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**“Out of the Ashes:
Remembrance and Reconstruction in Catholic Shanxi, 1900-Present”**

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When the Sino-Western conflicts of the Boxer Uprising had reached their climax in 1900, the Shanxi Confucian, Liu Dapeng, penned a vivid account of the turbulence around his studio. In his *Qianyuan suoji*, Liu described the theatrical ceremonies of the Boxers who summoned the gods to possess their bodies:

Suddenly they raised their gaze and then dropped to the ground as if they were in a sound sleep. Before long their hands and feet began to undulate. They stood erect and danced around with a fierce expression, their eyes shut so tightly they could not be opened. Then they made fists and claws with their hands, leaping and rushing around.

Once possessed by popular gods, Shanxi’s Boxers set out from local temples to eradicate foreigners and their Christian religion.

Regardless of the veracity of such rumors, many in Shanxi believed that the Italian missionaries and their followers were casting magical spells against the Chinese people and plotting a rebellion against the Court. Recalling these fears, Liu Dapeng wrote that the Court ordered a military expedition, anxious that Western forces would assemble a Christian military against China’s government. Liu recounted that the Court had decreed, “anyone [Christian] who seizes the opportunity to rebel or collaborate in forming plots should be executed on the spot.” Shanxi’s anti-foreign and anti-Christian

governor, Yuxian, was so relieved by the Court's order to suppress the Catholic presence that he was reportedly "moved to tears of appreciation." From the point of view of many Shanxi locals, the Catholic presence was a spiritual and political menace.

On 28 June 1900, the Italian Franciscan, Barnabas Nanetti da Bologna sat in his seminary office in the small Shanxi Catholic village of Dongergou and wrote an alarming entry in his personal journal:

Three seminarians arrived in the evening from the convent at Taiyuan, exhausted from their journey. They informed us that the situation in the city had turned toward the worst, and that the bishop [Gregorio Grassi] had ordered the seminarians to flee. . . . We have been told that soldiers went to the convent, determined to slaughter all Europeans and Christians.

Dongergou's Catholics were so frightened that "during the night, the women and orphans are concealed inside of coal pits" to hide them from soldiers and Boxers.

Liu Dapeng recorded Yuxian's arrest of both the Protestant and Catholic missionaries in Taiyuan, who he believed were busily organizing an insurrection against the Qing. "Hearing of their rebellion," Liu wrote, "Yuxian urgently commanded the central army, leading them himself, to detain the foreigners in the guesthouse at Pig-head Alley." The pretext for the arrests was that the foreign missionaries were, as Liu put it, "plotting to revolt." The Chinese Jesuit, Li Di, described what happened next to the missionaries in Yuxian's yamen courtyard:

The Boxers and rank-and-file soldiers competed with each other to be the first to kill at random. Some victims received several tens of hacks from swords, and some lost their heads. . . . Their blood formed into channels and countless corpses

covered the courtyard.

In all, forty-five missionaries and Chinese Christians were massacred at Yuxian's yamen on 9 July, inaugurating a wave of anti-Christian violence in Shanxi.

Similar violence against Catholics continued for several months, and by the time peace was restored, both Shanxi's provincial troops and Boxers had killed 191 missionaries and more than 6,060 Chinese Christians. In addition to the great loss of human lives, the Boxer Uprising in Shanxi had laid waste to 225 mission buildings and over 20,000 Christian homes. By early 1901, Shanxi's Catholics only saw ruins where church spires had once risen into the sky; and restoration of their diminished community began with the burial of thousands of victims, bodies that were often unrecognizable after months of exposure and the ravages of dogs and birds. Catholic Shanxi was in ashes; rebuilding the wreckage would require funds, funds that came from the defeated and humiliated Court in Beijing.

Funding, however, was not the only ingredient needed for Catholic restoration in Shanxi. The indigenization of the clergy and the construction of what Eugenio Menegon has called Christianity as a "local Chinese religion" were also vital to rebuild Shanxi's shattered Catholic population. This study examines how Shanxi's Catholics employed such tactics as commemoration and aggressive proselytization to rebuild Christianity in the province, tactics that continued to prove effective after the Maoist era, during which Catholics were again persecuted and their buildings seized or destroyed. Most previous studies have centered on the historical events of the larger Catholic populations in Beijing and Shanghai, though the center of Boxer violence in 1900 was in fact located in Shanxi, and to date little attention has been given to Christian attempts at restoration in that

important province.

After the Eight Allied Nations had restored a semblance of order to Beijing in August 1900, which was unfortunately attained with instances of foreign looting and reprisal violence, the Court's support of the Boxer movement was swiftly repealed, and Yuxian's replacement, Governor Cen Chunxuan, made an immediate *volte face* – about face. All of the pejorative rumors in Shanxi were reversed. Cen posted a series of new edicts that extolled the merits of the Catholic missionaries and expressed the emperor's regret for their suffering. Once Shanxi's officials had renewed their public support of the Catholic mission, the Italian Franciscans instantly sought financial reparation.

After negotiations with Li Hongzhang, the Shanxi mission secured one million taels of silver to begin the restoration, and the first use of these funds was the erection of commemorative stelae in remembrance of Christians who had died during the uprising; these stone monuments would perennially memorialize the Catholic martyrs of Shanxi, and function to codify the collective identity of the Christian community as “fellow sufferers” for the faith. The most prominent monument erected was the stele and pavilion built at Pighead Alley in 1901, where the foreign missionaries were lodged before the massacre at Yuxian's residence. Governor Cen's inscription read:

The Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries encountered difficulties and were willing to die for their benevolent way, and in all 150 people died who were assembled here on the 30th day of the 6th month (lunar calendar) where they gave their lives together, and we commend those faithful missionaries who repeatedly encountered difficulties and cruelty.

The narrative continued to recount Yuxian's “treachery” and “cruel massacre” of

Christians on 9 July, during the Boxer Uprising, even though he was operating under a directive from the central government.

With its new reparation revenues, the Italian Franciscans began a massive brick and mortar campaign to resurrect the “visible Church” in Shanxi, one that would broadcast the Church Militant, which they claimed had won a sweeping victory over the anti-Christian attacks of the Boxers. Taiyuan’s first bishop after the Boxer movement was Agapito Fiorentini, who in less than eight years managed to increase the number of Catholics in his diocese from 15,412 to more than 21,000. There is little doubt that Fiorentini’s success was facilitated by his capacity to solicit both Court money and the public support of the local magistrate at Catholic ceremonies. In one large public procession, in which an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary was carried to the Portiuncula church, almost eighty miles from Taiyuan, the official “Mandarins also followed in venerable fashion.” And when the new bishop had procured money to rebuild the Catholic cathedral, “the magistrate was present for the laying of the foundation for the new church.” At other Catholic events Fiorentini arranged for local Chinese officials to carry flowers in the long processions, which “repaired the dignity of the Church.”

Whether Shanxi’s ranking officials were eager to participate in such high-profile Catholic events, or whether they were compelled to do so under pressures from the French and Italian Protectorates, is unknown. What is certain is that the common population of Shanxi was given the strong message that the Catholic mission was endorsed by the Court, and had become even more powerful than before. Between Bishop Fiorentini and his successor, Bishop Eugenio Massi, Shanxi’s vast landscape was quickly punctuated with Catholic churches and affiliated structures. Other than his

imposing new Western-style cathedral, Fiorentini oversaw the construction of more than sixty-seven new buildings, including a chancery, churches, rectories, convents for the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary sisters, an orphanage, and Saint Joseph's Hospital. Massi commissioned two new Catholic schools, a press, an additional floor to the cathedral rectory, and another building for the Franciscan sisters.

Perhaps the most effective and enduring tactic for Catholic growth and survival in Shanxi was the calculated indigenization of the clergy and hierarchy. Indeed, the Franciscan impulse to train a native clergy proved an effective antidote to Shanxi's two periods of anti-Christian persecution, during which foreign missionaries were either killed or expelled from China. Among the more influential events that solidified Shanxi's clerical indigenization was the election and episcopal consecration of a native Chinese priest to bishop in 1926. In that year, Pope Pius XI ordained six Chinese bishops, and was so stirred during the ceremony that "his voice failed him and he was unable for a time to proceed." Among the six Chinese bishops present was Aloysius Chen Guodi, OFM, who was a native son of Shanxi. By the time the last European bishop was expelled from Shanxi in 1951, the Catholic community there was large and well supplied with native priests to sustain the Church.

Unlike the history of Catholicism in Shanxi during the late Qing and Republican Era, which was marked by antagonisms between Chinese and European powers, the era after Mao's ascendancy in 1949 marked new tensions and violence between Chinese Catholics and the Chinese state. Once missionaries were connected in Mao's ideology with "imperialist powers," it was inevitable that the European Franciscans of Shanxi would become a target, for they had built a highly visible "empire" of hospitals, schools,

and a press. While religious toleration was advertised by Mao's early government, religious belief was nonetheless seen as a temporary stage in human development, and it was clear that, as Mao put it, "Communists . . . can never approve of their idealism or religious doctrines." In Taiyuan, the Catholic Church initiated a policy of opposition to the new Communist government, which was centered in the establishment of a Shanxi resistance group under the Legion of Mary. Just before his arrest, Bishop Domenico Luca Capozzi, assigned Father Hao Nai to lead the local Legion of Mary to resist "atheistic Communism," and conduct the spiritual battle "against the Church's enemies." In response to this new Catholic resistance, largely comprised of young, zealous faithful, Mao instigated a media campaign against the Legion and its leaders. Newspapers all over China contained articles and cartoons depicting the Legion of Mary as an imperialist organization "hiding under the cloak of religion." In a 1951 edition of the *Jiefangribao*, one popular cartoon depicted a revolutionary cadre sweeping away a Western priest holding a torn slip of paper with the words, "*Shengmujun*," or "Legion of Mary." Several other articles and cartoons lampooned the Legion of Mary as anti-Chinese and imperialist. Father Hao was arrested for his involvement with the Legion and executed in 1970 during the Cultural Revolution.

Perhaps one of the most effective strategies for preserving Catholic identity and loyalty in Shanxi has been the community's determined efforts to preserve the collective memories of the bishops, priests, sisters, and laypersons who were either persecuted or executed for their association with the Legion of Mary and other resistance groups. A dramatic account of a priest who suffered during the Maoist era has been safeguarded in the small Catholic village of Liuhecun. This priest, Father Wang Shiwei, was among the

many Chinese Franciscans who remained in Shanxi after the expulsion of the foreign friars, and his intractable resistance and eventual execution in 1970 is still celebrated in the village. While public monuments to Catholic martyrs under China's post-1949 government are not today prudent, the villagers have preserved his memory in a small booklet, written by Father Wang's nephew, Wang Jingshan.

Within the region, all of the Catholic bishops, priests, sisters, and seminarians were summoned in 1963 to a mandatory meeting at Taiyuan's cathedral, the same church that was funded by the Qing court after the Boxer Uprising. The meeting slogan was "Eradicate Religion," and during one of the sessions Father Wang Shiwei publically defied the authorities, and loudly called the assembled Catholics to "resist cowardice" and remain faithful to the Pope. Wang was arrested and shackled in his small cell; his feet and hands were chained so that he was unable to stand, while another chain suspended his body to a beam above him so that he could not lie down to sleep. After six years of such confinement, and countless "struggle sessions," Father Wang was sentenced to death for his resistance to reform, and in 1970 he was taken to a platform and shot. One of the commemorative tropes frequently employed by Shanxi Catholics is to attribute a particular miracle to examples of Christian martyrdom, which function effectively to cast a patina of the supernatural on such events. As Wang Jingshan recounts, when Father Wang faced his executioner, "the sky was dark and hazy, and when twelve-thirty noon arrived," the traditional time of Christ's passion on the cross, "there suddenly arose a fearsome wind."

Examples of resistance, perhaps even more than examples of miracles, have persisted in the shared memory of Shanxi Catholics to sustain their identity vis-à-vis the

larger society and the ruling state. Even before Father Wang's arrest and execution, Shanxi's Catholics willfully defied the Communist authorities. During the summer of 1949, Taiyuan Catholics openly disobeyed the new authorities to march to a distant pilgrimage shrine; more than a thousand faithful intoned litanies to the Blessed Virgin as they made their long procession over mountains, and when arrests were made the charge was "wasting time." In Dongergou village, seventy Catholic men were fined for "wasting time" at Mass, and despite being ordered not to, Shanxi families brought 700 children to the bishop at Taiyuan to be Confirmed. The tactics of self-preservation and restoration through resistance, remembrance, and proselytization has made Shanxi one of the largest and most publically active Catholic populations in China today.

Shanxi's Catholics have employed the memory of anti-Christian persecution during the Boxer and Maoist eras to reinforce their identity as a "suffering people" under the banner of martyrdom. Though, in addition to the time-honored practice of commemoration, Shanxi Catholicism has in recent years turned again to a program of "proselytization through construction." New Catholic churches are emerging throughout Shanxi's arid landscape at an astonishing pace, and old churches are being restored to an even grander scale. During two separate fieldwork trips to China, in 2008 and again in 2010, I compared the development of the brick and mortar, and human growth of the Catholic community, in Shanxi province. I observed that nearly all of the Catholic churches and pilgrimage sights I visited underwent some level of restoration between these two visits; three churches will serve to illustrate this trend of growth and improvement. One church I visited boasted a massive edifice, and beside the fact that it was being built with red brick, it was a strikingly accurate replica of the famous Sacré-

Cœur Basilica that towers over Paris, France. The Shanxi imitation was even named after the French original: *Shengxin Tianzhu jiaotang*, or “Sacred Heart Catholic Church.” The funds for the new church were seeded by the local faithful, but the government was providing the bulk of the costs. When I returned to this church in 2010 it was complete and had become the center of a flourishing Catholic village community.

The popular church in Shanxi’s Guchengying village, known for its history of Boxer era martyrdom, was being restored during my visit in 2008. Its spires were being heightened to, as it seemed, assert an increased hierarchical presence in the village, which created tensions with the Nine Dragons Temple located across the street. In addition to the expanded monumentality of the original church, the construction of a commemorative “Hall of the Martyrs” was being built, despite the objection of the authorities. By 2011 the hall was nearly finished, replete with statues of Chinese martyr saints, three memorial stelae, and frescos detailing the lives and deaths of the villagers who died at Guchengying in 1900. The church renovations were also complete, and the parishioners, many of whom had descended from the Boxer era martyrs, had begun to make overtures to Rome for the canonization of their ancestors and permission to list Guchengying as an official pilgrimage site.

Taiyuan’s cathedral is also an important site of commemoration, and has today become the central pulse of proselytization in the province. When Fiorentini was charged with the restoration of Church properties after the Boxer destruction, he was able to retrieve land at Taiyuan’s north gate, where he oversaw the construction of the present cathedral church, which began in 1903 and was completed in 1905. The towering new church was named for the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the

inscription above the façade entrance was dedicated to Saints Joseph and Francis of Assisi. Non-Christian Chinese in Taiyuan could not help but perceive the new structure's dominance over the surrounding buildings, though the Catholics in Taiyuan could not help but celebrate the Church's renewed "authority over paganism." For some the cathedral represented a manifestation of foreign arrogance, and for others it was a testament to God's victory, the victory of the *Ecclesia Militans*, or Church Militant, over non-Christian China.

By 2000, native Chinese bishops had administered the cathedral church in Taiyuan, with some interruptions during the Maoist era, for six decades, and after the canonization of Chinese saints during that year a marble frieze of Shanxi's Catholic martyrs of 1900 was installed on the main altar. This commemorative act has functioned to further "indigenize" the Chinese Church in Shanxi, and since then a well-staffed line of tables is regularly set up on the busy boulevard in front of the cathedral where pamphlets about the Catholic faith are handed to passers by as large speakers broadcast upbeat church hymns. Statistics prepared regarding the Shanxi vicariate by Bishop Grassi suggest that the missionary effort was modestly successful. In a handwritten report Grassi prepared for the Franciscan Curia in 1896, he recorded the state of the mission in Shanxi. In 1896 the Taiyuan mission had registered 15,510 Christians, a number that more or less remained the same until 1900. Owing to the tireless policies of proselytization, the number of Catholics in the Taiyuan diocese by 2010 has risen to more than 80,000 faithful, and according to official statistics, which include only Catholics under the auspices of the sanctioned Catholic community, the province by that year recorded an astonishing 180,000 as the total number of faithful in the province.

Shanxi natives still marvel at the remarkable advance of the province's Catholic population. In particular, Shanxi's Chinese puzzle over this growth in light of the state's persistent attempts to discourage Catholic expansion, or even its continuation. As Henrietta Harrison has noted of the post-1950s Catholic Church in Shanxi:

After that the remaining Chinese clergy were much restricted and from 1965 to the 1970s all the priests in the province were either in prison or in other employment. Moreover, from the late 1940s church property and buildings were gradually taken over by the state for use as granaries, meeting halls, and offices. Shanxi's faithful continued to pray and worship privately in their homes, and even managed to increase the number of Catholics during this time of suppression. In the 1980s, priests were released from their prisons and new priests began to be prepared for the future of Shanxi Catholicism.

Through the Boxer Uprising and Maoist era, Shanxi's Catholic community has suffered periods of persecution and loss. And after these two eras the Chinese faithful employed similar methods of restoration; namely, they carefully crafted a historical narrative of martyrdom which formed a collective ecclesial identity, and they rebuilt a "visible Church" that architecturally rises above its surrounding landscape. Questions of foreign influence and cultural antagonism have been largely mitigated by the Chinese Church's post-1950 "independence," though ideological antagonisms, Communist/Christian, remain. In 2005, Taiyuan's bishop, Sylvester Li Jiantang, orchestrated a massive public display of Catholic influence in Shanxi, organized around the 100-year anniversary of Taiyuan's eminent cathedral. Bishop Li managed to secure the government's protection of the cathedral as an officially registered "historical site,"

and solicited one million *yuan* from the provincial authorities to use towards the restoration of the aging edifice.

In a Chinese Catholic media report of the cathedral's centenary celebration, the periodical *Xinde* recounted the astonishing scale of the event. The entire celebration took place over the course of eight months, and the closing ceremony was arranged at the cathedral.

At 9:30 am, December 31, silence in the square in front of the cathedral was broken by the sounds of drums and gongs and brass instruments. The cathedral was decorated with colorful flags and beautiful flowers. Then a solemn Mass ensued inside the cathedral in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of its completion. Bishop Jiantang Li, the Bishop of Taiyuan Archdiocese, was the main celebrant. . . . 57 priests concelebrated, and more than five thousand faithful participated in the Mass. At 11:30, a grand ceremony marking the end of the celebration was held in the square in front of the cathedral. Representatives of the provincial government of Shanxi, the municipality of Taiyuan, the government of the district where the cathedral is located, as well as delegates from other religions, attended the ceremony.

In his homily at the Mass in the cathedral, built by Italian Franciscans after the Boxer Uprising and restored by Chinese clergy after the Maoist era, Bishop Li Jiantang announced that, "The history of Taiyuan Archdiocese is a miniature of that of the Church in China," and after "the darkness and sufferings at the beginning of the 20th century . . . and torment of the Cultural Revolution. . . . We also experienced glories and joy in the building up of the Archdiocese." During a recent visit to the Catholic seminary in Beijing,

the rector informed me that a disproportionate number of seminarians come from Shanxi, and that the Catholic community there had especially risen “out of the ashes.” Shanxi’s Christian community represents a complex matrix of accommodation to state authority, resistance to that authority, and a tenacious impulse to remember its “persecuted past,” a narrative it has learned to harness in order to assure its rising future.