

## BOOK REVIEW

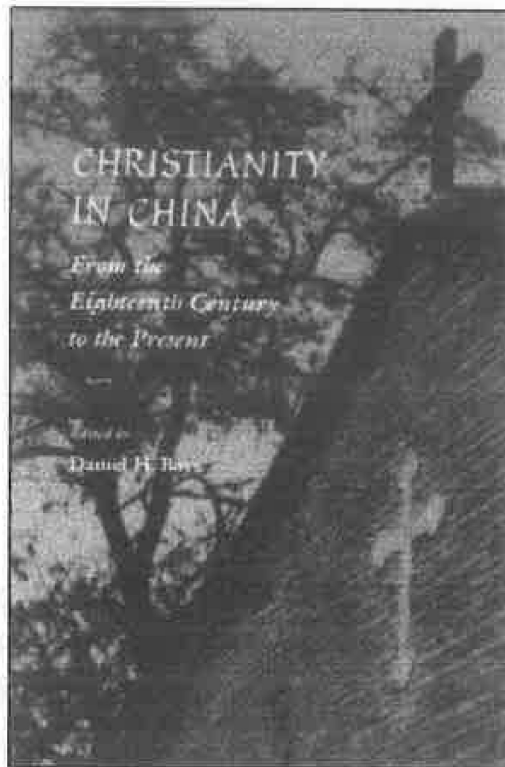
### *China Mission Revisited*

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Review of *Christianity in China, From the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present*, edited by Daniel Bays (Stanford University Press, 1996), 483 pp.

The Daniel Bays' edited book *Christianity in China* is a recent welcome contribution to the ongoing investigation into the history of Christian missions and of their encounter with Chinese society and culture. The book originated from the papers delivered at two conferences held at Lawrence, Kansas, in 1989 and 1990 as part of the History of Christianity in China Project. The project itself was funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, and administered by the University of Kansas from 1985 to 1992. Professor



Bays, however, credits the late John K. Fairbank of Harvard University with giving the initial impetus to the project. He did this in a 1968 address to the American Historical Association, entitled "Assignment for the 70s," when he urged historians to search the hitherto largely untapped wealth of material contained in the

archives of China mission societies, both Catholic and Protestant. Later the eminent China historian, Paul A. Cohen, added the note that such investigations into mission history should be "China-centered." By this he meant that Chinese sources should primarily be used, and that Chinese people, believers and non-believers alike, should be given the opportunity to report in their own words about the impact of Christianity on their lives. In other words, what the response was of the ordinary Chinese citizen to the message of the Christian gospel. Previous China mission histories had mostly made use of Western sources, and had presented mission history largely from the point of view of the foreign missionary. The benefit of the papers in the present volume is that, for the most part, they have been written with the abovementioned admonition about "China-centeredness" in mind.

In his preface Professor Bays points out that, ignoring Fairbank's advice, most China histories of the 1970s and 80s were written from the political, social or economic point of view. Very little China mission history was written. But since the late 1980s several China mission histories have appeared. Professor Bays credits this renewed interest in China missions to the resurgence of life in the Chinese Christian church itself in the years following the reform and open door policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping. Missions represent one example of contact between Chinese and Westerners at the grassroots level, and research into the history of that unique contact should lead to greater understanding and harmony between peoples on both sides of the encounter.

The 20 essays in this volume are listed under four categories: Christianity and the Dynamics of Qing Society, Christianity and Ethnicity, Christianity and Chinese Women, and the Rise of Indigenous Chinese Christianity.

The six papers grouped together in Part I, under the title Christianity and the Dynamics of Qing Society, frequently relate accounts of court cases (*jiaoan*), and are an interesting commentary on the relations between Catholics and their non-Catholic neighbors. Robert E. Entenmann's "Catholics and Society in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Sichuan" treats the activity of Catholic communities in rural Sichuan in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century well after the Yongzheng emperor's 1724 empire-wide proscription of Christianity. Presenting actual court transcripts, Entenmann vividly describes

local persecutions of Catholics, which took place in 1746 and 1755, and their concomitant court cases. He concludes that the Catholics were frequently recent immigrants to Sichuan from Guangdong, Fujian and Jiangxi, and that they did not belong to one social stratum. Some were rich landowners, who employed tenants to farm the land. They were resented because of their wealth, and not necessarily because of their Catholic faith. In fact, the court case leading to the persecution of 1755 was brought by a poor Catholic tenant against his Catholic landlord. But, as Entenmann points out, Catholics were always vulnerable because of their faith. Catholicism was considered heterodox, and was lumped together with the White Lotus sect as a belief to be proscribed, if not altogether wiped out. Thus it was always open to persecution.

From 18<sup>th</sup> century Sichuan, the second essay in Part I entitled "Catholic Converts in Jiangxi Province: Conflict and Accommodation, 1860-1900" by Alan Richard Sweeten, jumps up to late-19<sup>th</sup> century Jiangxi. While Entenmann's article deals with the period 1724 to 1844, when Christianity (then, only Catholicism) was proscribed throughout the whole empire, Sweeten's deals with the period after the Treaty of Beijing in 1860, which permitted foreign missionaries to reside in the interior of China. As a result, from 1860 to 1900 the number of foreign missionaries (now Protestant as well as Catholic) residing in the interior of China rose from a clandestine few to well over 10,000. One can well imagine the alarm raised among the local Chinese gentry and general populace by this turn of events.

Sweeten describes a number of court cases in Jiangxi involving Christians and their non-Christian neighbors. He mentions that Chinese officials sometimes pointed out that converts must still be considered Chinese citizens living in a Chinese social context. Therefore in the cases under review in Sweeten's article, a number of factors for the litigation come into play, of which religion is only one. Sweeten concludes that Christians were brought to court by their non-Christian neighbors over practical, mundane problems common to any community, and not necessarily because of their faith.

Chapter 3 in Part I is an article by Charles A. Litzinger entitled "Rural Religion and Village Organization in North China: The Catholic Challenge in the late 19th Century." Litzinger

likewise describes conflicts between Catholics and their local community, this time in late 19th century Hebei Province. The focal point for Litzinger's study is the local village temple. The village temple and its lands were considered public property. The temple community and the village community were thus equated. Conflicts arose when the Catholics claimed a certain percentage of the temple public property, which they considered belonged to them as members of the village, so that they could build a church. On the other side of the coin, the temple adherents would harass the Catholics to contribute to temple festivals, such as to give thanks for a good harvest or to pray for rain. The contribution sought was often an assessment for a folk opera performance. Naturally enough, these differences often led to the filing of court cases. As Litzinger points out, a basic reason for this was that originally the temple rituals were the glue that held the community together socially. Thus he concludes that because villagers in late 19<sup>th</sup> century China did not make a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane, non-Christian members of the village considered those villagers who had become Christian as separating themselves from the community.

"Opera subscriptions" come up again in the next essay "Twilight of the Gods in the Chinese Countryside: Christians, Confucians, and the Modernizing State, 1861-1911" by Roger R. Thompson. Citing a number of cases from rural late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanxi Province, Thompson describes the conflicts which arose over a period of 50 years regarding opera subscriptions, between Catholic (Franciscan) and Protestant converts on the one hand, and non-Christian villagers on the other. He points out that these were a major factor in the large scale Boxer destruction in Shanxi in 1900. After the Boxer uprising, local authorities realized that a distinction should be made between public works, like bridge-building, road work and welfare, to which Christians should contribute, and religious rituals, like operas, organized to give thanks for the harvest or to pray for rain, for which Christians ought not be required to pay. If I read him correctly, Thompson sees this and other like decisions as leading to the modernization of the State.

In the final two essays of Part I, Tsou Mingteh recounts the life of the Protestant missionary Gilbert Reid (1857-1927) and his connection to the Reform Movement in the late Qing period, and



Ernest P. Young examines the background, circumstances and consequences of the 1906 Nanchang (Jiangxi) Affair, in which the local county magistrate was found with his throat slit in the local Catholic mission.

Of the three papers in Part II, which deals with Christianity and Ethnicity, perhaps the most interesting is Nicole Constable's "Christianity and Hakka Identity." In it, Constable traces the historical connection between the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society and the Hakka people of Hong Kong and Guangdong Province. She shows how Christianity rather than diminishing the Hakka identity of the Hakka Christians has, on the contrary, enhanced and reinforced it. Furthermore, she offers proof that the Hakka Christians did not lose their Hakka identity, or their sense of being Han Chinese, by becoming Christians.

Jumping for the moment to Part IV, "The Rise of Indigenous Chinese Christianity," the six essays in this section deal with the question of Chinese Christianity's adaptation to Chinese society and culture. Daniel Bays feels that this section deals with the most important issue underlying Christianity's presence in China, namely the indigenization and inculturation of the Chinese Church into the Chinese context. Of the six essays in this section perhaps those of the Lutz's and Professor Bays himself are of most interest to the general reader. In "Karl Gutzlaff's Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union," authors Jessie G. Lutz and R. Ray Lutz, describe Gutzlaff's efforts in the late 1830s and early 1840s to send his Chinese assistants into the interior of China to preach the Gospel. Gutzlaff felt that the missionary task of preaching should be turned over to the Chinese Christians as soon as possible. In other words he gave his converts a sense of independence right from the beginning. The Lutz's point out that later, in the 1850s, the foreign missionaries of the Basel Mission reaped the rewards of Gutzlaff's work, especially among the Hakkas of northeast Guangdong, when many of these people, who had initially heard the Good News from Gutzlaff's preachers, were baptized into the church.

Professor Bays' own contribution, entitled "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937," recounts the growth of independent Protestant churches, such as the True Jesus Church, the Little Flock of Watchman Ni, the Jesus Family, and

the churches of independent preachers, like Wang Mingdao. These broke off from, or grew up outside the pale of the mainstream Protestant denominations. Bays claims that these independent Christians accounted for as much as 20-25% of all Protestants in China. Thus, he concludes, there was an effort to set up independent Chinese churches many years before independence was actively promoted in the 1950s by the Three-Self Movement.

We will now turn to Part III of Bays' book to the section entitled "Christianity and Chinese Women." It is good that Bays gives much space (one quarter of his book) to women missionaries and women converts because they are the unsung heroines in the history of the church in China, and yet they get very little publicity. Most mission histories highlight the work of male missionaries and male native church leaders. Kwok Pui-lan makes this point in her chapter in this section, entitled "Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the 20th Century." Kwok points out that in China since it was in the nature of things to separate male and female members of the Christian congregation, women missionaries did a tremendous amount of work teaching the faith and the Bible to the local women converts. Female leaders in the local congregations were active as organizers of Bible study groups and prayer meetings for the women, and led the way in reform movements concerning women, such as the anti-footbinding campaign. The story of the women's role in the church in China should be told, Kwok posits, because it would make the history of the implantation and development of the church in China more complete.

Two concrete examples cited to show the contribution of women missionaries in China concern girls' schools at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are Heidi Ross' account of the McTyeire Home and School for Girls in Shanghai, and Judith Liu and Donald P. Kelly's account about St. Hilda's School for Girls in Wuhan. These schools were founded to educate upper class Chinese young women who, it was hoped, would transform their families and one day even help to transform the nation. The students at McTyeire were not unaware of the social changes taking place all around them. One described taking a rickshaw to school everyday, and passing the racecourse with its sign: "Chinese and dogs not allowed." It made her blood boil, she said, but the

students never talked about these things with the missionaries. Sometimes the missionaries expressed their regret at the bad things happening in China. It made the student feel: "We were almost on the same side." Almost, but not quite.

Another student wanted to attend McTyeire so that she could "fight the laws against women in China." She wanted to fight against concubinage and footbinding. This student waited nine years after graduation from McTyeire until Suzhou Law School accepted women. She entered that school with the thought: "I am going to show you boys that I have bigger brains than you have. I'm going to beat you all, because you think men are superior to women. I'm going to show you women are superior to you." This McTyeire graduate became China's first female lawyer.

At St. Hilda's in Wuhan the girls also absorbed a socially concerned Christianity. "We learned," one wrote, "the principles of equality – not to denigrate the poor and elevate the rich." The students also studied hard in order "to prove that the Chinese were as good as the foreigners" in their studies. Most of the students interviewed for the two articles have fond, nostalgic memories of their schooldays. Many of the students at both schools became Christians, and upon graduation, they went forth confidently believing that they could serve God and China simultaneously.

While the interviewees among the graduates of McTyeire and St. Hilda's remain anonymous, we know the person and stance of Cora Deng, first Chinese director of the YWCA in China, from the essay about her written by Emily Honig, entitled "Christianity, Feminism and Communism: The Life and Times of Deng Yuzhi." Deng first became involved with the YWCA in the 1920s. Regarding the relationship of Christianity to social problems, Cora, herself a baptized Christian, admitted, "I was more interested in social problems than in the religious aspect of YWCA work." She wanted to train women workers to have a working class feminist consciousness, rather than to engage in Bible study and to do Christian work. She was sympathetic with the goals of the Communist Party, but she felt that, through the YWCA, she could contribute to the revolution without joining the Party. She did not want to subordinate her work to the dictates of the Party. "The evidence shows that Cora Deng became more emphatically Christian after her appointment as head of the Chinese YWCA in

the late 1940s, and in all the years following Liberation," Honig concludes.

As for the Roman Catholics, the single entry under women for them in Bays' book is also by Robert E. Entenmann. It is entitled "Christian Virgins in 18th-Century Sichuan." The institution of Christian Virgins originated in Fujian Province in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the area evangelized by the Dominican Fathers. It was organized into an institute in Sichuan by the Paris Foreign Mission Society in 1744. However the initiative to dedicate themselves completely to the work of the church came from the women themselves. Although Emperor Yongzheng had proscribed the preaching of Christianity in 1724, the number of Catholics increased tenfold in Sichuan between 1750 and 1800. By 1800 there were 40,000 Catholics spread in small "christianities" throughout the province, and only 22 priests to serve them: 18 Chinese priests and 4 French missionaries. Since the priests could not care for the widespread Christian communities, and they were also always subject to arrest, due to the empire-wide prohibition of Christianity, they had to depend on the laity to help oversee their far-flung congregations. Thus a local lay leader (*huizhang*) was appointed over each congregation. Women willing to forego marriage and dedicate their whole lives to the mission of the church also came forward. They volunteered to teach catechism to the women and children, to prepare catechumens for baptism, to baptize dying infants, to do some welfare work and provide medical care, and lastly to serve as teachers in schools for girls. This was the beginning of the Institute of Christian Virgins.

The Institute of Christian Virgins flourished after its establishment in Sichuan in 1744. By 1892 there were 1,060 Christian Virgins in Sichuan and 434 in other provinces where the Paris missionaries worked. In that year 2,945 pupils studied in 231 schools directed by the virgins in Sichuan, and they also ran six orphanages in that province. Entenmann concludes that these women made a great contribution to the education of girls in rural Sichuan at a time when such an education was not greatly valued.

However, relations between the foreign missionaries and the virgins did not go as smoothly in other areas of China as with the Paris foreign missionaries in Sichuan. We have seen that the Paris missionaries stayed behind in Sichuan in spite of the 1724

imperial proscription against Christianity. In other areas, the missionaries were expelled. In these areas, in the absence of the missionaries, the virgins frequently took over responsibility for running the local congregations. When the missionaries returned to China (to the five treaty ports) in the 1840s after the signing of the Nanjing Treaty ending the First Opium War, they experienced difficulty in some places getting back control of the Christian communities from the hands of the virgins. In the 1840s, Bishop de Besi, SJ, of Jiangnan complained to Rome that the virgins in his area were like the deaconesses of the early church, but that their power was greater! (*Jiangnan Chuanjiao Shi*, Shanghai: Translation Press, 1983, Vol. 1, pp. 22-23, translated from the French of J. de la Serviere, *Histoire de la Mission du Kiang-nan*, Imprimerie de l'Orphelinat de T'ou-se-we, Changhai, 1914.)

However, another side of the virgins is given in Jean-Paul Wiest's *Maryknoll in China*. Wiest (p. 230) describes how, in 1930, when the Maryknoll Fathers wished to establish a native congregation of Sisters in Fushun, they entrusted the first eight candidates to the care of the Christian virgin Bibiana in the mission of Erbadan. Bibiana trained these aspirants for the first year, and then in 1931 when the Maryknoll Sisters arrived, she turned the eight candidates over to them for the continuation of their formation.

After citing other works regarding the Christian virgins, we return to Bays' book, and congratulate him on devoting so much space to the work of Christian women, both foreign and Chinese, in the building up of the church in China. It is long overdue. The contribution of Christian women, both missionary and native, must be recognized. The Bays' book does this admirably. Indeed the whole work is a marvelous addition to the literature on the history of the encounter between two great cultures in the world: the Chinese and the Christian. The book is enhanced by a bibliography of all the historical sources cited in the book and a list in Chinese characters of all the names and places which appear in the book. *Christianity in China* should be on the reference shelf of every seminary or mission sending society. If a student of the history of the missions in China is looking for a thesis topic, he could do no better than to start with this book!