Cultural Contact, Science and the Empire of Salvation
Recent Developments in the Study of Christianity in Late Imperial China (1500s-1800s)

Eugenio Menegon

From the 1920s, the story of Christianity in China has mainly been recounted as one of cultural imperialism and aggression. The revolutionary winds that swept the country fueled a firm anti-imperialist stance, justified by the dire straits of the Chinese Republic, faced with intrusive foreign economic and military control. The historical narratives created in the crucible of the Nationalist and Communist revolutions have remained dominant to this day in the collective imagination of the Chinese public, and still frame the analysis of many Western and Chinese scholars.

The undeniable links of Christian churches with foreign powers, and the close intellectual relationship forged at the end of the nineteenth century between the discourse of “Western civilization” and Christian conversion are historical facts. The Boxer Uprising and the consequent suppression led by foreign imperial powers was perhaps the bloodiest and most tragic consequence of such a perverse marriage. Decades of scholarly work, however, have by now contributed to illuminate other facets of Christian presence in China, showing that the grand narrative of national liberation from foreign imperialism has obscured the halting, yet continuous process of incorporation of Christianity in Chinese religious, social, and intellectual life. That process of “becoming Chinese” started as early as the seventeenth century. Always the creed of a small minority, what we call “Christianity” did not represent simply a religious faith to the Chinese. The early modern Catholic missionaries and their Chinese elite converts presented their “Heavenly Teachings” (Tiànzuì) to contemporary intellectuals and rulers as a complex of knowledge that combined European moral philosophy, theology, ritual, the sciences, and the arts. Concurrently, priests and catechists worked at implanting Christian moral tenets and liturgical habits in the minds and hearts of converts in small local communities. The later Protestant project, in a development that in some ways paralleled the earlier Catholic efforts, combined evangelism with the introduction of Western-style educational institutions and technical, legal, and political knowledge aiming at “modernizing” China.

In this essay, I examine four recent English-language historical works which, from different disciplinary perspectives (history of science, social history, history of cross-cultural contacts, early modern European religious history, global history), have contributed to throw new light on the fascinating phase of the early Catholic missions (1550-1840), which can be seen as the prehistory of the modern Christian experience in China, and more broadly, of the Western intellectual and religious influence in China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Historiographical Context

The historiography of the old 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. 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 and intellectual circumstances of scientific interactions at the centre and the periphery of the empire.

On the other hand—and this is a more recent development—scholars have concentrated their attention on missionary institutional organization in China and globally, focusing in particular on the Jesuits, and on the daily life of the Christian communities evangelized by those missionary organizations, including analysis of Christian ideas and practices, and of missionary accommodations to local conditions. The examination of the social, ritual, and spiritual dimensions of “Chinese-Christian life” has today become a central feature of the study of missions in China.

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文化接触、科学与拯救之帝国
对中国后帝制时期（十六至十九世纪）
基督宗教研究的最近进展

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从二十世纪二十年代以来，基督宗教在华事功主要被描述为一种文化帝国主义与侵略。当时席卷全国的革命风暴激发出一种坚定的反对帝国主义立场：民国的艰难处境为其提供了根据，同时面临侵略性的外国经济与军事控制。那些形成于国共革命严峻考验时期的历史叙事迄今仍在中国公众的集体想象中占据主导地位，仍影响着许多中西学者的分析。

基督教会与外国列强之间的不可否认的认知以及在十九世纪末期“西方文明”与基督化之关系的紧密性关系只是历史事实，义和团暴乱及因此由外国列强所主导的镇压也许是这种冲突的一个血腥、最悲剧的结果。然而，数十年来的深入学术研究迄今为止已经为映照在华基督宗教在的其它层面做出了贡献，从而向人们显示，脱离外国帝国主义的民族解放的宏大叙事已经遮蔽模糊了基督宗教融入中国宗教、社会和知性生活的精髓而延续的进程。这个“成为中国人”（汉化）的进程早在十七世纪就已经开始。在国人眼里，这个渺小的、我们称之为“基督宗教”的少数群体的信仰并不仅仅代表一种宗教信仰。早期现代天主教传教士及其中国精致化信徒呈现给当时知识分子及统治者的“天学”是一套复杂的知识体系，融合了欧洲的伦理哲学、神学、宗教礼仪、科学及艺术等学科。与此同时，神父和传教士们共同努力，尝试将基督宗教伦理信条与宗教礼仪习惯植入当地小团体归信者的心中。后来的基督新教传道项目以一种类似于早期天主教传教法的方式，将福音的传播与旨在“现代化”中国的西方教育机制及技术、法制以及宗教知识的引进联结起来。

在本文中，我将审视近四部英文历史著作，它们来自不同的学科（科学史、社会史、文化交流史、早期近代欧洲宗教史、全球史），为理解早期天主教传教事业（1500-1840年）这段有趣历史时期提供新的角度与视角——这段历史
come one of the most interesting subfields within the study of Christianity in China, and such examination borrows methodological and theoretical frameworks from the larger fields of study of both Chinese and European "popular" religiosity in the early modern era. 10

The comprehensive *Handbook of Christianity in China* (Leiden, Brill, 2001) edited by Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink outlines the main historiographical trends in the study of early modern Christianity in China, which have dominated scholarly debates from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. Here, rather, I will concentrate on four English-language works published after the *Handbook*, to show in what directions Western scholars have been moving since the beginning of the new century, under the three rubrics of "cultural contact," "science" and "empire of salvation" (i.e., the organizational dimensions of the missionary enterprise in the contexts of the Portuguese empire and European expansion on a global scale).

**Cultural Contact**

Nicolas Standaert's *The Interweaving of Rituals* approaches the study of Christianity in China as part of the history of "contact between cultures." 11 The book analyzes funerary rituals practiced by Chinese Christians and missionaries at the imperial service as a way to gauge the "interaction and communication" of information, values, and bodily practices between Europe and China in the seventeenth century. Funerary rituals have been chosen, in particular, because they are central features of Chinese religious life and social practices. The Chinese "cultural imperative" of filial piety was expressed through proper funerary rituals, which fulfilled the need to appease the deceased, and reflected a yearning to create harmony among the descendants. This need and yearning determined the centrality of funerary rituals, which in turn contributed to the creation of a discernible "Chinese identity". By performing these rituals, in other words, people confirmed that they were "true Chinese". When Catholicism added new religious layers on existing Chinese sensibilities, funerals became a crucial focus for the creation of a new Chinese Christian identity. For Standaert, to study how the cultural imperatives of China and the religious imperatives of Catholicism collided and accommodated each other in the crucible of funerals is the best way to plot the creation of a Chinese-Christian "intermediary identity", which illuminates not only the religious dimensions of the exchange, but the broader cultural ones. Missionaries in China were "in-between" actors, standing as *trist d'union* between Europe and China; similarly, Christian funerary rites were "in-between" practices that brought together Chinese and Christian identities. They also brought together European and Chinese actors, and in fact, the latter became increasingly central over time. The customary importance of family members in performing funeral practices in China contributed to marginalize the priests in China, exactly a reversal of the process happening in Europe, where the clergy were instead becoming increasingly dominant in the expense of the laity. Moreover, local rites that the missionaries agreed were "non-superstitious" by the standards of Catholic orthodoxy and became an accepted part of the ritual sequence practiced by Chinese Christians, grafting the Christian new practice onto pre-existing "Confucian" practices.

The historicalographic focus of Standaert's work here and elsewhere is on the dynamics of cultural contact, an interest that he developed in the 1980s as a student of Erik

时期可被视为现代基督教宗教在华经验的史前期，更广泛地讲，它可被视为西方知识与宗教十九、二十世纪在华影响的史前期。

**历史学背景**

旧中国天主教传教事业的历史学传统上是围绕基督教和“西学”对当时帝制末期文人及宫廷圈子的冲击而形成的。然而，在过去二十年里，这种研究体系的改变已经受到重视和拓展。一方面，在延续那几代人将全部注意力给了西方文献及外国传教士行为的长久传统的同时，新的学术研究通过研究传教士、归信者及对于中西文化接触的文献，以及帝国内和周边地区进行科学互动的学术和宗教情绪，而将在华耶稣会士的科技与艺术成就融入广大意义上的学术环境中予以审视。

另一方面——这是更为近期的发展——学者们已经将新知识力聚焦于传教士在华及全球的机构组织，视野焦点尤其在耶稣会士；学者们也注意到这些传教机构所辐射化的基督徒群体的日常生活，包括对基督教观念和实践以及传教士近似本地条件所努力的分析。今天，对“华人群体生活”的社会、礼仪及灵性维度的审视已经成为中国基督教研究领域的一个十分有趣的分支学科，而且这种审视从更广泛的研领域（如对中国及欧洲在早期现代时期的“流行”宗教热忱的研究）借方法论与理论框架。（2）

由钟鸣旦和杜甫共同编辑的全四卷《中国基督教史稿》（莱顿, Brill, 2001）概括描述了对中世纪及现代基督教宗教在华研究的历史学趋向，而在十九世纪末至二十世纪此时弥漫，这些历史学趋势占据学界讨论的主导地位。然而，在此，我将集中讨论发表于《手册》之后的四卷英文作品，向人们展示西方学者在新近世纪之始的研究方向，即三个题目：“文化交流”、“科学”及“救世之帝国”（亦即西班牙帝国与欧洲全球扩张背景下的传教事业的组织性维度）。

**文化接触**

钟鸣旦的《礼仪的交织》（3）将中国基督教研究视为“文化间接触”历史学的一部分。该书分析了中国基督教及其服务于宫廷的传教士们的丧葬礼仪实践，作为一种影响十七世纪中叶中国社会、价值观和身体实践等方面的“互动与沟通”的方式。丧葬礼仪之所以被特别选择，主要是因为它们是中国人宗教生活及社会实践的核心特征，中国人的孝道“文化命令”是通过仪式的丧葬礼仪来体现表达的，这些丧葬礼仪能够满足人们安葬死者的需要，也反映出一种在后代子孙之间和谐共处的愿望。这种需要与愿望在当时不可避免地对丧葬礼仪的中心地位，而丧葬的核心地位又为创造一种鲜明的“中国人礼仪”做出了贡献。换言之，通过考查这些仪式，人们肯定他们是“真正的中国人”。当天主教在已有中国观念上加上一些新的宗教教义时，丧葬礼仪就成为创造一种新近中国基督教教义的中心场所。对于钟鸣旦来说，研究中国文化命令和天主教宗教礼仪如何在丧葬礼仪中具象化并传达至适应而变成插图式创造一个中国基督教教义“中心位置”的最好方式。这种定义不仅能够展示出此文化交流的宗教维度，也能拓宽其文化维度。在华传教士
是“中间”行动者，好像是欧洲与中国之间的连接线：与此类似，教会丧葬礼仪也是将中国定位与欧洲定位联结起来的“中间”实现。它们还将欧洲与中国的行动者联结起来，事实上，后者日益成为核心角色。在中国，家庭成员在举行丧葬礼仪过程中的通常重要角色，即在华神父协同作用。这正好与欧洲情形相反——在欧洲，丧葬礼仪正日益被神职人员所主导，而传教士只是在场的设色者了。另外，那些传教士所信奉的本地礼仪符合天主教正统标准，并非“迷信”，因此能够成为中国天主教徒所奉行的礼俗仪式的一部分，从而将教会新实践嫁接在已经存在的“儒教”实践上。

钟鸣旦著作的历史学着眼点在于文化接触的逻辑，这一兴趣是他在二十世纪八十年代在莱顿作为许可和学生时培养起来的。许理和(1928-2008年)是一位研究中国佛教的著名历史学家，在五十年代末，他以一种既欢迎又批评的态度，即所谓“佛教的中国转型”：之后，他在自己学术生涯的最后几十年里重新研究明末清初时期“宗教改革的中国转型”。除了基督教之外，他还不回避对华传教士的排外行为，甚至对华传教士的排外行为。这一视角也使得他成为重新理解中国传教士所带来知识的一个视角。这一视角使得他成为重新理解中国传教士所带来知识的一个视角。
Empire of Salvation

The religious dimension of the mission is indeed central in two recent monographs published by historians of early modern Europe, with interest in the history of the Portuguese empire and of early modern globalization. Liam Brockley's Journey to the East is a masterful, sweeping narrative of the Jesuit mission, written from the documentary vantage point of the central archives of the Order in Rome and of the correspondence of the Portuguese Assistancy. The administrative unit responsible for evangelizing in China, Brockley, however, is a scholar of the Portuguese empire and of early modern European religious history, and in this book he is mainly intent on recovering the internal organization of the Jesuit China mission within the broader framework of the Jesuit order as a whole, and only secondarily on exploring the life of Chinese Christian communities. When he does so, his objective is to show how the methods the Jesuits employed in so-called "popular missions" in early modern Catholic Europe were transmitted with remarkable integrity to the far-flung China mission, what he calls "an outpost of Baroque Catholicism in the vastness of China". This focus on the European matrix, however, obscures the role of native converts. Chinese Christians were hardly passive agents "moulded" by attempts to replicate the Society of Jesus' European evangelization model on Chinese soil. 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, as the work by Standaert discussed above and the recent research of other scholars show.5


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Conclusion

This conclusion section discusses the continuous and contextualization of the Christian religious enterprise within the fabric of early modern and modern Chinese and global history. The evangelical mission, often intimately intertwined with the spreading of Western science and knowledge, is now increasingly seen as a case study within the broader frameworks of cultural and religious contact, the history of science and religious movements in China, and the religious, economic, and political impulses of the European expansion. In light of China's growing amalgamation in the world economy and culture today, this scholarly re-examination of the early modern history of Christianity in China suggests that present integration processes have a long history, dating their beginnings to the late sixteenth century. Recurrent historical ruptures and the socio-political revolutions of the twentieth century have at times dramatically redirected these long-standing processes. But past ruptures have also conditioned our historical views, downplaying the continuities that this new scholarship is only now starting to uncover.
