

Christians from Zeng Guofan's Confucian Clan

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Abstract: Hunan was renowned for its anti-Christian sentiment during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. Zeng Guofan, a notable figure from Xiangxiang, earned his reputation as a minister of revival for suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, which controversially used the banner of Christianity. However, his handling of the Tianjin Incident tarnished his reputation. Zeng's aversion to Christianity was not entirely passed down within his family, one of the most influential Confucian families at the time. After the Xinhai Revolution, several of his descendants converted to Christianity, taking it as a means for self-salvation and national redemption. They hoped to fulfill Zeng Guofan's dream of national rejuvenation by embracing and spreading Western learning and Christianity. This study of their religious choices may help clarify the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Confucianism in their minds.

Keywords: Zeng Guofan's clan, Conversion from Confucianism to Christianity, Self-salvation and national redemption, Strengths and weaknesses of Confucianism

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On the missionary map of modern China, Hunan was a province that filled the missionaries with both anxiety and contradictions. On one hand, the people of Hunan played a leading role¹ in the Westernization Movement and the Hundred Days' Reform (Wu Shu Reform), demonstrating their progressive and pragmatic revolutionary character. On the other hand, the Hunan gentry in the relatively isolated and backward environment were often considered by the missionaries as the most conservative and xenophobic group. Indeed, the intellectual elite of Hunan, deeply influenced by the teachings of Wang Fuzhi (王夫之) in ideology and culture, had a special and tenacious resistance to foreign invasive forces and were referred to by the missionaries as the "iron gate city."² From "Hunan Province's Joint Proclamation" published by the local gentry in Changsha,

1 According to the textual research, Zeng Guofan from Xiangxiang, Hunan, was the first to propose the idea of learning foreign science and technology and initiating modern military industry, which was called the Westernization Movement. 朱东安 Zhu Dongan 《曾国藩传》 *Zeng Guofan Zhuan* [Zeng Guofan's Autobiography], (成都 Chengdu: 四川人民出版社 Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe [Sichuan People's Publishing House], 1985), 316.

2 刘泱泱 Liu Yangyang, 《周汉反洋教案述论》 [C]// *Zhouhan fanyang jiaoran shulun* [C]// [Zhou Han's Anti-Foreign Religious Teaching Case] [C]//, (四川近代教案史研究会 Sichuan jindai jiaoranshi yanjiuhui [Sichuan Contemporary Religious Teaching History Research Association], 四川省哲学社会科学联合会 Sichuansheng zhexue kexue lianhehui [Sichuan Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Federation], 近代中国教案研究 Jindai zhongguo jiaoran

Hengzhou, and other places in the early 1860s, to "Exposing the Evil Reality" published later by Cui Jian (崔 暕), known as the "most heartbroken person in the world," and then to the anti-foreign teaching posters by Zhou Han (周汉) that triggered a storm across the Yangtze River basin and lasted for several years,³ all these made both the Christian Church and the Qing government, which sought to calm the situation, extremely uneasy. However, it was in such a "troublesome place" that the two famous families - the Xiangxiang Zeng (曾) family and the Hengshan Nie (聂) family, which had always been Confucians - produced a few "traitors to their ancestors" who chose to convert to Christianity amidst the rapidly changing historical trends.

Families played a pivotal role in traditional Chinese social structure and life⁴, a fact indisputable and widely acknowledged common knowledge. Setting that aside, focusing solely on aspects relevant to the topic of this paper, the attitude of an important figure within a family towards a certain religion often tends to pass down through generations. However, this norm during stable times can change when society undergoes significant upheaval due to the family, like the larger system of the nation, facing pressures of change when its functions atrophy or fall short, and the changes may include the symbolic elements that sustain its social prestige. This paper will primarily take the entanglement and interaction between Zeng Guofan's (曾国藩) clan and Christianity as an example (the relationship between the Nie family and Christianity will be discussed in a separate paper), to explore the following questions: What factors led to the younger generations of Zeng Guofan who was quite averse to Christianity, converting from Confucianism to Christianity? What functional roles and meanings did the Christians within the Zeng family attribute to Christianity?

I. Christianity and Zeng Guofan's Glory and Disgrace

Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) of late Qing Xiangxiang was both a prominent Neo-Confucian official and a leading figure in the revival during the Xianfeng and Tongzhi reigns. In his capacity as a Confucian scholar, he was not only deeply devoted to and meticulously studied Neo-Confucianism, but also endeavored to consistently practice it throughout his official career, especially during his prolonged military service. Moreover, he was dedicated to passing down the orthodox teachings through meticulous family instructions. As a revivalist, his reputation as a minister of revival was closely linked to his significant role in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion waged under the banner of Christianity. Thus, it seemed predestined that he could not have a favorable view towards Christianity. In his "Proclamation Against the Cantonese Bandits" (written in February 1854) composed for the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion who claimed to "crusade against the alien in Heaven's name," Zeng Guofan placed Christianity in an irreconcilable opposition to Confucian orthodoxy, calling for a defense of the orthodox teachings:

yanjiu [Research on Contemporary Chinese Religious Teaching Cases], (成都 Chengdu: 四川省社会科学院出版社 Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe [Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences Press], 1987), 374.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 375; Timothy Richard, *Forty-five Years in China: Reminiscences* [M], (天津 Tianjin: 天津人民出版社 Tianjin renmin chubanshe [Tianjin People's Publishing House], 2005), 346.

⁴ 唐德刚 Tang Degang, 《晚清七十年》 *Wanqing qishinian* [Seventy Years of the Late Qing Dynasty], (长沙 Changsha: 岳麓书社 Yuelu Shushe [Yuelu Publishing House], 2006), 415-416.

"Since the times of Tang, Yu, and the Three Dynasties, successive sages have upheld the orthodox teachings and maintained the proper human relationships. The order of ruler and subject, father and son, superior and inferior, respected and humble, has been as orderly as the crown and the shoe, which cannot be inverted. The Cantonese bandits have stolen the ways of foreign barbarians and venerate the religion of the Lord of Heaven. They speak of something called Jesus and a book called the 'New Testament,' discarding thousands of years of Chinese rites, ethics, poetry, books, and canons in one fell swoop. This is not only a great change in our Great Qing but also an unprecedented strange change in the history of orthodox teachings since the beginning of time. Confucius and Mencius would weep bitterly in their graves. How could those who are literate just stand idly by, not thinking of doing something about it? If there are gentlemen who uphold our way and are pained by the rampant spread of the Lord of Heaven's religion in the Central Plains, and who rise in anger to defend our way, we welcome them to the high ranking offices, treating them as distinguished guests."⁵

Here, he referred to the Taiping Rebellion's worship of Catholicism, confusing Catholicism with Protestantism or the Jesus religion, which was a misunderstanding. Regardless of this, his defensive stance for the orthodox teachings and his call to arms indeed generated a broad cultural appeal. It not only mobilized a large number of scholars and peasants to participate in suppressing the rebellion but also instilled a sense of loyalty and righteous indignation in the suppressors, boosting their morale. The rise of the Xiang Army and the fall of the Taiping Rebellion provided a certain opportunity for the so-called revival dreamed of by Zeng Guofan and other literati.

Furthermore, Zeng Guofan's ignorance of Christianity, as mentioned earlier, was later improved through his unavoidable personal dealings with Christian forces. Yet, this increase in knowledge was obtained at the cost of the lives of common people and substantial compensation. According to the records of the renowned British missionary to China, Richard Timothy (李提摩太, 1845–1919), during the "Great Famine of 1877–1878" in Shanxi, Richard brought two thousand liang silver raised through donations and sought an audience with Zeng Guoquan (曾国荃), who was then the governor of Shanxi, hoping to participate in disaster relief efforts and distribute the charitable funds. However, the latter obstructed him in every way. When Richard asked him how to better distribute the relief funds, with a sly glint in his eyes, he said: "There is a Roman Catholic missionary in the city. A few days ago, he came to apply for food for the orphanage he was in charge of. You had better hand over to him the two thousand liang silver for handling." As a Baptist missionary, Richard naturally encountered a refusal when he followed the advice and sought cooperation from the Catholic bishop. Richard attributed Zeng Guoquan's almost provocative actions towards missionaries to the attitude towards Christianity from his elder brother Zeng Guofan, because the latter had once submitted to the court his views on Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, suggesting that these two factions were mutually hostile and would often undermine each other.

5 李瀚章, 编纂 Li Hanzhang, edit, 李鸿章, 校勘 Li Hongzhang, collate, 《足本曾文正公全集》 *Zuben zeng wenzhengong quanji* [Complete Works of Zeng Wenzhengong], 第三部卷三文集: 讨粤匪檄[C] *Disanbu juansan wenji: tao yuefei xi* [C] [Collections of Works, Vol. 3, Part 3: Proclamation Against the Cantonese Bandits] [C], (长春 Changchun: 吉林人民出版社 Jilin renmin chubanshe [Jilin People's Publishing House], 1995), 1579.

Therefore, the Chinese government could take advantage of their contradictions and not adopt an aggressive policy towards both.⁶

Zeng Guofan's ability to distinguish between Catholicism and Protestantism, and his knowledge of how to exploit their mutual animosity, stemmed from his personal experience in handling the Tianjin Church Incident. In May of the ninth year of the Tongzhi reign (June 1870), a local ruffian in Tianjin was accused of human trafficking, and the suspect confessed that the case involved a French church. Following an agreement between the Three Ports Trade Commissioner, Chong Hou, and the French Consul in Tianjin, Feng Daye(丰大业, Henri Victor Fontanier), on the twenty-third day of the fifth month (June 21 in the Gregorian calendar), Tianjin County Magistrate Liu Jie (刘杰) brought the criminal, Wu Lanzhen (武兰珍), to the church located at Wanghailou for confrontation. The result confirmed that Wu's confession was inaccurate and there was no evidence to support the claim. The church's Father Xie Fuyin(谢福音 Father Joseph-Marie Chevrier) had also negotiated with Chong Hou (崇厚) on the follow-up handling of the matter. However, at that time, thousands of people had already surrounded the church, and a quarrel and fight broke out between the church personnel and the onlookers. Feng Daye suddenly demanded that Chong Hou send troops to suppress the crowd. During the negotiation, Feng Daye was aggressive and rude, and in a fit of anger, he fired at Chong Hou but missed. Seeing the surging public sentiment outside, Chong Hou, fearing an escalation of the situation, advised Feng Daye not to go out, but Feng Daye rushed out. At this time, Liu Jie also tried to dissuade Feng Daye, who then fired at Liu Jie, injuring a member of Liu Jie's family. The on-looking crowd was enraged and killed Feng Daye and his secretary on the spot⁷. They also killed some nuns, priests and Chinese believers, and set fire to the French consulate, Wanghailou Catholic Church, Ren Ci Tang, as well as four Christian churches run by local British and American missionaries. This was the most deadly incident up to that time, with 20 foreigners killed. After the incident, warships from seven countries, including the UK, the US, France, Germany and Italy, gathered off the coast of Tianjin and Yantai to demonstrate military power. Zeng Guofan, who was the Governor of Zhili, was ordered to go to Tianjin to investigate although he was ill. Under the pressure of the foreign powers, in order to calm the situation, Zeng Guofan, who knew that "if the case was found to be false, the foreigners would be in the right; if the case was found to be true, the foreigners would be in the wrong,"⁸ had no choice but to compromise. In the end, he sentenced 20 ringleaders to death, 25 people to exile. He even sentenced Tianjin Prefecture Magistrate Liu Guangzao (刘光藻) and County Magistrate Liu Jie to be sent to Heilongjiang⁹. The Qing

6 *Ibid.*, Forty-five Years in China: Reminiscences [M], 108.

7 “著直隶总督曾国藩迅赴天津与崇厚持平办理该处教案事上谕”Zhu zhili zongdu zeng guofan xunfu Tianjin yu chong hou chiping banli gaichu jiaohan shi shangyu [Imperial edict issued on the 25th day of the 5th lunar month in the 9th year of the Tongzhi reign (June 23, 1870), ordering Zeng Guofan, the Governor of Zhili, to promptly go to Tianjin and handle the religious case there in an impartial manner together with Chong Hou], 中国第一历史档案馆、福建师范大学历史系合编《中国近代史资料丛刊续编-清末教案》Zhongguo diyi lishi danganguan, Fujian shifan daxue lishixi hebian *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao congkan xubian - qingmo jiaohan* [A continued Compilation of Historical Materials of Contemporary Chinese History - The Late Qing Dynasty Religious Cases], jointly compiled by the First Historical Archives of China and the History Department of Fujian Normal University, (北京 Beijing: 中华书局 Zhonghua shuju [Zhonghua Book Company], 1996), 778 - 779.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 784.

9 The judgment of the Tianjin Prefecture Magistrate and County magistrate was a compromise between the demands of the French and Zeng Guofan's own conscience. It was truly a last resort. Afterward, Zeng Guofan regretted it almost immediately. In his diary entry on the 22nd day of the 6th lunar month in the

government was also forced to pay 460,000 liang silver in compensation. In October, Chong Hou was sent to France to apologize. A weak country has no diplomacy. Zeng Guofan, who sought peace with humiliation, became the focus of public opinion in the country. His handling of the case caused nationwide indignation. His fellow townspeople in Beijing smashed and burned the plaques boasting of his achievements in the Huguang Guild Hall. All of this made the introspective Zeng Guofan feel "ashamed before the divine and embarrassed by public criticism."¹⁰ In March 1872, Zeng Guofan, transferred to be the Governor of Liangjiang after the later stage of handling the case, died in depression in Nanjing.

Upon reviewing the relevant archives, no memorial from Zeng Guofan advocating the use of the contradictions between Catholicism and Protestantism has been found. Instead, it was found that some high-ranking officials, such as Jiangsu Governor Ding Richang (丁日昌), felt that Protestantism was "law-abiding and uncontentious, posing no other threat," while Catholicism, due to "missionaries indiscriminately recruiting followers in large numbers wherever they went,"¹¹ often led to disputes between the people and the church. This is a matter for later discussion and will not be elaborated here. In any case, it seems that the greatest glory and disgrace of Zeng Guofan's life were both related to Christianity. The suppression of the Taiping Rebellion waged under the banner of Christianity earned him great honor, while his handling of the Tianjin Religious Case tarnished his reputation, leading to accusations of favoring foreigners¹² and even charges of selling out the country. Zeng thus endured tremendous pressure. As the saying goes, the Christian religion was both the making and the undoing of him. However, throughout his rise and fall, Christianity was basically the object of his struggle and an inescapable adversary. It seems that a negative attitude towards, or even hatred of, Christianity should have reasonably permeated the blood of the Zeng family through Zeng Guofan. However, the drastic social changes in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century greatly weakened the inheritance of this family attitude. Instead, it even developed in the opposite direction.

II. From Confucian Disciples to Christians: The Conversion of Zeng Guofan's Descendants

The first Christians in the Zeng family were Zeng Baosun (曾宝荪) and Zeng Jirong (曾季融). The former was the granddaughter of Zeng Guofan's youngest son, Zeng Jihong (曾纪鸿), and the latter was Zeng Jihong's fourth son, Guangzhong (广钟), making him Zeng Guofan's grandson.

9th year of the Tongzhi reign (1870), he wrote: "On this day, due to the foreigner's letter demanding that the Prefecture Magistrate and County Magistrate be executed, I memorialized to the throne, requesting that the Prefecture Magistrate and County Magistrate be handed over to the Ministry of Justice for punishment. This is heartless and against my principles, and I feel extremely ashamed and remorseful." 《曾国藩全集 - 日记三》 *Zeng Guofan quanji - riji san* [The Complete Works of Zeng Guofan: Diaries Vol. 3], (长沙 Changsha: 岳麓书社 Yuelu shushe [Yuelu Publishing House], 1989), 1760.

10 《曾胡会谈》 Zeng hu huitan [Collection of Talks by Zeng and Hu], 《国闻周报》第六卷 Guowen zhoubao diliujuan [Guowen Weekly, Vol. 6], 38. *Ibid.*, Zeng Guofan's Autobiography, 295.

11 *Ibid.*, A continued Compilation of Historical Materials of Contemporary Chinese History - The Late Qing Dynasty Religious Cases, 910-911.

12 *Ibid.*, Proclamation Against the Cantonese Bandits [C], 271.

Zeng Baosun (1893–1978) was open to Christianity due to the tolerant atmosphere created by her grandmother Guo, her progressive and open father, Zeng Guangjun (曾广钧), and her forward-thinking uncle, Zeng Jirong (also known as Guangzhong, 1875–1923), as well as the direct influence and guidance of Christian insiders.

Zeng Baosun's grandmother, Guo Yun (郭筠), was the first wife of Zeng Jihong. Guo's father, Guo Peilin (郭沛霖 1809–1859), was from Huangshui, Hubei, and became an imperial scholar in the same year as Zeng Guofan. In 1859, he died in a battle against the Taiping Rebellion. Guo Yun received a strict traditional education from a young age. After marrying into the Zeng family in 1865, she continued her studies under Zeng Guofan's guidance, reading books such as the "Thirteen Classics with Commentaries and Sub-commentaries" and the "Imperially Approved Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government."¹³ She was also a cultured poetess with a study named "Yifang Studio." Guo Yun was open-minded and placed great emphasis on the education of her grandchildren, treating boys and girls equally. Under her supervision, Zeng Baosun developed a habit of diligent study from the age of four.

In 1904, her uncle Zeng Jirong, who firmly believed that China needed new knowledge to avert the tragedy of national extinction and thus had great faith in the effectiveness of modern education, took Zeng Baosun to enter the Yanmuoshi Girls' School (a girls' school founded by the Baptist Church) in Shanghai¹⁴, thus ending her homeschooling. She then attended the Shanghai West Gate Wuben Girls' School and the Zhejiang Provincial Normal School for Girls. In the Normal School, Zeng Baosun made significant progress in all subjects. A teacher there, Mr. Chen Boyuan (陈伯原), who was unwilling to see such a "highly talented" student become a primary school teacher after graduation, persuaded Zeng Baosun to transfer to the Feng's Advanced Girls' School run by the Anglican Church in Hangzhou, where he was hired to teach mathematics and science. With the strong support of her uncle and the consent of her father and grandmother, Zeng Baosun entered this church school in early 1909. Due to her hard work and dedication, she was highly valued and respected at the school, serving as a dormitory leader and receiving scholarships. It was also at this school that Zeng Baosun experienced a turning point in her life: her baptism and the opportunity to study in England.

According to Zeng Baosun's later recollections, although she initially admired the spirit of Christianity in its endeavors, she found its missionary methods to be at odds with traditional Chinese thought and thus could not accept Christianity. Her conversion to Christianity was a gradual process, with some dramatic events and individuals playing a significant role in her journey. In the spring of 1910, during her second year at Feng's Advanced Girls' School, a classmate's English exercise book was torn by several pages. After the teacher's inquiry, no one took responsibility. The principal, Ms. Louise Barnes, was requested to announce that if no one confessed by lunchtime, all students would be punished. The school indeed punished each student with an hour of copying from 4pm. At 5pm, a British teacher entered the auditorium (where all students were gathered) and asked the students to line up and walk in the garden for another hour before entering the dining hall. Zeng

13 曾宝荪 Zeng Baosun, 《曾宝荪回忆录》 *Zeng Baosun huiyilu* [Memoirs of Zeng Baosun] [M], (长沙 Changsha: 岳麓书社 Yuelu shushe [Yuelu Publishing House], 1986), 2.

14 *Ibid.*, 19

Baosun, with her rebellious nature, stood up indignantly and refused to go out, and six or seven classmates followed her example. Zeng Baosun was then seen as a troublemaker. She called herself a leader of rebellion, and even published a small newspaper titled "Bamboo Ends and Wood Shavings," which reported on injustices at school and expressed revolutionary views on national affairs. The principal was greatly alarmed and discussed disciplinary measures with the teachers; some suggested expelling Zeng Baosun. Mr. Chen, who had introduced Zeng Baosun to the school, strongly opposed this and wrote to her uncle, Zeng Jirong, to consult. Zeng Jirong, a staunch believer in modern education, persuaded Zeng Baosun, who had left school and returned home, to go back. Zeng Baosun and the seven other students influenced by her returned to school. Principal Barnes kept Zeng Baosun alone in her room, tearfully saying to her, "I know you do not oppose the school; it is the devil in your heart that harms you." She then asked Zeng Baosun to kneel and pray with her. Touched by her sincere and blame-free words, Zeng Baosun agreed to change for good and stopped publishing the newspaper. This incident made Zeng Baosun experience the love of Christians and led her to publicly express her desire to become a catechumen. In addition, the contemplation of the meaning of life and the exploration of the reasons for the weak motherland made Zeng Baosun feel that China needed the spirit of Christian "practice".

If the spirit of Christian practice reflected in the love of Ms. Barnes opened Zeng Baosun's spirituality to Christianity, the behavior of another Christian had a profound impact on Zeng Baosun's decision to convert to Christianity, a spiritual experience similar to the sudden enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. This person was Miss Stuart, a temporary English substitute teacher at Feng's Advanced Girls' School. Her parents had been missionaries in Sichuan. During the Boxer Rebellion, they and her siblings were killed at home, leaving her injured and disabled, becoming a cripple. Originally, she harbored deep hatred for the Chinese due to this unforgivable grudge. However, it is said that she was moved by the Holy Spirit at a conference and let go of her resentment, choosing instead to serve the Chinese. It was after witnessing Miss Stuart's actions that Zeng Baosun decided to embrace Christianity.

Zeng Baosun's ultimate conversion to Christianity was not without internal struggle, with the main pressure coming from the family's Confucian tradition. When listing the difficulties of converting to Christianity, Zeng Baosun wrote:

"First, my family is a Confucian family with thousands of years of history, from Master Zongsheng(宗圣夫子) to the Wenzheng, my grandfather and my father's generation, all are followers of Confucius. Second, my grandmother's father, Guishui's Guo Peilin, died in the defense of Yangzhou against the Taiping Rebellion. My grandmother is a devoted believer in Confucianism, neither believing in Buddhism nor Taoism, no mentioning Christianity. Third, none of our relatives and friends are 'Christian believers'. The fact that a girl in the family believes in Jesus is simply a laughingstock in the village."¹⁵

Here, Zeng Baosun only remembers the family feud with Christianity due to death of her grandmother's father in the battle, seemingly forgetting the humiliation her great-grandfather Zeng Guofan suffered from handling the Tianjin Church Incident with compromise. However, from the three reasons she listed, it can be

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-28.

seen that the family's Confucian faith tradition caused her a certain degree of identity crisis before her conversion to Christianity. If she had been in a conservative family that stubbornly adhered to traditional beliefs, her journey of faith might have ended there. Interestingly, when she wrote to seek permission from her grandmother and father, expressing her inner distress and arguing that the love and dedication of Christians showed that Christianity was not in conflict with Confucianism and that Christianity could revitalize the country's declining morals, she wanted to become a Christian to save herself and others. The response she received was that her grandmother was not very enthusiastic, while her father was quite willing to consider it. He even mentioned the significant contributions made by the late Ming Dynasty Christian Xu Guangqi in opening schools and benefiting the people. But Zeng Guangjun also asked Zeng Baosun to read Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics," Spencer's "The Study of Sociology," and several simple Buddhist books. Zeng Guangjun's intention in doing so was to present various possibilities for spiritual affiliation to Zeng Baosun, which was actually a test. After Zeng Baosun finished reading these books, she still resolutely chose to be baptized on Christmas Day in 1911 at the Anglican Church in Hangzhou.¹⁶

The following year after her baptism, Ms. Barnes was granted a one-year leave to return to her home country and hoped to take Zeng Baosun abroad for further studies. With the strong support of her uncle Zeng Jirong and her cousin Nie Yuntai (聂云台 named Qijie 其杰, the son of Zeng Guofan's youngest daughter, Zeng Jifen 曾纪芬), Zeng Baosun was able to go. In England, after nearly a year of studying and preparing for exams at two secondary schools, Zeng Baosun was admitted to Nishida College (西田书院) of the University of London in 1913. At that time, Zeng Baosun was not thinking more about her own future nor making a lot of money, but firmly believed in the idea of saving the country through science and hoped to serve her country with science in the future. Therefore, she chose biology as her major, mathematics as her minor. She also selected courses in chemistry and physiology. Due to her hard work and dedication, Zeng Baosun obtained her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of London in July 1916, becoming the first Chinese person to receive this honor at the time. As World War I was in full swing, Zeng Baosun found it difficult to return to China after graduation, so she continued her studies at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. At that time, these two universities did not grant degrees to women, so she could only attend lectures and further her education there. She left England in October 1917.

During her studies in England, Zeng Baosun's identification with and knowledge of Christianity grew in tandem. While visiting friends and seeking wisdom, a British Christian said, "We act like Jesus in our daily lives, and that is what makes us Christians." This attitude, which did not emphasize strict adherence to doctrines but focused on the practice of the Christian spirit, greatly influenced Zeng Baosun's subsequent religious life.¹⁷ Ms. Barnes, in order to honor the agreement previously made with the Zeng family, gave up the pension she would have received had she stayed in Hangzhou for another five years. Instead, she decided to accompany Zeng Baosun throughout her studies abroad. This act made Zeng Baosun feel that "this is truly the greatest love and the best example of a Christian who sacrifices herself to save others," and thus she made up her mind to "do the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

Lord's work."¹⁸ She actively participated in religious activities, listened to lectures by Christian leaders, broadened her intellectual horizons, and became more concerned with the relationship between Christianity and social issues. She also deeply felt that social reform was impossible without the spirit of Christianity. She actively participated in the volunteer movement popular among student Christians at the time and preached Christianity in English, speaking about the work and contributions of Christianity in China; at the same time, she addressed current issues, advocating for cooperation among civilized nations of the world: as science advances, the tools of destruction become more sophisticated and deadly. If humanity does not embrace the love of Jesus and the spirit of "all under heaven are brothers" as spoken by Confucius, humanity will commit suicide, and the extinction of culture will inevitably occur. She also visited Timothy Richard several times, who had returned to England on leave from China, and she strongly agreed with his proposal to establish a League of Nations to resolve international disputes¹⁹.

During her studies abroad, Zeng Baosun began planning to establish a girls' school in her hometown of Changsha, Hunan, and received financial and faculty support from her British teachers and friends. In February 1918, after returning to Changsha via Shanghai and Xiangxiang, with the strong support of her father Zeng Guangjun and her uncle Zeng Guangzhong, Zeng Baosun began to prepare for the school. In September, the Yifang Girls' School, named after her grandmother's studio, officially opened in Xiyuan Dragon Residence (西园龙宅). Zeng Baosun served as the principal, her cousin Yuenong (曾约农, who had studied at the University of London and returned to China on the same ship as Zeng Baosun) as the dean of studies, Ms. Barnes as the English teacher, and there were five other teachers. The school was positioned as a university preparatory program and also offered specialized classes in English and mathematics. From 1918 to 1949, Zeng Baosun presided over the Yifang Girls' School. During these 32 years, China was in a state of turmoil and war, and the Yifang Girls' School experienced three closures and three re-openings. However, Zeng Baosun became more determined facing these difficulties and did not surrender to them, dedicating her youth (she remained unmarried), energy and wealth mostly to the cause of women's education in China, cultivating many talents. If it can be said that her personal struggle is a good interpretation of the spirit of Christian love and dedication, it may not be an exaggeration. Her endeavors also received high praise from society, the Republic of China government, and the church. She was elected as a representative to the National Assembly, attended the World Christian Student Federation meetings twice on behalf of Chinese churches, and was invited to give a series of lectures in 12 major cities in China on the relationship between cultural education and Christianity. Since attending these meetings is of great importance to scholars studying Chinese Christianity, it is worthwhile for a short elaboration. In the spring of 1928, during the Easter period, Zeng Baosun attended the World Missionary Conference held in Jerusalem. The Chinese delegation consisted of about 20 people, with Yu Rizhang (余日章) as the chairman and members including Zhao Zichen (赵紫宸), Cheng Jingyi (陈静谥), Wei Zhuomin (韦卓民) and others, all of whom were important leaders of the Chinese church at the time and well-known to scholars studying the history of modern Chinese Christianity. Participating in religious activities and conferences in the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

Holy City, hosted by the already famous Dr. Mott in China, made Zeng Baosun more profoundly realize the necessity of Jesus Christ's love. In December 1938, during the Christmas period, Zeng Baosun attended the World Christian Student Federation meeting at the Christian University in Madras, South India, with colleagues including Zhao Zichen, Liu Tingfang (刘廷芳), Cheng Jingyi and others. Through attending these two conferences, Zeng Baosun realized: first, material civilization cannot be separated from religious morality; and second, a trend in the development of religion is that while missionaries used to see other religions as enemies, they now recognize that extreme materialism is the real enemy of religion²⁰.

After 1949, Zeng Baosun temporarily stayed in Hong Kong and then moved to Taiwan in 1951. In addition to holding some honorary positions, she mainly devoted herself to the organization, protection and publication of the Zeng family's collection of manuscripts and copies, as these documents, which contain true records of modern Chinese history, are treasures of the nation. The arrangements made by Zeng Baosun and Zeng Yuenong for this purpose have received high praise from the academic community. Zeng Baosun passed away in Taiwan on July 27, 1978.

The year Zeng Baosun was baptized into Christianity was an important year in modern Chinese history, as the Double Tenth Revolution (Wuchang Uprising) occurred. At that time, Zhejiang province where she was located quickly responded to the revolution. Her uncle Zeng Jirong led the family members, including Zeng Baosun, to Shanghai for temporary refuge. This dramatic and significant change brought negative impacts on the political and economic status of the once very important Zeng family in late Qing history, which Zeng Baosun referred to as "the family situation has been greatly affected by the revolution."²¹ At this time, Zeng Jirong began to feel a sense of depression and started discussing religion, especially Christianity, with Zeng Baosun, and gradually gained faith. When Zeng Baosun returned to Hangzhou to resume her studies, around the tenth month of the lunar calendar that year, Zeng Jirong was baptized in Shanghai. If we follow this account, the first Christian in the Zeng family should be Zeng Jirong. Regarding the specific time of Zeng Jirong's baptism, Zeng Baosun's recollections offer two versions: one is the aforementioned version of the tenth month of the lunar calendar in the year of the Xinhai Revolution, and the other is the "Christmas Day of the revolutionary year".²² Checking the perpetual calendar, the Christmas Day of the Xinhai year was the sixth day of the eleventh month of the lunar calendar, and the last day of the tenth month of the lunar calendar (the 29th day) was December 19 in the Gregorian calendar. Therefore, there is a slight discrepancy in time between the lunar October version and the "Christmas Day of the revolutionary year" version. If we take the "Christmas Day of the revolutionary year" version as accurate - according to the church's traditional arrangement for baptism times, it is more likely that believers would be baptized on major festivals - Zeng Jirong and Zeng Baosun, uncle and niece, are the first batch of Christians in the Zeng family.

Zeng Jirong was the fifth son of Zeng Guofan's second son Jize (纪泽). He was somewhat of a spoiled child of a prominent family, accustomed to a life of luxury and indulgence. Thanks to the influence of his

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 28, 181.

ancestors and father, he held the position of a first-class hereditary official with the special appointment of a junior magistrate. During the First Sino-Japanese War (also known as the Jiawu War), his elder brother Zeng Guangjun had gone to the front to aid Korea, while Zeng Guangzhong also led the Zhong and Shu camps to support him. After the peace negotiations between China and Japan, they were withdrawn. Soon after, Zeng Guangzhong was assigned as a waiting official with the rank of a circuit intendant (补侯道员) in Zhejiang, where he served in Hangzhou, Yuyao and other places for many years until the Xinhai Revolution broke out, forcing him to leave the political arena. According to Zeng Baosun's recollections, the retired Zeng Jirong became quite devout in his Christian faith, having resolutely given up opium before his baptism. After his baptism, he aspired to establish an independent Jesus Church. In 1918, after consulting with Zeng Baosun and Zeng Yuenong, he decided to purchase a piece of land outside the Changsha city gate Liuyangmen(浏阳门). Although the location was extremely inconvenient and was one of the poorest areas in Changsha County, Zeng Jirong insisted on working with the poor there. So he bought the land. With the joint donations from Zeng Jifen (曾纪芬) and other relatives and friends, the construction of the church began in 1921. But Zeng Jirong passed away before its completion. Zeng Baosun mentioned Zeng Jirong multiple times in her memoirs, affectionately referring to him as her uncle, as she admired him for being a pioneer in promoting new education within the Zeng family and for his transformation "from a playboy to an extremely devout Christian; from one who sought pleasure to one who could endure hard work."²³ If he had lived longer, the independent church Zeng Jirong intended to construct might have achieved something significant. There are currently not many other historical materials available regarding Zeng Jirong's religious experiences and activities. Interestingly, we can find traces of Zeng Jirong's religious activities in Timothy Richard's records.

In June 1914, Timothy Richard visited Changsha, which was suffering from severe flooding at the time. After giving a speech on education, "a grandson of Zeng Guofan, Mr. Nie's (referring to Nie Qijie) cousin, about thirty years old, entered the reception room. There were more than fifty people in the reception room. He chatted with everyone and elaborated on the points of my (Timothy Richard's) speech. He was an honest Christian and the head of an independent church."²⁴ Although Richard did not name him, the person he described should be Zeng Jirong. The only discrepancy is that at this time, Zeng Jirong was already in his forties, but in Richard's eyes, the privileged Zeng Jirong appeared younger than the average Chinese; of course, he was also a true Christian. In addition, according to the "Chinese Christian Directory" (Bates' List) by Miner Searle Bates, Zeng Jirong (Guangzhong) was proposed by Cheng Jingyi in 1916 and elected as the leader of the independent church in Changsha.²⁵ Furthermore, according to reports, Zeng Jirong attended a Christian church gathering in Shanghai on January 4, 1921, to welcome Nie Yuntai's return to the country and presided over the prayer.²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Forty-five Years in China: Reminiscences [M], 349.

²⁵ 章开沅 Zhang Kaiyuan, 《教会大学与社会转型》 *Jiaohui daxue yu shehui zhuanxing* [Church Universities and Social Transformation] [M], (武汉 Wuhan: 湖北教育出版社 Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe [Hubei Education Publishing House], 1998), 472.

²⁶ 《基督教会欢迎聂云台纪》 *Jidu jiaohui huanyin nie yuntai ji* [Record of the Christian Church's Welcome to Nie Yuntai]. 《申报》, 民国十年一月四日 *Shenbao*, minguo shinian yiyue siri [Shenbao, January 4, 1921 (the 10th year of the Republic of China)].

The second batch of Christians in the Zeng family should be Zeng Jifen and her son Nie Qijie (聂其杰). Zeng Jifen (1852–1935) was the youngest daughter of Zeng Guofan. She was dearly loved by her father, brothers and sisters from a young age. She followed her tutor Deng Yinjie (邓寅皆) to study and also learned to knit sweaters from her eldest sister-in-law (who had learned this fashionable skill in Europe), as per her father's instructions. At the age of 18 (in 1870), she was betrothed to Nie Jigui(聂缉槩), a person from Hengshan, Hunan, through the matchmaking of Zeng Guoquan. They got married in 1875. Zeng Jifen was well-versed in her father's family rules, was frugal in managing the household, accustomed to hard work, and maintained an open attitude towards new things. For example, she had her two sons, Nie Qichang (聂其昌) and Nie Qijie, learn English from the wife of the missionary John Fryer (傅兰雅). According to her own later recollections, she was baptized in 1915. "In the fourth year of the Republic of China, in the first month, she and her son Qijie and his wife were baptized together at the Methodist Episcopal Church (监理会) on Kunshan Road in Shanghai." Her conversion to Christianity was due to the aforementioned devout Christian, Zeng Jirong. "In March of the year of Gengxu (1910), I sent my daughter Qichun (其纯) to Shanghai to visit my son Qijie and his wife who were ill. My nephew Jirong invited me to Hangzhou, but I could not make it. He often came to enlighten me about the truth of Christianity, and I was deeply enlightened, thus having the intention to embrace it. After returning to Hunan, I often talked about it with my relatives and friends. When I came to Shanghai again in the year of Xinhai, I felt that the world was becoming more chaotic, which was actually due to the moral decay of people's hearts. I believed that to save the confused hearts of people, one should start with loving others as oneself, and thus I became more convinced and dedicated to this belief."²⁷ It should be noted that although her nephew Zeng Jirong's enthusiastic preaching was an important channel for Aunt Zeng Jifen to understand Christianity, the Xinhai Revolution once again became an important background for the members of the Zeng family to convert to Christianity. Of course, Zeng Jifen's understanding and belief in Christianity had its own characteristics, that is, emphasizing enlightenment and focusing on the moral edification of people's hearts and social customs to give Christianity meaning and function. Additionally, it is worth noting that Zeng Jifen had always been a Buddhist believer, and her belief in Christianity had a Buddhist characteristic. In the letter "The Old Lady's Reply to Her American Friend Mrs. Jia," which was dictated by Zeng Jifen herself and drafted by Nie Qijie, she explained the origin of this Buddhist characteristic: "My mother was a devout Buddhist believer, and I was also influenced by her since childhood. After I got married, due to the frequent illnesses of my children, I was also drawn to the Buddhist faith. Buddhism mainly talks about the principle of the connection between the mind and karma, and the suffering and obstacles caused by past karma can also be eliminated by the power of sincere and great kindness, such as abstaining from killing, releasing life, keeping vegetarian, worshipping Buddha, almsgiving, and relieving suffering, etc. I have been following these practices for almost forty years... In recent

27 *Ibid.*, Memoirs of Zeng Baosun [M], 49.

聂其杰 Nie Qijie, 《中国近代史料丛刊-第三辑: 崇德老人纪念册》[C] Zhongguo jindai shiliao congkan disanji: chongde laoren jiniance [C] [Contemporary Chinese Historical Materials Series, Vol. 3: Memorial Volume for the Elderly Who Cherish Virtue] [C]. (台北 Taipei: 文海出版社. Wenhai chubanshe [Wenhai Publishing House], 1967), 337.

years, although I have come to believe in the Creator, I still rely on the doctrine of cause and effect to lay the foundation."²⁸ From Zeng Jifen's own account, it can be seen that Buddhism did not become an obstacle for Chinese people to convert to Christianity as Christians might have imagined. On the contrary, the doctrine of Karma in Buddhism cultivated the foundation for her belief in Christianity (the belief in the Creator). Here, there are two important facts that need to be pointed out and deserve attention. First, when this letter was published (in the "Weekly Publications of Nie Family's Words," the fifth collection, which came out in the autumn of 1928), her son Nie Qijie had already abandoned Christianity for many years and turned to Buddhism. Through a weekly family Buddhist study group, he created a strong atmosphere of refuting Christianity and promoting Buddhism in the Nie family. In the records of the family Buddhist study group published in the "Selected Publications of Nie Family's Words," Zeng Jifen was always one of the attendees. Although she was the main target of her son's persuasion to convert back, she maintained her belief in Christianity in this strong Buddhist atmosphere. Of course, since her belief had a Buddhist characteristic, what she maintained might have a syncretic belief that was both Buddhist and Christian. However, perhaps it was precisely because her belief was a mix of Buddhism and Christianity that she did not feel any hindrance in her religious life in this strong Buddhist atmosphere, which is a unique case worthy of attention for comparative religion scholars and religious dialogue theorists. Second, as Zeng Baosun mentioned, the Zeng family was a Confucian family with thousands of years of history and did not believe in Buddhism or Taoism, but in Zeng Jifen's own account, her mother Lady Ouyang, was a devout Buddhist believer. Zeng Baosun also explained this: "Our family's ancestral instructions do not believe in monks and Taoist priests, but there are a few exceptions. Our family observes four days of vegetarian each year... On these days, everyone in the household abstains from meat, as it is a vow made by the wife of Wenzheng."²⁹ It can be seen that in traditional Chinese society, even within the most orthodox Confucian families, there was still room for other religions, especially Buddhism and Taoism. The reasons for this are the religious aspects of orthodox Confucianism, such as ancestor worship, were mainly used to enhance the interests of the family as a whole, while it pays less attention to individual ultimate concerns, such as the afterlife, personal misfortunes and sufferings, as well as individual anxieties or worries about uncertainties or impermanence, thus leaving ample space for Buddhism, Taoism and other religions.³⁰ Interestingly, upon reviewing Zeng Guofan's diary, we find that the head of this orthodox Confucian family, despite the absence of a Buddhist altar in his home, did have monks read scriptures for him. For example, on the seventh day of the tenth month in the ninth year of the Tongzhi reign (in the lunar calendar), his diary entry reads: "At night, Cao Jingchu(曹镜初) accompanied Shengxing (圣性) Monk for a chat. He gave me the "A Handy Commentary on Shurangama Sutra ". I casually

28 《聂氏家言选刊》第五辑，第 181-182 页，Nieshi jiyuan xuankan [Selected Publications of the Nie Family's Words, Vol. 5, 181-182]. 《民国佛教期刊文献集成 - 补编》83, *Minguo fojiao qikan jicheng - bubian 83* [Supplementary Compilation of Buddhist Periodical Literatures in the Republic of China, Vol. 83], (北京 Beijing: 中国书店 Zhongguo shudian [China Bookstore], 2008), 341-342.

For all subsequent citations of this book, the issue number and page number of the original publication will no longer be indicated. Only the page number in Arabic numerals of *Supplementary Compilation of Buddhist Periodical Literatures in the Republic of China, Vol. 83* will be noted.

29 *Ibid.*, Memoirs of Zeng Baosun [M].

30 C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961), 301-302.

flipped through it but still could not understand it."³¹ It is worth noting that Zeng Guofan's engagement with Buddhism took place at night, instead of in broad daylight. Furthermore, his comprehension of Buddhist teachings seemed to be rather limited.

After Zeng Jifen's conversion to Christianity, her actions were marked by the implementation of Christian values. On New Year's Day in the seventh year of the Republic of China (1918), when Zeng Jifen was over sixty years old, she presided over the establishment of the Nie family's property distribution plan. One particularly notable item was: "Our ancestors have always been generous in giving. When Zhongcheng Gong (中丞公 referring to Nie Jigui – noted by the author) was alive, he donated a considerable amount to charitable causes every year. Since I have recently embraced Christianity and understood universal love, I propose to follow the biblical rule of tithing, setting aside one-tenth as a charity fund. This fund shall never be disposed of in the future. The annual interest shall be used for church and various public welfare donations for disasters such as floods, droughts and plagues. The principal fund shall only be used in extreme necessity, so that the virtuous legacy of our ancestors' kindness can be passed down for a long time."³² It is worth noting that Zeng Jifen integrated the Christian spirit of universal love with the Nie family's tradition of philanthropy without any hindrance. Zeng Jifen's claim that "Zhongcheng Gong donated a large sum to charitable causes every year" was not an exaggeration. According to Timothy Richard's records, in 1894, Zhang Zhidong (张之洞) donated one thousand liang silver to the The Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese (广学会), which was dedicated to spreading Western science and religion. "A certain Nie, a local official Intendant (道台) from Shandong, sent a donation, albeit a smaller amount... After a few years, when Nie, the local official Intendant, was promoted to the Zhejiang Governor in 1905, through his recommendation, local officials and gentry subscribed to books and periodicals from the The Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese worth six hundred liang silver. In 1902, he also sent a donation of one thousand yuan. His wife was the famous daughter of Zeng Guofan."³³ The Intendant in question was undoubtedly Nie Jigui, who had served as the local official Intendant of Shanghai. His philanthropic actions indicate that he was not as distant from Western religion as his father-in-law, the Westernization advocate Zeng Guofan, but rather actively supported the endeavor of The Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese. Earlier, Zeng Jifen also took the initiative to donate the Nie family's land on Peikaier Road in Shanghai to the Municipal Council (equivalent to the autonomous municipal government of the concession), which was named Nie Zhongcheng Public School following Western examples,³⁴ and later renamed Jigui Middle School. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, it was renamed Shanghai Shidong High School. According to reports, Zeng Jifen donated land in Shanghai in 1921 to build a church, "for the glory

31 *Ibid.*, Complete Works of Zeng Guofan: Diaries III, p.1790.

32 Memoirs of Zeng Baosun [M], 50.

33 *Ibid.*, Forty-five Years in China: Reminiscences [M], 203.

The amount of the donation with a relatively smaller quantity was 100 silver dollars. At that time, Nie Jigui served as the Chief Financial Commissioner of Shandong Province. 王立新 Wang Lixin, 美国传教士与晚清中国现代化 Meiguo chuanjiaoshi yu wanqing zhongguo xiandaihua [American Missionaries and the Modernization of Late Qing China], (天津 Tianjin: 天津人民出版社 Tianjin renmin chubanshe [Tianjin People's Publishing House], 1997), 353.

34 *Ibid.*, Memoirs of Zeng Baosun [M], 51.

of the Lord."³⁵ All of these actions demonstrate that the spirit of Christian universal love was fully embodied in Zeng Jifen's life. She, like her nephew Zeng Jirong, was a true Christian, albeit with a slightly different significance.

Nie Qijie, who was baptized at the same time as Zeng Jifen, was a person who later abandoned Christianity. Since he left behind numerous writings refuting Christianity and promoting Buddhism, and as he does not strictly belong to the Zeng family, his actions and words will be discussed in a separate paper.

In the same generation as Zeng Baosun (the Zhao 昭 generation), there were two more Christians: Zeng Yuenong (Zhaoshan 昭榘) and Zeng Zhaoquan(曾昭权). We can draw this conclusion first and foremost thanks to the records of their cousin, the apostate Nie Qijie (Yuntai). In his article "A Record of a Conversation with Zeng Baosun" (signed Yuntai), Nie Qijie wrote: "Baosun, my female cousin, Yuenong and Weimou, my male cousins, sacrificed their assets and gave up family happiness, dedicating all their energy to running schools. Their noble aspirations and pure character are rare in society. However, they are attached to Western religion and teach it to their students, which I deeply regret."³⁶ In this article, Nie Qijie also contrasted the Confucian tradition of Wenzheng (the ancestor's teachings) with Christianity, hoping that the younger generations of the Zeng family including Zeng Baosun, Zeng Yuenong and Zeng Zhaoquan would follow the teachings of Wenzheng to promote Confucianism,³⁷ while blaming these younger generations for forgetting their ancestors' ways.

Zeng Yuenong (1893–1986) was the grandson of Zeng Jihong and the eldest son of Zeng Guangquan (an adopted son of Zeng Jize). He was born in Beijing and soon after followed his parents to London, England (his father served as an attaché at the Chinese embassy in the UK), where he lived for six years. In 1909, he went to London again to attend secondary school. After graduation, he was admitted to the University of London, majoring in mining and metallurgy. He graduated in 1916 with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the University of London and returned to China at the end of the following year on the same ship as Zeng Baosun. In early 1918, Zeng Yuenong and Zeng Baosun returned to their hometown of Fuhou Tang in Hunan. According to Zeng Baosun's recollections, at that time Zeng Yuenong had not yet converted to Christianity, thus he participated in the ancestral worship as usual, while Zeng Baosun, adhering to her religious rules, stood by.³⁸ Since then, Zeng Yuenong always strongly supported Zeng Baosun in her educational endeavors, playing a crucial role in the difficult process of the Yifang Girls' School being closed and reopened three times. In fact, while studying in London, Zeng Baosun and Zeng Yuenong had "made a pact to dedicate themselves to the service of their country and the world, promising to help each other to achieve this goal."³⁹ Zeng Yuenong sincerely kept this promise, remaining unmarried and devoting all his energy to the cause of education in China. After settling in Taiwan in 1951, he was appointed as a professor in the Department of Foreign Languages at National Taiwan University. In 1955, Zeng Yuenong became the founding president of Tunghai University. This

35 *Ibid.*, Record of the Christian Church's Welcome to Nie Yuntai.

36 *Ibid.*, Supplementary Compilation of Buddhist Periodical Literatures in the Republic of China, Vol. 83, p. 405.

37 *Ibid.*, p.408.

38 *Ibid.*, Memoirs of Zeng Baosun [M], 69.

39 *Ibid.*, 53.

appointment was quite interesting. According to Zeng Baosun's records, when the founder of Time Magazine, Mr. H. Luce, had his sister, Mrs. Moore, donate funds to establish Tunghai University and was in need of an appropriate president, the board of trustees (of which Zeng Baosun was a member) invited several individuals associated with Chinese church schools and who were also Christians to meet with Mrs. Moore, intending for her to select a suitable candidate for the presidency. Each attendee expressed their views on Christian higher education, and although Zeng Yuenong had no affiliation with any church and Zeng Baosun did not recommend him, and despite Zeng Yuenong being an unbaptized Christian, his policy proposals were praised by Mrs. Moore. He was then invited to serve as the founding president of Tunghai University.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that Zeng Baosun mentioned again that Zeng Yuenong was unbaptized but still considered him a Christian. Some scholars, based on Zeng Baosun's statement that Zeng Yuenong was an "unbaptized Christian," have concluded that he was not a Christian,⁴¹ which is a misunderstanding. This is because there are people around the world who, although have not been baptized and have no church affiliation, are recognized as Christians due to their belief in and practice of the core doctrines of Christianity, and they also consider themselves as such. Furthermore, considering Nie Qijie's criticism that Zeng Yuenong and others were "attached to Western religion and taught it to their students," it is evident that his Christian identity was acknowledged not only by his close Christian friend Zeng Baosun but also by those who were against Christianity. The discussion on cultural Christians in the Chinese academic community in recent years may help us identify Zeng Yuenong's Christian identity.⁴² In addition, Zeng Yuenong is listed in the "Chinese Christian Directory" compiled by Bates,⁴³ which is credible as the result of multiple verifications. According to Lin Jingyuan's (林景渊) account, in his later years, Zeng Yuenong frequently attended church testimonial activities in Taiwan,⁴⁴ further demonstrating his sincere faith.

Nie Qijie mentioned another individual "attached to Western religion," Zeng Zhaoquan (1894–1976), styled Weimou (威谋), who was the eldest son of Zeng Guangzhong. He was among the first group of students sent to the United States with indemnity funds from the Boxer Protocol. After graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he served as the chief engineer of the Western Hills New Plant of the Beijing Electric Light Company and later became a professor and head of the Electrical Engineering Department at Hunan University after the founding of the People's Republic of China.⁴⁵ Information on his religious life and working as a Christian is currently very limited. Here he is identified as a Christian based on Nie Qijie's records.

Many descendants of Zeng Guofan have followed the tradition of farming and reading, with a strong emphasis on education, and a significant number have studied abroad. The subsequent "Xian" (宪) generation has

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴¹ 成晓军 Cheng Xiaojun, 《曾国藩家族》[M], *Zeng Guofan jiazhu* [M], [The Zeng Family] [M], (重庆 Chongqing: 重庆出版社 Chongqing chubanshe [Chongqing Publishing House], 2006), 210.

⁴² 汉语基督教文化研究所 Hanyu jidujiao wenhua yanjiusuo [Chinese Christian Culture Research Institute], 文化基督徒：现象与争论[C] *Wenhua jidutu: xianxiang yu zhenglun* [Cultural Christians: Phenomena and Controversies] [C], (香港 Hong Kong: 汉语基督教文化研究所 Hanyu jidujiao wenhua yanjiusuo [Chinese Christian Culture Research Institute], 1997).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Church Universities and Social Transformation] [M], 466.

⁴⁴ 林景渊 Lin Jingyuan, 《曾约农先生言论集》[C] *Zeng yuenong xiansheng yanlunji* [Collected Speeches of Mr. Zeng Yuenong] [C], (台北 Taipei: 台湾商务印书馆 Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan [Taiwan Commercial Press], 1970), 173.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, The Zeng Family, 238.

also produced many talented individuals. Whether there are more Christians among them will be a subject of my continued attention in the future. The discussion in this paper is limited to the "Zhao" generation, as they are closer in time to Zeng Guofan and have a more direct and profound understanding of the family's academic tradition. Therefore, they may offer more insights to contemporary researchers studying the process of conversion from Confucianism to Christianity among some Chinese Christians, as well as the characteristics and qualities of their religious life.

Conclusion

From the practice of vegetarianism by Zeng Guofan's wife, Lady Ouyang, to Zeng Guofan's own engagement with Buddhist monk in his later years, it is evident that even within a family that has upheld Confucianism for thousands of years, the lack of sufficient and profound attention to ultimate questions within the Confucianism itself necessitates a certain degree of openness to other religions outside of orthodox Confucianism. The ultimate religious affiliation chosen by the family members is often closely related to social changes and personal life experiences. We observe that Zeng Baosun, one of the first Christians in the Zeng family, when reflecting on her and her uncle Zeng Jirong's journey of conversion, consciously regarded the Xinhai Revolution as an important context for their transition from Confucian disciples to Christians. Indeed, the establishment of the Republic, the spread of republican ideas, and the principle of freedom of belief enshrined in the provisional constitution all led to the loss of Confucianism's status as the official national religion and the decline of the Zeng family's once prominent political and economic standing. We cannot simplistically conclude, with a vulgar compensatory perspective, that Zeng Baosun, Zeng Jirong and others converted to Christianity to seek protection and benefits like the "rice Christians" of the time. However, the Xinhai Revolution, as a monumental change, indeed made Zeng Baosun painfully aware of the significant impact on her family's situation and also made Zeng Jirong feel a sense of depression (or loss) amidst the transition from old to new. It further led the second batch of Christians, such as Zeng Jifen, deeply feel that "the world is becoming more chaotic." All of these factors created a sense of life crisis that many experience during their journey of conversion. A crisis is also an opportunity. When the door of faith for Christians opened to Zeng Baosun, the attitude of her fathers' generation, especially Zeng Guangjun's attitude, which is crucial in a traditional family dominated by patriarchy, provided a convenient gateway for such an opportunity. According to Zeng Baosun's recollections, Zeng Guangjun was extremely progressive, and his three major supports for her were something she was grateful for throughout her life: not allowing foot binding, not arranging a marriage for her in her childhood, and permitting her to embrace Christianity and study abroad.⁴⁶ As the eldest brother, Zeng Guangjun's open-mindedness likely played a facilitating role in his brother Zeng Jirong's conversion to Christianity. It should be noted that Zeng Guangjun "showed extraordinary talent from a young age and was known as a child prodigy."⁴⁷ He was likely a Buddhist in terms of his beliefs. His cousin Nie Qijie addressed him

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Memoirs of Zeng Baosun [M], 178, 13.

⁴⁷ 刘声木 Liu Shengmu, 苕楚斋随笔续笔三笔四笔五笔 *Changchuzhai suibi xubi sanbi sibi wubi* [M], (北京 Beijing: 中华书局 Zhonghua shuju

as Huantian(环天) Lay Buddhist (Zeng Guangjun wrote Poetry Collection of Huantian Studio), and they discussed the methods of Buddhist learning and cultivation.⁴⁸ However, he believed that Christianity "takes 'justification by faith' as its religious tenet, and it also seems to have its wonderful functions and advantages," which led to fierce criticism from Nie Qijie,⁴⁹ who had apostatized. It can be seen from this that Zeng Guangjun's open-minded attitude was by no means the kind of "anything goes" attitude of traditional Confucianism, but a healthy attitude with principles. The attitude of Zeng Guangjun, who was the head of a Confucian family, was an important factor in enabling Zeng Baosun did not stop at admiring the Tao (慕道). The active actions of missionaries and Christians such as Ms. Barnes and Ms. Stuart as well as their practice and dedication to the Christian spirit of universal love, although they might have been accidental events in Zeng Baosun's life, were the crucial impetus for her to take the final step in her conversion journey. Zeng Jirong, an elder influenced by Zeng Baosun, was enthusiastic about missionary work,⁵⁰ which further influenced Zeng Jifen. Thus, in an orthodox Confucian family, there emerged a bottom-up (from younger generations to elders) spreading of Christianity within the family. Obviously, this kind of effect definitely did not conform to Zeng Guofan's original vision for the spiritual tradition of his family.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Zeng Guofan's dream of self-strengthening through Westernization was infused into the blood of his descendants. We observe that many of Zeng Guofan's descendants who studied abroad focused on natural sciences. This was because they mostly hold the grand ambition of saving the country through science, which was essentially no different from their ancestor Zeng Guofan's dream of learning from the West to enrich and strengthen the nation. The difference was that the descendants of the Zeng family did not oppose Western learning and Western religion; on the contrary, they believed that Western religion could revitalize China's declining ethos (Zeng Baosun) or save the Chinese people from moral confusion (Zeng Jifen). In other words, in the minds of these converted Christians among the Zeng family, the combination of Western knowledge, science and religion could save China. This salvation plan's effectiveness may be questionable today, but it at least indicates that the main motive for the Zeng family's conversion to Christianity was probably not individual redemption but the redemption of the nation. Although some of them listed saving others and themselves as the goal of their conversion to Christianity, the traditional religious purpose of Christians, which is to be saved from the fires of hell or eternal punishment, was apparently not the fundamental motive for their conversion. Their aim was to integrate Western knowledge, science and religion to serve their own nation. Interestingly, when Zeng Guofan's grandson and apostate, Nie Qijie, explored the family's method of preserving wealth, by

[Zhonghua Book Company], 1998), 595.

48 *Ibid.*, Supplementary Compilation of Buddhist Periodical Literatures in the Republic of China, Vol. 83, p. 378.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

50 Zeng Baosun explicitly stated that her influence led Zeng Jirong to delve into religious issues.

Ibid., Memoirs of Zeng Baosun, p. 181.

51 In April 1870, prior to his departure for Tianjin to deal with the church incident, Zeng Guofan was concerned that the situation might escalate into a major turmoil, potentially endangering his life. Consequently, he penned "A Letter to My Two Sons before Proceeding to Tianjin." In this letter, he exhorted his sons to be free from envy and avarice, to study assiduously, to self-motivate, and to uphold the values of filial piety and fraternal affection. All these teachings were firmly rooted in the core tenets of traditional Confucianism.

Ibid., The Complete Works of Zeng Wenzheng, Vol. 1, p. 38.

comparing several prominent families that rose during the Tongzhi and Guangxu reigns, he concluded that "the family with the least money had the most descendants who were capable of studying and serving society through academia. Among the great-grandchildren of Zeng Wenzheng, six or seven had graduated from universities at home and abroad, and three had become university professors."⁵² Nie Qijie's perspective on the issue was the method of preserving family wealth in a turbulent society. His views caused a sensation in Shanghai at the time, and were largely accurate. However, the "academia" in "academia serving the society", which the descendants of Zeng Guofan promoted, was an integration of Western learning and Western religion. This was perhaps a fact that the apostate Nie Qijie was unwilling to highlight.

Another point worth noting is that when summarizing his gains from his trip to Changsha in the summer of 1914, missionary Timothy Richard wrote with no small amount of pride: "The most extraordinary experience of my visit to Changsha this time was that the welcome speeches for my arrival were given by two grandsons of the most glorious Chinese person in nearly two hundred years. It was they who pointed out that what I have done in China is no different from what the apostles of Jesus Christ - their source of strength - have done. How wonderful and gratifying this change in Hunan is!"⁵³ According to the context, the most glorious Chinese person in the past two hundred years refers to Zeng Guofan, and the "two grandsons" refer to Zeng Jirong and Nie Qijie. Due to the fact that Westerners do not differentiate between maternal and paternal relatives in terms of kinship (for example, "uncle" can refer to both an uncle and a maternal uncle), Timothy Richard collectively referred to Zeng Jirong and Nie Qijie as Zeng Guofan's grandsons. Timothy Richard, who was shy of claiming to be an apostle, used the words of Zeng Guofan's grandsons here to praise his actions as apostolic. What did the apostles do? Nothing more than saving people's souls and guiding them to repent and believe in Christ. The once admonishing Zeng Guofan, who advised his children to "study diligently, encourage each other, and pursue filial piety and brotherly respect," might never have imagined that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren would follow in the footsteps of Christ's apostles. However, the world changes, and the family's Confucian tradition indeed faced a crisis of succession in the face of the challenging spread of Christianity. Interestingly, the apostate Nie Qijie did not ultimately return to orthodox Confucianism but to Buddhism, or at least a blend of Confucianism and Buddhism. Thus, studying the religious choices of Zeng Guofan's descendants can at least help us reflect rationally on the strengths and weaknesses of Confucianism.

52 聂云台 Nie Yuntai, 《保富法》 *Baofu fa* [The Method of Preserving Wealth] [M] (北京 Beijing: 中国城市出版社 Zhongguo chengshi chubanshe [China Urban Publishing House], 2007), 22.

53 *Ibid.*, Forty-five Years in China: Reminiscences [M], 349-350.

中文题目：曾国藩家族的基督徒

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提要：湖南在清朝晚期和民国初期因反基督教情绪而闻名。曾国藩，作为湘乡的名将，以镇压太平天国起义而声名显赫，而太平天国以基督教旗帜为号引发争议。然而，他处理天津事件的方式却使他的声誉受损。曾国藩对基督教的反感并未完全传承至他的家族中，这个家族在当时是最具影响力的儒家家族之一。辛亥革命后，曾国藩的几个后代皈依基督教，将其视为自我救赎和国家振兴的途径。他们希望通过拥抱和传播西方学问和基督教，实现曾国藩的国家复兴梦想。这项关于他们宗教选择的研究有助于澄清他们心中儒学的优缺点。

关键词：曾国藩家族，儒学到基督教的转变，自我救赎与国家振兴，儒学的优缺点