Eugenio Menegon

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CHILD BODIES, BLESSED BODIES: THE CONTEST BETWEEN CHRISTIAN VIRGINITY AND CONFUCIAN CHASTITY*

BY

EUGENIO MENEGON

(Boston University)

Abstract

In late imperial China chastity of a widowed or betrothed woman, rather than virginity *per se*, was considered the core female virtue in social practice, in literary discourse, and in law. However, religious chastity as offered in Buddhism and other Chinese religious traditions was a way for women to evade the strictures of married life. This helps explain why, when introduced in the seventeenth century by Spanish Dominican friars, the concept of virginity as a prerequisite for consecrated religious life found enthusiastic acceptance among some women in Fujian province. To legitimize virginity as a virtue and a perpetual state of life for some Chinese women, missionaries and their converts ingeniously revised the meaning of filiality, claiming a place for Christian filiality within orthodox boundaries of filial piety (*xiao*), while suggesting that Christianity offered a truer meaning of filiality, subordinated to the divine prerogatives of the Christian God.

Prologue

The summer of 1746–the eleventh year of the Qianlong 乾隆 reign–found the officialdom of the southern Chinese province of Fujian

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engaged in a suppression campaign against a local cult in Fuan 福安, a mountainous county tucked in the northeastern borders of the province, in the prefecture of Funing 福寧. Officials uncovered the presence of a few Spanish Catholic missionaries of the Dominican order, who had been living among the local populace for decades and had many followers. Five Spaniards were captured and later on executed, and local Christians were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and in some cases exiled.

Among the most disturbing features of this underground Catholic community was the presence of numerous unmarried virgin women. These women lived at home with their natal families and engaged in devotional activities, while assisting the foreign priests in their domestic chores and daily religious duties. A report by the Prefect of Funing, Dong Qizuo 董啓祚, who had uncovered these illegal activities during a patrol, stated: "In the locale of Fuan we found converts to the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven, and there are many women who remain unmarried all their life. This they call 'to preserve the chaste state of a child' (*shou tongzhen* 守童貞)."[1]

This, however, was not the first time Qing provincial officials had engaged in anti-Christian actions in Fujian and Fuan and had noticed the presence of these 'Christian virgins'. Already during the Kangxi 康熙 period, local officials had felt somewhat encouraged to attack the heterodox Christian communities as a consequence of the emperor's ambiguous policy towards Christianity. While the emperor bestowed his personal favors on the court missionaries for their technical services, thus indirectly benefiting their associates in the provinces, he always carefully avoided making any legal concessions to the Christian enterprise in China. Since 1669, in fact, the further propagation of Christianity among Han subjects was expressly forbidden. However, this prohibition was never seriously enforced during the Kangxi reign, and the provision that missionaries could care for existing communities

[1] Quotation from the initial report on the discovery of Christians and missionaries in Fuan by the Prefect of Funing Dong Qizuo, as found in Archives du Séminaire des Missions Étrangères de Paris (hereafter AMEP), *Chine*, 434: 1093r. Dong's report, dated May 22, 1746 (Qianlong 11/4/3), probably reached the governor of Fujian sometime in June; see vermilion-endorsed memorial of June 30, 1746 (Qianlong 11/5/1) in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan 中國第一歷史檔案館, ed., *Qing zhong-qian qi Xiyang Tianzhujiao zai Hua huodong dang'an shiliao* 清中前期西洋天主教在華活動檔案史料 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 1: 78-82.

in fact meant that Christian religious propaganda could in practice continue.

In the latter part of his reign (1700-1722) Kangxi raised his vigilance at the prompting of his high officials and as a consequence of his clash with papal envoys on the question of the Chinese rites to the ancestors and Confucius, allowed to Christians by the Jesuits but forbidden by papal authorities. He thus decided to impose on the missionaries in 1706 a residence permit (called *yinpiao* 印票) which reflected adherence to the imperial ideological position on the Chinese rites. This had important consequences for the Dominican communities in Fujian. Most of the friars were obliged to leave their missions in 1707, since they would not accept the imperial order, although two of them remained *incognito*.[2] Moreover, at this juncture the neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Boxing 張伯行 (1652-1725) became by imperial fiat Governor of Fujian. Before moving on to another post in 1709, Zhang prepared a memorial recommending that the Catholic churches in coastal Fujian, including Funing, be turned into schools, the Christian communities dispersed, and the foreigners expelled. He so hoped to stop the "disintegration of morality" attributed to the cult of the Lord of Heaven and the abandonment of ancestral cults and the cult of Confucius, a direct reference to practices upheld by the Dominicans in their communities.[3]

[2] On the beginnings of the Dominican mission in Fuan, see Eugenio Menegon, "Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: The Localization of Christianity in Late Imperial Mindong (Fujian, China), 1632-1863" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2002), Ch. 3; and Eugenio Menegon, "Christian Loyalists, Spanish Friars, and Holy Virgins in Fujian during the Ming-Qing Transition," *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003): 335-65; on Kangxi's policy of guarded "tacit tolerance" towards Christianity, see Adrian Dudink, "Opponents," in Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 515.

[3] Since his transfer to the governorship of Jiangsu was impending, Zhang did not present the memorial, which was anyway widely circulated among his students in Fuzhou; see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943-44), 51b; Fu Lo-shu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations* (Tucson: AAS - University of Arizona Press, 1966), 504, n. 1; Lin Jinshui 林金水 and Xie Bizhen 謝必震, eds., *Fujian duiwai wenhua jiaoliu shi* 福建對外文化交流史 (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 265-67; Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 518. The text of Zhang Boxing's memorial, entitled "Niqing fei Tianzhutang shu 擬請廢天主堂疏" (Memorial petitioning for the destruction of Catholic churches, 1709?), can be found in Zhang Boxing, *Zhengyi Tang Wenji - Xuji* 正誼堂文集 - 續集 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 175-76. The memorial attacks Christians in the prefectures of Fuzhou 福州, Quanzhou 泉州, Xinghua 興化, Zhangzhou 漳州, and Funing for their neglect of ancestors and of the cult to Confucius, for blasphemy against Heaven and for the mixing of sexes.

Zhang has been called by Jonathan Spence a "purist," and his memorial against the Catholics of the Fujian coastal region should be seen in the context of his efforts to reform the climate of the province and re-establish orthodox Confucian mores.[4] However, in spite of his call for the proscription of Catholicism, the imperial government did not take any action. The Kangxi Emperor had warned him to respect the local customs of Fujian: "Each place has different customs," the emperor told him. "Don't try to change them. Just make sure that your area stays peaceful."[5] Zhang ignored the Emperor's advice and tried to modify some of the Fujianese customs he decried. For example, he attempted to curb the financial and ritual excesses locals incurred in their weddings and funerals, and he ordered that young Buddhist nuns be returned to their families and married off.[6] He also championed the upholding of rituals to Confucius and the former sages, established or revived neo-Confucian academies in Fuzhou and elsewhere, and complained that in Taiwan local officials had neglected the promotion of altars to worthies and chaste women.[7]

It is thus little surprise that he found that Catholic activities collided with his plans for the moral reform of Fujian. Catholics, or at least the ones under the care of the Dominicans, refrained from offering rituals to Confucius and the ancestors and kept "no distinctions between men and women, who mix indiscriminately in common places, harming our civilizing customs."[8] Zhang seems to have been unaware that in Fuan already at this time some Catholic girls remained unmarried and engaged in religious life; otherwise he would have asked for their prompt marriage, as he had done with Buddhist nuns. To Kangxi, however, a peaceful province was what mattered most. Fujian had experienced a long period of turmoil in the second half of the seventeenth century, and the Emperor may have deemed that social peace and a certain tolerance of innocuous local eccentricities were the best strategy to

[4] Zhang was a philosopher, not an official, and was promoted to the post of governor by personal intervention of the Kangxi Emperor. During his tenure in Fujian, he tried to stabilize prices and implement some administrative measures. But he also published Confucian compendia and engaged in zealous efforts to reform Fujianese customs; see Jonathan Spence, "Collapse of a Purist," in Jonathan Spence, ed., *Chinese Roundabouts: Essays in History and Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 124-31, 127.

[5] Spence, "Collapse of a Purist," 127.

[6] Zhang, *Zhengyi Tang Wenji*, 59-61; Spence, "Collapse of a Purist," 127; Lin and Xie, *Fujian duiwai wenhua jiaoliu shi*, 266.

[7] Zhang, *Zhengyi Tang Wenji*, 57-58, 111-13.

[8] Zhang, *Zhengyi Tang Wenji*, 175.

keep the empire together. The religion of the Lord of Heaven was just a cult kept under state control, and in Adrian Dudink's words, "as long as Christians were not opposed to the state and did not create chaos, they were to be tolerated and allowed to practice their rituals in their churches."[9]

The muffled opposition to Christianity by high officials in the central and provincial governments during the Kangxi period, however, finally found a favorable climate with the accession of the Yongzheng 雍正 Emperor and exploded into a full-fledged campaign.[10] In 1723, Zhang Boxing became president of the Ministry of Rites, and, soon after Yongzheng's enthronement, anti-Christian recommendations from the Ministry of Rites, traditionally hostile to heterodoxy and to Christianity, reached the Emperor. A prominent Han official, Zhang Pengge 張鵬翮 (1649-1725), who had attempted to forbid Christianity as Governor of Zhejiang 浙江 in 1691, spearheaded the attack. He apparently presented the new emperor with three memorials asking for the proscription of Christianity in the provinces and the continuation of the mission only in Beijing, where the foreign priests could be useful.[11]

[9] Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 517.

[10] The Yongzheng Emperor had already developed over the years a negative impression of Christianity. The monarch was annoyed by Jesuit interference in his succession struggle, disturbed by the conversion to Christianity of treacherous members of the imperial clan, and remembered with disgust his father's lenient attitude towards these importune foreigners, who had bothered him for years with their ritual controversies. These topics are already explored in Eugenio Menegon, "*Surniama Tragoedia*: Religious and Political Martyrdom in the Yongzheng Period" (Paper presented at the "Symposium on the History of Christianity in China," Hong Kong, October 2-4, 1996); see also Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 521.

[11] Zhang Pengge was named Grand Tutor of the Heir Apparent and Grand Secretary in short succession between January and March 1723. According to Ignatius Kögler, S.J., (1680-1746), head of the Directorate of Astronomy, at this time Zhang presented a series of anti-Christian memorials to the emperor; see Kögler's letter of October 12, 1723, in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (Rome), *Japonica Sinica* 179: 272-73r, as quoted in Pasquale D'Elia, *Il lontano confino e la tragica morte del P. João Mourão S.I., missionario in Cina (1681-1726) nella storia e nella leggenda, secondo documenti in gran parte inediti* (Lisboa: Agencia-Geral do Ultramar, 1963), 97. The first available document requesting the proscription of Christianity, a Manchu-language memorial dated March 16, 1723 (Yongzheng 1/2/10), written by a Manchu official in the Ministry of Rites, in fact closely follows Zhang Pengge's alleged recommendations to exile the missionaries, except for those in the imperial service at the court; see Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan, ed., *Yongzheng chao Manwen zhupi zouzhe quan yi* 雍正朝滿文硃批奏摺全譯 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1998), 1: 30-31.

The Emperor did not need any encouragement to accept the memorial's recommendations. Gioro Mamboo 覺羅滿保 (1673-1725), the Manchu Governor-General in charge of the sensitive maritime provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian, was quick in implementing the new imperial policy, and the first Christian community to receive the attention of the imperial government was Fuan. In mid-June 1723, following tips from intelligence agents, the Governor-General notified the local county magistrate of his 'discovery' of Christians in Fuan. Given the long history of official monitoring of Fujian Christians, Mamboo's was certainly no 'discovery'.[12] The governor ordered the magistrate to issue a public prohibition of Christianity in his jurisdiction, to confiscate the local churches, to compile lists of converts, to oblige the local Christian virgins to get married, and to make sure that lineage and *baojia* 保甲 leaders (*fangzu zhang* 房族長 and *xiangbao zhang* 鄉保長) would implement his orders.[13] Again, the forced marriage of the virgins loomed prominently in the documents as an urgent measure to rectify local customs.

Yet, the Christian communities of Fuan, in spite of this first campaign that soon reached beyond the provincial borders to the whole empire, remained resilient. As the missionaries observed, local authorities were

[12] Mamboo's long tenures in Fujian (1711-15 as Governor of Fujian and 1715-25 as Governor-General of Zhejiang and Fujian) probably put him in a delicate spot: he needed to show particular zeal in implementing the imperial directives, lest he be considered negligent for having tolerated Christian activities that his predecessor Zhang Boxing had censored. Fu Lo-shu suggests that Mamboo may have been inspired by Zhang's 1709 draft memorial (Fu, *A Documentary Chronicle*, 505). In fact, Zhang Pengge's alleged memorials (and quite possibly also Zhang Boxing's role as Minister of Rites in the early Yongzheng reign) resulted in a directive to provincial governors that prompted the quick reaction of Mamboo. The anti-Christian recommendation of Mamboo to the Ministry of Rites is dated November 17, 1723 (Yongzheng 1/10/20; memorial from the Grand Secretariat Archives, Registers of the Section of Scrutiny of Ministry of Rites, published in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan, ed., *Qing . . . Xiyang Tianzhujiao*, 1: 56; I owe this information to Dr. Zhang Xianqing 張先清, Xiamen 廈門 University). The Ministry soon approved Mamboo's memorial and an imperial decree ordering the gradual expulsion of the missionaries was issued on January 12, 1724 (Yongzheng 1/1/17).

[13] The Chinese text of Mamboo's orders of June 15, 1723 (Yongzheng 1/5/12) is quoted in a proclamation by the Fuan magistrate, in Archivo de la Provincia del Santo Rosario (Manila and Avila; hereafter APSR), *China*, 9: docs. 12a and 12b; Spanish version in José Maria González, *Misiones Dominicanas en China (1700-1750)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1952-58), 1: 113-14. Chinese text of the response of Fuan county magistrate to Mamboo (mid-June 1723?) in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican City), *Borgia Cinese*, 316 (8-h).

able to gather only the names of seven elderly Christian virgins (who were clearly unmarriageable), and never got their hands on the others. Yongzheng and his high officials in fact perceived the resilience of Christianity as a problem of some import, as can be gauged from a 1729 secret court letter directed to all provincial governors. In the letter, the Emperor lamented the negligence of provincial authorities in checking Catholic activities, already forbidden for several years, and the fact that foreign missionaries were still living in the provinces and that "local rascals" (*bendi wulai zhi ren* 本地無賴之人) were following their teachings, therefore damaging local customs (*fengsu* 風俗).[14] This letter shows an increasing concern of the central government with local stability, represented by orthodox customs, but is also a testimony that local people continued to be steadfast believers in the heterodox teachings.

The Qianlong Emperor did not reverse the hostile attitude of his father's government to Catholicism, but in the initial ten years of his reign (1735-46) he did not launch any large campaign against the Christians. Thus, this was a quiet period empire-wide and in Fuan for Christian communities. Vicar Apostolic Pedro Sanz (1680-1747), one of the five Dominicans who would lose their lives in the wake of the 1746 campaign, observed in 1738 that "although the mandarins know very well that we [missionaries] are residing here [in the territory of Fuan], when they discover [us] they dissimulate, since no orders come from the [Imperial] Court. Thus we can in the meanwhile engage in our usual business of *hing-kiao* (*xingjiao*, 行教, 'propagating the faith'), albeit always with appropriate caution and prudence."[15] Sanz's words are corroborated by the lack of any records of official actions against Christianity between 1734 and 1746. In that period, at least seven magistrates held tenure in Fuan, and none denounced the Christians.[16]

[14] See a transcript of the archival version in Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, "Qing Shizong jin jiao kao 清世宗禁教考," *Dongfang zazhi* 62.6 (1981): 26-36, 34.

[15] Letter of Sanz to the Propaganda Fide Procurator in Macao, Arcangelo Miralta, Muyang, November 3, 1738, in González, *Misiones Dominicanas*, 2:38.

[16] An additional factor in the relative peace enjoyed by the Christians in Fujian may have been the protection of Depei 德沛 (1688-1752), a member of the Imperial Household and a crypto-Christian, who was Governor-General of Zhejiang and Fujian between 1739 and 1742; see a letter of Fr. Eusebio Fernando Oscot (Hoscote) to Fr. Juan de Arrechedera dated January 12, 1741, APSR, *China*, 14: 80v: ". . . under the shadow of this prince . . . we can preach the Gospel with a little bit more freedom.

Clearly, county civil officials were covering up, or at least ignoring, the situation. The main reasons for this 'negligence' were two: first, the local magistrates were wary of denouncing the presence of missionaries to superior authorities, lest demotion and further trouble ensue for them; second, some *yamen* runners and military personnel and a considerable number of local residents were believers of the forbidden teachings. Even if the magistrate knew about their beliefs, he could have accomplished little by alienating his own staff and by upsetting local order with a suppression campaign. The deep ties that the Christian community had by now developed with the local society acted as buffers against the pretensions of the central state.

The 1746 arrest of missionaries and Christians in Fuan was occasioned by heightened government vigilance, the consequence of a general rise in sectarian activities in the mid-1740s, partly connected to the worsening economic situation of the peasantry at the time. Starting in 1744, and with renewed intensity in mid-1746, provincial governors discovered sectarian groups in several provinces.[17] These repeated discoveries preoccupied Qianlong, who issued alarmed orders to the governors to deal with the matter. Soon, high officials were pressed into producing results, and heterodox groups were found and suppressed in Guizhou 貴州, Sichuan 四川, and Jiangsu 江蘇.[18] The Christians of Fuan soon fell into the net.

Thus, recently on Christmas Eve [I could celebrate mass] with more than four hundred Christians gathered in the courtyard of my patron, a literatus called Domingo." On Depei see Chen Yuan 陳垣, "Yong-Qian jian feng Tianzhujiao zhi zongshi 雍乾間奉天主教之宗室," in Chen Yuan, *Chen Yuan xueshu lunwen ji* 陳垣學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 1: 140-183, 164-83 (part 2); Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 714-15; Fang Hao 方豪, *Zhongguo Tianzhujiao shi renwu zhuan* 中國天主教史人物傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988; original ed. 1970), 3: 66-70; Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 446-47.

[17] Particularly active at the time were the Great Vehicle Teachings (大乘教), the Hongyang Teachings (宏陽教), and the Laoguanzhai Teachings (老官齋教). The Laoguanzhai groups rose in rebellion in Jianning 建寧 county (Fujian), and one of the captured Dominican missionaries in fact shared a prison cell with some sect members in 1748; see Francisco Serrano's report "Rebelión de Kien-ning-fu," 1748?, in González, *Misiones Dominicanas*, 2: 250-52. On the political economy favoring the rise of sectarian activities at this time, see Zhuang Jifa, *Qingdai mimi huidang shi yanjiu* 清代秘密會黨史研究 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1994), 79-94.

[18] See Ma Zhao, "The Christian Mission from the Perspective of the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Imperial Archives: Reasons for the 1746-1748 Missionary Case" (Paper presented at the International Seminar for Young Eighteenth-Century Scholars, "The European Enlightenment in its Relation to the Other Great Cultures and Religions of the Eighteenth Century," Saarbrucken, Germany, 1999), 5. See a table of cases involving sectarian "societies" (*hui* 會) in Zhuang, *Qingdai mimi huidang*, 48-49.

In his initial memorial to the Governor, the Prefect of Funing, Dong Qizuo, stressed that disrespect for the social structures of patriarchy and for its rituals were the most heinous crimes of the Fuan Christians. As customary, local gentry and lineages were expected to collaborate in social control through the enforcement of proper customs and rites. But the accusations raised against the Fuan Christians at the onset of the 1746 campaign showed to provincial authorities an apparent laissez-faire attitude of local elites. In their measures taken in response to the Prefect's report, thus, provincial authorities showed particular concern for the laxity of the *baojia* units and the lineages, which were supposed to be the guardians of social peace and of the patriarchal order. The preoccupation that loomed most prominently in the official mind was that local elders entrusted by authorities with the marriage of Christian virgins were likely to be convinced to "keep the situation secret by way of bribery," as they had in the past.[19] In spite of the fact that in 1723 and again in 1729, for example, the Fujian governors had exacted written sworn statements from converted gentry, had filed such statements in the archives for reference, and had ordered the lineage elders to make sure that the Christians avoided relapsing into heterodoxy, Christian activities had continued unabated.[20]

In this context of bureaucratic control of local customs, the Fujian provincial officialdom solicited counsel from subordinates on appropriate actions to solve the issue of the unmarried women of Fuan, revealing the importance they gave to proper conjugal relations in the province. The Prefect of Xinghua 興化, a coastal prefecture south of the provincial capital Fuzhou, offered the following policy recommendation. The Prefect observed that rejecting marriage was particularly damaging to human relations and suggested that "proclaims be issued everywhere to clarify and let be known the virtues of human relations and the evils of heterodoxy." [21] Moreover, he recommended that "those

[19] That such forced marriages failed is shown, for example, by the fact that in the 1770s some Christian virgins bought the silence of the *yamen* runners and the *baojia* leaders (*cabecillas*) by paying bribes, so that "up to now no [virgin] has ever been obliged to marry"; see José Maria González, *Historia de las misiones dominicanas de China* (Madrid: Imprenta Juan Bravo, 1955-67), 2: 521. These words suggest that bribery in these cases was a recurrent practice.

[20] See order of Fujian Governor Liu Shiming 劉世明 in 1729, as recorded in a Spanish translation of a lost Chinese-language memorial dated October 18, 1729 (Yongzheng 7/8/26), in González, *Historia*, 2: 192-93.

[21] See copy of a Chinese-language document issued by the Prefect of Xinghua in

[Christian] women who did not marry be entrusted to the elderly males in the neighboring *baojia* and within a year be married off."[22] Clearly aware of the fact that these women had been unmarried for a long time with the consent of their families and the tolerance of their neighbors, he also proposed sanctions against local lineages and *baojia* leaders should they attempt to sidestep these official orders through secret dealings and bribery.

The preoccupation of the Qing bureaucracy for the integrity of the matrimonial institution and for the control of religious celibacy among women is evident from a number of policies regulating Buddhist nunneries issued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Authorities actively discouraged ordinations, especially of young girls. In Fujian and other provinces, for example, local officials frowned upon the phenomenon of the 'purchase' of poor girls, who were recruited for the Buddhist monastic system at a very young age. In 1688, the Governor of Fujian requested that all Buddhist nuns under the age of thirty be returned to their families of origin.[23] Around 1709, as we have seen, Zhang Boxing not only attempted to proscribe Christianity in Fujian but also ordered that daughters sold off by families as Buddhist nuns be redeemed and married off. Again in the early Qianlong period, governors responded to imperial regulations of the Buddhist and Daoist monastic establishments issued during the Yongzheng era by ordering that young novices, upon reaching the age of twenty, be returned to their families and lineages to be married off, and that women could in the future only enter a nunnery after reaching the age of forty.[24] With these actions, provincial governors were likely trying to inject back into the marital market a number of available brides in a period of

response to a request from the Provincial Surveillance Commissioner on the Fuan case, dated June 28, 1746 (Qianlong 11/5/10), in AMEP, *Chine*, 434: 1092r-1094r.

[22] AMEP, *Chine*, 434: 1092r.

[23] Eduard B. Vermeer, "The Decline of Hsing-hua Prefecture in the Early Ch'ing," in Eduard B. Vermeer, ed., *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 129, citing a local history of Putian by Chen Hong 陳鴻 (1618-98), *Xichao Puqing xiaoji* 熙朝莆靖小紀, covering the period 1684-97.

[24] A memorial by the Governor of Hubei Zhong Bao 鍾保, dated December 3, 1736 (Qianlong 1/11/2), for example, quoted a substatute of the Qing Code saying that "from now on, women must be older than forty to become nuns" (*sihou, funü bi nian yue sishi, fang zhun chujia wei ni* 嗣後，婦女必年逾四十，方准出家爲尼); see "Qianlong chunian zhengchi minfeng minsu shiliao (I) 乾隆初年整飭民風民俗史料," *Lishi dang'an* 81.1 (2001), 28-46, 35, transcribing Zhong's memorial on the regulation of male and female novices in Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and temples.

demographic recovery and of a "marriage crunch" that was especially felt in the southern coastal region.

Although these kinds of practical considerations were certainly in the minds of officials when they tried to curb religious ordinations, their actions were also ideologically motivated. The second item in the recommendations of the Prefect of Xinghua was a response to reports from the magistrate of Ningde 寧德 county (near Fuan) on the practice of renting one's wife, or actually pawning her to another man. The Prefect chastised the practice, referring to the article in the Qing legal statutes punishing this crime, a common custom in Fujian at the time.[25] This suggests that not only religious celibacy but also deviant matrimonial practices preoccupied authorities. Indeed, the defense of *proper* marriage was a ubiquitous theme in Qing official documents. The sanctity of marriage, the foundation of the Confucian family was at stake. Young Buddhist nuns, Christian virgins, and wives sold or pawned by their poor husbands were all alarming signs to officials that the institution of marriage was in danger, threatened by heterodox religious ideas as well as by the economic and immoral choices of many contemporary men. "Every woman a wife" may have been the slogan of Qing officials, but many situations did not conform to this moral ideal.[26]

Governmental concern was parallelled by anxiety in elite intellectual circles and in broader social discourse. Marriage was an important symbolic citadel for the safeguard of the patrilinear model, and the most striking manifestation of the hoped-for impregnability of the fortress was the cult of female chastity (that is, fidelity to a deceased husband or betrothed fiancé). For the state and elites, women's chastity was an indicator of the solidity of the matrimonial institution and reaffirmed

[25] The wife was pawned to another man for a certain amount of time, usually five to ten years, and then returned to the legal husband. The target of such arrangement was usually the production of a male heir for men married to barren wives. Contracts modeled on current property contracts were used in these transactions. The statute against wife-pawning is cited in Guo Songyi 郭松義, *Lunli yu shenghuo: Qingdai de hunyin guanxi* 倫理與生活 - 清代的婚姻關係 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2000), 497, n. 1. On wife-selling see Paola Paderni, "Between Formal and Informal Justice: A Case of Wife Selling in Eighteenth-Century China," *Ming Qing yanjiu 5* (1996): 139-56; Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000): 57-64; on wife-pawning, see Guo, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 486-98.

[26] On legal and bureaucratic measures regulating marriage and sexuality, see, e.g., Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, passim.

in the eyes of men that male honor was safe and that the centrality of patriliny went unchallenged.[27]

The Christian virgins of Fuan, therefore, represented a challenge not only to the institution of matrimony but indirectly to the ideological foundations of patriarchy and of the state. At least, this was the interpretation of officials. However, local perceptions must have been rather different: otherwise, how can we explain the presence in the mid-eighteenth century of over two hundred Christian virgins in the county of Fuan alone, without visible signs of opposition among local lineages and structures of power?[28]

This essay will explore this conundrum, and in the process try to explicate how the Christian concept of perpetual virginity found a receptive environment in Fuan within the existing discourse of widow chastity and the religious sensibilities alimented by Buddhism and popular religious cults. Chronologically the phenomenon of the Fuan Christian virgins had its first beginnings in the last decade of the Ming period (1640s) but developed into a local Christian institution only in the Qing period, reaching maturity in the eighteenth century. Thus, the historical focus of my research is mainly centered upon the Qing. However, to better contextualize Christian virginity as a social phenomenon in Qing Fujian, I will also review the early seventeenth-century Chinese Christian writings introducing the *ideal* of virginity–mainly authored by Jesuits–which provided its discursive antecedents.

[27] As noted by Janet Theiss, "the efflorescence of the so-called 'cult of female chastity' [in the High Qing] signalled the unprecedented significance of women's virtue as a component of elite and state orthodoxy and an obsession of popular culture"; see Janet Mary Theiss, "Dealing with Disgrace: The Negotiation of Female Virtue in Eighteenth-Century China" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1998), 1.

[28] This was also a Qing government's complaint. When in 1754 Christian activities were again discovered in Fuan, the Qianlong Emperor and his Grand Council observed in a court letter that to employ local lineages in functions of control was "a formality without substance" (*youming wushi* 有名無實). Thus officials were instructed to directly enforce harsh punishment towards the Christians, rather than trust lineage elders to do so; the letter is preserved in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan (Beijing), section *Jixin dang* (寄信檔), no. 1549-50, October 13, 1754 (Qianlong 19/8/27); compare Fang, *Zhongguo Tianzhujiao shi renwu zhuan*, 3:168.

Christian and Chinese Constructions of Virginity and Chastity: Social and Religious Dimensions

Before examining how Christian virginity was introduced and interpreted in China among missionaries and Christians, a word on the development of the concept and the attending religious institutions in the West is in order. Virginity in religious contexts has been prized by many societies as a state of grace that positioned men and especially women in a liminal zone of asexual purity. This purity allowed for a better, at times unique, capability to communicate with the divine, and in certain societies (such as hunting communities) virginity was thought to confer enhanced mental and physical strength and a gift of communicating directly with nature and the animal world.[29] Christianity lent a new twist to religiously motivated virginity, elevating it to a level of importance never seen before. In his classical analysis of virginity from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, John Bugge traces the roots of the virginal ideal in the negative view of the body and of sexuality displayed by the Gnostic movements of late antiquity, both outside and inside mainstream Christianity.[30] The implicit Gnostic view of the creation story in Genesis, seen as an allegory of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, was that "man's first sin was somehow equivalent to sexual intercourse; its principal effects were death and sexuality itself."[31] If sex and death were so intimately linked, then asexuality was seen as the privileged gate to immortality. Moreover, the prospect of a second coming of Christ within a generation made the idea of the continuation of humankind irrelevant.

This radical approach, however, did not become normative in mainstream Christianity. Rather, the interpretation of St. Augustine

[29] See entry on "Virginity" by Han J. W. Drijvers in Mircea Eliade, Charles J. Adams, et al. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987) 15: 279-81. Drijvers defines virginity as "the condition of young male and female persons who have not had sexual intercourse and have preserved their sexual innocence. This state is partly biologically determined, in that children do not yet have sexual potency; but that condition can be voluntarily or obligatorily extended until marriage, so that virginal status becomes a social fact." In the Christian tradition, virginity (but also chastity) becomes a lifelong condition for selected men and women consecrated to religious life.

[30] John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975). Here I rely on Bugge's rather specific essay on virginity, but a large literature on early Christian visions of sexuality and the body, including virginity, is available; see, e.g., Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

of Hippo (354-430) gave a new, relatively more moderate direction to the Western Latin tradition. Augustine read Genesis literally and saw sexuality between the human progenitors Adam and Eve as natural. However, Gnostic influence was so strong at the time that the ideal of virginity survived in Augustine and in later Christian thought. In Augustine's eyes, similar to the Gnostic view, virginal/asexual status was the primitive state of human beings. But while for the Gnostics the cause of the Fall had been sexual desire, Augustine emphasized that it had rather been the presumption of knowledge on the part of man.

And yet, in spite of this demoting of sexuality as the prime mover of death and sin, the ideal of virginal perfection remained alive and became institutionalized, thanks to the spreading of monasticism from the fifth century on, first in the East and later in the Latin West. Monks led a life that was essentially in anticipation of the "angelic life" (*vita angelica*) of Heaven, where there was no distinction between male and female. Theologians of the time affirmed that since virginity in this life was so difficult to achieve, it was in fact a worthier condition than that of angels, who were asexual by nature, not by choice. Male virginity was the main object of theological attention (as seen in the use of the masculine expression "unblemished [male] virgin" *virgo immaculatus*) and symbolized the resolve of monks to fight evil in the service of good, rather than simply to suppress lust. In early monasticism the imagery connected to virginity was military. Virgin monks were seen as *milites Christi* (soldiers of God) in imitation of angels, who "were not the effeminate young men of Quattrocento art, but a proud and vital race of demigods."[32]

Female virgins also acquired virile and agonistic attributes, and the hagiographies of the female virgin martyrs of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages portray them as resisting defilement with great strength. And yet, women's virtue was depicted as depending more intimately from their sexuality. As observed by Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "many [early Christian] accounts of women's martyrdoms stress sexual aspects of their lives in ways that descriptions of male martyrs do not. In women, preservation of their virginity and chastity at all costs is praised as the ultimate sacrifice."[33]

[31] Bugge, *Virginitas*, 19.
[32] Bugge, *Virginitas*, 48.
[33] Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London: Routledge, 2000), 29.

By the later Middle Ages, however, the prevailing moderate view of sexuality reduced the appeal of virginity/asexuality as a source of supernatural strength in a dualistic system of good versus evil. Rather, virginity was promoted as a form of ascetism, a struggle to subdue sexual desire. Celibacy, which had been required only of monks, became the rule for all the clergy by the twelfth century: "As perfect chastity came to be expected of all, the air of exclusiveness that had surrounded the practice of virginity in the cloister dissipated."[34] Moreover, a new theological emphasis on the humanity of Christ undermined the ideal of monastic virginity. Seeing Christ as a man not only diminished the appeal of the image of monks as soldiers in a cosmic struggle of good against evil but also "opened the way to speaking of Christ in the metaphorical terms of human sexual love."[35] This process led in the later Middle Ages to a "de-emphasis on physical virginity as central to sainthood for women."[36] Mothers and widows could also be elevated to the honors of the altar.

But the power of the virginal ideal remained strong among cloistered nuns. By the sixteenth century, the imagery of spiritual marriage once belonging to male monasticism had been appropriated by female mysticism. An outstanding example of such virginal, and yet matrimonial, imagery of union of a nun with Christ is offered by Teresa of Avila, whose writings "lent enormous richness of flesh-and-blood feminity to the concept of the bride of Christ."[37] The ambiguous status of nuns–virgins and yet brides of Christ–was typified by the figure of the Virgin Mary, who was both virgin and bride. Concurrently, the defense of the ideal of virginity was literally entrusted to the walls of monasteries. The Catholic church, worried by Protestant accusations of immorality in the cloisters, and within a larger movement of control of the female body, proceeded to enforce a strict policy of enclosure on nuns, forbidding the more liberal and porous conventual lifestyles tolerated in the late medieval period.[38]

[34] Bugge, *Virginitas*, 81.
[35] Bugge, *Virginitas*, 83.
[36] Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 45.
[37] Bugge, *Virginitas*, 140.
[38] Wiesner-Hanks *Christianity and Sexuality*, 106; Gabriella Zarri, *Recinti: Donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), 22-25. We should not ignore, of course, the important economic and social reasons that were behind the institution of female monasteries in Europe. The creation of a place where unmarriageable women from the nobility and the bourgeoisie could be safely cloistered benefited

And yet, religious institutions other than cloistered female orders, established by (mainly unmarried) women, existed in Europe at this time. Late medieval institutions like the Beguines of northern Europe or the *Beatas* and Tertiaries in the Iberian peninsula, which enjoyed relative freedom, were succeeded after the Council of Trent by groups of unmarried women who lived in their families' homes or in private houses adapted to their small communities and were not subject to enclosure. Such was the case of the Company of St. Ursula in northern Italy, or the later movement of the *Dévotes* in France.[39]

If religiously motivated virginity in the West, through a tortuous process, had become by the sixteenth century an exalted state of womanhood in the eyes of the Church, that was not the case in China. In late imperial China, women were expected to marry and give birth to a male heir, and lifelong virginity was thus an abhorrent thought for most people. The concentration in the medical and social discourse on women as mothers, and the need to procreate to fulfill the filial obligations towards the ancestors, prevented an exaltation of virginity similar to the one found in Christianity. In medical circles, abstinence from sexual intercourse was seen as the cause of dreaded dreams of intercourse with ghosts that caused physical depletion. Physicians deemed such disorders especially common among celibate women (widows, nuns, palace women, and women who had delayed marriage for too long) and believed that the repression of sexual desire was their main cause. The corollary to this theory was that "sexual activity was imperative if a woman was to remain normal."[40] This medical negative view of virginity reflected not only current physiological theories, but also what Charlotte Furth calls a "gender system that stressed female weakness and enslavement to reproductive necessity."[41] In spite of this,

their families, by reducing the burden of dowries and by extending to the convents the families' power and networking opportunities.

[39] See Zarri, *Recinti*, Chs. 6 and 7 and cited literature on the so-called "Third Way" chosen by women who were neither married nor nuns.

[40] See Charlotte Furth, "Blood, Body, and Gender: Medical Images of the Female Condition in China, 1600-1850," in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 291-314, 306; Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960-1665* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 91. Also in ancient Greece, doctors considered virginity a source of illness, and prescribed marriage and maternity as a cure; see, e.g., Catherine Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), 21.

[41] Furth, "Blood, Body, and Gender," 292.

however, premarital virginity remained prized. Although not seen as a social virtue in itself, virginity was deemed a necessary precondition for fulfilling the role of the wife and remained an important component in the economy of marriage, as shown by legal materials.

The word commonly used in legal documents of the Qing period for "virgin" is not *tongzhen* 童貞, *tongshen* 童身, and similar compounds, but *chunü* (處女) or *shinü* (室女). Both words meant "a girl who lives in [the paternal] home," and by extension an unmarried girl who had had no sexual intercourse.[42] *Chunü/shinü* also indicated individuals fitting a legal-medical definition of virginity. In late imperial China, as was the case in early modern Europe, virginity in girls was thought to be guaranteed by the presence of an unbroken hymen, and midwives were entrusted with the delicate task of checking on the virginity of girls when a doubt arouse or when a girl had been the object of attempted rape.[43] A case from the famous Qing dynasty legal compendium *Xing'an huilan* 刑案匯覽 (Conspectus of penal cases) highlights the social dimension of female virginity. The compendium reports the judgment reached in a failed attempt by a man to rape a fourteen-*sui* virgin girl (*chunü*). Since the girl had been violated only with a finger but not with a penis, her relatives considered that she had not been "polluted by illicit sex" (*jianwu* 姦污) and that she was thus still virginal. To confirm this, a midwife was brought in to check the physical integrity of the girl. Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris observed that in this case "loss of virginity would, *of course,* seriously undermine the girl's chances for marriage [emphasis mine]."[44] Matthew Sommer adds that "this case also suggests the social significance of virginity [. . .]: it seems to have been important to the father to establish that his unmarried daughter

[42] Luo, Zhufeng 羅竹風 et al., eds., *Hanyu Da Cidian* 漢語大辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1986-1994), 8:837.

[43] In fact, physiologically there is no basis for such belief. While in the ancient Mediterranean cultures hymeneal integrity was little valued, popular knowledge in the medieval and early modern West attached great importance to it as a sign of virgin status. Midwives were the bearers of this pseudo-knowledge, and in spite of opposition from important anatomists like Antoine Paré in sixteenth-century France, and later on by the authors of the *Encyclopedié*, this misconception is still with us; see Giulia Sissa "La verginità materiale. Evanescenza di un oggetto," *Quaderni Storici* 75.3 (1990): 739-55. On midwives in China, see Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 282.

[44] Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, eds., *Law in Imperial China. Exemplified by 190 Ch'ing Dynasty Cases* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967), 427-28.

had not been polluted by the attack."[45] In fact, husbands would even murder their wives, if they suspected or 'discovered' that the women were not virgin at the time of marriage.[46] What was then the "social significance of virginity," and why were sexual pollution and loss of virginity deemed so important?

According to Sommer's research, only penetration by a penis could truly represent rape and thus real pollution. He concludes that the idea of sexual pollution was mainly linked in the eighteenth century to the fear by commoner families of the 'rogue male', one of the increasingly numerous single poor men who crowded the High Qing underworld. To lose one's virginity with a rogue male was a loss of status and entailed downward mobility. Since even the status of a peasant family did not depend any longer on heredity but on moral behavior, by losing her sexual purity a girl would lose her moral goodness vis-à-vis the community, and in the end, compromise her status.[47] Thus, virginity was a commodity in the economy of marriage and family alliances, what has been described for early modern Europe as "a 'quality' [which is] a morphological sign of an unviolated family property, and a winning card for proper social positioning."[48] As Bodde and Morris hinted, a virgin girl was a piece of property in the marriage market, and she had to be given to the future husband in pristine conditions, so as to guarantee the purity of the ancestral line. A disgraced girl, on the other hand, became much less desirable and was headed for the position of concubine or prostitute or marriage to a debased man.

Moreover, the virginity of a betrothed woman reflected also on the honor of the future husband and his family. As the cases studied by Paola Paderni show, the suspicion of lack of virginity at the time of marriage created strong social pressure on the husband, who defended his honor with drastic measures, sometimes even murder.[49] In sum,

[45] Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 80.

[46] Paola Paderni, *Furori d'amore. Gelosia maschile e identità di genere nella Cina del XVIII secolo* (Napoli: Libreria Dante e Descartes, 1999), 27-29.

[47] Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 315.

[48] Giorgia Alessi, "Il gioco degli scambi: seduzione e risarcimento nella casistica cattolica del XVI e XVII secolo," *Quaderni Storici* 75.3 (1990), 805-31, 805.

[49] In 1735, for example, a local magistrate in Guangxi deemed that the main reason for the homicide of a woman by her husband had been the gnawing doubt he held about the virginity of his wife at the time of their marriage (*wei fei shinü zhi yi* 委非室女之疑). In another instance in 1734 in Shandong, a young man murdered his wife and their infant daughter out of suspicions about his wife's lack of premarital virtue (*zhengjing* 正

virginity represented both a socioeconomic asset in the hands of the woman's family and a way to preserve male honor and the purity of the man's family line. However, here we find no trace of virginity as a virtue to be made into a lifelong pursuit.

This social and reproductive discourse of virginity, in fact, was not the only one available in late imperial China. Religious virginity as symbolized by certain goddesses and as chosen by religious adepts represented another competing discourse. However, since religiously motivated virginity in China was not so much concerned with physiological hymeneal integrity but rather with sexual renunciation and rejection of the married condition, it would be better to define it as celibacy, although virginity could remain one of its unspoken constituents.[50] At least two main traditions nourished the controversial concept of the celibate status, Buddhism and Daoism. In Buddhism, sexuality and desire were seen as the roots of the eternal cycle of transmigration: "Love of life is the cause and sexual desire is the consequence. When cause and consequence are intertwined, one undergoes ten thousand births and ten thousand deaths. Changing one's heads and faces, one wanders in the six realms of rebirth and sees no beginning for deliverance."[51] Marriage was obviously the way love of life and sexual desire took a social form and had to be similarly rejected: "When man and woman get married, they plant a tree of bitterness and cast seeds broadly which take roots only in [purgatory]."[52] The seeds of marriage were maternity and the loss of blood during delivery, which, together with menstruation, represented the most polluting experiences and made women into inferior and dangerous beings in Chinese popular religion and Buddhism.[53]

Guanyin 觀音 and one of her most revered incarnations, Princess Miaoshan 妙善, are the two best-known examples of Buddhist virgin

經), and for the shame (*chou* 醜) he felt at being cuckolded (*wangba* 忘八) and at having a bastard daughter, as people rumored. See Paderni, *Furori d'amore*, 27-31.

[50] Celibacy is defined as a "deliberate abstinence from sexual activity," in Eliade et al., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 3: 144.

[51] These are Princess Miaoshan's words from a version of her legend, as quoted in Yü Chün-fang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press 2000), 333.

[52] Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 333-34.

[53] See Gary Seaman, "The Sexual Politics of Karmic Retribution," in Emily Martin and Hill Gates, eds., *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 381-396; Beata Grant, "The Spiritual Saga of Woman Huang: From

goddesses, untouched by such pollution. The ubiquitous Guanyin, as protectress of women asking for pregnancy and as an asexual goddess, embodied a tension between motherhood/pollution and virginity/purity, reminding us of the Virgin Mary. Similarly, Miaoshan exemplified the divergence between life in the world, signified by marriage, and the pursuit of religious enlightenment, found in celibacy. This tension between endorsement of the reproductive role of women and refusal of marriage in order to lead a life of religious commitment could go in both directions. On the one hand, as Glen Dudbridge argues, Miaoshan's example provided a model for female celibacy that inspired some to take that route.[54] On the other hand, however, as observed by Yü Chun-fang, most women in late imperial times did not follow this example and instead opted to engage in a domesticated religiosity that entailed a religious routine at home and sanctification through the fulfillment of their wifely duties.[55]

The Daoist tradition of celibacy was probably influenced by Buddhism and became important after the Six Dynasties, especially with the rise of monastic orders like "Complete Perfection" (*Quanzhen* 全真), which had a female branch. However, Daoist celibacy was not predicated on suppression of sexual desire to escape the wheel of reincarnation, but rather on the channeling of sexual energy to store power for superior stages of meditational and inner-alchemical practice. Yet, by the Ming and Qing periods celibate women are rarely mentioned in Daoist sources, and existing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century inner-alchemical texts written for women stressed the importance of undertaking the Daoist path as part of a household and of being filial and obedient to one's husband.[56]

Still, the myths of goddesses connected to Daoism continued to suggest to women the possibility of maintaining chastity as Miaoshan had done. In Fuan, in particular, the strong cult of the goddess-shamaness Linshui Furen 臨水夫人 (alias Chen Jinggu 陳靖姑) offered incentives

Pollution to Purification," in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: "Mulien Rescues His Mother" in Chinese Popular Culture* (Berkeley: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1989), 224-311; Emma Teng Jinhua, "Religion as a Source of Oppression and Creativity for Chinese Women," *Journal of Women and Gender Studies* 1 (1990), 165-91.

[54] See Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 102.

[55] See Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 337-38.

[56] See Catherine Despeux, "Women in Daoism," in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 384-412, 398.

for religiously motivated marriage resistance. In Funing subprefecture, where Fuan was located, there were numerous shrines dedicated to the goddess, and at least eleven were located in Fuan alone.[57] The version of the story of the "Lady of the Water Margins" included in the Daoist Canon describes her as a rebellious young woman, who "died without marrying and would possess young boys to speak about events through them."[58] She refused to yield to family pressure to marry and instead took to the mountains where she engaged in Daoist practices of interior alchemy and in ritual studies. Linshui Furen was even superscribed by Buddhism as one of the manifestations of the virgin bodhisattva Guanyin.[59]

Popular versions of the Lady's story finally normalized the deity, who accepted marriage and died while giving birth, thus becoming the goddess invoked by women for a smooth delivery.[60] In spite of her co-optation in the framework of the orthodox patriarchal order, however, her disorderly and rebellious behavior–never erased from the legend–may have been present in the minds of girls in late imperial times.[61] The diffusion of devotional hagiographies and the staging of

[57] See Fujian sheng Fuan xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 福建省福安縣地方誌編纂委員會, ed., *Fuan xianzhi* 福安縣誌 (1884 edition, with collations from earlier editions; Fuan: reprint, 1986), j. 13: 228, 231; for temples in Fuan, see Xu Xiaowang 徐曉望, *Fujian minjian xinyang yuanliu* 福建民間信仰源流 (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993), 330.

[58] Quoted from Vivienne Lo, "The Legend of the Lady of Linshui," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21 (1993), 69-96, 77. This version of her legend appears in the collection *Soushen ji* 搜神記, eventually included in the Daoist Canon; compare also Barend J. ter Haar, "The Genesis and Spread of Temple Cults in Fukien," in Vermeer, *Development and Decline of Fukien*, 349-96, 359.

[59] On the cult and lore of Linshui Furen see Brigitte Berthier, *La Dame-du-Bord-de-L'Eau* (Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, 1988); Lo, "The Legend of the Lady of Linshui"; Xu, *Fujian minjian xinyang yuanliu*, 329-37; Lin Guoping 林國平 and Peng Wenyu 彭文宇, *Fujian minjian xinyang* 福建民間信仰 (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 162-80; Brigitte Baptendier [Berthier], "The Lady Linshui: How a Woman Became a Goddess," in Mehir Shahar and Robert Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 105-49.

[60] The eighteenth-century popular novel *Mindu bieji* 閩都別記 contains a detailed account of the goddess's early life, marriage, death while delivering a son, and exploits against demons after she became a deity. This is the most popular version diffused in late imperial Fujian and known among devotees even today; see Lo, "The Legend of the Lady of Linshui," 80, 89.

[61] The ambiguity of the image of Linshui Furen is explored in Baptendier, "The Lady Jinshui," 132: "Chinese patrilineal lines demand only a single thing from women: a descendant who will assure the ancestral cult. This implies that women agree to

ritual dramas and puppet shows at temple festivals accomplished the transmission of such an image.[62] These forms of popular literature and theater dramatized the tension between the pursuit of enlightenment and salvation on the one hand and the attachment to the family on the other. Although the discourse of religious celibacy presented by figures like Miaoshan or Linshui Furen was usually brought into the framework of patriarchal family relations, nevertheless female religious celibacy and refusal of marriage remained as possibilities in the conceptual repertoire of the time and prepared a space for the introduction of Christian virginity in Fuan.[63]

be goods of exchange and material for the alliance between two lines. This is the model that Chen Jinggu refuses. She prefers to dedicate herself to meditation, to studying rituals and to keeping her independence as a shaman. . . . For some Chinese women this choice is either a matter of survival or a search and an attempt at self-preservation and self-cultivation, in a society that offers no other personal alternatives. . . . In traditional society, women have two possibilities outside of, or in addition to, alliance with the Confucian arrangement. The first model is the one chosen by Buddhist and Daoist nuns, looking to the practices of interior alchemy to sublimate their bodies . . . approximating the model chosen by Linshui Furen. . . . [T]he other model is the one chosen or endorsed by female mediums. Most female mediums are married and mothers. Sometimes they still leave their home after many years of marriage. Their cults are called licentious by structured religion and the state, and they resemble the split image of Linshui Furen as rebellious and yet under the patriliny, or the double image of both Chen Jinggu and the serpent she kills." Baptendier adds on p. 133: "The legendary story of Chen Jinggu is undoubtedly a kind of derision of marriage, but also a warning of its inevitability."

[62] On "novels" and other popular writings and songs on the Lady's legend, see Baptendier, "The Lady Linshui," 106-08. For examples of puppet shows on the legend of Linshui Furen in the counties of Shouning 壽寧 (near Fuan) and Shanghang 上杭 (southeastern Fujian), see Ye Mingsheng and Wu Naiyu 吳乃宇, *Fujian Shouning Siping kuilei xi "Nainiang zhuan"* 福建壽寧四平傀儡戲奶娘傳 (Taipei: Shi Ho-cheng Folk Culture Foundation, 1997); and Ye Mingsheng 葉明生 and Yuan Hongliang 袁洪亮, *Fujian Shanghang Luantan kuilei xi "Furen zhuan"* 福建上杭亂彈傀儡戲夫人傳 (Taipei: Shi Ho-cheng Folk Culture Foundation, 1996). The Shouning play stresses the Daoist-shamanic independent role of the goddess, whereas the Hakka play from Shanghang underlines her role as dutiful wife.

[63] The dynamic of "reintegration" of women in search of religious experience into the household is also reflected in hagiographic accounts contained in Qing *baojuan*; see Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995): 29-58, 45. The dramatic tension felt by women between salvation and family (a Buddhist problematique) is illustrated by the cycle of Woman Huang, see Grant, "The Spiritual Saga of Woman Huang."

The Ideal of Christian Virginity Transmitted to China

How were the various strains of the ideal of Christian virginity transmitted to China during the early modern period? Missionaries in China presented a diverse body of texts and models to their converts that reflected the historical stages of development of the concept and institutions of virginity in the West, from early Christian male monastic virginity to the more familiar image of female virginity connected to the life of the cloister and to the figure of the Virgin Mary. Before proceeding to an analysis of my case study in Fuan, I will briefly explore some of these materials, used to acquaint the Chinese public with the ideal of Christian virginity prior to the arrival of Dominicans in Fujian in the early 1630s.

The earliest mention of refusal of marriage and abstension from sex for religious purposes I found in Christian materials is in the famous catechetical work by Matteo Ricci S.J. (Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552-1610), *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven, 1604). Ricci uses the expression "to avoid sex and remain unmarried" (*juese buqu* 絕色不娶) when referring to the priestly celibacy of the Jesuits. However, the concept of virginity is not explicitly presented here, nor is any connection made to the virginity of Mary or to any other concepts in the repertoire of Christian virginity. Ricci is simply defending the Jesuits from the accusations of unfiliality leveled by unsympathetic literati, and not advocating celibacy or virginity for common Christians.[64]

It is rather in discussions by Ricci's successors about the seven capital sins and sacramental confession that the virtuous counterparts of lust–chastity and virginity–are explicitly mentioned. Concurrently, early Jesuit texts also introduce episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary and hagiographies of virgin saints into Chinese.[65] It is through

[64] See Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven. T'ien-chu Shih-i*, transl. by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuochen, ed. by Edward Malatesta (St. Louis - Miss. and San Francisco: The Institute of Jesuit Sources - Ricci Institute, 1985), 416-17: "Those concerned for the salvation of the world feel deep pity for the situation in the world today, and have therefore made chastity and celibacy rules of my humble Society [of Jesus]."

[65] An obvious source in the development of the concept and institutions of religious female virginity in the West was the cult of the Virgin Mary. Mary, however, was constructed over time as a metaphor for the Church itself, and thus her virginity was metaphorically presented, and rarely analized as a physiological or social reality, as Alain

texts and preaching on such topics that the theme of virginity–although not yet its practice–was explicitly conveyed to the Chinese public.

Diego de Pantoja (Pang Diwo 龐迪我, 1571-1618), one of Ricci's companions in Beijing, was probably the first to discuss in some detail the concept of Christian virginity in his well-known and widely-diffused text *Qike* 七克 (The seven victories [over sins], 1614).[66] There he also included a series of hagiographic stories about the explicit preservation of virginity and chastity among saints of the Christian West. Interestingly, the *Qike* targeted an audience made up not only of Christians but also of potential converts among the male members of the elites. It also attempted to pander to the taste of late Ming literati for moral treatises on self-cultivation.[67] Thus, the materials we find in the *Qike* on virginity are oriented to a male readership.

Boureau observes: "The discourse on Mary, eminently ecclesiological, reveals the double belonging of the Church to heaven and earth, to the divine and the human; it prefigures the double body of the State but says nothing on the particular bodies of women and on their position in the social exchange. In the thirteenth century virginity in the discourse of the Church is mainly a metaphor"; see Boureau, "L'imene e l'ulivo: la verginità femminile nel discorso della chiesa nel XIII secolo," *Quaderni storici* 75.3 (1990), 791-803, 802. Rather, Mary became, in this similar to the Church, a mediatrix between the people and her son Jesus Christ. The success of this intermediary role is confirmed by the great array of devotional Marian practices which flourished from the thirteenth century on. In this role of protrectess, she was also invoked as a bastion for the preservation of virginity and chastity, and it is in this role that we find her in China.

[66] The virginity of Mary (indicated by the terms *tongshen* and *tongzhen*) had been already mentioned in the Creed, translated in the initial period of the mission, as well as in early catechisms; for some occurrences of these terms in early seventeenth-century Christian texts, see Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink, eds., *Yesuhui Luoma Dang'anguan Ming-Qing Tianzhujiao wenxian* 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus* (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002), 1: 97 [*tongshen* in the Creed], 1: 319 [*tongshen*, in Matteo Ricci, S.J., et al., *Tianzhu jiaoyao* 天主教要, n.d.], 1: 184-85 [*tongshen*, but exceptionally also *shinü*, in Alfonso Vagnone, S.J., *Jiaoyao jielüe* 教要解略, 1615], 1: 380 [*tongzhen*, in João da Rocha, *Tianzhu shengjiao qimeng* 天主聖教啓蒙, 1619].

[67] In the early 1610s, Pantoja circulated as a manuscript, and eventually published in 1614, this famous and extensive treatise on the seven capital sins and the seven virtues to overcome them. The book received wide attention among scholars at the time, being reprinted in 1626 in *Tianxue chuhan* (on which see n. 68). It also had several other editions between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. In the *Qike*, Pantoja tried to offer to a public of sympathetic literati a Christian method of moral betterment superior to that of the *Ledgers of Merit and Demerit* so popular in this period. To do so it often criticized existing practices, such as the Buddhist idea of karmic retribution. Yet, the focus remained on moral self-cultivation. On the contents and reception of this text, see Ann Waltner, "Demerits and Deadly Sins. Jesuit Moral Tracts in Late Ming China," in Stuart Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understanding: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 422-48; Zhang Kai 張鎧, *Pang Diwo yü Zhongguo, 1597-1618* 龐迪我與中國, 1597-1618 (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan chubanshe, 1997), 276-92; for a reliable discussion of the composition date and some editions, see Adrian Dudink, "The Image of Xu Guangqi as Author of Christian Texts (A Bibliographical Appraisal)," in Catherine Jami, Peter Engelfriet, and Gregory Blue, eds., *Statecraft and Intellectual Renewal in Late Ming China. The Cross-Cultural Synthesis of Xu Guangqi (1562-1633)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 99-154, 212, n. 65; for a comparison of *Tianzhu shiyi* and the *Qike*'s sections pertaining to sexual ethics, see Lin Zhongze 林中澤, "Wan Ming Zhong-Xi xing lunli de xiangyu: yi Li Madou 'Tianzhu shiyi' he Pang Diwo 'Qi ke' wei zhongxin" 晚明中西性倫理的相遇：以利瑪竇 '天主實義' 和龐迪我 '七克' 爲中心 (Ph.D. diss., Zhongshan 中山 University, 2001).

The first section of the sixth *juan* of the *Qike* discusses how to contain lust (*fang yin* 坊淫), and the second section presents the antidote to lust, the virtue of chastity (*zhen de* 貞德). Then, in the third section, we are presented with an outline of "the orthodox discourse of matrimony" (*hunqu zhengyi* 婚娶正議). Given the target audience, married literati who often kept concubines, Pantoja's immediate objective was to establish the Western model of proper monogamous marriage as the ideal vehicle for chaste behavior: "One husband and one wife, that is the orthodox [way of marriage]. All other behaviors are heterodox and lustful."[68] Moreover, within marriage there is only one type of orthodox intercourse (*zheng se* 正色), regulated by seasons and done to produce offspring.[69] Within that model, Pantoja proposes both the rejection of lust and the establishment of a chaste *male* behavior, and women are presented as offering occasions of unchaste conduct. Some *exempla* translated from Western sources present a detached picture of the rejection of lustful thoughts among Western sages. Other stories, however, introduce the figure of a lustful woman (*yin nü* 淫女) or of a beautiful bejeweled woman as the occasions for sinful thoughts. The Western monastic tradition saw women as temptresses with insatiable

[68] Wu Xiangxiang 吳相湘, ed., *Tianxue chuhan* 天學初函 (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1965), 1015: "Yi fu yi fu zheng ye. Waici wanzhuang, xi jie xieyin 一夫一婦正也。外此萬狀。悉皆邪淫。" The *Tianxue chuhan* (First collectanea of heavenly studies), an important collection compiled by the prominent convert Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565-1630) in early 1626, includes twenty works, divided between those pertaining to principle (*li* 理; among them, the *Qike*) and those pertaining to concrete things (*qi* 器), i.e. scientific writings; see Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 602-03. This is the first large-scale attempt to present European knowledge (including the Aristotelian-Thomistic worldview) and Christianity as a unitary complex, although Ricci's works, including the *Tianzhu shiyi*, had already done so.

[69] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1008.

sexual appetites. However, since Pantoja's stories in the first section of the chapter are all about the overcoming (*ke* 克) of sin, women are seen as passive characters eliciting impure thoughts rather than agents with power over the mind and soul of a true sage engaged in spiritual cultivation. Virtuous men are the only active subjects of the *exempla*, and they choose to avoid *yin* thoughts because lust impedes cultivation and inevitably leads to the torments of hell.[70]

In the second section on the virtue of chastity, however, this detached tone changes abruptly. The entire section is a paean to virginity and to total sexual abstention, rather than merely to chastity within marriage (that is, a regulated expression of sexuality). This is so despite the classic definition of chastity offered by Pantoja at the outset, which describes a hierarchy of degrees of sexual abstention:

> What is chastity (*zhen* 貞)? It is to eliminate the desire of concupiscence (*jue yinyü zhi yuan ye* 絕淫欲之願也). There are three classes of chastity. The lower kind is chastity between husband and wife. They practice only proper intercourse (*zheng se*), and they do it only at the appropriate times.[71] Both in their minds and words they eliminate even the least evil desire. The intermediate kind is the chastity of widowers and widows. Some of them remarry, but others maintain chastity (*shoujie* 守節) and do not remarry, but rather from then on in thoughts and words refrain from entertaining [even] proper [sexual] desire (*zheng yu* 正欲). The superior kind is the chastity of the virgins (*tongshen zhi zhen* 童身之貞). From birth to death the mind is always completely free from sexual desire and the body is uncontaminated by sexual acts. In determining the reward (*gongbao* 功報) for such different kinds of chastity, the Holy Scriptures say: 'The reward for the chastity between husband and wife will be thirtyfold; the reward for the chastity of widowers and widows will be sixtyfold. But the reward for the virginal chastity will be one-hundredfold.'[72]

In spite of this depiction of married people as part of the Christian system of chastity, the remainder of the section relentlessly attacks the institution of marriage, showing that total sexual abstension (for Pantoja this means *male* virginity or celibacy) is the example offered to readers. The following passage well illustrates the point:

[70] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1019-28, containing fourteen exempla.

[71] This refers to the prohibitions against engaging in sex during certain Christian liturgical seasons, such as Lent and Advent, as well as the menstrual period and pregnancy; see James A. Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law," in Vern L. Bullogh and James A. Brundage, eds., *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 33-50, 36.

[72] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1029. In fact, the last sentence on the rewards of chastity and virginity is a reference to St. Jerome, *Epistula 123 ad Ageruchium*, and not to the Holy Scriptures; compare Boureau, "L'imene e l'ulivo," 802, n. 4.

> The beauty of the virtue of chastity is difficult to describe for those who have experienced it, and difficult to understand for those who have not. It is like the sweetness of honey; how can it be known by those who have never tasted it ? Those who are caught up in the preoccupations of married life cannot fathom the peace and joy of chastity. The Scriptures say that marriage is not something that is not good. However, those who have married must experience 'trouble in the flesh.'[73] [. . .] Once a man takes a wife, he is trapped. He is no longer the master of his own body, and becomes the slave of his wife. A wise wife is most difficult to find. When one is close to her, she does not obey; but when one is far from her, she complains. This is something that the Chinese sages have [also] said. When a mother gives birth, she often has to suffer a lot of pain. If, when a son is born, the mother dies, the grief over losing one's wife is only slightly offset by the joy of getting a son. Once a son has been [safely] delivered, the grief of [possibly] losing him [during birth] passes, but then starts the hard work of having a son, of raising and protecting him, of being afraid that he will fall ill or encounter some disaster and that one will lose him. Thus, where is the joy of having a son?! Together come the toils of having a son, which often outnumber the joys. If a son suddenly dies, many years will have been spent in vain effort, which makes the pain even more insufferable. Some have too many sons and daughters, and if they encounter a reversal of fortune, they find themselves without the wherewithal to clothe, feed, and marry them off. Others amass great riches, and then suffer the disgrace of not producing an heir to whom to leave their inheritance. The hope of the former [to have money for one's offspring] is the pain and disgrace of the latter [to have money but to lack an heir]. Some have wise sons who, however, die prematurely. Others have many sons, but disgrace comes after a long time, after they have been married. We cannot exhaust all the possible problems![74]

Here Pantoja employs some popular, and often misogynistic, 'pearls of wisdom' from both the West and China in order to elicit a knowing smile in his readers, mostly married men who know the 'pain' of being husbands and fathers. But Pantoja is dead serious about the evils of sex, and the superiority of virginity, a choice he himself has embraced. Thus he later says, "Sex, no matter whether proper or improper (*zheng xie* 正邪) muddles (*hun* 昏) the human soul and mind (*ling-xin* 靈心)."[75] And then he adds: "The Scriptures say 'In paradise there is no marriage, and after ascending to heaven, people are as pure as angels.'

[73] This is a reference to St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, 7:28, which recites in the Vulgata version: "Si autem acceperis uxorem non peccasti, et si nupserit virgo non peccavit, tribulationem tamen carnis habebunt huiusmodi, ego autem vobis parco"; and in the King James version: "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you." Here the reference is to women's trouble of child-bearing. I thank Adrian Dudink for pointing to me this reference.

[74] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1029-31.

[75] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1032.

If common people have to await paradise to reach that state, virgins already enjoy it in this world. They live in the flesh (*roushi* 肉室), but do not became defiled by the concupiscence of the flesh (*rouyu* 肉欲). [. . .] Virgins do not suffer the pollution of women (*tongshen bu shou nüwu* 童身不受女污)."[76] Virginity, in fact, offers almost an equivalent to the Daoist search for immortality: "Virginity not only prolongs life and protects the strength of the body [in life], but also makes the dead body fragrant and incorruptible; it makes the mind preserve perfect happiness, increases virtue, and yields a celestial reward."[77] Here, once again, what is being referred to is primarily male virginity.

And yet, Pantoja cannot completely elide the importance of marriage, especially in China. In the last section of the chapter "The Orthodox Discourse of Matrimony" he tries to defuse the objections of those in his Chinese audience who might regard male virginity/chastity as being a crime against filiality (*xiao* 孝), an infringement against the Confucian command to produce progeny. Among other strategies, he ingeniously employs the existing concept of widow fidelity to buttress his point, a strategy also employed in 1604 by Ricci in his *Tianzhu shiyi*: "Some say that if one already has a son, and takes a second wife, only then is there a sin of lust. However, if the first wife does not bear a son, then it does not seem to be a crime to acquire a second wife. I say that it is not so. When their husbands die, [Chinese] wives do not remarry, even if they have not borne a son. The monarch then bestows honors on them, and the people sing their praises. Thus, if a husband does not seek out a second wife despite the fact that the first wife has not borne him a son, then people will call him a righteous person."[78]

Most Chinese readers would have disagreed not only with Pantoja's assessment of the cult of widow chastity, but also with his comparisons and with many of his points about the superiority of virginity, as did the reviewers of the *Qike* in the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Annotated bibliography of the *Siku quanshu*, 1798).[79] In fact, even Christian readers in Jesuit communities were rarely asked to maintain

[76] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1037, 1038.

[77] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1039. The idea of the fragrant corpse is commonly found in many Christian hagiographic accounts of saints' lives, as well as in stories of the exhumation of the body of famous China missionaries in the seventeenth century (e.g., Martino Martini in Hangzhou and Jacques le Favre in Shaanxi).

[78] Wu, *Tianxue chuhan*, 1049.

[79] Critique of "*baoshou tongshen yi tiao*" 保守童身一條; compare the *Siku quanshu* review reproduced in Xu Zongze 徐宗澤, *Ming Qing jian Yesuhuishi yizhu tiyao* 明清間耶穌會士譯著提要 (Peiping: Zhonghua shuju, 1949), 52, translated in Waltner, "Demerits and Deadly Sins," 445 (with my modifications): "In the discussion on preservation of virginity [*baoshou tongshen*], the text cites an interlocutor, who asks, if everyone respected chastity and did not marry [*shouzhen buhun* 守貞不婚], would not the human race become extinct? The response is that if all humans respected chastity, and the human race became extinct, the Lord of Heaven would surely look after things so there would be no need to worry. The text is muddled." Waltner uses the term "celibacy" for *baoshou tongshen* and "celibate" for *shouzhen*. In fact, celibacy (abstension from sex) is not an equivalent of virginity (lack of any sexual experience).

virginity, since very few Chinese became priests or lay brothers, and women were never encouraged to do so by the Jesuits. The superior state of virginity was thus reserved for the male clergy, mainly foreign, and was presented to the laity primarily as an ideal. Marital chastity was thus the only practical form of chastity asked of most Christians in Jesuit communities, and literati converts such as the Fujianese Li Jiugong 李九功 (d. 1681) regarded the overcoming of lust as a form of self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition.[80]

In sum, the *Qike*'s ethical discussions concentrated on the theme of contempt for the flesh and for sexual contacts and showed the influence of Western classical philosophy and patristic literature. The anecdotal hagiographies mainly concentrated on male *exempla* from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Given its intended audience, Pantoja revived discussions of male clerical virginity that were by this time no longer fashionable in the West, where the monastic discourse of male militant virginity had been already superseded by a mainly female discourse of virginity. It is doubtful that the *Qike*'s discussion of lust and virginity/chastity elicited much interest among literati.[81] On the contrary, as seen in the remarks found later in the

[80] See Li Jiugong, *Shensi lu* 慎思錄, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (hereafter BNF), *Chinois* 7227, Part 3, "Reflections on the relationship with the self" (*he ji zhi si* 和己之思), 7b: "Food and sex are the great desires of humans. Thus to confront these two is hard. The gentleman who exerts effort in cultivation has the capability to first defeat these two desires. Then it will be possible to overcome the other desires. One must reach a state of purity of mind; then to become a spirit without form from being a man with form will not be so difficult." Folios 8a-b: "When flames and combustible grass get close to each other, then we have a fire. When man and woman get familiar, there will certainly be confusion [*mi* 迷]. To writings containing debauchery one must say 'enough!', 'go away', 'no!' This will show to people the way to counter lust, although clearly it will not be so easy."

[81] The *Qike*'s condemnation of concubinage, on the other hand, was at the core of moral dilemmas for a number of converted literati; see, e.g., the case from Shanxi presented in Huang Yi-long (Yinong) 黃一農, "Ming Qing Tianzhujiao zai Shanxi Jiang-

Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao, the *Qike*'s section on virginity became one of the prominent targets of criticism by non-Christian literati.

Soon after the *Qike*, other Jesuit texts appeared which presented a fuller, and this time, predominantly female version of virginity. These texts, unlike the *Qike*, were intended for a Christian public. One of the earliest books of this genre is the ponderous *Shengren xingshi* 聖人行實 (Lives of saints, 1629) by Alfonso Vagnoni S.J. (Gao Yizhi 高一志, 1568-1640).[82] Out of a total of seventy-five saints included, fifty-one are male and twenty-four female. These women are split in two groups: twelve virgins (*tongshen*, juan 6) and twelve chaste widows (*shoujie*, juan 7). Women saints are thus categorized primarily on the basis of their sexual status, while none of the men are included specifically under the rubric "virgin" but rather under the categories of apostles, clergy, martyrs, members of active religious orders, contemplative monks, or hermits, testifying to an increasing feminization of the concept of virginity/chastity.

Another book by Vagnoni more specifically concerned with the concept of virginity is the *Shengmu xingshi* 聖母行實 (Life of the Holy Mother, 1631). This treatise, a mix of hagiographic materials and more sophisticated theological disquisitions in three *juan*, includes both materials on Mary's virginity and a defense of virginity among the saints and martyrs. Its popularity is attested by a number of reprints throughout the centuries (in 1680, 1694, 1798, 1905, and 1928) as well as by a Korean translation.[83] Some Chinese literati corrected the text,

zhou de fazhan jiqi fanying 明清天主教在山西降州的發展及其反應," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 26 (1996), 1-39.

[82] The book is four-hundred-twenty folios long (copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Chinois* 6693-6694). Vagnoni's manuscript was completed in 1624 in Macao during his exile from Nanjing in the wake of the first important anti-Christian campaign in 1616 and first published in Hangzhou in 1629; see Henri Bernard, "Les adaptations chinoises d'ouvrages européens: bibliographie chronologique. Première Partie: depuis la venue des Portugais à Canton jusqu'à la Mission française de Pékin, 1514 –1688," *Monumenta Serica* 10 (1945), 1-57, and 309-388, 337, 343. Thus, the collection is certainly based on published Western-language hagiographies readily available in Macanese conventual libraries. It was republished in 1631 in Fuzhou (compare Bernard "Les adaptations chinoises," 344, no. 188, reference to copy in BNF, *Chinois* 6695), assuring its diffusion among Christians in Fujian province, a point of importance in the economy of my essay, as will become clear later.

[83] It was first published in Jiangzhou 絳州 (Shanxi 山西); see Bernard, "Les adaptations chinoises," 344, no. 187. An earlier (?) text with the same title by Niccolò Longobardo, S.J., (Long Huamin 龍華民, 1565-1655) is apparently no longer extant; see Bernard, "Les adaptations chinoises," no. 43. Copies of Vagnoni's and Longobardo's

but since it was intended for internal circulation among Christians, who had already accepted Mariology as well as Marian devotions as an article of faith, no important converts or other sympathetic literati wrote prefaces to make it more attractive to outsiders.

The internal nature of the text seems to be confirmed by the way the virginity of Mary is discussed in *juan* 2, under the heading "*Shengmu tongzhen* 聖母童貞" (The virginity of the Holy Mother):

> The Lord of Heaven since the moment of the creation of humankind decided to become incarnated. He chose a virgin (*shinü*) in order to be conceived in purity, so that even if there was birth, nevertheless she would not lose her child's body (*tongti* 童體). *This is something difficult to believe for the ignorant people of the world* (*shiren yulou* 世人愚陋), *who inevitably doubt this* [emphasis mine]. However, there are several ways to establish the case. Let us take as an example the saints of old, letting their knowledge illuminate us, letting their faith fortify us. [Such knowledge and faith] were inscribed on the scriptures in numerous books for a long time and finally commented on by later holy men. They wrote that the Holy Mother was blessed and remained a virgin (*tongzhen*) all her life. This is truly so and cannot be doubted.[84]

The following pages abundantly quote from the *loci classici* of prophetic scriptures prefiguring the virginal birth of the Messiah and from the commentaries on such passages by Christian saints and theologians.[85] There is no attempt to prove one of the most intractable 'mysteries' of Catholicism by rational arguments, nor is there any use of the usual Jesuit strategy of employing citations from the Confucian classics to buttress a point. Everything is accomplished by way of Christian textual authority. Such approach could only work for believing Christians. In fact, the virginal birth of Christ was one of the first Christian ideas to

work were both found by Qing authorities in Fuan in 1746, as I will describe below. Vagnoni's book is divided in three *juan*. The first *juan* chronicles the ancestry and life of Mary, much of it from apocryphal sources. In an appendix we find a description of the miracle of the Holy House of Mary, which according to legend was transported by angels to Loreto (Italy), where it is still the core relic of a famous Marian sanctuary. In the second *juan*, theologians' and saints' works are quoted to explain the various attributes of Mary. The third *juan* is a collection of Marian miracle stories. I have used the 1680 Guangzhou reprint of the text, reproduced in Wu Xiangxiang, ed., *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian san bian* 天主教東傳文獻三編 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1984), 3: 1273-1552.

[84] Wu, *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian san bian*, 3: j. 2, 1354.

[85] The literature on Mariology–i.e., the theology related to Mary, including the problems of her own immaculate conception and of the virginal birth of Jesus–is enormous; Bugge's appendix "The Virgin Mary: Virgin Birth and Immaculate Conception," in Bugge, *Virginitas*, 141-54, offers an exploration of the topic, covering early Christianity and the Middle Ages.

be attacked as ludicrous, if not outrightly immoral, by Chinese opponents of the missionaries, and the irritation of the Western priests at these attacks is revealed by the reference to "the ignorant people of the world, who inevitably doubt [the mystery of Mary's virginity]."[86]

Moreover, the contents of both Vagnoni's collections suggest that these Christian texts also aspired to reach, or at least be orally transmitted to, a female readership. Among the eleven *exempla* on preservation of chastity and virginity translated by Vagnoni in his *Shengmu xingshi*, for example, six are about virgin women, one is about a chaste marriage (an asexual union, where in fact the woman took the lead in pursuing virginity), and only four are about celibate men avoiding any sexual contact.[87] In Pantoja's text, on the other hand, almost all of the examples are of celibate men.

We know that the Christian audience of these texts included literate women like the granddaughter of the famous convert Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (1562-1633), Candida Xu 許 (1607-80), as well as other women who were orally taught their contents by husbands, female catechists, and priests. According to her biographer Philippe Couplet SJ (1623-93), Candida "explained to the missionaries that the surest and easiest way to convert women, who are not free to go to church, is to write lots of pious books in Chinese. [. . .] Madame Hiu [Xu] distributed

[86] Vagnoni was one of the Jesuits who suffered expulsion from his mission in Nanjing in 1616 during the first important anti-Christian campaign, led by the Vice-Minister of Rites Shen Que 沈潅, and one of the points singled out by critics at this juncture was precisely the virginity of Mary. Shen was certainly one of those "dull people" in Vagnoni's eyes. On literati's criticism of Mary's virginity, see Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 228-29; Eugenio Menegon, "La polemica ideologica tra gesuiti e intellettuali neo-confuciani nella Cina del XVII secolo: le tesi di Yang Guangxian," *Ming Qing yanjiu* 1 (1992): 103-23. In fact, Mary's divine purity (although not the virginal birth of Christ) remained a matter of contention in Europe too for a long time, and the Dominican order opposed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (that is, the fact that Mary herself had been conceived through God's intervention in the womb of her mother Anne, thus eschewing the burden of the original sin) into the seventeenth century. In Seville, for example, riots erupted on the streets between partisans of the two theological positions. The Jesuits in China presented the Immaculate Conception of Mary as an article of faith, but were opposed by the Dominican Domingo Navarrete; see J.S. Cummins, *A Question of Rites. Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China* (Hants: Scolar Press, 1993), 40.

[87] See Wu, *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian san bian*, 3: 1517-29, section entitled "The Holy Mother offers protection against dangers to chastity and purity" ("Sheng Mu tiyuan zhenjie zhi wei 聖母提援貞潔之危").

such books in all our churches, and donated copies to other Ladies, and to all [other] women to whom she had some access, or who had contact with her."[88] This sort of indirect catechization, through books or the intermediation of others, was the only kind available in Jesuit communities, since early on the Jesuits had decided to accommodate themselves to literati ways and thus had ignored the model offered by Buddhist monks, which would have given them opportunities to be closer to women.[89] Ideas about virginity were thus transmitted to Chinese women mainly through written hagiographies. And yet, as Couplet observed, there were very few Christian women in Jesuit communities who took the vows of virginity.[90] It appears, thus, that the discourse on virginity in those communities remained simply an ideal. Couplet obviously did not know about, or chose to ignore, the experience of Dominican converts in Fuan. As I will indicate later on, however, Fuan Christian virgins absorbed the exemplary hagiographies of Western virgins preached to them by missionaries and found inspiration in them to refuse marriage and embrace lifelong virginity. How were they able to transform such an ideal into a social practice?

[88] See Philippe Couplet, *Histoire d'une dame chretienne de la Chine, ou par occasion les usages de ces peuples, l'établissment de la Religion, les manieres des Missionaires, et les Exercices de Pieté des nouveaux Chrétiens sont expliquez* (Paris, 1688), 38-39. On the Jesuit apostolate among women, and on the activities of Candida Xu and other Christian women in Jiangnan, see, e.g., Gail King, "Candida Xu and the Growth of Christianity in China in the Seventeenth Century," *Monumenta Serica* 46 (1998): 49-66; compare also Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 393-97.

[89] Couplet, *Histoire d'une dame chretienne*, 8, writes: "If the Fathers who first entered in this Kingdom to preach the Gospel had continued to wear like the Bonzes [as Ruggieri and Ricci did in the very beginning], they would have had an easier task in dealing with women. Women have the freedom to talk to these Priests of the Idols, and to visit their temples to recite their prayers. But the first missionaries decided that it was more important for our religion to deal with magistrates, with literati and with family heads, rather than with those persons [women] who are more naturally disposed to piety, and who can anyway be instructed in our religious mysteries without visits and meetings, either through the reading of books, or through the intermediation of their husbands."

[90] Couplet, *Histoire d'une dame chretienne*, 24, refers to a commoner woman called Rosalie, a servant of Candida Xu, who vowed to remain virgin out of devotion, and who managed Candida's charity network outside her mistress's house.

Women, Religion, and Christianity in Fuan: Beatas and the Social Contest between Virginity and Marriage

In his biography of Candida Xu, Couplet recognized that there were practically no Christian virgins in the Jesuit China mission. This was also partly due to the difficulties the Jesuits encountered in their contacts with women, given the rather strict customs of segregation between the sexes. For that reason, the missionaries maintained private chapels for women and conducted confessions only in special places that could be easily monitored by males of the household. Although starting in the 1650s the Jesuits established a number of female confraternities of devotional nature in the urban centers of Jiangnan, they avoided any direct involvement with consecrated women, given the opposition that such choice would elicit within the patriarchal organization of society.[91] Jesuits would still minister to women, but their approach was generally very prudent.

This prudence was due, in no small part, to the widespread perception among men in China that female piety was often associated with religious heterodoxy. Women frequented temples; were acolytes of monks, nuns, or shamans; and sometimes formed religious sororities. All of these activities were connected in men's minds to sexual misconduct.[92] Lineage rules preserved in genealogies prescribed the seclusion of women as a way to ward off bad influences from the so-called "three nuns" (Buddhist nuns, Daoist nuns, and female fortune-tellers) and six "service women" (brokers, matchmakers, sorceresses, bewitchers, medical women, and midwives). Moreover, such rules also proscribed visits to temples, festivals, and other celebrations, as Chinese literature was replete with stories of lewd monks taking advantage of young girls in temples and during festivals.[93] Imperial laws also reflected

[91] See Liam Brockey, "The Harvest of the Vine: The Jesuit Missionary Enterprise in China, 1579-1710" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2002), 449, 454-55, 463-64.

[92] Charlotte Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy: Household Instructions and the Transmission of Orthodox Values," in Liu Kwang-Ching, ed., *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 187-211, 197; Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 191.

[93] Liu Hui-chen Wang, *The Traditional Chinese Clan Rules* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin, 1959), 94-95; Mann, *Precious Records*, 192; Andrea S. Goldman, "The Nun Who Wouldn't be: Representations of Female Desire in Two Performance Genres of 'Si Fan'," *Late Imperial China* 21.1 (2001): 1-40.

a great deal of suspicion of the clergy in sexual matters and suggested severe punishments for sexual crimes committed by Buddhist monks or Daoist priests. These sexual overtones tainted religious activities outside the home and were in part a symptom of men's concern for the spiritual supremacy of the patriarchal order, symbolically centered upon the family shrine and embodied by ancestral rituals. Yet, prohibitions and suspicions notwithstanding, women continued to test the boundaries of permeability between the inner and outer spheres of their lives, participating in religious activities and pilgrimages outside of their homes.[94]

Given this tradition, it is not surprising that from the very beginning of Dominican presence in the 1630s women became the most enthusiastic Christian converts in the region of Fuan. By congregating at night to confess and communicate with the Spanish missionaries, these Christian women defied patriarchal authority as well as state ideology. Like the Jesuits before them, the Dominicans experienced the strictures of the segregation of sexes typical of China. However, over time, the friars developed a more intense relationship with women than the Jesuits ever had. This happened in spite of initial opposition by Chinese men to such religious liaisons.

The approach of the Dominicans in Fuan and the nature of the place itself certainly contributed to this phenomenon, and a word is in order to explain how the forceful proselytizing component of the friars' mission came to be accepted there. Breaking a Jesuit monopoly of the China mission, the friars had reached Fujian in the final decade of the Ming dynasty. Invited by a handful of local literati previously converted by the Jesuits in Fuzhou, the friars elected as their main missionary territory the cluster of rural villages centering around Fuan, never reached by their missionary competitors. There, assisted by a few committed converts, they began to spread their faith among

[94] On laws punishing the clergy's sexual misdemeanor, see William C. Jones, Cheng Tianquan, and Jiang Yongling, eds. *The Great Qing Code* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 132-133, 352; Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 100. On anticlericalism in China, see Vincent Goossaert, ed., *L'anticléricalisme en Chine. Extreme-Orient Extreme-Occident*, 24 (2002). On the tension in women's lives between ancestral shrine and temple as loci of religious activity, and the male elite discourse of subordination of female piety to the rituals of the patriarchy, see Zhou Yiqun, "The Hearth and the Temple: Mapping Female Religiosity in Late Imperial China, 1550-1900," *Late Imperial China* 24. 2 (2003): 109-55.

commoners and the lower strata of the gentry (students and lower-degree holders).

The region, unlike the culturally and economically advanced areas of Fuzhou and Minnan 閩南, had seen its heyday before the Yuan period. From the Tang to the Song, the major commercial venue for the agricultural products of the region and the home base of the lineages producing higher-degree holders had been the Mushui 穆水 valley.[95] Liancun 廉村, together with the other villages of Muyang 穆洋 in the upper reaches of the valley, and Suyang 蘇洋 on Baima 白馬 harbor, formed a commercial axis that controlled the flow of people and merchandise from the coast towards the interior. Between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, out of the seventy-six *jinshi*-holders from Fuan, fifty-six were members of the important lineages of the Mushui valley, such as the Xue 薛 and Chen 陳 of Liancun, the Liu 劉 of Suyang, and in lesser numbers, the Miao 繆 of Muyang, among whom many eventually became–and still are–Christian.[96] Fuan became the main commercial and political center of northeastern Fujian only in the Ming-Qing period. Overall, the region experienced a gradual decline in importance from the Song period on, and it was a backwater by late imperial times. A measure of this marginality is the dubious record held by Funing as the least successful prefecture of Fujian in obtaining higher degrees during the late Ming and Qing periods.[97]

Initially, the friars' confrontational methods of evangelization (iconoclasm, opposition to ancestral rites, and contact with women) provoked conflict with segments of the local elites, and as a consequence county and provincial authorities had to intervene to avoid escalation.[98] However, the priests could count on the support of some local literati. By

[95] Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi yu Fujian sheng Fuanshi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 中國人民政治協商會議與福建省福安市委員會文史資料委員會, ed., *Fujian Liancun gu wenhua qunluo* 福建廉村古文化群落 (Fuan: locally published, 1997), 3.

[96] Miao Zaizuo 繆載祚, "Mushui cangmang hua Muyang 穆水蒼茫話穆陽" (Muyang: unpublished paper, 1996?), 1; Liu Haifeng 劉海峰 and Zhuang Mingshui 莊明水, eds., *Fujian jiaoyu shi* 福建教育史 (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 7-8.

[97] In the Ming, the *jinshi* and *juren* from Funing represented only 0.6% and 0.7% of the Fujian provincial totals, respectively; in the Qing (1650-1820) the average was 0.6% and 0.4% respectively; see Liu and Zhuang, *Fujian jiaoyu shi*, 152, 160, 212, 220.

[98] On this early phase of conflicts, see Eugenio Menegon, "Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans in Fujian: the Anti-Christian Incidents of 1637-38," in Tiziana Lippiello and Roman Malek, eds., *"Scholar from the West": Giulio Aleni, S.J., (1582-1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China* (Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag 1997), 219-262; Menegon, "Christian Loyalists."

1649, during a period in which Christianity enjoyed the favor of the local Ming loyalist military commander, Liu Zhongzao 劉中藻, missionary sources mention that 5,400 people had been baptized, and that among them were four "military mandarins," three *gongsheng*, one *juren*, seventy *shengyuan*, and twelve *beatas* ("blessed virgins") from prominent families.[99]

The region was deeply touched by the Qing conquest: between 1647 and the early 1650s, Fuan and the surrounding subprefecture of Funing, like many other coastal prefectures of Fujian, were repeatedly attacked by the troops of different Ming loyalist regimes and by the Qing, becoming the temporary stronghold of one side and then the other.[100] Later on, the military confrontation between the Qing and the regime of Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624-62), then that of Geng Jingzhong 耿精忠 (d. 1682), followed by the coastal evacuation, provoked enormous dislocation, and bandits or unruly troops continued to pillage the region, as is testified in Chinese and missionary sources. The advent of the Qing, however, brought protection to the court Jesuits from the Shunzhi 順治 and Kangxi Emperors. This gave Christianity a relatively safe position in China and favored the strengthening of the Catholic communities of the Fuan region. Blood relations and alliances among local lineages through marriage further spread the new religion.[101]

The number of Christian virgins continued to increase: twenty-four in 1695, fifty in 1714, between one-hundred-thirty and two-hundred in the 1740-60s.[102] Also the overall number of converts grew con-

[99] Domingo Navarrete, *Controversias antiguas y modernas de la mission de la gran China* (ms., Madrid, 1679) as quoted in González, *Historia*, 1: 297. On *beatas*, see n. 108.

[100] For details and further references on the vicissitudes of Funing prefecture during the conquest, see Menegon, "Christian Loyalists."

[101] Historically, the county seat of Fuan and the important nearby fortified village of Muyang always had the largest number of Christians; see the report of Fr. Joaquin Royo (1741) in González, *Misiones Dominicanas*, 2: 372. For details on the role of family ties and lineage organization in the diffusion of Christianity in Fuan, see Menegon, "Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars," Ch. 4, and Zhang Xianqing 張先清, "Guanfu, zongzu yu Tianzhujiao: Ming-Qing shiqi Mindong Fuan de xiangcun jiaohui fazhan 官府、宗族與天主教：明清時期閩東福安的鄉村教會發展" (Ph.D. diss., Xiamen University, 2003), Ch. 4. For an English-language introduction to the relationship among lineage organization, ancestral cults, and local religion in northern Fujian, see Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship. Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), Chs. 4-6.

[102] See nn. 129, 130, 131.

tinuously, although the percentage of Christian degree-holders seems to have decreased into the Qing, especially after the proscription of Christianity. By the eighteenth century Christian practices had become so commonplace in the region that local elites no longer openly opposed them. After the Yongzheng Emperor issued in 1724 a ban on Catholicism in China, it was the Qing central government, not the local elites, that took upon itself the role of policing local society and reforming the 'evil customs' (*efeng* 惡風) of Fuan Christians through a series of military raids during the eighteenth century. The lack of active gentry and lineage opposition to Christianity is a sign that Christianity underwent a process of incorporation by local society. Again and again, the local structures of social control (*baojia* and lineages) failed to fulfill the policing role they were assigned by the imperial state.

Imperial suppressions only succeeded in strengthening the resolve of committed Christians to resist government control and provoked the creation of a native clergy, who could escape easy detection and care for the underground church. These developments rooted Christianity even deeper in the region, so much so that during prolonged stretches of peaceful times, Christian communities built churches, engaged in public rituals, and numerically increased in spite of official proscription. These dynamics prevailed until the 1860s, when the enforcement of the unequal treaties modified the delicate balance of power relations that had developed over time, and opened a new phase of conflict led by local notables.

Women represented a large portion of the community, and Dominicans in Fuan found that women's enthusiasm overcame male resistance to their religious activities. In 1647 the county magistrate of Fuan asked one of the Spanish missionaries, Fr. Francisco Capillas, "whether he had practiced any witchcraft on the Christians, since without it, it would be impossible for women to feel closer [to the friars] than to their husbands."[103] As a matter of fact, from the beginning, the friars did not follow the Jesuit policy of keeping a 'safe' distance from women. This attitude quite likely stemmed from a tradition of close mendicant supervision of single pious women and of female congregations in Europe, Latin America, and the Philippines. The Jesuits never even considered the creation of a Jesuit-inspired female

[103] Letter by Capillas dated 1647, in Archivum Generale Ordinis Praedicatorum, Rome (hereafter AGOP), ms., X 1120.4, 1v.

religious order, while the Dominican and Franciscan Third Orders had accepted women in their ranks since the thirteenth century. Among the early Dominicans in Fuan (1640s), Frs. Capillas and Diez were particularly close to women and "discussed with them matters of [spiritual] perfection."[104]

The remarks of a Dominican observer in the 1660s throw some light on incentives that women might have found in conversion. Fr. Victorio Riccio (1621-85), a first-hand witness and chronicler of the Fujian mission, noted that women in China led miserable lives, treated as chattel or slaves, and that they would go to any length in their prayers and sacrifices to avoid the horror of reincarnation as females. Such was their despair that at times they even hanged themselves. He ends by saying that "this is something that should give special reason to Christian women to thank God for the liberty they enjoy. But it must be the kind of liberty that Christ gave us, not the mundane one that, unlike a holy and laudable Christian liberty, subjects us to many sins and makes us even worse slaves, either of the body or of the soul."[105] Although this excessively negative image comes from the propagandistic pen of a missionary, it does reflect some of the hardships encountered by Chinese women.[106] Riccio here refers probably not only to married Christian women, who, through subterfuge, could still participate in ritual activities, but to the select group of Fuan women

[104] Juan García, "Posdata a la relación de China del Bto. Capillas," 1649, ms., APSR, *China*, 7.5: 18-21, 19.

[105] Victorio Riccio, "Hechos de la Orden de Predicadores en el Imperio de la China, scriptos por el P. Fr. Victorio Riccio," ms., APSR, *China*, 2: 75r-v. Riccio, a native of Tuscany, is known for his role as diplomatic envoy between Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) and the Spanish government of Manila during the 1660s. He compiled the extensive "Hechos" of over 500 folios in 1667 in the Convent of San Juan del Monte, near Manila. This work has survived in three copies, all kept in the APSR. After a decade of work in China (1655-65), Riccio remained in the Philippines until his death (1665-85). See José Maria González, *Un misionero diplomático: vida del Padre Victorio Riccio* (Madrid: Ediciones Studium, 1955); John E. Wills, "The Hazardous Missions of a Dominican: Victorio Riccio, O.P., in Amoy, Taiwan, and Manila," in Joseph Dehergne, ed., *Actes du IIe Colloque International de Sinologie. Les Rapports entre la Chine et l'Europe au Temps des Lumieres, Chantilly, 16-18 septembre 1977* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres - Cathasia, 1980), 243-57; Eugenio Menegon, "Riccio, Vittorio" in electronic database "The Ricci Twenty-First Century Roundtable on the History of Christianity in China" (http://ricci.rt.usfca.edu).

[106] Recent work on the role of women in Buddhism, while detailing their participation in devotional activities, also shows how misogynistic attitudes were reinforced by Buddhism; see Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

who refused marriage *tout court*, and embraced a consecrated life of "Christian liberty." In this case, the usual expectation for women in local society was reversed among Christian women: the axiom "every woman a wife," which was particularly true for elite women, was disregarded among Fuan Christians. In increasing numbers over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Christian women of elite provenance chose not to marry and instead led consecrated lives as tertiaries or *beatas*.

While some tertiaries in Europe and the Spanish colonies had founded religious orders, many had never established a formal institution, limiting themselves to follow the rules of the Third Order privately at home.[107] Women leading this form of religious life, which was quite popular in sixteenth-century Spain, were known as "the blessed ones" (*beatas*). In time, though, the church tried to limit the independence and spiritual eccentricity of these holy women by cloistering them, first at home and later in communities. By the seventeenth century, following repeated condemnations by the Inquisition and the decrees of enclosure of the Council of Trent (1563), the cloistered life of nuns and tertiaries alike had been almost completely institutionalized. The Spanish tradition of the cloistered *beatas* was transmitted to the Philippines, where a Dominican *beaterío* (community of *beatas*) was first established in 1682 in Manila.[108]

[107] "Third Orders" signify in general lay members of religious orders. They are men and women who do not necessarily live in community and yet can wear the habit and participate in the spiritual and charitable activities of male religious orders, which are known as "First Orders." Nuns belong to "Second Orders." The Third Order of Penance of Saint Dominic, affiliated with the Dominicans and known in Chinese as *San Hui* 三會, originated in the spiritual climate of the penitential movements of the European Middle Ages and obtained its first rule in 1284 as a form of lay affiliation to the Dominican Order.

[108] On enclosure, see Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millenia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 461. On *beatas* in Spain, see William Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); in the Philippines, Nick Joaquin, "The Beatas of 17th-Century Manila," in Nick Joaquin, ed., *Culture and History. Occasional Notes on the Process of Philippine Becoming* (Manila: Solar Publishing Corporation, 1988), 101-23, and Fidel Villaroel, ed., *A Brief History of the Foundation of the Beaterio de Santa Catalina, by F. Juan de Santo Domingo OP, Its Founder* (Quezon City: Congregation of Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, 1996). According to Christian, *Local Religion*, 170, "[t]he word *beata* in sixteenth century Castile usually meant a woman who had made a simple (that is, private) vote of chastity, wore a habit, and observed a religious rule of some sort, whether temporarily or permanently, cloistered or in company of others. *Beatas* were usually under diocesan supervision and not subject to an order, even if they adopted its habit and rule. Many were simply devout single or widowed women, who lived in their own houses with habits they made for themselves." In the Dominican China mission the term was more rarely used in the seventeenth century (more common were expressions like "virgin girls who observe chastity," "doncellas que guardan castidad"; however, see Riccio, "Hechos," 179r, for an occurrence of *beata*), while it became more common in the eighteenth century. The term does not appear in Varo's "Vocabulario de la Lengua Mandarina" (1670; see Francisco Varo (South W. Coblin trans.), *Francisco Varo's Glossary of the Mandarin Language. An English and Chinese Annotation of the 'Vocabulario de la lengua Mandarina,'* forthcoming), where *beatas* are instead called *virgen[es]* (under the entry for *virgen* we find: "we call our [Christian virgins] *tung xin* 童身 or *tung ching* [sic] 童貞" (Varo and Coblin, *Francisco Varo's Glossary*, 443). The expression *beata* can be often found in eighteenth century letters (for examples, see González, *Historia*, 2: 67, 242). It appears in the Fuan dialect dictionary by Ignacio Ibañez, *Diccionario Español-Chino, dialecto de Fu-an (Houc-An). Ban-Hua zidian Fuan fangyan* 班華字典福安方言 (Shanghai: Imprimerie Commerciale "Don Bosco" School, 1941-43), 171, as *xiudao* 修道, *xiunü* 修女, *nü xiudao* 女修道 or *zai cuo de xiudao* 在厝的修道, that is "*beatas* who stay at home"; *cuo* 厝 is a dialectal form for "family" or "home."

[109] Francisco Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración de la verdad de algunas cosas que se dicen en dos Tratados muy copiosos que hicieron los RR. PP. Diego Fabro y Francisco Brancato, religiosos de la Compañia de Jesús y ministros de este Reyno de China, acerca de la praxi que dichos PP. permiten a sus Xstianos en la veneración del M. Confucio y sus difuntos" (1671), as quoted in Evaristo Fernández Arias, *El Beato Sanz y compañeros mártires del Orden de Predicadores* (Manila: Establicimiento Tipográfico del Colegio de Santo Tomás, 1893), 178: "What initially moved them to this holy institution were not [we] the friars, but the Lord, employing as his tool the fact that they heard the lives of some women saints we were preaching to them. At first we tried to dissuade them, expounding to them the great difficulties in pursuing such an arduous aim, almost impossible for human nature. However, since it was the Holy Ghost that motivated them, this [i.e., the friars' dissuasion] and what they later suffered was not sufficient to have them desist from their purpose. Thus, having seen their constancy and courage, the friars admitted them into [the kind of life] they were asking and so much desired, letting [a probation] of a few years to prove that they deserved [such state]."

[110] In 1746, for example, Qing authorities found in Fuan a copy of Vagnoni's "Life of the Holy Mother" analyzed in the first part of this essay; see a list of confiscated

Quite naturally, the friars also communicated this ascetic ideal to their Fuan converts through their principal charismatic activity, preaching. In their sermons, the Dominicans introduced to Fuan women the life stories of famous tertiaries such as St. Catherine of Siena and St. Rosa of Lima, who had remained virgin and spent their lives in the service of God.[109] They also employed the hagiographic texts on virginity previously published by the Jesuits, either as a source of inspiration or for distribution among converts. Thus, Chinese catechists, such as the literatus and member of the Third Order Andrés Huang 黃 (1630s), could also employ these hagiographies to orally illustrate the virtue of virginity to young girls wishing to become *beatas*.[110] However, the

peculiar conditions of Chinese society made for a unique situation of hybridity between cloistered life and mobility in the larger social arena. The Dominican Francisco Varo (1627-87) reports that *beatas* lived in their natal homes, rigorously respecting the fasts, penances, and other mortifications of the Third Order of Penance, and that their parents or brothers gave them a special room (*aposento aparte*) to do their pious exercises, as was also common for Buddhist female devotees. González de San Pedro (d. 1730) in 1710 confirms that "the professed [virgins live] . . . in the houses of their parents or relatives, except for a few older ones who reside in the women's church for their own protection and neatness."[111] What differentiated them from tertiaries of strict observance in Europe was that, in Varo's words, they were not able to live in an independent community "due to the inconveniences that might result from it."[112] In fact, the only serious attempt to create a *beaterío* in Dingtou 頂頭 in the late 1640s was eventually thwarted by the destruction of the convent in 1651 by the loyalist troops of the Yongli 永曆 Emperor.[113]

The inconveniences referred to by Varo were likely of two kinds. First, the missionaries were probably wary of instituting a convent for women, given the way Buddhist nunneries were organized in China. Riccio writes in 1667: "In this kingdom there are many monasteries of nuns, whom they call *ni-ku* [*nigu* 尼姑]. They are not unmarried virgin girls, but rather widows, elderly women, or wives repudiated by their husbands. They take this road due to their great probity, and the pagans give them alms that they use to sustain themselves. However, they do not follow an appropriate way of life, since they live with much liberty, going out alone in the cities and towns, begging for alms. In this, as in most things, they are the opposite of Europeans, since our nuns live perpetually cloistered and the laywomen in liberty but in China, the nuns are free, and all the others are kept in very strict reclusion."[114]

This picture largely confirms the little we know of the Buddhist monastic institutions for women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In her discussion of nunneries and laywomen's vegetarian halls in the late imperial period, Hill Gates observes that "[t]he freedom of women who led such lives contrasted markedly with the housebound lives of ordinary women. Nuns were highly visible as they went about collecting for charity or performing at women's funerals on unbound or let-out feet. Individual nuns were often well known regionally for their piety and for the freedom it gave them."[115]

Riccio's words revealed the prejudices of the European age of "Great Confinement." For the missionary, since Buddhist nuns were free to move around, unlike European nuns, they represented a potentially uncontrollable group, prone to all kinds of misconduct. His opinion reflected the displeasure of Pope Urban VIII, who in 1631 lamented the liberty of certain unofficial congregations of women who "go freely everywhere without respect for the laws of the cloister under the pretext of working for the salvation of souls . . ."[116] At issue was male control over women. The negative attitude of missionaries towards Buddhist and Daoist nuns ironically coincided with that of the Qing state.

The second kind of 'inconvenience' experienced by Fuan *beatas*, at least in the first few decades of Dominican presence, was the opposition of non-Christians (usually men), and even of Christian families, to their young women abandoning the prospect of a good marriage for a life of religious dedication and celibacy. This general attitude of

Christian books in AMEP, *Chine*, 436: 151r. Riccio, "Hechos," 221v, describes the role of the catechist Andrés Huang, a native of the village of Dingtou, in spreading hagiographies of virgin saints as early as the 1630s: "Andres was the one who taught and persuaded unmarried girls [*doncellas*] about the angelic virtue of virginity, and clearly explained to them the nature of that state, and what a treasure it was to take a path so unusual in this kingdom. After [the girls] had attained that state, he would encourage them and support them, proposing to them the deeds of the holy virgins who had suffered death and cruel treatments for Christ. Therefore, the unmarried girls and the other women were always eager to listen to him. Whenever he would go where there were virgins dedicated to God, they all would feel common enjoyment and great happiness, but when it was time to part, they would feel very sad."

[111] González de San Pedro as quoted in González, *Historia* 2: 48, n. 10.

[112] Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz*, 177-79; compare González, *Historia*, 1: 297, quoting Navarrete, *Controversias*.

[113] See González, *Historia* 1: 291, quoting Riccio, "Hechos"; later on, Magino Ventallol, O.P., (1647-1732) established a *beaterío* in Zhangzhou; see González, *Historia* 2: 227.

[114] Riccio, "Hechos," 161r.

[115] Hill Gates, *China's Motor: A Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 193-95. For a general discussion of eighteenth-century Buddhist nuns, see Beata Grant, "The Red Cord Untied: Buddhist Nuns in Eighteenth-Century China," in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 91-103. In his description of the social background of Chinese nuns Riccio failed to mention the large number of poor and orphaned girls who joined nunneries at a young age.

[116] McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 463.

opposition to chastity vows was reflected in genealogies, which often condemned men and women who left their households to join a religious order: children, one source states forcefully, "are not reared by their parents to become monks and nuns."[117] Riccio (1667) vividly reports the hostile atmosphere initially experienced by the *beatas*: "The unfaithful saw that among Christians there were unmarried girls [*doncellas*] who did not need to beg for alms, but that on the contrary were rather rich heiresses, and rather beautiful and graceful . . . In spite of this, [these women] had vowed to keep chastity, avoiding forever engagement or marriage. [Pagans] thought that this was a way to secretly live in laxity [*anchura*], and even [to live in laxity] with those who had permitted or persuaded them to do so [i.e. the friars]. Thus, rumors circulated not for a few days, but for many years, until the Divine Majesty clearly showed the purity and virtue [of those women], and the pagans were edified, while Christians were confirmed in their Catholic faith."[118]

This passage illustrates three main contentious points. The most prominent was the refusal of engagement or marriage. Then, there was the perceived sexual predatory nature of the clergy in China (the friars had "persuaded" the *beatas* to a life of promiscuity). Finally, there was the suspicion that the Christian virgins willfully "lived in laxity" with the foreign priests, a perception that incidentally corresponded with the prevailing image of young Buddhist nuns as "sexually promiscuous girls who cannot be counted on to take their vows seriously."[119] Thus, Christian women, friars, and some of the more devoted male converts initially had to struggle to make the idea of consecrated virginity (and its corollary, marriage refusal) acceptable to their kin and to local society. Both to avoid rumors on the *beatas*' relationships with the friars and the risk that they might be married off by their parents, it became necessary by the eighteenth century to require that women be at least thirty years old before they could formally take vows as professed tertiaries. In fact the Dominican superiors repeatedly suggested that the age of admission even be raised to forty, the same age suggested by Qing officials for Buddhist nuns.

Riccio recounts the great conflicts that characterized the life of early

[117] Liu, *Traditional Chinese Clan Rules*, 94-95.

[118] Riccio, "Hechos," 161r-v.

[119] Quotation about Buddhist nuns from Mann, *Precious Records*, 192, referring to the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

beatas. The most celebrated among these women was Petronilla Chen 陳 (ca. 1625-1710s), a native of Xiapei 下邳 near Fuan. As a child, she had been a devout Buddhist who practiced fasting and followed a vegetarian diet. She learned about Christianity through a concubine of her maternal grandfather and apparently was also instructed in the rudiments of the new faith by a Christian uncle, a member of the Christian Huang 黃 lineage from the coastal village of Dingtou. She soon memorized the catechism, was baptized at the age of eleven, and at the age of eighteen took vows of chastity as a member of the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic.[120] She continued her ascetic practices and refused a marriage that had been arranged years in advance by her father. Her non-Christian family at first tried to placate the household of the prospective groom with money, but finally they forced her to marry. She then embarked on a long fast and subsequently decided to cut her hair and join a female cousin in a nearby village. The cutting of the hair in the Buddhist tradition, as in the Christian one, was the symbol of irreversible entrance into a religious order and of perpetual vows of chastity.[121] The missionary attempted a mediation: it was decided that she would go to the house of the groom for a wedding ceremony, stay eight days, and then leave it forever.[122] The plan failed, and Petronilla was detained by the household of the groom, and beaten repeatedly over the following eight months. The local Christian leader and degree-holder Joaquin Guo Bangyong 郭邦雍 (ca. 1582-1649) tried to intervene to free her, but it was only through her stubborn refusal to give up her virginity and her desperate acts, like covering her body with excrement to avoid being harassed by her husband, that she finally was released.[123] She then joined the friars in Dingtou, where she lived in a Christian household, since her par-

[120] Biographical data on Petronilla in Riccio, "Hechos," 161r.

[121] T'ien Ju-k'ang in his *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 37, observes that "[c]utting of the hair and disfiguring the body were usually the methods used [by widows to avoid remarriage]"; compare Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society*, 179-80.

[122] This practice seems similar to what we see in a number of legal cases from Baxian 巴縣 county (Sichuan), where married women were fictitiously allowed to "temporarily" leave the home of their husbands following marital crises, to return to their natal family where they stayed thereafter; see Philip Huang, "Women's Choices Under the Law: Marriage, Divorce, and Illicit Sex in the Qing and the Republic," *Modern China* 27.1 (2001): 3-58, 22.

[123] Apparently, if the bride refused consummation, the only option remaining to the family of the groom was rejection of the bride; see Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 162.

ents refused to have any contact with her. We know that she continued to engage in her religious activities until at least the 1710s, since her death was commemorated in the 1720 Provincial Chapter of the Manila Dominicans.[124]

Petronilla Chen's story is one of the more dramatic–and famous–among those of the Fuan *beatas*. It illustrates that, despite the great pressure on women to marry, she and the succeeding generations of *beatas* found it more rewarding to live the semicloistered life of single Christian virgins.[125] Even more remarkable is the fact that *beatas* were mostly young elite women.[126] Although they were not the "learned women" of Jiangnan studied by Susan Mann (Fuan had few such women), clearly the choice of the Fuan *beatas* and their families contradicts the assertion that "no [elite] family allowed a promising young lady to escape marriage."[127]

The opposition experienced by Petronilla Chen and the first generation of Christian virgins in the 1630s-40s may explain why initially only a handful of women chose the unusual path of virginity and marriage resistance to become *beatas*. However, gradually their numbers increased. In 1671, Varo noted that in Fuan there were twelve *doncellas* from prominent families such as the Miao, "who had offered their

[124] See Riccio, "Hechos," 161v-71v; Francisco Capillas, "Relación de la Misión de China hecha por el V.P. Fr. Francisco Capillas, terminada en la cárcel de Fogán," dated 1647, in Hilario Ocio, ed., *Notas biographicas del venerable Padre Fray Francisco Fernández de Capillas, por un alumno de la Provincia del Santisimo Rosario de Filipinas* (Manila: Establicimiento Tipografico del Real Colegio de Santo Tomás, 1894), 61-66.

[125] Determined by an insufficient number of brides, the phenomenon of the "marriage crunch" was felt also in the prosperous High Qing period. In Fuan marriageable women between the late Ming and the High Qing were so few that poor husbands would sell or mortgage their wives to other men; see T'ien, *Male Anxiety*, 30.

[126] For example, among the twelve *beatas* of Fuan in the period between 1632 and 1671, eight were daughters of *shengyuan*, two came from families who had degree-holders in the previous two generations, and only one was the daughter of poor parents; see Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz*, 178. In a marginal region like Fuan, *shengyuan* could already be considered members of the local elite. A similar phenomenon can be observed in some Buddhist centers of the south and of Jiangnan, where women from gentry families became respected masters in the late Ming and early Qing. Many of them did so after losing their prospective husbands or family members in the Ming-Qing conflict, in what can be simultaneously seen as a religious choice, an act of fidelity or respect to their deceased ones and a loyalist gesture towards the fallen dynasty; see forthcoming research in Beata Grant's manuscript *Remarkable Women: Female Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China*. Yet, the larger portion of the female monastic body was recruited among poor or orphaned girls, as well as among the elderly; on the social provenance of Buddhist nuns, see Mann, *Precious Records*, 10.

[127] Mann, *Precious Records*, 10.

virginity to God with a vow of chastity."[128] By 1695, their number reached twenty-four, aged between eighteen and seventy-two years.[129] In the eighteenth century, they became even more numerous. A 1735 document states that "there are so many women wishing the state of tertiaries of the Order, that there would be more religious than lay women, if we were to give [the habit to all of them.]"[130] The contemporary Chinese commentary to the rules of the Third Order by Royo (1741) also testifies to this continued increase, as do letters in the second half of the eighteenth century. Qing memorials set their number in 1746 between one-hundred-thirty and two-hundred.[131]

This phenomenon clearly illustrates the gradual process of entrenchment and normalization of Christian virginity in Fuan. In the 1670s Varo noted that *beatas* had suffered much opposition from their families at the beginning, but by the Kangxi period they were living "in utmost peace, without any impediment disturbing their religious exercises."[132] Similarly, in 1710 González de San Pedro observed that initially these young women had suffered for their "choice of being Christian and not marrying, something that is considered very shameful in China, and against all their laws and customs; . . . [but] with time and their exemplary life, they made themselves so esteemed and venerated that

[128] Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz*, 177.

[129] AMEP, *Chine*, 434: 7r.

[130] González, *Historia* , 2: 240, n. 9, quoting P. de la Cruz's manuscript in APSR "Narración histórica," 1735.

[131] According to a 1714 memorial, the *beatas* of Fuan were then around fifty; see González, *Historia* 2:46; Joachin Royo in his explanations of the Third Order's rules "San Hui si zhang lüexiang 三會四章略詳" (1741), AGOP, X. 2571: 1-10, 4v, says: "... presently the religious people (*xiudao*) are many..." A 1755 letter of Simón Lo [Luo 羅] del Rosario (1728-61) refers to thirty-three professed *beatas* and novices in the region of Zhangzhou alone, see González, *Historia* 5: 352. One hundred-thirty *beatas* are mentioned in a 1746 vermilion-endorsed memorial by Fujian Provincial Surveillance Commissioner Gioro Yarhašan, published in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan, ed., *Qing . . . Xiyang Tianzhujiao*, 1: 104; over two hundred are mentioned in a contemporary memorial by Fujian Governor Zhou Xuejian 周學健, published in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan, ed., *Qing . . . Xiyang Tianzhujiao*, 1: 88. In 1756, Fr. Teradillos stated that "the number of *beatas* in Fuan is no fewer than two-hundred-fifty, including novices and professed [sisters]"; see González, *Historia* 2: 441, n. 78. Another letter by Fr. Teradillos in 1760 states that "in this village of Muyang [alone] there are eighty *beatas*, and counting those in the other villages [of the region] of Fuan, there are more than two-hundred"; see González, *Historia* 2: 503-04, n. 35. In a 1781 letter Fr. Muñoz confirms that "in the territory of Fuan there are many *beatas*."; see González, *Historia*, 2: 539-40.

[132] Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz*, 177-79.

not only Christians prized a daughter who was among the tertiaries or who desired to join [. . .], but even some pagans greatly venerated and reverenced them, and some [of these pagans], whose daughters belonged to this order, thought highly of them."[133]

Beatas and other Christian women, like their peers engaging in Buddhist or Daoist pilgrimages and temple worship, were therefore able to assert *de facto* control of a female religious sphere, shielding it from male interference by virtue of the respect commanded by such religious activities.[134] Thus, local society over time accepted the institution of the *beatas* as a form of legitimate religious life in Fuan. When in 1707 the women's church of Fuan was seized and sealed by the authorities and the *beatas* were ejected from the compound, local Christian women broke the seals and, led by the *beatas*, occupied the church in prayer. A missionary commented that officials had to refrain from further action, "because it is a very grave matter in China to persecute women, especially when they do things together, which is something looked upon as rather sacred."[135]

By the late seventeenth century, *beatas* had indeed created a corporate identity for themselves. This can be seen from a Chinese-language letter they wrote in 1695 to the Visitation Sisters of the French convent of Beaune in Côte d'Or (near Dijon, France). In spite of its ceremonious and humble tone, typical of Chinese polite correspondence, the document shows that these twenty-four Fuan *beatas*, young and elderly, each one listed by name, felt connected to a universal body of religious women whom they regarded as their "Elder Sisters in the Way" (*daozhang* 道長). Although they declared themselves to be younger and inexperienced disciples of the French Sisters and paid obedience to the male priests, the Fuan *beatas* nevertheless thought of themselves as legitimately pursuing the Dao, in a way similar to their European counterparts.[136]

[133] González de San Pedro as quoted in González, *Historia* 2: 48, n. 10.

[134] For a male derogatory description of women's religious activities and pilgrimages in the seventeenth century, nevertheless showing the autonomy and resistance of women to men in the religious arena, see Glen Dudbridge, "Women Pilgrims to T'ai Shan: Some Pages from a Seventeenth-Century Novel," in Susan Naquin and Yü Chün-fang, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 39-64

[135] See González, *Historia*, 2: 67, quoting González de San Pedro, "Breve Relacion" (1707?); on the women's sacred sphere and its independence from state control, see Mann, *Precious Records*, 200.

[136] See AMEP, *Chine*, 429: 81r and 87r. The French title of the Chinese document in the AMEP manuscript catalogue by Adrien Launay is: "Les religieuses de Fôgân hien aux Soeurs de la Visitation de Beaune. Remerciements et acceptation de la proposition de union spirituelle transmise par M. Leblanc. Noms et age des religieuses." Here is my translation of the Chinese original: "In the mountainous corner of this maritime county [of Fuan] the nature [of people] is brutish; only few have been able to know the Lord of Heaven. To ask this of weak women is even more difficult. We are overwhelmed by the grace of the Lord, since we only have little faith. We learned that all of you 'Elder Sisters in the Way' engage in venerable and pious deeds and are thus moved to love virtue. We are aware of the difference between you and us, but you still extended to us your love and charitably donated to us holy objects, a fact that moved our hearts to the utmost. Furthermore, you communicated to us the idea of the common intention of prayer, how could we dare not to respect your orders? Previously we had already sent our names, but we did not anticipate they would be lost en route. Then a priest of our Order [i.e. a Dominican] told us [what had happened], and Fr. Li [Philibert Le Blanc, M.E.P.] ordered us to transmit [again] our names, and that we should write again to you. We are just frail women, and we fear that we might have failed your love for us. We would like to receive the respected surnames and holy names of the Elderly Sisters in the Way. Hopefully this way we will not miss the overflowing grace of the communion of prayer of the Holy Church."

This pride was shared by their families and extended beyond the boundaries of the Christian community. The pride of parents, even non-Christian ones, translated into economic support. To be able to sustain themselves financially, *beatas* needed the help of their families. Their parents allowed them to live at home and provided for them. In fact, a sort of religious dowry, similar to the one given to nuns in Europe, was a prerequisite for admission to religious life.[137] Nevertheless, *beatas* helped by working with their hands at home (possibly a reference to embroidery and other domestic work) "to support themselves and to avoid laziness."[138] Moreover, although the Ming and Qing laws of inheritance did not allow for the possibility of daughters inheriting, it appears that some families started leaving to *beatas* substantial portions of household property.[139]

[137] González, *Historia* 2: 242, quoting P. de la Cruz, "Narración histórica." A Dominican observed that "we have always made sure in our missions that those who want to live as *beatas* have enough to support themselves, so that they might lead a decorous and exemplary life." Even relatively poor families would give up the bride price "with which the parents usually sustain themselves," and would keep their daughters at home as tertiaries; see González de San Pedro, 1710, in González, *Historia* 2:48, n. 10. An M.E.P. missionary report from Fujian confirms the need of means to become a *beata*, stating that around 1796, young girls in Xinghua could not follow this vocation exactly because they were too poor; see letter of Mr. Lolivier, M.E.P., 1796, in AMEP, *Chine*, 439: 443r.

[138] José Calvo, O.P., in González, *Historia*, 2: 538-39.

[139] On daughters and Ming-Qing inheritance laws, see Kathryn Bernhardt, "The Inheritance Rights of Daughters: The Song Anomaly?," *Modern China* 21.3 (1995): 269-

The economic facet of the institution of the *beatas* shows that in Fuan, this Christian institution eventually became so accepted that customary inheritance laws were bent, and the economic loss of the bride price for poorer families became a real possibility. To be a *beata* conferred some prestige, since it conformed to both Confucian and Christian orthodox expectations of moral behavior. However, this was only half of the picture. To the *beatas*, consecrated life offered novel opportunities to carve for themselves a more independent sphere of spiritual and social growth than marriage or widowhood offered them, and their lifestyle combined in a unique way "orthodox" and "heterodox" elements.

The Contest between Christian Virginity and Confucian Chastity: Discursive Strategies

The previous section briefly describes the life of *beatas* in its social dimension and suggests some social explanations for their choice. However, we now need to explore the way in which this choice was discursively legitimated. *Beatas'* lifestyle and their virgin status outside of the institutions of marriage or chaste widowhood represented a clear challenge to dominant Chinese social mores. To be filial for a woman meant to accept marriage and its reproductive necessity in the context of the patriarchal organization of family life. It meant to be obedient to the arrangement of marriage at a young age, and then be obedient to one's in-laws and husband. The obedience to one's husband and his family, especially in the Ming and Qing periods, was even extended beyond the spouse's death. How could a value that was in principle abhorrent to late imperial social conventions—that is, perpetual religious virginity—become effectively transmitted and accepted in Fuan?

The myths of virgin goddesses such as Guanyin, Miaoshan, and Linshui Furen and the social practices of Buddhist and Daoist nuns and other celibate women living in vegetarian houses and local temples offered a conceptual repertoire for religious celibacy within a Chinese framework. This repertoire was available to Fuan Christian women contemplating religious life. However, the missionaries, intent as they were to censure Buddhism, Daoism, and local religions, could hardly have drawn on the examples of virgin goddesses or Buddhist nuns, as familiar as they were to most Chinese, to propose the ideal of Christian virginity as a superior form of religious commitment. Instead, they preferred to associate and contrast Christian virginity with the discourse on chaste widowhood, which powerfully emerged in the Ming and Qing periods. Yet, by introducing through preaching and texts new models of God-commanded virginity borrowed from Western hagiographies, they also subtly undermined patriarchal dominance over the discourse of filial piety, proposing themselves as intermediaries of God's vocation for local women. Fuan Christian literati cautiously endorsed this new model of virginal womanhood, legitimizing the shift proposed by missionaries and ensuring that the value of virginity became localized.

309, and Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), Ch. 1. On *beatas'* economic conditions, see Calvo in González, *Historia*, 2: 538-39; González, *Historia*, 2: 242, quoting P. de la Cruz, "Narración histórica." In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Franciscan friars in North Shandong devised a complex contractual procedure to ensure that local Christian virgins would be endowed with property, unalienable even after the death of their parents; see Gary R. Tiedemann, "Controlling the Virgins: Female Propagators and the Catholic Hierarchy in China," *Women's History Review*, forthcoming.

The Missionary Discourse of Female Christian Virginity in the Chinese Context

The discourse that missionaries utilized to explain the significance of Christian virginity and legitimize it in Fuan centered on, and expanded, concepts such as chastity (*zhen* 貞) and chaste woman (*zhen-nü* 貞女). These notions had become universally accepted in the Ming and Qing periods in the orthodox framework of the so-called chastity cult. As recently defined by Janet Theiss, "the term chastity cult refers to the state system of awarding honorific plaques and money for the construction of ceremonial arches and shrines for widows who refused remarriage or committed suicide upon the deaths of their husbands, and for women who committed suicide to prevent a violation of their chastity."[140] This state system was merely an official endorsement of a broader social movement that extolled chaste women in or-

[140] Janet M. Theiss, "Feminity in Flux: Gendered Virtue and Social Conflict in the Mid-Qing Courtroom," in Brownell and Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities*, 47. On the chastity cult, see the book-length study by T'ien, *Male Anxiety*.

der to promote correct norms of womanly behavior. The idea of this feminine chastity obviously centered on marriage, not around celibacy or virginity. But it was the closest orthodox category to Christian celibate virginity that missionaries could use. In his defense of clerical celibacy, Ricci had been the first to make the comparison in his *Tianzhu shiyi* (1604):

> There are at this time certain chaste women [*zhennü*] whose menfolk, to whom they have been betrothed, have died before they were married. To maintain their honor such women have refrained from a second betrothal [*shouyi wu er* 守義無二]. Confucians praise such action and emperors give public recognition to it. Chastity of the kind which results in a refusal to transmit life to later generations is merely due to a desire to keep faith with a spouse; and yet to remain at home and to refrain from further espousals results in public tribute being paid to that person. Is it not unfair that we few friends should be censured when, due to our work for the Sovereign on High, . . . we do not have the time to concern ourselves with marriage? . . . [T]o remain single and unmarried allows one greater tranquillity to perfect oneself, and makes it easier for one to extend [the perfection] to others.[141]

Ricci uses his argument to explain his own celibate status to the Chinese. He also ingeniously introduces the comparison with chaste women in order to make palatable the notion of clerical celibacy, usually censored by 'Confucians' (*Ruzhe* 儒者), by means of an accepted and familiar phenomenon, the chastity cult. Significantly, however, he singles out a special category of chaste women who were not widows who had consummated their marriages but rather virgins whose betrothed had died before the marriage could be consummated and who then decided to remain unmarried. In late imperial times, the expressions *shou shen* 守身 (to preserve the body, that is, to remain a virgin) and *shou zhen* 守貞 (to preserve chastity) were used to characterize the choice of this latter kind of "virgin widow."[142] Obviously, Ricci chose them as an example because they were not merely chaste but virgin.

As we have seen, soon afterwards other Jesuits introduced a new set of terms defining virginity. Christian catechetical materials mainly used variations of the term *tongshen*, that is, the child body of a virgin.[143] In

[141] Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 416-17.

[142] Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian*, 3: 1299-1300 (*shoushen*); 3: 1302 (*shouzhen*). A similar expression is *shoujie*, which, however, is applied to widows refusing to remarry (Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian*, 3: 1306). Ricci used *shouyi*, a general expression for widows avoiding remarriage; see Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian*, 3: 1306.

[143] The word *tongshen* for "virginity" does not appear in ancient texts (pre-Qin philosophers or the Thirteen Classics) nor in the Dynastic Histories. However, the expression was used in vernacular texts, especially in relation to religious rituals. The earliest usage of the term mentioned in the *Hanyu Da Cidian* does not refer to a Chinese concept or practice. It can be found in the Yuan-dynasty *Zhengla fengtu ji* 真臘風土記 (Record of customs of Cambodia) by Zhou Daguan 周達觀 (fl. 1297). Zhou, member of a Chinese embassy in Cambodia, reports that local girls between the ages of seven and eleven were deprived of their "child body" (*qu qi tongshen* 去其童身, i.e., deflowered) by Buddhist monks or Daoist priests using their hands during a ritual called *chentan* (陳毯). See Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian*, 8: 390; compare Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次, *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典 (Tokyo, 1955-60), 8:717, no. 25775.67. Paul Pelliot, trans., *Memoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Ta-kouan. Version nouvelle, suivie d'un commentaire inacheve [par Paul Pelliot]* (Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1951), 17: "Entre sept et neuf ans pour les filles de maisons riches, et seulement à onze ans pour les très pauvres, on charge un prêtre bouddhiste ou taoïste de les déflorer (去其童身)." Pelliot could not identify a Cambodian equivalent of *chentan* (69). Later on in Ming times the term indicated pure girls who were purchased for large sums for participation in *saihui* 賽會 (religious festivals in honor of local gods), probably to ease the descent of the divinities as mediums. See Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian*, 8:390, quoting the play *Tousuo ji* 投梭記, scene on "Selling daughters," by the Ming author Xu Fuzuo 徐復复祚 (1560-after 1630); Xu was a keen observer of popular customs and religion in the Suzhou region; compare Carrington Goodrich and Fang Chaoying, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 580-82. Apparently, virgin girls and boys were valued for their purity, which made them effective in ritual and magic matters.

[144] The terminology is found in the following documents: *xiudao* and *zhennü*: Chinese-language Christian report (1746) in AMEP, *Chine*, 434: 7r; *xiaozhen*: memorial from Fujian (1723), in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Borgia Cinese* 316 (8-l); *tongshen* and *tongzhen*: Varo, *Francisco Varo's Glossary*, 443; *shou tongshen*: memorials from Fujian (1746), in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan, ed., *Qing ... Xiyang Tianzhujiao*, 1: 78, 104, and AMEP, *Chine*, 434: 770r; *shou tongzhen*: AMEP, *Chine*, 436: 154r; *shengnü*: memorial from Fujian (1746), in Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan, ed., *Qing ... Xiyang Tianzhujiao*, 1: 83.

[145] Other terms such as *shinü* 仕女, *guinü* 閨女 or *chunü* were used to indicate a virgin, but had no such explicit bodily associations.

Fuan both these new terms and others were employed. In Christian and governmental sources, Fuan *beatas* were variously referred to as *zhennü* (chaste women), *xiaozhen* 小貞 (small chaste [women]), *tongzhen tongshen* or *tongzhenshen* 童貞身 (virgins), *shou tongzhen* or *shou tongshen* 守童身 (persons who keep virginity), *xiudao* (persons who cultivate virtue or the Dao), or even *shengnü* 聖女 (holy women).[144] Most of these terms referred to two related and yet distinct concepts: virginity (*tongzhen* or *tongshen*) and chastity (*zhen*). This terminological overlap reflects the ambiguous nature of the concept of Christian virginity in Fuan, which was located between existing notions of chastity, bodily integrity, and religious commitment, and the newly-imported Christian notion of religious virginity.[145] These terms were an extension of current compounds such as *shou shen* and *shou zhen*. However, by using

the character *tong* 童, the missionaries underscored the importance of the virgin body for Christianity and also clearly distinguished Christian virgins from Confucian chaste widows, elevating the former to a divinely inspired, and thus higher, form of chastity.

Christian Virginity and its Transmission to Fuan Women

The Christian value of perpetual virginity was transmitted by the Dominicans to their Fuan converts through preaching and texts, expanding on the concept and narratives first offered by the Jesuits. Until the early 1700s, Fuan women were introduced to the lives of European nuns and holy women by means of sermons. Varo observed in 1671 that such *exempla* fascinated a number of devout young girls who asked to follow the path of the Western exemplars' virginity and dedication to God.[146] The stories of the Western saints not only resonated with the experience of the Fuan *beatas* but also inspired their course of action.[147] The vocational stories of the first generation of Fuan *beatas* show that they initially encountered strong opposition from family and society to their desire to remain virgin. These struggles bore a striking resemblance to the hagiographic accounts of the lives of Christian virgins from the West, so that social experience and *exempla* found a fit in the *beatas*' lives.[148] It is quite likely that among the stories

[146] "[Fuan women] heard about the lives of some women saints we were preaching to them"; see Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz*, 178.

[147] In his discussion of the *beatas* of Lima in the seventeenth century, Fernando Carui Iwasaki observes that chivalric and theological literature were important sources of inspiration in the vocation of these women: "Feminine dissidence was possible through readings not only of 'profane' literature (chivalric literature), but much more through the readings of mystics and theologians, and the life of saints, especially female mystics like Catherine of Siena. The writings of Fr. Luis de Granada, for example, were attacked by Melchor Cano in 1559 because Granada 'wished to make everybody into contemplatives and teach the common people what is not for them'"; see "Capitulo III: Mujeres al borde de la perfección: Rosa de Santa María y las alumbradas de Lima," in Luis Millones, ed., *Una partecita del Cielo. La vida de Santa Rosa de Lima narrada por Don Gonzalo de la Maza a quien ella llamaba padre. Versión paleográfica de Luis Millones. Ensayos de Luis Millones (capítulos I, II, IV, V) y de Fernando Iwasaki (capítulo III)* (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1993) 71-110, 77.

[148] Although the influence of the literary genre of hagiography on the accounts of the lives of the *beatas* offered by Riccio and other missionaries cannot be completely excluded, the sources I used are detailed enough to warrant the historicity of the *beatas*' experience.

Fuan *beatas* heard from the friars were those of their namesakes in the Western tradition. *Beatas* were christened with names of famous virgins and martyrs (for example, Petronilla, Lucia, Agatha, Agnes, Ursula), of nuns (Teresa of Avila), or of professed lay women (Luisa de Carvajal, Rosa of Lima, Catherine of Siena).[149] Most of these saints had refused marriage to remain virgins dedicated to God, and in so doing had incurred the opposition of their families.

Although there were abundant examples of semilegendary virgins and martyrs of the early church who had refused marriage, the Dominicans chose to single out a more recent saint as a special example to the *beatas*: Saint Rosa of Lima in Peru (1586-1617; canonized 1671). Francisco González de San Pedro, O. P. (Luo Senduo 羅森鐸), published a full-length hagiographic account of the saint in Chinese in 1706, under the title *Shengnü Luosa xingshi* 聖女羅洒行實 (Deeds of Saint Rosa of Lima). The reasons for such predilection are to be found in the biographical details of Rosa's life, as is illustrated by the following précis of her life based on the first hagiography written about her, Leonardo Hansen's *Vita mirabilis et mors pretiosa venerabilis sororis Rosae de Sa. Mariae Limensis* (The extraordinary life and precious death of the venerable sister Rosa of S. Maria from Lima, 1664):

> After reading of St. Catherine [Rosa] determined to take that saint as her model. She began by fasting three times a week, adding secret severe penances, and when her vanity was assailed, cutting off her beautiful hair, wearing coarse clothing, and roughening her hands with toil. All this time she had to struggle against the objections of her friends, the ridicule of her family, and the censure of her parents. . . . Finally she became determined to take a vow of virginity, and inspired by supernatural love, adopted extraordinary means to fulfill it. At the outset she had to combat the opposition of her parents, who wished her to marry. The struggle went on for ten years before she won, by patience and prayer, their consent to continue her mission. [. . .] Overcoming the opposition of her parents, and with the consent of her confessor, she was finally allowed to become a virtual recluse in [her] cell, save for her visits to the Blessed Sacrament. In her twentieth year, she received the habit of St. Dominic. Thereafter she redoubled the severity and variety of her penances to a heroic degree.[150]

[149] These names of Fuan *beatas* can be found in AMEP, *Chine*, 436: 137r and in González, *Misiones Dominicanas*, 1: 364; 2: 210, 533.

[150] This is a summary based on Hansen's biography, published in Rome in 1664, as found in E. Aymé, "Rose of Lima, Saint," in Charles G. Herbermann, et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913-22), 13: 192-93.

Rosa's early years most closely resembled the travails that Fuan *beatas* were likely to face: refusal of marriage, family opposition, and harassment from suitors.[151] Moreover, the ingredients of Rosa's road to sanctity were similar to those found in the biographies of Petronilla Chen and her lay sisters: prayer, works of charity, penance, fasting and abstention from meat, wearing of coarse clothes.

However, the Chinese version of Rosa's life was also adapted somewhat for the intended Fuan audience.[152] An examination of the sections in Rosa's Chinese hagiography describing her filiality towards her parents (*Luosa xiao qin* 羅洒 孝親) and her entrance in the Third Order (*Luosa ru hui* 羅洒入會), for example, shows the translator attempting to reconcile the tension between filial piety towards one's parents and the religious calling to perpetual virginity. The dramatic cutting of the hair at an early age is mentioned in the section on Rosa's childhood: "Desiring to remain virgin [*shou tongshen*] until her death, and to maintain intact her purity [*quan qi jiejing* 全其潔淨], in imitation of Saint [Catherine] she cut off her hair. The first reason for this was to prevent her parents from marrying her off [*wei fumu bu quan jia* 爲父母不勸嫁]; the second reason was because . . . beautiful hair is harmful [since it is a demonic net used to attract men and plunge them into hell]."[153]

In spite of this early commitment to virginity and of her marriage refusal in defiance of social conventions and of her parents' desires, Rosa is shown to be unquestionably filial to her father and mother.

[151] Although not mentioned in the summary of Rosa's life quoted here, popular versions of Rosa's story also included the rejection of suitors. An eighteenth-century Peruvian popular painting of Santa Rosa, for example, shows her being beaten by her parents and harassed by a suitor; see figure 14 in Ramón Mujica Pinilla, "El ancla de Santa Rosa de Lima: mística y política en torno a la Patrona de América," in José Flores Araoz, et al., eds., *Santa Rosa de Lima y su tiempo* (Lima: Banco de Credito del Peru 1995), 53-211, an essay analyzing the antimatrimony elements in Rosa's life. For an anthropological and literary analysis of St. Rosa's cult in Peru, see Millones, *Una partecita del Ciel;* on Rosa's iconography, see Ramón Mujica Pinilla, *Rosa limensis. Mística, política e iconografía en torno a la patrona de América* (Lima: Institut Français d'Études Andines - Fondo de Cultura Económica - Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, 2001).

[152] The Chinese version may have been based on Hansen's 1664 *Vita mirabilis* or on one of the numerous biographies (derivative of Hansen's) that were published in Europe and Latin America after Rosa's canonization. I used the 1920 edition of González de San Pedro's Chinese version, Luo Senduo [Francisco González de San Pedro], *Shengnü Luosa xingshi* (Hong Kong; Nazareth Press, 1920) and compared it with the copies of the original 1706 Fuzhou edition in BNF, *Chinois* 6770-6771.

[153] Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*, 4.

She is abused by her relatives and especially her mother, but happily agrees to all kinds of painful chores, while keeping to herself her religious vocation. Parental authority is outwardly respected, but at the same time subtly undermined. While Rosa has been inspired by God to remain a virgin, it is a local spiritual advisor who confirms the legitimacy of her choice. And since "the will of the priest is the will of the Lord of Heaven" (*shenfu yi shi Tianzhu yi* 神父意是天主意), the *shenfu* becomes the true bearer of authority, a mirror image of the role the Dominicans had over Fuan *beatas*. A Chinese reader may have felt some unease at this overturning of filial piety, and the translator tried to soften it by observing that through her submission, Rosa was able to "listen to the orders of her parents, and also listen to the orders of the priest [advising her to remain a virgin]." But this cosmetic attempt is nullified by expressions like the following: "Sometimes the orders of a mother and the will of Jesus are at odds [*mu ming yu Yesu zhi yi, huo you xiangfan* 母命與耶穌之意，或有相反]."[154] This ambivalent attitude continues in González de San Pedro's treatment of marriage. When Rosa's parents express their intention to marry her off in spite of her early vows of chastity, the translator comments: "Marriage is the great basis of the five relationships, and a grave matter both for the body and the spirit. Therefore, according to the Holy Teachings, it is necessary to wait for the permission of the daughter, and only then is it possible to celebrate it. Rosa knew well the intentions of her parents, and she felt very sad in her heart. She hoped that the Lord would allow her to remain a virgin, but she respected her parents very much, and thus did not dare to speak clearly."[155]

Rosa's silence, however, did not mean that she had abandoned her (or better, in the spirit of the hagiography, God's) plans, and eventually she succeeded through divine intervention to continue on her path to sanctity. But the Chinese text by González de San Pedro fails to completely resolve the tension between *xiao* and *tongzhen/tongshen.*

[154] Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*, 4.

[155] Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*, 10.

The concluding description of Rosa's struggle with her family over marriage is again phrased in ambiguous terms:

> Although her relatives said [Rosa] lacked filiality [*bu xiao* 不孝], in fact she was completely filial [*zhi xiao* 至孝]. But the will of the Lord of Heaven ordains people's lives, and Jesus clearly wished Rosa to be a virgin [*shou tongzhen*]. A priest then advised her to follow the will of the Lord, and she followed it totally. Utmost filiality is accomplished by following a good order, not an evil one [*shun shanming, bu shun wangming, shi wei zhi xiao* 順善命，不順妄命，始爲至孝]. Why appease one's parents, when one is contravening the decrees of the Supreme Lord? However, sometimes there are girls who, using the excuse of the will of the Lord of Heaven, erroneously presume to resist marriage [*shi pi bu ken jia zhe* 恃僻不肯嫁者]. A look at [the life of] Rosa will show how different they are [from her model].[156]

Here González de San Pedro pays lip service to the institution of marriage, promoting instead the idea that the greatest form of filiality was to obey the Lord's order to remain a virgin in defiance of one's parents' wishes. The Dominicans were unambiguously introducing a reformed concept of filial piety. In the end, in spite of his caveats, the Dominican compiler of the hagiography leaves untouched the potentially disruptive elements of the story of Rosa, and in his own preface he clearly suggests that anybody could aspire to follow Rosa's path: "Virtue in male and female saints is not innate, and the Lord of Heaven has decided to send the spiritual strength to achieve it to everybody who sincerely determines to embark on that path. A holy master [. . .] said: 'If we act as the saints did, we all can become saints.'[157]"

This text thus opened up to local women the possibility of reworking the parameters of feminine filial piety, as it had already happened in Chinese Buddhism where religious life was presented as a higher form of filiality. This Christian "reformed" idea of feminine filial piety, although undermining important premises of the patriarchal order, nevertheless found acceptance in Fuan. As the next section will show, Christian literati trained in the Confucian tradition, who undoubtedly had every interest in supporting the dominant social system, chose to endorse the value of Christian virginity, thereby legitimizing it in the local arena.

[156] Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*, 10-11.

[157] Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*, "Xiaoyin 小引," 1.

Fuan Christian Literati and the Defense of Christian Virginity Versus Confucian Chastity

Obviously, the main beneficiaries of the printed biography of Rosa were literate *beatas*, who could in turn expound the contents of the book to their illiterate or semiliterate sisters. However, such an account was also a way to legitimize both in the larger social arena and within the local Christian community the *beatas*' religious choice of perpetual celibacy. The preface (*xu* 序) to the *Deeds of Saint Rosa* written in 1706 by the Fuan Christian literatus Wang Daoxing 王道性 shows how a convert educated in the Confucian classics and holder of an official degree (*en gongsheng* 恩貢生) in the late Kangxi period saw the *exemplum* of the Peruvian virgin.[158] Wang first mentions the *exempla* found in 'Confucian' histories of the inner chambers (*guishi* 閨史). Virtuous and chaste widows were known to have cut their hair to show fidelity to their deceased husbands, to have spun thread to support their mothers-in-law, and to have lived in such abject poverty that they had to use reeds to teach their sons to write. Others had not shied away from slashing themselves allowing their flesh to be cooked to save their in-laws (a reference to the practice of *gegu* 割股, the medical use of one's flesh to cure sick relatives). Wang concludes his list of examples by rhetorically asking, "Which one of [these women] failed to demonstrate personal integrity in facing adversity, and to show her virtue? Their virtuous conduct was sufficient to maintain high morals among the people, and to encourage good customs. . . . Their fame spread widely: which one of them would fail to be called in this country outstanding among women?"[159] His reply to this rhetorical que-

[158] Wang Daoxing, *zi* Yangshu 養淑 or Yangzhi 養之 was one of the collators of the Dominican Raymundo Del Valle (1613-83)'s *Xingsheng shiyi* 形神實義 (1677). A native of Muyang in Fuan county, and member of the Lufeng 蘆峰 Wang lineage, he earned an *en-gongsheng* degree in the late Kangxi period. His brother Wang Daosheng 王道甦 was also Christian, and so were his cousins Wang Daoya 王道雅 (educational intendant in Fujian, see *Fuan xianzhi*, j. 20, 344) and Wang Daoshu 王道淑, all degree-holders. Daoxing wrote prefaces not only to González de San Pedro's *Shengnü Luosa xingshi* (Luoyuan 羅源, 1706) but also to the same author's *Shengjiao cuoyao* 聖教撮要 (Luoyuan, 1706). Both prefaces are dated Kangxi 45/10, i.e., November-December 1706. Information on Wang Daoxing is found in *Fuan xianzhi*, j. 20, 343, and in the recently re-edited "Genealogy of the Wang of Lufeng" ("Lufeng Wang shi zongpu 蘆峰王氏宗譜," 2000); genealogical data are courtesy of Dr. Zhang Xianqing.

[159] Wang Daoxing, "Preface," 3, in Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*.

ry was, however, rather unexpected: actually, these women were not true heroines: "Although their chaste conduct was exceptional, it still sprang out of their own impetuous nature (*benxing jilie* 本性激烈). They may have done what they did in hopes of empty worldly fame. Even if they faced difficulties, or they lost their lives, they merely inflicted pain upon themselves in vain. In fact, their motives were not true, and if we trace their original motivations [we will find out that] they had no path [to follow], and this is for no other reason than that they did not know the Lord who gave origin to the world."[160]

Wang thus criticizes the chastity cult as a race for fame. In fact, other commentators and even emperors during the Qing had occasionally done the same, reproving gentry families for soliciting excessive honors for their own faithful widows as a way to enhance their local prestige.[161] But these objections went mostly unheeded, and the Qing period saw an unprecedented explosion of the cult of widow fidelity. In Fuan, as elsewhere, a large number of chaste widows was commemorated in the local gazetteers. In the Fuan gazetteer, for example, three *juan* were dedicated to hundreds of chaste and virtuous widows, and especially under the categories *zhenlie* 貞烈, heroic chaste widows, and *jiexiao* 節孝, chaste and filial widows, some were praised for having committed suicide after their betrothed or husbands had died.[162] And yet Wang Daoxing, sidestepping the issue of marriage and concentrating on heroic virginity, finds that "the virtuous women of our country pale in comparison" with the saints of the West, and in particular Saint Rosa: "If we consult the records of the canonical histories of the Western countries, [we will find that] not only are there exceptional men in great numbers who exercise [the virtue of] virginity [*li xiu tongzhen* 勵修童貞], renouncing the world and offering up their lives, but also that among women there are widows who remain chaste [*gua er zhen zhe* 寡而貞者], and many more who remain chaste from childhood [*tong er zhen zhe* 童而貞者]. In order to obey the will of the Great Lord, such women would rather renounce the pleasures of the world and enjoy the pains of the world, in hope of

[160] Wang Daoxing, "Preface," 3, in Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*.

[161] See T'ien, *Male Anxiety*, 126-28.

[162] *Fuan xianzhi*, j. 27-28-29, 474-556.

[163] Wang Daoxing, "Preface," 3, in Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*.

obtaining eternal happiness after death. But they do not ever do it merely for fame."[163]

Wang underlines the element of self-renunciation and suffering in the story of Rosa, but also notes how she fulfilled the imperatives of Confucian virtue: "In serving her parents, she was very obedient, and this indicates that she was filial [*xiao*], giving example to the world. Being content with her lot, she distributed [her money], and she always took care of the poor and the sick. This means she was able to practice the virtue of humanity [*ren* 仁] in order to hold steadfast [on the path of virtue]. She was capable of withstanding [*ren* 忍] the sorrows she experienced; she had many virtues, but still she was modest [*qian* 謙]. . . . She decided to remain virgin (*tongzhen*), without any doubt on her part. . . . Does this just spring out of an impetuous nature, bent on gaining empty fame from the world?"[164]

In other words, Rosa, and by extension the Chinese Christian women following her example, were not just embodiments of female Confucian virtue, but in fact superior examples of a virtue unavailable to non-Christian Chinese women. Wang saw the publication of González de San Pedro's translation as a way "to let people know that there are weak women who still can be virtuous and pure [*dunxiu chunjie* 敦修純潔]."[165] González de San Pedro had proclaimed the openness to all of the path of sanctity undertaken by the *beatas*. Wang, more prudently, at the end of his preface suggests the difficulty of such a path, but fundamentally endorses the choice of virginity made by the professed members of the Third Order in Fuan.

In sum, for Fuan Christians, the example of Saint Rosa was not only fraught with possibilities to subvert the patriarchal model of filial piety, but also represented a critique of the cult of widow chastity. In spite of this critique, however, the chastity cult in fact might have favored the acceptance of Christian virginity. Christian virgins, like female Chan masters in seventeenth-century Zhejiang, became accepted in the local honorary pantheon of chaste widowhood and women's martyrdom, although they never made it onto the pages of

[164] Wang Daoxing, "Preface," 4, in Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*.

[165] Wang Daoxing, "Preface," 4, in Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi*.

[166] See Beata Grant, "Leaving Home and Wandering Unrestrained: Chan Master Jizong Xinche (b. 1606)" (Paper presented at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., April 4-7, 2002).

the Fuan local gazetteers due to the proscription of Christianity.[166] Even if it was based on quite different values, the sexual renunciation of *beatas* located them in the same discourse of virtue inhabited by chaste widows, thus sheltering them from attacks and easing social opposition in the local arena over time.

Conclusion

The transmission of ideas such as lifelong virginity, which were foreign to the Chinese conceptual repertoire, was a process fraught with difficulties and ambiguities. However, by the eighteenth century, Christian modifications of the traditional Confucian notion of filiality and Christian notions of virginity had become accepted in Fuan. The tensions with Chinese socioreligious values and practices, such as universal marriage, never disappeared. However, local people saw the social choices of the Christians as congruent with the new religious teachings the latter had chosen to follow, and in most cases, refrained from interfering with them. The Christian community effectively created a space for Christian values and practices initially considered controversial in the local context (for example, virginity of consecrated people). These results were accomplished by appropriating, and also subverting, certain congruent Chinese values (for example widow chastity). In this way new values could slowly find a place in the local conceptual repertoire.

The religious celibacy of women required a modification of the traditional meanings of filial piety, a daring proposition on the part of the friars. To accomplish this reform, the Dominicans, by means of preaching and prescriptive texts, claimed a place for Christian filiality within the accepted and orthodox boundaries of *xiao*, while simultaneously suggesting that Christianity offered a better, truer meaning of filiality, subordinated to the divine prerogatives of the Lord of Heaven. The confession made to Qing authorities by a Christian degree-holder in 1746 seems to confirm that by the mid-eighteenth century local converts had come to share the vision of the Dominicans: "The principles of the Lord of Heaven are even stronger than those of Confucius" (*Tianzhu de daoli bi Kongsheng hai qiang* 天主的道理比孔聖還強).[167] This kind of statement did not mean that values associated with

[167] AMEP, *Chine*, 436: 140r.

the Confucian repertoire, such as filiality, had to be rejected. Rather, they had to be reinterpreted in a new hierarchy of meaning, with the Christian God taking precedence over Confucius, who represented the orthodox social order and the patriarchal hierarchy.

Obviously, these changes in thinking and practice would never have succeeded without the support of local Christians. Their support had complex motivations. Driven not only by the desire for personal salvation, but also by the social advantages they saw in religious choices such as celibacy, local Christians accepted the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven and their attendant obligations and through the transmission to future generations assured their localization.

Fuan Christians aimed at obtaining what one of the Fuan men arrested in 1746 by Qing authorities, Wang Ejian 王鄂薦, called the advantages (*haochu* 好處) of Christianity. These benefits were mainly, though not exclusively, spiritual ones. The goal for the more committed of the Fuan Christians was eternal salvation, and they apparently did not fear imprisonment, torture and, potentially, death at the hand of the Qing state machinery to achieve that goal. Nevertheless, spiritual rewards were accompanied by social rewards. Consecrated life offered *beatas* more 'advantages' than they could have found in marriage. A popular song from Fuan entitled "The Ten Keys" (*Shi ba suoshi* 十把鎖匙) poignantly expresses the unpleasant reality facing many brides in Fuan in the past. Each of the ten keys alluded to in the song locked away forever a part of the bride's family house upon her marriage. The consequences of this event were traumatic for a young woman, as the song remonstrates:

> Father, mother, and the family are left behind forever,
> brothers remain at home, but sisters are married outside. [. . .]
> Sisters are strangers,
> they set foot on the boat and leave on the waters
> to repay the grace of parents. [. . .]
> Brothers stay in the paternal home to take care of family property,
> while sisters are married off with their bride's trousseau. [. . .]
> A son is the completion of the family,
> a daughter can only be as good as cheap wood.[168]

By remaining at home as *beatas*, some Fuan Christian women could

[168] See Fuan shi minjian wenxue jicheng bianweihui 福安市民間文學集成編委會, ed., *Zhongguo geyao jicheng. Fujian juan. Fuan shi fen juan* 中國歌謠集成。福建卷。福安市分卷 (Fuan: locally published, 1992), 143-44.

figuratively keep the keys of their native homes and certainly felt more valuable than "cheap wood." In the final analysis, local Christians' mixture of spiritual and social motivations, together with a multiplicity of historical, structural, and ritual factors not only sustained the transmission of Christian values, but also favored a reworking of the social conventions among Fuan Christians and a widening of the local repertoire of socioreligious possibilities. This transmission was not limited to Fujian. Similar experiences could and can be found among Catholic Chinese women from the eighteenth century to this day in Sichuan, Shandong, Central Mongolia, Taiwan, and elsewhere. Their experience offers novel insights about the social, legal, and religious perceptions surrounding virginity in China and enhances our understanding of women's life in late imperial and modern times.[169]

[169] See Robert Entenman, "Christian Virgins in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan," in Daniel Bays, ed., *Christianity in China From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 180-93; Raymond Renson, "Virgins in Central Mongolia," in Willy F. Vande Walle and Nöel Golvers, eds., *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China in the Qing Era* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 343-67; Tiedemann, "Controlling the Virgins"; Zhang, Duanyun 張端雲, *Dangdai nüxing dushen jiaoyou. Shidai yiyi ji shengzhao fenxiang* 當代女性獨身教友。時代意義及聖召分享 (Taipei: Kuang-ch'i Press, 1999).