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Pioneer Chinese Christian Women

Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility

Edited by

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To Professor Vera Largent, UNCG
Who Steered Me toward History

Contents

Pioneer Chinese Christian Women

Introduction

CHINESE CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN WERE THE VITAL LINK BETWEEN THE missionaries and the Chinese community, both the converted and the unconverted. Yet our knowledge of the "old China mission" remains incomplete because, as Gail King notes regretfully, the voices of Chinese Christian women are largely lacking. Most of the female converts were illiterate and left no memoirs or letters, and even for those upper-class women who were educated, records are scanty or wanting. The one major exception is that of Candida Xu, for whom we have a biography written by a contemporary Jesuit priest, Philippe Couplet. We tend, therefore, to rely heavily on the life of Candida Xu in discussing the role of women in evangelizing among their sisters. Valuable as this information is, Lady Candida Xu was of high social rank and hardly typical of most Chinese Christians during the seventeenth century. We must garner data about the Christian lives and beliefs of Chinese women from occasional references in the writings of Western missionaries plus a few items by Chinese priests. The missionaries, of course, recorded activities and events rather than the inner lives of Christian women, and so we can only deduce women's perceptions of Christianity from their outward expression of their faith. Only rarely did Western priests mention individual Chinese women by name; when they did make comments about women, they usually refer to Virgins, catechists, orphans, or communicants as a group. Gail King has, nevertheless, assiduously scoured the sources and manages to bring life and substance to the female Christian community during the seventeenth century. Both their trials and their dedication to their new faith are impressive.

In certain ways the Roman Catholic Church of the seventeenth century was ill suited to evangelize among Chinese women. All of the Western missionaries were single males and Chinese society dictated separation of the sexes. Unmarried men who tried to gain access to women's quarters immediately aroused suspicion. Even if a young women ventured outside her home to visit a temple, even if she were a peddler or food vendor, she would hesitate to speak to a male, most especially a "barbarian" male with a long nose, sunken eyes, and a beard. The rare Chinese enquirer who invited a priest to come to his home to offer instruction, allowed the women of his household to listen only from behind a screen. The church did not have an institutional structure for working among women in Chinese society. Not

until 1846 did the first sisters, the Sisters of Charity, arrive in China, and they were, of course, cloistered. They could train women catechists and novitiates within the walls of the convent, and they could teach in girl's schools and orphanages, but they could not instruct women or evangelize in the secular world. Maryknoll sisters, able to engage in direct apostolate, first arrived in China in 1921. Yet Christian wives and mothers who would nurture the next generation in the faith were essential to the creation of Roman Catholic families, and Christian families were essential to the survival of the church. If the Christian husband of a nonbelieving wife died, reversion to Buddhism and veneration of the ancestors was more than likely.

As Gail King notes, the church tried in a variety of ways to contact and instruct women, for example, the composition of religious tracts in basic Chinese, the use of images and pictures in the church, memorization of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Catechism, the recitation of the rosary, and chanting and singing. The translation of these materials was a part of the Sinification process as the priests developed a Chinese Christian vocabulary. Beneficial to the church were its emphasis on ritual, self-examination, the mother figure of the Virgin Mary, and pilgrimages to shrines, all of which were attractive to women and resonated with their former Buddhist and Confucian experiences. One significant advantage that Chinese society offered the missionaries was the centrality of the family; even patriarchy proved to be beneficial. The missionaries relied heavily on kinship ties in their attempts to reach women. Often, a husband, after conversion, would bring his whole family into the church. Once a woman converted, she could use her network of friends and female kin, both through her husband and with her natal family for the apostolate. More troublesome was the marriage of a Christian woman to a non-Christian spouse, and Gail King offers illustrations of some of the trials of women in such a relationship. The church tried, in so far as possible, to insist on marriage between Christians, but the shortage of converts did not always make this possible.

And yet the familism of Chinese society made the introduction of the concept of lifelong virginity difficult as Eugenio Menegon illustrates. He traces the Christian modification of the traditional Confucian notion of filiality in order to make the Institut of Virgins acceptable in Chinese society. The Christian community and its practices became so enmeshed in the Fuan society of Fujian that even non-Christians sometimes supported them when the Chinese government sought to suppress what they considered a dangerous local cult.

The missionaries also relied on Christian Virgins and female catechists as links to the secular populace. Because of the controversial nature of the Christian Virgins during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sources on Chinese Virgins are more plentiful than on ordinary women converts. Many of the Virgins however, were illiterate or marginally literate so that

they themselves left few or no records. We know little of their inner life. What persuaded them to dedicate themselves to a life of celibacy and service in a society wherein marriage was the norm and the Roman Catholic Church offered few support mechanisms? We must be content with male reports of their actions, contributions, and relations with the patriarchal church hierarchy.

There had been groups of Virgins in European Catholicism, but among the seventeenth-century Catholic missionaries in China, there were neither Virgins nor orders of Sisters. Institutional guidelines and structures were lacking. Instruction, discipline, and monitoring of Chinese Virgins by males were problematical. Chinese women catechists were ordinarily not sufficiently educated or trained in theology to assume the responsibility. Yet there were these devout women who desired to remain celibate and devote themselves wholly to prayer and service to the church. Given that the church offered neither housing nor financial support to the Virgins, most of them lived with their family. Accordingly, most of the Virgins came from devout, prosperous families willing to allow their daughter to forego marriage and also willing to support an unproductive member. A few Virgins from poor families apparently supported themselves by weaving and spinning. As the Institute of Virgins became better organized during the nineteenth century, housing for Virgins became more common, and maintenance of standards was facilitated.

By detailing the many services of the Virgins, R. Gary Tiedemann explains the Western fathers' designation of the Virgins as "a necessary evil." Whatever the hazards of the church's association with the single, sequestered, segregated women, the church needed them in its mission to women. They played a crucial role in the introduction of Christianity during the seventeenth century, but they were especially necessary to the preservation of Christian communities during the years of proscription from the early eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. Western priests were few and the small Catholic congregations were largely on their own. The Virgins, Christian mothers, and women catechists continued to uphold the faith through their extended kinship network and local Christian communities. As during the decades of suppression, the 1950s and 1960s, the church did not expand, but concentrated on survival.

When Imperial decrees in the 1840s made it legal for Chinese Christians to practice their religion and Western missionaries to resume evangelizing, Chinese Christians were essential to the Western priests as they reestablished relations with surviving Chinese communities. Chinese Catholics were relieved that they could now worship openly, and they welcomed their mentors. Even so, relations between Chinese and Westerners were sometimes ambivalent. Chinese Catholics had grown accustomed to operating independently. Virgins went out in the countryside to baptize moribund babies and even female converts; they led choirs and chanting in churches;

they were engaged in external apostolate. Rumors that some of the Virgins had broken their vows of chastity reached the ears of the Western missionaries. Until the arrival of Western orders of sisters, however, Virgins were essential. They, along with women catechists trained catechumen for baptism, taught in girls' prayer schools, engaged in famine relief and sometimes distributed simple medicines in addition to baptizing dying infants and evangelizing among women. They had been empowered so that they fulfilled public roles not ordinarily associated with women. Only as Western Roman Catholic sisters and trained Chinese catechists took over the functions of the Virgins in the twentieth century did the Institut of Virgins decline in numbers and importance.

From the first establishment of the Chinese Institut of Virgins in the seventeenth century, relations between the Virgins and the church hierarchy had remained uneasy. As Robert Entenmann demonstrates, the China missionaries attempted again and again to regularize the Institute of Virgins and to establish effective guidelines for membership and conduct. The fear of scandal was ever present, but also conspicuous was the determination of the male church hierarchy to regulate every detail of the lifestyle and activities of the Virgins. The limited number of priests, restrictions on their travel, and lack of direct access to women, however, precluded close supervision of the Virgins' activities. In withdrawing from secular society and seeking direct communication with God, the Virgins achieved a degree of autonomy even though the church fathers tried to oversee them. Some saw visions that persuaded them that they could directly discern the will of God. Most of the Virgins, of course, were deeply respectful toward their priests, but the very existence of the Virgins in the Chinese environment posed a dilemma for the church. In view of the ambivalent attitude of the church toward the Virgins and its minimal support, most Virgins' commitment to the faith must have been resolute indeed.

Chinese Christian women, whose primary concern had been their family, found an additional focus for their loyalty and activities. As catechists and as teachers in Sunday schools and girls' prayer schools, they engaged in a different set of public roles than the domestic functions to which women had been restricted. Chinese Christian women, segregated from males, created their own space in which to believe and practice their faith.

Christian Women of China in the Seventeenth Century

Gail King

CHINESE CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WERE OF ALL classes, from peasants to imperial princesses, literate and illiterate, poor and wealthy. They taught the faith to their children and other women, they cared for the sick, they rescued abandoned children, they met with other women to worship, they belonged to religious societies, and they donated generously to the Chinese church. Despite all this, they are mostly unknown. Brief comments in missionary reports hint at their numbers and importance, but for the most part, Chinese women Christians are little mentioned in any kind of records. This is not because Chinese Christian women of the seventeenth century were few or unimportant. It rather reflects Chinese society and the mission situation in China at the time.

Like every society, the Chinese recorded what mattered to the record keepers of their society. In Chinese culture, what got recorded officially was public lives. People and events that belonged to the private sphere, like women and religious belief, did not belong in public record. Hence few women appear in official histories. As for missionaries, given Chinese society and culture, their contacts were nearly all with men. Women were a high percentage of their flocks, and missionaries baptized them, heard their confessions, and said Mass for them, but they knew personally very few. Women are mentioned in missionary letters, books, and reports, but for the most part only briefly, in second-hand reports of what they felt or said. One longs for the voice of Chinese Christian women, telling us of their beliefs, interactions, faith life—in short, what it was like to be a Chinese Christian woman in the seventeenth century. For the most part these longings must go unfulfilled. Our desire to know what they felt and believed must be teased out from what they did.

One Chinese Christian woman of the seventeenth century about whom we know more than a smattering is Candida Xu (1607–80), granddaughter of the eminent early convert Xu Guangqi (1562–1633). As it happened, Madame Xu's confessor in the last years of her life, Philippe Couplet, S.J. (1623–93), had both time and reason to write a biography of a Chinese

Child Bodies, Blessed Bodies: The Contest between Christian Virginity and Confucian Chastity

Eugenio Menegon

Prologue

The summer of 1746—the eleventh year of the Qianlong reign—found the officialdom of the southern Chinese province of Fujian engaged in a suppression campaign against a local cult in Fuan, a mountainous county tucked in the northeastern part of the province in Funing prefecture.[1] 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 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, 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 dedicate themselves [to religious activities] and do not get married. This they call 'to preserve the chaste state of a child' (*shou tongzhen*)."[2]

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 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 had been expressly forbidden. However, this prohibition was never seriously enforced during the Kangxi reign, and the provision that missionaries could care for existing communities 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 that reflected adherence to the imperial ideological position on the Chinese rites. Most of the Dominican friars in Fujian were obliged to leave their missions in 1707, as they would not accept the imperial order, although two of them remained incognito.[3] Moreover, at this juncture the neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Boxing saw Catholic activities as colliding 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."[4] 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 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."[5]

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 emperor and exploded into a full-fledged campaign. 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 reached the emperor. A prominent Han official, Zhang Pengge (1649–1725), who had attempted to forbid Christianity as governor of Zhejiang 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.[6]

The emperor did not need any encouragement to accept the memorial's recommendations. Gioro Mamboo (1673–1725), the Manchu governor-general in charge of Zhejiang and Fujian, was quick in implementing the new imperial policy, and the first Christian community to receive the at-

tention 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.[7] 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* leaders would implement his orders.[8] 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 remained resilient. As the missionaries observed, local authorities were able to gather only the names of seven elderly Christian virgins (who were clearly not marriageable), and never got their hands on the others. In 1729 in a secret court letter directed to all provincial governors, 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" were following their teachings, therefore damaging local customs.[9] This letter shows the 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. 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 propagating the faith, albeit always with appropriate caution and prudence."[10]

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 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. 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, Sichuan, and Jiangsu.[11] The Christians of Fuan fell into the net.

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 was customary, local gentry and lineages were expected to collaborate in social control through the enforcement of proper customs and rites. 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.[12] The prefect of Xinghua, a coastal prefecture south of the provincial capital Fuzhou, observed that rejecting marriage was particularly damaging to human relations and recommended that "those [Christian] women who did not marry be entrusted to the elderly males in the neighboring *baojia* and within a year be married off."[13] 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 the early Qianlong period, governors ordered 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.[14] 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 and Christian virgins were 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.

Governmental concern was paralleled 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 in the eyes of men that male honor was safe and that the centrality of patriliny went unchallenged.[15] 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?

This chapter 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. I will first review the early seventeenth-century Chinese Christian writings introducing the *ideal* of virginity—mainly authored by Jesuits—which provided its discursive antecedents.

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, ability 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.[16] Christianity lent a new twist to religiously motivated virginity, elevating it to a level of importance never seen before. The ideal of virginal perfection became institutionalized in Christianity, thanks to the spreading of monasticism from the fifth century on, first in the East and later in the Latin West. Male virginity was the main object of theological attention and

symbolized the resolve of monks to fight evil in the service of good, rather than simply to suppress lust.

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."[17] By the later Middle Ages, virginity was promoted as a form of asceticism, 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. The power of the virginal ideal was particularly 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."[18] 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 conventional lifestyles tolerated in the late medieval period.

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.

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 life long 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 toward the ancestors, prevented an exaltation of virginity similar to the one found in Christianity. In medical circles, sexual activity was considered imperative if a woman was to remain normal.[19] This medically 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."[20] In spite of this, however, premarital virginity remained prized.

The word commonly used in legal documents of the Qing period for 'virgin' is not *tongzhen* but *chunü* or *shinü*. Both words meant "a girl who lives in [the paternal] home," and by extension an unmarried girl who had had no sexual intercourse.[21] To lose one's virginity was a loss of status and entailed downward mobility. As 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-a-vis the community, and in the end, compromise her status.[22] 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 of his wife.[23] In sum, 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. Here we find no trace of virginity as a virtue to be made into a lifelong pursuit.

This social and reproductive discourse of virginity, however, 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. 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."[24] Marriage was obviously the way love of life and sexual desire took a social form, and had to be similarly rejected. 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.[25]

Guanyin and one of her most revered incarnations, Princess Miaoshan, are the two best-known examples of Buddhist virgin goddesses, untouched by such pollution. 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.[26] On the other hand, 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.[27]

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 (alias Chen Jinggu) offered incentives 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. 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."[28] 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. 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.[29] In spite of her cooptation into the framework of the orthodox patriarchal order, however, her disorderly and rebellious behavior was never erased from the legend. The diffusion of devotional hagiographies and the staging of ritual dramas and puppet shows at temple festivals accomplished the transmission of such an image.[30] 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.

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 famil-

iar image of female virginity connected to the life of the cloister and to the figure of the Virgin Mary.

The earliest mention of refusal of marriage and abstention from sex for religious purposes I found in Christian materials is in the famous catechetical work by Matteo Ricci, S.J. (Li Madou, 1552–1610), *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi,* 1604). Ricci uses the expression "to avoid sex and remain unmarried" 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 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.[31]

It is rather in discussions by Ricci's successors that the virtuous counterparts of lust—chastity and virginity—are explicitly mentioned. Diego de Pantoja (Pang Diwo, 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* (*The Seven Victories* [over sins], 1614). 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. Thus the materials we find in the *Qike* on virginity are oriented to a male readership. 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."[32] Moreover, within marriage there is only one type of orthodox intercourse, regulated by seasons and done to produce offspring. Within that model, Pantoja proposes both the rejection of lust and the establishment of a chaste *male* behavior. In spite of this depiction of married people as part of the Christian system of chastity, the second section relentlessly attacks the institution of marriage, showing that total sexual abstention is the example offered to readers. He says, "Sex, no matter whether proper or improper muddles the human soul and mind."[33]

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*), 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: "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."[34]

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. It is actually doubtful that the *Qike*'s discussion of lust and virginity/chastity elicited much interest among literati. Rather, 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 that 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 such books is the *Lives of Saints* (*Shengren xingshi,* 1629) by Alfonso Vagnoni S.J. (Gao Yizhi, 1568–1640).[35] 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. Another book by Vagnoni more specifically concerned with the concept of virginity is the *Life of the Holy Mother* (*Shengmu xingshi,* 1631). This treatise 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.[36] The virginity of Mary is discussed in *juan* 2, under the heading *The Virginity of the Holy Mother* (*Shengmu tongzhen*):

> 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. *This is something difficult to believe for the ignorant people of the world, 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. . . . They wrote that the Holy Mother was blessed and remained a virgin (*tongzhen*) all her life. This is truly so and cannot be doubted.[37]

The following pages abundantly quote from the prophetic scriptures prefiguring the virginal birth of the Messiah and from the commentaries on such passages by Christian saints and theologians. 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 be attacked as ludicrous, if not outrightly immoral, by Chinese opponents of the missionaries. 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 *Life of the Holy Mother,* 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.[38]

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

Although starting in the 1650s the Jesuits established a number of female confraternities of devotional nature in the urban centers of Jiangnan, they avoided direct involvement with consecrated women, given the opposition that such choice would elicit within the patriarchal organization of society.[39] 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.[40] Lineage rules 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.[41] 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.[42]

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. 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 commoners and the lower strata of the gentry (students and lower-degree holders). The region had seen its heyday before the Yuan period but had experienced a gradual decline in importance from the Song period on, and it was a backwater by late imperial times.

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.[43] However, the priests could count on the support of some local literati. By 1649, during a period in which Christianity enjoyed the favor of the local Ming loyalist military commander, Liu Zhongzao, missionary sources mention that 5,400 people had been baptized, and that among them were four "military mandarins," seventy-four degree holders, and twelve *beatas* ("blessed virgins") from prominent families.[44] The advent of the Qing, had brought protection to the court Jesuits from the Shunzhi 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.

The number of Christian virgins continued to increase: twenty-four in 1695, fifty in 1714, between one-hundred-thirty and two-hundred in 1740–60. Also the overall number of converts grew continuously, 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 up the role of policing local society

and reforming the "evil customs" of Fuan Christians through a series of military raids. 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 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."[45] As a matter of fact, from the beginning, the friars did not follow the Jesuit policy of keeping a "safe" distance from women. 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 ended by saying that "this is something that should give special reason to Christian women to thank God for the liberty they enjoy."[46] Although this excessively negative image comes from the propagandistic pen of a missionary, it does reflect some of the hardships encountered by Chinese women. 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 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.

The Spanish tradition of the cloistered *beatas* was transmitted to the Fuan converts by the Dominican friars. In their sermons, the Dominicans introduced 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. 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 (1630s), could also employ these hagiographies to orally illustrate the virtue of virginity to young girls wishing to become *beatas.* 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 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."[47] 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."

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*]. They are not unmarried virgin girls, but rather widows, elderly women, or wives repudiated by their husbands. . . .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."[48] Riccio's words revealed the prejudices of the European age of "Great Confinement." For the missionary, in that Buddhist nuns were free to move around, unlike European nuns, they represented a potentially uncontrollable group, prone to all kinds of misconduct. At issue was male control over women. The negative attitude of missionaries toward 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 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, "are not reared by their parents to become monks and nuns."[49] 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, 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."[50]

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. 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."[51] 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.

Riccio recounts the great conflicts that characterized the life of early *beatas.* The most celebrated among these women was Petronilla Chen (ca. 1625–1710s), a native of Xiapei 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. 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.[52] 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. 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. 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 (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. She then joined the friars in Dingtou, where she lived in a Christian household, as her parents refused to have any contact with her. We know that she continued to engage in her religious activities until at least the 1710s, as her death was commemorated in the 1720 Provincial Chapter of the Manila Dominicans.[53]

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.[54] Even more remarkable is the fact that *beatas* were mostly young elite women.[55] 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."[56]

The opposition experienced by Petronilla Chen and the first generation of Christian virgins in the 1630s and 1640s 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 girls from prominent families such as the Miao, "who had offered their virginity to God with a vow of chastity."[57] By 1695, their number reached twenty-four, aged between eighteen and seventy-two years.[58] In the eighteenth century, they became even more numerous. 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."[59] 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 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."[60]

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. 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."[61]

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." 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.[62]

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.[63] 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."[64] 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.[65]

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, as 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 Missionary Discourse of Female Christian Virginity in the Chinese Context

We now need to explore the way in which this choice was 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 become 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. Instead the missionaries 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 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.

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 and chaste woman. 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."[66] This state system was merely an official endorsement of a broader social movement that extolled chaste women in order 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 *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven:*

> There are at this time certain chaste women 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. 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.[67]

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, 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. Obviously, Ricci chose them as an example because they were not merely chaste but virgin.

Christian catechetical materials mainly used variations of the term *tongshen,* that is, the child body of a virgin. Most of these terms referred to two related and yet distinct concepts: virginity (*tongzhen*) 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. By using the character *tong,* 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

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.[68] The stories of the Western saints not only resonated with the experience of the Fuan *beatas* but also inspired their course of action. The vocational stories of the first generation of Fuan *beatas* shows 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.

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). González de San Pedro, O. P. (Luo Senduo), published a full-length hagiographic account of the saint in Chinese in 1706, under the title *Deeds of Saint Rosa of Lima* (*Shengnü Luosa xingshi*). 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 *The Extraordinary Life and Precious Death of the Venerable Sister Rosa of S. Maria from Lima* (*Vita mirabilis et mors pretiosa venerabilis sororis Rosae de Sa. Mariae Limensis,* 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, 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. 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.[69]

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. 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, and wearing of coarse clothes.

However, the Chinese version of Rosa's life was also adapted somewhat for the intended Fuan audience.[70] An examination of the sections in Rosa's Chinese hagiography describing her filiality toward her parents and her entrance in the Third Order, for example, shows the translator attempting to reconcile the tension between filial piety toward 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 until her death, and to maintain intact her purity in imitation of Saint [Catherine] she cut off her hair. The first reason for this was to prevent her parents from marrying her off; the second reason was because . . . beautiful hair is harmful [in that it is a demonic net used to attract men and plunge them into hell]."[71]

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. 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 given that "the will of the priest is the will of the Lord of Heaven," the priest 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."[72] 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."[73]

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*. 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, in fact she was completely filial. But the will of the Lord of Heaven ordains people's lives, and Jesus clearly wished Rosa to be a virgin. 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. Why appease one's parents, when one is contravening the decrees of the Supreme Lord?"[74] 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.'"[75]

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.

Fuan Christian Literati and the Defense of Christian Virginity vs. 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 to the *Deeds of Saint Rosa* written in 1706 by the Fuan Christian literatus Wang Daoxing shows how a convert educated in the Confucian classics and holder of an official degree in the late Kangxi period saw the *exemplum* of the Peruvian virgin. Wang first mentions the *exempla* found in "Confucian" histories of the inner chambers. 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 and allowing their flesh to be cooked to save their in-laws. 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. . . . which one of them would fail to be called in this country outstanding among women?"[76] His reply to this rhetorical query 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. They may have done what they did in hopes of empty worldly fame. Even if they faced difficulties, . . . if we trace their original motivations [we will find 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."[77]

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. But these objections went mostly unheeded, and the Qing period saw an unprecedented explosion of the cult of widow fidelity. In Fuan, as elsewhere, many chaste widows were commemorated in the local gazetteers. 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] . . . among women there are widows who remain chaste and many more who remain chaste from childhood. 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 obtaining eternal happiness after death. But they do not ever do it merely for fame."[78]

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, 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*] in order to hold steadfast [on the path of virtue]. She was capable of withstanding the sorrows she experienced; she had many virtues, but still she was modest. . . . She decided to remain virgin, without any doubt on her part. . . . Does this just spring out of an impetuous nature, bent on gaining empty fame from the world?"[79]

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."[80] 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 might, in fact, 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 the Fuan local gazetteers due to the proscription of Christianity. 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 socio-religious 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. These results were accomplished by appropriating, and also subverting, certain congruent Chinese values (e.g., 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."[81] This kind of statement did not mean that values associated with 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, called the advantages of Christianity. These benefits were mainly, although 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" 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 often 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.[82]

By remaining at home as *beatas,* some Fuan Christian women could 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.[83]

Notes

1. This chapter was first presented at the 55th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in New York, March 27–30, 2003. A longer version was published in *Nan Nü, Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Late Imperial China* 6, 2 (2004): 177–240. I wish to thank the panel members and other colleagues for their encouragement and suggestions. I am most grateful to Koninklijke Brill for permission to reprint a shortened version of the article. Those who wish to see the full text with extensive footnotes and Chinese characters may wish to consult the *Nan Nü* essay.

2. 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.

3. 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," ch. 3; and 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" toward Christianity, see Adrian Dudink, "Opponents," in *Handbook of Christianity in China: Volume One: 635–1800,* ed. Nicolas Standaert, 515.

4. Zhang Boxing, *Zhengyi Tang Wenji-Xuji,* 175.

5. Dudink, "Opponents," in Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity,* 1: 517.

6. See Ignatius 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,* 97.

7. 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 (Xiamen University).

8. 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).*

9. See a transcript of the archival version in Zhuang Jifa, "Qing Shizong jin jiao kao," *Dongfang zazhi* 62, 6 (1981): 26–36, 34.

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

11. 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.

12. 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,* 2:521.

13. AMEP, *Chine* 434:1092r.

14. A memorial by the Governor of Hubei Zhong Bao, dated December 3, 1736 (Qianlong 1/11/2), for example, quoted from the Qing Code saying that "from now on, women must be older than forty to become nuns"; see "Qianlong chunian zhengchi minfeng minsu shiliao," *Lishi dang'an* 81, 1 (2001): 28–46, 35.

15. 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.

16. See entry on "Virginity" by Han J. W. Drijvers in Mircea Eliade, Charles J. Adams, et al., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 15:279–81.

17. Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World;* Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World,* 29.

18. John Bugge, *Virginitas,* 140.

19. See Charlotte Furth, "Blood, Body, and Gender: Medical Images of the Female Condition in China, 1600–1850," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader,* ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 291–314, 306; Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665,* 91.

20. Furth, "Blood, Body, and Gender," 292.

21. Luo Zhufeng, et al., eds., *Hanyu Da Cidian,* 8:837.

22. Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China,* 315.

23. See Paola Paderni, *Furori d'amore: Gelosia maschile e identità di genere nella Cina del XVIII secolo,* 27–31.

24. 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,* 333.

25. See Gary Seaman, "The Sexual Politics of Karmic Retribution," in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society,* ed. Emily Martin and Hill Gates, 381–96; Beata Grant, "The Spiritual Saga of Woman Huang: From Pollution to Purification," in *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: "Mulien Rescues His Mother" in Chinese Popular Culture,* ed. David Johnson, 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.

26. See Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan,* 85.

27. See Yü Chün-fang, *Kuan-yin,* 337–38.

28. Quoted from Vivienne Lo, "The Legend of the Lady of Linshui," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21 (1993): 69–96, 77.

29. The eighteenth-century popular novel *Mindu bieji* contains a detailed account of the goddess's early life, marriage, death while delivering a son, and her 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 Vivienne Lo, "The Legend of the Lady of Linshui," 80, 89.

30. On "novels" and other popular writings and songs on the Lady's legend, see Brigitte Baptandier, "The Lady Linshui: How a Woman became a Goddess," in *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China,* ed. Mehir Shahar and Robert Weller, 106–8. For examples of puppet shows on the legend of Linshui Furen, see Ye Mingsheng and Wu Naiyu, *Fujian Shouning Siping kuilei xi "Nainiang zhuan";* and Ye and Yuan Hongliang, *Fujian Shanghang Luantan kuilei xi "Furen zhuan."*

31. See Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven: T'ien-chu Shih-i,* transl. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuochen, ed. Edward Malatesta, 416–17.

32. Wu Xiangxiang, ed., *Tianxue chuhan,* 1015.

33. Ibid., 1032.

34. Ibid., 1049

35. 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, 309–88, 337, 343.

36. Ibid., 43.

37. Wu, *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian san bian,* 3: j. 2, 1354.

38. Ibid., 3: 1517–29.

39. See Liam Brockey, "The Harvest of the Vine: The Jesuit Missionary Enterprise in China, 1579–1710," 449, 454–55, 463–64.

40. Charlotte Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy: Household Instructions and the Transmission of Orthodox Values," in *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China,* ed. Liu Kwang-Ching, 187–211, 197; Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century,* 191.

41. Liu Hui-chen Wang, *The Traditional Chinese Clan Rules,* 94–95; Susan 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.

42. On laws punishing the clergy's sexual misdemeanor, see William C. Jones, Cheng Tianquan, and Jiang Yongling, eds., *The Great Qing Code,* 132–33, 352; Matthew 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.

43. Eugenio Menegon, "Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans in Fujian: the Anti-Christian Incidents of 1637–38," in *"Scholar from the West": Giulio Aleni, S.J., (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China,* ed. Tiziana Lippiello and Roman Malek, 219–62; Menegon, "Christian Loyalists."

44. Domingo Navarrete, *Controversias antiguas y modernas de la mission de la gran China* (ms., Madrid, 1679) as quoted in González, *Historia,* 1:297.

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

46. Victorio Riccio, "Hechos," 161r.

47. González de San Pedro as quoted in José M. González, *Historia* 2:48 n 10.

48. Riccio, "Hechos," 161r.

49. Liu Hui-chen Wang, *Traditional Chinese Clan Rules,* 94–95.

50. Riccio, "Hechos," 161r–v.

51. Quotation on Buddhist nuns from Susan Mann, *Precious Records,* 192, referring to the *Dream of the Red Chamber.*

52. Biographical data on Petronilla in Riccio, "Hechos," 161r.

53. See Riccio, "Hechos," 161v–171v; 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,* 61–66.

54. Determined by an insufficient number of brides, the phenomenon of the "marriage crunch" was felt also in the prosperous High Qing period. In Fuan marriageble 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 Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity,* 30.

55. 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 Evaristo F. Arias, *El Beato Sanz,* 178.

56. Susan Mann, *Precious Records,* 10.

57. Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz,* 177.

58. AMEP, *Chine* 434:7r.

59. Varo, "Manifiesto y declaración," in Arias, *El Beato Sanz,* 177–79.

60. González de San Pedro as quoted in José M. González, *Historia,* 2:48 n 10.

61. 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 Susan Mann, *Precious Records,* 200.

62. See AMEP, *Chine* 429:81r and 87r. The French title of the Chinese document in the manuscript catalogue of the Archives 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."

63. González, *Historia* 2:242, quoting P. de la Cruz, "Narración histórica."

64. José Calvo, in González, *Historia,* 2:538–39.

65. 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, inalienable even after the death of their parents; see Tiedemann, "Controlling the Virgins: Female Propagators and the Catholic Hierarchy in China," *Women's History Review,* 2008.

66. Janet M. Theiss, "Feminity in Flux: Gendered Virtue and Social Conflict in the Mid-Qing Courtroom," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities,* ed. Brownell and Wasserstrom, 47.

67. Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning,* 416–17.

68. "[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.

69. This is a summary based on Hansen's biography, published in Rome in 1664, as found in E. Aymé, "Rose of Lima, Saint," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church,* ed. Charles G. Herbermann, et al., 13:192–93.

70. I used the 1920 edition of González de San Pedro's Chinese version, Luo Senduo [Francisco González de San Pedro], *Shengnü Luosa xingshi* and compared it with the copies of the original 1706 Fuzhou edition in Bibliotheque Nationale de France, *Chinois,* 6770 and 6771.

71. Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi,* 4.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., 10.

74. Ibid., 10–11.

75. Luo-González de San Pedro, *Shengnü Luosa xingshi,* "Xiaoyin."

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

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. AMEP, *Chine* 436:140r.

82. See Fuan shi minjian wenxue jicheng bianweihui, ed., *Zhongguo geyao jicheng: Fujian juan. Fuan shi fen juan,*143–44.

83. See Robert Entenman, "Christian Virgins in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan," in *Christianity in China From the Eighteenth Century to the Present,* ed. Daniel Bays, 180–93; Raymond Renson, "Virgins in Central Mongolia," in *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China in the Qing Era,* ed. Willy F. Vande Walle and Nöel Golvers, 343–67; Tiedemann, "Controlling the Virgins"; Duanyun Zhang, *Dangdai nüxing dushen jiaoyoui. Shidai yiyi ji shengzhao fenxiang.*

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Christian Virgins in Early Qing, Sichuan

Robert Entenmann

EARLY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, A FEW INDIVIDUAL CHINESE CATHOLIC women in Sichuan, without recognition or leadership by the clergy, chose to live a life of celibacy and religious contemplation while continuing to live with their families.[1] In 1744 Joachim Enjobert de Martiliat (1706–55), a missionary of the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris, vicar apostolic with jurisdiction over Sichuan, organized them into the Institute of Christian Virgins and placed them under missionary supervision. The Christian Virgins became more and more active in evangelism and public life during the decades that followed. Although this conflicted with the traditional expectations for women, both in the church and in Chinese society, some missionaries encouraged these endeavors. Others objected, however, and Rome responded in 1784 with new rules and more restrictive ecclesiastical control to ensure that the Christian Virgins behaved according to the expectations of the church. The Christian Virgins, through teaching in schools for Catholic girls, nevertheless helped maintain the Catholic community in Sichuan.

Origins of the Christian Virgins

Christianity had been introduced into Sichuan in the 1640s by two Jesuit missionaries, but the early Catholic community did not survive the rebellion of Zhang Xianzhong and the Qing conquest that soon followed. In 1702, however, four missionaries, two Lazarists and two French missionaries of the Missions Étrangères, reestablished a Catholic presence there. During the decades that followed, Lazarists and members of the Missions Étrangères competed for control over the mission. Both the Lazarists and the Missions Étrangères trained a growing corps of Chinese clergy, as well as catechists and other male lay leaders.

Sichuan had perhaps five thousand Catholics in 1753, when the Société des Missions Étrangères won exclusive jurisdiction over the province. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the number of Catholics in Sichuan grew rapidly, reaching about 40,000 by 1800. They were scattered across a province the size of France. Yet they were served by a small number of