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Christian Social Services in China: Growths and Limitation

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Abstract: This paper discusses the types, faith attributes, development characteristics, and limitations of Christian social organizations in China. China's religious social service organizations mainly include four types of organizations: associations, private non-enterprise units, foundations, and venues for religious activities. From the perspective of faith attributes, they can be divided into faith-permeated organizations, faith-centered organizations, faith-affiliated organizations, faith-background organizations, and faith–secular partnerships. Since the reform and opening up in 1978, China's Christian social services have been in a period of organizational reconstruction. The main development characteristics are as follows: (a) social services have begun to take on multiple forms; (b) institutional services have transferred their original focus on those with disabilities to the elderly, and the services have been gradually extended from the low-income populations to other target groups; and (c) the basic functions of social services are still in the recovery stage, and the organizational system and service scale are not complete and sufficient. The multiple limitations of Christian social services involve (a) the social development stage and institutional background; (b) government policy text and implementation; and (c) maturity of its own organizational structure and service ability. There is still a long way to go to achieve the basic goals of reconstruction and development.

Keywords: Christianity; Chinese Christian; social services; church–state relations; de-religionization; cultural sensitivity

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Citation: Gao, Jianguo. 2021. Christian Social Services in China: Growths and Limitation. *Religions* 12: 955. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110955

Academic Editor: Tiangang Li

Received: 8 August 2021
Accepted: 18 October 2021
Published: 2 November 2021

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1. Introduction and Context

Religious organizations have consistently engaged in social services (Garland 2008). This paper explores the situation and policy environment of Chinese Christian groups and their members (including Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox) participating in social services based on literature research and field evidence, with the aim of promoting the legalized management and professional development of religious organizations in the domain of social services.

1.1. Overview of Christianity in China

The major religions practiced in China are Buddhism, Taoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam, with a total of nearly 200 million believers and more than 380,000 clerical personnel. Protestantism and Catholicism have 38 million and 6 million followers in China, respectively, with 57,000 and 8000 clerical personnel (The White Paper 2018). According to three rounds of data (2012, 2014, and 2016) from China's household tracking survey, it was estimated that in 2016, there were about 28.29 million "open Christians"(people who admitted their Christian identity in the questionnaire) and nearly 11.67 million "hidden Christians" (unwilling to admit their Christianity), totaling about 39.97 million; a report by Asia Harvest in 2010 estimated that there are 83.5 million Protestants in China, including 54 million members of the "House Church" (Lu et al. 2019). There are few Orthodox believers in China, with a total of about 15,000 (Interfax-Religion 2011), and there is no national association for them.

1.2. The Emergence, Development, Interruption, and Reconstruction of Christian Social Services in China

China's Christian social services have experienced a process of starting, development, disappearance, and reconstruction: (a) Starting in the 16th century, Christian missionaries began to enter China; in the middle and late Qing Dynasty, Christianity and social philanthropy formed a prototype in China. Some of the well-known charities, educational institutions, and medical institutions were established in the early 19th century[1]. (b) Development: During the Republic of China, freedom of religion was respected, and the Christian charities were further developed. The YMCA established branches in 26 large and medium-sized cities[2]. The international social service organization Salvation Army came to China in 1916 to carry out professional disaster relief, poverty alleviation, and development activities. (c) Disappearance: After the founding of People's Republic of China, the Christian organizations and service organizations were forced to shrink, and their functions greatly weakened or even disappeared (Weller et al. 2017). (d) Reconstruction: Since 1978, the reform and opening up of the country has contributed to a gradual increase in the total number of Christians in China, and it has become the second largest religion after Buddhism in the Han nationality area[3].

Since the reforms in 1978, Christian social services have entered a period of organizational reconstruction in China. Major achievements include (a) the restoration of social service coordination organizations and specialized service groups, such as the social service departments of the two national Christian associations (National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council), the restitution of YMCAs in 10 cities(National Council of YMCAs of China 2021), and the development of showcasing events of social services; (b) the growth of social service agencies to meet special social needs, such as community service centers for the disabled and nursing homes for the aged (Chambon 2020); (c) integrating local and overseas resources to accept overseas enthusiasts to actively serve local communities, for example, Shepherd's Field Children's Village (Philip Hayden Foundation 2021) in Tianjin; and (d) initiating international community services, such as the relief works of Amity Foundation's Love Beyond Borders and food services in Africa (Amity Foundation 2019). The international assistance reflects the initial image of soft power or the need for "soft diplomacy", which has been tacitly approved by government departments, although it has been criticized by members of the public. However, compared to the number and function of Christian social service organizations in countries around the world, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the function and level of Christian social service organizations in mainland China are only in the initial stage, and their institutional environment and policy conditions are very different.

1.3. The Emergence and Stagnation of "Encouraging Support" and "Equal Treatment" Policies by Government Departments

While strengthening the control and supervision over the scale of religious organizations' activities, government departments have also further adapted and encouraged them to carry out charitable activities. In 2012, the Chinese government's six administrations, including the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA), jointly released "Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles' Participation in Public Welfare Charitable Activities" (NRAA et al. 2012), which is a landmark document extending the space for religious organizations to engage in charitable activities. The guiding features of the opinion are as follows:

Firstly, it affirms the rationality of engaging in public welfare and charity activities among the religious organizations with a "deep foundation of belief, a long historical tradition, and high social credibility", and is "an important way to play an active role of religious circles and believers" and "a beneficial supplement to the healthy development of public welfare charity".

Secondly, it advances the work requirements or policy issues of "active support and equal treatment" for public welfare and charity activities in religious circles, emphasizes

that "public welfare and charity activities and organizations established by religious circles in accordance with the law are protected by law and enjoy the same preferential treatment as other aspects of society", and at the same time they enjoy "other support and preferential measures within the scope of laws and policies".

Thirdly, it lists the main scope and basic forms of encouraging religious circles to engage in charitable activities including disaster relief, supporting the disabled, elderly care, childcare, poverty alleviation, donating money to help students, medical and health services, environmental protection, and other fields, as well as activities such as donating for charitable undertakings, and setting up charitable projects and charitable organizations.

Fourthly, at the same time, it continues the requirement that charitable services in the religious community should "consciously accept the guidance, management, supervision and inspection of relevant departments" (NRAA et al. 2012). The policy of "active support" and "equalization" proposed in this document is conducive to bringing religious charities on track with other social service organizations regarding the rule of law.

After the promulgation of the six administrations' document in 2012, some changes took place in the religious community's participation in public welfare and charity activities: (a) The service direction of religious associations and institutions at all levels has been further defined, such as when the CC/TSPM began to include public welfare and charity services into the main annual work tasks, including humanistic care, related public welfare and charity undertakings, registration of service agencies, and professional talent training, poverty alleviation, and elderly service brands (CCC/TSPM 2018); and (b) the intensity and scope of service integration has increased, beginning in 2012. Under the organization and promotion of religious work departments at all levels, the religious community has carried out the Religious Charity Week activity year after year throughout the country, with annual donations of more than CNY100 million, becoming an effective platform for the religious community to service the society and people.

The State Council's "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Healthy Development of Charity" (State Council, People's Republic of China 2014), as the first document issued in the name of the central government to guide, regulate, and promote the development of charity, clearly proposes to encourage qualified religious organizations and places of religious activity to carry out various charity activities in accordance with laws and regulations. The old "Regulations on Religious Affairs" (State Council, People's Republic of China 2004) did not make special provisions for the charitable activities of religious organizations or venues; the new "Regulations on Religious Affairs" (State Council, People's Republic of China 2017) clearly stipulated that religious organizations and venues for religious activities set up public welfare charities according to law and encouraged religious organizations, religious colleges, and venues for religious activities, as organizations or individual religious staff, to participate in charity activities and promote public charity. The new "Regulations on Religious Affairs", as one of the Chinese government's highest administrative regulations, marks that the rationality and legitimacy of religious social service organizations and activities is basically affirmed by government departments. In the practical sense, various religious individuals or communities have different opinions on the extent of commitment to social services. Meanwhile, government policies both promote and restrict the effects (especially for "illegal" house church organizations).

The "encouraging support" and "equal treatment" policy does not mean the fundamental transformation of de-religionization and de-diversification as the dominant politics. In today's Chinese policy context, "encouraging support" and "equal treatment" usually mean relaxing some overly strict administrative restrictions under certain conditions, which does not mean the protection of rights based on rule of law. Since 2012, the scale of religious charities and social services has not achieved the expected greater development. Some major regulatory documents issued since the mid-2010s have avoided involving religious charity or religious social services (e.g., NRAA 2019; SCNPC 2016a), and some (e.g., NRAA 2018; NRAA 2021; SCNPC 2016b) have placed further restrictions on the initiation of large-scale social services by religious bodies, the acceptance of donations from

foreign non-governmental organizations or individuals, and the participation of international religious organizations in activities within China. This reflects two characteristics of the government's policy: (a) the duality of policy objectives—recognizing the legitimacy of religion as well as de-religiosity, and trying to control the organized behavior of religion through refining policy provisions and implementation[4], and (b) by "ups and downs" or "to and from" in policy content or process, for instance, the government's highest regulation (State Council, People's Republic of China 2017) clearly stipulates that religious bodies and venues can carry out charitable activities and set up public welfare undertakings. However, the subsequent latest departmental document "Administrative Measures of Religious Bodies" (NRAA 2021) does not stipulate the charitable service functions of religious organizations.

1.4. Research Questions and Methodology

This paper tries to answer some indistinct questions regarding the current practice of Christian service in China: What are the key points in the development process and policy background of social service? What are the legal status types and belief characteristics of various social service organizations? What are the development features of social services and the main obstacles? By presenting and analyzing the relationship between the structural characteristics of Chinese Christian social service organizations and the policy environment, the academic and professional communities will be better informed about the Chinese context.

The research methodology of this paper is based on literature research, also known as the document research method (Scott 2006; McCulloch 2004). According to the research theme and framework, the existing literature was collected and analyzed to form a new and scientific understanding of the facts: the development process, organization types and characteristics of Christian social services, and the government policy connotations and attributes in contemporary China. This paper mainly searches and uses three kinds of data: (a) official government documents, including government regulations and work reports; (b) academic literature at home and abroad; and (c) case information, including websites (such as those of the Amity Foundation and Christian associations at national and local levels), Christian newspapers and periodicals (such as *Gospel Times*, *Heavenly Wind*), and various reports from WeChat official accounts. The specific analytical approaches utilized in the literature include literature review, historical and comparative research, content analysis, statistical analysis, system function analysis, feature and attribute analysis, etc.

2. Types, Functions, and Faith Attributes of Christian Social Organizations in China

2.1. Types of Religious Organizations and Social Service Functions

In China, faith-based social service organizations, like secular social service organizations, are registered as associations, private non-enterprise units, and foundations (MCA 2018). Since 2019, venues for religious activities can be separately registered as independent organizations in the form of a "donation corporation". The above mentioned four types of corporate organizations have relatively different social service functions.

Christian groups: A religious organization is a social organization voluntarily formed by citizens of a common faith background. It is charged with organizing, supervising, and coordinating related educational activities, including religious affairs in religious venues, and identification of religious staff and others. As of 2017, there was a total of half a million registered religious organizations (MCA 2018), accounting for 1.4% of the 355,000 associations in the country. These religious organizations are divided into four levels: national, provincial, municipal, and township levels. They mainly refer to various religious associations and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committees. There are four national Christian organizations officially recognized by the government, namely, the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, the China Christian Council, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and the Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China. Religious organizations at all levels

are independent civic entities; none are subordinate to or led by any others. The main function of these religious associations is faith activities, as well as providing charitable programs or social services through various specialized committees—such as a social service committee or family service committee—or affiliated direct service organizations. Unlike other religious associations in China, the YMCA and the YWCA focus exclusively on social services[5].

Since 2009, a great variety of social organizations in China have enjoyed ample resources for development and are growing by leaps and bounds. However, religious associations have not kept pace with this trend. Conversely, their growth was slowing down. Meanwhile, there was also a downturn in the number of faith-based private non-enterprise units from 2009 to 2014. The growth has been at a standstill since 2015. The category of religious organizations was removed from the social organization data statistics after 2018 (Table 1). This change in the data disclosure of religious organizations is not unrelated to the measures of de-religionization. This shows that the government has taken restrictive measures against the growth of religious organizations in recent years.

Table 1. Religious social organizations in China (2009–2019). Unit: one.

Year	Religious Association NGOs	Ratio %	Religious Social Service NGOs	Ratio %	Total NGOs	Ratio %
2009	4165		271		431,000	
2010	n/a		n/a		n/a	
2011	4650	11.64	169	–37.64	462,000	7.19
2012	4693	0.92	132	–21.89	499,000	8.01
2013	4801	2.30	94	–28.79	547,000	9.62
2014	4898	2.02	82	–14.63	606,000	10.79
2015	5000	2.08	114	39.02	662,000	9.24
2016	5000	0	102	–10.53	722,000	9.06
2017	5000	0	115	12.75	762,000	5.54
2018	n/a		n/a		817,000	7.22
2019	n/a		n/a		866,000	6.00

Source: Ministry of Civil Affairs, Statistical Bulletin on Social Service Development 2009–2019 (MCA 2009–2019).

"Private non-enterprise units" of Christian background: These are direct service providers, such as nursing homes, service centers for the disabled, hospitals, etc. There is no integrated registration system for Christian social service organizations; therefore, it is difficult to collect accurate statistical standards and data. Of the four million private non-enterprise units registered before the end of 2017, only 115 have been explicitly registered as "religious units". In other words, most of the social service organizations run by religious groups are not registered as "religious" organizations, but as "social service" and "medical service" private non-enterprises. By and large, those private non-enterprises with religious backgrounds are in the following three situations: (a) service organizations that were registered in the name of "Christianity". Through the National Social Organization Query portal of China's social organization public service platform, 51 social service organizations with the name of "Christianity" were found, including 28 pension service agencies, seven hospital clinics, eight Christian community organizations (Three-Self Patriotic Committee, management committee, etc.), five churches, two training centers, and one in another form (CSOPSP 2018); (b) Organizations that were registered in spiritual terms, such as "Jesus Love" and "Faith Hope Love"; and (c) organizations that were registered with secular names. Christian faith attributes are generally weaker in these organizations than in those of the first two categories; however, it is hard to use any precise numbers. The name of

an institution often reflects its religious identity and the obstacles to registration it faces. For example, the Shanghai Cedar Love Elderly Home has changed its name six times to manage the challenges (Vala et al. 2015, p. 316).

Foundations of Christian background: This mainly includes the Amity Foundation (1985), which is currently the largest Christian foundation in China. Founded in the early days of the reform period, the operation of the Amity Foundation is mainly funded by international support. At its peak, this support was 98% (Qiu 2015). Since 2013, the Amity Foundation has been able to raise more domestic funds than overseas ones. This change in the structure of service resources reflects the increase in social donations with the fast growth of China's economy, the increase in the government purchase of special services, and the new restrictions on donations and grants from overseas. As the leader of China's non-profit public welfare foundation, the Amity Foundation has been leading the pack in domestic public welfare, being the first to carry out AIDS prevention and control, rural doctor training, a comprehensive poverty alleviation project for the disabled community, social organization training; being the first to use the Internet as a platform to carry out domestic and international fundraising initiatives; and being one of the earliest to establish social enterprises. As of the end of 2018, there were 97 foundations with religious backgrounds in mainland China, including nine of protestant background and four of Catholic background (Qiu et al. 2019). Early established foundations with a Christian background include the Hunan Christian Faith–Deed Foundation (1991), Sichuan Holy Love Special Child Aid Foundation (1994), Zhejiang Light&Salt Agape Foundation (2010), and Shanghai Rende Foundation (2011), etc.

Venues for Christian activities: At present, there are 144,000 religious venues registered in compliance with the law in China, including about 60,000 Christian churches and meeting sites, 98 Catholic dioceses, and more than 6000 churches and activity sites (The White Paper 2018). For a long time, religious venues have had no independent legal status. They were faced with many institutional obstacles in maintaining their own rights and developing social services. According to the newly revised General Provisions of the Civil Law (2017) and "Regulations on Religious Affairs" (2017), venues for religious activities can apply for "registration of venues of religious activities" as "donation juridical entity". At present, this registration work is being carried out in accordance with a document explaining the related legislation and regulations issued by the government (NRAA and MCA 2019); however, no data regarding existing registration institutions have been released. As a "donation juridical entity", the social service functions of Christian venues are mainly reflected in (a) public welfare and charity activities through donations and related projects, (b) community voluntary service through social ministry, and (c) "church reordering", which provides a place for the third-party social services (e.g., the case of Jinan Hongjialou Catholic Church mentioned above).

2.2. The Faith Attributes of the Christian Social Service Organizations in China

In China's current development stage and policy context, the political "sensitivity" to Christian social service organizations mainly stems from their belief characteristics, but not their legal status or service functions. There are two main methods to classify social service organizations according to the degree of their religious affiliations: (a) according to the degree of association with religious institutions—Ellor et al. (1999) proposed that social service organizations related to religious background can be divided into the following four categories: church agency, church-associated agency, church affiliate, and secular agency; the Catholic social service agencies in China now mainly include four types: parish (or diocese)-affiliated agencies, nunnery-affiliated agencies, local church pastoral-affiliated agencies, and agencies managed by individual members (Zhao 2006), and (b) based on the contributing factors or defining features of the religious NGOs and programs, Sider and Unruh (2004) identified six types of organizations: faith-permeated organizations, faith-centered organizations, faith-affiliated organizations, faith-based organizations, faith–secular partnerships, and secular organizations. The first five are differentiated generally

by the degree of their relevance to religion: highly relevant, relatively high in relevance, fairly relevant, relatively low in relevance, and lowly relevant (which can be defined as 1–5 stars). Those of high religious relevance may explicitly reflect their religious faith in their operation, management, staff recruitment, and resource development and utilization[6]. Based on document research and field visits, this paper shows that several Christian social service organizations in China can serve as living examples of the "ideal types" in Sider and Unruh's typology.

2.2.1. Faith-Permeated Organizations

Case: Yunnan Baoshan Gospel Voluntary Drug Rehabilitation Centre

Baoshan Gospel Voluntary Drug Rehabilitation Centre was established and registered in 2009. Managed by the Baoshan Christian Council, the center provides social care in anti-drug and AIDS prevention by means of missionary activities. The rehabilitation and treatment programs are based on the Bible. The patients voluntarily agree to abstain from drugs by relying on the power of Jesus, and to accept the guidance of the Bible as their faith and life principles. The center provides 18 months of guidance and support for their rehabilitation. During this period, the addicts live with other students and staff to support each other, study the Bible, pray, and sing hymns, and take part in other religious activities (Wang 2016; Yang 2019).

2.2.2. Faith-Centered Organizations

Case: Faith Hope Love Disabled People Service Center in Jinan City

This organization, formerly known as the Jinan Ji'ai (*Jesus Love*) Service Center for the Mentally Handicapped, was established in October 2007 and was re-registered as Jinan Faith Hope Love Disabled People Service Center in September 2016. Meanwhile, it has transformed from a faith-background organization into a faith-centered social service organization. The organization makes explicit religious references in their mission statement. As stated, its purpose is to "promote Christ's love, focus on the disabled, work together to build harmony". The organizational principles are not to be served but to serve, offer people-oriented love, and respect/acceptance/caring (Jinan Faith Hope Love Disabled Service Center 2017). It is affiliated with the provincial CC/TSPM (chairperson/vice chairperson and the president act as the board chairs). At first, council members and staff did not have any faith background, but now all members of the council are from the same religious faith. The organization has gained greater support from the faith community. Their faith approaches (spiritual theology) are widely applied in service activities.

2.2.3. Faith-Affiliated Organizations

Case: The Amity Foundation

The Amity Foundation is a charity foundation established in April 1985.Its mandate is twofold: direct services and project funding. Its organizational mission highlights the influence of the religious beliefs of their founder. The majority of the senior management and board members share the same religion. Some of the board members are staff from the government, leaders of other established social organizations, as well as other professionals. There is no consideration for the faith commitment in other staff recruitment. Basically, the organization acknowledges their faith but separates religious elements from their programs, and there are no fixed linkages, depending on different contexts. Faith may be expressed implicitly in their service programs or as acts of compassion and care (Amity Foundation 2021).

2.2.4. Faith-Background Organizations

Case: Elim Autism Training Center in Qingdao City

Elim Autism Training Center, established in October 2000, is mainly engaged in the training of autistic children and coaches for parents. It has set up a wholistic service

system and facility for children with autism (Elim Autism Forum 2015). Religious faith is closely linked to the founder; however, there are no direct business connections with any religious groups. The key members of the board have a faith commitment. Staff recruitment emphasizes professional competence rather than faith obligations. Programs have no explicitly religious content. The "fee policy" is based on a mixed model of social and private enterprise. The organization is currently undergoing a restructuring of the governance of this family-owned enterprise.

2.2.5. Faith–Secular Partnership

Case: Shengde Pension Service Center in Shouguang

This type of organization differs entirely from the "faith–secular partnership" generalized by Sider and Unruh. Though it draws on various secular and religious resources, the combination method is of different modes, which are determined by the local social development level and certain factors such as the faith background of the management and the cooperation relations.

Shengde Pension Service Center in Shouguang opened in May 2016. It accepts elderly clients who are self-reliant, disabled, or living with dementia. The key features of this organization are that (a) it was invested by village committee officials, operated by a local church group, and managed by church members, and (b) it combines traditional Chinese culture and modern service ideas, and Christian culture. On the one hand, it carries traditional Chinese virtues of respecting the elderly and worships the wisdom of "filial piety". On the other hand, it insists that evangelism comes first, and tries to soothe the seniors' souls and lead them to eternity by promoting the gospel (Pension Service Center of Shengde 2017).

For a long time in China, the service organizations of higher religious relevance seldom got social recognition, and it has been difficult for them to register, compared to those of lower religious relevance. Since 2012, after the publication of the document encouraging and regulating the charity activities issued by the six ministries and commissions, the atmosphere has improved greatly. Government sectors and local communities started to embrace religious social service organizations. As a result, significant progress has been made in their legal status as well as in their own management capacity. However, to what extent social service organizations or charity organizations with religious backgrounds can maintain their faith characteristics and balance the faith elements and service expertise remain the topics for further discussion by the government and all sectors of society.

3. The Development Characteristics and Limitations of Christian Social Services in China

3.1. Some Development Features

Having been witness to the Christian social services in China since the 21st century, we can make the following summaries and comments:

Firstly, Christian social service activities have entered the initial stage of development and begun to take on multiple forms (Luo 2018; Pei et al. 2010; Zhao 2006; Dong 2012; Zhang 2011), including (a) donations and voluntary services—religious groups and venues receive more donation income, service income, and operating income for charity activities (during the Religious Charity Week in 2012–2014, the donation amount of various religious factions (including Christianity) exceeded CNY 800 million in total (NRAA 2015)); (b) public welfare and charity activities based on social service projects, including cooperative service projects purchased by the government and service projects contracted by religious groups or foundations, such as the operation and management project of Shanghai Community Cultural Center undertaken by Shanghai Husain Community Service Management Center affiliated with the Shanghai YMCA, and the Western Manna aid project of the Social Service Department of the CCC/TSPM (Zuo 2016; CCC/TSPM 2019); and (c) public service relying on professional service organizations. This includes accelerating the establishment of special fund management institutions, foundations, social welfare service agencies,

non-profit medical institutions, etc., or increasing the introduction and participation of professional organizations and the use of church facilities to provide social services. In 2015, Hongjialou Catholic Church in Jinan accepted the Zhiguang Qineng Center (Service agency for mentally disabled children) of Licheng District as one of the church's auxiliary facilities for carrying out services[7]. In December 2016, Shandong Provincial CC/TSPM "officially took over" Jinan Faith Hope Love Disabled People Service Center (autism rehabilitation center) (Gao and Wang 2017). The heads of the provincial CC/TSPM directly participate in the agency board, and it is expected to build a demonstration agency. In addition, it is worth noting that some social work service agencies with a Christian background have come into existence, such as Guangzhou's Yiren Social Service Center (established in 2010)[8]. These agencies are trying to combine mission ideals with professional services.

Secondly, the main target groups of organizational services have changed from the disabled to the elderly, and the service objects of the project have gradually extended from low-income people to other target groups. When Christian social services reappeared in China in the 1980s, for the sake of service legitimacy and in need of overseas resource support, disabled children, the most vulnerable group at that time, were chosen as the service objects. Some of the social service organizations with a Catholic background have played the role of pioneer, such as Huiling Home (Guangdong)[9], Zhiguang Center (Shandong), Liming Family (Hebei), Angel House (Guangxi), etc. As of the 21st century, institutional care for the elderly has become the growth point for religious social services. According to the statistics from government departments, there are more than 400 elderly care institutions in the religious community, with a total number of about 29,000 beds (The White Paper 2018). Among them, there were 22 Christian elderly care institutions in Shandong Province in 2017, with more than 2800 beds, 75% of which were nursing beds, and the occupancy rate was more than 90% (Gao and Wang 2017). From 2012 to 2019, the national CCC/TSPM held 14 seminars on elderly care services, covering such professional themes as the architectural design of nursing homes, admission assessment and care plans, hospice care, care for the mentally disabled and whole person care, performance, and management of elderly care institutions, with 1058 beneficiaries (Social Service Department of China Christian Council 2021). The advantages and prospects of the Christian religious community in providing elderly care services have also attracted the attention of academia and media (Zhao and Zhao 2012; Wu 2017). From the perspective of the community development and charity assistance projects of frontier organizations such as the Amity Foundation and Hebei Jinde Charities Foundation (formerly known as Hebei Jinde Charities Service Center, founded in 1997, the largest Catholic social service organization in China), beneficiaries have extended to young children (education), overseas poor people, etc., reflecting some new directions for the future development of Chinese Christian social services.

Thirdly, the basic functions of social services are still in the recovery period, and the organizational system and service size are not complete and sufficient. (a) Only a few organizations have formulated their relatively standardized operational standards for management systems, professional services, and resource allocations. Since the mid-1980s, the two most famous Christian social service organizations, Shanghai YMCA and the Amity Foundation (Nanjing), have been leading the process of non-profit and professionalization of Chinese Christian social services (He and Wang 2015). In 1996, Shanghai YMCA and YWCA cooperated with the government to establish the first comprehensive community service center in Shanghai and even in China, which was independently managed and operated by the Christian non-profit organizations Luoshan Civil Center (Yang 2001a, 2001b). The Amity Foundation, established in 1985, is the largest Christian foundation in China. There are 86 full-time staff in its headquarters, with an annual average wage of CNY 106,000 and nearly 1000 staff in subordinate institutions and projects (Amity Foundation 2019; Qiu 2015). At present, except for a small number of market-oriented special education institutions, most of the nonprofit-oriented small and medium-sized organizations are faced with problems such as lack of funds, poor professionalism, and irregular organization and management (Liu 2013). Generally speaking, the existing human

resources of Christianity in China are greater than they were before 1949, but the service scale and scope are far from the level before 1949 (Gao 2008). (b) The service department systems of church groups are not complete. Christian social services in various countries and in regions of Hong Kong and Taiwan are mainly divided into two major systems: social services departments (such as the social services department of Anglican Church in Hong Kong) and the relatively independent non-profit service organizations (such as the Hong Kong YMCA and Hong Kong Christian Service). Although China's two national Protestant associations (CCC/TSPM) established the "social service department" as early as 2003, few of the major Christian organizations at the provincial level have set up their social service departments. According to the statistics on the websites of officially recognized national Christian organizations and provincial (autonomous region and municipality) Christian churches (January 2020), China's national CCC/TSPM set up a full-time social service department, and China's Catholic "one meeting one group" set up a public charity and social service committee; 11 of 31 provincial Christian churches in mainland China have set up websites (20 provinces have not)[10]. Only Shandong and Hunan provinces have set up part-time professional committees of social services. Generally speaking, the direct service effectiveness of social service organizations with religious backgrounds is significantly greater than that of separate church groups (Gao 2018). However, the number of Christian social service agencies is not large everywhere. In addition to the 22 elderly care institutions in the Shandong provincial Christian church system, there are only two autistic rehabilitation centers, three orphanages, and two small hospitals (Gao and Wang 2017). It is far from the situation where religious non-profit organizations hold up "half the sky" of civil society services, as in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which can provide the Chinese mainland with an important frame of reference in terms of service scale, diversity, and professionalism. (c) Many social service organizations and groups with an unregistered congregation (house church) background can only maintain small-scale operations because they have not been recognized and supported by government departments. If the scale escalates, it will be restricted or even banned (Vala et al. 2015).

3.2. Limitations

In general, the role of Chinese Christian groups in social services has not been fulfilled, which is not commensurate with their rich human capital conditions. China's Christian social services have their external and internal limitations.

The first is the restrictions of the social system and the level of modernization. At present, China's social system, in contrast to "civil society", is known as "centralized society" or "(post) total society" (Sun 1993; Sun et al. 2001), that is, a unified society in which the state has control and allocates power over almost all resources in the society. This system determines the duality of China's social structure; that is, there is only a two-tier structure of "state" and "citizens", and there is no independent intermediary structure between the state and the people. The development of various social organizations, including religious organizations, trying to become intermediary forces will be tightly restricted by the state. At the same time, this kind of "total society" adopts a developmentalist social policy. In addition to providing a higher level of welfare guarantee for the employees within the system, it also implements the supplementary welfare policy for employees and residents outside the system. Through strict registration and tax management, it hinders and restricts the flow of social resources to welfare services and NPOs. In grassroots fields such as charity and community service, the government's leading management role is also emphasized. For example, the Interim Measures for the Management of Social Welfare Institutions (1999) issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs stipulates that "social organizations and individuals that set up social welfare institutions with orphans and abandoned children as service objects must be jointly organized with the local civil affairs department of people's government at or above the county level; when adopting orphans or abandoned children, social welfare institutions shall be reviewed and approved by the competent civil affairs department, and sign a surrogate agreement" (MCA 1999). To

a great extent, this hinders and restricts the development of the third sector, including religious charities, by virtue of social service demand and resource accumulation.

The second is the textual limitation and uncertainty of religious policy itself. Policy documents are a synthesis of specific information, opinions, and intentions (Olssen et al. 2004). There needs to be an objective explanation for the content of policy text and the practice of policy implementation. China has not yet adopted basic law or common law on religion. It mainly takes the government's regulations on religious affairs as the policy framework. To a large extent, the lower-level law replaces the upper-level law to deal with religious issues (Liu 2008), which makes it difficult to guarantee the rights of "freedom of religious belief" and "normal religious activities" stipulated in the constitution. The texts of administrative regulations and rules at the national level are mainly formulated and implemented by the National Religious Affairs Administration, which inevitably affects the scientific context and impartiality. Because of the institutional characteristics and policy orientation, the binding effect on the civil and religious forces is greater than the encouraging effect; difficulties of registration and tax exemption are common problems that plague the civil society service organizations. However, social service organizations with religious backgrounds have faced a double dilemma in terms of various resource conditions: The civil affairs departments of the government usually put forward the requirements of de-religionization for the registration and administration of social service organizations with religious backgrounds. "Equal treatment" for religious social service organizations and non-religious social service organizations is the same treatment on the premise of irreligion and hidden religion, or on the premise of retaining a certain degree of belief and expression; this is an issue that government departments and religious social service agencies have not sorted out for a long time. Therefore, the registration of some famous institutions such as China Catholic Jinde Charities and Liaoning Catholic Social Service Center (Caritas Shengjing) has experienced many years of setbacks (Gao 2008; Dong 2012). The government departments prohibit religious logos, prints, advertisements, clothes, etc., in service settings. Recognition of religious social services and charity achievements is generally confined to the religious world, and is mainly commended by government departments and rarely put into the mass media. The uncertainty in the implementation of religious charity policies has led some religious non-profit organizations to switch to registration with industrial and commercial institutions and to avoid or reduce the administrative supervision of government departments at the cost of weakening public welfare missions.

The third is the lag in internal capacity building. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Christian social services gradually disappeared, and by the period of the "Cultural Revolution", they had completely disappeared. The social welfare and charity institutions that the Catholic Church operates globally to date comprise 5158 hospitals, 16,523 clinics, 612 leprosy hospitals, 15,679 elderly homes and chronic disease centers for the disabled, 9492 orphanages, 12,637 children's parks, 14,576 marriage counseling centers, 3782 education and social re-education centers, and 37,601 other charity agencies (Agenzia Fides 2016). Due to historical interruption and constraint, the types, quantity, and scale of the existing Christian charitable organizations in China are very limited, and the capacity of the organizational system is insufficient. In the early 1980s, China's Christian social service recovery mainly relied on overseas resource support and the guidance of management methods. For example, the early partners of Jinde Charities included Misereor (Germany), Catholic Relief Services (US), Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (UK), and Caritas Italy (Gao 2008). At present, one of the main internal bottlenecks in the development of charitable organizations with a religious background is still the lag in management system and the lack of professional talents (Chang 2018). Most of the public welfare charities lack standardized organizational and financial systems and have not formed a system for public disclosure of institutional funding sources, flows, and uses (Dong 2012). Major Christian colleges or seminaries have not set up professional courses in social services or social work (Yanjing Theological Seminary 2021). At present,

another important problem that religious social service organizations generally need to solve is how to achieve the de-religious or cross-cultural sensitivity of professional services and to provide services for the public of different faiths according to the principle of separating public charitable activities from religious beliefs[11].

4. Summary and Discussion

Due to the social demand and internal motivation, China's Christian social services have formed a trend of initial development. The specific performance is as follows: (a) government departments have issued policies to encourage religious charity and equal treatment, (b) the religious community has formed a basic consensus on the task of developing social services, (c) national and local religious organizations have started to set up social service coordination departments, (d) various types of religious social service organizations are increasing, and (e) all kinds of charity activities tend to be active. However, compared with the advanced international level, there is a significant gap in the scale and types of Christian social services in China. There are specific limitations in the social system background, government policy text and implementation, and organizational structure and service capacity, etc. There is still a long way to go to achieve the basic goal of reconstruction and development.

Since 2012, the government has clearly put forward the policy of "encouraging" and "supporting" the development of religious charity and begun to adopt an equal treatment policy. However, the specific provisions of government departments on how to encourage and support the implementation are not clear enough. Although there are many specific provisions that restrict the content, place, methods, donation, and other fields of service activities, there are many ambiguities in the content of the policy, resulting in a randomness or flexibility in policy implementation. Since the mid-2010s, the government policy of religious social service has also stagnated or even regressed, which is reflected in the restrictions on religious bodies being able to directly set up and engage in social service agencies, as well as the suppression of the cultural identity and symbols of religious social service agencies. For social policy researchers, it is necessary to discuss with the public and government departments how to increase the "desensitization" awareness of religious social services (to give up traditional political vigilance) and shift from ideological exclusion to cultural acceptance and social recognition; it is necessary to coordinate with policymakers of government departments to sort out the connotation and standards of "equal treatment", and to bring religious social service institutions and activities into the management of non-profit organizations through clearer and more scientific policy rules and implementation processes.

At the same time, social workers need to participate in and cooperate with religious social service organizations to realize the standardization of their organizational management and the professionalization of their services, and to assist religious social service organizations in the process of accepting social supervision and providing professional social services with cultural sensitivity to the public and to religious believers.

Funding: This research was funded by the Major Project of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Base of the Ministry of Education, grant number 12JJD730002.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: All data generated or used during the study appear in the submitted article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Such as Canton Hospital (1835, Guangzhou), Renji Hospital (1844, Shanghai), Saint John's University (1879, Shanghai), Relief Institute, Orphanage, Foundling Hospital (1882, Hong Kong), School for the Blind of Peking (1874), Chefoo School for the Deaf and Dumb (1887, Yantai), Huiai Medicine Epilepsy Hospital (1898, Guangzhou), and the Leprosarium (1887, Beihai) (Wang 2004).

2 Including Beijing, Tianjin, Taiyuan, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Jinan, Qingdao, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Hankou, Wuchang, Changsha, Guangzhou, Nanchang, Kaifeng, Taishan, Shantou, Xi'an, Lanzhou, Baoji, Chongqing, Chengdu, Kunming, Guiyang, etc. (Jin 2002).

3 Buddhism and Taoism have a large number of believers, but the number of their ordinary believers is difficult to accurately count because of the lack of strict admission procedures; it is generally believed that the number of ordinary believers in Buddhism in China exceeds that in Christianity (The White Paper 2018; Lu and Zhang 2016).

4 The functions of religious organizations stipulated in the "Administrative Measures of Religious Bodies" (NRAA 2019) do not include social services and charity, whereas the "Administrative Measures of Religious Personnel" (NRAA 2021) stipulates that religious personnel have the right to "carry out public welfare and charity activities".

5 Historically, there are also the Salvation Army, Caritas, and other religious social service organizations that have not been restored or reestablished in mainland China.

6 The "5 stars class" faith-permeated organizations are quite rare. In the Hong Kong Region of China, the typical "5 stars class" organization is Wu Oi Christian Center. This organization emphasizes the recipient's degree of faith in Christianity. The "spiritual progress" of recipients during training is taken as the evaluation standard for service effectiveness. The funding is mainly by donations from different Christian Churches, believers, and enthusiasts (Wu Oi Christian Center 2021).

7 The author's interview with Mr. Cheng (the manager of the Zhiguang Qineng Center of Licheng District), 6 October 2019.

8 Others include Nanjing Amity Social Work Service Center, Dongguan Angel Heart Social Work Service Center, Chengdu Angel Heart Social Work Service Center, Zhengzhou Faith Hope Love Social Work Service Center, Qingdao Agape Social Work Service Center, and Qingdao Cabala Social Work Service Center (the author of this paper interviewed the directors of the two agencies in Qingdao in 2019).

9 Huiling Home is the largest non-governmental community service organization for persons with mental disabilities in China, and it now belongs to the Faith–Secular Partnership. Ms. Meng, the founder of Huiling Home for Persons with Mental Disabilities, said that Huiling is a service institution with a Christian "birthmark" (online interview with the author on 28 January 2020); Ms. Meng is of the Christian faith and was strongly supported by overseas Caritas in the early stage of operation.

10 With the help of Ms. Zhang Jie (2017 MSW student of Shandong University) in statistics.

11 The famous statesman and theologian John Stott (1975) offered a classic discussion on the differences of Christian groups' views on the relationship between social activity and evangelism.

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