

## **Occasional Martyrs:**

### **Catholic Life in Nineteenth-Century China between Coexistence and Subjugation**

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Catholic Christians caught up in the anti-heresy arrests of late imperial China defended themselves as being followers of a peace-loving religion, piously passed on from their parents. The reason why these believers nonetheless sometimes ended up being persecuted was because their faith happened to take root at a time when popular Buddhist groups began to be persecuted as alleged “heretics”. This connection is a key aspect of the present article, of which the time-frame is divided in two halves: From the anti-missionary edict of 1724 to the Treaty of Beijing (1860), followed by the era of Western missionary proliferation up to the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. The first phase can be described as one of general religious tolerance with only occasional state repression, whereas the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed broader popular mistrust and violence. This was true for Christians of all denominations, but perhaps more for the followers of Catholicism, clearly distinguishable in name (“Teaching of the Lord of Heaven”) from the Protestant equivalent (“Teaching of Christ”). The nineteenth century would culminate in an orgy of violence, known as the Boxer Uprising, which would leave permanent marks on the Catholic missionary enterprise in China and which would serve as a catalyst for the eventual indigenization of the Catholic Church in the Republican era (1912–1949).

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The development of Christianity in China can only with great artificiality be equated with that of other historical regions in the world. This is on the one hand due to the absence of religious institutions that could rival the authority of the State and which could thus become the target of political violence (such as during the French or Russian revolutions). This, in turn, provided the imperial state with a remarkable political continuity and with greater authority than most of its ephemeral European counterparts enjoyed. On the other hand, and again in contradistinction to Europe, the religious policy of imperial China was overwhelmingly marked by dynastic *laissez-faire*, mirroring the peaceful coexistence of different religious traditions in Chinese society. Conceptually, research on the history of Christianity in China has been sharply divided between a discourse of rejection due to cultural incompatibility<sup>1</sup> and scholars who point to the adaptability of Christian practice, in particular at a popular level.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the former tend to cite documentary sources produced by members of the scholar-official elite, comprising both Christian converts and staunch opponents of the “alien teaching” (*yangjiao* 洋教), empirical evidence for the latter argumentation rarely exists in published form, since it belongs to the category of “popular religion”. It requires the meticulous analysis of tangentially related sources, as well as a comparative approach which takes the experience of other religious groups as well as that of Catholics in other parts of eastern Asia into account, to arrive at a more balanced analysis. Based on this premise, the present article posits that Catholic communities may very well have experienced communal violence and official repression, but that this experience was mitigated by the fact that groups belonging to the White Lotus and other expressions of popular Buddhism were generally treated more harshly. Furthermore, the complete suppression of Christianity in Tokugawa Japan, as well as periodically in Korea and Vietnam, serves as a further reminder that Catholics in late imperial China

experienced an environment of general peace – but with occasions of violent opposition by both state officials and local populations.

This paper thus argues that the history of Catholic Christianity in China was for the greater part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries less characterized by violence than other parts of Asia – which applies to hostile acts both by the non-Christian population and by government agencies. This is particularly true in comparison to Japan during the early Tokugawa reign, when Christianity was forced underground and crypto-Christians, the *kakure kirishitan*, were persecuted with exceptional brutality.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no denying that from the very onset of the Catholic missions in China – for instance during the persecution of 1616/17 in Nanjing, and in particular following the anti-missionary edict of 1724 – disturbing investigations and harsh punishments did take place, although such action usually coincided with punitive campaigns by the State against dissenting (*xie* 邪 “heretical”) religious movements.<sup>4</sup> Even if these cases were to be included as examples of religious persecution, there can be no denying that most acts of deadly violence occurred during the so-called Boxer Rebellion (義和團起義) around 1900, as indicated by the martyrological literature on the event.<sup>5</sup> But the excessive violence during the Boxer Rebellion stood in stark contrast to the comparably peaceful development of Christianity during the period under review in this volume. This argument is premised both on the relationship between the Catholics and the state officials and in the indifference of their non-Christian neighbors. The degree of religious tolerance also impressed nineteenth-century European missionaries – albeit not always in favorable terms, as shown by the remark of Father Louvet that ‘no people carries skepticism and indifference as far as the Chinese people’.<sup>6</sup> This relative calm would come to an abrupt end with the Boxer Rebellion, heralding not just the end of the nineteenth century, but in due course also that of the ruling Qing dynasty (1644–1911).<sup>7</sup>

## Christianity in China

The first Christians to arrive in China were adherents to Bishop Nestor's Syriac church, declared heretical at the Council of Ephesos in 431. Since Nestor's dogmatic line remained popular in Mesopotamia and Persia, the name Church of the East was adopted. Sogdian merchants and mercenaries took "Nestorian" Christianity into the Tang 唐 empire (618–907), where Christianity became established as the Luminous Teaching (*jingjiao* 景教).<sup>8</sup> The Catholic mission founded by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) meant that from the early 1600s onwards, Roman Catholicism took root in China.<sup>9</sup> It was being promoted by the Jesuit, Franciscan and Dominican orders.

In keeping with China's tradition of religious tolerance, the Catholic orders enjoyed a positive reception, aided by the fact that many ordinary faithful interpreted the missionaries' message as a variation on Buddhism. The emphasis on Mary as Mother of God certainly helped, since Chinese women in the late imperial period habitually flocked to temples dedicated to the Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音菩薩 and to the (Daoist) Wusheng Laomu 無生老母 ("Original Venerable Mother" 無生老母), *alias* Xiwangmu 西王母 ("Queen Mother of the West" 西王母) in order to pray for (male) offspring. It is thus unsurprising that Catholic churches during this period were commonly referred to as "Halls of the Sacred Mother" (*shengmutang* 聖母堂). The Manchu conquest and transition to Qing rule had a positive effect on missionary activity, as the imperial edict of 1692 explicitly protected the Christian Church. This edict of toleration would be invoked by Catholic missionaries well into the nineteenth century whenever signs of discrimination or persecution arose.<sup>10</sup> Imperial protection persuaded numerous members of China's Confucian-educated

scholar-official elite to convert, chiefly those residing in the Lower Yangtse Valley. As a result, by 1720, Catholic communities were often well-educated and affluent. At the same time, the efforts of the mendicant orders on the countryside had created Catholic village communities in agrarian regions throughout China, in particular in Guangdong, Fujian, Sichuan, Shaanxi and in the North China Plain.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas the Jesuits enjoyed the protection of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (Manchu: Elhe Taifin ᡤᡠᡨᡤᡳ ᡤᡠᡶᡳᡳᠨ, reigned 1661–1722), at least up to the so-called Rites Controversy, scholar-officials that deemed Christianity a “foreign teaching” (*yangjiao* 洋教) incited opposition to the religion in the urban centers where they were based.<sup>12</sup> The Rites Controversy hinged upon the Catholic missionaries’ attempts to reconcile the traditional practice of paying reverence to one’s deceased parents by burning incense in front of a funerary memorial (the so-called *lingpai* 靈牌, “spirit tablet”) with fundamental Christian beliefs. The suspicion that this was an act of “spirit worship” rather than filial piety (*xiao* 孝) caused missionaries less inclined to cultural adaptation to lobby the papal authorities to prohibit the practice amongst Chinese converts altogether. The conflict with those missionaries – especially ones belonging to the Society of Jesus – who believed that there was no superstitious nature in these ancestral rites led to an acrimonious controversy within the Catholic establishment during the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> The Rites Controversy was concluded in 1714 with a bull by Pope Benedict XIV, prohibiting all ancestral rites amongst China’s Catholics.<sup>14</sup> Scholars hostile to Christianity built on the arguments first used in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, when anti-Christian reactions resulted in episodes of short-lived but intense communal violence.<sup>15</sup> The Kangxi emperor’s successor, the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor (Manchu: Hūwaliyasun Tob

ཡོང་མཁོ་ལོ་གཤམ་པོ། 1723–1736), nurtured further hostility against Catholics, less because of anti-Christian enmity than due to a desire to tighten state control over religious activity. Because the short-lived Yongzheng administration wished to extend state influence over the uneducated population (*yumin* 愚民), the emperor issued an edict in 1724 prohibiting all missionary activity, including proselytization by Chinese clerics. As “anti-missionary” this edict may have been, it did not prohibit Christianity as such. The emperor moreover imposed similar restrictions on other religious groups, in particular on folk Buddhist movements. Overzealous officials sometimes went beyond the intentions of the edict by placing armed guards outside church buildings and by forcing clerics to provide certificates of legitimization (*piao* 票). The informal elites, such as village heads and retired officials, were called upon to keep a watchful eye on the religious situation in their localities. This was particularly true for Manchu converts, who the Yongzheng administration specifically forbade “to disrespect the Manchu Way.” The emperor’s punitive actions against the Sunu clan, Christians related to the ruling dynasty, in the 1720s created a dramatized discourse of Christian martyrdom in Catholic Europe.<sup>16</sup> In China itself, especially in the provinces, the Yongzheng edict was interpreted in different ways. Whereas provincial authorities and local magistrates in Sichuan closed their eyes on the presence of both indigenous and Western (French) missionaries, officials in Fujian often resorted to violent suppression.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to Chinese Christians, Manchu soldiers and officials who had converted to Catholicism were sanctioned by hard labor, official ostracism, rarely execution, but as much dreaded: exile and enslavement to the tribal warlords to the north of the Great Wall.<sup>18</sup>

This takes us to the core aspect to be scrutinized in this article, namely the connection between anti-Catholic violence and perseverance in the Christian faith. The nineteenth and twentieth-century biographies of Catholic individuals, often Western missionaries, tended to emphasise the

determination of the faithful to endure whatever earthly predicaments God – or rather Satanic earthly governments – had produced in order to test their steadfastness. In particular the emphasis on their willingness to accept the Crown of Martyrdom, with a Western target audience in mind, positioned these missionaries into the same category as the saintly martyrs of antiquity, pillars of the Church.<sup>19</sup> The more recent scholarship has tended to shift the emphasis away from the European missionaries to the indigenous believers and their communal leaders. In so doing, and against the background of increasing numbers of Chinese Christians during the period of missionary prohibition (1724–1858), the relative importance of the missionary sacrifices decreases. In other words, during times when Chinese Christians lived predominantly in hidden and priestless communities, the number of victims of state violence tended to decrease. Western missionaries, by virtue of being clearly visible outsiders, thus put the communities they intended to serve at risk. Left undisturbed, often in locations where the state officials preferred not to venture, the number of Christians tended to steadily increase. If the Qing state was not willing – or able – to eradicate these ever-expanding centres of Chinese Christianity, it clearly managed to drive the greatest part of the Church “underground”. The causative link between increased repression and the tendency to avoid open visibility has been made both for the Qing empire as well as for the early People’s Republic.<sup>20</sup> Even the methods of suppression – exile, psychological torture, and indoctrination rather than brutal annihilation – appear to be similar.<sup>21</sup>

The persecutions of the early nineteenth century can be explained in the same manner. When Hongli 弘曆 took over power as the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (Manchu: Abkai Wehiyehe ᠠᠪᠠᠵᠢ ᠠᠪᠬᠠᠢ ᠠᠨᠠᠭᠤᠨ, 1736–1796), he continued the restrictive policies of his predecessor. Whereas the repression of so-called “heretical teachings” (*xiejiao* 邪教) could affect any religious tradition, the focus was on the so-called White Lotus Teaching (*bailianjiao* 白蓮教), an umbrella term for folk Buddhist sects



with eschatological leanings.<sup>22</sup> The local character of the mid-Qing persecutions can only be understood when the perceived threat posed by millenarian movements in such localities is taken into account – in particular in Fujian.<sup>23</sup> Whereas established religious traditions, such as Sunni Islam, were fully protected by the State, the perceived threat posed by ‘newcomers’ ensured that, like the White Lotus movement, Catholic communities during the later eighteenth century were subjected to sporadic acts of official persecution.<sup>24</sup> The introduction of the “Canton System” in 1757 furthermore strengthened state authorities’ control over any remaining Westerners in the empire. The new import arrangement obliged European traders to use Guangzhou as their sole harbor for all commercial transactions, which brought greater protection from pirate attacks against the silver-laden Western vessels. For the Catholic orders, this new system initially changed very little, since they could continue to use Macau (Aomen 澳門) as their port of entrance in southern China. The Yongzheng edict of 1724 also guaranteed freedom of residence in Macau and in Beijing by Western clerics, as well as right of passage between the two cities.

One of the stipulations of the Canton System was that no commercial vessel was to have missionaries on board – a demand which was heeded until the arrival of Robert Morrison in 1807. Catholic missionaries nevertheless made good use of the century-old network connecting village congregations in the Chinese interior.<sup>25</sup> The Parisian Overseas Missions (Missions Étrangères de Paris) used the forested highlands between Burma and Laos as a corridor to reach the southwestern provinces of the Qing empire, notably Sichuan.<sup>26</sup> Others, such as the Franciscan Bernardo de los Santos, formed one-man missions in order to rejoin the communities founded by their Catholic predecessors. The greatest factor for clandestine Christian missions were, however, itinerant preachers originating from long-established congregations. Making use of catechetical

texts printed in Beijing or transported from Macau, these indigenous missionaries used vernacular imagery in local dialects to emphasise the messages of the religious texts which they distributed. Prosecuting officials automatically recorded these texts as “heretical scriptures” (*xieshu* 邪書) – unaware of the fact that the missionaries in Beijing were representatives of a legitimate religious teaching. The proliferation of Christian scriptures became the cause of violent suppression movements, such as the coordinated campaign of 1765 south of Beijing and in the Hubei-Hunan corridor.<sup>27</sup>

On the whole, anti-Christian persecutions remained relatively rare during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This does not mean that they were entirely absent. Rather, violence initiated by state officials usually went hand in hand with the suppression of other religious movements – in particular if these were regarded as “heretical.” Such movements were thus more “political” than “religious.” Convinced that China was under threat by a bewildering array of heretical sects, Christian proselytization was regarded by many officials as part of a wider heresy problem. The religious quality of the suppressed groups was of secondary importance, for these could be Muslim as during the insurgency in Gansu, folk Buddhist as in Linqing 臨清 (Shandong) – or indeed Christian, as was the case in Xi’an, where in 1784 two European priests were discovered, triggering persecutions against the local Christian community.<sup>28</sup> The subsequent investigations of the late Qianlong administration yielded evidence of thriving Catholic communities in all provinces, further emphasizing the autonomy which China’s Christian communities had attained. These were often located along the provincial boundaries, areas which magistrates usually avoided for security reasons.<sup>29</sup>

## **The Early Nineteenth Century: State Authority between Moral Management and Social Control**

Although there was no dramatic change in the official position of Christianity at the turn of the nineteenth century, the steady growth of the Catholic communities would eventually expose them to greater official scrutiny. But it was mostly due to the intensifying anti-heresy campaigns of the first two decades, against the perceived threat by the White Lotus movement, that Christians began to suffer serious reprisals.<sup>30</sup> Millenarianism in the late Qing era (nineteenth century) arose in response to over-population, coupled with natural calamities and ensuing famine. The belief in a better future (Maitreyan Buddhism) was interpreted by some heterodox movements as an appeal to destroy the existing world order – Qing China included.<sup>31</sup> Most of the so-called White Lotus sects were pacifist, but since state officials interpreted their eschatological vision as an attack against state institutions, they began to suppress them harshly. Catholic communities could also be counted as “heretical” because Christian eschatology envisaged a cataclysmic end to the existing world order. It did not help that the paraphernalia used were similar (rosaries, incense, religious scriptures) and that some millenarian sects adopted Christian names in order to confuse the prosecutors – including the term “Tianzhujiao 天主教” for the Catholic Church.<sup>32</sup>

Zealous officials looked out for any books, pamphlets or paraphernalia that could be interpreted as subversive. Most important were, however, weapons. When none could be found, as was the norm in Christian households, homes could still be ransacked or burnt and entire families arrested. Religious leaders – the *huizhang* 會長 – could be exiled to the remote northern part of the empire.<sup>33</sup>

But these were isolated examples. The dynasty was aware of the destabilizing effects that the oppression of a peaceful part of China's population would have, already struggling with regional rebellions. In return, Christians often made use of pretended apostasies in order to cooperate with state authorities, thus directly contributing to a reduction of violent retributions by same.<sup>34</sup> As long as villagers and the urban population peacefully continued the traditions of their forefathers, state officials tended to leave them be even in the case of non-conventional teachings. But because itinerant preachers upset this balance, encouraging social change and at times political discontent, they faced serious penalties and were forced to tread onto the crucifix as a sign of public apostasy. Western missionaries also lived in perpetual danger, as testified by the execution of Louis Gabriel Taurin Dufresse (Xu Dexin 徐德新), a member of the Society of Foreign Missions, in Chengdu in 1815, and the strangulation of Vincentian Francis-Régis Clet in Wuchang in 1820.<sup>35</sup> The same fate had already befallen Giovanni Lantrua, a Franciscan missionary in the Lower Yangtse Valley; by order of the imperial authorities, he had been strangled in Changsha in January 1816.<sup>36</sup>

Fears of Western infiltration had become evident when, in 1805, a detailed map outlining zones of missionary influence in Shandong was discovered. The Propaganda Fide missionary Adeodato di San Agostino (1760–1821) had produced the map intended to resolve a border dispute between two Catholic orders and was already *en route* to Macau from where the map should have been dispatched to Europe.<sup>37</sup> The missionary's subsequent execution was meant to act as warning, also for the Catholic house communities on which both European and Chinese missionaries relied for support. This set-up implied a high degree of danger, since prying neighbors could easily spot and report strangers visiting their villages. The Naples-trained missionary Paul Wang had sought shelter during his efforts to establish a seminary, but was caught in 1815 and executed shortly

afterwards. The turn of the 1820s saw similar instances of punitive action, coinciding with the ever greater presence of Western merchants in southern China – not least British traders smuggling opium.<sup>38</sup> Despite the increased tension between the 1780s and the 1810s, Chinese Christian communities continued to live mostly harmoniously with their non-Christian neighbors.<sup>39</sup>

During the Daoguang 道光 era (1821–1851), on the eve of the Taiping Rebellion, China witnessed a relaxation of the anti-heterodoxy campaigns. In a carefully-worded gesture to the Christian communities, the Daoguang court stressed that as long as they posed no harm to state or society, Christians were free to practice their own religious traditions.<sup>40</sup> This tolerance did not extend to foreign missionaries, who were still barred from proselytizing. By 1827, the only legally residing foreign priest was Gaetano Pires Pereira (Bi Xueyuan 畢學源). In 1840, prosecution resulted in the Vincentian P. Perboyre (Dong Wenxue 董文學), who had entered through Macau in 1835 and relied on the charity of local Christian families, being tied to a cross and then strangled in Wuchang.<sup>41</sup> The demise of the permanent mission in Beijing translated into more harassment in certain districts. While execution by local Qing officials acted as a deterrent against overt proselytization, non-lethal punishments such as caning, incising or branding “anti-heretical” messages onto the face could have the same warning effect.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to remember that although the number of Western missionaries prior to the mid-nineteenth century was negligible, Christian communities in China continued to grow. During the peak of the anti-heretical campaigns, between 1805 and 1821, many believers had sought refuge in exile communities beyond the Great Wall where Chinese clerics would provide spiritual and

practical guidance for hundreds of Catholic households, who celebrated their faith with “cymbals and drums, exorcisms, and written or painted charms.”<sup>44</sup> The banishment destination of Yili was transformed into a large and open Christian community, featuring churches and seminaries. The local Christians who during the Muslim uprisings of the 1820s had assisted the Qing magistrates in suppressing the rebels, were offered amnesty by the Daoguang emperor.<sup>45</sup>

To sum up, violence by or against Catholics was for a long time not the norm in China, despite the missionary prohibition of 1724 and the increased persecutions during the anti-heresy campaigns of the early nineteenth century. Christianity instead proliferated throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and, with few exceptions, village communities coexisted harmoniously with their non-Christian neighbors. Only occasionally would the state persecutions against presumed “heretics” create a hostile environment for established Catholic communities.<sup>46</sup> Thus, until the return of Western missionaries after 1858, China was a laboratory for religious innovation and syncretic cross-fertilization. Whenever acts of communal violence did occur, they were generally not caused by religious disagreements but by inter-family rivalry based on more mundane grievances such as property disputes.<sup>47</sup>

From the 1830s onwards, there was a significant increase in the number of foreign missionaries. By 1838, the Vatican had established twelve bishoprics, not least to counter the active Protestant mission. The total number of Catholics present in China was a modest two or three hundred thousand, to which were added forty to eighty Western and some ninety Chinese missionaries.<sup>48</sup> The 1844 treaty between France and China officially ended state repression of the Catholic mission

(西洋外國所崇奉之教 “the teaching venerated in foreign countries of the West”) and allowed French clerics to build churches in specified locations, including in treaty ports. A official communiqué from 1845 by Qiying 耆英 emphasized that Catholics were to be regarded as morally upright people and called for the repeal of all remaining restrictions against Christianity.<sup>49</sup>

### **Intra-Communal Tensions as a Reason for Christian Conversion**

Following the relaxation of anti-Christian policy in 1844, and increasingly after 1860, Christian communities continued to consolidate as clan-based units. In so doing, they reaffirmed a familiar pattern in the sociopolitical set-up of Chinese small-town life, namely of communal divisions cemented with the aid of external factors. Catholic clans now enjoyed public support of French missionaries and hence of the French State, while Methodist families looked for British protection and other Protestants for assistance from the United States. Even within districts that had been missionary territories of Roman Catholic orders, deep-rooted differences between the Roman (“Propaganda”), Iberian (“padroado”) and French missions<sup>50</sup> were becoming accentuated from the 1790s onwards, when Chinese clerics such as Maurus Cheng (1752–1801) or François-Marie Tseng (1740–1815) aggravated divisions created by their European predecessors.<sup>51</sup> In locations with fewer Western power brokers, more complex interactions between local officialdom and religious communities emerged.<sup>52</sup> Even in places far away from the coastal bases of European influence, such as in Ba county near Chongqing in Sichuan, the relaxation in state control meant that Christian clans could purchase land with the backing of French missionaries, who would support them in case of subsequent conflict. Most clashes involving Christians in the latter part of the nineteenth century were indeed defined by disputes over title deeds and estate boundaries –

hardly “anti-Christian” in the doctrinal sense, but directly involving the churches and (foreign) missionaries. Having swiftly learnt how to utilize the foreign missions to their own advantage, clans employed a *realpolitik* aimed at maximizing their influence in the communities where they lived. This strategy became particularly pronounced with the increase of Western missionary stations during the later nineteenth century. The political maneuvers of the Zheng clan in Shantou (Guangdong) during the 1880s, which aimed to mobilize support from foreign clerics for the construction of a family hall within the city limits, illustrates the ease with which they approached the American Baptist and French Catholic congregations.<sup>53</sup> When conflicts could not be resolved peacefully, violence against the mission stations occasionally followed. In such cases, the Qing officials usually intervened on the side of the foreign clerics – though not always.<sup>54</sup>

Property conflicts between neighbors thus constitute the most important source of violence perpetrated against Christians during the late nineteenth century, also in the treaty ports and the colony of Hong Kong.<sup>55</sup> There existed, however, another category of violence: instances when cultural norms were challenged to the perceived detriment of the community as a whole. Such cases occurred in growing numbers once the reintroduction of foreign missionaries led to a “Westernization” of Christianity in China, which in turn could prompt anti-foreign reactions among the non-Christian majority. One such example was the Dazu 大足 revolt of 1886–67, near Chongqing. Despite French protection, the Wan-gu-chang 萬古場 Church and the attached surgery were burnt down by crowds. The Boxers would later cause substantial damage to Chengdu’s eighteenth-century Sujiawan 蘇家灣 Church.<sup>56</sup>



A specific aspect of violence in relation to Christianity in China was the role that (foreign) missionary stations played as protective devices for Christian and non-Christian villagers alike. After the Convention of Beijing (1860), foreign clerics were once again allowed to establish a missionary presence in the Chinese interior. The need for safety, but also the property issues referred to above, were conducive to the establishment of new stations, which often resembled the military forts of border regions. The more general role of the fortified missionary stations was thus one resembling the feudal donjon, offering protection to the local peasantry. In this regard, they fulfilled the same role as the rural self-defense leagues provided by the leading clans against marauding bandits, and often coordinated by the semi-official gentry (*shenshi* 紳士) of village elders and retired scholar-officials.<sup>57</sup> And just like the latter, the missionaries possessed rifles and other weaponry that allowed them to play a vital role in upholding security in those parts of the countryside where the official police forces could not be relied upon. The reputation of missionary stations as centers of medical care and general education consolidated their reputation as safe houses in times of unrest.

On certain occasions, however, the stations specifically protected Christians from attacks by hostile crowds. Isolated incidents aside, the great test arose during the Boxer Rebellion (*Yihetuan qiyi* 義和團起義) which erupted in the late 1890s and came to a dramatic end in 1901. It broke out after peasants throughout northern China had come to believe that the spirits had locked all clouds due to the disrupting influence of “Western Teachings” (*yangjiao* 洋教) and because of the harmful effect that the steeped roofs adorning new missionary churches had on the geomantic harmony (*fengshui* 風水). Peasants attempted to avert these natural disasters by staging spiritual

processions to release celestial water onto their parched fields, while also protesting against the presumed negative effect of angular Western architecture and modern infrastructure (railways and telegraph wires) on the local *fengshui*. Similar arguments were well-known to Chinese Christians. Already in 1886, building work on a church in the center of Chongqing city aroused popular fears of damaged geomantic power fields [士民恐傷地脈], sparking widespread violence and causing Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, a senior Qing official and decorated victor over the Nian and Taiping rebels, to intervene at the highest level. In 1901, he was recalled as Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi when the Boxer Rebellion was beginning to threaten Qing authority.<sup>58</sup>

The Boxers branded Catholics as followers of the “Celestial Pig” (*Tianzhu* 天豬) – an insult homophonous to the Catholic term for God (*Tianzhu* 天主). The resulting violence went beyond anything China’s Christian congregations had ever experienced before. Foreign missionaries and Chinese clerics were held responsible for the droughts that affected northern China during the late 1890s; pamphlets and popular songs promised blood-curdling vengeance, while rebels prepared suicide attacks on Western mission stations, thinking themselves as spiritually protected from rifle fire. For missionaries and Catholic laypeople alike, the siege-like atmosphere and violence of the “Fists for Righteousness and Harmony” (*Yihequan* 義和拳, hence ‘Boxers’) were deeply troubling. The witness report of missionary Archibald Glover recalls the fear they experienced:

The following night, [...] we were roused from sleep by the noise of a rain-procession nearing our premises on the main north street. A sufficiently dreadful sound at any time, but awful in the dead of night. In the semi-consciousness of the awakening it came upon

the senses as a hideous nightmare, until one was alive to the truth of it. [...] The terror of clamorous cursings; and next, the battering of the gate and a volley of stones and brick-bats flung over the roof of the outer buildings into the courtyard, where our own quarters were. There was no time to be lost. Our hearts went up to God as we hurriedly dressed, expecting each moment would see the gate broken in. Just as we were preparing to take the children from their beds, suddenly the volleying and battering ceased, the procession resumed its march, and the terrifying noise of curses, gongs and drums drew away, [...] shouting threats of revenge should the drought continue.<sup>59</sup>

Glover's recollections, filled with a sense of feeling terrified, were written from the vantage point of a Western cleric – a tiny minority within the already small Christian community in China. Given the self-assumed role of the Chinese state as the ultimate adjudicator over questions of orthodoxy and heresy, how did the scholar-officials, as the intellectual pillars of the imperial state, view the anti-Christian violence by the Boxers in the local societies that they were supposed to govern equitably? And how can the extreme violence of the Boxer Rebellion be explained? One explanation would be that tensions between local communities were accentuated by “Confucian” notions of loyalty to earlier generations, their beliefs and their vengeance.<sup>60</sup> Their destructive power may also explain why much martyrological evidence of Christian suffering is condensed into the explosive events of the Boxer movement.

### **Between Integration and Confrontation: Premonitions of Catholic Life in Communist China**

The years between the Yongzheng edict of 1724 against the proselytization of heterodox religious beliefs not sanctioned by the Qing state, including the preaching of Christianity as represented by the missionaries from Catholic Europe, and the re-admission of Western missionaries after the Convention of Beijing (1860), were a period of insecurity for Chinese Catholics. During this time, Christian activity shifted from the established urban centers to the provincial hinterland, usually to border regions difficult to access for Qing magistrates or military troops. This relative obscurity protected most Christians from the attention of the State, leading to their gradual multiplication and the creation of a house church culture. At times, state officials would get involved in the prosecution of Christian villagers, but mostly in the wider context of anti-heterodox persecutions, specifically of the White Lotus movement. Although well documented, anti-Catholic violence was rare, the norm being peaceful coexistence with the non-Christian majority and tacit toleration by officials.

Following the opening of the Chinese interior to Western missionaries in 1860, this equilibrium was disturbed by the mass conversions achieved by a new generation of Catholic and Protestant missionaries. On the one hand, their missionary stations contributed to the pacification of the countryside by providing shelter for people regardless of their faith. They also provided basic education and health care. On the other hand, the missionary centers could become foci of public anger, often generated by conflicts between Christian and non-Christian families concerning property purchases. More rarely, albeit well-documented in the (auto-)biographical literature of the nineteenth century, missionaries found themselves at the receiving end of popular beliefs concerning the outbreak of natural disasters and the supposed disruption of cosmic harmony (geomantics). The violent events of the Boxer Uprising should be seen against this background.

Indeed, the often-cited explanation for its outbreak, which links it to the imperialist ambitions of Western missionaries, is problematic since the latter frequently acted as local powerbrokers with the active support of county officials and indigenous gentry. Their actions hence contradicted the power diplomacy of the governments who were supposed to protect them. In other words, both the nationalist, anti-imperialist interpretation – first propagated by the May Fourth intellectuals during the 1920s – as well as the original Western view of an unprovoked attack by uncivilized heathens are in serious need of reconsideration. A more balanced view would also need to take into account the desperation which the long and severe drought of the late 1890s had engendered in the north-Chinese peasantry. Spearheaded by sectarian leaders who promised the immiserated peasantry paradise on earth if they forced the alien clerics and their local converts to leave, gained ever-more widespread appeal.<sup>61</sup> The Boxer Rebellion thus has parallels both with the classical peasant uprisings of the late imperial era and with the political mass movements of the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most eloquently argued by Jacques Gernet, *Chine et christianisme: action et réaction*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). Note that the title of the English translation *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1985, accentuates the author’s thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009). Lars P. Laamann, *Christian Heretics in Late Imperial China: Christian Inculturation and State Control, 1720–1850*. (London: Routledge, 2006). Rolf G. Tiedemann, “Christianity

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day* (Richmond: Japan Library/Curzon, 1998), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Judicial trials against Christians are documented in the systematically kept archival records of the latter Qing period, reprinted in Qingmo jiaoran 清末教案, edited by Zhu Jinfu 朱金甫, Lü Jian 呂堅, China Number One Historical Archives 中國第一歷史檔案館 and History Department of Fujian Normal University 福建師範大學歷史系; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 and Xinhua shudian 新華書店, 1996 – 2000.

<sup>5</sup> This includes, significantly, the martyrologium of the 120 Catholics, both Chinese and Western, who were killed during the Boxer Rebellion. The overall death toll amongst Chinese Christians is estimated at circa 30,000. Some 200 Westerners were reported to have died. See Roger R. Thompsen, “Reporting the Taiyuan Massacre: Culture and Politics in the China War of 1900,” in R. G. Tiedemann & Robert Bickers (eds.), *The Boxers, China and the World* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), (107–139) 107.

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Boell, *Le protectorat des Missions Catholiques en Chine et la Politique de la France en Extrême-Orient* (Paris: Centre Scientifique de la Libre-Pensée, 1899), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Charbonnier, *Les 120 martyrs de Chine, canonisés le 1er octobre 2000* (Paris: Églises d’Asie, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), pp. 15–26.

<sup>9</sup> The state of the art in terms of Christianity’s early implantation in China is Nicolas Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume one, 635–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> For a thought-provoking study of this era, see the doctoral thesis by Kang Wonmook, “The Xiyangs in the Early Qing Empire, 1644–1724,” SOAS, University of London, 2022 [forthcoming].

<sup>11</sup> For a focus on the Spanish Franciscan missionary enterprise, see Antolín Abad Pérez (ed.), *Misioneros Franciscanos Españoles en China: Siglos XVIII-XIX (1722–1813)* (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See Donald Sure and Ray Noll, *100 Roman Documents concerning the Chinese Rites Controversy (1645–1941)* (San Francisco: Ricci Institute / University of San Francisco, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> See Minamiki, George, *The Chinese Rites Controversy - from its Beginnings to Modern Times*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> This prohibition was rescinded in 1939, just one decade before the Communist victory on the Chinese mainland.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Gernet, *Chine et christianisme – action et réaction* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Eugenio Menegon, “Surniama Tragoedia: Religion and Political Martyrdom in the Yongzheng Period,” Symposium on the History of Christianity in China, Hong Kong 2–4 October 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Ma Zhao 馬釗, “Shilun Qianlong shiqi (1736-1796) chajin tianzhujiao shijian 試論乾隆時期(1736-1795)查禁天主教事件” (MA dissertation, *Zhongguo renmin daxue / Qingshi yanjiusuo* 中國人民大學清史研究所 (Research Centre for Qing History, People’s University of China [Beijing], 1999), 19; Joseph de Moidrey, *La Hiérarchie Catholique, en Chine, en Corée et au Japon* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de l’orphelinat de T’ou-sè-wè, 1914), 28–30 and 242–243; and Bernward Willeke, *Imperial Government and Catholic Missions in China during the Years 1784–1789* (St Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 1948), 85–86.

<sup>18</sup> J.J.M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution* (Leiden: Brill, 1901), 395–6; Zhang Ze 張澤. *Qingdai jinjiaoqi de tianzhujiao* 清代禁教期的天主教 (“Christianity during the Qing Prohibition”) (Taipei: Guangqi chubanshe 光啟出版社, 1992), 154–155.

<sup>19</sup> See Joseph Boucard, *Vie et martyre du bienheureux Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, prêtre de la Congrégation de la Mission de Saint-Lazare–Mort pour la foi en Chine*, Tours: Mame, 1897, on the execution of Jean-Gabriel Perboyre in 1840.

<sup>20</sup> David Mungello, *This Suffering is my Joy: The Underground Church in Eighteenth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> See Paul Mariani, *Church Militant: Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Catholic China* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 6–7.

<sup>22</sup> Benoît Vermander, “Jesuits and China,” in: *Oxford Handbooks Online* (April 2015) DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.013.53 [last accessed October 2021]; David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) and Qin Baoqi 秦寶琦, *Hongmen zhenshi* 洪門真史 (Fuzhou: Fujian People’s Press 福建人民出版社, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Laamann, *Christian Heretics*, 61.

- <sup>24</sup> Gauvin Alexander Bailey, “Jesus in Chinese Art during the Time of the Jesuit Missions (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)”, in *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ, Volume 2*, ed. Roman Malek (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2003), (395–415) **PAGE START-PAGE END**, 408; Léonide Guiot, *La Mission du Su-tchuen au XVIII<sup>e</sup>me siècle: Vie et apostolat de Mgr Pottier* (Paris: Téqui, 1892), 149.
- <sup>25</sup> See Joseph Krahll, *China Missions in Crisis: Bishop Laimbeckhoven and his Time 1738–1787* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1964) for a vivid account of the clandestine missionary activities during this era.
- <sup>26</sup> Zhang Ze, *Qingdai jinjiaoqi de tianzhujiao*, 156–159.
- <sup>27</sup> See Laamann, *Christian Heretics*, 87–90.
- <sup>28</sup> On Muslims see Willeke, *Imperial Government*, 75–95. On Buddhists see S. Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion*, iii ff. The parallel campaign against Gansu ‘Wahhabees’ and against Christians is covered in de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution*, 311–335.
- <sup>29</sup> John Emanuel, “Matteo Ripa and the Founding of the Chinese College at Naples,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 37 (1981), 136–140.
- <sup>30</sup> Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (1976); de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution*, 409 ff.
- <sup>31</sup> On millenarian cults, see de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution*, 443. Richard Hon-chun Shek, “Sectarianism and Popular Thought in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China” (PhD dissertation, University of California, 1980), 276–287, 305; Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 56.
- <sup>32</sup> Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, “Pilgrimages in China,” in *Pilgrims and sacred sites in China*, edited by idem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 9–21.
- <sup>33</sup> Laamann, *Christian Heretics*, 96–98.
- <sup>34</sup> The main conclusion of LP Laamann, “Apostasy and Martyrdom in Eighteenth-Century China.” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*. Dec. 2015, Vol. 15 Issue 4, 275–288. See also Margiotti, *Il cattolicesimo nello Shansi*, 478.
- <sup>35</sup> Evarist-Régis Huc, *Souvenirs of a Journey through Tartary, Tibet and China during the Years 1844, 1845 and 1846* (Beijing: Imprimerie des Lazaristes, 1931), vol. I, 37.
- <sup>36</sup> Laamann, *Christian Heretics*, 107.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–70.
- <sup>38</sup> De Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution*, 484–485.
- <sup>39</sup> Henrietta Harrison, “Village Politics and National Politics: The Boxer Movement in Central Shanxi.” In Bickers & Tiedemann, *The Boxers, China, and the World*, (1–16) **PAGE START-PAGE END**, 12.
- <sup>40</sup> Zhang, *Qingdai jinjiao de tianzhujiao*, 209.
- <sup>41</sup> Perboyre’s execution was portrayed as an act of “martyrdom” in Alfred Milon, *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris: C.M., 1912) 572–580 – published by Perboyre’s own missionary society.
- <sup>42</sup> In 1822, Liu Wenyan 劉文元 of Zhouxian 周縣, Guizhou, for instance, had “Christian Heretic” (天主邪教) incised into his face. Cited in Zhang, *Qingdai jinjiao de tianzhujiao*, 210–211, with reference to *Daqing xuanzong cheng huangdi shilu* 大清宣宗成皇帝實錄 (“Veritable records of the Daoguang emperor”), 1834. Huc, *Souvenirs of a Journey*, vol. 1, 38.
- <sup>44</sup> Cited from de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution*, 495.
- <sup>45</sup> Demetrius C. de Boulger, *The Life of Yakooob Beg* (London: W. H. Allen, 1878), 236–257.
- <sup>46</sup> Johannes Beckmann, “China im Blickfeld der jesuitischen Bettelorden des 16. Jahrhunderts,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 19 (1963): 195–214 and 20 (1964): 27–41, 89–108.
- <sup>47</sup> See the research in Joseph Lee, *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860–1900* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- <sup>48</sup> Zhang counts 220,000 Christians for 1836, whereas Zhao Qingyuan 趙慶源 estimates 210,000 believers for the year 1815. Zhang, Ze 張澤. *Qingdai jinjiaoqi de tianzhujiao* 清代禁教期的天主教 (“Christianity during the Qing prohibition”). Taipei: Guangqi chubanshe 光啟出版社, 1992, **218**; Zhao Qingyuan 趙慶源, *Zhongguo tianzhujiao jiaoku huafenjiqi shouzhang jieti nianbao* 中國天主教教區劃分及其首長接替年表 (Annual compendium of China’s Catholic dioceses and their leaders) (Tainan: Wen-dao Publishers, 1980) 30.
- <sup>49</sup> See Wang Zhichun, *Qingchao rouyuan ji*, 251 and Zhang Ze, *Qingdai jinjiaoqi de tianzhujiao*, 222.
- <sup>50</sup> For the letter by Cardinal Dufresse to Rome (20 June 1813), which lists Christian preachers active in Zhaojiazhuang, see Laamann, *Christian Heretics*, 115–116.
- <sup>51</sup> David Eric Mungello, *The Catholic Invasion of China: Remaking Chinese Christianity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 19–23.

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<sup>52</sup> Systematically analyzed for the Fujian county of 福安 by Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2009). On the sororities after 1840, see page 343 ff.

<sup>53</sup> Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, 125.

<sup>54</sup> The author has found ample evidence in the Ba County records of the Sichuan Provincial Archives (Chengdu).

<sup>55</sup> See the study by Iris Leung 梁翠華, “Zhanzhang yu xuanjiao: diyici shijiedazhan yu xianggangde deguo chaihui 戰爭與宣教——第一次世界大戰與香港的德國差會” (Warfare and Missions: The First World War and the German Missions in Hong Kong), *Daofeng 道風 Logos & Pneuma* 52 (January 2020): 112–135.

<sup>56</sup> Zhang Li and Liu Jiantang, *Zhongguo jiaoshishi*, 425–426.

<sup>57</sup> Rolf Gerhard Tiedemann, *Huabeide baoli he konghuang – yihetuan yundong qianxi jidujia chuanbo he shehui chongtu* 華北的暴力和恐慌——義和團運動前夕基督教傳播和社會衝突 (“Violence and Panic in Northern China: Missionary Activity and Social Conflicts on the Eve of the Boxer Uprising”) (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Press 江蘇人民出版社, 2011), 126–131.

<sup>58</sup> Roger R. Thompson, “Reporting the Taiyuan Massacre: Culture and Politics in the China War of 1900,” in *The Boxers, China, and the World*, eds. Rolf Gerhard Tiedemann & Robert Bickers (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), (107–139), 120–126.

<sup>59</sup> Archibald E. Glover, *A Thousand Miles of Miracle in China: A Personal Record of God’s Delivering Power from the Hands of the Imperial Boxers of Shan-si* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), 18–20.

<sup>60</sup> The latter point is emphatically made in the recollections of an old Chinese priest in the oral history account by Tian Weiyun 田維耘 “Yiwei laoshenfu de zishu” “一位老神父的自述” (Account by an old priest), in Wang Junyi 王俊義 and Ding Dong 丁東 (eds), *Koushu lishi* 《口述歷史》 (Oral History) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社 (China Social Sciences Press), 2006) 261–3.

<sup>61</sup> On this phenomenon immediately prior to the Boxer Uprising, see R. G. Tiedemann, “Not Every Martyr is a Saint! The Juye Missionary Case of 1897 Reconsidered,” in Noel Golvers and Sara Lievens (eds.), *A lifelong dedication to the China mission: Essays presented in honor of Father Jerom Heyndrickx, CICM, on the occasion of his 75th birthday and the 25th anniversary of the F. Verbiest Institute, K.U. Leuven* (Leuven/Louvain: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, K.U. Leuven, 2007).