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Mandarins and Martyrs of Shanxi in Late-Imperial China

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RICCI LECTURE SERIES: SOWING THE FIELD OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS
(Symposium 2010)

Title: "Mandarins and Martyrs of Shanxi in Late-Imperial China"
Speaker: Anthony E. Clark, *Whitworth University*
Date/Time: Friday, February 19, 2010 (6:30 pm)

[First, I would like to thank Ms. Marie Melrose, Whitworth and Gonzaga Universities, Catholic Studies, and my fellow speakers for making this important event possible. . . .]

On July 9, 1900, a group of Baptist and Franciscan missionaries were marched through the streets of Shanxi's capital city, men and women stripped to the waist, and beheaded near the gate of the governor's yamen. Their heads were then displayed in small wooden cages at the official mansion, as was commonly done with the decapitated heads of criminals in late-imperial China. Historical accounts of this massacre conform to common Protestant and Catholic hagiographical tropes. The Protestants render stirring testimonies, one might describe them as protracted homilies, before dying, and the Catholic martyrs are depicted as piously intoning Latin hymns as they die. Catholic descriptions of the Shanxi martyrs emulate popular devotional literature of the late nineteenth century. The seven nuns who were executed are said to have intoned the *Te Deum* as they were beheaded, their voices diminishing one-by-one as they died, just as in Francois Poulenc's opera, *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The anti-Christian violence during China's Boxer Uprising occurred nearly three centuries after Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) had established his mission in Beijing.

Ricci's anxieties that Chinese misunderstanding of Christianity could precipitate intense cultural and religious antagonisms, became manifest in events such as the Taiyuan massacre discussed in this talk. In a letter to his superior in 1596, Matteo Ricci wrote, "We only venture to move forward very slowly . . . it is true that up till now we have not

explained the mysteries of our holy faith, but we are nonetheless making progress by laying the principle foundations.”¹ Two aspects of this letter that have attracted scholarly attention; Ricci exhibits certain anxieties about disclosing Christian doctrine too hastily in his new cultural context, **and** he notes progress, albeit prolonged, in proselytizing China. In **my talk today** I would like to argue three points: First, Ricci, who was perhaps one of the most sinified of all Westerners, knew quite early that the religious components of his mission could attract negative consequences in its new cultural context; second, the so-called “Ricci Method” indeed resulted in the effective conversions of a large number of native Chinese; and third, the accommodationist approach of Protestant and Catholic missionaries was, for the most part, only able ^{to} generate cultural and religious understanding among those Chinese who were “converted” to Christianity via slow indoctrination. The historical events of the Boxer Uprising in 1900 suggest that on the macro level, however, Chinese society largely misunderstood (and misrepresented) the activities and beliefs of the Western missionaries.]

I should note at the outset that the so-called “Ricci method” of deliberate and calculated Christianization was not actually formulated by Matteo Ricci. It is more accurate to ascribe the accommodationist approach of these early missionaries to Ricci’s famous confrere, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), who advocated adjusting Christianity to Chinese language and cultural mores rather than making Europeans of the native Chinese. History attests to the general successes of the missionary methods of Ricci and Ruggieri, and their influence on China’s late-imperial history spans beyond religious indoctrination.

¹ Quoted by Joseph Shih, S.J, in his introduction to Matteo Ricci and Nicolas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expédition chrétienne au royaume de la Chine, 1582-1610* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1978), 38. Also see Charbonnier, *Christians in China*, 153.

The scientific, philosophical, and theological expertise of these early missionaries was prodigious, and they left a remarkable legacy of Western expertise on the landscape of Chinese history. The cartographic, philosophical, theological, and scientific works produced by Ricci and his successors has been the predominate occupation of Western scholars.

But while Scholarly works have highlighted the scientific and intellectual aspects of the Christian mission in China, ^{they have largely} ~~largely~~ ignoring the religious dimension of their efforts. My goal here is consider the religious, rather than scientific, aspects of China's mission history by dilating on a single historical event to demonstrate how the "Ricci method" eventually manifest into a thriving Christian community ^{one mostly} that was ~~largely~~ martyred during the turbulence of the Boxer Uprising in 1900. This account illustrates that Ricci's anxieties regarding the potential for hostile and violent religious misunderstanding were legitimate, and that the slow unveiling of Christian doctrine indeed materialized into a well catechized native Christian community, one that appears to have understood Tertullian's (ca. 160-225) assertion that, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."²

(Mis)Representations and the Advent of Conflict

By the late nineteenth century Protestant and Catholic missionaries shared the mission field, and both communities had acquired firsthand knowledge of the conflicts caused by cultural and religious differences. These animosities were by no means unilateral; both the European/American and Chinese non-Christian communities imagined and produced pejorative representations of the Others' cultural and religious views. These uncomplimentary depictions were quite broad, coloring ~~cultural~~ impressions of sexuality, ceremonies, medical practice, ^{and} religious iconography, ^{and} nomenclature. Missionaries wrote

² Tertullian, *The Apology* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, reprinted 2004), 50.

often in derogatory terms about the religious culture of native Chinese, and these impressions traveled to European and American audiences. One missionary, W. E. Hipwell, recorded his response to visiting a Chinese temple during a festival in 1907:

I entered the temple for a few moments, but was compelled to withdraw quickly, on account of the horror by which I was overwhelmed as I watched those before the idol who with intense fervour besought the blessings which they desired. . . . The place was reeking with sickening smoke, and horrible because of the almost manifest presence of the devil, glorying over these multitudes thus enslaved by him.³

Hipwell's account represents China's indigenous religious culture in resolutely disapproving terms; the Chinese people render offerings of "sickening smoke" to Satan, who has, we are told, "enslaved" them.

This and similar missionary accounts translated later into a popular genre of literary works which portray the Chinese in analogous terms. Sax Rohmer's (1883 – 1959, Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward) widely-read novels on the "insidious" Chinese Dr. Fu-Manchu appear to directly emulate Hipwell's temple description. Rohmer wrote:

In a chair piled high with dragon-covered cushions a man sat behind this table. . . . From a plain brass bowl upon the corner of the huge table smoke writhed aloft. . . . smoke faintly penciled through the air—from the burning perfume on the table—grew in volume, thickened, and wafted towards me in a cloud of **grey horror**. It

³ W. E. Hipwell, "Union in Face of the Foe; or, Co-operation in Evangelistic Effort in China," *Church Missionary Gleaner* (December 1907), 185. I am indebted to Eric Reinders for alerting me to Hipwell's description of the indigenous Chinese temple.

enveloped me, clammily. Dimly, through its oily wreaths, I saw the immobile **yellow** face of Fu-Manchu.⁴

Rohmer's imagination of the "Satanic doctor" resonate with other Protestant descriptions of such Chinese worshippers, "with their hideous, grotesque expressions, staring fixedly in front of them."⁵ Catholic missionaries, too, industriously occupied themselves with similar depictions of the Chinese.

Father George Stenz (1869-1928), a Catholic missionary of the Society of the Divine Word, has recorded a song intoned to departing missionaries to China:

Friends, farewell, and may God speed you,
And to holy combat lead you
In the far off heathen land,
Here in darkness most repelling
Teeming millions still dwelling
Who await your noble band.
. . . Yet, the enemy has swayed them
And for centuries has made them
Spurn their Maker, the all-good.
Shall he longer yet enslave them?
Hasten, brethren, forth to save them.⁶

⁴ Sax Rohmer, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (Dover: New York), 81-82.

⁵ "The Idol's Protection." *Homes* (January 1910), 4.

⁶ George M. Stenz, S.V.D., *Life of Father Richard Henle, S.V.D.: Missionary in China* (Techny, IL: Mission Press, 1921), 45.

This rather militant song presents a ^{very} ~~rather~~ pejorative view of China's religious heritage and China's people; it dispatches missionaries to "holy combat" in "darkness most repelling," where the devil has "swayed them," causing them to "spurn their maker."⁷ The Catholic missionaries departing from their native European soil were exhorted to "save them" from enslavement. Father Stenz also writes that the, "Chinaman murmurs everything between his teeth and with such laziness that it is well-nigh impossible to distinguish anything but a hopscotch of sounds and tones," and furthermore that Chinese "possesses an unsurpassable dexterity in the use of vile and corrupt language."⁸

Stenz's disdain for the Chinese language was not uncommon Catholic missionaries living in China, who established schools to instruct the native Chinese in the "more civilized" European languages. Protestant and Catholic missionaries habitually described China's indigenous religions as "Satanic" and "repulsive," while also complaining in personal letters of the "uncivilized" nature of Chinese language and culture. Jaques Gernet has stated that, "The missionaries were deeply imbued with all that the oppositions between the eternal soul and the perishable body imply for the human moral and philosophiocal order and they were convinced of the existence of transcendental truths."⁹ And he adds that they "found

⁷ This song is quite typical of Catholic missionary expressions during the nineteenth century, during which the notion of the *Ecclesia Militans* (Church Militant) was underscored.

⁸ Stenz, 61.

⁹ Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 247. Gernet's work was originally published in French under the title *Chine et christianisme*, published in Paris by Editions Gallimard in 1982.

themselves in the presence of a different kind of humanity,” one that sadly led to more conflict than mutual understanding.¹⁰

For its part, China viewed the West in similar terms. Foreign missionaries were “barbarian,” more animal than human. In fact, since China’s tonal language allowed for certain anti-Christian punning, Catholic missionaries were depicted as worshippers of a “grunting pig.” The Chinese term for “Catholic” is “*Tianzhujiao*” 天主教, or the “Lord of Heaven Religion.” And the last two graphs “*zhujiao*,” sound homophonically analogous to two other characters, “*zhujiao*,” 豬叫 which mean “pig grunt.” Thus, Catholics were said to be worshipers of a grunting pig. In addition, Christian missionaries were rumored to have practiced cruel and lascivious acts on the Chinese.

The popular nineteenth-century book, *Bixie jishi* 辟邪紀實 (A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy), outlined several inventive mythologies. Christians worship a pig names “Yesu” 耶穌 (Jesus), gouge out the eyes of Christian converts, remove living fetuses, and commonly rape young and married Chinese women. One passage describes a Sunday service:

On this day work ceases entirely and old and young, male and female, all assemble at the Christian church. The pastor takes his seat at the front and extols the virtue of

¹⁰ Gernet, 247.

Yesu. . . . The whole group mumbles through the liturgies, after which they copulate together in order to consummate their joy.¹¹

With such images of Christian missionaries disseminated throughout late-imperial China there is little wonder that violent conflicts occurred.

By 1900 popular anti-Christian songs were heard throughout northern China, and Shanxi was one of the most anti-foreign provinces. These ditties contained most of the prevalent anti-missionary mythologies: accusations of injustice, rape, kidnapping, and the removal of human organs to produce silver. One such song was the widely intoned, “*Mie gui ge*” 滅鬼歌 (Exterminating the Demons Song), which calls for ~~a~~ ^{the} quite fearsome elimination of Christian missionaries.¹²

The pig grunt of heaven [religion]
Bewitches its followers;
Their wanton deeds
Are all unspeakable.
Men of every family must be aware,
Or the hat of a cuckold you will wear.
The pig grunt of heaven [religion]
Cuts open your wombs,

¹¹ Quoted in Paul Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Antiforeignism, 1860-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 49.

¹² The song appears in *Fan yangjiao shuwen jietie xuan* (Selections of Anti-Foreign Religion Books and Placards), ed. by Wang Minglun (Jinan: Qi lu shushe, 1984), and is translated in *Renditions* 53 &54 (Spring & Autumn 2000): 251-252.

Drags out your fetuses,

Slices off your nipples:

All goes into the potions they prepare. ㄨ ㄨ ㄨ

Women of every family must beware.

The pig grunt of heaven [religion]

Goes for kidneys;

Who knows how many kids

Their knives have killed?

Children of every family must beware,

Or else your lives they will not spare.¹³

The pig grunt of heaven [religion]

Easy to tell:

They worship Jesus the only pig;

Emperor and parents they heed not.

In their temples there's no incense at all;

In their homes there's no ancestral hall.

Anyone in your district behaving like this

Has turned himself into a grandson of the demons.

Have him tightly bound,

¹³ The graphs *yanwang* 閻王 in this line denote the “King of Hell.” Thus the song here

recommends its hearer to beware of the missionaries who will remove your internal organs

and send you to an audience with the ruler of hell. The character “閻” literally means “a

village gate” or the “gate of a lane,” and “王” means “king” – thus, the “king of the gate.” In

Buddhism he is referred to as the “閻魔大王,” or the “great demon king of the gate.” This

guardian of Hell’s gate is also called “琰魔” and “閻羅.”

Force some shit down his throat,¹⁴
And search his house all around:
Any demon-book should go in the fire.
Then draw a cross on the ground
With a devil hanging down,
And tell him to piss on this thing
If he wants to be unbound.
Should he dare to disobey,
Throw him into the waterway,
And see how he'll scream in dismay!
Fathers and brothers who teach this song
Will reap blessings and virtue aplenty;
Boys and girls who learn this song
Will be free from menace their whole life long.
Though the demons may come in a horde
We're sure to put them all to the sword.¹⁵

Besides this song, which exhorts Chinese to put all missionaries “to the sword,” there were other works that encouraged Chinese action against Christians.

The famous scholar, Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875-1905), rendered a rather caustic assessment of Westerners in his *Jing shi zhong* 警世鐘 (Alarm Bells), and called his fellow Chinese to ~~unions~~ rise against the foreign threat.

Here they come, here they come! Here who comes? The westerners. The westerners!

Young and old, men and women, rich and poor, officials, scholars, merchants and

¹⁴ Feces has been held in China to be an effective agent in exorcisms.

¹⁵ I have followed Eva Hung's translation in *Renditions*, 251-252, with minor changes.

craftsmen – from this day on we're all just livestock in his pen, meat in his pot; not an inch of room to move, to kill as he chooses and stew to his taste. Alas, our day of death has come! . . . Kill them, kill them all! . . . Let scholars put aside their pens, peasants their ploughs, merchants their business and craftsmen their tools; sharpen the steel, load the guns and drink the wine of blood; advance in your multitudes with warlike cry, to kill the foreign devils. . . . kill them all, kill, kill, kill!¹⁶

→ Foreign missionaries are described as cannibals (accusation has been applied to Catholics)
Ricci's fears that Chinese misconceptions of Christian belief and praxis could precipitate

antagonisms had by the late nineteenth century become a reality, and it was in this context of misinterpretation and misrepresentation that several Protestant and Catholic missionaries found themselves in Taiyuan, during the most fierce months of the Boxer Uprising, June through August, 1900.

The Protestant Missionaries of Taiyuan

Not long after Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit confreres had established the Christian mission in Beijing, other Catholic and Protestant groups began pouring into China. By the late nineteenth century the poor province of Shanxi boasted a sizeable number of mission churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools, and the capital city, Taiyuan, contained the largest number of foreigners. The Catholic mission was located near Taiyuan's imposing North Gate, and the Protestant mission ~~had constructed~~ ^{included} the large Schofield Memorial Hospital. Until the summer of 1900, when the Boxer violence against foreigners was at its height, the two groups seldom interacted, but they were lodged together in June, prior to their collective execution under the order of Governor Yuxian 毓賢 (d. 1901).

¹⁶ Chen Taihua, *Alarm Bells*, trans. by Ian Chapman, quoted in *Renditions* 53 & 54 (Spring & Autumn 2000), 246.

The account of the Taiyuan massacre is significant because it was, as far as I have been able to discern, the first instance in the history of Christianity in China wherein Protestants and Catholics were imprisoned and martyred together. Unfortunately there are scant historical documents recounting this event, and what sources do exist describe the actual executions at Yuxian's yamen very differently.¹⁷ Protestant, Catholic, and Chinese sources render a dissimilar sequence of events, though the skeletal details of the massacre conform to a similar narrative.¹⁸ In order to gather what information I have acquired, it was necessary to consult Protestant missionary records and Catholic sources compiled for the

¹⁷ Sources on the Boxer Movement that include mention of the Taiyuan incident are Qiao Zhiqiang, "Shanxi diqu de yihetuan yundong" (Shanxi Area Boxer Incidents), in *Yibetuan yundong liushi zhounian jinian lunwenji* (Commemorative Articles on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Boxer Incident) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961): 167-183; Liao Yizhong, Li Dezheng, and Zhang Zuru, *Yibetuan yundong shi* (A History of the Boxer Incident) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981); and Giovanni Ricci, *Barbarie e trionfi: Ossia le vittime illustri del Sansi in Cina nella persecuzione del 1900*, 2nd ed. (Firenze: Associazioni Nazionale per Soccorrere I missionary Cattolici Italiani, 1910).

¹⁸ For a narrative on the Protestants attached to Baptist mission in Taiyuan see Arthur H. Smith, *China in Convulsion*, vol. 2 (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901), 613-615. Smith's record includes Yong Zheng's "The Martyrdom at Taiyuanfu on the 9th of July, 1900. By an Eyewitness," *North China Herald*, 3 April 1901, 637. Smith's quotation, as Roger R. Thompson notes, contains some slight alterations, but the content is essentially the same. See Roger R. Thompson, "Reporting the Taiyuan Massacre: Culture and Politics in the China War of 1900," in *The Boxers, China, and the World*, 84.

respective causes for sainthood; and finally I traveled to Taiyuan to interview the descendants of ~~many~~ of the Chinese converts who were martyred there. The Taiyuan Christian martyrs function as a remote example of other similar conflicts throughout China's northern landscape; misunderstanding and misrepresentation informed native Chinese hostilities against the foreign and Chinese convert Christian community, which was willing to sacrifice itself.

~~Schofield Hospital~~ ^{The Protestant mission} was operated by sixteen English Baptists in the southeast section of Taiyuan. As Nat Brandt notes, "only four families and a single female missionary could be accommodated inside its walls."¹⁹ Several of the Baptists who operated this ~~mission~~ were old China-hands: Rev. and Mrs. James Simpson (thirteen years in China); Rev. and Mrs. George Stokes (nine years in China); Rev. and Mrs. Silvester Whitehouse; and Edith Coombs, who ran the Baptist girls' school, were among those long-time missionaries. Dr. Arnold Lovitt managed the hospital along ^{with his wife} ~~with the assistance of his wife~~, who was a trained nurse.²⁰ Other Protestant families, such as the Farthings and Benyons, were also executed on July 9. By the early summer of 1900, this intimate group of English Christians was quite aware of the growing number of ^{young} ~~displaced~~ ^{displaced} ~~young~~ Chinese, ~~caused~~ by recent natural disasters in northern China; famine and crop failures had left several thousand peasant families without fields to

¹⁹ Nat Brandt, *Massacre in Shansi* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 224.

²⁰ For a general biography of the Protestant missionaries attached to the Schofield Memorial Hospital, chapel, and girls' school in Taiyuan, see Paul Hattaway, *China's Book of Martyrs, Volume 1* (Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2007), 227-239.

rumors, pamphlets, and songs.

harvest, hungry, and with more free time to give attention to anti-Christian materials, such as ~~Chen Tianhua's *Jing shi zhong*, the *Bixie jishi*, and the popular ditty, "Mie yin ge."~~²¹

Anti-foreign pamphlets commonly accused Christians of provoking the natural disasters that had beset China. ⁶ And in addition to this, the court had declared war on the Christian churches and foreign legations in Beijing. Taiyuan's governor, Yuxian, was himself notoriously anti-foreign, and the popular uprising against Christian missions helped facilitate his efforts to eliminate Shanxi's foreign and Christian presence. Yuxian was also known for his generally malicious methods of confronting missionaries, and for his alliance with the Boxers. Paul Cohen has stated:

Yuxian . . . was to take actions that would make him a lasting emblem, at least among Westerners, of the [Boxer] movement's worst xenophobic excesses, succeeded in restoring calm to southern Shandong. . . . his policy of decapitation and dispersion was well adapted to the structure of the groups that were its main target.²²

The various historical narratives of Yuxian's massacre of Christian missionaries at Taiyuan confirm all accounts of his ensanguined persecution of foreigners and Christians, which were

²¹ For a study of famine in nineteenth-century China see, Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

²² Cohen, 28. For another, perhaps more sympathetic, account of Yuxian's actions on July 1900, at Taiyuan, see Roger R. Thompson, "Reporting the Taiyuan Massacre: Culture and Politics in the China War of 1900," 65-92.

largely fueled by the misrepresentations disseminated by anti-Christian literati and peasants during the late nineteenth century.

Relying on several sources, both scholarly and hagiographical, we can weave together a broad narrative of the massacre. Sino-Western conflicts in Beijing between the court and foreigners in early 1900 were magnified by the numbers of anti-Christian Boxers who occupied Beijing in early June. A Manchu bannerman killed the German official, Klemens Freiherr von Ketteler (1853-1900), on June 20, and open hostilities quickly erupted. The foreign legations demanded reparation, and Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) used this as a pretext to declare war against foreign missions and the legations on June 21. Local Chinese officials, such as Governor Yuxian, were enlisted into the conflict after the court issued an official declaration of war. ^{the governor} ~~Yuxian~~ had gained official sanction to do what he had all along hoped for; he was now ^{officially} at war with the Christians in Shanxi.

A decree was posted at Taiyuan's telegraph office in June that alarmed the Christian community:

This area has foreign missionaries who have ravaged our region, angering both gods and men. All of you who have converted to their religion, correct your errors and reform yourselves. . . . Those who remain unenlightened will have endless regrets. . . .²³

In a fearful letter dated just two weeks before her execution on July 9, Mary Duval wrote:

²³ *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, ed. Diocese of Taipei Secretariat (Taipei: Taipei Catholic Bishops Committee, 2005), 260.

These are not nice times we are living in. . . . Rumour says [the governor] is going to ask permission to kill the foreigners. . . . There are horrid rumours, but God is keeping us trusting; and looking up to Him, away from all else, gives peace.²⁴

The imperial decree published in late July had clearly stirred anxieties among the Christians living at the Baptist mission. Not too long after Duval's letter was written, a crowd attacked Schofield Hospital and razed much of the mission compound. Dr. Lovitt and his family attempted to escape the flames through a street exit, but were noticed by Boxers and assailed ^{with} bricks. Edith Coombs fell on her way out of the mission while attempting to save a small ^{Chinese} schoolgirl, and Eben Edwards recounts that she was, "thrust once, twice, thrice into the flames as she endeavored to escape."²⁵

The remaining Protestant missionaries, along with several Chinese converts, were taken into custody by Yuxian for "their protection," and held under guard in a railway office located at "Pig Head Alley." ^(猪头巷) Members of the English Baptist mission and the Italian Franciscan mission were now lodged together.²⁶ Once convened the two groups of missionaries prepared themselves for what they knew was about to befall them. For his part,

²⁴ In Eben Henry Edwards, *Fire and Sword in Shansi: The Story of Martyrdom of Foreigners and Chinese Christians* (New York: Flemming H. Revell, 1903), 224.

²⁵ Edwards, 216. Wen Cui, Edwards' personal friend, offers another account of her death. "They then threw Miss Coombs on the fire in the gateway, and then when twice she rose out of the flames, they heaped a door and tables and boards on top of her [The next day] they found only a few charred bones which they buried amid the ruins of the mission compound." In Minor, 425-426.

²⁶ *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 230.

Yuxian was uneasy about rumors that Catholic converts were well armed, and he called for reinforcement militia from nearby Pingyang and Datong before finally ordering the Christian execution.²⁷ After his reinforcements arrived, Yuxian stationed both official troops and Boxers around the execution ground near the yamen gate, and summoned the prisoners. Luella Minor ^{describes} ~~an account of Christian martyrs during the Boxer Uprising~~ recounts an eyewitness who was:

. . . startled to see them coming up the street in a long line, each with a rope tied tightly around his forehead and passing back to the next one. Men, women, and children, they formed a strange procession. And they must have been marching to their death, for that is the way they lead condemned criminals out to execution.²⁸

The missionaries and converts were not only tied together, but were also, “stripped to the waist, as was the custom with,” criminals about to be beheaded.²⁹

The Catholic Missionaries of Taiyuan

Leading up to the July 9th massacre, the Catholic mission operated by the Franciscan friars and nuns had grown to an imposing size. Taiyuan and surrounding villages had large Catholic churches, hospitals, convents, rectories, and priories that were built in Western style; they were edifices of foreign power that appeared, to the poor Chinese communities near them, to be wealthy and imperialist. Public Catholic celebrations conducted on certain feasts,

²⁷ *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 230.

²⁸ Luella Minor, *China's Book of Minors: A Record of Heroic Martyrdoms and Marvelous Deliverances of Chinese Christians During the Summer of 1900* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1903), 428.

²⁹ Brandt, 231.

such as Corpus Christi, displayed long processions that wound through Chinese streets, often passing Chinese native temples. A non-Christian Shanxi man named Liu Dapeng (1857-1942) wrote in 1902 of the Franciscan compound at Dongergou, located very near Taiyuan:

The villagers all follow the foreign religion. The village lies at the foot of the hills, with the church standing on the slope of the hill, surrounded by a wall. There are many buildings within the wall. The site is impressive and the buildings are all in the foreign style.³⁰

~~This~~ ^{The} prominent presence of Catholic missionaries in Shanxi during a time of cultural antagonism exacerbated China's impressions ^{of} of foreign imperialism; large Western structures with seemingly wealthy foreigners attached were an easy target for hostility, especially during a time of famine.

Official action against the Catholic mission at Shanxi began on July second, a week before Yuxian ordered the executions of the Franciscans and Baptists.³¹ Around four o'clock

³⁰ Liu Dapeng, "Tuixiangzhai riji" (Diary From the Study for Retreat and Contemplation), in *Jindaishi ziliao yibetuan shiliao* (Materials for Modern History: Materials on the Boxers) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 819. Translated in Henrietta Harrison, "Village Politics and National Politics: The Boxer Movement in Central Shanxi," in *The Boxers, China, and the World*, 3. The abandoned Franciscan complex of buildings described in Liu's diary still rest on the slope of the hill at Dongergou.

³¹ Yuxian had begun organizing his action against the Shanxi Christian communities venet before July 2. On June 28, for example, he sent a communication to Bishop Grassi

in the afternoon the Catholic Bishops, priests, and faithful were praying together in the mission chapel, when Governor Yuxian's entourage broke in to arrest them. They were taken to a building at "Pig-Head Alley," where they were allowed to celebrate Mass together before their executions; Father Théodoric Balat (1858-1900) gave Communion to fifteen persons the night before they died.³²

Sources note that the Catholic and Protestant Christians were derided and beaten on their way to the yamen to be beheaded. According to the testimony of one witness, as the Catholics were being tied with ropes to be taken to Governor Yuxian, Bishop Francis Fogolla (1839-1900) asked if he could process unbound.³³ He was tied with the rope, nonetheless, and a soldier sliced Fogolla's leg with his sword; his elderly confrere, Bishop Gregory Grassi (1833-1900), endured similar abuses as he was marched to the execution ground.³⁴ Grassi suffered "a deep wound on the forehead and a sword cut on the shoulders"

forbidding Christians from gathering for religious meetings. Yuxian also ordered his men to collect the children from the Catholic orphanage, and Georges Goyau recounts that, "The nuns looked on helplessly while soldiers carried off the sobbing orphans." Goyau, 35.

³² Cardinal Louis Bégin writes that, "Every day Mass was said in the prison and the Ordo of Father Théodoric, afterward found, indicated that on the night of July 8th the eve of the massacre, he gave communion to fifteen persons." Louis Nazaire Cardinal Bégin, *Life of Mother Marie-Hermine of Jesus: Massacred in Shan-si (China) July 9th, 1900*. (Quebec, 1910), 61. The "Ordo" mentioned here is Fr. Theodoric Balat's booklet, in which he recorded marginalia during his captivity in Yuxian's yamen.

³³ *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 232.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 232.

while he walked, and the other Catholics were attacked with swords and clubs.³⁵ Once the Christians had arrived at the yamen gate, Yuxian ordered them to kneel according to Chinese custom, and what occurred after this is narrated differently in Protestant and Catholic accounts.

Varied Accounts

Catholic versions record that after a brief dialogue between Yuxian and Bishop Fogolla, in which the bishop refuted the magistrate's accusations of harming the Chinese, Yuxian struck Fogolla twice on the chest and ordered his troops to begin the executions.³⁶ In this account the Catholics are the first to be attacked and martyred. The description of the executions by Georges Goyau (1869-1939), ~~former professor at the Académie Française~~, is a vivid précis of ^{Catholic accounts:} ~~the collective records:~~

In a harsh voice Yu-Hsien ordered the yard to be cleared and the prisoners were dragged out to the tribunal, the people hurling insults at them as they passed down the streets. Yu-Hsien did not even pretend to hold a trial. He himself gave the order to kill and dealt the death blow to the two bishops with his own hand. On their knees the nuns . . . sang the *Te Deum* as they knelt with heads bowed to the executioner. 'They were very tranquil,' some pagan spectators said afterwards. 'They lifted up their veils for the death blow,' and added, 'It is a shame! These European nuns were so good.'³⁷

³⁵ Bégin, 61-62.

³⁶ *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 232.

³⁷ Goyau, 37.

Louis Nazaire Cardinal Bégin's account is more detailed.

Cardinal Bégin recalls that as Yuxian's men struck Bishop Grassi, a ^{Chinese Christian} ~~Christian man, Fr.~~ ~~Balat's assistant~~, escaped unnoticed and was thus able to provide one of the more extensive testimonies.

'Kill them, kill them!' roared the crowd. Yu-Hsien striking with his own sword cried: 'Kill them!' At this sight the soldiers began the slaughter, dealing blows right and left, cruelly injuring their victims before giving the final stroke. Father Elie, aged sixty one years, received more than one hundred sword cuts and at each lifted his eyes to heaven saying: 'I go to heaven.' During the scene the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary were spectators, for their executioners hoped the sight of the martyred priests would make their own death more horrible. They knelt in prayer with eyes lifted to heaven, praying for the martyrs, for the conversion of their persecutors and for the perseverance of the Christians. . . . The nuns embraced each other, intoned the *Te Deum*, and presented their heads to the executioners – a stroke of the sword and all was over!³⁸

The Chinese Jesuit, Li Di 李迪 (1840-1911), describes the scene in similarly poignant terms:

"In a moment the blood gathered into flowing channels and countless corpses lay prone throughout the courtyard."³⁹ The Franciscan bishops, priests, nuns, seminarians, and tertiaries, had died along with several Chinese Catholics, and letters from the highest levels

³⁸ Bégin, 62-63.

³⁹ Li Di, 340.

of the Church were sent by way of condolences and congratulations.⁴⁰ The particulars of the massacre are described in decidedly Catholic terms; courage while dying *in odium fidei* and displays of extreme piety are highlighted. The narratives are carefully crafted to conform to a requisite checklist of details for canonization. One cannot help but notice also that in both the Catholic and Protestant narratives of the executions, little is said about the other group with whom they were martyred.

Protestant sources render a ^{very} ~~slightly~~ different account. In these records two themes are underscored: first, the Protestants remain virulently faithful when pressured to apostatize; and second, they are afforded opportunities to, in essence, preach to the governor, his troops, and the crowd before finally being beheaded. In Luella Minor's hagiographical account of the event, she writes that Yuxian offered the Chinese converts a last opportunity to disavow their "foreign religion," but they replied, "Don't ask us any more, but quickly do what you mean to do."⁴¹ In Robert Forsyth's description of the massacre, another Chinese Protestant, a fifteen-year-old boy named Chang Ang, was also given a chance to apostatize. Chang is said to have replied, "I will not. You can do as you please with me, but I will not deny the Lord."⁴² Protestant sources also record sermons delivered by several missionaries

⁴⁰ Pope Leo XIII's private secretary, Mgr. Rinaldo Angeli, wrote to Mother Mary of the Passion on behalf of the Holy Father: "His Holiness blesses with all his heart the Institute which has given these spotless victims. I rejoice with you in this new pledge of heavenly graces given to your society." In Goyau, 38.

⁴¹ Minor, 110.

⁴² Robert Forsyth, ed, *The China Martyrs of 1900: A Complete Roll of the Christian Heroes Martyred in China in 1900, with Narratives of Survivors* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1904), 364.

before their executions; this is curious in light of the fact that Chinese jurisprudence does not normally allow for criminals to present soliloquies prior to their beheadings.

Conveniently, these pre-execution orations are in some sources said to “shame” Governor Yuxian; indeed, Yuxian’s mother is said to have become a Christian because of ~~the testimonies of the Christians her son persecuted.~~ *the Protestant Germans, exclaimed before they died.* Jonathon Goforth recounts that a thirteen-year-old member of the Baptist mission castigated the governor just before the bloodshed began. She first reminds him of the long list of charitable works the missionaries had done in Shanxi, exclaiming that, “Many [Chinese] with hopeless diseases have been healed.”⁴³ The young girl then calls into question Yuxian’s Confucian character, suggesting that he does not fully apprehend the concept of *xiaoshun*, 孝順 or “filial piety.” She exclaims:

Governor, you talk a lot about filial piety. It is your claim, is it not, that among the hundred virtues filial piety takes the highest place. But you have hundreds of young men in this province who are opium sots and gamblers. Can they exercise filial piety? Can they love their parents and obey their will? Our missionaries have come from foreign lands and have preached Jesus to them . . . [who] has given them power to live rightly and to love and obey their parents.”⁴⁴

Following her exhortation Yuxian is said to have felt humiliated at her rebuke, and a soldier grabbed her hair and beheaded her. In ~~this version,~~ *Protestant histories,* the Protestants are first killed.⁴⁵ One of the members of the Baptist mission, Thomas Piggot, was among those who died preaching.

⁴³ In Jonathan Goforth, *By My Spirit* (Minneapolis: Bethany Publishing, 1964), 63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

C. A. Pigott notes that, “Mr. Pigott, preaching to the last moment, was beheaded with one blow.”⁴⁶ Over the next twenty-four hours Yuxian’s troops and Boxers killed several hundred Christians throughout Shanxi.

This and other accounts of Christian martyrdom during the Boxer Uprising conjure, I believe, a rather compelling question regarding the so-called Ricci method of Christian accommodation. Clearly the foreign and native Christians were convinced enough of the legitimacy of their faith to offer themselves in martyrdom. The majority of native Chinese, however, appear to have agreed with Yuxian’s urgent desire to excise from China Christianity and the foreigners who brought it. Conversion occurred on the micro-level, but understanding and sympathies for alternative religious views had not occurred on the macro-level. In a probably apocryphal account, the Jesuit missionary, Allesandro Valignano (1539-1606), stared defiantly at Mainland China from Macao and said, “Rock, rock, oh when wilt thou open, rock,” wondering at the impenetrability of the Middle Kingdom. Allesandro’s apprehensions regarding the possible success of grafting one religion onto a very different culture were also sensed by Matteo Ricci. Indeed, Christian missionaries were unprepared for a culture that had never entertained, nor seemed interested, in the question of where the cosmos derived from. Nor were the Chinese prepared for foreigners who taught that an executed “criminal” was the Incarnate creator of that cosmos.

The Christian martyrs of Shanxi died three centuries after Matteo Ricci’s death, and now, four centuries later, Chinese Christians still wonder if, or how, the “rock” can be opened.

⁴⁶ C. A. Pigott, *Steadfast Unto Death, or Martyred for China: Memorials of Thomas, Wellesley, and Jessie Pigott* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1903), 239.