"Growing on Holy Ground"
Keynote Presentations at
The Eighteenth National Catholic China Conference

In November 2000 the Ricci Institute joined the US Catholic China Bureau for its eighteenth National Catholic China Conference entitled "Christianity in China: Growing on Holy Ground." In this issue of Pacific Rim Report, we are including two keynote presentations delivered at the meeting by Paul Rule and Nicolas Standaert, S.J..

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"Christianity in China: Growing on Holy Ground"

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In the marvelous exhibition, "The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology," which concluded in San Francisco, there was a bronze double mask looking in two directions at once. This is what I feel as I try to look at the past of Chinese Christianity in order to understand its present and to think simultaneously about its future.

I also want to penetrate the enigmatic expression of that mask which seemed to mock me every time I saw it, challenging my conviction that I, a Christian of European descent, could ever understand Chinese culture or Chinese spirituality. I can only console myself with the thought that others like me have clearly done so in the past with success, especially with the patient, understanding guidance native to that culture.

Looking Both Ways
Recently I have spent much of my time trying to understand the inner lives of Chinese Christians of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. I have come to the conclusion that their time was in many ways like our own. It saw the collapse of an old order—that of the Ming—and the creation of a new, superficially foreign one, the Manchu or Qing dynasty. Many educated Chinese suffered from divided allegiances, disgusted with the corrupt old regime that had failed them and the people as a whole and contemptuous of the ignorant and arrogant new rulers. The violent restoration of order by the Qing and the return of prosperity could not satisfy their hunger for certainty and social and spiritual equanimity.

One reaction was a turn inwards. Christianity was but one of the spiritual reactions to this crisis of civilization. Buddhism revived and new syncretic religious sects emerged, some preaching apocalyptic futures. The sectarian movements generically labeled the White Lotus flourished, often in the same regions where Christianity seemed to be undergoing rapid growth. In Shandong and Fujian there was a close association between the two and the Qing government, noting this, lumped them together in condemnation.

Reversing the gaze of the mask, let us glance briefly at the present situation of religion in China. We have what the government calls, in bewilderment, a state of "Christianity fever." According to Marx, religion, especially an 'imperialist' religion like Christianity, should be dying; instead, it is flourishing, perhaps more than at any time within a century. The very material achievements of China over the past two decades have generated not content but a new search for meaning, for a viable spirituality, something that is equally evident in Taiwan.

The Spirituality of the 'Confucian Christians'
'Spirituality' is a much abused term today, but I use it in its technical meaning of the quality, the tone, the characteristic features of the religious outlook and practices of an individual or group. Spirituality is a cultural artifact, influenced by time and place. A spirituality for today must be a global spirituality and struggle against the forces of materialism and consumerism that are equally global. But it must also accommodate the specific historical experiences of each society.

The spirituality of the seventeenth-century Chinese Christians was, for educated Chinese at least, that of 'Confucian Christians'. A Christian spirituality for China today must necessarily be different. Richard Madsen in his challenging recent study indicated that China's Catholics see the rural Catholic communities that he studied as understandably, but regrettably, self-centered and inward-looking rather than concerned with civil society as a whole. However, what strikes me about seventeenth-century Christianity is its social concern.

There was inwardness, certainly, an interest in meditation, prayer, self-examination. But there were also very active confraternities engaged in charitable activities. These were not just the now somewhat notorious groups which baptized abandoned babies, but those that looked after such children. Others visited the sick and dying, provided basic education, and gave spiritual support to upper-class Christian women, who were largely house-bound within their own homes.
Professor Erik Zürcher of Leiden thinks seventeenth-century Christianity was "two-faced" (that mask again!) in that it presented a Confucian face to the non-Christian world and that of "a living minority religion" to insiders. Critics saw both faces and often deplored the devotional one, yet I find no evidence of tension or strain on the part of these Christians. They were openly Christian and Chinese and, for the scholars among them, also Confucian. And not just for the scholars but for their wives, children, and servants who happily performed domestic rituals that can be loosely labeled 'Confucian' while attending mass, saying prayers in common and privately, and doing good works recommended to them by the Gospel.

The Role of Difference

Preaching Christianity through the familiar was, of course, a necessary and productive missionary task. Especially it meant for the Jesuits the use of Confucian concepts, and the great project of 'complementing' Confucianism with Christian revelation. I believe that the 'Confucian Christian' label is an appropriate one for the educated male literati elite Christianized by the Jesuits.

However, most of the new Christians of the seventeenth century were neither literati nor male. As I have closely examined the catalogues of collections of Jesuit writings in Chinese of the period, I realized that I had been skipping over the vast bulk of such publications. These were neither works of apologetics based on Confucian texts nor polemics against Buddhism, although these, of course, exist; but works of devotion. Some are translations of standard European devotional works—on the mass, the rosary, litanies to the saints, treatises on prayer, lives of Jesus. Others, especially later in the seventeenth century, seem to be specifically written to meet the spiritual needs of ordinary literate but not scholarly Christians, including women.

There is little if any attempt in such works to use the language of either Confucianism or popular Chinese religion. This is post-Tridentine European devotional Catholicism, although beginning to develop towards a new and interesting Chinese synthesis of practices and sensibility. Could it be, I thought, that what was attracting many Chinese was not similarity but difference? Was Christianity offering something missing in both Confucian moralism and popular religiosity? And does this explain both the nineteenth century spread of Christianity and today's Christianity fever?

Belief in Christ Crucified

What were the gaps? Firstly, a belief not just in a remote God, a Tian or Shangdi, but in an incarnate God, in Jesus Christ the God-Man. This was the sticking point for many otherwise attracted literati and certainly for the contributors to the major anti-Christian writing of the seventeenth century, the Paxie ji. Jiang Dejing's preface to Book 3 of that work expresses his disgust on reading Christian books to discover that

"They consider their Tiantzhu the equivalent of the Shangdi that we Chinese worship, and I had not known that they think one Jesus who lived at the time of Emperor Ai of Han to be Tiantzhu."7

"Tianzhu-ism," as Erik Zürcher somewhat pejoratively calls it,9 entailed acceptance of a Jesus as savior. Giulio Aleni, S.J., early in the seventeenth century wrote a treatise on the incarnation.9 It was the incarnation of God as Jesus that proved the final obstacle to the baptism of Aleni's friend, the retired Grand Secretary, Ye Xianggao, who seems otherwise to have been persuaded of the truth of Aleni's teaching.10 There was, according to the mission historian Daniello Bartoli, "a single but insuperable obstacle," namely that "it did not seem to him worthy of God to become man to redeem man."11

Even more scandalous was that Tiantzhu incarnate had been crucified. Yang Guangxian, in his bitter anti-Christian polemic, the Budeyi, which was to lead to mass imprisonments and some executions of Christians in the late 1660s, makes much of the ignominious death of Jesus.12 But the Christians themselves made it central to their religious practices. The most influential Ming dynasty convert, Xu Guangqi, wrote a moving meditation on the crucifixion,13 as early as 1615. Aleni's life of Jesus, which ran through several editions,14 included powerful and realistic engravings based on European models of the passion and death of Jesus. One of the most popular early Christian confraternities was in honor of the passion of Jesus. It is ironic, then, that one of the most frequently repeated charges against the Jesuits, even today, is that they did not preach Christ crucified. ...one of the most frequently repeated charges against the Jesuits, even today, is that they did not preach Christ crucified."
Jesus Christ crucified was, then, the "stumbling-block," and many seventeenth-century Chinese overcame it to become Christians just as many who were confronted by Him did not. The Confucian Christians were like the Platonist Christian Fathers of the Church, or medieval European Aristotelian Christians, not the less Christian for expressing their faith in the categories of a specific system of thought. In their religious life, though, they shared the practices of their less intellectual Christian brothers and sisters and believed in an unexceptional and ultimately incredible faith.

**Christanity as an Alternative Community**

Secondly, in addition to accepting Jesus as Savior, there was a sense of a church, a living faith community. A cohesive organized body that was not part of the top-down structure of Chinese autocracy; one that owed allegiance to foreign priests and a shadowy religious ruler, a Jiao-huang (the 'Emperor of the Religion', i.e. the Pope): this was a direct challenge to an all-powerful state. They had a God who was their ultimate 'Father and Mother' (fumu) rather than the Emperor. The Kangxi emperor of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was confident enough of his power and trusting enough of his Jesuit advisers to reject the constant warnings of his Board of Rites, but later emperors were happy to draw no fine distinctions between the Lord of Heaven Religion and the White Lotus Society. And they had good reasons. The Christians did have a king other than Caesar, and they were expected to follow him on those rare occasions when allegiances clashed, even if they were not seditionist in the terms often alleged. The same holds true today.

**Socially Subversive?**

Thirdly, although conforming to many features of the traditional Chinese social structure, Christianity was challenging others, however gently and gradually: the position of women (at least in its rejection of polygamy), the low value given to human life, (as seen in infant abandonment), conscription for war, harsh legal and judicial regimes, the inequalities and injustices of Chinese society. The Confucians might proclaim that "within the four seas all men are brothers," but they scarcely acted as if this were so, and certainly did not include women in the phrase.

In my view, when anti-Christian officials claimed that the new religion was subversive they were right. Few in the seventeenth century seriously believed in invasions from Manila or Goa, but they rightly saw a challenge to the existing order even more fundamental than that posed by millenarian Buddhist and Daoist sects. Although in the nineteenth century the outside threat was real and Christianity inextricably linked to it, I agree with Paul Cohen that the anti-Christian movement was mainly a gentry-led reaction against a challenge to their privileges and pretensions.

**Difference as an Attraction**

At this point, I would like to raise the question of whether the very foreignness of Christianity was not and is not one of its attractions. It is striking that today in the West some forms of religion proving enormously popular are those most alien to the Western religious and cultural traditions—I am thinking of Tibetan Buddhism, the Society for Krishna Consciousness, and many forms of New Age religion. Could this explain 'Christianity fever' among the young in China today? And did it play a role in the seventeenth century? My tentative conclusion is that it is a factor today in age of globalization, but was less important, although present, until recently.

I agree that Chinese scholars were fascinated by the technology and new ideas brought by the Jesuits and that they sometimes indiscriminately lumped together astronomy and Christianity as Tianxue ('Heavenly Teaching'). But to join the Tianzhu jiao ('The Lord of Heaven Religion') involved a religious commitment, a serious one that necessarily caused some painful differentiation from their own society. It was embraced not for the sake of novelty but out of conviction. When that commitment demanded radical separation after the Vatican decision in the Chinese Rites controversy, it proved too much for many gentry families. Those who remained were essentially those outside the social and ritual parameters of respectability.

However, whatever the attractions of foreignness, I strongly reject that they included a political dimension. To call such patriots as Xu Guangqi or Han Lin "lackeys of imperialism" is ludicrous, and the charge was untenable even in the nineteenth century. People do
not offer their lives for imperialism but for what they believe to be true and all important, more important than life itself.

The Inner Life of Seventeenth-Century Christians

But to turn back to the inner life which sustained such steadfastness. What was that 'hallowed ground' out of which Chinese Christianity grew?

Many practiced meditation. There are a considerable number of Jesuit and other seventeenth-century works in Chinese explaining various methods of meditation. Some involved reflections on the life of Jesus, some involved the use of rosaries, some came close to Buddhist song nian, 'reciting sacred texts'. We must assume there was a demand for such books, that they were used, even if we have little in the way of personal writings on the subject.

There are some few books of personal reflections. For example, in the Jesuit Archives in Rome there is a manuscript treatise by the Fujian Christian Li Jiugong entitled Shensi Lu (A Record of Night Thoughts) in which the old man during sleepless nights meditates on his relationships with others and on the moral dilemmas of his society. And there is a published work from 1635, the Shengjiao yuanliu (The Origin and Progress of the Holy Teaching) by one Zhu Yupo, claiming to be related to the ruling Ming house. It gives minute details of Christian practices and is written in vernacular style.

Confraternities abounded among these seventeenth-century Christians. The Sodality of Our Lady was founded in 1609 in Beijing, on the initiative of one Luke Li, according to Matteo Ricci, but as Ricci himself had been a member of the archetypal Prima Primaria Sodality in Rome, he probably played a major part. By 1664, according to the historian of the Jesuit sodalities, Delplace, there were 400 such sodalities in China. In 1611, Alfonso Vagnoni founded a sodality of the Holy Angels for women in Nanjing, putting it in the charge of the Chinese Brother, Zhong Mingren, who presumably was thought to be sufficiently advanced in age to serve in that capacity. Others were for special groups such as catechists, scholars, children, or midwives; or for special purposes: baptizing the moribund, feeding the hungry, burying those without family. Some, like the Holy Water Society (Shengshui Hui) founded in Huangzhou by Yang Tingyun and the Humanitarian Society (Renhui) founded by Wang Zheng in Xi'an, seem to have served a combination of functions, mutual help in the faith, and good works. One person particularly active in founding such groups was Candida Xu, Xu Guangqi's granddaughter.

Mention of Candida Xu is a reminder that, as usual, the women tend to be forgotten in this story. I recently came across a 1686 report by Antoine Thomas, S.J. writing from Beijing on the state of Christianity in that city, which gives some interesting details on the lives of Christian women. Women, says Thomas, cannot without scandal attend church with men, nor assemble together except with extreme caution. So, another church dedicated to the Virgin Mary has been erected near the principal church and the women are accustomed to come there twice a year, in spring and autumn, in small groups throughout the month. They are informed of the day, picked up in a carriage and are given instruction, have their confessions heard and receive the eucharist. If time allows the service finishes with a brief sermon. On Sundays and feasts they gather in domestic chapels for prayers and instruction "by a Vice-prefect or other important Christian" and they are given catechisms. "So it happens that often the women and girls of a young age are better instructed in the Christian faith than the men." Conclusion: The Test of Love

It is my hope that, at last, we are on the threshold of a new two-way sharing of the treasures old and new that Christianity in its many cultural forms has for us.

We in the West have much to learn from the resistance offered by our Chinese Christian brothers and sisters to an all-powerful state and its formidable machinery of conformity, just as we have things to give them derived from our experience of being Christian in pluralist and democratic societies. We also have, as Father Benoit Vermander has recently reminded us, a Christian tradition of activism for justice and peace which is desperately needed in a China (or better, Chinas, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) with a history of so much recent violence and such gross social injustices.

There is one last lesson to be learned from those earlier Christians in China. Great distress, scandal, and
even final alienation was caused from the Church by quarrels among pastors over questions of principle and church discipline. Most ordinary Christians were unable to follow the issues involved—the licitly of ancestor and other rituals, the authority of Portuguese bishops and French Vicars Apostolic, or incomprehensible decrees from far off Rome. Others took sides and became embittered. In the nineteenth century, a similar division occurred among Chinese Protestants over the question of ‘terms’, one still reflected in modern Bible translations.

I do not want to enter into the details of those quarrels, or to draw the obvious parallels with the present day disputes between ‘open’ and ‘underground’ Christians, except to note their tragic consequences and their flagrant contradiction of the teaching of the Gospel of Love. The First Epistle of John warns us, “in these last days,” against antichrists,

5. E. Zürcher “Conclusion: The Two Faces of Late Ming Christianity in Confucian and Christian Religiosity in Late Ming China,” Catholic Historical Review 83.4 (October 1997), pp. 649-50.
7. Shengchao Poxie ji, Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1996, p. 139.
9. The Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi, Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu (ARSJ): JS I. 77a
11. Quoted in Fonti Ricciiane, II, p. 43, note from Daniello Bartoli’s La Cina, 1663.
15. 1 Cor. 1:23
17. In ARSJ: JS I. 34/37, 1.
18. Copies in ARSJ: JS I.142 and BN, Courant 6882, 6883. Plisher attributes the work to Rodrigo Figueiredo S.J. and says it was printed in Kaifeng “sous le nom d’un célèbre mandarin” (I:169). But an examination both of title pages and contents makes it clear that it was written (zhuan) and caused to be engraved (luzi) by Zhu after the teaching of an unnamed missionary, presumably Figueiredo.
19. The cover note on the ARSJ copy reads; “Auctor videtur ex familia praecedenti imperatoris.” He identifies himself on the cover page as “of the ruling family of the Zhou country” (Zhou gao zong xing) and his seal identifies him as a “Christian sinner” (Tianxue guren).
"Wisdom for the Journey: Historical Perspectives on Inculturation of Christianity in China"

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With this presentation I would like to achieve two goals: 1) to show how the process of inculturation is rooted in the history of the local church; and 2) to show that our opinions are influenced by the perspective of historical events. I will take Christianity in China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a reference point and mainly concentrate on its social, rather than theological, aspects. I hope it will become apparent that the experience of Chinese Christians in the past has relevance for understanding their experience today.

What is Inculturation?

It may be helpful to explain the difference between two terms used in mission theology: 'accommodation' (or 'adaptation') and 'inculturation'. They may be distinguished with regard to primary agency and goals.

The term accommodation was very common in mission theology, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. In the accommodation method, the primary agents with responsibility for initiative and actions are the proclaimers of the Gospel; the missionaries. They are asked to adapt themselves to the culture of the country where they were sent. Accommodation means adapting to local language and customs. Missionaries should not impose their culture but adapt to the new.

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In the inculturation process, a term originating in the 1970s, the chief actor is not the missionary but the people belonging to the culture in which the Gospel takes root. Only people who are fully formed in their...
Astronomical speaking, these of the eighteenth centuries at court, while numerically speaking, Christianity in China in the "Until reform, the Astronomical Bureau in Beijing, or Jesuit painters at court, while numerically speaking, these aspects occupied a limited place in the whole of the mission."

Inculturation takes place at all levels of religious expression: 1) thought or theology (e.g., God as father-mother); 2) activity or action, including ceremonial action (liturgy; e.g., ceremonies of ancestor worship) and social behavior (ways of social sharing and solidarity; e.g., burying the dead); and 3) structure, organization and various services and charisms (e.g., charitable organizations, lay community leaders). It is the latter that is the focus of this presentation.

Inculturation is the result of a complex process of interpretation in which at least four factors are involved: 1) the cultural roots of a given society (e.g., Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist); 2) the socio-economic and political context of present-day Chinese Christians; 3) Christian scripture; and 4) the Christian memory and the communion of churches. Christian memory involves the traditions and history not only of the Universal Church but also of the local Church. Our focus will be the latter: Chinese Christian theologians of the seventeenth century, and the history of the Chinese Church.

Statistics
Until recently, Christianity in China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was often associated with calendar reform, the Astronomical Bureau in Beijing, or Jesuit painters at court, while numerically speaking, these aspects occupied a limited place in the whole of the mission.

Between 1582–1800 the total number of missionaries in China at one time never exceeded 140. No more than twenty were primarily occupied with 'scientific activities' at court, while all of the others were involved in missionary and pastoral activities outside the capital in cities and villages. A second relevant statistic is the number of Chinese priests. In 1800, they numbered about fifty, two-thirds of the total number of priests in China at that time. In terms of local leadership, then, Christianity was, in majority, Chinese. Finally, while the number of Chinese Christians reached 200,000 by 1700, by 1800 there were probably only about 135,000. This was after all a very small number compared with the total population of 150 to 200 million inhabitants. Degree-holders within this group are estimated at less than one percent of the entire Christian population for the late Ming period. During the Qing their number was further reduced. For the entire period from the late Ming until the end of the Kangxi reign (1722) only sixty-eight Christian degree holders have been identified by name. While these numbers may approximate at certain moments the percentage of degree-holders in reference to the total population, it is clear that Christianity in China was not at all the elite Church which exists in our imagination. In short, our attention went to less than one percent of Chinese Christians and to the activities of a tiny minority of missionaries and priests.

Christianity as a Marginal Religion
One way of looking at Christianity within broader Chinese society is to consider it a 'marginal religion'. Such a point of view is proposed by Erik Zürcher who, as a historian of religions in China, approaches the central issues of Christianity as part of a special phenomenon in late imperial Chinese culture. He examines the way in which sinicized marginal religions of foreign origin adapted to the central ideology of Confucianism. The two pivotal concepts proposed by Zürcher are 'marginal religion' and 'cultural imperative'. Marginal religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and in an earlier period Buddhism, shared the patterns of adaptation intrinsic to the same "deep structure in Chinese religious life" in late imperial China: congruity, complementarity, historical precedent, reductionism. Just like other foreign religions, the Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century were faced with a 'cultural imperative': "no marginal religion penetrating from the outside could expect to take root in China (at least at that social level) unless it conformed to that pattern which in late imperial times was more clearly defined than ever. Confucianism represented what is zheng, 'orthodox' in a religious, ritual, social and political sense; in order not to be branded xie, 'heterodox' and thus to be treated as a subversive sect, a marginal religion had to prove that it was on the side of zheng."
Zürcher points out that the survival of Christianity largely depended on the attitude of local authorities and gentry toward Christian beliefs and practices and their compatibility with Confucian norms and values. Under such circumstances Christianity lost some of its monopolistic character. It could develop into a small but not negligible religious movement by grafting itself onto the dominant Confucian tradition, which it claimed to 'complement' (bu ru), or even to restore to its original purity. In his studies of writings of Chinese converts, Zürcher shows how this dialogue between Chinese and missionaries produced a sophisticated and highly original hybrid: a monotheistic and purist version of Confucianism, strongly opposed to Buddhism, Taoism, and popular 'superstition'.

The notion of marginality also contains another dimension. Zürcher shows that from a Chinese perspective, seventeenth century Christianity contained two orientations that were mutually incompatible. On the one hand, Christianity attempted to associate itself with elitist Confucianism, a rather rational doctrine, without a concept of a personal God, without precise ideas of afterlife, retribution, without priests or miracles. On the other hand, Christianity was forced, by its own nature, to proclaim a doctrine full of 'mysteries of faith', fundamentally irrational, focused around a personal Master of Heaven, who was a supreme Judge, punishing and rewarding, and directly intervening in history. It was composed of very precise and detailed ideas on the nature of the soul and after life. It was a doctrine full of miracles and supernatural events propagated by persons who, despite their efforts to identify themselves with the class of literati, could never dissociate themselves from their religious profession. Christianity was not just an intellectual construct but a living minority religion, a complex of beliefs, rituals, prayer, magic, icons, private piety, and communal celebrations. In that whole sphere of religious practice Christianity was by no means a semi-Confucian hybrid. In fact, in most cases it came much closer to devotional Buddhism than to Confucianism. Thus Christianity fulfilled two roles—as a doctrine and as a religion—that were incompatible in the Chinese system.

Ultimately, Zürcher is of the opinion that it is this internal contradiction, rather than external circumstances, such as the hostility of certain officials or the Rites Controversy, that prevented Christianity from becoming more than a 'marginal' phenomenon in pre-modern China. Christianity "could not confine itself to one of those spheres as Confucianism and Buddhism did; true to its nature as a monopolistic Mediterranean religion, it had to encompass both. The two faces of early Chinese Christianity constituted an internal contradiction that was never solved, and that no doubt has contributed to its final breakdown in the early eighteenth century." This approach, then, insists on some particular aspects of the encounter between Christianity and China, and reveals peculiarities of both actors.

Communities of Effective Rituals
Instead of looking at inculturation at the level of the elite, one can also try to look at inculturation at the lower levels of society. One of the major characteristics of Christianity as revealed by its imbedding at the local level is the establishment of 'communities of effective rituals'. By this I mean that people are brought together and united in a group whose life is rhythmized around certain rituals (mass, feasts, confession, etc.). These rituals are founded in faith and doctrine and are organized by a liturgical calendar. They are 'effective' both in the sense that they build a group and that they are considered by the members of the group as bringing meaning and salvation.

The most obvious examples are the communities of Chinese Christians. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Christians were not organized in parishes, i.e. geographical units around a church building, but in hui (associations), often according to age, sex, and social background, with lay people as responsibles (huizhang). In the late Ming, several of these communities were patterned on Confucian or Buddhist models, some with an explicit charitable purpose. In the early Qing they were a mixture of European inspired congregations and a Chinese type of social organization.

Effective rituals formed the basis of these communities. One of the characteristics of religion in China is that it proves its worth by the immediate efficacy of its rituals. In most cases, the proven efficacy of these rituals, the happy discovery that "they work," appears to be a primary motive for conversion. These were communities of mutual support in the general fight against all...
kinds of fear (disease, death, demons, natural disasters). The regular intervention of the supernatural (by way of miraculous healing, rescue from disaster, appearance of auspicious objects, revival from temporary death, etc.) in such a community constituted the way in which the efficacy of the faith was sustained. There are sufficient indications that the elite was not less susceptible to these interventions. The difference between elite and common society in appropriation of these supernatural interventions is that they were basic to the formation of these communities among the common people, while the elite had looser and more individualized relationships with the priests, partly because they had higher potential mobility.

Rituals were patterned according to the Christian liturgical calendar. Thus, by introducing a new calendar in China, the missionaries did not just accommodate some technical aspects of a neutral division of time. They consciously or unconsciously challenged what was the basis of ritual life: the transformation of cultural time itself. The introduction of a 'Sunday' and of Christian religious feasts made people live according to a time rhythm different from the one practiced in Buddhist or Taoist communities of effective rituals. These practices may not have been introduced effectively at all places, but it is at this ritual level that itinerant missionaries most strongly competed with Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, or local shamans and that they often inflated their differences.

There are different ways of evaluating these Christian communities. Anyone acquainted with the Chinese context is struck by the similarity with other communities of effective rituals existing in China, especially in the Buddhist and Taoist traditions. As a result of this resemblance, Christian communities seem to reveal some essential characteristics of Chinese religiosity: communities which are very much lay-oriented and which have lay responsibilities; the important role of women as the transmitters of rituals and traditions within the nei-sphere of the family; a service-oriented concept of priesthood (priests who travel and are present only at important feasts or celebrations); a simple doctrine (recitative prayers, simple and clear moral principles, a pastoral of fear supplemented by relief through confession); a belief in the transformative power of rituals (patterned by a liturgical calendar with feasts and yearly gatherings; the regular intervention of miraculous events). It seems that just in the same way as Chinese popular devotions and rituals shaped the life of common people, Christian practices also provided inspiring ceremonies which mediated Heaven's salvation in the daily struggle for survival.

While there are good reasons to approve of this concept of Chinese folk religion, there are also reasons to assume that this type of religiosity is characteristic of Christianity. This conclusion can be reached by comparison with Christianity in medieval and renaissance Europe (in the study of which a similar downward move has taken place). Taking into account that missionaries tend to reproduce in the mission areas the type of religiosity they have known at home, popular Christianity in China may also be a reflection of popular Christianity in Europe in which ritual took an equally important place.

A good way to describe the purpose of the missionaries who went to China in the seventeenth century is to say that they aimed at the installation of christianitas (Christendom). This term, which medieval writers applied to themselves and their civilization, is in my eyes fully appropriate not only for the activities of the Jesuits, but also for what happened with Christianity in China. As John Van Engen has pointed out, in the broad sense of the word christianitas referred to a common religious observance (cultus) overseen and enforced by the king together with his lords and bishops. It referred not only to religious faith but also to practice. "Christianitas is the rite and/or propriety by which people are called Christians." The case of Christianity in China seems to corroborate that ritual life was at the heart of Christian life in medieval and renaissance Europe. In line with this research, the "real measure of Christian religious culture on a broad scale must be the degree to which time, space, and ritual observances came to be defined and grasped essentially in terms of the Christian liturgical year." The existence of Christian communities of effective rituals in China are confirmation of Christian imbedding in China.

The communities of effective rituals seem to be characteristic of both Chinese and Christian folk traditions, and likely of religion as such. Yet there is an important question that is still subject to further
research. Did the Christian communities in China show the characteristics of an exclusive group that is clearly identified by the members themselves and that seems to be typical of the East-Mediterranean religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)?

The reason for this assumption is the research on religious belonging in Chinese society conducted by Joë Thoraal. Thoraal analyzed two surveys that had been conducted in Hong Kong (in 1881 and 1911). The statistics led to some astonishing results: more than half (in 1881) or three-quarters (in 1911) of the population declare themselves Confucians (tuija), while one third are lay (sujia; in 1881) or animists (in 1911). Even more significant is that while China is considered the country of 'three religions' the total number of Taoists and Buddhists does not represent one percent of the total population. Finally, Chinese Christians, who can be clearly distinguished according to their denomination, exceed the number of Taoists and Buddhists. While statistical analysis based on a Western concept of religion leads to debatable results in the analysis of the phenomenon of 'religion' in China, it still may reveal some aspects of how people identify their religious belonging with regard to 'Western' and 'Chinese' religions.

Here Thoraal's distinction between the status of the lay people and the religious 'professionals' may be very useful. In the modern West, people who claim to have a religious belonging can be divided into communities or churches that can be easily distinguished. Each of these communities has its own priests, its own place of cult, its own creed and own rituals. They tend to be an exclusive belonging, which unites both the believers and the religious specialists (priests, rabbis, pastors, imams), who are exclusively at their service. Except for special circumstances, a Methodist would not appeal to an Anglican priest, a Catholic would not pray in a Protestant church, and a Baptist would not use a Catholic Bible, etc.

In China the situation tends to be quite different, since a stronger distinction can be made between the 'lay' community and the religious specialists (Buddhist monk, Taoist master, or female shaman) to whom one may appeal at any time. It is important to point out, in principle, the undivided character of the lay community, as opposed to the multiple worlds of the religious specialists. At the level of the latter (together with some very active lay people) one has an exclusive doctrinal or ritual distinction and identification (the difference between a Buddhist monk and Taoist priest) which resembles the Western situation.

What is important for our subject is that, although in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was only one Christian denomination in China, Christianity appears to contain characteristics that are expressed in this analysis of the Hong Kong surveys. Indeed, when Eastern-Mediterranean religions came to settle in China, they tended to reproduce their exclusive communities which unite both lay people and specialists around ritual and doctrine. Unlike Buddhist monks who would hardly intervene in the private lives of the faithful, Western missionaries applied the European model, which implied an interference in and guidance of the private lives of the converts. As a result, lay people seem to have been much more dependent on priests than in Buddhism. This also explains why Chinese belonging to an originally Western religion easily distinguish themselves from other Chinese, whether lay people or specialists.

Conclusion
This presentation has probably raised more questions than it answers. Questions were raised about our way of looking at Christianity in China: Do we consider it a failure or success? Do we look at the missionary or at the local church? Do we focus on the elite or on the popular levels of society? Other questions originate from the historical experience of Christianity in China. Since Christianity has the experience of a minority religion, will it remain a marginal religion? If it has to adapt to a cultural imperative, to what extent can Christianity remain subject to an official orthodoxy? It also has the experience of lay-oriented communities of effective rituals, which resemble Chinese folk religions but also contain characteristics of exclusivity. To what extent will these communities survive in modern society?

No matter how many questions we raise, the most important fact is that the history of Christianity in China is not only the history of ideas, structures, or organizations, but the history of an encounter between living beings. The center of this history is the experience of a personal encounter with the living Christ.
ENDNOTES


12. In the final decades of the eighteenth century, there are cases where Christianity is transmitted as a kind of family cult without any intervention of a missionary or priest. See for example, studies on the emergence of popular Christianity in Northern China (eighteenth century) by Lars Peter Laamann (SOAS).


