

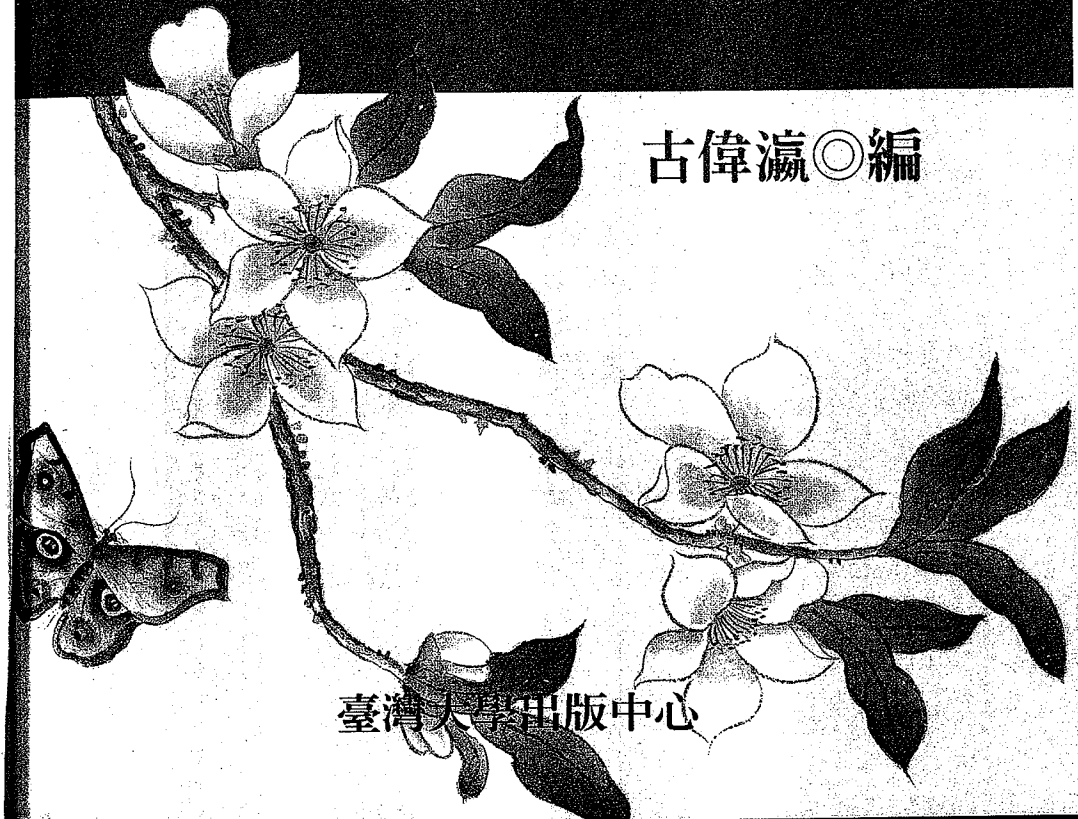
東亞文明研究叢書 45

# 東西交流史的新局

以基督宗教為中心

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臺灣大學出版中心



# 東西交流史的新局：以基督宗教為中心

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## 序

東西文化的互動及交流是國立台灣大學東亞文明研究中心成立以來就相當重視的一個主題。在此全球化世界村的時代，對於現存各種文明之間的交流及互惠是大家努力的目標，也是較無爭議的共識。在此目標下，東西文化交流的歷史也成為本中心所關心的研究項目，成立兩年多來召開了數次相關會議，也陸續邀請對此議題有成就的學者前來交流參訪，因而累積了一些重要的研究成果。此論文集之編纂即是展現成果的一部份。

明末清初是東西方開始大規模接觸交流之始，而其中又是以基督宗教中的天主教傳播為中介的，陸續完成的論文中，以基督宗教為例，在資料、方法、研究的角度及史學史的反省上恰恰能合成一本以東西交流研究的新局為題的論文集。

本書一開始有兩篇文章討論此領域的回顧，一篇較以中國大陸為中心；另一則以海內外的華人研究為對象。在史料上，則有數篇文章提出新的可能，例如在澳門利氏學社所進行的《北京檔案》(Acta Pekinensia)逐日記載教宗特使鐸羅的情況，大可補充禮儀之爭的細節；李晟文教授則介紹鮮為人知的加拿大耶穌會傳教士在江蘇徐州的傳教檔案。

在方法上，黃一農教授的「e-考據」正是一個很重大的在

were not, in this period, a major concern of the bureaucracy, informal sources, local and central, are likely to be more use than those that were part of the process of compiling the official histories.<sup>60</sup> In this age of electronic data compilation and email communication, collaboration is much easier than was the case until recently. No longer do isolated scholars have to spend years in dusty archives painfully copying passages and writing notes in pencil. And each in his or her own study can instantly be in touch with scholars throughout the world, even in the P.R.C. I well remember the scorn with which was greeted my suggestion to an audience of Chinese students in Shanghai in 1992 that in a very short time we would be exchanging views this way. But there is also no substitute for face to face exchanges. It is occasions like this, for which I thank our hosts, that advance work in the fascinating and burgeoning field of writing about the history of Chinese Christians.

<sup>60</sup> In my contribution to the 1992 Symposium on the Chinese Rites Controversy in San Francisco I drew attention to the recently acquired collection of Chinese documents in the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco which I call the Sala Papers. Their main value lies in the fact that most are copies made at the time by Europeans in Canton and Macao of instructions from Beijing and responses of local officials dealing with the house arrest of de Tournon in Macao none of which to my knowledge are found today in Chinese archives. v. 'Towards a history of the Chinese Rites controversy' in D.E.Mungello, ed. *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, Nettetal (Steyler Verlag), Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, XXXIII, 1995, pp. 252-256.

## Popular or Local? Historiographical Shifts in the Study of Christianity in Late Imperial China

Eugenio Menegon\*

### Abstract

In the last decade, scholars have increasingly focused their attention on the social and ritual life of Chinese Christian communities, and this has today become one of the most interesting subfields within the study of Christianity in China. This new scholarship borrows methodological and theoretical frameworks from the larger field of the study of Chinese "popular" religions, in particular those traditions that were seen as heterodox by the Chinese state. My essay offers an assessment of this recent literature, problematizes the concept of "popular Christianity," and offers a possible alternative framework, that of "localization." To

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see Christianity as a “local Chinese religion” not only better suits the historical experience of Chinese Christians, but also contributes to buttress arguments for the “Chineseness” of Christianity in late imperial times. To argue that Christianity was perceived and experienced as a Chinese religion, in spite of its foreign origins, is an important historiographical move, which will help us go beyond past “mission-centered” history, and move towards a new view of Christianity as integral part of the diverse Chinese religious landscape.

## 典範的轉移：晚近基督宗教研究的地方化

梅歐金

提 要

在過去的十年裏，學者們逐漸將研究的注意力轉向了中國基督教社區的社會和宗教生活，時至今日，它們已經成為中國基督教史研究的重要組成部分。新的研究廣泛借鑑了中國民間宗教研究、特別是對統治階級眼中的異端傳統的研究中體現的方法論和理論框架。本文將對近年來的研究成果做一個評介，對所謂的“民間基督教”這一概念提出質疑，並試圖尋找到一個可行的新的詮釋框架，即通過“地方化”的視角研究中國基督教史。將基督教視為“中國本土宗教”不僅更符合中國基督徒的歷史經驗，也有力地支持了努力發掘中華帝國晚期基督教的“中國特質”的新嘗試。強調基督教不是外來洋教，要研究人們如何理解和體驗作為中國本土宗教的基督教，這是一次重要的史學理論轉向，它有助於我們超越原有的以教會和傳教士為中心的歷史研究，轉向新的、將基督教至於整合的中國本土宗教語境的歷史研究。

The historiography of the China Catholic mission has traditionally revolved around the impact of Christianity and “Western knowledge” upon literati and court circles in late imperial China. In the last two decades, however, this research paradigm has been both refined and broadened to a great extent. On the one hand, following a long-standing tradition which gave almost exclusive attention to Western sources and the deeds of foreign missionaries, new scholarship has endeavored to contextualize the scientific and artistic accomplishments of the Jesuits in China by studying works written in Chinese by missionaries, converts and opponents, as well as the social circumstances of scientific interactions at the center and the periphery of the empire. The recent Western and Chinese scholarship presented in the *Handbook of Christianity in China* (2001) edited by Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink, as well as the bird-eye view of the “Jesuit phase” of Chinese science in Benjamin Elman’s *On their Own Terms* (2005) both reflect this shift.

On the other hand—and this is a more recent development—scholars have focused their attention on the life of the Christian communities, which comprised the vast majority of converts at any time. The examination of the social, ritual and spiritual dimensions of “Chinese Christian life” has today become one of the

most interesting subfields within the study of Christianity in China, and such examination borrows methodological and theoretical frameworks from the larger field of the study of Chinese “popular” religions, in particular those traditions that were seen as heterodox by the Chinese state. My contribution will concentrate on this latter development. I will offer an assessment of the literature, problematize the concept of “popular” Christianity, and propose a possible alternative framework that may better suit the historical experience of late imperial Chinese Christians.

### Christianity as a Chinese Religion: From Elites to Commoners

Until recently, most scholarship on the interaction between Christian teachings and practices and Chinese thought, religion, society and institutions in the Ming and Qing periods has been influenced by a paramount preoccupation with the internal transformation of Christianity under pressure from what Erik Zürcher has called the “cultural imperative” of Confucian orthodoxy. Zürcher observed that “no marginal religion penetrating from the outside could expect to take root in China (at

least at the *social* level) unless it conformed to [the Confucian] pattern that in late imperial times was more clearly defined than ever. Confucianism represented what is *zheng* 正 'orthodox' in a religious, ritual, social and political sense."<sup>1</sup> In other words, as Liu Kwang-ching also noted, religions could peacefully co-exist with the established social order in China only if they conformed to the "moral orthodoxy" of Confucianism, embodied in the rituals (*lijiao* 禮教) of the imperial institutions and the kinship system. This co-existence represented a balance of "religious pluralism and moral orthodoxy." Liu specifies that "orthodoxy" as a socio-ethical system of belief encompassed both elite and popular milieus and was based on the "Three Bonds" (i.e. the subordination of the subject to the monarch, child to parents, and wife to husband), a triad that supported state institutions and the patriarchal organization of kinship. Ancestral rituals were the central institution of orthodox socio-ethics in the kinship system, and one of the universal elements in the life of most Chinese. Even popular cults were co-opted in an effort to buttress the values of this official orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zürcher 1994, p. 41; for Zürcher's view of orthodoxy, see Zürcher 1993; Standaert 2001, pp. 639-640.

<sup>2</sup> See Liu 1990, *passim*. These ideas, and the meaning of heterodoxy, were systematically explored in C.K. Yang's classic *Religion in Chinese Society*; see

The corollary to this vision is that Christianity could take root in China only by becoming "Confucianized," and by engaging the Confucian elites. According to this view, it was imperative for missionaries and Christians to attempt to reconcile with Confucian ideological and social dictates whenever Christian tenets were at odds with them. This is indeed reflected in the strategy of early Jesuit missionaries and their converts. In responding to the accusations of heterodoxy levied by elites and the Chinese state against Christianity for its non-canonical scriptures, its advocacy of a celibate priesthood and so on, early missionaries and converts embraced the main tenets of the moral system of Confucianism and also validated the political order of China. Through this move, they could proclaim the orthodoxy of Christianity and contrast themselves with the other religious traditions of China, considered heterodox by a portion of the educated. Behind this move was also the hope that slowly Christianity could change those elements of the Confucian world-view that were deemed incompatible with Christian theology and ethics.

What Christianity became in the late Ming, however, did not necessarily conform to the plans of the missionaries. Zürcher, who

Yang 1961, pp. 192-217. Compare also Liu and Shek 2004. See Dudink in Standaert 2001, pp. 504-505 for a summary of discussion of Confucian orthodoxy and its relationship to Christianity as heterodoxy.

has concentrated on the mission of the Jesuit Aleni in Fujian, has come to the conclusion that the Chinese converts of the late Ming “created a marginal religion of a very characteristic type that has to be studied by itself, as an indigenous religious movement that may be called ‘Confucian monotheism.’”<sup>3</sup> Eschewing a direct presentation of the figure of Christ, which the missionaries themselves had not emphasized in their catechisms, many Christian literati conceived of Christianity as an alternative spiritual system supplementing deficient aspects of neo-Confucianism.<sup>4</sup>

Nicolas Standaert has also argued from a different angle that, although the foreign element did not completely disappear in the eyes of the Chinese, the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven became

<sup>3</sup> Zürcher 1994, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> See Zürcher 1997. This view is also shared by David Mungello (1994), who, as an intellectual historian, shows less interest in the sociological and ritual dimensions of the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven. Such emphasis on intellectual history leads Mungello to emphasize the “Confucianization” of Christianity in the thought and writings of Christian literati (a point well-taken), while he underestimates the fact that even literati converts adhered to a rather orthodox Catholic position in matters of ritual and devotion; see Dudink 1998 for a critique of Mungello 1994 on this point. On the presentation of Christ (Christology) by the late-Ming Jesuits Ricci and Aleni see Criveller 1997. Although missionaries did present the image of the crucifixion and the life of Christ in their catechetical works, Chinese literati converts in their own writings did not emphasize the figure of Jesus Christ, but rather that of the “Lord of Heaven,” corresponding more to an image of “God as king.”

a “syncretic” Chinese religion. Standaert maintains that converts elaborated complex Confucian-Christian theological explanations for their new faith, trying to harmonize Catholic dogma and neo-Confucian ideas. They learned the doctrine in Chinese translation and brought their own cultural baggage to the process of interpretation. Some of them then created new ideas that failed to faithfully conform to Catholic orthodoxy. Standaert calls this doctrine “a new Christian orthodoxy,” a system following internal principles of coherence based on a highly selective process of “inculturation.”<sup>5</sup>

The scholarship discussed above has addressed the transformation of Christianity into a Chinese religious movement among the higher echelons of literati converts. However, by concentrating on this “Confucian Christianity” and its textual tradition, most of this past research has viewed the matter from a doctrinal point of view. This focus has limited most research to a small number of prominent scholarly converts, especially in the late Ming, and has resulted in the neglect of lower social strata and the world of “practiced religion” (ritual and devotion) in which they lived. At the level of commoners and local lower gentry in the

<sup>5</sup> Standaert 1988, p. 223. Inculturation is a Catholic theological term that indicates the “reshaping” of a new message (usually religious) in terms of the receiving culture.



different locales of China, the “Confucian monotheism” of prominent literati converts did not occupy the place of honor.

### “Popular Christianity”

Scholars in fact have not been oblivious to the existence of “popular Christianity.” Already in the 1980s Jacques Gernet and Erik Zürcher observed that Christian ideas and practices in China faced different “levels of response” depending on the social strata where they were deployed.<sup>6</sup> Interest in the topic has increased since then, and this is a reflection of the general turn in Western academic circles toward “popular culture.” More specifically, however, it is connected to new research on “heterodox” religious movements in China. Scholarship in several fields such as history, political science, and sociology has customarily shown overwhelming concern for the topic of state control over religious heterodoxy (including Christianity), state and elite reactions to heterodox groups, and the potential rebelliousness of such groups in Chinese history. This interest is connected to a preoccupation

<sup>6</sup> Gernet 1982 and Zürcher 1985; for a summary and assessment of past scholarship on popular Christianity, see Menegon 1998.

with social and political change in traditional China. Without denying the importance of this approach, however, some scholars have in recent decades started to shift the focus of research toward the *internal* dynamics of the “heterodox” groups (especially lay Buddhist groups), whose activities were certainly shaped by state pressure and were occasionally violent, but which should also be studied for the sake of their own religious tradition, theological vision, and ritual structure.<sup>7</sup> The label “heterodox” was a creation of the state and of the elites, and a reading of official sources on religious movements labeled as “heterodox” should always be accompanied by a healthy skepticism. Officials and elites were only mildly interested in the cosmological, theological and ritual contents of the religious teachings they tried to suppress, and at times uncritical use of such sources has created knotty historiographical problems.<sup>8</sup> As Barend ter Haar suggests, critical

<sup>7</sup> In recent decades, the work of Daniel Overmyer has greatly contributed to detaching issues of state control over religious heterodoxy and of political rebelliousness of “sectarian groups” from the more purely religious dynamics of such groups; see Overmyer 1976, 1981, 1999; cf. also Naquin 1985; ter Haar 1992; Seiwert and Ma 2003, especially the “Epilogue: Popular Religious Movements and Elite Culture,” pp. 485-501; Liu and Shek 2004. Inspiration for much of this work can be traced to Yang 1961.

<sup>8</sup> See for example the discussion on the problem of “origins” of White Lotus religious groups in Chinese and Japanese scholarship, as summarized in ter Haar 1992, *passim*.

reading of official sources should be accompanied by an exploration of the extant texts belonging to a specific tradition, and by the ethnographic fieldwork conducted since the late nineteenth century on such religious traditions. Thus we should go beyond state-imposed labels and try to reach the socio-religious experience of these mostly peaceful proscribed groups.

The study of “popular Christianity” fits within these broader historiographical developments, as Zürcher’s more recent definition of Christianity in late Ming Fujian testifies: “Christianity was not just an intellectual construct but a living minority religion, a complex of beliefs, rituals, prayer, magic, icons, private piety, and communal celebration. In that whole sphere of religious practice Christianity was by no means a semi-Confucian hybrid; in fact it came much closer to devotional Buddhism than to Confucianism.”<sup>9</sup> After having devoted most of their energy over the last twenty years to reconstructing the doctrinal and theological creations of Chinese Christian literati (“Confucian monotheism” or “*Tianzhu*-ism,” in Zürcher’s words), scholars have therefore started to pay more attention to the ritual and devotional side of Christianity.

<sup>9</sup> Quotation from Zürcher 1997, p. 650. See discussions on “levels of response” in Zürcher 1990 and Standaert 2001, pp. 634-636; on social stratification of converts, see *ibid.*, pp. 386-391.

Gernet was one of the first scholars to discuss “popular” conversion in the Ming-Qing periods. However, although he highlighted the similarity of devotional Christianity to devotional Buddhism, he did not seriously consider the possibility of viewing Christianity as a form of popular religion rooted in China. This position stemmed from his general theory that all aspects of Christianity were incompatible with the Chinese worldview and social order. Using cases from disparate sources that lacked a precise chronological or geographical context, he finally concluded that most Catholic rituals were “assimilated” by the Chinese to already existing practices and that their meaning was fundamentally misunderstood and altered.<sup>10</sup> His dismissive attitude toward “popular Christianity” paradoxically derived from his understanding of “true” Christian conversion as a personal act that entails a complete intellectual and spiritual adherence on the part of the individual. However, as he recognized, in China (and I would also add in early medieval Europe), Christian conversion

<sup>10</sup> Gernet had expertise in the socio-economic history of Buddhism and in Chinese intellectual history, but in his landmark 1982 book *Chine et christianisme. Action et réaction* (English edition, Gernet 1985, entitled *China and the Christian Impact*) he did not choose to engage in a social history of Christianity, but mainly reacted to the partly hagiographic missiological literature by privileging the point of view of seventeenth-century anti-Christian Chinese literature. See Gernet 1982. For a recent critique of Gernet’s position, see Hart 1999.

was often not an individual affair, but a collective endeavor that included one's family or village. Gernet did not see that the communal conversion of Chinese families, occasionally triggered by a miraculous healing, was in fact often just the first step in the transformation of Christianity into a family tradition that sometimes extended to an entire Christian local community, generation after generation. Over time, instruction by missionaries and by trained catechists solidified among such families the understanding of the more basic Christian theological elements that stood behind sacraments and devotions (such as the connection between eternal damnation and confession of sins). Such knowledge became part of the family heritage and was passed on. While, as Gernet noted, previous religious sensibilities certainly favored the smooth adoption of Christian practices, there is no reason to reject the idea that peculiarly Christian rituals and concepts could be understood and accepted by these communities.

This is in essence the position taken by Erik Zürcher, who has deepened our understanding of Christianity as a communal religion and not simply as the result of individual conversions. He can be seen as indirectly engaging the larger literature on lay Buddhist groups inspired by C.K. Yang's sociology of religion, and his vision has been recently included and expanded in the

*Handbook of Christianity in China* (2001) edited by his students, Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink. Mainly using records produced in late Ming Fujian, Zürcher has offered a "model" of Christian life more integrated in the local social and religious landscape. While he sees some Christian rituals and religious practices as typically Christian, others were "cross-cultural hybrids," in the sense that they shared both Christian and Chinese indigenous roots.<sup>11</sup> Zürcher, for example, has researched an extant rare collection of Christian miracle stories (*Lixiu yijian* 勵修一鑑), identifying a series of concerns that loomed prominently in the religious experience of Fujianese converts: exorcism of evil powers, cases of miraculous healing, supernatural rescue from worldly disasters, strange qualities of auspicious objects, supernatural revelation of texts, and revival from temporary death.<sup>12</sup> Many of these concerns and phenomena were and are still common in Chinese popular religion. Moreover, preoccupations with personal salvation and the afterlife, although based on different ontological and theological models, were shared by Christians and lay Buddhist practitioners. These characteristics of "popular Christianity" have led Zürcher to qualify it as "an

<sup>11</sup> Zürcher 1997, p. 638.

<sup>12</sup> Zürcher 1985; cf. also Boin 1984; Standaert 1993.

indigenous complex of beliefs and practices that was only marginally controlled by the foreign missionaries, and that by its amalgamation with popular 'heterodox' cults and rituals easily could become the target of suspicion and repression [by the government]."<sup>13</sup> This characterization has the merit of seeing these practices not as misunderstood forms of Catholic rituals like Gernet did, but as a Chinese form of Christianity. However, such a vision separates the priests from the converts too starkly, and ends up disjoining doctrine from practice, and elite from popular.

### The Trouble with "Popular Christianity"

When Zürcher tried to bring together in his essay "Confucian and Christian Religiosity in Late Ming China" (1997) what he called the two faces of Christianity, i.e. "Confucian monotheism" and ritual-devotional practices, he encountered a fundamental "contradiction." He concluded that in an elite environment the doctrinal and the ritual-devotional "faces" were incompatible: "As a doctrine, expressed at a high level of philosophical and theological articulation, [Christianity] could act as a 'complement

<sup>13</sup> Zürcher 1985, p. 373.

to Confucianism'; as a religion it was bound to show close analogies to precisely those indigenous beliefs and practices which [the Jesuits, the Chinese state and most literati] rejected as superstitious."<sup>14</sup> In the same essay, however, Zürcher also conceded that "the modern reader is tempted to view [Christian] beliefs and practices [dealing with the supernatural] as characteristic of popular, non-elite Christianity, but that would be quite wrong. Also on the level of Christian literati, the supernatural and the miraculous were fully accepted."<sup>15</sup> If to this we add that the missionaries themselves shared with most Chinese literati and commoners many of the same presumptions about the supernatural world, then we will come to the conclusion that no clear-cut boundary between popular and elite religiosity can be sharply drawn, a conundrum that has been at the core of much discussion in the study of religion for decades.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Zürcher 1997, p. 650.

<sup>15</sup> Zürcher 1997, p. 643.

<sup>16</sup> The use of "popular" applied to religion has been and continues to be a contentious issue, both in the study of pre-modern Europe and China. I have summarized the debate up to the mid 1990s in Menegon 1995; see also Stephen Teiser's "The Problem of Popular Religion," in Lopez 1996, pp. 21-25. Recent scholarship has pointed out that Chinese elites and masses at least since the Song period shared common beliefs in the supernatural, although different social groups saw gods and their symbols in different ways; see e.g. Davis 2001 on the Song period; Chan 1993, Katz 1995, Guo 2003 and 2005, and many others, on the late imperial period.

This dichotomy between elite and popular is in many respects determined by our modern outlook. An essay by Richard Madsen (2001) on the topic of “folk Christianity” is an example of how contemporary sociological categories can lead to this false dichotomization. Madsen defines today’s Catholicism in rural China as a “localized folk religion,” and projects this view to the past history of Catholicism in China. Although he does not define what “folk Christianity” is, his essay implies that it is the religion of rural, non-elite Chinese Christians. Moreover, it is characterized by “heterodox” beliefs and practices—that is heterodox from the point of view of Catholic orthodoxy—, including use of healing rituals, belief in miracles, visions and apparitions and the like. His point is acceptable with qualification for contemporary society, since today the world of religious devotion and miracles has faded away in urban areas (where more educated people live), while remaining stronger in the countryside (where a larger percentage of people is illiterate or semi-literate, and bound by “traditional values”).<sup>17</sup> However, when applied to the pre-modern period, this division becomes untenable. Missionaries going to China and

<sup>17</sup> In fact, even in contemporary Chinese society this dichotomy has limited validity. The famous *Falun Dafa* 法輪大法 movement, for example, is associated with ritual healing, but is a typical urban movement, and its practitioners are in general educated.

administering to local communities (and this applies to the Jesuits as well as members of other religious orders and congregations) shared with their flocks a strong belief in the presence of the supernatural in daily life and employed Catholic rituals and devotions to tackle such presence. But Madsen sees state and elite antagonism in China as the major factors in the transformation of Catholicism into a “folk religion.” He plainly states that “[i]t is a maxim in sociology that people often become what they are socially labeled.”<sup>18</sup> He adds that once the Confucian state labeled Catholics as heterodox in the Ming-Qing period, they had no choice but to develop those Catholic elements that corresponded to the religious traditions (e.g. lay Buddhist groups) censored by the guardians of Confucian orthodoxy. Madsen concludes:

If Chinese Catholics had been able to define themselves as belonging to the orthodox part of the Chinese cultural classification system, they would probably have emphasized the more rational parts of the Catholic tradition, for instance Thomistic teachings about how virtues can be cultivated with the aid of grace within the principles of natural law. [Instead] Chinese Catholics

<sup>18</sup> Madsen 2001, p. 240.

picked and chose parts of their tradition that made their beliefs similar in structure to those of heterodox folk-Buddhism.<sup>19</sup>

This statement ignores that most Chinese Catholics, even when Christianity was *not* a forbidden religion, practiced so-called “folk” rituals and devotions that were integral to the European matrix of contemporary Catholicism. Existing religious sensibilities like those made commonplace by lay Buddhist groups made Catholic rituals and devotions appealing to Chinese converts. It would be incorrect to think that Catholicism as a practiced religion in the early modern period could stand devoid of beliefs in the supernatural and of the ritual and devotional practices identified by Madsen as “folk.” These beliefs and practices were central to Catholicism as a practiced religion. Catholicism came to China in a single “package,” including *both* its doctrinal and devotional elements. The large majority of converts as well as the priests shared a common stock of beliefs and practiced the

same rituals and devotions. Therefore, terms like “popular Christianity” or “folk Christianity” turn out to be slippery concepts, and this may require an alternative terminology that better reflects the historical reality.

### From “Popular Christianity” to “Localized Christianity”

The most recent and innovative research on what we can provisionally continue to call “popular Christianity” shows that rituals, devotions, and beliefs in the same set of supernatural realities were shared by Chinese converts in different social groups, who belonged to the same Christian community (*christianitas*).<sup>20</sup> Rather than to focus on a concept such as “popular/folk Christianity,” it might be more fruitful to approach the practices and beliefs listed above in terms of “local community.” This emphasis shifts the attention away from the

<sup>19</sup> Madsen 2001, p. 243.

<sup>20</sup> The Latin concept of *christianitas* (in Spanish *crístiandad*) indicates a group of people sharing the same Christian faith. It also indicates the physical locales with a church or missionary residence; see Standaert 2001, pp. 536-37.

broad elite/popular dichotomy and focuses instead on locality.<sup>21</sup> This interpretive move addresses an important characteristic of Christianity in China, that is, its embedment in kinship and a discrete locale.

Recently, Hubert Seiwert (2003) has employed the notion of “cultural system” and of Foucaultian “discourse” to dissolve the dichotomy between popular and elite in the study of popular religious sects in China. He correctly observes that “[t]o belong to the social milieu of the powerful, rich, and educated does not exclude participation in popular culture... Popular religion penetrated all layers of society.” (493) He adds that a fluid transition characterized popular religion, and that “floating symbols” assured the survival of this “popular” cultural system outside official and elite control. His approach is extremely useful, yet, I would say, it is best applied to the regional and

<sup>21</sup> In William Christian’s view, “folk” religion is in fact “local” rural religion, and provides people with “ways to deal with the local natural and social world, as well as the wider social, economic, and political network of which they are part”; see the entry “Folk Religion. An Overview” by Christian in Eliade et al. 1987, vol. 5, p. 371. Such an approach has been used by Christian (1981) and more recently by William Taylor (1996), who both adopt the concept of “local religion” when describing the kind of Christianity found in rural sixteenth century Spain and eighteenth century Mexico, respectively. Taylor offers a summary of the state of scholarship on this topic (“Issues of Local Religion”) in Taylor 1996, pp. 47-73.

empire-wide networks of “sectarians” he studies. These “sectarians” belonged to different social and cultural milieus, yet shared a common symbolic repertoire, including elements that we like to define as belonging to both “elite” and “popular.” The horizontal ties among disciples and with a master, rather than the vertical kinship ties, strongly defined these heterodox communities. Christianity had obviously also such a regional and empire-wide (even global!) reach, and had a stock of symbols proper to its own tradition, but in the Chinese countryside the survival of Christian practices and beliefs was guaranteed by kinship networks at the local level, rather than by looser supra-regional networks. The Christian communities of China did connect in a larger “cultural and symbolic system,” competing but also accommodating with existing Chinese cultural systems, yet at the basic level they found strength, even during periods of official suppression, in localized kinship ties. Thus, the ultimate glue in many Christian communities was the family.

Yet, when thinking “local” we have to resist the temptation to generalize: each region of China produced different forms of Christian communities (some more cohesive than others), that reflected local social arrangements, as observed by Lars Laaman (2000). Precisely because Christian communities experienced a

diverse range of historical developments linked to their local contexts, in my own recent research I have employed two concepts to account for these differences: “localization of Christianity” and “localized Christianity.” “Localization of Christianity” describes the historical process through which peculiarly Christian *practices* (e.g. rituals; prayers; uses of religious symbols) and *values* (e.g. perpetual virginity, celibacy, anti-idolatric attitudes) imported by foreign missionaries became part of the daily religious and social experience of Chinese Christians living in a specific place during the Ming and Qing periods. “Localized Christianity” in turn describes the object of this process, and it mainly indicates a community of people performing Christian rituals and adhering to some rules of conduct influenced by Christian values in a local context, rather than a reified religious system.<sup>22</sup> This focus on the

locale does not entail an erasure of social stratification in the community. However, it counters the tendency to privilege the high elite arenas (sojourning officials; higher-degree holders; imperial court) over local actors, including not only lower social strata (commoners), but also the lower fringes of the local elites. Such an approach also highlights the singular historical experience of each locale.<sup>23</sup>

Zürcher’s recently revised definition of Christianity at the level of the lower gentry and of the popular masses appropriately describes the social gamut of a local *christianitas*: “a minority religion practiced in small communities of largely illiterate or semi-literate believers.”<sup>24</sup> Literacy is, to a certain extent, the discriminating factor, and it closely follows social stratification. Most members of the Christian communities were illiterate or had

<sup>22</sup> There is a vast literature on what in Chinese has been often termed *bentuhua* 本土化 translated as “indigenization” [of Christianity]. Most of this literature stems from theological debates among Protestant scholars in China and the West. Recently, the terms “globalization” (*quanqiuhua* 全球化), “localization” (*difanghua* 地方化) and “glocalization” (*quanqiu-difanghua* 全球地方化) have been employed to describe the contemporary articulation and opposition between global capitalism and cultural messages on the one hand, and the local dimension on the other hand. Most recently Lozada (2001) has applied the concept of localization to a contemporary Catholic community in Guangdong. However, since my own perspective is not theological, and since I am dealing with the pre-modern historical context, here I employ the term “localization” in its etymological and simplest meaning of “making something local.” For an

overview of the literature on globalization/localization and its implications for Christian-Chinese theology and the history of Christian theology in China, see Pan 2001; cf. also Laaman 2000, chapter 2, where the focus is more on “inculturation,” a concept sanctioned in Catholic theology.

<sup>23</sup> My discussion here concerns the Catholic missions in the period before the Opium Wars. I am aware that recent studies touching on the topic of Christianity in specific locales in the nineteenth century already exist. With few exceptions (e.g. Wiest 1982), however, such studies are mainly interested in the reaction of the state and the local power structures to Christian activities, and not so much in the internal developments of the communities. For examples, see Bays 1996, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> See Standaert 2001, p. 634.



a minimal knowledge of characters. They were farmers (of varying degrees of prosperity), small businessmen, artisans and their family members, including a large percentage of women.<sup>25</sup> The label of illiterate obviously cannot be applied to the lay leaders of the communities (mainly men), who were sometimes holders of gentry lower degrees (e.g. *gongsheng*, *shengyuan*, *jiansheng* etc.), and who lived off inherited land, found occupation as schoolmasters and yamen clerks, or engaged in small businesses. Moreover, a select number of women belonged to the same lower-gentry milieu of the community leaders, and they may have had rudimentary literacy, such as the capability to read and recite texts. Nevertheless, the social position of these people at the lower fringes of the *local* elite and their conventional mental outlook did not dramatically separate them from the remainder of the community.<sup>26</sup> This social picture of the Christian community is

<sup>25</sup> See Standaert 2001, p. 391.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the intersection between literacy and class, see Johnson 1985. Johnson (p. 59) situates the classically educated/self-sufficient at the top of village society (including candidates for the *yuan* examination, i.e. *tongsheng* without a degree), and believes that the number of such men was around 10 percent of the total population in the early eighteenth century. He also observes that those in this group who did not have a degree, i.e. classically educated commoners (*gengdu* 耕讀, scholar-farmers), were more likely “to have greater sympathy for commoners than the typical gentry man had. . . . [and] more willing to listen sympathetically to, and even advocate, ideas or beliefs that were not quite respectable than full-fledged members of the gentry were, for whom

better drawn in terms of localization than in terms of a “popular-vs.-elite” dichotomy.

The definition of localized Christianity proposed here is partly inspired by some recent scholarship. Chronological “local histories” of Christianity in China have been written since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> However, while the histories by missiologists or members of religious orders in generations past have, with rare exceptions, concentrated on the ecclesiastical structure of the missions, recent works have tried to focus more on the religious and social life of the Christians themselves, and to “localize” it in the social, religious, and economic context of a region.<sup>28</sup> Besides using rare Chinese sources by converts on “popular Christianity,” this recent literature has probed the topic mainly through a critical reading of missionary sources and

even the appearance of dissent from orthodox values could have had extremely serious consequences” (p. 61). My research on Christian converts in Mindong shows that even lower-degree holders in fact could share the same attitude towards “not quite respectable ideas and beliefs” attributed by Johnson’s to scholar-farmers. This, however, does not mean that they harbored rebellious ideas. As evinced from Zürcher’s study of Fujianese lower degree Christians, “their mental outlook must have been rather conventional. . . . [and] nothing suggests that they took part in the intellectual and philosophical debates that were held in high intellectual circles”; see Standaert 2001, p. 635.

<sup>27</sup> For a list of such histories, see Standaert 2001, pp. 573-574.

<sup>28</sup> The Standaert 2001, pp. 534-575, now offers a summary of the scholarship on local communities, their patterns of development, and their differences.

imperial government memorials. In addition to the studies already mentioned on Fujian (e.g. Zürcher 1985 and 1990, Menegon 1994, Dudink 1997), Western scholars have conducted research on Shandong (Tiedemann 1996; Mungello 2001), on Hangzhou (Mungello 1994), on Changshu and the Jiangnan mission (Golvers 1999; Brockey 2002), on the Sichuan mission (Entenmann 1987, 1995a; 1995b; 1996a; 1996b), and on northern China (Laaman 2000). The works of Tiedemann and Entenmann, in particular, have attempted to situate Christianity in its respective local contexts (i.e. Shandong and Sichuan). Tiedemann, for example, finds that the growth of Christianity in the late Kangxi period in Western Shandong was a result of the combination of local official malfeasance and the role of Catholic missionaries as local power brokers. Thanks to the emperor's protection of the court Jesuit missionaries, Franciscan friars in Shandong acquired enough leverage to be able to offer local converts some protection from rapacious officials, and some members of "White Lotus" groups even employed the newly acquired Catholic identity as a cover for their "heterodox" beliefs.<sup>29</sup> Entenmann, on the other hand, has attributed the flourishing of Christianity in eighteenth-century Sichuan to the situation of that recently settled province as a

<sup>29</sup> Tiedemann 1996, pp. 274-275.

"frontier society," which was relatively free from official control, and where kinship networks were fragmented due to the immigrants' fresh arrival in the region. The fellowship offered by heterodox religions, including White Lotus traditions and Christianity, was thus important in providing these deracinated immigrants with a sense of community.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the historical experience of different Christian communities varied according to local circumstances. Among Western scholars, Entenmann has offered the most integral picture of a cluster of regional communities, their organization and social composition, although the limits of space imposed by his short articles and the kind of sources employed have so far only allowed him to outline the social and religious dimension of Sichuan Christianity in broad strokes.<sup>31</sup> One of the major insights of Entenmann's research (which was inspired by Bays 1982) is the recognition that once a Christian community was established in a locale it tended to survive as a tolerated part of the local religious landscape over long stretches of time (in most cases up to today), in spite of

<sup>30</sup> Entenmann 1995b, pp. 149-150.

<sup>31</sup> For a summary of his research, see Entenmann 1996a. An early and rather exceptional example of a more "contextualized" history of a regional mission (Shanxi) is Margiotti 1958.

periodic government suppression.<sup>32</sup> Entenmann, and especially Laaman (2000) have also suggested how pre-existing religious traditions (especially lay Buddhism) were important in making Christianity an accepted fixture of local religious life. Finally, Brockey's (2002) exploration of seventeenth-century Jesuit lay institutions in Jiangnan has shown the importance of European-style confraternities in offering a standardized religious instruction and in shifting religious responsibilities to local leaders, a possible factor in the resilience of this region's communities in the eighteenth century.

Chinese scholars both in the People's Republic of China and in Taiwan have focused on detailed examinations of the life of some missionaries or converts in a specific province, and on the reactions of Chinese literati and officialdom in local contexts and at the central level. Fujian and the mission of Giulio Aleni, for

<sup>32</sup> Although others had sporadically commented on this phenomenon, Entenmann has stated it most clearly in recent years. See Entenmann 1996a, especially p. 23, where he concludes: "By the mid-eighteenth century Catholicism had become a popular religion with roots in Chinese society. The foreign provenance of the religion did not seem particularly important to its adherents, their neighbors, or even the authorities. . . . Chinese Catholics usually lived in peace with their non-Christian neighbors. When conflict arose between them, the Catholics' membership in an illegal religion gave their adversaries an advantage in the dispute. Yet such strife was generally caused not by religious differences but merely reflected the ordinary economic and social conflicts of eighteenth-century China."

example, have been an object of research by Lin Jinshui (Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou) and his student Zhang Xianqing (Xiamen University). Huang Yi-long (Tsinghua University, Taiwan) has studied the Han brothers and the Christian community of Jiangzhou in Shanxi, and the creation of a "Confucian-Christian" moral synthesis at the local level.<sup>33</sup> Ma Zhao (formerly at the Institute of Qing History, Renmin University, Beijing, now at Johns Hopkins University) has worked on patterns of official control of Christianity in the early to mid-Qing period, using archival sources and selecting certain regions as representative of local specificities in the development of Christian institutions and Qing bureaucratic response (Ma 1998, 1999a and 1999b). This innovative Chinese scholarship has mainly concentrated on the reaction of local society (e.g. lineages) to Christian activities, on official control, or on the life of rural missionaries and Christian literati and other converts, and paid less attention to the *internal* life of local Christian communities, including the areas of religious fellowship and ritual.

At a scholarly conference in Beijing (2001), however,

<sup>33</sup> Lin 1992, 1994, 1996; Lin and Wu 1994; Huang 1996; Zhang 1999. Johan van Mechelen (K.U. Leuven) has spent several years collecting materials on the Shanxi late Ming communities, but only a fraction of his work has been presented in scholarly circles.

research by Mainland scholars showed a shift towards the study of rural Christian communities in Fujian and Hubei, and a greater attention to the dimensions of local social and cultural history. The selected proceedings of that meeting have been published in 2005.<sup>34</sup> The same trend was visible in some research presented at the 8th International Symposium of the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation in Leuven, Belgium (September 2004), centering on the experience of lay Christians and the Chinese clergy.

Finally, the publication in 2004 of a new collection of primary sources from the Qing archives on the history of pre-Opium War Christianity (*Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'an guan* 2004), as well as a collection of Chinese materials from the Jesuit Archives in Rome (Standaert and Dudink 2002; cf. also Chan 2002) are offering to scholars new materials to explore the life of local communities and their rituality, and to clarify the history of the transition from early modern to modern Chinese Christianity between the end of the eighteenth century and the second half of the nineteenth century.

### Christianity as Localized Chinese Religion:

<sup>34</sup> See Kang 2001 (not included in proceedings) and Zhang 2005.

### Recent Case Studies and Work in Progress

This assessment of recent literature reveals that we have just begun to address the localization of Christianity in late imperial China in its social and religious dimensions.<sup>35</sup> So far, literature on local communities has either focused on offering a relatively abstract “model” of the development of Christianity in the late Ming (e.g. Zürcher 1997), or has covered a large terrain, and offered historical narrative and some sociological analysis (e.g. Entenmann on Qing Sichuan or Laaman on north China).

An acceleration in the study of local communities, their ritual-devotional life, and their geographic and social contexts, however, is under way. This new work recognizes and evaluates the diversity of local communities. The Sichuan mission described by Entenmann or the cases of extreme syncretism between Christianity and other local religions in isolated Christian communities of northern and central China discussed by Laaman present a rather different picture from the more homogenous situation of the compact Mindong mission in Fujian, for example,

<sup>35</sup> The editors of Standaert 2001, p. 636, recognize that “there is hardly any research on the topic [of popular Christianity]” (p. 636). As I discussed above, my definition of localized Christianity attempts to go beyond “popular Christianity.”

studied by Menegon, Zhang and San Roman in recent years. Only after in-depth work on local communities is accomplished, regional patterns will become more easily discernable. Some theses and dissertations under revision for publication, dissertations being developed now, as well as very recent articles and presentations at conferences show that this new trend is gathering strength.

One good example of this new "localized" approach is the recent research conducted on the Christian communities of north-eastern Fujian, also known as Mindong. In my own 2002 dissertation (Menegon 2002), I did not attempt to offer a model applicable to all Christian communities in pre-Opium War China. Rather, by taking a micro-historical approach, and combining textual study and limited fieldwork, my study of the Dominican communities of Fuan and vicinity in north-eastern Fujian between the seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth century has offered a richer, more detailed picture of the chronological development of this given community but also a depiction of the peculiarities of its sociology, its ritual and devotional practices, and its moral-ethical values. In the case of Mindong this approach is facilitated by at least three main factors. First, the territory of the Dominican mission has historically covered the relatively small region of

Mindong, centering on the district of Fuan (today Fuan Township). This means that the social, religious, cultural, and economic environment of the region is relatively homogenous and that Christian records can more easily be associated with specific places, families or institutions than is possible in larger mission territories. Second, Christianity in Mindong has an uninterrupted history of almost four hundred years, and, especially in the district of Fuan, became embedded in local Christian families and lineages over many generations. Moreover, except for brief periods, these communities never lacked priests. Therefore the process of localization is particularly evident and can be observed in fine detail and chronological perspective. Third, this mission happens to be well documented. From the 1630s to the late 1940s, foreign and Chinese Dominican priests regularly sent reports on the state of their communities to the headquarters of the Province of the Holy Rosary located in Manila. Today, a large quantity of these reports is preserved in the Archives of the Province (Archivo de la Provincia del Santo Rosario, APSR) as well as in European archives, and a portion of them has been published in the works of José Maria González OP.<sup>36</sup> Complemented by other sources (e.g.

<sup>36</sup> In my dissertation I used unpublished documents from the APSR, as well as sources published in two multi-volume works by González: *Historia de las misiones dominicanas de China*, 5 volumes (González 1955-67, which covers the

Qing dynasty documents preserved in the First Historical Archives of China [Beijing] and in the National Palace Museum [Taipei]; gazetteers; genealogies), these records offer a multifaceted picture of Christian activities in this region of Fujian.<sup>37</sup> My project is chronologically limited to the period between the arrival of the Dominicans in the early 1630s, and the 1860s, when the implementation of the unequal treaties allowed missionaries to gain free access to the Chinese hinterland, and to purchase properties therein, thus dramatically changing the dynamics of power between the Christian communities and local society at large. The dissertation is being revised for publication but some of

period 1630-1950); and *Misiones dominicanas de China, 1700-1750*, 2 volumes (González 1952-58).

<sup>37</sup> Besides the sources I mentioned, local "parish" records regarding the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were left in Mindong by expelled missionaries in the early 1950s, and later on Communist authorities produced additional records during anti-Christian rectification campaigns. Such documents are today preserved in county and regional archives in Mindong. However, until very recently researchers have not been allowed to use them. Due to tensions between state authorities and local Catholics belonging to the "underground" Catholic church faithful to the Vatican, foreign researchers are not welcome in Mindong, and my own two fieldtrips there (mainly in Fuan and surrounding villages, 1996 and 1997) were very brief and closely monitored by officials. On my second trip I was assisted by Dr. Zhang Xianqing (then of Fujian Normal University, and now at Xiamen University) who could on that occasion make a preliminary survey of the local situation in preparation for his doctoral work. In 2001 Dr. Zhang was given access to local archives in Fuan and subsequently conducted fieldwork in the region for the writing of his dissertation.

its findings have been already published in a series of articles (Menegon 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005).

A complementary look at the Mindong Christian communities is presented in the 2003 dissertation of Zhang Xianqing (Zhang 2003; cf. also Zhang 2005), a researcher at the Institute of Anthropology of Xiamen University, with training both in history and anthropological methods, Zhang, besides using Chinese imperial archival documents and Western-language histories of the mission, has also conducted fieldwork in Mindong, and gathered rich local materials (e.g. genealogies, local publications, local archival sources etc.) as well as interviewed local Christians. His work, being revised into a monograph, shows the concrete workings of the "localization" of Christian practices and values within lineages, according to different patterns closely linked to lineage structures. Zhang illustrates how pre-existing lineage rituals and values were adapted to Catholicism and its rites, and proves that "Catholic lineages" co-existed with traditional lineages (Zhang 2003, 2005). Zhang (2003, p. 237) mentions the theoretical frameworks used by other scholars in recent years to study the development of Christianity in late imperial times, such as indigenization 本土化, popularization /folk religion 民間化, localization 地方化, and acculturation/inculturation 文化適應,

but does not adopt any of them, since his vantage point is the local lineage, rather than the Christian local community.

Yet another point of view on the Mindong mission is offered in the doctoral thesis in missiology by Miguel Ángel San Roman O.P. (2000), where the focus is rather on the pastoral-theological dimension of the life of the laity during the late Ming period. San Roman, in particular, examines the creation of different categories of lay Christians at the beginning of the mission (catechists, servants, tertiaries and *beatas*), and the biographies-hagiographies of a number of local Christian men and women.

Continuities with the kind of beliefs and practices seen in the late imperial local Catholic communities such as those of Mindong are uncovered in a number of recent anthropological and sociological works on modern and contemporary Catholicism. Madsen (1998), for example, has offered a general interpretation of Catholicism in the northern region around Tianjin, pointing to the importance of local community and family as the strongholds of the faith in the countryside since late imperial times (see his chapter 2, "Community and Solidarity"). Sweeten (2001) has shown that Christians in nineteenth-century Jiangxi were part and parcel of local society and that "conversion to Catholicism or Protestantism did not remove converts from the Chinese context,

be it a legal or social one. ... ..[M]any Chinese Catholics remained in close contact with non-Catholic kith and kin." (Sweeten 2001, 39). Lozada (2001)'s anthropological study of a contemporary Catholic village in Guangdong has described local rituals dating back to the early days of the mission, and has shown a contemporary version of Catholic "localization" within today's globalized world (see his chapter 1, "Being Local in a Global World"). Wang Xiaqing's doctoral dissertation in sociology (2004) has concentrated on a Catholic village in the Baoding region of Hebei, and combined sociological methods, ethnographic interviews and some historical research to understand the relationship between local culture and Catholicism, and their interdependence. Again, here the concept of "locality" emerges as a key to understand the resilience of Catholicism. Finally, Joseph Lee's study of late nineteenth-century Protestant communities in the Chaozhou region of Guangdong (Lee 2003) has reiterated the importance of locality and lineage in understanding the dynamics of conversion and community-building, as well as of conflict and violence.

This research, as well as other work in progress will extend our understanding of Christian communitarian life to other local contexts of the empire. Ms. Huang Xiaojuan (Ph.D. candidate,

Princeton University), for example, is completing a dissertation on nineteenth century Jiangnan Catholic communities under the guidance of Professor Susan Naquin.<sup>38</sup> Prof. Henrietta Harrison (University of Leeds, UK) is working on Catholic communities in north-central Shanxi between the early nineteenth century and the 1950s. Moreover, more studies on Christian liturgy and ritual, including devotionality and artistic aspects of rituality, are in the making. For example, a choice of papers on Christian rituality in late imperial times presented at an international workshop in Leuven (June 2004) will be serially published in a new monograph series by *Monumenta Serica*. The first volume of this series contains three extensive essays by Erik Zürcher, Liam Brockey, and Eugenio Menegon on the concept of sin and the sacrament of confession in the China mission, and should appear in 2006-2007. Another outcome of the same workshop is a study of Christian funerals in 17<sup>th</sup> century China being prepared by Nicolas Standaert. All these studies try to contextualize Christian practices within a precise historical and geographical framework.

<sup>38</sup> On the Jiangnan Christians in the early nineteenth century see also Mungello 2005.

## Conclusion

The growing interest and research on local communities is finally revealing in richer detail what scholars had been commenting in general terms for a long time, i.e. the importance of the village community and of the family in the rural context of Chinese Christianity. This seems to have been particularly true for Catholicism since the seventeenth century, but reflects also the reality of rural Protestant communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Owen Lattimore so described a Catholic village in the 1920s: "The Catholics begin with the land, which is the heart of the Chinese people, and aim less at the soul of the individual than at the life of the community. The principle seems to be that if you build up a Catholic community, family by family, grounded on the Church, instead of gathering a lot of stray sheep, here a son and there a brother and there a grandmother, then the individual in the community will have the same chances of Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory as the individual in a Catholic community in Europe or America."<sup>39</sup> This general observation was valid not just for the early twentieth century, but also for

<sup>39</sup> From Owen Lattimore, *High Tartary*, 1930, as quoted in Madsen 1998, pp. 50-51.



earlier times.

The interest in localization and kinship, however, is not just a shift internal to the field of Christianity-in-China. Rather, it should be seen within a larger movement to historiographically position Christianity within the broader field of research on “Chinese religion.” The most innovative scholars, in other words, are attempting to break away from a history centered on foreign missionaries, perceived by most China scholars as tainted by imperialism and “foreignness,” and move towards a history of Chinese Christians as fully *Chinese* historical subjects in late imperial and modern times. Christian communities thrived, but also frequently encountered opposition and dwindled, within the structures of traditional Chinese society, and included in their ranks people of several classes. This process of historiographical “normalization” seems indeed to better reflect the historical record, at least for the countryside and the period before the Opium-War (but even beyond it, as new scholarship shows).

Another important, broader historiographical shift is the association of Christianity with “heterodox religions.” This label is obviously elite- and state-imposed, but it has its merits. By clustering Christianity with other religious traditions, the label encapsulates what empirical research is indeed showing: that Christianity had a ritual and even magic appeal among the Chinese

similar to that of other traditions. While not entirely new (de Groot was the first to make the association of Christianity with “sects” in his *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution* in 1903), the idea that Christians are simply another heterodox group in the eyes of the Chinese state and elites makes them more similar to existing “popular religions” than the missionary tradition would have wanted. Ironically, especially in Mainland China, the study of Christianity is often conducted in institutes that isolate the “Great Traditions” from the lived religious traditions of the countryside, reproducing the theological and doctrinal differences created by clerics and state. But those theological and administrative distinctions become less important when we observe exorcisms, healing, miracles and the like, as experienced by local people. Christianity can then be seen as yet another “heterodox” group that, in its own peculiar ways, straddled the divide between family ethics and rituals in the “Confucian tradition,” and sectarian beliefs and rites forbidden by the state.

The emerging study of the liturgy, devotionality and socio-ritual life of late imperial Christian communities is helping refine this picture of Christianity as part of the Chinese religious landscape. This research, still in its initial stage, is already revealing subtle transformations of Christian rituals to suit local needs, but also shows how local Chinese were attracted to

Christian rituals in their Counter-Reformation form. This suggests that the religious experience of Chinese Christians in local contexts was shaped by a constant negotiation among Chinese cultural imperatives *in the plural* (including Confucian ones, but also “heterodox” ones, like needs for exorcism and healing), Christian liturgical and theological imperatives imposed by missionaries and church policies, and Christian ritual and devotional elements, congruent with existing needs and religious traditions, and thus attractive for the Chinese. Christian religious experience in China’s regional cultures should be seen as a balancing act within this tension among diverse elements.

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