

ANCESTORS,
VIRGINS,
& FRIARS
*Christianity as a
Local Religion in
Late Imperial China*

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Eugenio Menegon

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To my fathers:
Florio, Ed, and Fred

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E.M.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

For complete bibliographic data on the works cited below, see the Bibliography, pp. 385–425.

- AMEP Archives du Séminaire des Missions Étrangères de Paris (Archives of the Seminary of the Society of Foreign Missions, Paris)
- APF Archivio Storico della Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli o *de Propaganda Fide*
- APSR Archivo de la Provincia del Santo Rosario (Archives of the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary, Manila and Avila)
- ARSI Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus)
- CE Herbermann et al., eds., 1913–22, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.
- CHOC *The Cambridge History of China*, 1978–2009.
- CCT ARSI Standaert and Dudink, eds., 2002, *Yesuhui Luoma dang'anguan Ming-Qing Tianzhujiào wénxiàn—Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*.

- DMB Goodrich and Fang, eds., 1976, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*.
- ECCP Hummel, ed., 1943–44, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*.
- FAXZ *Fuan xianzhi* ([Guangxu] Gazetteer of Fuan county), 1986.
- GH González, 1955–67, *Historia de las misiones dominicanas de China*, 5 vols.
- GM González, 1952–58, *Misiones dominicanas de China (1700–1750)*, 2 vols.
- HCC Standaert, ed., 2001, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, vol. 1, 635–1800.
- MEP Missions Étrangères de Paris (Society of Foreign Missions, Paris)
- OP Ordo Praedicatorum (Order of Preachers = Dominicans)
- OFM Ordo Fratrum Minorum (Order of the Friars Minor = Franciscans)
- PXJ Xu Changzhi, 1986, *Shengchao poxie ji* (1640).
- QTS *Qing zhong qianqi Xiyang Tianzhujiào zai Hua huodong dang'an shiliao* (Historical materials on Catholic activities in China in the early Qing), 2003.
- RH Riccio, 1667, “Hechos de la Orden de Predicadores en el Imperio de la China.”
- SF *Sinica Franciscana*, 1933–97, 11 vols.
- SJ Societas Jesu (Society of Jesus = Jesuits)
- SOCG *Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali* (Original documents referred to in the general meetings), in APF.
- YQTW Wu Min and Han Qi, eds., 2008, *Ouzhou suocang Yongzheng Qianlong chao Tianzhujiào wenxian huibian* (A collection of Yongzheng- and Qianlong-era [Chinese-language] documents on Catholicism preserved in Europe).

- YZH *Yongzheng chao Hanwen zhupi zouzhe huibian* (A compilation of Chinese-language vermilion-rescripted memorials from the Yongzheng era). 1989.
- YZM *Yongzheng chao Manwen zhupi zouzhe quan yi* 雍正朝滿文硃批奏摺全譯 (A complete translation of the Manchu-language vermilion-rescripted memorials from the Yongzheng era). 1998.

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INTRODUCTION

“Truly Unfathomable”?

Throughout 1746, the eleventh year of the Qianlong reign of the Qing dynasty, baffled provincial officials in the southern province of Fujian reported to Beijing the strange and, in their words, “truly unfathomable” activities of a handful of Western missionaries and their numerous Chinese followers. Officials had discovered that in Fuan 福安 county adherents of the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven, or Tianzhujiao 天主教, as “Catholicism” is still translated into Chinese, had for decades been secretly sheltering Spanish priests in their homes. In 1724 the Yongzheng emperor had forbidden Christian activities, and yet, in Fuan, some of the culprits were degree-holders, young unmarried women from respectable families, and even low-ranking employees in local government offices. The authorities promptly sent troops, who raided the county and arrested five foreigners and a score of their Chinese followers. To add to the shock, the provincial surveillance commissioner reported to his superiors that when the foreigners and the most prominent native leaders of the Christian community were being transferred in chains for trial in the provincial capital of Fuzhou, over a thousand men and women gathered at the town gates, “grabbing the carts [of the prisoners] and crying aloud” in support of the detainees. To the officials’ horror, one of the captives, an elderly local degree-holder, shouted: “We are suffering for the Lord of Heaven, and even if we die we will not regret it!” This appalling behavior confirmed an earlier report offered by the local prefect: “[In this place] the bad custom of female virginity

thrives. . . . [These Christians] do not recognize the ancestors, do not believe in the gods, and consider their parents as mere vessels for birth, and the foreigners as their 'great fathers.' . . . Alas, the onslaught against the [Five] Relationships and the damage to civilization are unbearable!" Missionary sources confirm that local Christians had indeed burned effigies of gods, abandoned ancestral rituals, and even destroyed their ancestral tablets, a capital crime in the Qing legal code. Moreover, most of the arrested women, in spite of their elite background, had upset the order of orthodox social relations. Rather than marry, they had chosen to remain virgins in order to better serve the Lord of Heaven.¹

These rebellious acts stemmed in part from the religious teachings the converts had absorbed from their Spanish priests. These priests were Dominican friars of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary, headquartered in the Philippines, who had first reached Fuan in the 1630s. The Dominicans' adamant opposition to ancestral rituals among Christians and their admission of women into their lay branch, the Third Order, challenged two crucial pillars of the patriarchal kinship system: veneration of ancestors and the subordinate social status of women.

The 1746 Fuan incident could have been an eruption from a religious group on its way to annihilation. But the history of Tianzhujiao in Fujian puts this incident in a rather different light. Over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Catholic communities first established in the region of Fuan in the 1630s survived this and several other anti-Christian campaigns conducted by the imperial state. More recently, they have weathered the frequent political campaigns of the Maoist era and are now a constituent of regional religious life. As of 1990, the year of the last official population survey, 45,386 Catholics in Fuan township, or 8.56 percent of the total population of 530,069, lived in eighteen locales within the township and represented around 20 percent of all Catholics in Fujian province. According to statistics of the

1. Quotations on the arrest of Christians and missionaries are from a memorial by the Fujian Provincial Surveillance Commissioner Gioro Yarhašan (Jue-luo Yar-er-ha-shan 覺羅雅爾哈善), QL 11/8/2 (Sept. 16, 1746), in *QTS*, vol. 1, doc. 68, 104; for other details on this episode, compare the memorial by Governor Zhou Xuejian 周學健, QL 11/5/28 (July 16, 1746), in *QTS*, vol. 1, doc. 58, 88. The report of Prefect Dong Qizuo 董啓祚 is preserved in *AMEP*, vol. 434, ff. 893–94 (*YQTW*, doc. 27, 60–62). The Confucian Five Relationships describe the hierarchies and duties between sovereign and official, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, and among friends.

Roman Catholic Church, in the diocese of Mindong 閩東 (northeastern Fujian), whose historical seat is Fuan, there are today over 80,000 Catholics. Many of these Christians, especially in the territory of Fuan, are descendants of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century converts. Catholicism has become a permanent fixture of the local cultural and religious landscape.²

How could a religious community that so openly defied the central institutions of Chinese patriarchal society—ancestral rituals and marriage—and promoted values challenging prevailing norms and imperial laws and policies survive for so long in the face of state opposition? How is it possible that local elites, government personnel, and women from elite families, not the marginal individuals or social discontents as some past scholarly wisdom would have us believe, made up the rank and file of this heterodox Christian community? Yet, this is what we find in the 1746 episode. By then, Catholicism, a foreign and global religion brought to China by European missionaries, had become a local religion, finding a niche within a lively world of religious groups, such as the various lay devotional sects partly inspired by Buddhism ubiquitous in late imperial times, equally suspect in the eyes of government censors and gentry critics. In the past few decades, scholars of Chinese society and religions, in particular those working on Daoism, Buddhism, lay devotional groups, and village religion have been dismantling the myth of a China fully under the spell of Confucian values enforced by state and local elites. In fact, state and elite attempts at creating an orthodox “cultural integration” and “cultural standardization” of practices and beliefs run parallel to the practices and beliefs of diverse local religious expressions, frequently heterodox and heteroprax in state and elite opinions. In the spirit of this new scholarship, this book charts the local transformation of Christianity and illustrates its importance to late imperial history.³

2. Official statistics on Fuan township (an administrative unit recently introduced and replacing the old county) from *Fuan shizhi*, 1036–37. Contemporary church statistics include Catholics in both the official, government-sponsored open church (ca. 10,000 members) and the “underground” church faithful to the Vatican (ca. 70,000 members); see “China Catholic Directory” 2006, 510, 525–31.

3. For recent critiques of the past emphasis on the Confucian model of Chinese society, see, e.g., Faure 2007 and Lagerwey 2007. These authors show how the two parallel worlds of “territorial China,” dominated by the gods, and “lineage China,” dominated by the ancestors, co-existed side by side, and how the emphasis in the

To talk of Christianity as a local religion in China, however, may sound contentious to some. Since the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1910s and 1920s, much of the literature on Christian missions in China has either praised Christianity as an agent of modernization or damned it as a form of cultural and religious imperialism. In both cases, Christianity's foreignness and the alienation it sometimes brought Chinese Christians, who were shunned by their compatriots as traitors, have long been at the center of the debate. Protected by diplomatic treaties with Western powers, Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, expanded in China after 1860 and provoked conflict in rural and urban areas. The interference of foreign missionaries in local politics and social life combined with pre-existing tensions along kinship or ethnic lines to produce hundreds of "missionary cases." Local officials had to adjudicate disputes over property and community duties (taxes and labor) between Christians and non-Christians and to endure strong pressure from the central government and the foreign diplomatic corps to protect Chinese Christians and foreign priests and pastors. Often that meant exempting converts and their churches from legal and customary obligations. Many violent outbursts resulted in the deaths of missionaries and converts, and a wave of anti-Christian sentiment pervaded all levels of society. Missions, however, contributed to the advancement of the Chinese educational and medical systems and to the scientific and technological development of the country. This view of Christianity as a foreign, modern, and aggressive faith is based on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century experience, and that experience has triggered ambiguous feelings of admiration of and loathing toward missionaries and Chinese Christians, in China and elsewhere.⁴

Modern experiences have obscured perceptions of Catholic communities in the late Ming and mid-Qing periods *before* the Opium Wars,

historical record on the lineage dimension has obfuscated the territorial dimension: "Economic changes, administrative necessities, and the neo-Confucian agenda for social engineering converged to produce what China's intellectuals and, in their wake, we in the West, thanks first to the Jesuits and last to anthropologists like [Maurice] Freedman, came to think of as China. That China . . . came into existence in the sixteenth and disappeared in the nineteenth century. If we really want to talk about 'China,' then, we will have to do better than that" (Lagerwey 2007, 473). For a recent appraisal of this shift in scholarship, see, e.g., Sutton 2007.

4. For a summary of scholarly approaches to the history of Christianity in late Qing China, covering up to 1978, see Paul Cohen's chapter "Christian Missions and Their Impact to 1900" in *CHOC*, 10.1, 543–90.

and a completely different historical context has too often been misunderstood. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Chinese government exerted full political, economic, and military dominance over Catholic missionaries and the European powers impinging on the fringes of the empire. When Catholic priests of the Society of Jesus reached the shores of southern China in the 1550s under Portuguese protection, they opened the door for the first sustained cultural and religious exchange between Europe and the Chinese empire. But they did so in a manner that was specifically developed for the Asian missions. In Japan, China, and, to a lesser degree, India, the Jesuits pioneered a method of evangelization that made use of European “secular” learning, while adapting themselves to native cultures and ideologies. The Jesuits’ introduction of some European scientific knowledge to the imperial court had a limited impact on late imperial technology and science, and virtually none on education. No “modernization” resulted from this contact. In spite of this, much of past scholarship has projected over that earlier Catholic experience a judgment about missionaries as either heralds of Western modernity or instruments of cultural and religious imperialism more applicable to the nineteenth or twentieth century.⁵

The past two decades of scholarship, however, have called into question existing interpretations of the role of Christianity in China before and after the Opium Wars. Scholars have concentrated on Chinese Christians and their interactions with missionaries and the rest of the populace in an attempt to probe the lived experience of local actors and understand their position within native society. New research on Catholic missions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on Protestantism and Catholicism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has reconstructed the experience of Chinese Christians in state-building, intellectual history, civil society, and religious activities and showed that in many locales Christians were part of broader native intellectual circles and kinship networks and thus fully integrated into the dynamics of Chinese social life.⁶

5. For a recent treatment of the late imperial reception and use of Catholic and Protestant scientific and technological knowledge and its evangelistic inflections, see Elman 2005.

6. On the shift to the study of Chinese Christians’ agency and local communities in late imperial times, see Menegon 1998a and 2005b, with references to further historiography on the topic. For an overview of new approaches in both the

An interpretation relatively unconcerned with imperialism and modernization, what is sometimes called the scholarly discourse of "Confucian Christianity," frames and further complicates the picture of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Catholic experience. The central assumption of this framework, spearheaded by European scholars such as Erik Zürcher, Nicolas Standaert, and Adrian Dudink, is that missionaries, in particular the Jesuits, had to accommodate the cultural imperatives of "Confucian orthodoxy" in order to transmit Christian doctrine, rituals, and values to the Chinese. Similarly, the only way for Christians to survive in China was to continue respecting the social norms and the rituals (*lijiao* 禮教) of the imperial institutions and the kinship system, the ultimate embodiments of Confucian orthodoxy. In this view, religious plurality could exist only as long as the basic institutions and values of the Confucian order were respected. This orthodox socio-ethical system of belief encompassed both elite and popular milieus and was based on the Three Bonds (the subordination of subject to monarch, child to parents, and wife to husband), a triad that supported state institutions and a patriarchal organization of kinship. Ancestral rituals were the central institution of orthodox socio-ethics in this 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.⁷

The corollary to this scholarly vision, strongly influenced by elite Chinese interpretations of late imperial culture and society, is that Christianity could take root in China only by becoming "Confucianized." Indeed, the strategy of early Jesuit missionaries and their converts in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries echoes this interpreta-

Catholic and the Protestant historiographical traditions, see the edited volume Bays 1996. The best and most up-to-date introduction to sources, new methodologies, and scholarship on Christianity in China before 1800 is HCC. Recent examples of the new scholarly trend focusing on native agency among Protestants are Dunch 2001 (Fujian) and Joseph Lee 2003 (Guangdong); for nineteenth-century Catholicism (Jiangxi), see Sweeten 1996 and 2001. See also Dunch 2002 for a historiographical critique of the indiscriminate use of the concept of "cultural imperialism" as applied to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Christian missions.

7. Kwang-ching Liu 1990, *passim*. These ideas, and the meaning of heterodoxy, were most systematically explored in C. K. Yang's classic *Religion in Chinese Society*; see Yang 1961, 192–217; cf. also Dudink in HCC, 504–5 for a summary of scholarly discussions of Confucian orthodoxy and its relationship to Christianity as heterodoxy.

tion. These missionaries and elite Christians embraced the main tenets of the moral system of Confucianism and supported the political order of China. The Jesuits could therefore proclaim the orthodoxy of Christianity while still distinguishing themselves from other religious traditions considered heterodox by most of the educated class. Behind this strategy lurked the hope that Christianity would eventually change those elements of the Confucian worldview deemed incompatible with Christian theology and moral practice. The Jesuits thus accepted ancestral rituals as civil and not religious ceremonies. What Christianity became in the late Ming, however, did not necessarily conform to the master plan of the missionaries. Further research has revealed that Chinese Christians transformed the teachings and practices they received from Europeans into an indigenous religious movement, with a special theological understanding informed by neo-Confucian thought.⁸

By concentrating on “Confucian Christianity” and its textual tradition, most scholars have limited their investigations to doctrinal debates among the higher echelons of literati converts and privileged the study of literati networks that extended over great distances and among elites to the neglect of local communities and commoners. Rituals and social relations in local contexts have now started to attract scholarly attention. It is becoming increasingly clear that the historical experience of Christian communities in different parts of the empire varied according to localized norms and social practices. In places like Fuan, “Confucian Christianity” and the textual world of prominent literati converts did not occupy the place of honor. Daily rituals and personal devotions did. And it is in this environment that, I argue, Christianity was fully transformed into a local Chinese religion.⁹

By examining the religion practiced among Christian commoners and local gentry in rural Fujian, my study aims to show that Christians did not necessarily practice rituals and follow social norms fully in

8. See Zürcher 1994, 33, and 1997a; and Standaert 1988, 223; cf. Mungello 1994.

9. Recent scholarship adopting the localization paradigm to study Catholic communities in late imperial times includes, e.g., Entenmann 1996a, on Sichuan; Laamann 2006, on north China; Lozada 2001, on Guangdong; Kang 2006, on Hubei; Xiaojuan Huang 2006, on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Beijing and Jiangnan; Brockey 2007, on Ming to mid-Qing Jiangnan; and Zhang Xianqing 2003a and 2009, on Ming-Qing northeastern Fujian. Recent studies of Catholic ritual practices in the seventeenth century are Standaert and Dudink 2006; and Standaert 2008.

harmony with the dominant socio-religious context. Fuan's experience, in particular, shows that one could be an accepted member of local society *and* a Christian without subscribing to the Confucianized Christianity of Jesuit communities. Chinese Christians, and especially Fuan Christians, moreover were hardly passive agents "molded" by attempts to replicate a European evangelization model on Chinese soil and create "outposts of baroque Catholicism in the vastness of China," as Liam Brockey has recently proposed. For converts, to be local and Christian in China meant creating a new religious identity, both Chinese *and* Catholic, local and yet universalistic in aspiration. This was not an easy course. The process of localization was fraught with conflict and required continuous negotiations with local society and responses to state intervention. The story of the Fuan communities starkly illuminates the confrontations and adaptations of the new local religion, as Fuan Christians challenged society over some of the central issues of social organization, including ancestral rituals, gender norms, and local religious cults. By the early eighteenth century, Fuan's Christians had succeeded in creating a niche for their values and practices in the local arena.¹⁰

At this point, however, the Qing state's energetic attempt to impose on local societies everywhere in the empire its civilizing agenda of "moral transformation" (*jiaohua* 教化; also translated as "transformation of customs through education") disrupted the life of Christian commu-

10. The expression "outposts of baroque Catholicism in the vastness of China" appears on the dust jacket of Liam Brockey's book. The introduction uses a similar phrase: "The pastoral efforts of the China Jesuits were . . . an effort in emulation [of European prototypes]. In that sense the scattered communities of Chinese Christians were vivid patches of baroque piety set in a vast and largely indifferent land" (Brockey 2007, 7). Brockey's analysis of the inner workings of the Society of Jesus in the Portuguese Assistancy and of Jesuit religious strategies in China is a great advancement in our knowledge of missionary organization in East Asia. His work also shows the importance of Jesuit lay organizations in Jiangnan and elsewhere. The focus, however, remains mostly on the missionaries, their internal structure, their educational background, and their initiatives modeled after European prototypes, and only to a limited extent on the Chinese Catholics. By covering the history of the Jesuit mission only up to 1724, moreover, Brockey's otherwise excellent book gives the impression that the Catholic church's organization and communitarian life completely collapsed after the Kangxi period, a perception that, in light of my own research, needs to be seriously reconsidered. It is precisely in the post-1724 period that localization of Christianity accelerated.

nities. As Janet Theiss puts it, this “old staple of Confucian statecraft discourse . . . acquired a distinctly paternalistic and bureaucratic cast in the eighteenth century as emperors and officials basking in the peace, prosperity, and imperial might of the High Qing formulated new ambitions for the state’s role in society.” As part of these policies, but also in response to court politics involving his father, the Kangxi emperor, his brothers, and the court Jesuits, the Yongzheng emperor forbade Christian activities in the provinces, labeling them heterodox. Fuan was the first place where the new prohibition policy was implemented in 1724.¹¹

If Christians in Fuan never fit the model of the Confucianized Jesuit communities, after 1724 they clearly belonged to the world of outlawed heterodox groups. But rather than derailing localization, the outlaw status accelerated it, forcing priests and Christians to live in close quarters to hide from authorities. This fostered a sense of tighter religious identity and nurtured the formation of native clergy who could more easily conduct a local ministry. Over long stretches of time, interrupted by episodic outbursts of state intrusion and repression, Christians continued their religious activities, gathering for prayer and for the ministrations of sacraments and carrying on the traditions of their fathers and mothers, generation after generation. Lineages, often viewed by scholars as the ultimate structures of local control, showed little concern for these activities, and in some cases embraced them. This phase in the life of Fuan Christian communities offers a fresh look at the relationship between state-backed orthodoxy and heterodoxy in late imperial times. The vantage point here is not so much that of the state, already considered by many scholars, but the local arena and the internal perspective of the Christian community. Christianity as heterodoxy inhabited the same conceptual space that the state assigned to other officially proscribed religious expressions, such as lay devotional groups inspired by Buddhist tenets. But Christianity also fit literally within a physical space of *local* religious toleration that existed below the surface of state-imposed order. As Daniel Overmyer tells us, lay devotional groups were “a lively and widespread alternative religious tradition that was always technically illegal but that nevertheless managed to flourish in many areas over long periods of time.”¹² This was certainly true in Fujian. In

11. On High Qing “civilizing” policies, see Theiss 2004, 35.

12. Overmyer 1999, 8.

spite of state suppression, by the sixteenth century lay devotional groups had spread to the province from north and eastern China and remained quite ubiquitous until the late nineteenth century. The religious field in the province was also occupied by another heterodox religious tradition, the Three-in-One Teachings (Sanyijiao 三一教), initiated by Lin Zhaoen 林兆恩 (1517–98), a native of Putian 莆田 (Xinghua 興化 prefecture) in coastal Fujian. Lin's message, which combined Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist tenets and practices, garnered broad support in the late Ming. Eventually, during the Qing and Republican eras, it grew into a large movement extending locally and transregionally and even to Southeast Asia. Despite this popularity, the founder and his followers earned condemnations as heretics and inciters of popular unrest from members of the elite and government officials. Finally, even mainstream and state-certified religious traditions, including monastic Buddhism or the cult of the canonized goddess Linshui furen 臨水夫人 (Lady of the Water Margins) popular in northern Fujian, offered heterodox models of religious behavior, such as marriage refusal and celibacy for women, that Christianity could present as legitimate possibilities for prospective converts. The same religious toleration and plurality at the local level that allowed these groups to survive and these ideas to circulate also benefited Christianity.¹³

The special interest of the Fuan Christian case derives in part from the nature of the documentary sources, which are exceptional in the history of premodern Chinese heterodox religious movements. These movements usually left few records, except for normative scriptures and confessions extorted under duress in government prisons. The internal perspective, the self-representation, and the detailed social history of these movements must be pieced together through sources penned for the most part by hostile outsiders. The voices contributing to our understanding of the Christian story are, instead, more diverse and include the perspectives of both insiders and outsiders. The internal story of the Fuan communities can be reconstructed through writings by native Christians, religious tracts, missionary reports, and family genealogies. The outsiders' picture is offered in local gazetteers, elite writings, and Qing memorials on the suppression of the communities. The sources are in most cases the products of two "civilizing projects" hovering over

13. On lay devotional groups in Fujian, see Seiwert 1992, 54, and 2003, *passim*; on Lin Zhaoen in Fujian, see Dean 1998a.

Fuan Christians: on one hand, the missionary project intent on saving souls and channeling converts into the Christian moral mold and, on the other hand, the Qing normative agenda aimed at maintaining orthodox social practices. By reading between the lines of these sources, the lived experience of local Christians, the "inner life" of the Christian community, can be understood and situated in relation to the prescriptive frameworks of church and state. What these sources ultimately yield is the story of the transformation of a foreign religion into a local religion within a pluralistic religious landscape, particularly rich and diverse in Fujian, and usually beyond the purview of central authorities.¹⁴

Chapters 2 through 5 of this book chronologically chart the process of Christianity's transformation into a local religion. Chapter 2 highlights the crucial role of local literati in bringing Catholicism to Fuan in the 1630s within the broader context of maritime China and the Spanish presence in Asia. Until then, the missionaries who had entered the Chinese empire belonged exclusively to the Jesuit order, but, in 1600, thanks to a reversal of previous papal policy, other Catholic religious groups were allowed to join them. Dominican and Franciscan friars could count both on the support of the Spanish colonial government and on the network of contacts developed in Manila within the local community of immigrants from southern Fujian. The Dominicans, in particular, heralded a "spiritual conquest" of China, whose rhetoric derived from the Spanish imperial project. After the colonial government in Manila abandoned a plan to invade China militarily in the 1580s, the Dominicans masterminded the Spanish occupation of northern Taiwan in 1626–42 for their own strategic reasons, and the island became the springboard to the Chinese mainland for the missionaries. These aggressive postures of the Spaniards in Asia and the close collaboration of the friars in their imperial enterprise were well known to

14. The best guides to the sources of the Dominican China mission, scattered in archives all over Europe and the Philippines, are two multivolume works by José María Gonzáles, GH and GM. The four-volume collection QTS contains the Qing government memorials preserved in the First Historical Archives in Beijing relevant to the history of the Christian community of Fuan. Some remaining Qing memorials on the topic are kept at the Palace Museum in Taiwan. Fuan Christian materials in Chinese and some other Qing government materials are preserved in several archives and libraries in Europe and China. Most genealogical materials are still in the hands of local lineages. For a discussion of the typology and nature of sources, see the "Note on Sources" at the end of this volume.

Chinese officials and the population of the southern littoral but did not prevent evangelization from succeeding.

Chapters 3 through 5 narrate the story of Fuan's Christian communities from 1632, the year of the first Dominican's arrival, to the late 1830s, the eve of epochal changes in modern Chinese history and in the history of Christianity in China following the signing of the Sino-Western treaties imposing the legalization of the Christian presence in China. These chapters chronicle both the internal history of the Christian communities and the reactions of local elites, local authorities, and the central government to Christian activities. Local Christians, rather than the foreign missionaries, were the key actors in the gradual entrenchment of Catholicism in the local scene. This development is charted under four main rubrics characterizing subsequent phases in the story of the community before the Opium Wars: conflict, opportunity, toleration, and suppression and persistence. The initial period of social conflict between Christians and local elites is explored in Chapter 3. A split in the Christian community between pro-Jesuit and pro-Dominican converts and a violent backlash in local society followed in quick sequence after incidents involving the friars' iconoclasm against local gods and rejection of ancestral rituals. The conflict climaxed in a government-led anti-Christian provincial campaign in 1637–38, which radicalized a few committed converts and redirected the missionaries' evangelizing efforts from literati to commoners and women. These developments earned the community a hard-core nucleus of followers that gradually expanded Christian influence into the "inner chambers," where women lived. Local elites and lineages perceived this as yet another frontal attack against the patriarchal order and reacted accordingly by accusing missionaries of predatory sexual behavior and Christians of a lack of filiality. The local establishment thus revealed its deep anxieties over gender boundaries and lineage stability. The process of penetration of Christian values and practices in the life of Fuan had started to unfold.

Chapter 4 relates the unique circumstances of a brief golden age of opportunity for local Christians during the Ming-Qing transition. This historical juncture allowed the Christian community, under the leadership of some notable literati, to emerge as a local power-holder within the Southern Ming loyalist movement of resistance to the Manchu invaders. After this fleeting moment of glory and the defeat of the Ming, the Qing establishment led to an age of toleration for Christians but

also of stronger central government control during the Shunzhi and Kangxi reigns. This injected an actor mostly ineffective in the late Ming, the state. Chapter 5 charts the intrusion of the Qing state into local society in Fuan through repression guided from the provincial capital and Beijing against the Catholic communities, by then fully embedded as a local religion and largely accepted by elites and populace alike. Rather than annihilation, however, suppression led to resistance, the creation of a native priesthood, and a sense of stronger religious identity connecting Fuan Christians even more directly with the global circuit of Catholicism as a world religion.

The picture of local toleration even during the period of suppression by the Qing state, however, should not mask the fact that some Christian beliefs and practices posed ideological challenges to local society. How do we account for the acceptance of these Christian heterodox positions in Fuan? Chapters 6 to 9 offer an in-depth examination of important territorial, social, and cultural-religious elements in the process of Christian entrenchment. They also discuss areas of conflict and negotiation over rituals and social norms. Chapter 6 analyzes the organizational and sociological dimensions of the Fuan Christian communities and argues that several pre-existing factors strongly influenced the growth of the Christian communities. These factors included the geographical layout of the land, the administrative and marketing systems of the region, and the territorial organization of lineages within a changing historical context. The other crucial factor in cementing the Christian presence after the first generation of conversions, especially in the core area of Fuan county, was the role of kinship relationships in the conversion process. By integrating themselves within the fabric of local society and especially by nesting themselves within kinship networks, Christians partially blended their values and practices with those dominating the religious and social life of late imperial Fujian. This was one of the main factors in their survival.

Social and kinship networks alone, however, would have not been sufficient to bind the Christian community of Fuan. Ritual life and religious piety made Christianity an attractive path for locals while fostering a communitarian ethos. Chapter 7 concentrates on the religious ingredients that shaped the internal life of the community: the priests, the community's lay institutions, and their common ritual activities. The rituals, devotions, and institutions of the Christian communities, administered by the priest and sustained by the laity, fulfilled local

religious longings. The Dominicans positioned themselves as experts in a vivacious and competitive religious market of "effective rituals," accommodating requests for exorcisms and cures by Christians and non-Christians alike. They thus became an accepted part of local religious life. The daily religious life of Christians, however, centered mainly on personal participation in rituals, sacraments, and devotions and not merely around occurrences of possession or disease. Novel and fascinatingly strange Christian symbols and rituals resonated with time-honored local traditions, both in communal rites like the Corpus Christi feast and in daily devotional practices like the rosary. The Third Order, the Christian virgins (*beatas*), and the confraternities offered the needed venue to empower the most devout sector of the community. Lay leaders earned the respect of their families and their social circles through their lives of devotion and penance, as well as the investment of their possessions in the construction of churches, the printing of religious tracts, and charitable activities.

Religious life was not without tension and conflict. The Dominicans tried to exert control over orthopraxy and orthodoxy through pastoral tours and letters, the disciplinary use of the sacraments, and oral and written instruction. This clerical religious dominance was sometimes challenged by local Christians: lay leaders and Christian virgins tried to establish their spiritual power independently of priestly intermediation, or they disobeyed disciplinary rules imposed by the Dominicans. Chapters 8 and 9 explore two main areas of tension with local society and within the communities and uncover the crucial fault lines in the process of localization: ancestral rituals and marriage. These two chapters ask if Catholicism was successfully co-opted by prevailing social mores, remained a simple phenomenon of "cultural resistance" to the existing order for some sectors of the local population, or provoked some restructuring of social conventions. All three processes took place to varying degrees. These processes, traced both in prescriptive texts and in practices, illustrate how values were transmitted and show the negotiations over the borders of socio-religious toleration that transformed Fuan Catholicism into a local religion. This Christianity continues to develop and adapt to changing circumstances in Fuan, as discussed in the Conclusion.

Qing officials saw Christian conversion and religious life as a "truly unfathomable" phenomenon, and many scholars still perceive Christianity as an interloper, a disturbing force in village religion, due to its loose

and sometimes antagonistic institutional connection to local socio-religious structures. However, by appreciating the fact that so-called heterodox religious groups co-existed with state-sanctioned, gentry-led village religion, we can see Christianity as just another type of local religion. I hope this book will also help to soften the prevailing attitude of cultural dichotomization between China and the West as two essentialized and incompatible entities and to encourage a view of the experience of religious exchange as a two-way road, with many Chinese and European participants in a transnational context. Let us take a cue from one of the historical actors who inhabits the pages of this study, Fujian Governor Zhou Xuejian 周學健. When he arrested missionaries and Chinese Christians in Fuan in 1746, he reported to the Qianlong emperor:

Why do [the missionaries] desire to pursue [these activities]? Their clandestine actions and their secrecy are truly unfathomable (*shi bu ke ce* 實不可測). Upon investigation of their Western customs, we found that they are similar to us Chinese in what pertains to food and the things they like. The only difference is that in order to spread their teachings, [some of them] abandon their relatives, forfeit what they like, and commit their life to their king to spread religion until they are old or they die. They hide among commoners. Some live behind false walls and others in secret underground chambers. They are not mindful about their lives, they are scornful of laws, and they absolutely have no mental qualms about it. Their obstinacy and evil are really unfathomable (*shi bu ke ce* 實不可測). Sadly, this state of things is not limited to the foreigners spreading those teachings. When they join their religion, even Chinese people end up committing their whole life without ever changing their beliefs. And it is not that only stupid villagers are behaving like this. Even government students and students by purchase (*sheng-jian* 生監) follow their teachings their whole life, without ever paying worship to the Most Holy Master [Confucius], Guandi 關帝, and all the other gods.¹⁵

In the words of the hostile governor, we recognize the major theme of this book: Christianity became a local religion, fully supported by na-

15. See *QTS*, vol. 1, doc. 75, 117. Starting in the Yongzheng period, the Qing state raised the cult of the martial god Guandi to the same high level of prestige enjoyed by the cult of Confucius. The two cults represented the religious aspect of the imperial institutions in their civil and military branches, and for degree-holders to neglect those cults implied opposition to the state. On the Qing patronage of Guandi, see Duara 1988, 785. Paul Cohen's observation that both the missionary and the Chinese "viewed the other as unfathomable" (in reference to the nineteenth century) seems to echo the language of Qing officials; see *CHOC*, 10.1, 565.

tive commoners and literati. This was a faith that, while still perceived as foreign, had also become attractive to some Chinese and thus “their own.” The coming pages attempt to explain the “unfathomable” nature of Christianity in late imperial China and detail its transformation through an exploration of the lives of Fuan Christians, the activities of the Dominican missionaries, and the reactions of Chinese elites, officials, and commoners who formed the fabric of late imperial life.