



# Reconciliation and the Gospel

CHINA-USA  
Protestant Church  
Leaders Forum



和好·福音

中美基督教领袖  
论坛专辑

China Christian Council & National Committee of TSPM

## IS THE US A RELIGIOUS THREAT TO CHINA? CHRISTIANITY AND THE CURRENT SINO-US RELATIONS

Dr. Xu Yihua

Professor and Director

Department of International Politics, Fudan University

The title of my speech is eye-catching to say the least. Actually what I really want to say is that US is not a religious threat to China. On the contrary, religion especially Christianity has always been serving as a spiritual ligament and cultural bridge between the two countries.

My speech is composed of three parts. The first part is about the so-called post-missionary Sino-US religious interaction. The second part tries to argue that the US is not a religious threat to China, and vice versa. The third part calls for the normalization of religious relations between China and the US.

### Post-missionary Sino-US religious interaction

About 3 years ago I was invited to speak at a conference in Washington D.C., and at this conference, I proposed the idea of the Sino-US religious interaction in the post-missionary era, which argues that Mainland China was once a country receiving the largest number of Christian missionaries during the first half of the 20th century. During the past 60 years, however, the same country has transformed from a blessed region into a forbidden territory for American missionaries. Obviously, the religious interaction and exchange between China and the U.S. has entered a post-missionary era, but the content of this interaction has become more diversified and pluralized than at any time in the past.

Here I am not going to repeat what I have already said about this theme. To summarize, with the exception of missionaries, China is a quite open and friendly country to American religion, especially to the Christian churches from the US. Sino-US religious exchange and cooperation is a large field with many aspects, including projects like joint-research, teaching, publication, charity, social work, relief work, public opinion

philanthropy, Christian media, religious advocacy groups or faith-based NGOs, and missionaries.

At the moment scholars of missiology have been talking about the “southward shift” of world Christianity. Actually with the exception of Christian population, the center of gravity of Christian organizations, finance, and theology is still in the global North.

My view is that the American “religious exporting industry” is not a threat to China. On the contrary, it has not only contributed to the social, educational and religious development in China as mentioned earlier, but also played a positive role in improving Sino-US relations.

However, based on the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, The US government of several administrations has continuously put China on its list of “the country of particular concern (CPC),” referring to the country which “egregiously violate religious freedom.” Interestingly, CPC is also the abbreviation of the Communist Party of China. My American friends hadn’t realized that till I told them about it.

On the other hand, China has never been a religious threat to the United States.

As I said some years ago that it is the US which is one of the largest victims of international religious terrorism, and religious extremism and terrorism were once viewed by the US government as the largest threat to its national security. China is the country which is most unlikely to threaten and challenge the US national security in field of religion.

As to the issue of religious freedom, my view is that religious freedom is more like soccer than it is like American football. China and the US are not adversaries but comrades-in-arms on this issue. Needless to say that China still needs to improve its religious freedom record, but the general situation of religious freedom in China is better than what the western media reported, and China’s international ranking in the area of religious freedom is higher than that of the Chinese national soccer team. This is why the Chinese leaders, both secular and religious, have always welcome the Christians and church leaders from the US to come to China to see by themselves the real situation in China, emphasizing the old Chinese proverb that “seeing it once is better than hearing it a hundred times.”

### The Normalization of Religious Relations between China and the US

In 1979, China and the United States normalized their diplomatic relations.

However, that the status of CPC (country of particular concern) of China has made it very hard for the two countries to normalize their religious relations, just like the serious damage that would have inflicted on the Sino-US economic relations had China been put on the list of currency manipulator by the US government.

However, just because the religious relations between China and the US have not been normalized, there are perhaps more rooms for improvement and cooperation between the two countries in the religious field than in other fields.

Before China was opening up to the outside world, people here worried about the harm that would be brought to China's underdeveloped industry by free trade. Now it is the western countries that are worrying about the economic competition from China and even try to return to trade protectionism. The same scene might also happen in the field of religion if we just consider the fact that the entire religious population in China might be as large as if not larger than the total population of the US.

On May 28, 2013, when meeting with the Los Angeles Mayor Mr. Antonio Villaraigosa, Party Secretary Xi Jinping said that the Sino-US relations should not be only promoted from top to bottom but also from bottom to top. This is because "the basis of Sino-US relations is in the local, popular and grassroots levels." Religion as the most local, popular and grassroots factor in Sino-US relations, its potential in promoting the relationship between the two countries is obvious and most significant.

Therefore, broadening channels for Sino-US religious contacts, and normalizing the Sino-US religious relations will have significant impact on the new type of Sino-US relations in the 21st century. I believe that this forum can serve this purpose well.



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