

# H-Net Reviews

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Jeremy Clarke. *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013. 312 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-988-8139-99-6.

Ernest P. Young. *Ecclesiastical Colony: China's Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. xii + 383 pp. \$78.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-992462-2.

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## Struggling for Indigenization: New Perspectives on Catholicism in China (ca. 1842-1937)

During the last decades, researchers have made great efforts to understand the history of Catholicism in China as an entangled history.[1] Most importantly, they have left behind a tradition of historiography that puts the towering figures of missionaries in the center of the plot. Instead, a variety of approaches has been employed to understand Chinese Christianity as a site of cultural, religious, and scientific contact. Many researchers have shifted their attention to Chinese protagonists and their interaction with missionaries in order to better understand Christianity's place in Chinese society and culture. This shift went along with the study of new source material, especially Chinese-language sources. Most of this recent research has been inspired by a debate stimulated by Jacques Gernet, who in *Chine et Christianisme* (1982) put forward the hypothesis of an incompatibility of European Christianity with the Chinese Confucian tradition. Challenged by Gernet's hypothesis, many scholars have since studied Catholicism in China with the question in mind whether it remained a foreign religion or managed to become indigenized. Different answers have been formulated. Whereas some historians, especially (but not exclusively) those focusing on the early modern period, have highlighted the fruitfulness of an analysis of Catholicism as a Chinese "local religion," many researchers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have stressed the hampering consequences of Catholicism's entanglement with Western imperialism on indigenization.[2]

The two books under review, focusing on the time span from the first Unequal Treaties to the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1842-1937), also address the question of indigenization, albeit within different analytical frameworks and arriving at diverging conclusions.

Jeremy Clarke's approach is informed by recent developments in the field of cultural studies, especially the visual/iconic turn. In *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, he analyzes visual representations of the Virgin Mary employed by Chinese Catholics. From the nineteenth century onward, these oscillated between indigenized versions inspired by Chinese visual traditions and versions inspired by European sacred art. Clarke concludes that, although European-style representations of the Virgin Mary are still highly popular among Chinese Catholics today, the many Chinese-style representations created from the early twentieth century onward can be read as "a powerful expression of a church that had grown in confidence and self-awareness" (p. 194). In contrast, Ernest P. Young writes the history of Catholic missions in China as a political history. In *Ecclesiastical Colony*, he painstakingly analyzes the missions' entanglement with the French Religious Protectorate during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Young draws the conclusion that the Catholic Church's failure to create a hierarchy of indigenous clergy in China was one reason for Catholicism's decline during the political turmoil of mid-twentieth-century China. As will be pointed out in the following, these two readings of indigenization of Catholicism in China both have their benefits, for they highlight different aspects of the Catholic presence in China. Our discussion will start with Young's book on the French Religious Protectorate.

By analyzing the history of the French Religious Protectorate, *Ecclesiastical Colony* addresses a key issue of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholic mission in China, which has so far not been discussed in a monograph study. Young, a professor emeritus of

Chinese history at the University of Michigan, manages to interweave the political and religious strands of his topic into an intriguing historical drama that takes into account both institutional and personal aspects and is firmly embedded in its various broader historical contexts. The book is grouped in eleven clearly written, instructive chapters.

The first chapter describes the emergence of the protectorate as a result of the religious and political situation in mid-nineteenth-century France. French missionaries, on the one hand, represented the largest group of Catholic missionaries sent to China due to a renewed missionary zeal in France. The French government, on the other hand, was in search of a political sphere of influence in China. This convergence resulted in French diplomats assuming the role as protectors of Catholic missionaries in China. After France had established itself in China in the wake of the Sino-French treaty in 1844, the French plenipotentiary Théodose de Lagrené obtained an imperial statement that decriminalized Christianity for the first time after its prohibition in 1724. In the following decades, French diplomats gradually but steadily expanded France's protecting influence on the Catholic missions in China. The treaties of Tianjin (1858) and Beijing (1860) legalized the conversion of Chinese subjects to Christianity. In 1865, the French additionally extracted permission from the Chinese side to allow French missionaries to acquire property in China. Through a close reading of both the French and the Chinese versions of the letters, edicts, and treaties on which the French Religious Protectorate was built, Young stringently shows how the protectorate came about by means of salami tactics adopted by French diplomats. He demonstrates that the devil often laid in the details of translation: thus the permission of missionary property was first formulated in the Chinese version of the Beijing convention in 1860, in a sentence absent in the French version. According to Young, "official French interpreters, including a missionary, managed surreptitiously to inject into the Chinese text this expansive right to property acquisition. The evidence suggests that responsible Chinese officials were for almost a decade not alert to the fact that the French text ... did not allow, as the Chinese text seemed to, missionary rental and purchase of land" (p. 31).

Although established on an assemblage of documents whose degree of authority varied, the French Religious Protectorate managed to gain a firm foothold in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the mechanisms by which this was achieved. A central means by which French political representatives in China established themselves as main contacts not

only for French but for all foreign Catholic missionaries was by handling "missionary cases" (*jiao'an*). These "incidents of conflict including Christians usually became cases through the petition of missionaries to foreign consular and legation officials in China, who then took up the affair with Chinese authorities for settlement" (p. 45). If there had been damage to person or property, the French authorities usually extracted monetary indemnities from the Chinese side. In this way, Catholic missionaries greatly benefited from the protection granted to them by the French state. Therefore, Catholic missionaries often chose to stay with the French Religious Protectorate even if they had other options. And France successfully warded off all attempts of other European powers, including the Vatican, to engage in the protection of Catholic missions in China. The first breach in the protectorate only occurred in the late 1880s, when the Steyl mission in Shandong accepted German protection for his missionaries.

The Boxer movement marked a turning point in the history of the French Religious Protectorate. Young discusses its aftermath in chapters 4 to 6. The Boxer violence, which had cost the lives of between twenty thousand and thirty thousand Christians (most of them Catholics), had clearly shown the limits of French protection. However, as pointed out by Young in chapter 4, France made itself indispensable in the Boxer movement's aftermath by extracting an exorbitant 450,000,000-tael indemnity from the Chinese government. This sum, which was complemented with a great number of "irregular indemnities" paid to private claimants, made some vicariates of the Chinese mission highly affluent. However, although the Boxer movement did not result in a "lessening of missionary assertiveness" (p. 95) and even led to an increase of *jiao'an* in the 1900s (a phenomenon discussed in chapter 5), the early twentieth century also saw the emergence of criticism of the French Religious Protectorate from within the church. This criticism, which is analyzed in chapter 6, was nourished not only by the Boxer violence but also by the fact that an increasing Catholic presence in China had not resulted in rising numbers of conversions. The remedies proposed for this ailment varied: whereas Alphonse Favier, bishop of Beijing until 1905, recommended that the mission should pay more attention to the training of an indigenous cleric, his successor, Stanislas Jarlin, introduced the practice to subsidize conversions, especially in rural areas. Subsidized conversions indeed led to soaring numbers of converts. These were, however, usually poorly instructed and did not often remain Catholic for a long time.

The most famous critic of the Catholic Church under the French Religious Protectorate was the Belgian Lazarist Vincent Lebbe, who is the main protagonist of the second half of Young's book. He enters the stage at the end of chapter 6. Although Lebbe was, in Young's words, "in many ways a remarkable man,... nothing stands out more than his affection for the Chinese people and for things Chinese" (p. 132). Lebbe was assigned to be head of the Tianjin mission in 1906, where he developed a missionary style that was entirely incompatible with the French Religious Protectorate. Fluent in Chinese, he associated with Tianjin intellectuals and was a driving force in the founding of a famous Chinese newspaper, the *Yishibao*. Furthermore, together with his missionary friend Antoine Cotta, he strongly advocated Chinese patriotism. When the French set out on the endeavor to enlarge their Tianjin concession in the Laoxikai area against the will of the Chinese government, Lebbe actively supported local resistance, which soon took national dimensions.

Young meticulously traces the events around the Laoxikai affair in chapter 7. In a skillfully interwoven narrative, he manages to put the role played by its key protagonists into relief. He shows that, contrary to a view taken by many historians and despite the existence of a certain degree of complicity, source evidence does not suggest a close collaboration between the bishop of Tianjin, Paul Dumond, and the French consul, Henry Bourgeois, in the realization of the French expansionist plans. Young vividly evokes the paranoia by which the French were gripped after the emergence of Chinese resistance, which led to endless speculations about a conspiracy organized by Lebbe. The French reaction to the Laoxikai affair shows how little attention French political representatives in China had paid to recent developments within Chinese society, which had become increasingly politicized in the 1910s.

In chapters 8 to 10, Young shows how Lebbe's aim to establish a Chinese church within China with an entirely Chinese ecclesiastical hierarchy was, despite all sorts of obstructions by the French political and ecclesiastical representatives, finally heard in Rome. The letters written by Lebbe and his friends to the Propaganda Fide (discussed in chapter 8) found a receptive ear with Pope Benedict XV and the Propaganda Fide prefect Willem van Rossum in the late 1910s. Questionnaires were sent to bishops in China and a papal delegate was appointed. As shown in chapter 9, the answers given by the ecclesiastics conspicuously diverged from the answers given by several groups of Chinese Christians who engaged in writing to Rome after the publication of the pope's question-

naire in Tianjin's Catholic weekly newspaper. In contrast to the bishops, who rather unequivocally stated that the time had not yet come for a Chinese-led church in China, these Chinese Christians strongly voiced their desire to strengthen the position of the indigenous cleric instead of being dependent on foreign priests, whose performance was, in their eyes, poor indeed. By juxtaposing the Chinese voices to the assessment of the mission by the bishops, Young gives a vivid impression of the deep divide between missionaries under the French Religious Protectorate and their Chinese flock.

Despite the publication of *Maximum Illud* (1919), in which Benedict XV expressed his desire to strengthen the efforts to create an indigenous clergy in the missions, and the subsequent appointment of Celso Costantini as an apostolic delegate to China (discussed in chapter 11), Young concludes in his last chapter that Rome fell short of its goal to indigenize the Chinese church. He remarks that, "although important steps toward indigenization were taken in the 1920s, the pace slowed before anything like a Chinese-run Catholic church in China had emerged" (p. 257). The lingering power of the French Religious Protectorate, which was only formally dissolved in 1947, was certainly a decisive reason for this. Young's book shows that, although the protectorate had more often than not served worldly goals instead of religious ones, it was often wholeheartedly embraced by representatives of the Catholic Church in China.

Drawing on a broad array of archival sources in various Western languages as well as in Chinese, Young gives a detailed picture of the complex political rationales that determined the history of the French Religious Protectorate. Carefully interweaving case studies with more general historical analysis, he presents this intriguing story in a clearly written language. Although the author tends to include sometimes lengthy citations and paraphrases of single source documents, the book is a fascinating read. It can warmly be recommended to every student of Catholicism in China.

Compared to *Ecclesiastical Colony*, the scope of the second book under review is narrower. Based on the author's doctoral thesis at the Australian National University, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History* aims at describing "the development and promotion within Chinese Catholic communities of a national devotion to Mary" by analyzing Chinese Christian Marian images (p. 12). Being a Jesuit, Clarke's interest in this subject reaches beyond that of a detached historian. In the introduction, he makes clear that he has a clear personal preference for indigenized depictions of the Virgin

Mary, which he deems a genuine expression of Chinese Christian identity. With his view of inculturation as a necessary prerequisite for the flourishing of Christianity in China, Clarke follows the line of early modern Jesuits in China, whose accommodation to certain Chinese customs gave rise to the Chinese rites controversy and was finally condemned by the pope in 1742. Presented in six chapters, Clarke's analysis mainly draws on printed source material in Western and Chinese languages.

The first, preliminary chapter focuses on premodern representations of Mary in China. Clarke discusses Nestorian and Jesuit depictions of Mary dating from the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively and shows that these indigenized versions of Mary give testimony to "an attitude of mind that was both flexible and open" (p. 46). Clarke also shows that the process of indigenization was not a one-way track, for there is, as suggested by the specialist of Chinese Buddhism, Yü Chün-fang, evidence that the emergence of the visual representation of the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin, as Son-Delivering (*songzi*) Goddess holding an infant in her arms was possibly influenced by Marian images imported by Catholic missionaries from the sixteenth century onward.

Chapters 2 to 4 discuss the Marian images that were in use in China under the French Religious Protectorate. According to Clarke, this period saw "an overwhelming preference for European-style Christian art..., which in turn had a negative impact on the growth of a Chinese Christian identity" (p. 47). As shown in chapter 2, the great number of French missionaries present in China introduced a renewed Marian spirituality that was influenced by several apparitions reported in France in the mid-nineteenth century, namely, the Paris apparitions to Catherine Labouré in 1830 and the Lourdes apparitions to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. These events instigated the development of new Marian visual representations in France, which subsequently also spread in China. Thus many Lourdes grottoes were created by Catholic missionaries all over China in the late nineteenth century. In chapter 4, Clarke shows that, despite the prevalence of European Marian imagery, there were also examples of Chinese-style Marian images in this period. He traces the intriguing story of the image of Our Lady of Donglu, which was created after the village of Donglu was spared from the Boxer violence, a fact that was attributed by its Christian inhabitants to the Virgin Mary. In a highly revealing analysis, Clarke shows that the Donglu image (which was created in Shanghai) was inspired by depictions of the Chinese empress Cixi, who had been portrayed in the guise of Guanyin by a West-

ern artist, Catherine Bell. As shown in chapter 6, this highly intercultural Marian image became deeply influential in the China mission. It was used by the apostolic delegate, Costantini, for the promotion of the consecration of China to the Virgin Mary decided at the Shanghai Plenary Council in 1924 and was therefore widely disseminated in China.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on Chinese Christian art produced in the art department of Furen University, a Catholic university established in Beijing in the mid-1920s. The art department attracted several non-Christian students whose families had produced artists for several generations. Many of the early Furen students—among them Chen Yuandu, Wang Suda, and Lu Hongnian—finally converted to Christianity. These artists created Christian art that was firmly rooted in the Chinese tradition. As shown in chapter 6, they used traditional Chinese material, painting techniques, and styles. They placed biblical scenes in Chinese-looking landscapes and buildings inhabited by Chinese-looking people. Most interestingly, they combined European Christian with Chinese symbols. For instance, Lu painted a version of the Holy Couple Seeking Shelter that is "almost completely framed by branches and fronds of bamboo" (p. 177), thus symbolizing the hardship endured and the moral integrity maintained by the Holy Couple. The "lively and evocative examples of Christian images in local style" produced by Furen teachers and students found a broad viewership in and beyond China (p. 175). They were exhibited in annual shows in Beijing, and seventeen Furen artworks were even shown at the Paris World Fair in 1937. However, they did not find approval only. According to Clarke, there were also critics who "thought paintings on silk or paper scrolls were inherently incapable of conveying the truths of Christianity with the necessarily graceful force" (p. 167). In his conclusion, Clarke shows that these critical voices still make themselves heard in present-day China, where many Christians oppose indigenized Christian images because they think they do not depict the religious truths correctly.

Whereas Clarke's study offers many interesting insights into the role of Marian images in the history of Chinese Christianity, it also has its shortcomings. It contains unnecessarily long passages focusing on the general history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christianity in China. These are rendered at the expense of the analysis of Marian visual representations, which in some chapters undeservedly recede to the background. The fact that many images mentioned in the text are not depicted in the book adds to the impression that Marian images are not always given the deserved attention. Over-

all, it would have been interesting to know more about the exact historical circumstances under which particular Marian images in China were produced, received, and employed by different groups of people. How did Chinese Christian communities interact with missionaries? Were there groups among Chinese Christians that proved to be especially accessible for Marian devotions? Was there a specifically female reception of Marian images?

Because these questions are not satisfactorily addressed, Clarke is not able to fully substantiate his hypothesis that visual representations of Mary “provide clues to the emergence of new identities” in Chinese Catholicism (p. 5). This can be illustrated with respect to Clarke’s analysis of the creation of the Lady of Donglu image. At the beginning of this chapter, Clarke argues that “the Donglu Catholics produced a portrait embodying their devotion to Mary” (p. 89). Only later it becomes clear that the sources consulted by Clarke do not mention the Donglu Christians, but rather their missionary, René Flament, who “dreamt of equipping his church with a beautiful painting of the Holy Virgin” (p. 102). If indeed, as suggested by Clarke, the Donglu Christians played an important role in the process of creating the image of the Donglu Virgin, it would have been important to describe their participation in detail. This would have required the study of archival source material in addition to printed sources. Nevertheless, Clarke’s focus on Marian visual representations opens an interesting avenue for further research on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholicism in China. Like Young’s study of the French Religious Protectorate, it complements our picture of Chinese Catholicism as an entangled historical phenomenon by turning our attention to

aspects that have so far not received much attention by historians.

The two books under review offer remarkably different yet not fully incompatible perspectives on the Chinese Catholic Church’s struggle for indigenization. Whereas Clarke aims at describing this struggle by focusing on Chinese Christian communities and showing that they developed their own expressions of their Chinese Christian religiosity, Young describes the same phenomenon with a focus on missionaries and foreign political representatives who decided on the political framework in which these Chinese Catholic communities were set. A combined reading of Young’s and Clarke’s analyses of Catholicism in China shows that its indigenization did not entirely fail, nor was it a full success. The two books reveal that, from early modern times into the twentieth century, Catholicism in China never ceased to be a foreign religion, but nevertheless became a Chinese religion in many ways.

#### Notes

[1]. The state of the field has been summarized in Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001-2010).

[2]. For a study of Christianity as a local religion in late imperial Fujian, see Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). For a study of Christianity as a local religion covering the period from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, see Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse and Other Strange Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

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