

China and Orthodoxy

At one time hundreds of thousands of Russians lived in Manchuria - for example, St Jonah of Manchuria (<http://www.saintjonah.org/stjonahlife.htm>) - especially in Harbin, and also in coastal cities of China, especially Shanghai. Then came Communism and the Russians, for example St John of Shanghai and the future Metropolitan Philaret, left, mainly for Australia and the west coast of North America. Inevitably, many of these Russians had intermarried with Chinese.



What was in China

There still exists a Chinese Orthodox Church. Like the Japanese Orthodox Church, it is an autonomous part of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, unlike the former, the Chinese Church is sleeping. With only a few thousand elderly and isolated faithful in China, many of Russian origin, with fewer than twenty former Chinese seminarists in Russia and China, who are busy translating liturgical and other books into Chinese (Mandarin, I believe), the Chinese Orthodox Church is not allowed for political reasons to operate freely in China.

This is a pity, for it has been predicted that within a generation the awoken Chinese giant may well become the largest Christian country in the world. True, like other US cultural colonies in Asia, for instance Thailand and South Korea, tens of millions of Chinese Christians are being hoodwinked into joining various Protestant sects in imitation of American culture, which is the fashion that modern Chinese capitalism is undergoing.

However, although we mildly say that this is 'a pity', perhaps it is also Providential. It may be that these Protestant sects will prepare the ground for the serious and historically and spiritually

founded Orthodox Church. The following article, here translated from Russian, is dated 29 December 2110 and the author is Anastasia Khoniak, writing for the well-known and eminently respectable Russian website sedmitza.ru.



One of the last Chinese Orthodox priests still alive

All the Conditions for the Rebirth of Orthodoxy in China are ready.



In Harbin

Beijing. At the present time China is like a vast field in which religious ideas can be sown. One of the reasons for this is the massive loss of faith in Communist ideology. People want to live according to true moral values. Another reason could be defined as the desire of the government to create conditions whereby people ‘practise their faith within official structures’. This allows it to control the situation but at the same time it does not restrict religious propaganda, according to the newspaper El Pais.

Over the last six years more than 80 million Chinese have left the Communist Party. It all began in 2004 after the international information project The Epoch Times published a series of articles under the title ‘Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party’. The enquiry was based on historical facts and revealed little-known episodes in the history of the Chinese Communist Party, including crimes committed by the regime against its own people.

The loss of confidence in the Party was compounded by the complex social situation in the country: high inflation, low salaries (about 65% of the country’s population lives below the poverty line with an income of less than a dollar a day, national economic growth was only widening the gap between rich and poor.

In recent years the number of people who call themselves believers has increased sharply. For example, the Catholic Church already has some 10 million faithful today. However, relations between the Chinese government and the Vatican are tense. Protestantism came into China in the nineteenth century. According to the source there are today between 10 and 60 million Protestants in the country. Precise statistics are impossible to come by because the majority of Christians belong to unofficial religious groups. Islam exists but it is basically the religion of a national minority, about 18 million, who live in a specific area.

The history of the Orthodox Church in China begins in 1685 when Cossacks captured at the fort of Albazin were taken to Beijing. Here they founded an Orthodox community. In the middle of the nineteenth century, there were no more than 200 Orthodox, some of whom were Chinese and Manchurians. In the second half of that century the Russian Church Mission was able to translate the Bible and liturgical books into Chinese. Orthodoxy began to be actively preached among the local population. As a result, the number of faithful grew sharply: in 1902 there were 32 Orthodox churches and 6,000 faithful. (This was in spite of – or rather because of – the Boxer massacre of nearly 250 Chinese Orthodox martyrs who are commemorated in the Church today).

At present there are about 13,000 Orthodox. Community life is starting to be reinvigorated. However, so far the Orthodox Church in China has no official status and does not have the possibility to live a full liturgical life. Resources are meagre. The lack of clergy and lack of

liturgical and catechetical literature in Chinese are problems common to all Orthodox parishes in China. The experience of parish and liturgical life has been lost. On the one hand, the situation could be called critical. On the other hand – all the conditions vital for the rebirth of Orthodoxy in China are there. The Russian Orthodox Church could become the key player in this process.



The New Martyrs of China: See: http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/chinesemartyrs_en.htm