



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

# ROAD TO EMMAUS

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# ORTHODOXY IN GREATER CHINA

## Laying the Foundation for an International Orthodox Presence

Archpriest Dionisy Pozdnyaev of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) has had a life-long interest in China and Chinese Orthodoxy. In 2003, he moved to Hong Kong to reestablish the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, Hong Kong's original Orthodox Christian parish, and to search for avenues of communication with mainland China. Thirteen years after his initial interview with *Road to Emmaus Journal*, Fr. Dionisy returns to update us on the history of Orthodoxy in China, the challenges faced by native Chinese Orthodox, and his hopes for the future of Greater China.

RTE: Father Dionisy, in 2005, after living in Hong Kong for two years, you said, “I can’t speak about real missionary work yet, as we are only preparing for missionary work. First we have to lay the groundwork.” A dozen years on, do you feel that foundation has been laid?

FR. DIONISY: Yes, and it has been the work of an entire team of people. We give talks, translate and publish Orthodox books in Chinese, as well as work on the preparation of seminary materials and attend to the formation of priests. A number of our parishioners and catechumens in Hong Kong are Chinese, and we are connected to mainland China through our visits there and through people visiting us. We also maintain personal contact through the internet, which is now quite a good and reliable resource in China. With

*Opposite: Blessing of the South China Sea. Archpriest Dionysy Pozdnayev and Fr. Anatoly Kung.*

Orthodox materials in Chinese now available on the internet, we have more Chinese Orthodox Christians, as well as Chinese speakers interested in exploring Orthodoxy.

RTE: You have been the priest in charge of the Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church parish in Hong Kong since 2003. Have you found a permanent home for the mission?

FR. DIONISY: After spending a number of years in two different rented apartments, we finally moved to our permanent location, a suite of rooms on the twelfth floor of a large office building. Hong Kong is a small island, of course, so very few churches or businesses have their own separate building. The donation that enabled us to buy this space was itself a miracle because the cost of property in Hong Kong is astronomically high; higher than New York or Tokyo, and four times higher than Moscow. It is impossible for a small parish to buy anything, so we used the donation as a down payment. Now we have a twenty-year mortgage.

Our location in the city center is essential for people to be able to reach the church easily from any part of Hong Kong. Because we are near the Macau Ferry Terminal, it is also a good location for Macau residents. Tourists and visitors can find it easily, and it has quick access from the airport.

The church is a continuation of the Russian Hong Kong parish established in 1934 and dedicated to the same saints. This was the only Orthodox Church in Hong Kong, and it was closed after the death of Fr. Dmitry Uspensky in 1970, because there were fewer Orthodox Christians and they were no longer able to financially support the parish. Although Moscow was willing to send another priest, in the 1970s, Hong Kong was a British colony with quite strict immigration rules, which included only allowing European citizens to serve as foreign clergy.

I was born in 1970, the year Fr. Dmitry died. He was buried, alongside his wife and daughter, in the section of the Anglican cemetery in Hong Kong set aside for Orthodox Christians, and we continue to serve panikhidas over their graves. Although I didn't know him, I was able to exchange letters with his daughter in Germany. After Fr. Dmitry's death, visiting priests occasionally served in Hong Kong, but the parish finally closed in 1972. We reestablished it after a thirty-year break.

RTE: Is there anything left of the original church building and land, or was it sold off by the Soviet government?

FR. DIONISY: No, land has always been scarce here, so they rented, but we do have artifacts from the earlier parish. Icons from the original church were sent to a Russian parish in Melbourne also named after the Apostles Peter and Paul. My classmate is now a priest at this parish, so after he visited us in Hong Kong, his parish decided to return two of the icons.

Now we also have a Chinese priest serving in our parish – Father Anatoly Kung, the first Chinese priest to be ordained in the fifty-six years after the Cultural Revolution. He is forty-six years old, a citizen of Hong Kong with a Ph.D. in Economics who speaks Russian, English, and Chinese, and previously worked in Moscow for twelve years as a businessman. After he returned to Hong Kong, he visited us, became interested in Orthodoxy, and I baptized him. He later began studies at the seminary in Khabarovsk and was ordained there in 2014.

RTE: That is wonderful.

FR. DIONISY: Yes, we were very glad. We've also had visiting priests from ROCOR celebrate in our church, and one of these, Fr. Antony Serafimovich, serves at our parish because his wife works in Hong Kong. He was born in Moscow, but ordained in France, and although still under thirty, he has been a priest for five years.

## A Short History of Orthodoxy in China

RTE: As a foundation for the rest of the interview, I'd like to pause here to do a quick recap for our readers of the history of Orthodoxy in China.

Although there were East Assyrian and Nestorian Christians in China in the first millennium, and for a short period under the Mongols, the origins of Orthodox Christianity in China can be traced back to 1685 when a Russian fort at Albazin on the Amur River was stormed by Qing troops. The captured Cossack soldiers were pardoned and, according to oral tradition, as many as fifty of the younger soldiers chose to stay and enter the employ of the Kangxi emperor in Beijing as part of his personal bodyguard. They were given living quarters and married Chinese women while retaining their Orthodox faith. One of the captives was an Orthodox priest, Fr. Maxim Leontiev, who

remained to minister to those left in China, and the Orthodox regiment was given an empty Buddhist temple to use as a church by the emperor.

In 1715, Tsar Peter the Great established the Chinese Russian Mission, eventually building a church on the grounds of the Russian embassy, and for the next two and a half centuries the mission ministered to the spiritual needs of Russians in China, their descendants, and to Chinese who converted to Orthodoxy. The mission translated a number of Orthodox texts and services into Chinese.

During the Boxer Rebellion of 1898-1900, 222 native Chinese Orthodox Christians, including their priest Fr. Mitrophan (Cháng Yángjí) and his family, were martyred in Beijing. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, Russian émigrés swelled the Orthodox population in China, and by 1949 there were five bishops in the country with 100,000 faithful, 60 parishes, 200 priests, two monasteries and a seminary in Manchuria, as well as 150 parishes and 200,000 faithful with schools and orphanages throughout the rest of China, and an Orthodox university in Harbin. These numbers included about 10,000 native Chinese Orthodox Christians, some of whom were ordained deacons, priests, and bishops.<sup>1</sup>

Most Russians left the country after the 1945-1949 Chinese Communist Revolution, and in 1956, under pressure from the new atheist government, which proscribed any ties between its people and foreign governments or churches, the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) established the Autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church, in the hope that such ecclesiastical independence would allow Chinese Orthodox Christians to maintain their church life under the mounting isolation of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. Unfortunately, the two native Chinese bishops, in Shanghai and Peking, lived only a few more years. Without hierarchs to ordain priests and deacons, there were no replacements as Chinese clergy began to die off or were compelled by the Chinese authorities to stop serving.

In 1996, with no previous history in China except for a newly-founded mission in Taiwan with a single Greek hieromonk, the Ecumenical Patriarchate unexpectedly established a metropolitanate in Hong Kong, and as yet having done no missionary work there, claimed jurisdiction over all of China as well as India, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia.

1 Statistics courtesy of Fr. Ronald G. Roberson C.S.P., "The Orthodox Church in China," Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

*Opposite: Fr. Anatoly Kung, the first native Chinese Orthodox priest ordained since the Cultural Revolution.*







In 1997, the synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), itself newly emerging from the catastrophic Soviet era, reaffirmed its ecclesiastical support and oversight of the Autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church pending the election of a native Chinese primate. This position, however, proved to be a stalemate because, although the Chinese government recognized the rights of the Chinese Russian Orthodox minority, and even rebuilt some of their ruined churches, it still did not allow foreign clergy or native Chinese clergy with ties to foreign churches (including ordination) to serve on the soil of the People's Republic of China, until 2014.<sup>2</sup>

In 2003, the Orthodox parish of Sts. Peter and Paul in Hong Kong was re-established as a base to support the church in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, and to commence translation and publishing activities under Archpriest Dionisy Pozdnyayev.

### New Orthodox Communities in Greater China

RTE: Has the population of Orthodox Chinese on the mainland grown since the last interview? You said then that there were about 10,000 people on the northern borders who call themselves Orthodox because of their ancestry from the Russian Albazinians, although the younger generations may not be baptized because of the lack of churches and priests. Also, you mentioned that in Beijing there were perhaps 250 Orthodox, and fewer in Shanghai.

FR. DIONISY: Numerically it is about the same. We are still in a period of preparation.

RTE: Russia's President Vladimir Putin has visited China a dozen times since 2000, and in our last interview, you hoped that diplomatic relations might also increase the Church's opportunity to serve Chinese Orthodox Christian minorities who were left without priests after the Cultural Revolution. Was there progress as a result of those visits?

FR. DIONISY: Official dialog is an important part of diplomatic work, but it's only a part. Since the president's visits, and Patriarch Kirill's in 2013, we

<sup>2</sup> The Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches were faced with the same constraints, although the Roman Catholic situation with universal allegiance to the pope in Rome was even more untenable. A separatist Chinese Roman Catholic Church was established, and traditional Catholics who wanted to stay with Rome were forced into hiding. Protestant Churches that could more easily adapt to local leadership fared better

have established a channel for the exchange of opinions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State Administration of Religious Affairs of China. This is a good mechanism and now we have regular communication.

RTE: You also mentioned Orthodox communities that do reader's services, such as in Shenzhen, the free-trade city on the mainland across from Hong Kong, and Canton City (Guangzhou), a little north of Macau. Are there others?

FR. DIONISY: Yes, and now there is a priest from Russia who studies Chinese in Shenzhen. He serves in both Shenzhen and Guangzhou, so each Saturday and Sunday there are services in one of these cities. These are unofficial Orthodox communities without formal government registration and so are intended mostly for foreigners living in those cities, but some Chinese do come. Usually they find us on their own, because we are not allowed to actively proselytize.

We have also opened a community on Taiwan, where a Russian parish was established by St. Nicholas of Japan in 1901. This parish in Taiwan City has a Russian priest who lives in Taipei and is a Canadian citizen. He studied in China, speaks very good Chinese, and is young, active and well-liked. Because Taiwan is not part of the People's Republic of China, he can do active missionary work. There is also a Greek mission in Taiwan.

RTE: And how about mainland China?

FR. DIONISY: There is an unofficial international community in Dalian City in the northeast of China, which has a Russian deacon and a community made up of Americans, Russians, and Chinese who celebrate weekly reader's services. When priests come through, they serve there, although we cannot publicize this to the local Chinese or it could also be construed as proselytizing. We've had a number of converts, even one American Mormon.

RTE: Aren't there also Albazinian Orthodox communities in the north?

FR. DIONISY: There is a group of Albazinians living in Beijing, but they do not hold any religious services.

RTE: Do you still serve at the chapel of the Russian embassy in Beijing?

FR. DIONISY: This is another interesting story. The pre-revolutionary Dormition Church on the grounds of the Russian Embassy was destroyed during

the Soviet period, but has recently been rebuilt. There is a permanent priest in Beijing, Fr. Sergei Voronin, who is allowed to celebrate only on the territory of the Russian Embassy. Unfortunately, the embassy church is open for expatriates only. Because of China's restrictions, the Chinese are not allowed to attend except on Pascha and Christmas, when a small group of ten Albanian Chinese who claim Russian ancestry are allowed to visit.

So, there is now a group of Orthodox Chinese living in Beijing without any church, as well as expatriates of other nationalities, who, for political reasons, cannot access the embassy territory, such as Ukrainians and Americans. They have begun to talk about opening an international Orthodox community outside of the embassy.

## Ordinations and Opportunities

RTE: And Harbin? There were also two churches there before the Russian Revolution – Saint Sophia's Cathedral and the Protection of the Mother of God.

FR. DIONISY: The parish in Harbin was officially reopened in Harbin in 1984, but the priest, Fr. Gregory Chiu, died in 2000. There were no more liturgical services, only Sunday meetings, until three years ago. In 2014, Fr. Alexander Yushi, the present Chinese priest, was ordained in St. Petersburg with Chinese government approval after studying at the St. Alexander Nevsky Seminary. He serves at the Church of the Protection of the Mother of God.

RTE: This is an astounding breakthrough! How did the Chinese authorities approve this in light of the policy that native clergy cannot have ties with foreign churches?

FR. DIONISY: This was the result of the visit of Patriarch Kirill to China in 2013, an invitation initiated by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. They discussed the development of the Orthodox Church and the Chinese government decided to officially send students to Russia and to allow the ordination of at least one of them as a priest in Harbin. This is good, but Fr. Alexander is quite limited in his activity. He cannot do missionary work, and so he cannot easily communicate with other Orthodox communities in China.

RTE: Since they allow Fr. Alexander to serve in China and other native priests may follow, do you think that the government may eventually permit one or

two of them to be consecrated as bishops, so that the Autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church can be revived?

FR. DIONISY: This is possible according to the law, but the question is not the attitude of the government or authorities, the question is the status of the Orthodox Church. There are simply not enough priests and communities to fulfill the required conditions to be recognized as a national church. It's not a question of law or of the authorities, it's the question of the growth of the Orthodox Church in China, which is still weak and can exist only with support from abroad. In order to reinstate the Autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church, it must be self-supporting and have a certain number of communities. So, our main task now, in order to build this foundation of Orthodox communities, is the translation of useful Orthodox materials and the formation of priests.

### The Surety-of-Sinners Church in Shanghai

RTE: And how about Shanghai? Is the church dedicated to the Mother of God "Surety of Sinners," built by St. John Maximovitch still being used as a restaurant?

FR. DIONISY: No, it is no longer a restaurant, and now it is only used occasionally as an exhibition hall.

RTE: Is it possible that the government might return it to be used as a church?

FR. DIONISY: Yes, if the local Chinese Orthodox can unite, and a real community comes into existence. Regular services are held on the premises of the St. Nicholas Church on the territory of the Russian Consulate in Shanghai, but as in the embassy in Beijing, this mostly serves expatriates.

RTE: So, if enough people in Harbin or Shanghai convert, they could petition the government to reopen a church in their city?

FR. DIONISY: Yes, if they are local residents, serious about taking responsibility, and can show proof that they are able to provide financial support, they can request that the church be reopened. But it would not be a good

*Opposite: Fr. Dimitry Zhang, formerly the only Chinese deacon, is now a priest serving in Saratov, Russia.*





idea for them to try to use foreign support. They should only say, “We are Orthodox Christians, there was an Orthodox church here previously, and we want to revive it. We are residents and we are ready to take financial responsibility.” Of course, they will have to work hard for this. The authorities won’t be terribly happy with such a request, but constitutionally the Chinese have such a right, and legally they have the possibility to do so.

RTE: If they were able to reopen the church, how would they go about obtaining a priest? Would they request that someone from the parish be sent to seminary?

FR. DIONISY: They might start by saying something like, “We have this Chinese priest, Fr. Alexander Yushi in Harbin, and we are prepared to invite him from time to time to visit us.” Sending someone to seminary would come later.

## Preparing Seminarians

RTE: Can you tell us what happened with the unofficial Chinese seminarians who studied at the seminaries in Moscow a decade ago?

FR. DIONISY: One became a deacon, and is serving in Russia. A second now lives in Inner Mongolia with his family, but he is not yet ordained. Subdeacon Papiy, who was made a subdeacon many years ago, still serves in Shanghai.

RTE: If I remember, he was one of the last Chinese baptized before China became Communist.

FR. DIONISY: Yes, and there are a few others left, mostly in Beijing.

RTE: What are you doing now to prepare the seminarians?

FR. DIONISY: The seminarians need to be motivated and prepared to study in Russia. In terms of their formation here, we provide seminary materials in Chinese and we have regular talks with them about theology, spiritual practice, and parish life. We also encourage them to celebrate laymen’s services when there are no priests. Once they are prepared, the seminaries also have to be ready to teach them. Some have already had experience with Asian stu-

*Opposite: Subdeacon Papiy Fu, Shanghai.*

dents, and we have had good results in St. Petersburg, Saratov and Belgorod. In Moscow it didn't work out as well.

RTE: Then you feel strongly that they should attend an established seminary, as well as studying the translated seminary texts here in Chinese?

FR. DIONISY: I think they need to spend time in a real Orthodox environment to get some good experience, but it does not necessarily have to be in Russia. The Catholics and Protestants have one strong point, which is that they are not associated with any one country. Because the entire Orthodox history of China is bound up with Russia, the Chinese perception of the Church reflects the reality of Russian-Chinese relations, which can be good or not so good. We cannot predict, but, of course, we hope it will be good.

I believe that the right direction is to move toward the internationalization of Orthodoxy in China. While the Chinese have inherited the Russian liturgical tradition, the autonomous church should be quite independent and open to any people, such as Europeans.

RTE: Do you have a plan to open a residential seminary in mainland China?

FR. DIONISY: Not necessarily. This is too big of a project for us and there is no demand for it yet. It is better to prepare them one-on-one through personal contact and the internet, and then to send them abroad.

RTE: Do you have seminarians studying abroad now?

FR. DIONISY: No, but we are preparing about twelve people to go to seminary. We usually try to get government permission for them to be sent abroad, but we are also open to unofficial studies – that is, students who choose to study abroad without official government permission and support. We have a Chinese deacon who unofficially went to seminary abroad and has become a deacon, but in such cases, the future is not clear about where he can serve. Perhaps not on mainland China, but, of course China is not only the People's Republic of China, it is also Greater China, which includes the mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora in America, Australia, Western Europe, and Russia.

RTE: So, Chinese seminarians can be ordained without political repercussions even if they study abroad unofficially?



FR. DIONISY: The government doesn't have the authority to interfere in an ordination abroad, but they may not grant them permission to celebrate in the People's Republic of China. However, the need for Chinese clergy is not limited to mainland China. We should use the Chinese diaspora and Greater China as a bridge between mainland China and ourselves.

RTE: How did the Chinese Ministry of Religion reconcile the foreign ordination of Fr. Alexander Yushi with their decision to allow him to serve in Harbin?

FR. DIONISY: Official permission was granted to study, and the ordination was viewed as part of his study process. This has certainly set a precedent.

### An Honest Iconography

RTE: Some years ago, there was a young Chinese woman student studying iconography at Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra in Moscow. What was the result of her studies, and do you think that in time a Chinese style of iconography may develop?

FR. DIONISY: That student graduated from the St. Sergius Academy icon painting school, but she doesn't paint now, she works at a civil job. Also, I have my own view on the question of Chinese iconography. We know that some things can be localized such as clothing, written names and descriptions, and color schemes, but we shouldn't localize the faces of saints, because this is counter to historical truth. We don't need to introduce Christ as Chinese. Art is universally accessible and it is not strange for anyone in China to see foreign faces and foreign art. They do not need to speculate or to introduce anything artificial. It's actually the foreigners who are eager to see more localized Chinese styles and customs, but most Chinese would rather be international. They are going in opposite directions.

The Chinese have also started to travel more. They are going to Europe, Russia, and also to America, so sometimes they receive their first impressions of Orthodoxy from visiting a church in another country. In fact, we have a Chinese novice in the Republic of Georgia. He was a parish member in Guangzhou who wanted to become a monk, and finally we decided to send him to Georgia, where he lives in a small monastery with an elder. It is very healthy.

## The Curious Case of Orthodoxy in North Korea

RTE: Speaking of seminarians, can you tell us what has happened in North Korea with the Orthodox Church of the Life-Giving Trinity that President Kim Jong-il built after being favorably impressed by a similar Orthodox church in Khabarovsk, Russia? He also sent several young Koreans to the St. Sergius Lavra Seminary to become Orthodox, and at least one was ordained a deacon.

FR. DIONISY: Yes, it is an interesting situation. These Korean students were all very willing to become Orthodox simply because they had been told to. They were baptized, studied, and passed their exams, and the Korean deacon, Fr. Ioann, has become a priest at the church in Pyongyang. They have two priests now, and there are also new North Korean students at the seminary in Khabarovsk. They will perhaps be ordained later, but it is quite an artificial project and not indicative of the growth of Orthodoxy in North Korea.

RTE: This reminds me of northern Europe, Russia, and even Scandinavia, where medieval first-generation conversions weren't usually a matter of personal belief, but out of loyalty to a chieftain or ruler who decided that it was in his people's interest to convert. It seems to be a different kind of free choice, not the result of belief or understanding, but conversion out of loyalty.

FR. DIONISY: Yes, this is a pre-Christian attitude to faith. It is Christianity itself that brings the idea that faith can be chosen by a person. This situation in North Korea is complicated by the fact that, in the international secular sphere, people are expected to take personal responsibility for their decisions. Korea is more traditional in this aspect.

## International Communities in Hong Kong

RTE: When you first arrived in Hong Kong in 2003 you served for a year at the newly-established Greek Orthodox Church of St. Luke with Metropolitan Nikitas of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. You felt then that it was important to maintain warm relations with other jurisdictions. Were you able to do this?

*Opposite: Archpriest Dionisy Pozdnyaev and parishioners. Vigil at St. Peter and Paul Church, Hong Kong.*





FR. DIONISY: We celebrated with Metropolitan Nikitas when we first arrived in Hong Kong and he was very kind. The following year we reestablished our historic Russian Orthodox parish in Hong Kong and he continued to meet with us from time to time. We have maintained cordial relations and when I visited him in San Francisco last year we had a good talk, but once he was replaced in Hong Kong, everything changed.

The new metropolitan is from Thessalonica, and has much less experience than Metropolitan Nikitas of co-existing with different jurisdictions. He is not at ease with parishes who are independent of his authority, and finally he just ignored us. When Russians come to his parish to ask if there is a Russian parish in Hong Kong, he will sometimes answer, "There is no other parish than ours". We would like the situation to be different, but this is their present policy. Both communities are international: St. Luke's uses Greek, English, and a little Chinese, while we use English, Slavonic, and Chinese in equal proportions.

RTE: Pretending you don't exist seems extreme.

FR. DIONISY: Yes, and if you simply search the internet for an Orthodox Church in Hong Kong you will find both churches. In fact, many Greeks also come to us asking if there is a Greek church. They have also ordained a Chinese priest in Hong Kong. He is American-born and raised, and because he does business in China, he celebrates every week or two at the Greek parish.

RTE: Has the Patriarchate of Constantinople done any missionary work in China?

FR. DIONISY: I cannot say there is active missionary work among the Chinese, although the churches in Hong Kong and Taiwan are free to do such things. Archimandrite Jonah (Mourtos) in Taipei also translates and tries to publish, but without serious resources he finds it very difficult to keep going. There were also two Chinese students who went to Greece unofficially and studied theology there for some years, but they were not ordained and both are now back in Shanghai working in civil companies.

Recently, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople had a plan to officially visit mainland China, but permission was not granted by the Chinese authorities because, as they told him, there were no Greek Orthodox believers for him to visit, and thus, no reason to come.

*Opposite: Fr. Anatoly Kung and Fr. Antony Serafimovich.*

RTE: How about priests from other jurisdictions who serve occasionally in China? I know that one or two priests under the Serbian patriarchate have done so, as well as a few from ROCOR.

FR. DIONISY: Yes, but this is not systematic missionary work by these jurisdictions, just isolated instances of priests who happened to visit China. My hope is that all Orthodox will recognize the previously established Autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church and work together towards full recognition by the Chinese government. Then we can achieve a real Orthodoxy within the Chinese culture.

RTE: In your 2005 interview, you said that it was very important to change the attitude of the Chinese authorities so that they would not view Orthodoxy as only Russian, but open to all nationalities. Has this understanding progressed?

FR. DIONISY: After the visit of Patriarch Kirill, the Chinese authorities became more attentive to Orthodox Christians in China. But, as governments do, they continue to focus on the question of Russian-Chinese relations, so we still have this problem. As I said, I would be glad if our willingness to see Orthodoxy internationalized in China was shared by the other Orthodox Churches.

## Translation and Publications

RTE: I remember from our last interview that all of the work done by 19th- and early 20th-century Russian-Chinese translators on liturgical services and catechetical materials had to be set aside because the Chinese language has changed so rapidly over the last century that those translations are no longer understandable by most Chinese speakers. This meant that you had to start all over again with a team of Chinese and Russian translators. How has this gone?

FR. DIONISY: The Sts. Peter and Paul Brotherhood has sponsored the translation of over one hundred titles of catechetical books. We also work with Mitrophan Chin of the Orthodox Fellowship of All Saints of China on the lives of Chinese saints. A few years ago, we opened our own publishing house, The Chinese Orthodox Press, which is the first Orthodox publishing house in China. We translate books and print them on demand, as well as

having electronic versions for sale on our website: [www.orthodoxbookshop.asia](http://www.orthodoxbookshop.asia). This is partly a bookstore and partly a library, and many of these books, especially liturgical texts and services, are available for free as a PDF download to any Chinese speaker in the world. For the paper copies, we charge for printing and mailing.

RTE: Has print-on-demand worked out well in China?

FR. DIONISY: Yes. It is the main way that people order. We also have clients in America, Russia, and Europe. This is quite efficient because we don't have space to store our books, nor the funds to print thousands of copies. Digital print-on-demand copies are more expensive, but you don't spend as much on storage and handling. Our one hundred titles are mostly catechetical materials, saints' lives, and so on, but for now we are focusing on liturgical books and services, which are greatly needed.

The services must be translated, edited, and laid out, and this process is quite complicated. Translation is particularly difficult in that there is still no standard liturgical Chinese language to be used in all translations. The translators are having to create new Chinese characters to precisely communicate Orthodox liturgical and theological terms.

RTE: Who is doing the translations?

FR. DIONISY: Professional Chinese translators, but we also have Russian editors who speak Chinese to assist from the Russian side. Our policy is that the translation should be done by professional Chinese scholars and translators, because not all Chinese know their language well. They have to know Orthodox terms and have a deep knowledge of their own language. We also have a few Russian students studying Chinese in Harbin.

RTE: Can you explain to our readers who some of your co-workers are? Your website mentions your work with the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, and also the Orthodox Fellowship of All Saints of China.

FR. DIONISY: With ISCS, we develop academically-oriented projects that are interesting for Chinese scholars who study Orthodox theology. Volumes of writings of the Church Fathers and contemporary theologians have been published in Chinese, and we also develop programs of lectures for Chinese universities. With the Orthodox Fellowship of All Saints of China, we work on saints' lives and liturgical translations.

## Coming to Orthodoxy in China

RTE: I once asked you if the motive for belief was different in China than elsewhere, and you replied, “No, the difference isn’t great because people are all looking for the same thing, the truth. The difference is only language and perhaps the means of expression.” How then do the Chinese relate to an Orthodoxy from other cultural expressions?

FR. DIONISY: I think that the Chinese are quite open to the outer world, as their own culture has been seriously destroyed, and they are also looking outside of China for answers to the essential questions of being. The Chinese cultural mind is introverted. They like to focus on inner questions, which is also essential for Orthodox spiritual practice, so this is very compatible with the Chinese mind. From the other side, because Chinese people are introverts, they pay a lot of attention to forms and details, which are also important for the Orthodox Church. So, I think that Orthodoxy is quite suitable for the Chinese.

RTE: Is there anything that might be particularly challenging for them?

FR. DIONISY: One of the most complicated questions now is socialization. Because we do not yet have parishes in mainland China, if native Chinese become Orthodox, they understand that they should somehow break with their existing social network. However, this is quite difficult, because then they are left without support. There may be two or three Orthodox Chinese living in a city or town, but they don’t have many people in a single community, so if someone converts from the Catholic or Protestant Church, they often lose those important social connections. Such a conversion is quite painful for those who did not convert, and their friends often feel betrayed. Loyalty is a very deep and valued quality, so having to leave a supportive social environment combined with the inability to have much contact with other Chinese Orthodox believers makes conversion extremely difficult.

Another important element is family tradition. Chinese people are very linked to their families, although those links are not as strong in today’s post-industrial society. Nevertheless, family ties still exist in a different way than they do in the West and have to be taken into account with any conversion.

*Opposite: Procession on the parish feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Hong Kong.*







Another complication is the conflict between a contemporary lifestyle and the traditions you adopt as an Orthodox Christian. For example, the rules of fasting are quite strict in Orthodoxy, and for Chinese this is a problem. How do you follow such rules while living in a completely different environment, where often someone else cooks for you?

Converts are also limited in their personal spiritual growth because there is no regular access to the sacraments, and frequently their only communication with other Orthodox is through the internet or perhaps an occasional visit to a large city that has an Orthodox community. Also, people have to work so hard that they don't have the time or energy for spiritual life or for helping in a parish. They simply don't have enough strength.

This is one of the main challenges that the Church has to think about: how to adopt people who are relinquishing their whole social network in a society where Orthodox belief is rare.

### “Help Wanted”

RTE: How can our readers aid your missionary work?

FR. DIONISY: The biggest help would be contributions to our projects, mostly publishing. Currently, I have two projects that we need to work on. The first is to translate and publish the services for the Twelve Major Feasts, and the second is to start a daily internet news piece in Chinese about something in the Orthodox world. This could be distributed through websites and social networks and would cost about \$1000 a month for the translators.

Translating the Twelve Major Feasts will be about \$1000 each, so \$12,000 total for translating, typesetting and publishing. It is important that we have the funds to pay an adequate salary to good translators. Prices and salaries in Shanghai and China are quite high in general, and a person needs at least \$2,000 a month to meet their needs. Later, we hope to do more translations of lives and services for individual saints, such as St. Innocent of Irkutsk and St. Nicholas of Japan.

To maintain the parish and mission, we also have to pay for the upkeep and utilities of our building, and salaries for those involved. Our mortgage is very high, so our current need is quite acute. We have begun publishing a quarterly financial report on our website.

*Opposite: Great Thursday. Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Hong Kong.*

RTE: Thank you, Fr. Dionisy. To conclude, is there anything else you would like to say?

FR. DIONISY: For me, it is important that missionary work in China not be seen as only relating to the People's Republic of China. There is also Greater China, which includes the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, and the Chinese diaspora in America, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, Russia, and Singapore. I believe that we should focus more on those parts of the greater Chinese world where we are not limited in terms of law. With increasing economic and cultural connections, these areas can be a bridge between the Orthodox Christian world and mainland China.

When I was interviewed in San Francisco, I told the Russian Orthodox émigré parishioners that although they hadn't converted the Chinese to Orthodoxy during their stay in China, there is still hope: "You missed the first chance in China, but now you have a second chance: China has come to you." ✦

## Donations, Links, and Contact Information:

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To donate to the work of the Orthodox Brotherhood of the Sts. Apostles Peter and Paul online by credit or debit card, go to their webpage at: [www.orthodoxy.hk/donation](http://www.orthodoxy.hk/donation)

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**LINKS TO WEBSITES ON ORTHODOXY IN CHINA:**

A previous interview with Fr. Dionisy Pozdnyaev (“The Pearl of Great Price: Resurrecting Orthodoxy in China” Road to Emmaus Journal, Fall, 2005, Issue #23) can be read on the Road to Emmaus Journal website under Back Articles: [www.roadtoemmaus.net](http://www.roadtoemmaus.net)

Website for The Orthodox Brotherhood of Sts. Apostles Peter and Paul:  
[www.orthodoxy.hk](http://www.orthodoxy.hk)

Orthodoxy in China Website (Mitrophan Chin):  
[www.orthodox.cn/index\\_en.html](http://www.orthodox.cn/index_en.html)

Online Orthodox Books:  
[www.orthodoxbookshop.asia](http://www.orthodoxbookshop.asia)

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