

# A COMPANION TO THE REFORMATION WORLD

*Edited by*

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## TWENTY-TWO

### Promise: China

*R. PO-CHIA HSIA*

In 1585 the printer Johann Mayer in Dillingen published a work in German, entitled *Historical Report of the Conversion of the Great Land and Island of Japan*. Consisting of translations from the Latin letters received by German Jesuits from missionaries of their own Society in Japan, this work provided a first glimpse of the Catholic missions in faraway Japan from 1577 to 1581. Dedicated to Bishop Marquardt of Augsburg (whose episcopal seat was in nearby Dillingen), the printer wanted to show “that the Almighty good God, in the place of so many thousand souls in Upper and Lower Germany who were tempted by the Evil Enemy . . . through numerous unstable new teachings, particularly by the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Zwinglian heretical preachers . . . has elected another people from the other side of the world, who has hitherto known nothing of the holy faith.”

As it turned out, the Japanese did not become the new chosen people, as savage persecutions by the Tokugawa regime in the early seventeenth century crushed the flourishing Catholic mission (see chapter 23). But the publication of this book in 1585 pointed to a conjunction of events. As one of the strongest proponents of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Bishop Marquardt had just provoked the Protestants in Augsburg into a fierce confrontation over the introduction of the new Gregorian calendar (1582), rejected by Protestants due to its papal origins. Also in those very years, two Italian Jesuits, Michele Ruggiero and Matteo Ricci, obtained permission to establish a residence in southern China (1583), thus inaugurating a Catholic mission that would bring a more enduring success than in Japan. The force behind the China mission, Ricci, had been a student at the Roman College of the Society of Jesus under Christopher Clavius, the Jesuit mathematician responsible for the new Gregorian calendar. In time, Ricci himself and his Jesuit successors would play an equally significant role in calendar reform in seventeenth-century China.

Although the Catholic princes in the Holy Roman Empire became supporters of the Jesuit China mission, Catholicism in sixteenth-century China owed its origins to the Iberian maritime expansion. Under the patronage of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, sanctioned by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, Catholic missionaries accompanied Iberian sailors and merchants to the Americas, Africa, and Asia. China fell under

the sphere of influence of the Portuguese crown; and after the establishment of the small Portuguese enclave of Macao in 1557, several abortive attempts were made to introduce missionaries to China proper, before the successful venture of Ruggiero and Ricci in 1583.

## Chronology

### 1 Foundations, 1583–1630s

The major events in the history of Christianity in China are well known. As told in *The Christian Expedition to China* (1615), based on Ricci's memoirs and revised by the Belgian Jesuit Nicolas Trigault during a fundraising trip back to Europe, the story of the Catholic mission, at least during the first 20 years, represented to a large extent the personal triumph of one man, Ricci. Viewed initially by the Chinese as teachers of a new Buddhist sect from India, Ricci and a handful of Jesuits persisted in presenting a distinct message: Christianity, or the Teachings of Heaven, as Catholicism came to be called in the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), was the only true universal religion; its monotheism, its moral rigor, and its intellectual foundations agreed essentially with the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages, as recorded in the canon of the Confucian tradition. Christian conversion in China, in other words, was undertaken very differently from the practice in the Americas. Faced with an ancient and self-confident civilization, and without colonial conquests, natural reason and moral philosophy became the rhetoric of persuasion. Ricci succeeded brilliantly after investing more than a decade in mastering written classical Chinese and learning the Confucian canon. By 1595, the Jesuits cast off Buddhist robes and assumed a new persona as "western literati"; dressed in the style of Chinese scholars, Ricci and his companions cultivated officials and literati, exchanged western gifts (clocks and maps) for patronage, and attracted enormous curiosity by the novelty and brilliance of their intellectual and social performance, exemplified by learned discourse, expertise in mathematics, and printed works in Chinese.

While no more than a dozen Jesuits worked in China during his lifetime, Ricci's personal reputation and elite network achieved enormous gains for the Catholic mission. With converts numbering probably no more than a few hundred before 1600, Ricci's patrons secured for him imperial permission to reside in the capital Beijing. In 1603 Ricci published *Tianzhu shiyi* ("True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven"), combining Aristotelian logic, Christian doctrines, and Confucian rhetoric to create a template of Sino-Catholic persuasion that would be crucial for the future history of the Catholic mission. When Ricci died in 1610, the Wanli emperor bestowed an official funeral and cemetery. Ricci's work was continued by the cooperation between the major Chinese converts – leading officials and renowned literati – and a handful of new Jesuit arrivals. Between 1610 and the 1630s, when the Jesuits (European missionaries and Chinese and Macaist brothers) ranged from 10 to 20, the number of converts shot up from ca. 2,500 in 1610 to some 40,000 in 1636 (Standaert, *Handbook*, p. 382).

The success of the Jesuit mission was not uninterrupted. Sporadic, local, and early opposition to Christianity crystallized in the 1616–17 campaign instigated by Shen Que, the vice-minister of the Nanjing Ministry of Rites. Shen accused the Jesuits in

Beijing – Diego de Pantoja (1571–1618) and Sabatino De Ursis (1575–1620) – of subverting the Confucian state order by their projected calendar reform, and similarly accused Alfonso Vagnone (1568–1640) and Alvaro de Semedo (1586–1658) in Nanjing, the southern capital, of creating a heterodox sect. Even though the leading Christian officials Xu Guangqi (Paul) and Yang Tingyun (Michele) composed apologies defending the orthodoxy and usefulness of Christianity, other officials supported Shen and an imperial edict of February 3, 1617 expelled the four Jesuits to Macao. Protected by Yang in his hometown of Hangzhou, the other missionaries rode out the storm, and renewed their success in the following decades.

## 2 *Crisis, 1630s–1660s*

The second period of Christianity lasted from the 1630s to the 1660s. This was a time of tumultuous changes. Famine and uprisings toppled the Ming dynasty; and China was invaded by the Manchus, who established a new dynasty, the Qing. For most of these decades, warfare and insecurity hampered the work of conversion, but the Christian Church survived remarkably well the years of conquest and internal warfare. The number of Christians remained stable between 60,000 and 80,000; and the Jesuit astronomers in Beijing, under the leadership of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, were taken into service by the new conquest dynasty. China was no longer an exclusive mission domain for the Jesuits, who operated under Portuguese crown patronage. In the 1630s, Spanish friars (two Dominicans and one Franciscan) arrived in the southeastern coastal province of Fujian from Manila, where the orders had worked among the large Chinese (Fujian) immigrant community.

The arrival of Spanish friars initiated a long dispute over the methods of conversion in China. Formed by their experience in the Americas (the friars traveled from Spain to the New World before arriving in the Philippines), the Spanish mendicants held a more rigid view of Christianity: conversion entailed renouncing indigenous customs and beliefs, labeled as superstitious, and the new Christian identity often implied Hispanicization. This alternative model of conversion worked well for the friars, for their work in the New World and in the Philippines was backed up by the secular arm of the Spanish colonial empire. In Fujian, the friars were disturbed by the Jesuit method of conversion, specifically the accommodation of Christianity to Chinese practices in ancestral and Confucian rituals. They also criticized the Jesuit use of Chinese terms to denote the Christian God, fearing a confusion of “superstitious” and true beliefs. Controversy over proper terminology had previously divided the Jesuits; Niccolò Longobardo (1565–1655), Ricci’s successor, had opposed Ricci’s accommodationist method. But the Jesuits resolved their division internally at the 1627 conference at Jiading, where the majority of Jesuit missionaries supported Ricci’s methods against Longobardo’s minority view. True to Jesuit obedience, the fathers would maintain an almost solid front against later criticisms. This issue first reached Rome when the Dominican friar Juan Baptista Morales, the first of his order to work in China, presented a list of objections to Rome. It resulted in a first judgment against Chinese rites issued in 1645 by the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide). Jesuit counter-lobbying led to the dispatch of Martino Martini to Rome, who secured a favorable decree by Pope Alexander VII, affirming the civil character of Chinese rites and hence their approbation.



### 3 *Ascent, 1664–1707*

Differences over conversion strategies, in fact, reflected the national rivalry between the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, as well as competition between religious orders. During the third period of early modern Chinese Christianity, from 1664 to 1707, disagreements over Chinese rites intensified in a more complex missionary picture, with new religious orders entering the mission field and with papal intervention in the Portuguese patronage. The initial years of this period were marked by a political struggle against the Jesuit astronomers. In 1664, the Chinese official Yang Guangxian brought charges against Adam Schall, head of the Astronomical Bureau, of having selected an inauspicious date for the burial of an infant son of the Shunzhi emperor's favorite consort, thus resulting in the premature death of the consort and the emperor (1660/1661). Yang also condemned Christianity as a heterodox sect that undermined Confucian orthodoxy and social order. Deprived of Shunzhi's protection, in 1665 Schall and his Chinese colleagues at the Astronomical Bureau were arrested and condemned to death. The court executed the Chinese astronomers, five of whom were Christians, but pardoned Schall when Beijing was struck by a strong earthquake, which was interpreted as a sign of the wrath of the Christian God. The persecutions shook the foundations of the Christian mission. Except for four court Jesuits, all missionaries were rounded up and confined to prison and then house arrest in Canton (1665–71). Christianity was proscribed and churches were closed throughout the country. The Catholic mission only recovered from this grave crisis when Yang, who succeeded as director of the Astronomical Bureau, proved unequal to his task. The young emperor Kangxi allowed the Belgian Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest to challenge Yang to an astronomical prediction. With western science triumphant, Kangxi restored the Jesuits to good graces. Condemned to death in 1669 for his intrigue, Yang's sentence was commuted to internal exile. Although Kangxi freed the missionaries from confinement in Canton and allowed churches to reopen, the edict forbidding Christianity was not formally rescinded. Christianity in early modern China would reach its zenith under the reign of Kangxi, but it flourished only under the benevolence of the emperor. An imperial edict of 1692 gave the mission a great boost. In response to Jesuit petitions against a local persecution, Kangxi issued an edict disassociating Christianity from seditious heterodox sects, specifying that in reward for the service of Jesuits in diplomatic missions with Russia, Christian worship was allowed for subjects of the emperor. Repeated favors bestowed by Kangxi on individual Jesuits vastly increased the prestige of Christianity. Between the Calendar Case of 1664/5 and the 1692 Edict, the number of Christians roughly doubled to 200,000.

The end of persecutions coincided with a new missionary enthusiasm in Europe. Having recovered from the Thirty Years' War, a confident Catholic Europe sent new generations of missionaries to China in answer to Verbiest's appeal. With fewer than 30 missionaries during the Calendar Persecution in 1665, the number rose to almost 40 by 1679, and jumped rapidly during the following two decades to reach a maximum of around 140 Europeans in 1701. In addition to Jesuits under Portuguese patronage, whose number included members from many nationalities, a fresh contingent of French Jesuits arrived in China in 1687. As agents of Louis XIV's diplomatic, scientific, and religious mission, the French Jesuits refused to submit to

Portuguese authority and eventually won approval from the general in Rome to establish a separate and independent mission. The mendicants also received reinforcements. Fujian became the dominant missionary field of the Dominicans; Franciscans concentrated their effort in Shangdong and Guangdong provinces on the coast, and Shaanxi in the interior; and the first Augustinians arrived in 1680. Swelling the ranks of godly servants were missionaries sent by the Propaganda Fide in Rome. Aiming to pry China away from the monopoly of Portuguese patronage, the papacy dispatched Italian mendicants as vicars apostolic to China. A new religious order, the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP), created under Propaganda sponsorship, would play a significant role after 1684.

Ecclesiastical administration was also restructured during this period. Under Jesuit predominance, the China mission was originally subject to the province of Japan, before the vice-province of China was created as a separate unit. Given the small clerical presence in China during the first decades, the mission operated rather autonomously from the ecclesiastical structure of Portuguese Asia, centered in the archdiocese of Goa and in the diocese of Macao. In 1657 Pope Alexander VII created apostolic vicariates for China and Southeast Asia, to operate outside of the jurisdiction of the diocese of Macao. The first vicars apostolic entered China only in the 1680s. By the next decade, the China mission was administratively divided between the dioceses of Beijing, Nanjing, and Macao, in addition to the apostolic vicariates.

Initial conflict over jurisdiction and hierarchy gradually subsided, but the complex missionary presence ignited the dormant but persistent controversy over Chinese rites. In general, the Dominicans and the MEP strongly opposed Jesuit methods, a hostility linked to the Jesuit–Dominican rivalry in Europe and the strongly Jansenist anti-Jesuitism of the MEP. The Franciscans and Augustinians wavered between the two positions, trying to find a balance between the two.

The crucial initiative to ban Chinese rites came from Charles Maigrot, a member of the MEP and vicar apostolic in Fujian. In 1693 he submitted to Rome a series of articles on Chinese rites deemed superstitious. In 1697 Innocent XII ordered the Holy Office to investigate thoroughly the longstanding controversy, a laborious process interrupted by the death of the pope in 1700. Meanwhile, vigorous lobbying went on from both sides; the Jesuits even secured a statement from Emperor Kangxi to the effect that rites honoring ancestors and Confucius were essentially civil and not religious ceremonies. Disagreement over conversion strategy in China rapidly became a public matter in Catholic Europe and took on the character of an anti-Jesuit campaign. In 1700 the theological faculty at the Sorbonne condemned a list of proposals in a book on China written by the French Jesuit missionary Louis Le Comte. By 1704, the Holy Office reached a decision on Maigrot's mandate. Referring to the 1645 and 1656 papal decisions, Clement XI's decree concurred with many of Maigrot's propositions: the Chinese terms *tian* (heaven) and *shangdi* (Lord on High) were forbidden; church tablets bearing the words *jing tian* (respect heaven) were to be removed; Christians could not participate in sacrifices to Confucius or to ancestors; ancestral tablets were allowed only if they bore the names of the deceased and no other words. Clement appointed Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon as papal legate to China, instructing him to publish the papal decree at an appropriate time.

Tournon arrived in Beijing in December 1705. Despite an initially favorable audience with Emperor Kangxi, Tournon incurred imperial anger when he openly sided with Maigrot, whom Kangxi held in contempt for his limited knowledge of classical Chinese. Expelled from the court in 1706, Tournon publicized Clement's decree in 1707, to great consternation among the Jesuits and Chinese converts. The condemnation of rituals honoring ancestors and Confucius profoundly alienated the Chinese elites and provoked strong opposition in many Christian communities. The injunction to remove tablets with the words *jing tian* from churches exposed Christianity to political repressions, for the words were bestowed by Kangxi himself on the Jesuit church in Beijing. The emperor perceived Tournon's mission to be undue papal interference to his rule and required all missionaries to swear allegiance to the methods of Ricci and to remain forever in China. Those refusing the oath were denied a residence permit and ordered to leave.

#### 4 Decline, 1707–1800

The fourth period of Christianity dated from 1707 to the end of the eighteenth century. Three main developments were characteristic. First, the Chinese rites prohibition led to a definitive rupture between Beijing and Rome, leading to the official ban on Christianity in 1724. Second, the strength and nature of Chinese Christianity changed substantially in the face of persecutions, launched usually by hostile provincial and local officials, who could invoke the imperial ban. The persecutions of 1746–52 and 1784–5 shocked public opinion in Europe owing to the martyrdom of European missionaries. Finally, Christianity in China came to be viewed increasingly as incompatible with Chinese traditions, while the Catholic Church became Sinicized, with European missionaries playing a diminishing role.

Years of ambiguity followed Tournon's debacle. The legate himself, elevated to cardinal, died in 1710 in Macao under house arrest. Christian communities followed different ritual practices, depending on their clerical leadership. Strict prohibition of Chinese rites was only achieved in those communities (in Fujian) where the Dominicans and MEP exercised clerical control; many Jesuits and Franciscans continued to adhere to a modified form of Chinese rites, attempting to follow in Ricci's footsteps while obeying papal injunction. Kangxi himself avoided an open break with Christianity and continued to employ Jesuits and missionaries of other orders in imperial service. Definitive rupture was postponed until 1720/1. In 1715 Clement XI issued an apostolic constitution *Ex illa die*, which affirmed the decree of Tournon and forbade disobedience under any subterfuge. In strong language, the constitution prescribed excommunication for all recalcitrant clergy, and specifically admonished the Society of Jesus to obedience. The promulgation of this document in Beijing aroused anew the wrath of Kangxi. While submitting to papal authority, many missionaries feared the destruction of Christianity and appealed for revisions. To clarify papal intentions, Clement XI appointed Carlo Mezzabarba as new papal legate in 1719. In the course of many audiences with Kangxi in the winter of 1720/1, Mezzabarba's legation proved equally disastrous. Irrked by inter-order rivalry, Kangxi dismissed Mezzabarba's mission as a replay of that of Tournon and Maigrot. Intolerant of ecclesiastical intervention in China, contemptuous of the presumption of Europeans to judge Chinese culture, the emperor rejected *Ex illa die*: "After reviewing this procla-

mation, one can only speak of western ignoranti, and not of Chinese principles. Moreover, no European understands Chinese texts, and their arguments are often ludicrous. Now I see that this proclamation by the envoy is merely similar to the teachings of Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, and heterodox sectarians. Nothing can be more ridiculous and nonsensical than this. Hereafter, westerners do not need to preach their teachings in China. It ought to be forbidden to prevent troubles" (Chen Yuan, *Kangxi*, p. 96).

Kangxi's wish to proscribe Christianity was enacted only in 1724 by his successor, the Yongzhen emperor, who was troubled by the conversion of some imperial clansmen, sons of Sunu, a major supporter of Yongzhen's rivals to the throne. Zealous local officials closed down churches, but on the whole Christianity suffered little repression under Yongzhen's reign (1724–35), the only exceptions being the exile of Sunu's sons, who became celebrated in Jesuit letters to Europe, and the strangulation of the Portuguese Jesuit João Mourão (1681–1726), adviser to two rival imperial princes executed by Yongzhen. Clearly, the emperor's motivation was political; Christianity as such mattered little, it was a religion "without harm or benefit." Nevertheless, the loss of imperial favor dealt a severe blow to Chinese Christianity. From a high of 200,000 in 1701, the number of converts dropped almost in half to an estimated figure of 120,000 in 1740. It would grow only slightly over the eighteenth century, when China's population more than doubled from 160 to 350 million. Far more significant was the changing social profile of conversion: with a few exceptions, elite conversions dried up. The French Jesuit Antoine Gaubil, who arrived in China in 1722, stated the deplorable fact: "We only baptize poor people. The literati and the well-placed who had wanted to become Christians abandoned us the moment we published the decrees by order of the Supreme Pontiff, even with the permissions [exceptions to Chinese rites granted by Mezzabarba in China but later repudiated by Rome] given by Monsieur Patriarch Mezzabarba" (Gaubil, *Correspondance*, p. 128). Many observations in the letters and annual reports of the Jesuits attested to this new social profile of Chinese Christianity: a handful of officials, few elites, literati limited to local gentry of lower and middling sorts, large majority of artisanal and peasant membership, and a geographical shift from urban centers (Beijing being an exception) to rural areas.

The third and fourth developments – the disenchantment of Europe and the Sinicization of the Christian Church – responded to the same logic: the official proscription of Christianity and recurrent waves of persecution. After 1724, the only European missionaries tolerated in the Qing Empire were courtiers in the service of the Yongzhen and Qianlong emperors (r. 1735–95); their presence assured tacit toleration for a small but flourishing Catholic community in the imperial capital. In the provinces, foreign missionaries were forbidden to reside. When discovered, officials imprisoned or exiled them to Macao. In 1746, however, zealous local and provincial officials in Fujian arrested five Spanish Dominican missionaries. Despite the Grand Council's instruction to expel the Europeans to Macao, the provincial governor, citing the law of prohibition, executed the five in 1747 and 1748. Also in 1748, betrayed by an apostate angry over clerical intervention in a property dispute, two Jesuits in Suzhou were arrested and executed. These first European martyrdoms in China shocked public opinion in Europe. After the 1740s European taste for Chinese modes began to turn sour: the *chinoiserie* craze in decorative arts and architecture

subsidized in a rising discourse of oriental despotism, a rhetoric strengthened by the anti-Christian persecutions in the Qing Empire.

The danger for European missionaries necessitated the employment of Chinese priests. Although a handful of Chinese scholars had joined the Society of Jesus during the early years of Catholic mission, their inferior theological education prevented them from advancing to the priesthood. The first Chinese Jesuit priest was ordained in Portugal in 1664: Zheng Weixin (1633–73, alias Manuel de Siqueira) left Macao in 1645 and was trained in Rome, Bologna, and Coimbra. A small number of Chinese Jesuits followed his footsteps to France and Italy and began to play an important role in the mission field after the 1720s. Unlike the Jesuits, the Dominicans strongly advocated the training of an indigenous clergy from the beginning; one of their own, Luo Wenzao (1617–91, alias Gregory Lopez), ordained in Manila, became the first Chinese bishop in 1685. Paradoxically, those religious orders least accommodating to Chinese culture – the Dominicans and the MEP – strongly supported the training of an indigenous clergy, with the latter setting up a seminary in Siam for the education of Chinese priests. After 1732, an ex-China missionary, Matteo Ripa, established the Collegio Cinesi (Holy Family College) in Naples under the auspices of the Propaganda Fide. While there were only four Chinese clerics against 86 Europeans in 1724, their numbers rose to 26 out of a total of 109 in 1739 and 44 out of 101 in 1765 (Standaert, *Handbook*, p. 308). By the end of the century, native clergy constituted the core of the Chinese Christian Church.

### Sources and Historiography

Our brief chronological survey of the history of Christianity in China reveals the salient features of a historiography which, with notable exceptions, is based primarily on sources in western languages. Until the late 1980s, the story of Christianity in China had been told in two distinct modes: classic missiological studies, focusing on the work of religious orders, individual missionaries, liturgies, religious works, and persecutions; and Sinological studies that framed the Catholic mission in the perspective of Chinese culture and history.

The first group of studies characterized the work of church historians, many of them missionaries in China before 1949, some with good Sinological training. Analyzing the history of Christianity from within, as it were, this tradition of scholarship is responsible for the major collections of published sources, examples being the ongoing publication of sources on the Franciscan mission in China, the *Sinica Franciscana* (9 volumes in 14 books covering the sixteenth century to 1698, published between 1933 and 1997) and Pasquale D'Elia's impressive edition of Matteo Ricci's original diaries. Ricci himself is the subject of many monographs, of which the biography by Henri Bernard, S.J. (1937) is still outstanding. Individual and group biographies of missionaries constituted a large output of scholarship. There are studies of particular groups of Jesuits by time period and nationalities: Dunne's work on Jesuits of the late Ming and Duteil's study of French Jesuits. There are detailed biographies of individual Jesuits: on Pereira, Bouvet, Stumpf, Schall, Verbiest, Thomas, and Laimbeckhoven, among others. For the Dominicans we find studies on Domingo Navarrete, the fierce critic of Jesuit accommodation, Gregory Lopez, and the martyrs of 1747/8. Franciscan historiography has produced many shorter studies of the

Italian, Spanish, and German friars in China, including the one Mexican missionary, Pedro de la Piñuela, who composed influential works in Chinese. Other religious orders also produced studies of missionaries of their orders, even though the sheer volume of Jesuit historiography has dominated the field.

Another focus of this approach is on liturgy. Understandably, much of the scholarship has centered on the Chinese rites controversy, both because of its importance for the history of the Chinese Christian Church and on account of the enormous volume of extant sources. Jesuit historiography has been particularly active in this field: the work of Francis A. Rouleau and George Minamiki represents pioneering studies that are by no means exhaustive; and the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco houses a large collection of materials devoted to this topic.

Related to the rites controversy, the diplomatic relations between Rome and Beijing have been the subject of studies by Antonio S. Rosso in English and Luo Kuang in Chinese, but the key figure of Tournon has yet to receive a critical full-length treatment. On the interesting subject of Catholic liturgy and sacraments in the early modern Chinese context, some preliminary work has been done on the 1615 papal concession of a Chinese-language liturgy (never practiced and later withdrawn), but we know very little of the actual sacramental practices, especially among the rural Christian communities.

The subject of Christian martyrdom is the focus of several fine monographs: González's source edition and study of the Dominican martyrs of 1747/8, Willeke's study of the 1784–5 persecutions under Qianlong, and Zhang Ze's survey of persecutions of Christianity under the Qing between 1724 and 1842 (when proscription was rescinded after China's defeat in the Opium War). The first two of these studies rely on European and missionary sources, while Zhang's book is drawn primarily from Chinese-language Qing government records and Chinese Catholic sources.

As a couple of Chinese studies cited above reflect, the internalist or church-historical approach is by no means limited to western works. Although far fewer in volume, a distinct Chinese Catholic historiography has made substantial contributions. The major themes are echoed in this tradition as well: Fang Hao's three-volume biography of leading Chinese Catholics (1973), Luo Kuang's study of papal–Qing diplomacy, and Zhang's study of persecutions. A longstanding tradition of local church history, biographies of Chinese Catholics, editions of Chinese Catholic sources, and a general reliance on both Catholic and state sources in Chinese give these works a distinct flavor. Interrupted after 1949, this tradition within church history has focused more recently on translations from western works, both from documents and studies.

The second approach to this scholarship before the late 1980s was undertaken by Sinologists. Naturally, there existed points of overlap between the missiological/ecclesiastical history mode and Sinological studies, since many missionaries were Sinologists and the field owed its origins to the Catholic mission (especially the Jesuits). Not surprisingly, a lay scholar of literature such as René Etiemble, author of books on the Chinese rites controversy and Chinese cultural impact on Europe, held the Jesuits in high esteem. This evaluation was shared by historians of China who represented the Jesuits as cultural pioneers and heroes, an eminent example being Jonathan Spence's interpretation of Ricci. Still, other Sinologists took exception to the Jesuit contribution. Jacques Gernet's 1982 classic, *Chine et Christianisme* (English



translation 1985), argued for fundamental differences between Chinese, or more precisely Confucian, philosophy and Christianity, and faulted the Jesuits for intellectual dissimulation. Less critical than Gernet perhaps, the Dutch Sinologist Erik Zürcher compared Catholic conversion to the spread of Buddhism in early medieval China, and came away with a negative assessment of the long-term impact of the Jesuits. Still another approach in Sinology before the 1980s concentrated on the reception of China in early modern Europe, as exemplified by the research of David Mungello.

In Chinese-language historiography of the late Ming and early Qing, the interest in Christianity has been very limited outside of Chinese Catholic circles. For one, the question of foreign missionaries was bound up with the study of western colonialism and imperialism after 1842; and much effort in China and Taiwan went into the analysis of *jiao-an*, the hundreds of cases concerning litigational disputes and conflicts between Christians and Chinese between 1842 and 1900. However, Chinese historians are viewing the precolonial period in a more favorable light; they praise early Jesuits as bearers of western science and technology to China, a topic that continues to hold the interest of Chinese historians.

With both the missiological and Sinological approaches still active, a new energy has animated the historiography of early modern Chinese Christianity after the late 1980s. Three features are characteristic. First, a new generation of scholars in Europe and China is posing new questions and offering fresh perspectives. Instead of privileging the view of the missionaries and relying on western sources, new studies focus on the experience of the Chinese converts. Instead of asking how Matteo Ricci persuaded and converted the Chinese literati, these historians analyze the presence of the Jesuits through the lenses of Chinese society. A groundbreaking work was the 1988 study of Yang Tingyun (one of the Three Pillars of the early Chinese Church, in the words of Ricci) by Nicolas Standaert, a Jesuit and Sinologist, who analyzed the range of Yang's intellectual and spiritual experiences and followed Yang's conversion from Buddhism to Christianity. Another scholar is the Chinese historian Lin Jinshui, who tried to reconstruct the literati networks around Ricci and Giuglio Aleni, an Italian Jesuit hailed as a western sage and worthy successor to Ricci. Still another example is Mungello's book on the Chinese Christians of Hangzhou, focusing on Zhang Xingyao (1633–1715), one of the few Chinese literati active in publishing Christian works at the end of the seventeenth century. Besides correcting the Eurocentric and sacerdotalist view of traditional scholarship, these recent studies help us to understand the effectiveness of the early Jesuit mission. The translation and publication of scientific works, the preparation and printing of Chinese-language religious works, and the persona of Jesuits as western sages all resulted from collaboration. These were not so much the achievements of "a generation of giants" as the products of a novel and creative interaction between two intellectual elites in a specific historical setting of cultural curiosity and consciousness of crisis.

Interest in the Chinese collaborators goes beyond the small circle of literati converts, for the Jesuits enjoyed a much broader network of friends, wellwishers, and acquaintances, exalted officials and famous literati who discussed metaphysics and moral ethics, wrote prefaces to Jesuit books, and opened social and political doors without actually accepting the religious message of Christianity. The actual research into the Chinese dimension of Christianity, at least at the elite level, has been made possible by several key publications of Chinese-language Catholic works.

Altogether, European missionaries and Chinese converts composed more than 600 works in Chinese up to the mid-eighteenth century. The majority of these books were printed before 1700; some three-quarters were authored by European missionaries, with the Jesuits in a predominant position. In addition to some 120 texts on the sciences and geography of the West, the rest comprised compositions or translations on spiritual, moral, and liturgical subjects. Whereas scientific and philosophical texts tended to dominate in the first 50 years of Chinese Catholic printing, books for religious use (catechisms, prayer books, devotional treatises, handbooks on sacraments, etc.) made up the majority of titles by the end of the seventeenth century. Although all religious orders published Christian works in Chinese, the Jesuits were the only ones engaged in the production of scientific texts.

Until the late 1990s, the only collection of Chinese-language Catholic sources easily accessible was at the Bibliothèque de France (Division of Oriental Manuscripts). Thanks to recent publications, two further collections have been made accessible to research. Rome holds a significant deposit of Chinese Catholic works, primarily at the Historical Archives of the Society of Jesus and at the Vatican Library. A 2001 descriptive catalogue by Albert Chan, S.J., describes the Chinese works in the Jesuit collection, of which 500 date from the late Ming and early Qing. In 2002, Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink published 100 selected documents from this collection in 12 volumes. Also of note is the 1996 published collection of selected works from the former Jesuit Library at Zikawei (Shanghai), which represented the most important collection of its kind in pre-1949 China. A small portion of the library and some of the most valuable books were shipped out of China before the communist takeover and eventually found their way to Taiwan. The 1996 collection assembled 24 works from the late Ming to the mid-Qing; the entirety of this collection is accessible today on CD-Rom at the Institute of History and Philology at the Academia Sinica.

Using hitherto neglected or inaccessible Chinese sources has given a new burst of energy to research in the field. The writings by Standaert and Dudink mentioned above continue, albeit in an invigorated way, the Sinological and missiological traditions. A novel element, however, consists in the interests of Chinese scholars from a non-Christian tradition, such as Han Qi, Huang Yilong, Zhu Pingyi, and Li Tiangang who, since the 1990s, have published works on the scientific and cultural significance of the Catholic mission and on the Chinese rites controversy.

Without doubt, the intense interest in this corpus of Chinese Catholic works will yield yet more insights into the history of Christianity. Nevertheless, these printed and manuscript books provide few answers to the actual religious practices on the ground, especially in the lower social milieux. Compared to Dominican and Franciscan sources, the vast quantity of Jesuit documentation is still relatively underexplored. For example, the well-known collection *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* published by the French Jesuits in the eighteenth century contains a wealth of information, but very few annual reports (*Litterae Annuae*), which give more precise information and often telling episodes, are actually published and analyzed. There is still a vast amount of information to be mined from the Historical Archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome; and copies from the collection of Jesuit documents of the Portuguese vice-province in China, deposited at the Bibliotheca Ajuda in Lisbon, have formed the basis for the recent work of Liam Brockey, whose analysis shows the richness of the Ajuda collection. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I would like to outline some



of the more interesting current topics of research and indicate areas that need more attention.

## Themes

### *Missionaries*

Even though this is the most thoroughly researched topic in the field, we still do not know the exact number of missionaries working in China during the entire period under consideration. We do know, however, the magnitude of missionaries working in selected years, with the peak years being 1700–6 (the numbers were 122, 153, and 148, respectively). Among the religious orders, information on the Jesuits is most detailed. Dehergne gives a figure of 563 Jesuits who left Europe for China between 1583 and 1723. Some worked in India, Southeast Asia, or Japan primarily; others died en route. Excluding these Jesuits, Pascale Girard comes up with a revised figure of 288 Jesuits actually in the China mission for the same period. A breakdown of the main nationalities shows the following order of predominance: Portuguese (129), French (58), Italian (56), Spanish (16), Belgians (15), German and Austrian (13) (Girard, *Religiosos Occidentais*, pp. 172–3).

Until the dissolution of the Society of Jesus in 1772, its missionaries dominated the China mission. Except for the earliest period (1583–1630), when they represented an exclusive clerical presence in China, the Jesuits comprised between 50 and 80 percent of all missionaries. The Franciscans and Dominicans occupy second and third place in the numerical ranking, followed by roughly equal numbers of Augustinians, Missions Étrangères priests, and Propaganda Fide missionaries. Of all the non-European mission fields, China represented the region with the most diverse representation of religious orders and nationalities, and where the indigenous clergy played a significant role in the eighteenth century.

National rivalries played a crucial role in the conflict between Dominicans and Jesuits, and between the Portuguese vice-province and the French Jesuit mission. There is likewise scholarship on the European dimension of the Chinese rites controversy, located principally in the Jansenist hostility toward the Society in France. Less work has been done on the different formation and outlook of European missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – with the notable exception of Brockey's work on the Portuguese Jesuits – which had an important bearing on the perception of Chinese culture.

### *Converts*

Except for the *Litterae Annuae* from the eighteenth century with precise figures of Christians, the number of converts can only be estimated in a general order. Staandaert has evaluated the different figures and charted an approximate picture of steady growth from 1583 to 1690, with a golden period between 1690 and 1710 (ca. 200,000), followed by a substantial decline to ca. 120,000 by 1740 and slow and sporadic recovery thereafter.

As for the social profile of Chinese Christianity, again the general picture is clear enough. Catholicism reached the highest social level during 1600 to 1650: the con-

version of officials and literati in the late Ming was followed by success among eunuchs, court noblewomen, and one Southern Ming emperor in the period of Manchu conquest. This ephemeral success nourished the Jesuit hope for a Chinese Constantine and redirected their effort during the early Qing dynasty toward the imperial throne. Apart from a couple of conversions among imperial Manchu clansmen in the eighteenth century, this imperial strategy remained unsuccessful, as we have seen. The persona of the missionaries, especially that of the Jesuits, was transformed in the course of the seventeenth century from western sage and European Christian-Confucian into servant of the imperial household under the Manchu. While giving the Jesuits some political patronage, this restricted their role in China and provoked more criticisms in Europe.

By the late seventeenth century, the Confucian literati class as a whole had become indifferent or hostile toward Christianity. The climate of crisis and spiritual vacuum among the intellectual elites in the late Ming was replaced by one of self-confidence and orthodoxy. Under the Qing emperors, the Chinese Confucian elites in the mandarinates and the gentry often opposed foreign missionaries, who enjoyed better relations with the Manchu nobility. Converts among the literati and gentry elites were limited to those with lower examination degrees. While several of them published works defending the Christian-Confucian synthesis, none exerted more than a local influence.

From the beginning commoners constituted the numerical majority of converts. Until the arrival of the mendicants, this concerned mostly the urban lower classes, as the Jesuits concentrated their work in the cities. During the seventeenth century, the Catholic mission penetrated deeper into the interior provinces and branched out to smaller towns and villages. Documents seldom mentioned the specific profession of commoners, but by the eighteenth century, especially after the Chinese rites controversy, missionary sources occasionally named the presence of boatmen, charcoal workers, and peasants in their writings. There seemed to have been a distinct social profile between the older established Christian centers in Jiangnan and Fujian on the coast, regions with dense urban networks, often retaining a gentry leadership, and the newer, interior communities with a predominantly lower-class profile.

There remains much work to be done. A key question that has yet to be answered is the role of kinship networks in the spread and maintenance of Christianity, especially in periods of persecution and clerical absence. Also, the role of women in Chinese Christianity deserves more attention. Adjusting to the sexual regime of early modern Chinese society, the missionaries established separate churches and held separate masses for the sexes, in order to avoid scandal. The only female testimony is a laudatory portrait of Candida Hu, the granddaughter of Paul Xu Guangqi, written by the Belgian Jesuit Philippe Couplet and translated into several European languages. Her biography describes the indispensable role of women leaders in the life of a household Catholicism centered on prayers, religious rituals, and works of charity. Unlike Buddhist monasticism, early modern Christianity did not create a niche for pious women outside of the patriarchal household. In one specific area, however, the Christian mission challenged the social status quo: in its insistence of monogamy and condemnation of concubinage, European Christianity confronted an elite morality that prized filial piety (and the responsibility to produce male heirs)

above marital-sexual propriety. This would prove an enduring obstacle to the conversion of the elites during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

### *Christianity and Chinese Religions*

Ricci classified the Chinese into three sects, using the meaning of *sectarii*, or followers of a teaching: the followers of Buddha, Dao, and the sect of the literati. His rudimentary “religious sociology” was augmented later by the encounter with Islam and Judaism in China. Subsequent missionaries (almost all Jesuits, as the other religious orders showed little or no interest in indigenous religions) followed Ricci’s schemata, thereby giving perhaps an undue cultic emphasis to Confucianism. As I have mentioned above, Ricci and his literati collaborators created a Christian-Confucian synthesis: the ancient Chinese worshipped a monotheistic God, whose presence left traces in the ancient classics; over time, especially with the corrupting influence of idolatrous Buddhism and materialist neo-Confucianism, this knowledge of the true God was lost, but the Jesuit mission restored the knowledge of the true God and the correct interpretation of the ancient classics. This conversion strategy underlay the collective effort to introduce Confucianism to Europe in several pivotal translations of Confucian canonical books in the late seventeenth century. However, under attack for their cultural accommodation and faced with declining literati interest, the Jesuits, while not exactly repudiating this conversion strategy, generally abandoned it during the eighteenth century with the exceptions of the Figurists, several French Jesuits who pursued a Quixotic (and condemned) intellectual effort to find hidden prophecies in the *Yijing* (Book of Changes) and in ancient Chinese characters.

The Christian attitude toward Judaism and Islam was unambivalent. The latter represented an enemy, albeit not dangerous, on account of its low social esteem in China, and elicited few comments. Judaism, on the other hand, fascinated several generations of Jesuits. Ricci himself encountered and converted several Chinese Jews in Beijing; over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Jesuits paid at least two visits to the Jewish community at Kaifeng. There was even a plan to collect and ship all Jewish antiquities to Europe under the sponsorship of an imperial prince, a plan that came to naught.

Christianity’s relationship with the two officially recognized indigenous cults – Daoism and Buddhism – changed over time from combat and competition to indifference. In the initial years of the mission, the Jesuits struggled to create a distinct identity and clarify mistaken attributes: they repudiated Daoist alchemy, explained the differences between Buddhist and Christian fasting, and insisted on the complete incompatibility between the true Christian and the false Buddhist beliefs, often to the incomprehension of their Chinese interlocutors. Daoism represented a less prominent competitor for Christian missionaries, who generally dismissed its magical and esoteric orientations. Buddhism, however, was a different matter. As the most popular religion in China since the ninth century, Buddhism enjoyed not only a distinguished tradition but a large canon of texts. In the mid-sixteenth century, Buddhism experienced an impressive revival, winning substantial imperial patronage, gentry sponsorship of monastic renewal, and attracting men of high intellectual caliber into the Buddhist priesthood. Some of these leading Buddhist monks met and debated with

Ricci; some exchanged polemical writings with him. The hostility between Buddhism and Christianity was provoked entirely by the early Jesuit missionaries, especially by Ricci, in the effort to establish a distinct Christian identity in the minds of the literati. Works of polemics were published between 1600 and 1640, with laymen of both beliefs joining in the fray. Fascinating from the perspective of intellectual encounter, this Christian–Buddhist polemic never approximated the bitterness of Protestant–Catholic polemic in Europe and died away after 1640. By the end of the seventeenth century, even if Chinese converts still criticized the false teachings of Buddha, the European missionaries became indifferent to a cult that seemed socially inferior and politically ineffectual in the Qing empire.

A far more perplexing question was the relationship with popular Chinese religions. Syncretistic and highly amorphous, folk beliefs in China assumed a political liability in the sixteenth century with the creation of millenarian sects based on Buddhist doctrines of karma and reincarnation and Daoist esoteric rituals. Dismissed under the categorical label of White Lotus Sect by the Confucian state, popular religious cults shared certain common characteristics: they were created and transmitted by charismatic cult leaders, frequently by family or kinship succession; they produced and transmitted religious texts, the so-called precious scrolls (*baojuan*) that often contained millenarian prophecies; they attracted adherents almost exclusively from the lower classes, many of whom were mobile in their work (migrant farmers, charcoal burners, boatmen, soldiers); they operated outside of the framework of Confucian orthodoxy and represented a potential challenge to the political and social order built on Confucian loyalties; female deities and women sometimes played the central roles in these cults.

Concurrent with the consolidation of Christianity in the early seventeenth century, the first of many sectarian uprisings broke out in northern China. Defending Christianity as distinct from these heterodox popular sects, Yang Tingyun and Xu Guangqi argued for the elite status of Christianity and its message of loyalty to the state and social order. Although repeated by subsequent generations of converts and missionaries, this defense never completely absolved Christianity of the suspicion of sedition because of its foreign origins. As converts came increasingly only from the lower strata of society, there were examples of infiltration of Christian communities by popular heterodox sectarians, who appropriated Christian rituals and doctrines for their own purposes. Some research into this question has been undertaken, but a more systematic investigation of the sources is necessary before we can come up with answers that would illuminate the nature of Christian conversion among the commoners, and the complex relationship between ritual and magic in folk beliefs.

### *Europe and China*

One last area of research takes us back to the larger picture: the Christian mission in China formed part of the history of the early modern world. As Johann Mayer's work at the beginning of this chapter well testifies, the Catholic mission outside of Europe was part of the contest between Tridentine Catholicism and Protestantism for the mantle of true Christian apostleship. Besides the Iberian monarchies and their support of world Catholicism, the French monarchy, the Holy Roman Empire, and the German Catholic princes, especially the Wittelsbach dynasty, gave substantial

financial backing to the China mission in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And as late as 1757, the Jesuit mission still fueled the Protestant–Catholic polemic in the Holy Roman Empire, as Florian Bahr excoriated the Protestant Church historian Johann Lorenz Mossheim for his depiction of the Jesuit mission in China.

Embedded in the maritime empires of Portugal, Spain, and France, the history of Christianity constituted simultaneously the history of the early modern world. Ships from half a dozen European nations carried missionaries, envoys, converts, books, money, and scientific equipment across the oceans. Bills of exchange conveyed donations from Catholic Europe halfway around the world; and Jesuit letters portrayed heroic martyrs and cruel pagans to the imagination of European readers. Unlike the tender implant of Christianity in Mongol China during the thirteenth century, the Jesuit mission inaugurated a new era in the history of Chinese Christianity and in Sino-western relations.

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### FURTHER READING

The best place to start is volume 1 of the *Handbook of Christianity in China*, edited by Nicolas Standaert, which brings together contributions by 20 authors covering a wide range of subjects. There is a good presentation of sources, historiography, and current state of knowledge. Absolute beginners may wish to read Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed*, a succinct and well-balanced account by a church historian outside of the field. Jonathan Spence's *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* is a good read and scholarly introduction to the life of the China mission pioneer. A large amount of published sources is available. For documents translated into English, see Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-I)*, translated by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen (1985), and the website of the Ricci Institute, University of San Francisco ([www.usfca.edu/ricci/](http://www.usfca.edu/ricci/)), with resource links to bibliographical and biographical databases connected with the history of Christianity in China.