

China's Decolonization and Missionaries: Québec's Cold War

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When Mao declared the People's Republic of China in 1949, he triggered a reassessment in all sectors of Chinese society, including religion. This form of decolonization can be explained by a desire of the new communist regime to control all forms of thought and activity. The Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) implemented laws that would eventually create the Chinese Patriotic Church, an institution still not recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. Hundreds of Québec missionaries were present in China at the time and were among the last missionaries to leave the country. This departure coloured Québec's Cold War.

This paper explores how China's decolonization affected Québec missionaries and how it generated much more than a religious controversy.¹ China became Québec's Cold War in politics and culture because missionaries, having been involved in China for fifty years, were strongly opposed to Chinese communism. They were well-organized and utilized different media (film, periodicals, and classrooms) in an effort to publicize their opposition to the recognition of the communist regime and the Chinese Patriotic Church.

An initial brief outline of the CCP's policy toward religion provides some background to the new rules that were aimed at regaining total control over the Christian clergy in China. It also sets the historical context in which forces Québec missionaries were forced out of China. The second part of the paper details how Québec missionaries, especially the Catholics, experienced China's drive to decolonization by introducing its

own Christian church. Finally, the last part suggests that the exile of missionaries embodied Québec's Cold War rhetoric and culture. Literature, arts and politics in Québec presented China, not the USSR, as the main communist threat.

China's Policy on Religion

The CCP's decision to nationalize its clergy reflected the decision of past Chinese governments to subordinate religious affairs to the state. The division between the state and religion in China has always been difficult to determine. Therefore, clergy were always suspected and persecuted in order to ensure a secular government. A major component of the Chinese modern revival was its ability to regain control over the clergy in China. The arrival of communism permitted full control over the religious apparatus, and Chinese dynastic governments often used the historical pattern of meddling in religion to obtain wealth and power. In this sense, the CCP reproduced the traditional pattern of gaining control over religious bodies.

The heritage of legalism and the humanist political philosophy of Confucianism permitted such defence against the religious power over or within the state. The Confucian examination system established a literate elite educated outside of the religious circles. Those who followed Han Feizi's (280-234 BC) advice on how to run government shared the view that clerics were not "productive" and religious beliefs should be controlled or ignored by the state. The CCP's decision to supervise "the religious" operated in a legal and moral tradition that permitted the intervention of the state into all domains of society, including that of the clergy.²

The CCP embarked upon a process of decolonization that sought to exclude foreigners from modern China. To do so, nationalization in all domains of society, including religion, was a pattern that unrolled in new China. The clergy had to become Chinese; no more foreign dignitaries were considered needed in China if the clergy was to survive, and religious freedom would be tolerated only if China vetoed the leader of the concerned church. In the case of Catholicism, the election of the pope was clearly out of the hands of China. CCP uneasiness with a foreign pope can be interpreted as a concern over a society that took orders from outside China. This is why the nationalization of the nomination process of the indigenous church was seen as most important by the Chinese government.

Therefore, the 400 Québec missionaries and the Catholic clergy in China were the most vulnerable to such policy since the power apparatus of the church originated from the Vatican. Among the clergy in China, the Catholic Church remained one of the most foreign-maintained. Once the umbilical cord with the Vatican was cut, Québec Catholic missionaries in China were confronted with a theological problem, having to disagree with the new Chinese government and stay faithful towards the Vatican or accept the nationalization of religion even though it might be schismatic.

Jesuit Léo-Paul Bourassa was the Québec missionary who wrote most extensively about Chinese communist religious policy. Bourassa's book *Tactiques communistes contre l'Église: L'expérience chinoise* (1962) identifies five different steps by which the communists infiltrated the church. First, CCP infiltrators subscribed to the Légion de Marie (an association of Catholic Christians which sought to promote the link with the Vatican); second, they became the most zealous students in order to secure the sympathy of their professor; third, the infiltrators began to demand some reforms (notably more oriented towards the sinicization); fourth, infiltrators indoctrinated domestics at schools and missions; and finally, they devoted their energy to the dismemberment of foreign influence within the Chinese Christian Church. After the infiltration of the Church, the CCP began the second offensive, which consisted of taking control of missions and schools, their preferred target. The CCP also pressured families not to send their children to Catholic schools. Finally, the party issued movement restrictions confining the Québec missionaries to their mission.

One of the most effective schemes to nationalize religion and curtail Québec involvement in China was Triple Autonomy Policy (hereafter TAP). This policy consisted of bringing the Christian church under the control of the Chinese government, more specifically the Religious Affairs Bureau. This bureau was established to control all types of religious activity. The TAP stressed that the church in China had to be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting in order to be autonomous. The clerics Saint-Viateur, established in Manchuria, published a full account of the TAP indicating that Quebec missionaries were well aware of the plans outlined in the CCP.³ This meant that no more money from the Sainte-Enfance could reach Québec missions in China, Québec missionaries would not be permitted to enter China, and, worst of all, nominations for the Chinese Catholic clergy could be done without the approval of the

Vatican. Naturally, Québec missionaries opposed the new policy. Not surprisingly, Québec Catholic missionaries were prime suspects.

Québec missionary sources facilitate the examination of the implementation of the TAP because most missionaries stayed after the communist take-over and provided interesting testimonies about its execution. Québec missionary sources indicate a great sense of despair when Chinese priests agreed or were forced to agree to the principles espoused by the TAP. However, Québec missionary reaction to the TAP reveals more than just a reaction to CCP policy; it shows how the Chinese state managed to close its doors and sinicize all components of society.

Soon after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Québec missionaries confronted the ideas of Zhou Enlai who sought to promote the creation of a Chinese Catholic Church. In July 1950, Zhou permitted the release of the Manifesto, a brochure outlining the steps to be taken to create a Chinese Church. Campaigns to gather signatures over the principles of the TAP progressed in the Protestant circles while Québec missionaries warned their subjects neither to sign the Manifesto nor to participate in any conferences discussing the TAP. During the Sixty-fifth Session of the State Administrative Council held in December 1950, Zhou, acting as chairman, pushed for the adoption of *Regulations Governing All Organizations Subsidised with Foreign Funds*. All missionary personnel and properties had to be registered, and missions had to issue a monthly report about their finance and activities, and had to comply with the common program of TAP. In January 1951, Zhou met the Catholics leaders of China, stressing that relations with the Vatican could be maintained while pushing towards a complete autonomy of the Chinese Catholic Church. With the Korean War in the background, Zhou issued the regulations of *the Administrative Affairs Yuan on the Method of Controlling Christian Organizations That Have Received Financial Help From America* in April 1951. Furthermore, it became illegal for missions to receive money from America without any governmental acknowledgement. The CCP used the fact that some missionaries working in Québec missions were Franco-Americans to accuse them of siding with the United States during the Korean War. In addition, the CCP named Chinese Catholics to engage in reform committees of the TAP and Beijing went as far to nominating the Bishop of Nanjing.

Québec missionaries who would not recognize the TAP were re-educated, exiled, or confined; some, like Mgr Lapierre, even died during their confinement.⁴ Resistance was strong among Québec and Catholic

missionaries and many were accused of not co-operating with the new Chinese government; it became obvious that stronger measures would need to be implemented. If no accusations of spying, treason, or reactionary activities were to be found, there were always criminal accusations such as the case involving the Missionnaires de l'Immaculée-Conception of Canton in which the mission agency was held responsible for the death of 2,116 orphans.⁵ Québec missionary involvement in China produced a number of martyrs on which Cold War rhetoric could rely by demonstrating the danger of communism.

The TAP divided the Chinese Catholic clergy into two groups pushing Québec missionaries under a “non-patriotic Church.” Those who stayed loyal to the pope were declared illegal while the clergy who recognized this new policy agreed that Chinese Catholics, under the supervision of the Religious Affairs Bureau, would establish the Patriotic Catholic Church. Resisting China’s plan to nationalize religion, Québec missionaries reluctantly left China.

The TAP figures among the numerous arsenals that the CCP took to move China towards autonomy. China’s nationalization of religion muted Québec’s clerical involvement in Chinese affairs. The return of Chinese nationals to the head of schools and universities completed the revival in China. The Chinese nationalization of religion indicated that China was returning to its normal self, including state reassessment of all types of power, including religion.

Québec Missionaries and the People’s Republic of China

The evacuation of Québec missionaries from communist China was a process that took about six years (1949-1955). The CCP acted carefully towards foreign missionaries because they understood that they could be useful during the first days of the PRC. Missionaries would keep students in schools, provide social assistance (medicine and dentistry), and become an important source of information on the CCP’s enemies. Keeping schools open was a priority for the CCP because it provided a compact urban audience receiving propaganda. In addition, by keeping schools opened, it was easier for the “rural CCP” to identify those who had links with the outside world and were, therefore, a source of suspicion. However, since the spring of 1950, schools that were authorized to remain open could not give religion courses. Everything was to be monitored by the CCP network.

Québec missionary contact with the communists gave the impression that the CCP was disciplined, intelligent in its infiltration, and committed to their cause. For the *Missions Saint-Viateur*, communists were out to remake the mind of the Chinese; their revolution was social, ideological, and universal. On the other hand, some Québec missionaries like Jean Ho believed that the Chinese were not communist at heart, although they were secular in mind. The infiltration of the communists was the first step of a long-term policy that consisted of suffocating competing ideologies. Lionel Groulx summarized CCP plans as a program realized with wit, a sustained effort, and a logical inferno.⁶

Québec missionaries reported that the CCP operated on a long-term basis by infiltrating the Christian missions. *Le Brigand*, the Chinese Jesuit journal, informs us that as soon as Mao declared the revolution, missions were being infiltrated.⁷ Students became spies, and/or spies became Christians. After the infiltration of schools, political infiltration and indoctrination followed. After a year in power, the CCP understood more deeply the functioning of the missions and began to meddle in religious affairs. By 1951, Québec missionaries overwhelmingly complained about the compulsory political seminars held by the CCP.⁸ These seminars demonstrated the superiority of science versus religion, and materialism versus metaphysics. By introducing compulsory Marxism courses, students of the Communist Youth League were able to argue that religion would wither away as science became the new truth. Communist students wanted to stamp out religion, which to them was a symbol of feudalism. Active resistance to religious groups by the creation of lay compulsory schools and the standardization of education ended missionary input in Chinese education. Religious schools were seized, Chinese Marxist teachers were appointed, and mission properties were expropriated.

Québec missionaries and the Catholic Church were identified by the Chinese Communists as the main source of resistance of their new regime. They had every reason to believe this was so. The Vatican issued warnings to missionaries not to cooperate with the Chinese Communists, even though they were the ruling government. In addition, the creation of the Légion de Marie was set up to coordinate resistance against Marxism and its damaging effect on Christianity. By activating the Légion de Marie, Québec missionaries were committing the crime of maintaining an association opposed to the regime.

Québec Catholic missionaries experienced a number of the numerous CCP campaigns aimed at isolating foreign missionaries.

Suspicion that some missionaries were working for the United States and the United Nations forces prompted the Chinese government to increase campaigns aimed at identifying scapegoats and those who were opposed to communism.⁹ Compulsory demonstrations of the Resist America Aid Korea campaign forced Québec missionaries to participate in communist activities. These campaigns were not only drafted to uncover reactionaries, but also to prompt Chinese nationalism against western intervention in Korea, and create the new Chinese individual. Campaigns of the three-anti and the five-anti also were directed against missionaries in China. Québec missionaries were compelled to participate in demonstrations denouncing imperialism, the United States, and the Vatican. Considering the accusations some missionaries faced in the 1950s, it is apparent that their refusal to participate in those demonstrations was used against them. Finally, one of the most direct challenges toward Catholic missionaries in China was the new land reform policies. Catholic missions had estates that had been established since the Tianjin Treaty (1858); they were forced to relinquish them.¹⁰

The Vatican played an important role in keeping Québec missionaries in China despite the communist revolution. Since the mid-1930s, the Vatican urged disciples to fight communism and asked all Catholic missionaries to stay in China after the 1949 revolution, advising them not to collaborate with the new regime. By 1952, the Vatican issued an apostolic letter stressing that the establishment of an independent Chinese church would be a heresy.¹¹ The attitude of the Vatican towards Red China did not help the position of Québec missionaries because it had issued statements that were opposed to the TAP and the creation of a Chinese Patriotic Catholic Church.

The pressure exerted by the Chinese Communist Party finally ended Québec missionary activities in China. The Protestants were the first congregations to evacuate China. The retreat of all Protestant missionaries was achieved in late 1952. In September 1952, all the Canadian Presbyterians had left China.¹² In contrast, the Catholic missionaries took more time to evacuate the country. Some Québec missionaries were among those who stayed the longest in China. Most of the Québec missionaries remaining in China felt the pressure exerted by the CCP and were exiled in 1953. The last five Québec missionaries left in mid-1955.¹³ The departure of Québec missionaries from mainland China did not mean the end of Québec's involvement in China. Missionaries who left the mainland

could continue to live in a Chinese world either in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macao.

Cold War

The arrival of the communism in China enhanced the effect of the Cold War in Québec. Québec's active participation in the Cold War is quite modest, but when it did become active, China became its ideological and military enemy. The Chinese communist revolution forced the exile of Québec missionaries and diplomatic relations between Canada and China were severed for twenty years. Even so, China represented the communist country with which the people of Québec were most familiar; the fate of four hundred missionaries generated just as much interest in Québec as that of the thousands of soldiers involved in Korea.

In addition, the missionary periodicals provided a channel of mobilization capable of applying political pressure on the fate of those missionaries in China. Some secular organizations also supported the exiled missionaries in Québec's Cold War and helped to delay any recognition of China by the Canadian government. Québec Catholic missionaries were one of the organized groups capable of pressuring Ottawa. Combined with American hesitation, the pressure exerted on the Canadian government lasted until the beginning of the Korean War.

Divisions in the House of Commons also pushed back formal recognition of China. In Parliament, only the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (later the New Democratic Party) pushed for immediate recognition while the Conservatives and the Social Credit were opposed. The Liberals, in power at the time, were also divided. The hesitation to recognize China reflected the American policy of delay. The USA was reshaping its sphere of influence in the Pacific; Canada had very little choice but to see whether the Americans would recognize the new communist regime. In Québec, the government and the Catholic clergy mobilized against the recognition of China.

Québec's premier, Maurice Duplessis (1890-1959), undermined the idea of recognizing China. His relation with the Catholic clergy was obvious and he offered his support in presenting petitions against the new Chinese regime. For Duplessis and the missionary lobby, not only did China become an opponent of the west, but it became also a religious enemy because communism was perceived as contradictory to Christian-

ity. Relations between the religious orders and Duplessis gave missionaries additional influence in their opposition to the recognition of China.

The attitude of the Québec population toward Chinese communism was generally negative even though some newspapers adopted a pragmatic tone and called for normalization of relations with the new Chinese regime. *L'Action Catholique* and *Le Devoir* urged recognition while *The Montréal Star* and *La Presse* supported Pearson's wait-and-see attitude. Gérard Filion, the director of *Le Devoir*, often opposed the Duplessis line and visited China to participate in the Beijing World Peace Conference in 1953. He saw atheistic communism as a "philosophy incompatible with Christianity."¹⁴ His predecessor at *Le Devoir*, Omer Héroux, had signed an article entitled "Sous la coupe communiste" in *Missions-Étrangères du Québec* denouncing the way the communists handled religion in China.¹⁵ This new reality or incompatibility appears more troubling because it triggered MacCarthyism and polarized public opinion in regard to China. Chinese communism was a main concern in the 1950s; even at primary school children knew of it.

The Cold War in Québec was amplified by the Korean War that set China against the West. American troops were too involved in containing communism to permit any rapprochement between China and Canada. Out of 26,791 Canadian soldiers who served in Korea, nearly 30 per cent were French-speaking and about 7,000 came from Québec.¹⁶ This military involvement solidified the portrayal of China as the Cold War enemy in terms of military might and ideological supremacy.

With the victory of communism in China, an array of anti-Communist literature appeared in Québec's bookstores. Most important were missionary periodicals that warned against the emergence of world communism and its subsequent impact on Québec. Missionaries were an organized group and they possessed a number of media which could influence the population. Some periodicals reflected the witch-hunt taking place in the United States where McCarthyism suspected communists of infiltrating sectors of the public administration, including education.

The magazine *Relations* was among the first to denounce Canadian plans to recognize Beijing. The magazine and some Jesuits fought actively against the recognition of the PRC for more than a decade. The magazine *Relations* wrote that communism in China would enhance Soviet ideology aimed at destroying Christianity. Months before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, *Relations* warned Ottawa that the recognition of the PRC would demonstrate that the Canadian government was the

hostage of mercantilists showing no respect for human rights and religious freedom, thus linking them with the survival of western democracy. *Missions Saint-Viateur* also warned the Liberals of the danger of an electoral defeat if they recognized communist China. A few days before the Korean War, *Relations* acknowledged that, unless an international adventure weakened China, nothing much could be done to prevent communism in China. Pressure from the missionary lobby was maintained until news of war in Korea reached Canada. When the war began, it made China stronger and more unified against America. The implication of Canada's participation in the Korean War enhanced Québec's interest in China and intensified the perceived danger of Chinese communism and how it could affect Asia and the world as a whole.

Aside from missionary periodicals, many books appeared in the 1950s aimed at undermining the Chinese communist regime. In 1949, the Ligue anti-communiste de Montréal published Jean Ho's *Que faire en présence de la Chine communiste*. The author warned of the danger of Chinese communism and stated that it was the duty of Canada to resist it: "You, Canadians, are concerned when learning that communist spies are poisoning your country."¹⁷ Following that were *Les Communistes et la formation de la jeunesse: analyse d'un manuel* (1951), originally published in the *China Missionary Bulletin*; *La Résistance de la Chine catholique* (1952); and *Démasquer le communisme: le devoir présent* (1955) at the Éditions Bellarmin. Missionary books offering personal accounts include: Antonio Dragon's *En mission parmi les Rouges* (1946) and *Le Père Bernard* (1948); Jean Ho's second book entitled *Malheureux sont les paysans en Chine communiste* (1951); Antonio Bonin's *Mon témoignage* (1955); Armand S. J. Proulx's *Mon T'ang-li* (1958); and Ferdinand Coiteux's biography *Martyr à Chefoo: Père Didace Arcand, O.F.M., missionnaire en Chine* (1960). Politicians also published books concerned with Chinese communism such as Conservative MP, Samuel Gobeil's *Le péril communiste* (1953), and future mayor of Montréal, Jean Drapeau's *Communisme et Moralité Publique* (1956). Ultimately, Pierre Elliott Trudeau's book *Deux innocents en Chine rouge* (1961) broke the consensus by advocating the recognition of China.

The radio station CKAC hosted missionaries and the Chevaliers de Colomb on radio shows denouncing any move toward the recognition of the PRC.¹⁸ Poet Alain Grandbois explained the political situation in China on Radio-Canada from April to August 1950 in the midst of war. Grandbois took great caution in explaining the multiple facets of the

political situation in China but, nevertheless, declared that Chiang Kai-shek was a great Christian.¹⁹ Radio-Canada's correspondent in Korea, René Lévesque, described the Chinese as determined people protecting their land.²⁰

Pop culture also represented China as the Cold War enemy. Québec's top spy *LXE-13* combatted Chinese communism. With more than one million copies sold, the stories of Paul Saurel's secret agent translated the popularity of China when it came to personify the Cold War. Jacques Godbout would later on put on film *LXE-13* (1970) starring Louise Forestier as Taya, Queen of the Chinese communists!

Conclusion

The arrival of communism dramatically changed Québec-China relations in two ways. First, the Chinese government signaled that missionaries were not needed for the reconstruction of the country. Religious matters, education and hospitals were to be nationalized. Missionaries, Québec's main representative group in China, became obsolete, as most of them were forced into exile. The support of the TAP and the creation of the Chinese Patriotic Church (1957) made any Québec Catholic missionary work in China impossible. Second, with China now in the enemy communist camp, trade and diplomatic recognition posed a problem. Québec's Catholic missionaries pressured Ottawa to ignore recognition of China, seen as a persecutor of the Christian world. This lobby constituted the strongest domestic pressure against the recognition of China. In combination with numerous media to mobilize against recognition, the Catholic clergy in Québec constructed a Cold War enemy.

The abundance of material (arts and literature) in Québec concerning China dramatically outnumbers the studies of other communist countries, including the USSR. The fact that China occupied so much space in Québec's Cold War can be explained by the hundreds of missionaries and thousands of soldiers sent to the front. In fact, Québec missionaries never went to Russia and there was no war against the Soviets. I may conclude that, given the material available, China represented Québec's Cold War, but it would be more appropriate to consider Québec's perception of China in the 1950s as a turning point. In front of Chinese communism and revival, Québec opinion polarized and became more aware of the global change taking shape during the Cold War.

Endnotes

1. See also Serge Granger, *Le lys et le lotus: les relations du Québec avec la Chine de 1650 à 1950* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 2005).
2. Chinese Catholic priest, François Houang, maintains that tolerance animated Chinese state intervention in religious affairs. It appears more like a traditional use of the Chinese state to overcome any dual form of power rather than a war against people's beliefs.
3. *Missions Saint-Viateur* 27 (May 1951).
4. *Missions Saint-Viateur* 82 (April 1956). Mgr Lapierre died on 1 December 1952.
5. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 534.
6. Lionel Groulx, *Le Canada français missionnaire* (Montréal: Fides, 1962), 95. "Programme qui sera réalisé avec un raffinement de ruse et de ténacité, une logique infernale."
7. *Le Brigand* 127 (December 1949).
8. Léo-Paul Bourassa, *Tactiques communistes contre l'Église: l'expérience chinoise* (Montréal: Éditions de l'Heure, 1962), 24.
9. *Missions Saint-Viateur* 64 (June 1954).
10. *Relations* 117 (September 1950): 276.
11. PIUS XII, *Actes Pontificaux no. 48. Aux fidèles de Chine* (Montréal: Institut social populaire, 1952), 6.
12. Richard Bush, *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 46.
13. Jacques Langlais, *Les Jésuites du Québec en Chine, 1918-1955* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1979), 317-18.
14. See the introduction of Gérard Filion, *Rideau de fer au rideau de préjugés* (Montréal: Le Devoir, 1953).
15. *Missions-Étrangères du Québec* 3-4 (July-August 1947): 7.
16. Pierre Vennat, *Baptiste au pays du matin calme: les militaires canadiens-français en guerre de Corée 1950-1953* (Montréal: Éditions Méridien, 2000), 152.

17. Jean Ho, *Que faire en présence de la Chine communiste* (Montréal: Éditions de la ligue anti-communiste, 1949), 4.
18. Antonio Milot, "Le communisme reste toujours d'actualité," in *Les Chevaliers de Colomb de la Province du Québec et le Communisme* (Montréal: n.p., 1951), 34.
19. Private archives of Alain Grandbois, MSS-204/4/9-13, Quebec National Archives.
20. René Lévesque, *Mémoires* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986), 110-17.

