. According to a report, opposition to Sino-Vatican reconciliation runs deep in the State Administration of Religious Affairs and in the CPA, which employs thousands of bureaucrats. Normalization with the Vatican will end the *raison d'être* of the CPA, and these bureaucrats will be out of a job.⁸⁶ It has even been suggested by Hong Kong Catholics that "some elements" in China may have been trying to sabotage the effort of normalization.⁸⁷

2. The relationship between the CPA and the underground church

The relationship between CPA and the underground church in China is complicated. The CPA claims to be independent from the Vatican, which has forced churchgoers loyal to the Pope to turn to underground churches since the 1950s. The Vatican has made efforts to reconcile the two churches in China. In 2005, for example, it invited three government-recognized bishops and one underground bishop to the Synod of Bishops assembly as full members.⁸⁸ In 2007, Pope Benedict sent a letter to Catholics in China, praising the underground church but urging the faithful to reconcile with followers of the official church.⁸⁹

Many CPA bishops have secretly pledged their allegiance to the Pope, contacted the Vatican to receive papal blessing, and have been encouraged by some Vatican officials to make that publicly known after the Pope published his famous letter to Chinese Catholics in 2007.⁹⁰ As a result, the division between the two churches has gradually become blurred. Religious workers say they are cooperating quietly in some parts of China.⁹¹ Priests have started moving openly between the two churches as local government officials look the other way.⁹² Sometimes priests and bishops from the underground church work alongside those from the CPA. For the Vatican, this reconciliation means that it has infiltrated the government's official church. This gives the Vatican greater leverage in its negotiation with China. But it also adds to China's anxiety that the Vatican may completely control the church in China.⁹³

Meanwhile, the Vatican's call for reconciliation is criticized by some underground church members and church leaders in Hong Kong for being too accommodating. This indicates that the division between the two churches is still deeply rooted and a complete reconciliation is almost impossible.

3. *The Constitutions of the CPA and the Bishops' Conference*

The Vatican holds that the constitutions of China's CPA and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China are not compatible with Catholic doctrine. It urges Chinese bishops not to attend meetings held by the two organizations. China, however, states that these constitutions do not violate Catholic doctrine, and that "there is no question of getting recognition [of the CPA constitution] by any foreign organization or state." It accuses the Vatican of "obscuring the boundary between faith and politics on purpose."⁹⁴

IV. Vatican-Related Factors

1. *Doves and hawks in the Vatican*

Inside the Vatican, there are different views on how to approach China, and the Pope must balance these voices. The doves favor an accommodating approach, while the hawks want a more conservative stance, and some are looking for a new approach altogether. In 2007, the Vatican established a committee of Chinese affairs,⁹⁵ whose accommodating approach towards China since then has been largely shaped by the doves.

In March 2010, however, the Vatican issued a stern public warning to all bishops on the Chinese mainland, asking them not to take part in an upcoming national Catholic conference being organized by Beijing. The Vatican took a strong stance because its overall approach was criticized by the hawks for being too willing to compromise.⁹⁶ The warning was a signal that doves gave in.⁹⁷ One of the hawks was Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, who urged the Vatican to take a tougher stance against China's ordinations of bishops and argued that the Vatican's policy of compromise wasn't working.⁹⁸

China is well aware of the schism within the Vatican. The head of the CPA, Anthony Liu Bainian, praised the Pope as a loving man but criticized the Pope's "working staff on China affairs," saying they had "an unfriendly, even hostile attitude toward China."⁹⁹

2. *The Vatican's eagerness to normalize Sino-Vatican relations*

The Vatican has been seeking to normalize Sino-Vatican relations with greater eagerness than China (See IV.4 on Vatican's vision of China and V.7 on China's motivations.)

Back in 1981, Pope John Paul II expressed his strong wish to visit China. When Pope Benedict XVI took office in 2005, he made normalization of the Sino-Vatican relations a top priority.¹⁰⁰ Before the Pope publicized his letter to Chinese Catholics in 2007, the letter had been given to the Chinese Government through a diplomatic channel.¹⁰¹ Pope Francis has also made normalization with China a top priority, saying he “never forgets to pray for Chinese Catholics.”¹⁰² When China sees such eagerness on an opponents’ part, it asks for a very high price.

3. The Vatican’s effort to unify the church in China

Pope Benedict XVI’s 2007 letter laid down guidelines for the gradual merger of CPA churches and underground churches in China.¹⁰³ China responded that although the letter had positive elements, the Pope extended the Sino-Vatican conflicts that started in the 1950s and evaded the Taiwan issue, and called the letter unacceptable.¹⁰⁴

As a result of the Pope’s letter, some underground bishops joined the state-sanctioned church, believing that they may affect the operation of the CPA in a positive way. But soon after, the state-sanctioned church was accused of exploiting the Pope’s goodwill to lure underground bishops and priests into its ranks.

At the same time, underground Catholics accused the Vatican of misleading some underground bishops when they sought guidance on whether they could operate openly.¹⁰⁵ The Vatican was not moved by the accusations. In 2009, the Vatican’s secretary of state wrote a letter calling on mainland Catholics to reconcile.¹⁰⁶ In 2011, the Pope again expressed the hope to see one church in China.¹⁰⁷ As a result of these efforts, there is more interaction between the CPA churches and the underground church. But deep division between the two still exists.

4. *The Vatican's vision of China*

The Vatican harbors mixed views of a rapidly rising China. It has spoken of the possibility that “a great Chinese Christianity” may develop. It has hoped that China’s economic modernization would lead to religious liberty.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, it has apprehensions about China’s rise. Francesco Sisci, a journalist who has interviewed Pope Francis, said that the Vatican’s effort to normalize Sino-Vatican relations is a “new geopolitics” for the Vatican: “China is the biggest challenge [the West] has faced since the fall of Rome. It’s something completely strange, completely new... So this is a big problem.” He further noted that “[The Pope] was worried and concerned not only about the faith of the 1.4 billion Chinese, but also about the faith of the 5.5 billion non-Chinese worried about the rise of China.”¹⁰⁹

5. *Chinese experts in the Vatican*

Before 2007, there was a lack of expertise on China in the Vatican. Since then, the Vatican has set up a permanent commission to handle Chinese affairs, which includes Cardinal Zen of Hong Kong, his deputy Bishop John Tong Hon, Taiwanese Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi and Macao Bishop Jose Lai Hung-seng.¹¹⁰ In 2011, the Vatican appointed China expert Archbishop Fernando Filoni to lead the body overseeing the church’s development in more than 100 countries. Filoni spent nine years in Hong Kong as an unofficial envoy for the Vatican between 1992 and 2001. His expertise on Chinese church affairs is believed by observers to be the best in the Vatican.¹¹¹ But it is likely that even among the Chinese experts in the Vatican, there are different opinions on how to engage China.

6. *The sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church*

The epidemic of sexual abuse of children that plagues the Catholic Church has been cited by Beijing to question

the Vatican's authority in appointing priests. In 2011, Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny said that the Cloyne report, which was published earlier in the same year as a result of the investigation on clerical child sex abuse in the Cloyne diocese of Ireland, highlighted dysfunction and elitism in the Vatican. A newspaper controlled by the Chinese government said that Kenny's comments proved China was right to question the Vatican's authority in appointing priests. It claimed that the church's power was vastly disproportionate to the diminutive size of the Vatican, and that China is very much within its rights to question the power of the Vatican state to have sole authority in naming priests in faraway lands.¹¹²

7. Church-lay government relations in Europe

There were historical rows between the Vatican and the lay governments of Europe.¹¹³ In its power negotiations with the Vatican, it is probable that Beijing may argue that even in Europe—where the Catholic Church has had deep influence—the Vatican and the Pope's authority were not without challenge. When Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny openly criticized the Catholic Church over its role in the long-running child abuse scandal, China's state media took the opportunity to argue that "The huge support that the Irish PM received after his tirade has demonstrated how the Irish people have . . . put their allegiance to their government above that to the Vatican, without being any less Catholic. Institutions evolve and so should the Church."¹¹⁴

8. Canonization of Catholics killed in China

On October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized 120 people, including Chinese Catholics and foreign missionaries, who were killed in the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. The canonization was performed on China's National Day. The Vatican explained that the timing marked the feast

of St. Therese of Lisieux, patron saint of missionaries. The timing was more likely a blunder by Vatican officials than a provocation. Still, China reacted angrily, stating that “the majority of these people were executed for violation of Chinese laws during the invasion of China by imperialists and colonialists,” and that “the sanctification of such people distorts truth and history, beautifies imperialism and slanders the peace-loving Chinese people.”¹¹⁵ The canonization dealt a huge blow to diplomatic efforts to normalize Sino-Vatican relations.¹¹⁶

9. *The Vatican’s reflections on its approach to China*

The Vatican sometimes publicly reflects upon its past approaches toward China, which may help future relations. For example, in 2001, a year after the canonization dispute, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that, historically, members of the Church had to work within the context of “complex historical events and conflicting political interests” and their work “was not always without error.”¹¹⁷ When the Vatican received a request to beatify Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), the Italian Jesuit priest and the founder of the Jesuit China missions, Pope Francis said, “We must always ask forgiveness and look with shame upon the apostolic failures brought about by a lack of courage.”¹¹⁸ On another occasion, Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, stated that “[W]e must not conceal mistakes and blame, including on the part of Catholics... the enforced introduction of Western ideologies was one of the negative effects of European colonialism. Liberalism shook traditional Chinese religion and its ethical foundations. This is just one of the many examples of European intrusion into China’s culture, with effects which ultimately went on to be truly devastating.”¹¹⁹

V. Chinese Government-Related Factors

1. *Perceptions of religious conflict and diplomacy*

The Vatican positions itself firstly as a theocratic governing body safeguarding the rights of the Roman Catholic Church in different countries. The Pope requires territory only in order that contemporary governments recognize his sovereignty. Thus political power is secondary to the Vatican.¹²⁰ China, however, perceives the Vatican firstly as a political state, then a religious entity. Therefore, China assumes that diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican as two states take precedence over religious affairs. China's two conditions for normalizing Sino-Vatican relations are based on this assumption, suggesting that religious conflicts with the Vatican can only be addressed after diplomatic ties are resumed with Beijing.¹²¹ In this way, China sometimes perceives the Pope as a Western politician. For example, when Pope Benedict XVI condemned the persecution of Chinese Catholics, China's state media said the Pope had acted more like a western politician than a religious leader.¹²²

2. *Definition of "internal affairs"*

In the international arena, China has always defined the Taiwan issue as an "internal affair." But in its negotiations with the Vatican, Taiwan has been referred to as a separate issue along with "internal affairs." China and the Vatican have significantly disagreed on the meaning of "internal affairs." Beijing argues that the Vatican's nomination of bishops in China constitutes interference in its internal issues, claiming that such nominations are political, rather than religious. The Vatican argues that its nomination of bishops is not interference in China's internal affairs because the consecration is a religious act. In his 2007 letter, Pope Benedict XVI clarified that the Pope "exercises

his supreme spiritual authority: This authority and this intervention remain within the strictly religious sphere. It is not, therefore, a question of a political authority, unduly asserting itself in the internal affairs of a state and offending against its sovereignty."¹²³ Some observers note that China as a global player will gain trust if it balances its arguments on its so-called "internal" and the "external" interests, which in the Catholic Church case is hard to define. This impasse could be resolved if China were to reconsider its stand on "internal affairs" and recognize the legitimate concerns of the Vatican.¹²⁴

3. *The perceived ideological threat*

The Chinese government has always harbored suspicions and mistrust toward Western religious and cultural organizations and their China-targeting activities. This has affected the Party's approach towards the Vatican. China's chief prosecutor reportedly said in 2016 that battling "infiltration, subversion and sabotage by hostile forces" was a key priority for the year. Such hostile forces include, but are not limited to, agents of foreign governments, civil society groups, and religious dissenters such as the underground church.¹²⁵ A research report posted on the homepage of China's official think tank in 2010 stated that "foreign hostile forces have utilized religion as a means to infiltrate into China, and have increasingly threatened our nation's ideological security and political stability."¹²⁶

4. *China's memory of its modern history*

Differing views of history have been a source of friction between China and the Vatican. When the Vatican canonized the Christians killed during the Boxer Rebellion, China angrily stated that the saints were evildoers who came to China in the guise of missionaries to rape, loot, sell opium and collect intelligence for imperialists. China states that the self-

governance, self-support, and self-propagation of China's church is a historical choice by the Chinese people in "its struggle against the invasion and enslavement of colonialism and imperialism." China also claims that Western churches controlled and manipulated the Chinese church before the CCP took power in 1949: Among the 20 archbishops in China, 17 were foreigners. In the 143 dioceses, there were 110 foreign bishops and only about 20 were Chinese.¹²⁷ History has become such an important issue that academics from Hong Kong, the mainland, Taiwan and overseas gathered in 2003 to discuss the role of Christian churches in China during the Boxer Rebellion. Beijing was reportedly aware of the international conference.¹²⁸

5. *The Marxist view on religion as opium*

One tenet of communism is that religion is "the opium of the people," as stated by Karl Marx. Although the Chinese government has become pragmatic and stopped publicly embracing such a view, atheistic dogma persists in its religious policies. For example, one article in the Party's mouthpiece magazine *Qiu Shi* in 2016 stated that "the Marxist view of religion is the theoretical foundation of the Chinese Communist Party's approach towards understanding and dealing with religious issues."¹²⁹ As such, the party harbors no sympathy for the spirituality of its followers.

6. *The meaning of "religious freedom"*

For the Vatican, advocacy for religious freedom is a fundamental pillar of its negotiations with China. As Cardinal Joseph Zen put it, "The most important thing is religious freedom." Zen argued that the Vatican should be more concerned with Chinese Catholics' religious freedom than with any moves toward switching diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing.¹³⁰ For the Vatican, if China allowed the same degree of religious freedom as many other countries

do, then the issues of bishop ordination and the underground church would no longer exist. But China has its own definition of religious freedom. When the Vatican punished the CPA bishops in 2010 by excommunicating them, China accused the Vatican of violating religious freedom itself, stating that “any kind of allegation or intervention constitutes an act of restriction of freedom and non-tolerance.”¹³¹

7. China's lack of strong intent to normalize relations

China engaged in talks with the Vatican largely out of realpolitik considerations. It is doubtful how seriously it is committed to normalizing bilateral relations. As one Chinese scholar put it, Beijing never had any intention of normalizing ties, and it never said it wanted to restore relations with the Vatican. Another scholar in Hong Kong described Beijing's approach to negotiating with the Vatican as “schizophrenic.” In her view, China has agreed to continue talks, but it does not want the process to come to fruition, because resuming diplomatic ties will mean that China will be forced to loosen its grip on ideology. She suggested that China's courtship of the Vatican has been seen as an effort to improve a reputation tarnished by its poor human rights record and to win support from Catholic countries in the West.¹³²

8. Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring

The recent socio-political movements that swept the former Soviet republics and the Middle East have caused great anxiety for the Chinese Communist Party. The underground Catholic Church has been closely monitored for fear that Chinese Christians may become another source of unrest. In March 2011, following uprisings in the Middle East, leaders of Chinese Christian and Catholic churches urged Chinese Catholics not to answer calls for participation in street protests, saying that Chinese Christians should love their country and protect social stability, instead of following

the calls of “anti-China forces” who attempt to sabotage China.¹³³

9. *China’s nationalism*

China’s nationalism is based on the collective memory of its war-torn modern history, which is reinforced by anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist rhetoric adopted from Leninist ideology. In such a context, any perceived compromise of national interest or sovereignty can easily get a politician or a party labeled a “traitor.” China labeled the “Three-Self” protestant movement a “patriotic movement” and called the state-sanctioned catholic church the “Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association,” to show that anyone who does not identify with them is not a patriot.

10. *China’s birth control policy*

Starting in 1979, China introduced its harsh one-child policy. Sarah J. Conroy argues that the Vatican’s and China’s positions on birth control do not contradict one another, but the effects and the behavior they prescribe are still mutually exclusive. She suggests that these clashing policies create needless friction between China and the Vatican, catching the millions of Chinese Catholics in the crosshairs.¹³⁴ The one-child policy has started to have effects on the Chinese church itself, which has seen a shortage of priests. A Beijing diocese official warned that the one-child policy will soon translate into a shortage of priests for the Catholic Church in China, because sending an only son to seminary is a tough decision for Chinese parents.¹³⁵

11. *China’s realpolitik needs*

Following the crackdown of the Tiananmen Square demonstration in 1989, China arrested 12 underground bishops.¹³⁶ As a result, it was diplomatically isolated by

Western sanctions. In 1996, China showed that it wanted to resume talks with the Vatican.¹³⁷ The move was likely an attempt to end Western sanctions. In 1998, the CPA said that the Pope would be “welcome” to visit China, as long as the Vatican cut its relations with Taiwan. The timing coincided with Beijing’s bid to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. It was also designed to deflect criticism from U.S. religious groups before a U.S.-China summit and before the annual review by U.S. Congress of China’s Most Favored Nation (MFN) preferential trading status.¹³⁸ Two years before China hosted the 2008 Olympic Games, the CPA signaled that its relations with the Vatican would soon be normalized. One of the top CPA bishops, Antonio Li Duan, predicted that “by now, normalizing diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican is only a matter of time.”¹³⁹ More likely, however, this was just an attempt to appease the Vatican so it wouldn’t make trouble for China’s Olympic plans. It is questionable whether China had serious intentions to normalize relations with it.

As the Olympic Games approached, Chinese officials set up a religious center in the Olympic village. The China Philharmonic Orchestra performed for Pope Benedict XVI. The future leader of Hong Kong’s Catholic diocese was invited to attend the opening ceremony of the Games as the envoy of the Vatican.¹⁴⁰ Catholic churches in Beijing hired foreign priests to conduct masses to meet the demands of Games visitors from overseas.¹⁴¹ Most likely, all the goodwill was to ensure a successful Olympic Games.

12. *Conspiracy theories and the Vatican’s perceived secret power*

Conspiracy theories about international secret societies and the “New World Order” have drawn a sizable audience in China in recent years. Chinese conspiracy theorists believe that the Vatican, along with the freemasonry, the Order of

Marta, and Opus Dei, is involved with secret societies that aim to establish a Western-dominated world order through religious and ideological infiltration.¹⁴² One scholar-turned-government advisor, He Xin, who once had influence on the CCP's policy in the early 1990s has been actively writing on this subject. It seems that the Chinese government is aware of such theories because the advisor had talked about it during the People's Political Consultative Conference in 2013.

13. *The CCP's new doctrines*

In the past two decades, Chinese leadership has come up with a series of dicta as guidelines for domestic and foreign policy. These dicta include "The Three Represents," "A Harmonious Society," "Peaceful Rise," and the "Chinese Dream." Although the doctrines may not explicitly address religious policies, they have implications for Sino-Vatican relations. The Vatican reached out to China in the early 1980s, just after China started its "Open Door" policy in 1978. When President Hu Jintao launched his "Harmonious Society" campaign in 2003, one cardinal from the Vatican said that "today as never before, the Catholic faith may play an important role in the concrete realization of that harmonious society, as set out by the current leaders of China."¹⁴³ The Party's latest doctrine on religion is Sinization and localization. A core mouthpiece of the Party, Qiu Shi magazine, carried an article in 2016 stating that "some religions have showed signs and tendencies of straying away from the direction of Sinization," which requires the Party to "continuously work hard and stick to the road of Sinization of religions."¹⁴⁴

14. *Beijing's mixed messages and strategic ambiguity*

China often sends mixed messages to the Vatican, sometimes making the latter uncertain how to respond.

The Vatican held the hope that Sino-Vatican relations could be normalized before the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. But Beijing's motivation was likely to use the negotiation as a way to improve its image. After the Pope's letter to the Chinese Church in 2007, China began ordaining bishops with the Vatican's consent. At the same time, however, Chinese officials said in that "a river" still divided China and the Vatican.¹⁴⁵ When the CPA held its 50th anniversary meeting, a top government official attended the meeting. The CPA invited the Vietnamese Cardinal and the Archbishop of Edinburgh to visit China.¹⁴⁶ The Chinese government released priests from jail. Just as the international media and Catholics became very optimistic, however, the government jailed a number of priests, thus sending a mixed message to Chinese Catholics.¹⁴⁷ China's top officials played down expectations of an imminent breakthrough in Sino-Vatican relations, saying, "China will never make any concession on issues of principle."¹⁴⁸

15. *The Party's memory of Poland*

The CCP believes that the Vatican played a role in the collapse of the Communist regime in Poland. Their fear that the same might happen in China affects their attitude toward the Vatican. In 2006, China accused Hong Kong's newly-appointed Cardinal Zen of trying to do to China what the late Pope did to Poland. The CPA leader attacked Zen, saying, "We remember what happened in Poland and the former Soviet Union. No one can deny the Pope and the Vatican played an important role there, and those who promoted the great changes in Eastern Europe want it to happen in China as well."¹⁴⁹

16. *China's diplomatic relations with Catholic nations*

As China becomes a global power, its relations with heavily Catholic nations, such as those in Latin America,

might be influenced by its attitude toward the Vatican and its policy toward Chinese Catholics. Some Central American countries' diplomatic loyalties lie with Taiwan. To gain diplomatic relations with these countries, Beijing might see the need to improve its relations with the Vatican.

17. *When China feels confident*

When China feels confident on other fronts, it may take a hard approach toward the Vatican. For example, in 2010, Chinese officials ordained bishops without Vatican approval for the first time in four years. Observers attributed China's break from the Vatican to a wave of dramatically aggressive diplomacy by China which began in 2010, fueled by a new sense of power from China's rising economy and military.¹⁵⁰

18. *China's perception of the Vatican's intention*

China perceives the Vatican's insistence on its right to nominate bishops as an attempt to control Catholics throughout the world. When Pope Benedict XVI accused China of restricting freedom of religion, China's official media stated that the Pope "wants to lord over all Catholic believers in the world." It stated that "The Vatican has no power to control the direction and speed of the world's changes, and it should not attempt to do so," and that the Vatican's "stubborn entanglements with politics do not seem to fade away with time."¹⁵¹

VI. Underground Church-Related Factors

1. *Perceptions of the underground church*

The Vatican deems the underground church to be legal, valid, loyal and staunch. It regards China's CPA as illicit. China believes that the Vatican's support for the underground church is perhaps the greatest obstacle to bilateral relations.

China has suggested that the Vatican's support of the underground church is due to political considerations, arguing that many underground church bishops have never received permission from the Vatican for their canonization. Some were self-canonized, and some are even married.¹⁵²

The Chinese government has consistently cracked down on the underground church. In 2016, China furthered its regulations on religious activities, following an earlier law governing non-governmental organizations.¹⁵³ For the Vatican, the underground Catholics "have suffered a lot and are suffering."¹⁵⁴ China's crackdowns, it says, are martyrdom at the hands of the state.

The underground Church is probably the most important leverage the Vatican has in its negotiation with China. But it may also undercut the Vatican's efforts to normalize Sino-Vatican relations. The underground Catholics believe that they have suffered for pledging allegiance to the Pope, thus any move on the part of the Vatican to legitimize the state-sanctioned church would constitute disloyalty. If the Vatican and China reach an agreement and recognize the state-sanctioned church and its bishops, very likely the underground church may choose not to reconcile with the latter.

2. Challenges from other non-Catholic Christian movements

A study showed that as of 2010, there were more than 58 million Protestants in China, much more than the estimated 12 million Catholics.¹⁵⁵ Clerical celibacy and the strife between the Vatican and Beijing have made it harder for Catholicism to compete with the rapidly growing Protestant faith. In the Protestant Church, anyone can be a pastor, and they do not have a problem with the Pope.¹⁵⁶ There are also numerous homegrown evangelical movements.¹⁵⁷ Most of

these Christians have little association with a unified church hierarchy and are not involved in the contacts between the Vatican and Beijing.¹⁵⁸ Some of these Christians are subject to frequent government crackdowns as well. They may become an ally of the Catholics. But they may as well pose a challenge to the Vatican's China agenda when they turn into native cults.

3. The split between rural and urban Catholicism

One study by Richard Madsen in 1998 shows that 80 percent of Chinese Catholics live in rural communities, which tend to be more insular and less educated. This complicates the existing split between the state-sanctioned church and the underground church. According to Madsen, the rural Catholic Church is tightly integrated into the social world of pre-modern China, and therefore may not make a positive contribution to market-driven economic and political reforms. In addition, there is often bitter factionalism within the rural church and it is often hostile to outsiders.¹⁵⁹ Madsen argues that in the current Chinese context, the government has a realistic basis for fearing that such an independent religious organization may lead to a breakdown of law and order.¹⁶⁰

4. The activism of Chinese Catholics

Chinese Catholics have become increasingly assertive in defending their rights. Since the early 2000s, they have taken to the streets to protest against land grabbing by local government and developers.¹⁶¹ They have resisted local governments' campaigns to remove crosses and demolish churches, joined by lawyers and theologians.¹⁶² Seminary students have protested against the government appointment of non-Catholic government officials to the leadership of their seminaries.¹⁶³ The CCP perceives such activism as a threat to social stability and its own political

power, fearing that the church could become a rallying point for anti-government agitation as it did in Eastern Europe.

5. *Cults that sabotage the Catholic Church*

Catholics in China not only face the pressure from the government, but also from some native cults. One example is Eastern Lightning, a cult banned on the mainland. In 2005, it reportedly used services for Pope John Paul II as a recruitment platform to lure converts from among Catholics. The cult asks followers to believe in a Chinese woman as Christ.¹⁶⁴ Such cultish activities have added to the urgency for the Vatican to resume its relations with China so the correct gospels could be disseminated.

VII. Other factors

1. *Competition from other religions*

China's Catholic Church faces competition from other religions, such as Buddhism and Islam. In contrast to its control of the Christian church, the Chinese government actively supports Buddhism. On the Vatican's part, it has made efforts to improve its relations with other religions in recent decades. For example, Pope John Paul II improved relations with Islam and Judaism. Pope Francis had an historic meeting with the patriarch of Russia's Orthodox Church in 2016.¹⁶⁵ These efforts will likely add to the Vatican's geopolitical influence, which may eventually add to its power in negotiating Sino-Vatican relations.

2. *The secret nature of the two regimes and the way they engage*

The Vatican and the Chinese government are two of the world's most hierarchical political organizations. Sino-Vatican negotiations have always been held in secrecy. In fact, China has never openly admitted to its talks with the Vatican, but

says only that it maintains channels of communications with the Vatican. Such secretive engagement has fundamental problems. The negotiating parties, in particular China, do not feel any external pressure and, as a result, they can back out of the negotiation or void their promises at any time. They can accuse the other party of failing the negotiations. Chinese bishops and followers are excluded from, and even treated as pawns in, these secret negotiations.

3. *Gender*

The Roman Catholic Church and the Chinese communist party are both male-dominated hierarchical power structures. On some women-related issues, the two have even stood in the same camp. For example, at the 1995 World Women's Conference in Beijing, the United Nations Secretariat denied credentials to nearly 200 non-governmental organizations devoted to women's rights. Many suspected that this was a result of pressure from China or the Vatican.¹⁶⁶

Beatrice Leung observed that historically, nuns in western Europe and the Americas were able to effect significant change within the church on numerous instances. However, the Vatican has consistently rejected the possibility of female priests. In China, Catholic religious orders of women have little access to the power and autonomy they would need to serve as change agents in the Chinese Catholic Church.¹⁶⁷ If women were more involved in Sino-Vatican relations, the process and outcome might be different, as what have happened in western Europe and the Americas.

4. *Time*

Christianity was first introduced to China in the 7th century when the Nestorians appeared in the Tang Empire. In the 13th century, the Catholic Church sent missions to China's Yuan court in an attempt to enlist Mongol help to retake

the Holy Land from the Muslims. In the early Ming Dynasty, the Catholic Church was restricted, but it soon gained great influence in the empire. In the 17th century, Emperor Kang Xi banished Catholic missionaries when Pope Clement XI forbade Chinese believers to worship their ancestors. One century later, the missionaries returned as China's door was forced to open by imperialist powers. In this sense, the current engagement between the Vatican and China is only a blip in the ongoing power negotiations between the Christian world and Chinese civilization since ancient times.

Both the Vatican and Chinese regimes have strong senses of history. The Vatican has existed without interruption for two thousand years. It has seen empires come and go through the centuries. China has an even longer continuous history. It has seen foreign religions come, become Sinized and localized, or disappeared. Historically, they can choose to wait for a long time if things do not evolve as they expected.

With this being said, however, the world in a globalized era changes at a much faster pace. So does China. These rapid changes may not allow the two regimes to bide their time for too long. The growth of China's Christian population in particular may force the two regimes to seek a solution to the dispute.

Discussions and Conclusions

This research has tentatively mapped out about fifty factors that "account for a significant amount of variation" in Sino-Vatican relations, to draw on a term used by statisticians. Based on this analysis, the following preliminary conclusions may be drawn.

First, certain factors play far more important roles than others. In particular, the nomination of bishops, the role of the United States, the growing Christian population in China,

the active Catholic underground, and the role of Hong Kong all weigh heavily in Sino-Vatican relations. Each has the potential to determine the future of the Sino-Vatican relations.

Second, the importance of these factors may change over time. This seems to be particularly true with the Taiwan issue. As China's economy becomes second in size only to the United States, and while Taiwan is economically and diplomatically marginalized, Taiwan-Vatican relations have become a small inconvenience for the Chinese government, instead of a serious challenge to its core interest. In fact, the Taiwan-Vatican relations even become a convenient excuse for China not to further Sino-Vatican relations. Meanwhile, the role of the United States, the Hong Kong church, and the growth of the Christian population, which did not play an important role two decades ago, have now become serious concerns for China.

Third, from the perspective of the Chinese government, many of the above factors are unfavorable to it, pushing it to act in extreme ways. They pressure the Chinese government to adopt an increasingly restrictive approach towards Western religion. Sino-Vatican relations are currently stuck at what Susskind and Field labeled "Third-level" changes in conflict resolution, which requires people to change the way they view themselves, and thus is the hardest.¹⁶⁸

Fourth, many factors mapped in this research are perceived realities, or socially constructed realities.¹⁶⁹ Strategic communication, if properly used, may influence the meanings of these factors and subsequent decisions on how to deal with them. That is, the meaning assigned to a particular factor can be negotiated and transformed through dialogue. China and the Vatican need to compare their thoughts on each factor outlined above, through which they may understand, shape and share each other's thoughts.

In this process, accuracy, agreement, and congruence are essential.¹⁷⁰

Fifth, China and the Vatican have thus far mostly taken asymmetrical tactics in their interactions. Joint efforts to seek win-win situations have been fragile and short-lived. In the long run, however, some factors may pressure them to sincerely search for a long-term solution to the conflict. One such factor is the growth of the Christian population in China. When this population is large enough, the Chinese government cannot simply continue to restrict and crack down on them. It will have to make choice between an increasingly assertive underground church it cannot control and an open church it can manage through cooperation with the Vatican. For the Vatican's part, it does not want to see the Catholic church in China be overshadowed and even marginalized by Protestantism and other local evangelical movements, nor does it want to see the Chinese church completely break away from it.

Finally, in the long run, a mixed model of bishop nomination in the Greater China area, which covers Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, may best serve the interests of the Vatican, China, and the Chinese Church. In such a model, the Vatican nominates bishops in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, which it already does. In the Chinese mainland, some dioceses may adopt the Vietnamese model, in which bishop nomination is announced by the Chinese government, but only following consultations with the Vatican. In some dioceses, the Vatican may have to cede power to the local churches, as it has done with some dioceses in Europe and Latin America.

Appendix I. Factors Affecting Sino-Vatican relations

Geopolitical factors	<i>Taiwan issue; The role of Hong Kong; The role of the United States; The Dalai Lama; Macao</i>
Bishop-related factors	<i>How bishops in China should be appointed; Vacant bishop positions in China; Training of clerics; Secret bishops; Personal conduct of bishops; Individual bishops' activism; Conflict between bishops</i>
Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA)-related factors	<i>The CPA as an established interest; The relationship between the CPA and the underground church; The Constitutions of the CPA and the Bishops' Conference</i>
Vatican-related factors	<i>Doves and hawks in the Vatican; The Vatican's eagerness to normalize Sino-Vatican relations; The Vatican's effort to unify the church in China; The Vatican's vision of China; Chinese experts in the Vatican; The sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church; Church-lay government relations in Europe; Canonization of Catholics killed in China; The Vatican's reflection on its approach to China</i>
	<i>Perceptions on religious conflict and diplomacy; Definition of "internal</i>

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