

Article

Bailu's Catholicism in China: Religious Inculturation, Tourist Attraction, or Secularization

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Abstract: My article explores how Catholicism interacts with various forces and players in the local and political arena since it migrated into Bailu, China. My argument is based on extensive fieldwork done at two seminaries and one church there. I have shown that: (1) Catholicism encountered different secular forces and survived through effective interaction with them, (2) a market-oriented economy led to the commercialization of once-authentic religious sites for tourism and economic development, and (3) the secularization of Catholicism results in a unique paradox: Catholicism's public influence on tourism and economic development has been increasing, while its activities and church attendance have not followed synchronously. This paradox manifests itself in two facts: though the town has benefited from Catholicism's presence, measured by religious symbols and in numbers have been gradually reduced and even removed; and though its French influence makes this town a tourist destination, the prevailing Chinese culture has not been undermined but reinforced.

Keywords: Catholicism; China; secularization; tourism; *Seminarium Annunciationis*



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1. Introduction

In 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2019, I did fieldwork (observations and interview) of Catholicism in Bailu. Bailu is a typical town of China, which is located in Pengzhou, Sichuan province, Southwest China. This town has long historical and rich religious resources. The historical record of this town can be traced to 316 BCE in the *Huayang guozhi* (Huayang Chronical). Its ancient streets date from the 1750s and it is one of the top ten ancient towns in Chengdu (capital of Sichuan province). It has 17 Buddhist and Taoist temples. One of the 24 Taoist communities¹ was located there. In the 1850s, Catholicism migrated to Bailu, and in the 1860s, a Catholic church was built there. In the 1870s, one seminary was built there and in the 1900s, another seminary was built there.

In the past, Bailu was an ancient, remote, inaccessible, poor, and small town. But over time, it has changed. Now, it covers an area of 78.9 square kilometers and has a total population of 10,124. It has been named a Chinese-French town and has become a 4A² tourist destination for its unique Catholic cultural resources. The direct cause of this transformation was an earthquake in 2008, which made a former Catholic seminary much more significant than other religious buildings and spurred the reconstruction of the town. This is the *Seminarium Annunciationis* (*lingbao xiuyuan*).

In May 2008, an earthquake destroyed *Seminarium Annunciationis* as well as much of the town, including religious and non-religious buildings. But the destruction of *Seminarium Annunciationis* received much more significant attention by the local people than others. They posted pictures and stories of the seminary online. The post also continually attracted new visitors for the seminary.

Why would such a seminary have so great a social significance? It was my original interest to investigate this site. (Later on, this interest evolved into my research on Chinese Catholicism).

In 2008, I visited this site and other two Catholic sites (one Catholic seminary's ruin and one Catholic church) and did some field observations. In May and June 2009, during the first anniversary of the earthquake, I did some interviews about the social influence and reconstruction of this seminary.

In 2010, I visited this site and other two Catholic sites and did some field observations, again. I found that Bailu has been planned and constructed as a Chinese-French town. Its unique Catholic culture, which is of French origin, has made Bailu distinctively different in comparison to other nearby local towns. I also found that the Catholic church had been relocated and was being built, and that though the ruin of the seminary remained as a ruin, it was commemorated with a bridge named Chinese-French bridge, and that the seminary, *Seminarium Annunciationis*, was on the agenda for reconstruction.

In 2019, ten years later, after I began my sociological study, I visited Bailu and did some field observations, again, and to my surprise, I found Bailu has been a 4A tourist destination and a venue for *musical concerts*. The Catholic church has been reconstructed, but (in publicity for the town) it has another name: the *Centennial Wedding Manor*. The seminary, *Seminarium Annunciationis*, has also been rebuilt as cultural relic protection site but religious events are prohibited, there. Bailu's original Catholic culture and original French ambiance have been overshadowed by national and international concerts.

Taking the Catholicism of Bailu as a specific example, its 150 years' history (from the 1850s to 2010s) illustrates the process of interaction between religion and prevailing culture. Especially, four stages of Catholicism are evident in Bailu, which are represented by the 1850s, 1950s, 1980s and around 21st century, respectively. These exactly reflect the process of secularization and inculturation of Catholicism in Bailu as well as Catholicism of China.

Analyzing Chinese Catholicism according to the secularization thesis, what will be the results? This question is related to a series of sub-questions.

First, did Catholicism in Bailu experience the process of secularization, secularization understood as a process whereby religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance (Wilson 1966, p. 14), a process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols (Berger 1967, p. 107), a process which is shaped by the successive forms of the dominant framing of the interaction of Christianity with the prevailing culture (Warner 2010, p. 47)?

Second, does Catholicism in Bailu illustrate secularization as a failed theoretical hypothesis; is a whole body of literature loosely labeled 'secularization theory' by historians and social scientists is essentially mistaken (Berger 1999, p. 2)? Or is secularization nothing but a tool of counter-religious ideologies (Martin 1969, p. 10)? Is it time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories (Stark and Finke 2000)? Or has 'current sociology falsified the prediction about the decline and extinction of religion? The survival of religion in modern societies forces philosophy to rethink the classical secularization theory' (Bermejo 2014).

Third, does Catholicism in Bailu show that secularization is still proving to be a process that is not capable of producing a fully secular society? Is it even a self-limiting process, which tends (beyond a certain point) to provoke a resurgent appetite for a spiritual or religious quest (Warner 2010, p. 85)? Or is secularization a 'post-secular problematic' (Schewel 2018)?

Fourth, does the process of secularization happen at all in Chinese religions? If the concept of secularization refers to a particular historical process of transformation of Western European Christian societies, it might not be directly applicable to other non-Christian societies (Casanova 2001, p. 382). If secularization, as a long-run process of societies becoming less religious, cannot simply be a template of other societies (Bruce 2017). After she investigated Buddhism and Taoism in China, Liao (2019) proposed that Chinese religions possess controversial features of the secularization thesis, i.e., the growth and expansion of Chinese religions accompanied the decline of private religiosity and nonreligious factors play an important temporary role in promoting the growth of Chinese religions. But these controversial features of the secularization thesis are mainly based

on a study of Buddhism and Taoism in China. What will be the exact situation when the secularization thesis (which originated from western Christianity) is applied to analyze the Christianity of China (which has adopted itself to Chinese culture for more than 1000 years)?

In order to find answers to these questions, I engaged in field work and investigated the relevant literature investigation. I will discuss the four stages of Catholicism, which display Catholicism's interaction with various forces and players in the local and political arena. They are expansion under the conflicts in the 1850s, marginalization under the Three-Self policy in the 1950s, revival under the new religious policy and social fashion in the 1980s, and resurgence under the embrace of prevailing culture in the 2010s.

2. Methods

Bailu is one of my survey locations when I investigate the religious transformation of Catholicism on the Chengdu Plain, from 2008 through 2010. During that investigation, I selected 8 Catholic churches as my research targets, according to their different regional distributions, urban and rural distributions, functions, traffic conditions, architectural styles, and social activities. I used these materials of investigation to write my doctoral dissertation in 2011 and then updated it as a book. It was published in Chinese, named *Zhuixun wenming jiaorong de qidian—Chengdu pingyuan tianzhujiao de jiating zhichi yanjiu* (The Starting Point of Cultural Fusion: On Family Support for Catholicism on the Chengdu Plain), in 2017 (Liao 2017). Also, for the study of Bailu, I wrote and published an article in Chinese, titled *Longmen shan tianzhujiao chuanbo de san jieduan tezheng—"Baulu lingbao xiuyuan" de bainian fazhan* (The Three Characteristics of Catholicism Along Mountain Longmen—The Centurial Development of *Seminarium Annunciationis*), in 2010 (Liao 2010). Hence, this paper is a follow-up study and continuation about Bailu, one that is enlightened by and organized by the theoretical frame of secularization and the idea of inculturation.

I selected Bailu, because of its significance in the history of Chinese Catholicism and because it also possesses significant current importance. The French cultural origin of its church and seminaries are cultural symbols for local society and have become a driver of local economic development because the cultural symbol caters to the preferences of most tourists.

In order to conduct my investigation, I got three clearances³, in advance. First, I got a clearance from the religious authority and the Catholic Patriotic Association of Sichuan province. I talked with them about the purpose of my research and gave them the questions I would use to interview Catholics and an outline of my interview topics. They reviewed my questions and issued an official document, attaching the interview outline. This official document was effective in every church in Sichuan province. Second, I got an agreement from the churches I selected. I contacted and told the priests or chairmen of churches' administrative committees about the agreement I received from their superior departments. Third, I got an agreement from the churches' administrative committees for assistance in supporting my surveys.

In 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2019, I employed the sociological methods of observation and interview to collect data on Catholics, their church and seminaries. I principally used the method of participant observation to observe the religious sites and to understand the religious rituals, ceremonies, and other activities of the church. Participant observation is a method in which a researcher joins the observed group and takes part in their daily activities, like the members of the observed group. By this, the researcher directly learns the explicit and tacit aspects of the life routines and the culture of the observed group.

The method of participant observation includes two subtly different approaches. One is called that of the 'covert participant observation,' which refers to the practice of the observers who veil their status, act as the participants, and join the activities of the participants. The other is called the approach of 'overt participant observation,' which refers to the practice of observers who expose their status and then participate in public. I mainly used the 'covert participant observation' approach to investigate the religious

activities of the church, including Masses, rites, ceremonies, and other activities held in the church. I tried my best not to expose my status as researcher during the time I observed the church. My reasons were: (1) to appear natural or authentic to the social group. (2) To protect the good mood of the religious community.

Even if the local Catholic community is friendly and open, they might be somewhat sensitive to a person who has included them in a study target. The observer would interfere with the observed. In that case, the mentality and voice of natural communication would be reduced, and the naturalness or authenticity of observation would be lost.

I found that the local Catholic groups are simple and happy. Some of the generationally born Catholics still retain the memory of historical conflicts. Moreover, there were no researchers who engaged in investigations before my study. So, a rushed social investigation would increase the psychological pressure on religious groups. When, on occasion, my identity, as an observer, had to be revealed, I usually asked questions during church activities. I was often understood by the Catholic community to be a 'Catechumen'. Through participant observation, I visited and observed the Catholic community and buildings from 2008 through 2019.

To draw up a more comprehensive description of the church and the seminaries, I interviewed 50 Catholics, who served the church, attended church activities, or lived nearby the church; I interviewed 50 travelers, who visited the church and the seminaries. I interviewed people from four interest groups: 40 interviewees were residents, who live nearby the church or the seminary; 20 interviewees were from the Catholic community; 20 interviewees were from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA); and 20 interviewees were from the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA). These last three groups shared responsibility for the oversight of church or seminary reconstruction.

The interview technique I employed in my social investigation was through natural communication with the research object by way of conversation, to obtain the data of the research object's life prospect, viewpoint, behavior attitude, etc., and to further seek the real meaning and truth of the obtained data through repetition and questioning. The interview methods include structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and non-structured interviews. In my study, I applied the method of the semi-structured interview, which I outlined in advance. I interviewed Catholics according to this outline, which was reviewed by the religious authority and the Catholic Patriotic Association of Sichuan province.

So, my investigations possess both overt and covert characteristics. Almost all field observations are covert but almost all interviews are overt, depending on the specific situation, in order to protect the mood of interviewees and to get accurate information of interviewees.

Additionally, in order to figure out the historical trajectories of the church and the seminaries, I made use of: (1) *Omnibus of China Local Gazetteers (zhongguo difang zhi jicheng)*, which is published jointly by Bashu Publishing House, Jiangsu Guji Press and Shanghai Bookstore, and is a record of China's local chronicles of the Ming Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, (2) local chronicles in modern versions, which were edited by the local chronicles committees of the administrative regions from the 1980s through the beginning of the 21st century.

3. Findings

These materials, which I collected from field investigations and local chronicles, describe the historical trajectories and the current situation of Catholicism in Bailu. Both of them can be discussed under the range of secularization thesis, though they also possess obvious characteristics of religious inculturation.

I found that what Catholicism has experienced is exactly the process of the secularization. Within its 150 years' history (from the 1850s to 2010s), Bailu's Catholicism encountered different secular forces (political, economic, and cultural) in different eras and survives through effective *interaction* with these forces. It experienced expansion under conflicts, marginalization and revival under different religious policies, and resurgence

thoroughly under a new national strategy of a new age. This is exactly the process of the secularization. As Martin said secularization is a recurrent process that is shaped by the successive forms of the dominant framing of the interaction of Christianity with the prevailing culture (Warner 2010, p. 47). The secularization of Catholicism reached its peak when the fame of the church was displaced by the centennial wedding manor and when the seminary no longer housed religious events inside it.

I found that Catholicism is recently experiencing a unique paradox: Catholicism's public influence on tourism and economic development has been increasing, while its activities and church attendance have not followed synchronously. This paradox is pushed by a market-oriented economy. This led to the commercialization of once-authentic religious sites for tourism and economic development. This follows Scott's characterization that secularization is a process whereby religious beliefs, practices, and institutions lose social significance as measured by religious attendance, commitment to orthodox belief, support for organized religion in terms of payments, membership, and respect, and by the importance which religious activities such as festivals assume in social life (Scott 2015).

I also found, from my study of Bailu's Catholicism, that secularization is a process that is not capable of producing a fully secular society. One proof is that Catholic culture can be transformed into a key element of a 4A tourist destination, to attract numerous visitors. The other proof is that the Catholic church can, in itself, become an attractive aesthetic object for visitors. Although the publicity of Bailu focuses on French culture and its status as a music venue, the uniqueness of Catholic culture is the real driver for visitors' travel. What visitors mostly look for after they arrive Bailu is not a concert or European cultural site but a Catholic seminary or church, though they feel somewhat disappointed about the closed door and empty rooms of the seminary as well as the RMB 2 charge for shoe covers to protect the cleanliness of the church sanctuary.

My discovery was that the process of secularization of Chinese religions has different varieties. Under similar situations of commercialization, tourist, and economic development, what Chinese Buddhism and Taoism experienced were different from what Chinese Catholicism experienced.

My further discussion follow.

4. Discussions: Religious Inculturation, Secularization, or Tourist Attraction

The experience of Catholicism can be divided into 4 stages, which are represented by the expansion under the conflicts of the 1850s, marginalization under the Three-Self Policy of the 1950s, revival under religious policy and social fashion of the 1980s, and resurgence under the embrace of prevailing culture of the 2010s (Liao 2010). In each stage, Catholicism has encountered different secular forces such as the political, economic, and cultural, but has survived through effective interaction with secular society. Can this interaction between religion and secular society specifically be best understood as a matter of religious inculturation or does it demonstrate the secularization thesis?

4.1. Expansion under the Conflicts in the 1850s

Catholicism encountered different conflicts in China since it migrated there; these include: the conflict between government and religion and the conflict between the public and religion. These centered on religious thought, rituals, and prevailing of Chinese culture.

Nestorian Christianity had prospered for about 150 years (from the 7th to 9th century) but it was wiped out by the Tang emperor because it was misunderstood as a kind of quasi-Buddhism. Next, the prosperity of the *Erkeun* (*yeli kewen*)⁴ continued throughout the Mongol period (from the 11th to 14th century), but it disappeared with the Yuan Dynasty because it was confused with Mongolian culture. Catholicism was decisively introduced into China by Jesuit missionaries, at the end of the Ming Dynasty. Jesuits (such as Matteo Ricci) studied Chinese culture, taught Western science, introduced Western scientific instruments, and built good relationships with influential Confucians. Then, Catholicism integrated into Chinese society. Though it experienced numerous conflicts,

including the Chinese-Rites Controversy⁵ in the early Qing Dynasty and the conflicts it faced with public in the late Qing Dynasty.

Catholicism migrated into Bailu mainly due to the public conflicts it faced in the 1850s. After the Opium War, the status of Catholicism completely reversed. Once illegal, it became legal; once secret, it became public and even privileged. The clergies and organizations of Catholicism moved quickly into new areas to purchase church property and find new followers. Some strange social phenomena occurred at that time. People converted to Catholicism not because of their faith but for secular benefits. The naming of Catholicism followed from the benefits received. ‘*Chi jiao*’ which means “people convert to Catholicism just for food”; ‘*Da guan si jiao*’ which means “people converted to Catholicism just to win a lawsuit”; ‘*Niang zi jiao*’ which means “people converted to Catholicism just for finding their wives”. Additionally, there were a number of misunderstandings about the rituals of Catholicism and the structure of the church. Among them were: (1) some Chinese thought that baptism, the most important ritual of Catholicism, was something obscene because the water was used; (2) priests and nuns living in the same church building was considered scandalous because traditionally priests and nuns were expected to live separately; (3) orphanages, which the Catholic church ran as a charities, was thought by some Chinese to be places where organs were harvested. These strange social phenomena and misunderstandings resulted in countless conflicts between Catholicism and Chinese folk society, especially in the urban areas. Churches were destroyed or burned. Missionaries were expelled. Also, local Catholics were put in a dangerous situation. The rural areas, with lower education, less information, and long distances from the social elites and the urban areas (with their hostility toward Catholics) became the choice of Catholic believers and missionaries.

In the 1850s, a Catholic family named Zhu moved to Bailu and converted local and large families to Catholicism. In the 1860s, Hong Guanghua (Pinchon), a French missionary, bishop of Chengdu diocese, went to the town and got acquainted with Zhu. Hong bought the house and land of Zhu to construct a church in 1865. At the time he constructed the church, Hong also constructed a seminary near the church to train postulants, called *The Minor Seminary of the Immaculate Conception (wudian xiao xiuyuan)*. This seminary merged with another one which was located at Muping in 1872 and re-constructed in 1885. In the 1890s, the seminary, named *Seminarium Annunciationis (lingbao xiuyuan)*, was organized and constructed by another bishop of Chengdu diocese whose name is Dunand (Du ang) and the other two missionaries, Calurand (Gu Bulan), and Alex Pecredin (Bai Lishan). They all belonged to *Missions Etrangeres de Paris* (The Society of Foreign Missions of Paris). This seminary’s construction was completed in 1908⁶.

Why were seminaries built in Bailu, a place so remote and inaccessible? Even more surprising, *Seminarium Annunciationis* is 4 km distant from downtown Bailu. According to my investigation in 2008, only one vehicle may pass at a time for 3 of the 4 km between downtown Bailu and the seminary, and for 1 km no vehicle can pass at all. Visitors have to walk to the seminary. This is intentional. The primary reason was to distance the seminary from conflicts.

The conflict between government and religion accelerated the ordination of Chinese priests. The conflict between the public and religion accelerated the production of seminaries in remote and inaccessible regions. During the “*Rites Controversy*”, Catholicism was outlawed in China. Missionaries had to escape from cities and hide in the countryside. Meanwhile, they still spread and practiced their faith, secretly. But their physiological characteristics, which are so different from local people, worked against their intention. It was urgent and necessary to cultivate Chinese clergy. Increased seminary education arose at a historic moment. *Missions Etrangeres de Paris* built seminaries to train Chinese clergy in Thailand and India. In 1780, French missionaries, Hamel and Franciscus Gleyo, built Longxi seminary in Zhaotong, Yunnan. In 1782, Longxi seminary moved to Luoxianggou, Yibin, Sichuan. In 1814, Luoxianggou seminary was destroyed by the government in the aftermath of the outing of Catholic converts. In 1831, a French priest, Luo Anbai, rebuilt

the seminary in Mupin, Baoxing. Later, in 1872, Mupin seminary moved to Bailu. So, the history of seminaries in Bailu can be traced to Mupin, Luoxianggou, and Longxi. These places are all in the remote and poor countryside of Southwest China. In order to avoid the persecution of the Qing government, Catholic clergies and seminaries moved frequently to remote rural areas. Along their escape routes, Catholicism expanded by fostering new clergies, finding new Catholics, and building new bases, nevertheless.

To conclude: at this stage, Catholicism's survival was seriously challenged. It was drawn into persecution by the Qing government because of "Rites Controversy" and had an illegal status but was secretly accepted by the public. It was drawn into persecution by the public after Opium War and had a legal status but was publicly rejected. The deep reason of the shift in status was culture. In the first persecution, "Rites Controversy" was a matter of cultural conflict between Confucianism and Christianity. Both the Qing government and Rome Catholic Church held they were the orthodox thought and wanted to maintain their orthodox status in Chinese society. In the second persecution, the local Chinese public thought that what they held personally (almost all were either Buddhist, Taoist, or Confucian) should be the mainstream or master thought and that Catholicism, as a foreign culture, should follow and obey the rules of the mainstream culture. This is also a kind of cultural conflict. Both persecutions hinted at the failure of religious inculturation. However, what this failure really displayed is the competition between religion and the secular. Catholicism expanded under these conflicts, especially to remote rural areas. Meanwhile, Catholicism retained its religious purity. These conflicts also influenced the church and seminaries to go to Bailu. The process of conflicts and responses show the process of interaction between religion and the secular forces such as the political and the cultural.

4.2. Marginalization under the Three-Self Policy in the 1950s

At the beginning of the 1950s, numerous religious buildings were ruined. The religions of China were marginalized by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) asserting its ideology of atheism. The church in Bailu was also destroyed. The Catholic churches of Sichuan province are a research frame to describe the changing situation of religious sites, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Status of Catholic Churches in Sichuan from 1949 to Present.

Years to Collected	1949	1985	1990	2000	2010	2020	2020
Number of Churches	257	79 (6 *)	88 (14 *)	94 (19 *)	97 (22 *)	99 (24 *)	124
Status	Presence	Being reopened (<i>huifu huodong</i>) ⁷				Offering Religious Services	

Table 1 takes 257 churches as a research frame. These churches were listed in the book *Annals of Sichuan Province (Religion)* (Local Chronicles Committee of Sichuan 1998). This book listed the districts, names, and years the 257 churches were built. It noted that these data were collected by 1949 (the foundation of New China was in 1949), which means that there were 257 churches by 1949. It also noted the reopened churches and the years they were reopened.

In Table 1, I collected the number of the churches in 3 status categories (presence, being reopened, and offering religious services) and in 6 time periods (1985, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020). The data of 257 *presented* churches by 1949 are directly collected from the book. The data of *reopened* churches by 1985, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020 are collected *both* from the book and from my investigations: the data above in each case are collected from the book, the data below are labeled by the symbol '*' in the parentheses are collected from my investigations, i.e., by 2020, 99 churches were reopened, in which I collected information

of 24 reopened churches. I collected the data of 124 offering religious services churches. I decided whether a church offers religious services or not by examining this information: reopening, Mass, training programs, charity, the management of affairs, and travel logs, etc. My data is derived from field investigations and online texts related to the churches, including webpages, journal articles, and visitors' blogs, etc.

From Table 1, 257 churches presented by 1949; 99 churches had been reopened by 2020. Why does the term 'being reopened' occur as a description of the religions of China? One possible reason is that religious sites lost their legal status and had to close their gates in the past, though some of them regained their legal status and reopened their gates after 1979. Why did this phenomenon happen? The possible reasons are: (1) when the CCP took over a political regime and asserted its ideology of atheism in the 1950s, religions had to assent to the socialist transformation⁸ to gain a new life. However, in the process of this socialist transformation, some churches lost their former status. (2) When the Cultural Revolution broke out in the period, 1966–1976, most of the cultural symbols were destroyed. Those protesters, who thought religions were the oldest and most backward parts of culture, destroyed them. By the end of this period, the negative attitude toward religions reached its peak. (3) Chinese society regained its order after the Cultural Revolution. Religions regained their due status to some degree, also. As Gao says, "The end of the Cultural Revolution, however, reversed this process...Under the impact of reforms (1979), the sacredness of religion also experienced a drastic turn" (Gao 2017).

The destiny of the Catholicism of Bailu changed since the 1950s. The church was destroyed. No information about its reopening could be found, even now. The information about the seminaries was different: (1) *The Minor Seminary of the Immaculate Conception* was repurposed to be a nursing home and was taken over by the Chinese government in the 1950s. Only its wall and side door are left now. (2) The religious activities of the *Seminarium Annunciationis* were stopped in 1951. And then it went into hibernation for more than 30 years. However, its architecture was unexpectedly preserved, which is unique and different from many other religious buildings. This made it a matter of public interest.

Why was the seminary's architecture preserved without a religious function for so long a time? The seminary hibernated for two reasons. One is the Three-Self Policy⁹. Under the Three-Self Policy, *Seminarium Annunciationis* could not get its normal income because it stopped its religious functions. It also could not share the fruit of the market-oriented economy because of its remote and inaccessible location.

The other reason is because the Chinese are famous for a diversity of beliefs. Historically, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism were the three traditional religions (*San jiao*). According to my fieldwork, local people around the seminary call Catholics 'Feng jiao ren', which means "the people who worship Jesus", they call others 'San jiao ren', which means "the people who do not worship Jesus". Each group uses this appellation as a kind of description for the other. Because Catholics call themselves 'Feng jiao ren', they say that "we are 'Feng jiao ren', but they are 'San jiao ren'". While others call themselves 'San jiao ren', by saying that "we are 'San jiao ren', but they are 'Feng jiao ren'". Nevertheless, this distinction is limited to religious behavior and events. The 'San jiao ren' will commemorate their ancestors during the Qingming festival by burning paper money and so on, which is usually in April. The 'Feng jiao ren' will commemorate the saints during Memorial day, usually in November, for the dead by praying. Local people forget their differences in work and daily life. It is religious tolerance that prevented the seminary from human-caused destruction from the 1950s through the 1970s.

To conclude: in this stage, Catholicism positively took the process of religious inculturation. It is Catholicism that proposed the Three-Self Policy to adapt New China's culture, in the 1950s. However, under numerous political movements from the 1950s through the 1970s, Catholicism and other religions were marginalized by both religion and society. In this special and difficult period, religions lost their due position when they were drawn into the competition between religious forces and non-religious forces. When religions faced the pressure of political and economic forces, they received some space for survival

because of the tolerance of culture. At this time, religions, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Christianity, did not compete for the dominant position in Chinese society, anymore. They learned to live together in harmony. The appellations of “*San jiao ren*” and “*Feng jiao ren*” are good illustrations. It is religious tolerance that enabled the seminary to acquire its trans-century survival by hibernating. Possibly, the tolerance that Catholicism got from Chinese society was the fruit of the religious inculturation strategy of the Three-Self Policy, the religious conflicts Chinese society experienced for more than 100 years. What Catholicism experienced illustrates the way and extent that religion was influenced by secular forces such as the political, the economic, and the cultural.

4.3. Revival under the New Religious Policy and Social Fashion in the 1980s

In the 1980s, Catholicism was revived. The church was reconstructed, along with other ruined religious buildings. This is the outcome of the implementation of the religious policy, which was issued by the CCP in 1982, entitled *The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period*¹⁰, also known as “Document 19”. This official document provided the basic recognition for religion: “The political power in a Socialist state can in no way be used to promote any one religion, nor to forbid any one religion”, though it went on to declare that “[W]e Communists are atheists and must unremittently propagate atheism.” Its approach toward religion is based on patiently waiting for scientific education, not political coercion, to spread atheism (Madsen 2010), but following from this document, a great number of religious problems all around China have been resolved, including the re-construction of religious buildings and the return of religious property.

From Table 1, the data concerning the reopened churches illustrate the changing condition. 88 churches have been reopened by 1990. Why was it that so many churches could reopen their gates to offer religious services, while so many other churches could not, in the same political atmosphere? The most probable reasons are the condition of the church building itself, and the request by its members to reopen the church as a legal religious site. If the buildings were preserved well enough then they can serve as public sites for believers. In this case, the believers can immediately obtain the permit for it to be reopened. On the other hand, if the building were not destroyed so badly that it could be used after a simple and short-term repair, the believers could obtain a permit for it to be reopened quickly. That is why there are 79 churches reopened intensively by 1985, within 3 years after the religious policy issued. Whereas, the other 20 churches were sporadically reopened during the 30 years beyond 1982.

Furthermore, many churches were built or re-built under this religious policy. After the policy was issued publicly, the churches requested their religious property be returned if their churches had been destroyed during the 1950s to the 1970s. They acquired the land and money to construct or re-construct their churches. According to my limited survey, two newly-built churches were listed, in the book *Annals of Sichuan Province (Religion)*; three other newly-built churches were listed, in Huang's master's thesis (Huang 2013); three other churches were newly-built, according to the churches' websites; 11 other newly-built churches and 23 re-constructed churches were listed in Liao's book (Liao 2017).

The seminary appeared on the public horizon once again mainly because it is a unique building in the western style. Chinese society changed thoroughly, since 1979, because of the reform and opening policy. Western culture became popular, even as a type of fashion. The seminary, which is called *Eastern Notre Dame of Paris* by the public due to its purely western appearance, attracted wedding photographers and their customers. Meanwhile, some travelers drove there to memorialize events and people, who lived there once. Others traveled to find a seat and sit down to drink tea to experience the atmosphere around the old, shabby seminary, which emanates charm and nostalgia. For people nearby and from far away, it became a good place to reverie and relax. This is just as Madsen (2007) said one of the biggest surprise of China's reform era had been the resurgence of religious belief

and practice. Even better is that it was identified as a cultural relic protection site by the local government in 1989 and then by the Chinese government in 2006¹¹.

The condition of the revival of the seminary can be illustrated by a note to visitors, which was issued on 1 January 2008. The note listed four instructions: (1) that the *Seminarium Annunciationis* is the national cultural relic protection site and the property of the Catholic Church, (2) that security and sanitation should be maintained because there are so many visitors who come for sightseeing, taking photos and sketching, (3) that facilities for tea and wedding dressing are needed, (4) that a fee will be charged for its routine maintenance under the Three-Self Policy.

To conclude: in this stage, Catholicism as well as other religions became cultural resources. They received new recognition from the political side because it was recognized that religions could assist Chinese economic and social development. Under this relatively free political circumstance, economics and society gradually revived. The uniqueness of Catholicism is its western cultural elements, provided countless attractions for the Chinese people. This attraction formed a kind of social fashion, which continually brought visitors to Bailu's Catholic sites. Catholicism revived because of the implementation of new religious policy, the reform and open policy, and the appeal to social fashions. It is nothing other than the pursuit of fashion that made groups notice the seminary, and this is why and how it was revived by society. Again, the process of revival of Catholicism illustrates the way and extent that religion is influenced by secular forces such as the political, cultural, and economic.

4.4. Resurgence under the Embrace of Prevailing Culture in the 2010s

A thorough resurgence of Catholicism occurred in the 2010s. The church at Bailu was destroyed by an earthquake in 2008. Then, it was reconstructed in 2013 under the guise of the project of a wedding venue. The reconstruction was completed in 2014. It resumed operation under two names, church and centennial wedding manor. It offers regular religious services as a typical church. It also provides wedding services as a centennial wedding manor. Interestingly, it is listed in the town's brochure as a centennial wedding manor but not as a Catholic church.

The seminary was also ruined by the same earthquake. Its slight previous and fashionable revival was intensified afterward. Its ruined centuries old architecture was reconstructed. The reconstruction was completed when artists from Palais Garnier performed a classic concert in it in 2013.

The seminary's reconstruction is officially called conservation and restoration. It was conducted by the NCHA, and the constructed architecture is overseen by this ministration, also. The main building of the seminary has been re-constructed according to its original plan, including a classic and cambered stairway, which expresses its historical character through its mottled color and the green moss growing in the gaps between the bricks. Through it, visitors can go up into the main building. There is a square two-story building, which was used as classrooms and dormitories for monks and clergy. Here, also is a white sanctuary, which is on the west side of the square two-story building and just opposite the cambered stairway. This building is open from Tuesday through Sunday and closed on Monday. The rooms of the building are empty, no clergy or monks dwell in it. At the doorway, a worker sits to ask for visitors' registration. He is employed by the NCHA.

The town of Bailu also was well re-constructed in line with its French influence, reflecting the seminaries and the church. This town is highlighted among other local towns. It was planned, designed, and constructed as a Chinese-French town and financed preferentially. French aesthetics has been integrated into its construction, including the building of schools, hospitals, government offices, citizens' houses, plazas, streets, statues, and shops, etc. This town has been a 4A tourist destination. Many tourists travel there in summer due to its uniqueness and its western architecture, and cool weather. What's more, Pengzhou city (Bailu is a town of Pengzhou) has become the sister city with Seine-et-Marne, in France.

The resurgence of interest in the seminary is owing to two factors. The first derives from social fashion. It is fashionable for Chinese society to promote the seminary reconstruction. Its previous and fashionable revival has been noticed by social media, people on the internet, and public voices continuously since the earthquake happened. The problems (as to whether to re-construct it, when to re-construct it, and how to re-construct it) had become a public edifices.

How much social influence does social fashion hold on this former seminary? During the first anniversary of the earthquake, I investigated the seminary's social influence from May through June in 2009 through in-depth interviews of visitors. I interviewed 60 visitors asking 4 questions: Are you a Catholic? How do you know this seminary? Why would this seminary be reconstructed? What is the possibility of rebuilding this seminary? All of the statistics for the responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Social Influence of *Seminarium Annunciationis* (2009).

	Number	Percent
Visitors		
Catholics	36	60
Non-Catholics	24	40
Total	60	100
Ways to know <i>Seminarium Annunciationis</i>		
Friends' introduction	27	45
Media reports	28	47
Family members' narratives	19	32
Reasons for rebuilding <i>Seminarium Annunciationis</i>		
Religion	46	77
As a cultural relic	51	85
As a tourist destination	32	53
Local economy	27	45
Possibility for rebuilding <i>Seminarium Annunciationis</i>		
Should be rebuilt	59	98
Can be rebuilt	60	100

Note: $n = 60$. Among the 60 visitors, some visitors had more than one way to know *Seminarium Annunciationis* and more than one reason for rebuilding *Seminarium Annunciationis*, only one visitor thought *Seminarium Annunciationis* can be rebuilt but not should be rebuilt.

From Table 2, the data show these points: the visitors were diverse (Catholics accounting for only 60%, non-Catholics accounting for 40%); the way people came to know the seminary were also diverse—friends' introduction (accounting for 45%), media reports (accounting for 47%), and family members' narratives (accounting for 32%); the reasons for the re-construction of the seminary were likewise diverse—for religion (77%), for the preservation of a cultural relic (85%), for the creation of a tourist destination (53%), for development of the local economy (45%); the expectation and the hope that the seminary would be rebuilt was identical—it *should be* rebuilt (98%) and it *can be* rebuilt (100%). Both the diversity of visitors and the certainty of reconstruction indicate the social influence that the seminary possesses.

Also, some typical responses follow.

The responses for question 2:

My friends said it was a beautiful and historical seminary.

I read some articles online that mentioned.

My mother lived there, when she was an Educated Youth¹² in the 1960s.

The responses for question 3:

Because it is an important religious site.

Because it is an important Cultural relics.

Because it is a famous attraction.

Because it is an attractive destination, which is helpful to develop local economy.

The second factor explaining resurgence originates from the interests of several groups. I interviewed 80 local residents, 20 people from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), 20 people from the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA), and 20 people from the Catholic community asking two questions: Who will be responsible for the seminary's reconstruction? What is their goal to reconstruct it? All of the statistics for the responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Reconstruction Appeal of *Seminarium Annunciationis* (2009).

	Responsibility for Reconstruction	Purpose of Reconstruction
Interviewees		
Residents	Government	Tourism and local economic development
SARA	NCHA	National cultural relic
NCHA	Still under discussion	Still under discussion Religion
Catholic community	NCHA	Religion

From Table 3, the data indicate that the attitudes toward the reconstruction of the seminary reflect the interests of different groups. For residents, the government should be responsible for reconstructing the seminary because the reconstruction is for tourism and local economic development; for the SARA, the NCHA should be responsible for reconstructing the seminary to recover a national cultural relic; for the Catholic community, the NCHA also should be responsible for reconstructing the seminary, although the existence of the seminary is for religious purposes; for the NCHA, the subject and the reason are still under discussion.

From Table 3, note that the responsibilities of the reconstruction are identical—the NCHA, though the purposes to re-construct the seminary are diverse. Nevertheless, from Table 2, 53% of the visitors hold that the reason to reconstruct the seminary is for an attractive destination, and 45% of them hold that the reason to reconstruct it is to develop the local economy.

The exact reason that the NCHA reconstructed the seminary is just that it is a national cultural relic. And its only function is for tourism and economic development. If there are any group activities, these are the many musical events during the Music Festival, which is hosted in Bailu yearly. Bailu has been named 'Music Town' since 2013, to match the unique style of integration between Chinese and French culture, and its rich and local musical resources. Many musical activities have been held in the town. Some of the musical activities are held at the seminary. Also, musical events serve tourism and economic development.

Furthermore, the church, as with the other core elements of a Chinese-French town, is a typical religious site. But compared with the increased public influence of religion, the religious activities, as well as church attendance have not followed synchronously. The church offers Mass weekly. On a regular Sunday Mass, there are around 20 attendees, remaining the same as 10 years ago. Additionally, the church posts a rule. Everyone, who wants to go into the sanctuary, must wear shoe covers to keep the floor clean. The shoe covers are free for members of the church, but others will be charged 2 yuan per person. Travelers, who never experienced the ritual of Catholicism and are new to it, are usually stopped at the door by the tiny fee. Moreover, the church shares a priest with another church which is as far as a one hour drive. If the priest cannot arrive on time, the weekly Mass will not be held as scheduled. The rarity of priests, the decreasing members, and discouraging practices are all responsible for its low participation.

It is typical that numerous churches, located in town or the countryside, have no priest living in it. They have to share one priest with another one, two, or three churches. Generally, the churches hold Mass weekly, once every two weeks, monthly, or during the four annual feasts (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Assumption). If the number of Catholics decreased and the location is remote and the priests' visits were rare because the location is remote, the church will gradually become an empty building and eventually disappear.

In Table 1, 257 churches were taken as a research frame to trace their fate from 1949 through the present. Two indices are employed to describe the situation of the churches. One is “being reopened”. The other is “offering religious services” which indicates those having been reopened and those having recoverable information about them, including Mass, training program, charity, management affairs, and travel log, etc. From Table 1, 124 churches offer religious services now. That is to say 52% of the churches have disappeared if they were built before 1949, though many churches are newly built. This is one possible reason that there is no information about the churches, which once existed.

To conclude: in this stage, religions continually embraced their status as elements of Chinese culture. This embrace followed the main social cognition, voluntarily or involuntarily. My investigations are the evidence. 3 out of 4 groups of interests held that the Catholic seminary reconstructed for culture, though the Catholic community held the reconstruction was for religion. 85% of visitors held that the Catholic seminary reconstructed for culture, though 76% of them also held the reason of religion. What’s more, the seminary was really reconstructed only as a cultural site and church possess two titles. Catholicism had its resurgence when its church and seminaries constituted the key cultural symbols of a Chinese-French town. That is the result of religious inculturation. However, the well-known reputation of French Catholicism outside the town contrasts with the low attendance inside the church. The seminary’s architecture has been restored. But, its original function has been lost completely. If the empty architecture has a vivid voice, that is the event of music during the Music Festival. Both the reconstruction of religious architecture and musical events held inside the religious architecture serve local tourism and economic development. What is the value of this kind of inculturation for religion and how much will it be? This is an open question need to further explore. But, one truth is that this embrace led to commercialization of once—authentic religious sites for tourism and economic development as part of the secularization process. The process and result of the resurgence of Catholicism illustrate the way and extent that religion is influenced by secular forces such as the political, cultural, and economic.

5. Conclusions

The process of secularization is shaped by the successive interaction of religions with secular forces. The 150-year history of Catholicism in Bailu illustrates this process of interaction.

With the conflicts between religions and secular society (especially the hostile urban sector in the late Qing Dynasty), Catholicism fled to Bailu to escape the suppression by secular forces. With the negative and official religious policy of a special period (the eradication and destruction of public religion in the Maoist era), Catholicism was marginalized and remained inactive. With the more neutral and official religious policy of reform era, Catholicism got its due status and its sporadic and natural revival as a scenic spot in society occurred, but with a decline in religious practices. With the relatively positive and official religious policy of win-win cooperation, Catholicism experiences the most public and thorough resurgence. Though this resurgence is most represented by commercial sites and architectures, it possesses obvious Catholic characteristics. What’s more, different policies were produced in different eras, but there is a connection. That is the continuous dissolution of the sacred. The sacred diminished as the secular increased. This is the exact point of observation about secularization.

Further, the thorough resurgence of Catholicism in the 2010s owes its support to the prevailing culture, at the cost that religious symbols and number of believers, have been gradually reduced and even removed. One sign is the building of the church, which is recognized as both a centennial wedding manor and a church. The status of the centennial wedding manor exceeds that of the church. The other sign is that the architecture of the seminary was re-constructed, but without religious events housed in it. The seminary architecture was identified as a cultural relic protection site. The third sign is that Bailu was planned, designed, and constructed as a Chinese-French town. This is because of its unique

culture of Catholicism, which is French. But, the real explanation is that there were few Catholic activities in the Chinese-France town, except inside the Catholic church. Instead, the Chinese-French town has given way to a music venue. A number of musical events are held there. Catholic culture and French culture have been overshadowed by concerts. Moreover, the celebration of the seminary's reconstruction was showcased by a classic concert from Palais Garnier. The implication is that musical topics are more acceptable than religious ones in secular China.

Religious edifices have been reconstructed to serve tourism and economic development. About this is the greatest consensus about whether and how to rebuild the church and the seminary among different interest groups. This led to the commercialization of once—authentic religious sites for tourism and economic development as part of the secularization process.

However, here, Catholicism experiences a unique paradox. Catholicism's public influence on tourism and economic development has been increasing, while its activities and church attendance have not followed synchronously.

The low attendance inside the church does not match the well-known reputation of Catholicism outside it. This is an unchanged fact. Catholics are the minor religious group from the past to now. This church has only 400 to 500 members. It does not have a priest in residence. It remains at almost 5% of its possible attendance. This, however, preserves its quietude, in contrast to outside noisy tourist sites, because its sanctuary is only occasionally visited.

The increased public influence of religion is mostly promoted by tourism and economic development because religious culture brings unique resources to local society. The church and the seminary are core elements of a Chinese-French town to create a 4A tourist destination showcasing Catholic culture, and to protect Catholic culture itself. This is the changing fact. Religious position or pursue moves, from the first stage of competition over the truth of their beliefs, to the second stage of being one member of Chinese religions, to the third stage of one element of culture, and to the fourth stage of almost being displaced by cultural value. Also, the change that happened was praised by the local people, saying they did not imagine that Catholicism could benefit them but now it did.

The increased public influence did not bring with it an increase in religious behavior. Religious doctrines, systems, and rules; public acceptance; and acquiescence in public policy are all responsible for low attendance.

Still, commercialization plays an important role in promoting public influence but not religious growth. This is the other controversial feature of Catholicism, which is different from Buddhism and Taoism. Buddhism and Taoism also possess the expansion of public influence that is also mainly promoted by tourism and economic development. But meanwhile, they got growth. As Liao proposes, though the public influence of religion has acquired momentum in its expansion in China, the growth and expansion of Chinese religions are accompanied by the decline of private religiosity (Liao 2019).

Further, in terms of the support of secular forces, the commercialization of religious sites for tourism and economic development remains a difference between Catholicism and Buddhism and Taoism. What the government recently discouraged in Buddhism and Taoism is somewhat encouraged in the Catholicism of China. In 2017, 12 ministries of China jointly published a religious policy to govern the commercial problems of Buddhism and Taoism, asking them to return to the purity of religion. But, the reconstruction of the church has an important reason—to serve as a centennial wedding manor. The reconstruction of the seminary has an important reason—to function as a national cultural relics' protection unit. Both religious architectures are core elements of Bailu's 4A tourist destination and play a key role in promoting tourism and economic development. Then, it can be said that the government encourages Buddhism and Taoism to withdraw from commercial activities, meanwhile encouraging Catholicism to embrace commercial activities.

The almost opposite attitudes, that the Chinese government holds toward Catholicism and Buddhism and Taoism for tourism and economic development, illustrates the impor-

tance of religion in promoting tourism and local economic development. This answers the question that Madsen posed in the 1990s that “Will religion contribute to or impede economic modernization?” (Madsen 1998, p. 4), though Madsen focuses on civil society based on his experiences from Eastern China (Tianjin). This also illustrates the perspective that Madsen proposed namely that Catholics belong to marginalized groups who have not benefited from the rising prosperity (Madsen 1998, p. 21), though they may benefit it from now. Also, this matches previously reported research on the commercialization of religion in China, such as, the research of Ji (2008, pp. 233–60), Oakes and Sutton (2010), and so on.

Therefore, the secular Catholicism of Bailu is not a special case but a microcosm of the secularization of Chinese religions (Catholicism). It has experienced the recreation of Chinese society, including fashionable pursuits, spiritual meditation, economic development, and international relationships. Now, as a unique cultural element of Chinese society and its importance, in developing tourism and economy, has been rising. What will happen to it in the future? This is an open question, but its importance is no less than its complexity, as “the entire body of secularization research still has a predictive or explanatory value” (Casanova 1994). For this reason, the path of the secularization of Chinese Catholicism deserves to be examined and reexamined.

In addition, the theoretical exploration and discussion of the case of Bailu’s Catholicism might be more than the frame of secularization thesis. The interaction between religion and various secular forces displays the situation of religious inculturation. Does the religious inculturation belong to the category of secularization thesis? This is another open question deserves to be examined and reexamined.

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Notes

- ¹ At the end of the Han Dynasty (around 200), Zhang Daoling founded Taoism in Chengdu. He created a theocratic regime, which was governed and disseminated by Zhi (community). This theocratic regime had 24 communities, which maintained 3 generations. During the government of Zhang Daoling’s grandson, it was merged to a secular regime. But some of ruins of 24 communities have Taoist temples now.
- ² Tourist destination in China is divided into different grades using the number of A-s. The highest level is 5A, while the lowest level is 1A. That the town of Bailu gets the title of 4A tourist destination indicates the fact that this town is well-developed for tourism and economy because of its unique Catholic resources.
- ³ Regarding research ethics, there is no single institution in China charged with the responsibility of evaluating research ethics in Chinese universities or research institutions. However, before I received clearances, the questions I used to interview Catholics and the outline of my interview topics were checked by several authorities. Their review always included my research ethics. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I consulted with experts in the field about the purpose of my research and submitted both the questions I would use to interview Catholics and the outline of my interview topics. The experts reviewed my questions and interview outline. They then introduced me to the religious authority and the Catholic Patriotic Association of Sichuan province. Afterward, all parts of my research project were reviewed by these authorities. These authorities included the religious authority of Sichuan province, the Catholic Patriotic Association of Sichuan province, priests of each church, chairmen of churches’ administrative committees of each church, and the churches’ administrative committees. If my questions and interview outline had been deemed problematic, they would have asked me to change them or would have refused to issue an official document of support for my fieldwork. After these authorities reviewed my research statement and read my interview outline, they judged my research valuable and helpful for both Catholics and relevant institutions.
- ⁴ ‘*Erkeun*’ is the appellation of Christianity in the Yuan Dynasty. After the Roman Catholic Church officially sent missionaries to Yuan China, Christianity got official status. It merged with *Nestorianism* and together was referred to as *Erkeun*.
- ⁵ During the early Qing Dynasty, conflict occurred between the Roman Catholic Church and Qing government over whether to permit Chinese Catholics to worship their ancestors and Confucius or not. This is called “Rites Controversy”. This controversy continued for about 120 years, from the 1700s to the 1820s.
- ⁶ I searched and collected the materials from local chronicles and drew the historical trajectory of the seminary’s constructions.

- ⁷ ‘Being reopened’ is an important and official index for religious sites in China. It means the religious sites have official permission to legally and in public offer religious services after they were forced to close between the 1950s to 1970s.
- ⁸ Socialist transformation was a political movement in China in the 1950s. Its main purpose was to carry on a socialist transformation of agriculture, the handicraft industry, capitalist industry, and commerce.
- ⁹ The Three-Self refer to self-management, self-support, and self-propagation. It was proposed by a local Catholic Church in the 1950s. Then, it becomes a national policy for Catholicism and Protestantism.
- ¹⁰ See, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/wszt/wz/Document/883077/883077.htm> (accessed on 18 August 2021).
- ¹¹ Many religious sites acceptable of being listed on the record of cultural relic protection sites in China. This status is sought for purposes of financial and architectural protection. Also, most of them get special recognition from county, city, province, and state government.
- ¹² The ‘Educated Youth’ refers to “the young people who left their urban districts in China to live and work in rural areas”. This political movement began in the 1950s until the 1970s. It is also termed as the “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement of Educated Youth”.

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