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BOOK REVIEW

Guanfu, zongjiao yu tianzhujiao: 17–19 shiji Fu'an xiangcun jiaohui de lishi xushi 官府、宗族与天主教：17–19 世纪福安乡村教会的历史叙事 (The official, religion and Catholicism: The historical narrative of the village church in Fu'an County during 17–19 century). By Zhang Xianqing 张先清. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009. 344 pp.￥48. ISBN 978-7-101-06652-4

Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China. By Eugenio Menegon. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. 450 pp. $49.95. ISBN 978-0-674-03596-6

It is quite exceptional that two junior scholars investigate a research topic that is very close to each other, manage to help each other without rivalry, and independently produce two high-quality books each with their own characteristics. The books by Zhang Xianqing and Eugenio Menegon are such an example and because they complement each other nicely, scholars should read them together.

The two writings are revised versions of doctoral dissertations, which now appear as books. Zhang Xianqing, associate professor at Xiamen University, obtained the First Ph.D. Dissertation Award of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society (The Chinese University of Hong Kong) and his book is edited in a new series published by the same Centre in collaboration with Zhonghua shuju. Eugenio Menegon, now at Boston University, obtained his Ph.D. at Berkeley and his book appears in the Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series published by the Harvard University Asia Center. In both cases, the result is very nicely edited books.

Both works concern the history of the Catholic communities of Fu'an County in northeast Fujian. These communities started in the early seventeenth century and are still active today. Though the first literati from Fu'an were baptized by the well-know Jesuit Giulio Aleni, Fu'an was primarily a Dominican mission, led by Dominican friars belonging to the so-called Province of the Most Holy Rosary, which was headquartered in the Philippines. Thus, the history of a "Spanish Dominican" mission as presented in these books is a good complement to the numerous studies on the "Portuguese Jesuit" mission that appeared in recent decades.

The books by Zhang and Menegon share some characteristics that in recent years have come to the forefront in the study of Christianity in China: they focus on one place or region (rather than China as a whole); they approach the topic from the perspective of *longue durée*, i.e., covering several centuries (rather than

a short term event); they are primarily interested in local community, and not only in the missionaries; they pay substantial attention to the lower levels of society (rather than only the elite) and to communities and their rituals (rather than individuals and intellectual life). Characteristic is also their use of sources: sources in Chinese as well as in various European sources, printed and archival sources, visual and textual sources, even including genealogies (*zongpu*). Both works are also innovative because of the questions they take as point of departure: rather than a descriptive history concentrating on the "successes" of the missionaries, they investigate the processes on how a foreign religion becomes locally imbedded in one particular place in China and continues to be a local religion. The results are well-documented narratives in which vividly tell the concrete stories of multiple actors, Jesuit priests, Dominican friars, local catechists, community leaders, degree-holders, virgins, and ancestors.

The difference between the two works is less of what is often labeled as a "Chinese" or "Western" approach, since Zhang Xianqing and Eugenio Menegon both extensively quote Chinese and Western primary and secondary sources, but rather of academic discipline and interest. Zhang Xianqing has an anthropological interest with a focus on genealogies and their composition—his work includes extensive records and tables—as well as on the ritual developments and changes in these communities. His book is one of the first works that has investigated Christianity from the perspective of lineages into such depth, combining fieldwork and textual analysis. The chapter that describes the development and spread of Christianity through lineages, some of which became full Catholic lineages, is fascinating. In addition, it is embellished with contemporary pictures of these still existing communities. Zhang Xianqing clearly shows how a family genealogy in giving a collective history of the Catholic lineage strengthened its common identity and kept it alive. Eugenio Menegon is interested in the interaction between the state politics and the local culture and the conflicts that are involved in it. There was in fact a whole range of conflicts: controversies within the Catholic community itself, rivalries with the ambient other religious traditions, conflicts with Rome. Menegon focuses in particular on power struggle and suppression coming from the state (with its civilizing agenda of "moral transformation" (*jiaohua*)), and on the socio-religious and institutional ways in which the Christian communities resisted and persisted. He shows how the state rather than the local society was repeatedly worried about new practices. He also pays more attention to sacramental and devotional life, practiced by individuals or communities, including the religious life of *beatas* or virgins.

As such, both works throw a different light on the process of localization, i.e. the transformation of Christianity, a foreign world religion, into a local religion, and to the persistence of these Catholic communities until today. Each in their

own way, Zhang and Menegon show how Christians became part of an existing pluralistic local religious field, in which on the one hand Christians lived within the boundaries of existing social conventions and kinship networks, but also participated in social change by presenting alternative ideas and practices. This was also the way they built their Christian identity, which is still alive today.

These excellent works are not only histories of Christianity in China, but also fascinating investigations into the processes, changes and tensions of a local religion in late imperial China. Therefore not only scholars of Christianity will benefit from reading them, but also anthropologists, historians and sociologists interested in the place of religion in late imperial China.

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