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Ecclesiology from Below: Urbanizing Catholicism in an Urbanizing China

STEPHANIE M. WONG

Abstract

Given that the majority of Chinese Catholics have historically lived in rural villages rather than urban centers, China's recent urbanization presents heightened challenges and opportunities for the Catholic Church in China. In order to understand the church's engagement with this new urbanism, I consider an "ecclesiology from below" and analyze the ways in which rural and urban Catholic communities adjust their way of doing church in order to remain responsive to their social and pastoral circumstances. I propose that the rural-urban boundary in China is important to study—not because urbanization has made Catholic villagers and city-dwellers separate, but rather because after 1978 this boundary has become more permeable and therefore increasingly a site of ecclesiological experimentation. As ideas about Catholicism and its role move back and forth across this boundary, the transmission generates various new forms of church that will undoubtedly shape Chinese Catholicism in the years to come.

INTRODUCTION

Since the government implemented the Reform and Opening Up and began to allow religious practice in 1978, Catholic communities in China have sought to reanimate the church in the face of three challenging questions: 1) how to re-integrate priests and fellow Catholics after the divisions and betrayals of the Cultural Revolution, 2) how to incorporate Vatican II and other developments of the worldwide church into village faith life, and 3) how to respond to the massive demographic shifts of urbanization and migration. The first two have received the most attention because of the high political stakes in national church administration and Sino-Vatican relations. However, the third question is no less ecclesiological in nature: Given that the church in China has been historically strongest in rural villages, can Catholicism adjust with the transformations of an urbanizing society? How do migrating Catholics go about “doing church” once they are far removed from the places and family ties in which their tradition was so long imbedded? How do people understand the church, and their participation in it, under these new circumstances?

In this essay, I seek to identify features of an “ecclesiology from below,” looking at the experiences of communities in transition to see how the very concept of the church changes along with the circumstances of the church. Very often, theologians and sociologists pursue such different lines of inquiry that it is difficult to see how religious belief changes over time and in new circumstances. On the one hand, much of Roman Catholic academic ecclesiology operates “from above.” It starts from ideals of the church (such as the mystical body of Christ) or classical doctrines about its role (for example, in effecting sacraments) and then seeks to construe the structure of the historical church along those normative lines. On the other hand, sociologists of religion attend mostly to what religious actors do and say; sociologists might offer an account of how a ritual’s function changes in a given community, but they often refrain from making claims about what it “means” to people in the tradition.¹ In this study, I consider both con-

¹ See Robert Wuthnow’s critique of the notion of “meaning” as something inhering in people’s minds; in *Meaning and Moral Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), Wuthnow argues against the “subjective” understanding of culture,

ceptual and phenomenological factors in the development of ecclesiology. On the one hand, I am interested in how sociological factors condition Chinese Catholics' experience and understanding of the church; on the other hand, I am interested in how those theological interpretations feed back into the community and its lived organization.

BACKGROUND: MAPPING URBANIZATION AND MIGRATION 1978–2014

Before turning to the changes particular to Chinese Catholicism, it is helpful to first consider the phenomena of post-Reform urbanization and migration in China more generally. After all, even though rural peasants have made up the vast majority of the Catholic population since the eighteenth century, the Catholic population is itself less than 1% of the mainland Chinese population.² Since Catholics are one current in a much larger flow of social change, their experience must be understood within this broader context.

Moreover, the last 35 years mark a particular chapter in the history of the nation and the life of the church. In March 2014, the Chinese government published a long-awaited blueprint addressing the social inequalities exacerbated by the two-tier *hukou* (户籍 household registration system) that categorized people as either “rural” or “urban” workers. The document, the *National New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014–2020)*, outlines a plan to grant urban *hukou* (户口 household registration) to 100 million migrants in the cities by 2020 and some demographers like Chan Kam-wing 陳金永 suggest that this marks a new direction in government policy that will eventually phase out the system altogether.³ Nonetheless, we cannot overestimate the impact that the

which assumes that people hold ideas as expressions of their states of experience. While Wuthnow acknowledges that ideas do affect people and society, he does not believe that they have any “meaning” in themselves to people, but that culture only becomes known in discourse, symbolic dramatization, or institutional organization.

² While statistical data on the Catholic population vary according to different sources, nonetheless all recent estimates put Catholics at less than 1% of the overall population. For 2014, the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong estimated 10,500,000, “or between 9 million to 12 million.”

³ For an analysis of the National New-Type Urbanization Plan, see Chan Kam-wing, “China’s Urbanization 2020: A New Blueprint and Direction,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 1 (2014): 6.

*huj*i system has had upon Catholicism in the past three decades. As Catholic communities re-organized and re-built after the Cultural Revolution, most rural Catholics moving to the cities did so without the social benefits of “urban” status and relied instead on whatever relational or religious support they encountered.

Urbanization

What does it mean to say that the population of rural Catholics has undergone “urbanization”? Since China grants official “urban” designation to both cities (*shi* 市) and towns (*zhen* 鎮),⁴ the English word “urbanization” can be rendered in Chinese as either *chengzhenhua* 城鎮化 or *chengshihua* 城市化. The subtle difference between these terms reflects how urbanization can take place and has taken place in different ways.

On the one hand, *chengzhenhua* connotes urbanization in the administrative and technical sense of developing the countryside.⁵ In the early years of the Reform, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintained a strategy of rural industrialization without migration, encouraging peasants to “leave the land but not the village, enter the factory but not the city.”⁶ The goal was to develop the small rural units like towns (*zhen* 鎮), townships (*xiang* 鄉) and villages (*cun* 村) and re-classify them higher on the scale of citification. Especially after a 1984 administrative reorganization eased of the qualifications for becoming a town, many previously “rural” communities became “urban” simply as they got upgraded from *xiang* status to *cun* status.⁷ Meanwhile, rural urbanization policies did promote a rapid increase in the real number and size of urban centers, with new industrial hubs popping up and growing across the countryside of north China. This is all to say that the rural-urban boundary is not at all static; for the past 35 years, the government has generally preferred to move the

⁴ Chan Kam-wing, *Cities with Invisible Walls: Reinterpreting Urbanization in Post-1949 China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21.

⁵ Chen Aiming, “Urbanization: The Chinese Way,” *China and World Economy* (January 2005), accessed September 31, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/237250678?accountid=11091>.

⁶ “Li tu bu li xiang, jin chang bu jin cheng.” 離土不離鄉、進廠不進城。

⁷ For helpful charts of the pre- and post-1983 administrative schema, see Chan, *Cities with Invisible Walls*, 21–22.

line—striving to bring “the urban” *to* the people, so to speak—rather than allowing the population to freely migrate.

On the other hand, *chengshihua* connotes urbanization in the more general, descriptive sense of a place becoming more urbanized. This includes the creation and upgrading of rural municipalities as described above, but it also covers the increasing size and density of already existent small, middle, and large cities. While less technical, the imprecision of the term can be helpful in accounting for both the demographic and socio-cultural shifts that urbanizing communities undergo. In fact, the urban studies scholar Wu Fulong 吳縛龍 has pointed out the benefits of a “broad view” of urbanization, which refers not only to an increase in the urban population but also a deepening of “urbanism” as a set of behavioral norms.⁸ For example, as population density increases, service industries diversify and employ a larger proportion of the city’s residents. When people are added to an urban system, the system itself also urbanizes more deeply. This sense of urbanization is helpful because it accounts for the fact that urbanization is not just a demographic phenomenon but also a cultural phenomenon and therefore something that people grapple with, trying to make sense of their relationship to it.

For my purposes, these different aspects of urbanization are important insofar as they inflect Chinese Catholics’ understanding of what it means to become a more urban church. Since much of Roman Catholic social teaching was developed in the West, it tends to assume that urbanization entails industrialization in major cities. When Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, he had in mind the plight of factory workers in the major cities of Europe’s Industrial Revolution, such as London and Milan. However, due to the distinctive patterns of “urbanization the Chinese way”—namely, rural industrialization and extreme population density in the cities—“urbanization” means something quite different to Chinese Catholics. The Catholic villagers who left their fields for industrial work in the 1980’s generally stayed close to where they already were. Today, those who are urbanizing by moving to big cities are more likely to be leaving the factory than entering it.

⁸ Wu Fulong, *Globalization and the Chinese City* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6.

Migration

While migration is clearly related to urbanization, it is nonetheless a distinct phenomenon that poses a particularly acute challenge for Catholicism insofar as the Chinese Catholic village was for so long the foundational unit of the church. As Richard Madsen noted in *China's Catholics*, rural Catholicism in north China has long functioned as an “ethnicity,” much as in the Hui Muslim communities of the region.⁹ Most rural Catholic villagers inherited their Catholicism as membership in a community, and in some cases those lineages of family ties and property interest stretch back hundreds of years. Today, however, migration poses an enormous challenge to this locally-embedded form of religious belonging. Madsen observed that “a Chinese rural Catholic community is formed by bonds that for most practical purposes cannot be broken unless one leaves the countryside”¹⁰—yet this is precisely what is happening at increasing rates.

Some of the migration is large-scale and irreversible, caused by government-led water and energy projects in regions where high numbers of Catholics live. A report by John B. Zhang from the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies explains that economic development under the People's Republic of China (PRC) has resulted in 70 million involuntary migrants.¹¹ Zhang notes three major migrations that have most impacted rural Catholicism: 1) From 1992 to 1993, the Three Gorges reservoir project relocated 50,000 Catholics from Wanzhou 萬州 Diocese of Chongqing 重慶, and another 500 from Yichang 宜昌 Diocese of Hubei 湖北 province.¹² 2) Since 1949, water diversion projects in Henan 河南, such as the South-to-North Water Diversion Project (2009–2011), have affected 1.968 million people with many Catholics among them.¹³ 3) Currently, the Shaanxi 陝西 provincial government is shifting 2.4 million people out of southern Shaanxi due to “poor living conditions and uninhabitable situations” and again many of the af-

⁹ Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 53.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John B. Zhang, “The Chinese Church's Response to Migration,” *Religion and Christianity in Today's China* 2, no. 1 (2012): 26.

¹² Ibid., 25.

¹³ Ibid.

fectured townships are Catholic ones.¹⁴ In these cases, the migration is a one-way transition *en masse* as whole village or family units relocate. We need more research on these kinds of communities in order to know how large-scale relocation transforms religious communities.

In the case of voluntary migration, Catholics may move as individuals or in waves, and they may or may not maintain connections with their hometown. For example, Zhangzhuang 張莊 village in Hebei 河北 Province shows a pattern of villagers scattering widely yet returning for major holidays. Almost all the villagers (98.77%) have been Catholic for generations, but between 1977 and 2001 about 3/5 of the people migrated away for work—either to prefecture-level cities in Hebei like Shijiazhuang 石家莊 and Xingtai 邢台, or to provincial capitals elsewhere like Xi'an 西安 or Jinan 濟南.¹⁵ Back in Zhangzhuang village, the priest has had a difficult time maintaining the vitality of the faith community, where most of the villagers still remaining are the elderly or young children. Many of the parish's activities have ceased, except for festivals at major feast days when many of Zhangzhuang's migrants still visit.¹⁶ In other places, the exodus has been less scattered but more permanent. In the case of Erquanjing 二泉井 township, so many people moved to Zhangbei 張北 County city that the township population dropped from 2,000 in 2008 to 200 in 2011; in fact, so many people have left the village that there is less and less reason for migrants to return there.¹⁷ Yet the pattern is not one of decline alone. While Erquanjing has almost completely emptied, the parish in Zhangbei County City built a new 3,000-seat church to accommodate the influx of arriving Catholics.

CATHOLIC IDENTITY AT A CROSSROADS

I propose that Chinese Catholicism will be hard pressed to remain a lineage- and land-based “ethnicity” in the face of such massive demographic shifts. While Catholic villages have shown remarkable

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 33.

resilience to direct political attacks on their faith, it will be more difficult to remain immune from the forces of demographic shifts simply because they are more diffuse.

Granted, this is not to suggest that the Catholic villages existing today are all undergoing some generic or inevitable process of decline. In places where Catholics are able to maintain a stronghold presence, they may exist today much as in the past. In her 2006 article "How Has a Chinese Village Remained Catholic?" Wang Xiaoqing 王曉青 analyzes a north Chinese Catholic village, which she calls "Vincentzhuang," that quickly reasserted its Catholic identity after the Cultural Revolution and has continued to maintain a strong sense of separation from the surrounding non-Catholic or *dajiao* 大教 villages. Nonetheless, in another sense, Wang's research makes my point insofar as all of the community's strategies for maintaining the church within the village hinge on location-dependent life-cycle rituals: pressure from neighbors to quickly baptize one's baby into the church;¹⁸ the expectation that non-Catholic adults will either convert or move away; the custom that women marrying into the village will convert before marriage or soon after arrival;¹⁹ and the Catholic *zhengzang* 正葬 practice of burying the dead on a straight north-south axis rather than along a northwest axis as *dajiao* families in the region do.²⁰ Moreover, Wang found that the strength of these identity-maintaining factors was highly dependent on the fact that the village was monolithically or at least majority Catholic. Even in surrounding *dajiao* villages of the very same county, "it is very difficult for Catholics in the non-Catholic village to pass on their religion."²¹ Again, this calls into question the transferability or sustainability of this form of Catholicism unless the tradition makes adjustments.

Urbanization is clearly a strategy of developmental state to extend its reach further into society, but is this a challenge around which Catholics can rally and reinforce the faith? It is not clear that being Catholic means being anti-urban, and at any rate, the demographic shift happens outside the immediate orbit of life-cycle rituals where villagers have historically formed and reinforced their Catholic identity. An

¹⁸ Wang Xiaoqing, "How has a Chinese Village Remained Catholic? Catholicism and Local Culture in a Northern Chinese Village," *Journal of Contemporary China* 15, no. 49 (2006): 695.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 692.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 700.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 704.

illustrative example is the case of Haibei 海北 township in north Hailun 海倫 County, Heilongjiang 黑龍江 Province. At the 2013 Faith Institute Conference, professors Fan Zhihui 樊志輝 and Cai Ying 曹穎 of Heilongjiang University explained how Catholic influence in the village has changed in the course of power changes brought about by urbanization. They suggest that Catholicism in Haibei has played a conflicting role in the urbanization process, at times facilitating and at times impeding it.²² Yet at any rate, when Haibei was incorporated as a higher municipality, Catholics went from being the single unitary faith community to being a minority aggregated into a diverse new town; the “power change” (*shili bianqian* 勢力變遷) involved was evidently one of loss for the Catholics. In sum, if the strength of village Catholicism lies in strategies internal to a self-enclosed world,²³ it is unclear how helpful those strategies can be once the autonomy of the community is lost or once Catholics are no longer the majority.

Similarly, it is not clear how Catholicism could rally against a phenomenon as diffuse as migration, or that Catholic networks necessarily keep Catholics in the village at higher rates than non-Catholics. In fact, Kong Kit-fan’s 江結芬 study of women in Lutang Old Village 蘆塘舊村 suggests that in the past, Catholicism might have facilitated mobility insofar as the church equipped people with life skills like literacy.²⁴ Kong’s study found that bible studies and regional church activities gave Catholic women, compared with non-Catholic women, more opportunity to learn to read and to travel beyond their immediate village. Of course today, young men and women of whatever religious background have higher literacy rates because of formal education; but among Lutang women who grew up before the Reform and Opening Up policies, Catholic women were much more likely to be literate than

²² Fan Zhihui 樊志輝 and Cao Ying 曹穎, “Chengzhenhua jincheng zhong de Tianzhujiao cunzhen bianqian: Yi Suihua shi Haibei zhen wei li” 城鎮化進程中的天主教村鎮變遷——以綏化市海北鎮為例 [The Changes in Catholic Towns and Villages under Urbanization: A Case Study on Haibei Township, Suihua City], *Chengshi hua yu yimin ji mumin zhaogu yantaohui* 城市化與移民及牧民照顧研討會 [An International Conference on “Urbanization, Migration, and Pastoral Care”], September 10–12, 2013, accessed September 30, 2015, <http://www.chinacatholic.org/News/index/id/25933.html>.

²³ See Richard Madsen’s discussion of rural Catholic communities operating as self-enclosed world: “Where Catholics were a minority of the population, as in China, they sought to exert such control through the creation of enclaves dominated by the Church. Thus to be Catholic. . . is to live in ‘the world of God.’” Madsen, *China’s Catholics*, 62.

²⁴ Kong Kit-fan, “Status Enhancement of Catholic Women in a Chinese Village,” *Ching Feng* 4, no. 1 (2003): 79–98.

non-Catholic women because they learned to read in bible studies.²⁵ For families engaged in work outside the village, literacy was key in enabling women to run a small business at home while their husbands were away working elsewhere as migrants, or in doing business themselves beyond the immediate village.

Therefore, although there are still many “Catholic strongholds,”²⁶ in the countryside that maintain the rhetoric of the church as a bounded enclave separate from the non-Catholic world, we should not think of these communities as immune to the broader demographic changes in Chinese society. Catholics are urbanizing and migrating along with the rest of the rural population, and it is the networks between sending and receiving communities that hint at an alternate ecclesiology.

CATHOLICISM AS A “SOCIAL REMITTANCE”

How, then, can we conceptualize the dynamic structure of the church in transition? Migration scholar Peggy Levitt has developed a concept of “social remittances” that can be helpful in identifying those network patterns that are most transforming Chinese Catholics’ experience and conception of “church.” For once the church develops ways of responding to and meeting the real needs of its people, then the church can reflect theologically on its nature and purpose.

Levitt first coined the term “social remittances” to call attention to the fact that, in addition to sending money, migrants export behaviors, ideas, and knowledge.²⁷ Responding to the dominance of purely economic analyses of migrant communities in the field of sociology, Levitt’s work countered that migration is itself a cultural act. Migrants rarely simply relocate and cut all ties; rather, the sending and receiving communities circulate what they learn:

²⁵ Among Kong’s 22 interviewees, five of the six Catholic women in their 50’s or above had achieved literacy through bible study, whereas only one of the five non-Catholic women had some reading ability on account of having attended school for two years.

²⁶ Wang, “How Has a Chinese Village Remained Catholic?” 693.

²⁷ Peggy Levitt, “Social Remittances: Migration-driven Local-level Forms of Cultural Diffusion,” *International Migration Review* 32, no. 4 (1998): 926–948.

What migrants bring and continue to receive from their homelands affects their experiences in the countries where they settle. This, in turn, affects what they send back to non-migrants who either disregard or adopt these ideas and behaviors, transforming them in the process, and eventually re-remitting them back to migrants who adopt and transform them once again.²⁸

While some examples of social remittances are particular and technical (for example, knowledge of the legal system, how to draft a contract), social remittances can also be more general values or “outlooks” (like differing attitudes towards time, or towards work). This concept of social remittances is helpful because it allows us to “map” the church in cultural transition—mapping not just the physical flow of people, money, and material goods, but also the flow of ideas wherein theology develops.

Sometimes social remittances are transmitted between *individuals*. For example, Peggy Levitt and Deepak Lamba-Nieves show how when a migrant shares know-how with his or her relatives back home, the information flow can transform a cultural system for better or for worse. For example, Levitt references a 2005-study which found that Mexican women with international migrant partners had significantly lower rates of smoking and higher rates of exercise than other women; but they were also less likely to exclusively breastfeed their babies.²⁹ In the Chinese Catholic church, priests returning from seminary may function as individual transmitters due to their personal experiences and connections. For example, historian Henrietta Harrison recounts that in the 1980’s, a priest in Cave Gully, Shanxi 山西 Province, used a relational connection and funds from Taiwan to replace Cave Gully’s old European-style church with a new Chinese-style building.³⁰ Individual lay Catholics also regularly transmit ideas between village and city acquaintances, ranging from specific expertise (such as practicing devotions to a local saint) to more tacit attitudes (such as one’s openness to marrying a non-Catholic).

Social remittances can also be *collective*, circulating through the body of the church as such. Levitt points out that when migrants com-

²⁸ Peggy Levitt and Deepak Lamba-Nieves, “Social Remittances Revisited,” *Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies* 37, no. 1 (2001): 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse, and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 186.

municate ideas or behaviors, they do so as family members and friends but they also do so as members of hometown associations, political parties, or churches: “In particular, [collective social remittances] affect ideas about organizational management, capacity-building, what development and progress mean and how communities know when they have achieved them.”³¹ Indeed, in the case of Cave Gully, the new Chinese-style Church of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows not only represented the priest’s personal vision but also carried other potential messages, such as Vatican II’s call for a more indigenized church, or governmental promotion of Chinese nationalism.³² While the villagers were generally glad to have a new building, many had mixed feelings about the expression of these external values in their community, wary of the way that different values can alter the church.

Indeed, social remittances are significant precisely because they do bring about religious change of an essential kind. Social remittances are not external to people, getting passed around like a ball or some kind of mere technology that is used or set aside. Insofar as religion is a system of ideas by which people imagine the society of which they are members,³³ adopting a new conception of the church is itself a religious change. These new conceptions of the church are therefore not just descriptive but in fact ecclesiological.

Social Remittances between Sending and Receiving Communities

How do remittances flow between Catholic communities linked by urbanization and migration? Moreover, what kinds of remittances are transmitted?

First of all, some institutional networks have developed as pastors realized that many migrants lose their Catholicism in the transition from the village to the city. The Faith Institute for Cultural Studies and various *Xinde* 信德 news articles document some of the concrete ways that sending and receiving pastors can collaborate to provide more pastoral care to migrants and also keep track of migrant Catholics in transition. For example, Fr. Zhang Wenxi 張文西 of Hebei Catholic Major Seminary (河北天主教神哲學院 Hebei Tianzhujiao shen zhe

³¹ Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, “Social Remittances Revisited,” 3.

³² Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse*, 187.

³³ Emile Durkheim’s understanding of religion, as expressed in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2008), 227.

xueyuan) explains how Fr. Joseph Xu at Quzhou 曲周 parish of Handan 邯鄲 Diocese in Hebei has tried to facilitate young migrants' transition away into an urban parish:

About two or three thousand migrant workers gather together in the church. Joseph Xu prays with them, imparts God's blessing and gives each a letter of recommendation to the local pastor of the city where he or she will go to work, and a liturgical calendar. In this way, Joseph Xu facilitates contact with the local pastor so that his parishioners can join the local Catholic community. At the same time, the receiving pastor is informed of the arrival of the new migrant workers and prepares to welcome them.³⁴

Of course, some migrants do not engage with the parishes' institutional outreach. Although a church in Cixi 慈溪 City, Zhejiang 浙江 Province, has a team of Catholics who give phone calls to migrants in order to invite them to Mass and to other church activities, they acknowledge that fewer than half the believers come or get involved.³⁵ Nonetheless, migrant workers self-organized to found the Cixi "Catholics' Family" community (*Jiaoyou zhi Jia* 教友之家) in 2007; they had grown to over 600 people by 2013. By hosting activities and dinners during the holidays for migrants who cannot go home, this formal lay network provides an important space where migrant Catholics can find fellowship.

In these kinds of encounters, Catholics from rural and urban churches have unique experience and knowledge to offer to each other.

From the rural to the urban churches, some key remittances include:

1. *Concern for moral resilience*: While corruption has become widespread across China, rural Catholics bring with them various aspects of village morality—one of which is experience navigating the tension between morality and maximizing one's material well-being.

During the Socialist Education movement and the Four Clean-ups, Communist workteams tried to make the peasants reject Catholicism, criticize the church, and engage in class struggle against each other. However, when the workteams tried to give impover-

³⁴ Zhang Wenxi, "Biblical and Pastoral Reflections on the Impact of Urbanization on Christians in China," *Mission Studies* 30 (2013): 181–193.

³⁵ Ming Yan 明豔, "Waichu wugong jiaoyou xinyang shenghuo diaocha: Mo rang 'qunyang' cheng 'wangyang'" 外出務工教友信仰生活調查——莫讓「群羊」成「亡羊」 [Survey on Migrant Catholic Workers: Don't Let the Flocks Become the Lost], *Xindebao* 信德報 [Faith Weekly], January 16, 2011.

ished peasants money and food in order to win them to the Communist cause, the peasants were not easily bought. For example, in Liuhe 六合 Village, Shanxi Province, a lay Catholic leader rallied the villagers to hand back anything “gained through immoral means.”³⁶ The peasants returned to the workteam the cash, grain and vegetables they were given, “reject[ing] the moral order of class struggle. . . in favor of a much more traditional morality tied to the Ten Commandments.”³⁷ Many Catholic villages have similar legacies of resisting external pressure to act in self-interested ways, and the history is recent enough that even younger migrant know the lengths to which their relatives and neighbors went to stay true to Catholic morals rather than maximize their own material well-being. This legacy of commitment to financial morality is an important value for the rural churches to remit to Catholic communities in China’s highly competitive cities today.

2. *Stories of (and for) an indigenous church:* For all that the city churches and urban-educated priests have sought to implement Vatican II and its affirmation of local church culture, it is actually the rural villages and their evangelists who possess the most idiosyncratic stories of Chinese Catholicism.

In “Vincentzhuang,” the village studied by Wang Xiaoqing, villagers still tell how a god-spirit saved them during a siege by the Boxers in 1900; although the Catholics did not have time to finish digging protective ditches and building walls around the village, at night some villagers saw a bearded old man standing on top of the Vincentzhuang church and waving his hand over the village; miraculously, in the morning the ditches and walls were finished.³⁸ In Cave Gully 洞兒溝, Shanxi, an elderly lay evangelist Duan Runcheng 段潤成 published booklets from his decades spent visiting and praying for Catholics. The miracles he witnesses suggest that God works even in intensely local situations: healing a sick shepherd from Taiyuan 太原 by exorcising a demon with holy water; giving pregnancy advice to Catholic couples; helping the police settle a dispute about a Catholic accused of poisoning a neighbor’s

³⁶ Henrietta Harrison, “Chinese Catholic Visionaries and the Socialist Education Movement in Shanxi (1963–65),” *The Catholic Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (2014): 757.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Wang, “How Has a Catholic Village Remained Catholic?” 703.

fig.³⁹ While these accounts may seem odd or difficult to reconcile with modernity, having a history and repertoire of local miracles and testimonies is nonetheless essential for the particularity of the Chinese church.

From the urban churches to the rural, some key remittances include:

1. *Management Skills*: In cities where some wealthy businesspeople have emerged, lay “boss Christians/Catholics” have introduced new techniques for managing the church logistically and politically.

In the article “The Emergence of a New Type of Christians in China Today,” Chen Cunfu 陳村富 and Huang Tianhai 黃天海 describe a new class of Protestant and Catholic “boss (*laoban* 老板) Christians” or “civil (*shimin* 市民) Christians” who can wield their influence and business acumen on behalf of the church. The Reform economy has opened up a new category of these professionals who lie somewhere between the state-owned planned economy and individual farming. In some cases, the clergy and these affluent “boss Christians/Catholics” work together in the running of the churches, so that the theologically-trained clergy can focus on pastoring and preaching while these strong lay leaders handle things like financing, public relations, facilities and so on.⁴⁰ Chen points out that these Christians are accustomed to working with both the government and the private sector:

One of the most typical features of this new type of Christians is that they are pragmatic in their views toward realistic problems. They have a heartfelt dislike of the Three-Self Association (for the Protestants) and the Catholic Patriotic Association (for the Catholics), but they understand very clearly that these official associations are part of the ongoing political structure of China. Their pragmatic attitudes have led some of the competent and leading clergy to approach the official associations positively.⁴¹

As urban parishes learn from the management and political acumen of these urban businesspeople, migrant workers can watch, learn, and transmit best practices back to the local village.

³⁹ Harrison, *The Missionary's Curse*, 181–182.

⁴⁰ Chen Cunfu and Huang Tianhai, “The Emergence of a New Type of Christians in China Today,” *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 2 (2004): 196.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

2. *Lay Associations*: Catholics in the cities have formed lay communities, based on hometown associations and work units; these demonstrate the possibility of alternate units of Catholic belonging besides the geographical units of the rural Catholic village or parish.

Fr. John Zhang explains that these self-organized “base communities” are organized around the life circumstances of the migrants. For example, the “House for Companions on the Same Journey” in Beijing was founded to support young adult Catholics in the city for study or for work.⁴² Other associations are based on the migrants’ location of origin: The “Fellowship Association of Wenzhou Catholics in Shanghai” (or “Pasture of the Flock”) is a large and lively group of workers all originally from Wenzhou 溫州, and the “Yongnian Base Community in Shanghai” is a similar group of workers all originally from Yongnian 永年 County in Hebei.⁴³ In general, these various lay associations host a similar range of activities; they help migrants find work, offer bible studies and catechism classes, host festivities during the holidays for migrants away from home, and so on. While the underground associations do not operate so publically, they work similarly insofar as they are attending to the same pastoral needs of the migrant population.

At any rate, the voluntary nature of these common-interest groups is a distinctive social remittance that urban Catholics transmit back to the rural village. After all, rural Catholics are simply born into the Catholic village and have little to no choice about being Catholic; in the city, migrants experience a form of voluntary Catholicism and gain experience building community around non-familial commonalities like age, work, or common interest.

3. *Hospitality*: The urban churches have had to find creative ways to welcome the strangers entering their midst, adopting a new orientation towards hospitality outreach that is also needed in the villages.

Urban churches have been the locus of encounters between migrants and established city congregants. Granted, this has not always been a smooth process and some migrants have stories of feeling unwelcome in urban churches.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, urban Catho-

⁴² Zhang, “The Chinese Church’s Response to Migration,” 37.

⁴³ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁴ For example, migrant worker Wang Jiangbei explained in a *Xinde* article how he eagerly went to a church in Guangdong in 1992, but received a cold reception and an interrogation from the urban Catholics that made him feel anxious and unwelcome: 「1992 年的時候，我在廣東打工，有個主日堂，我懷着迫切的心情到當地一個教堂參與彌撒，結

lic communities have found creative ways to make space for the new people in their midst. Sometimes the shift is as simple but as significant as a priest using *Putonghua* Mandarin. Migrant worker Wang Jiangbei 汪江北 explains how he struggled to understand the Zhejiang dialect when he first arrived in Cixi City, but fortunately found the priest was willing to accommodate him. Wang recounted:

With the support of the bishops and priests, [the priest] soon switched to using *Putonghua* to celebrate the Mass. Even though at that time there were only about 40 to 50 congregants from elsewhere, Father said, “Don’t worry, even if there’s only one for Mass, I will use *Putonghua*.”⁴⁵

A 26-year-old Catholic named Zhang Enshun 張恩順 recounted how he was fortunate to find encounter with a kind stranger in the Yiwu 義烏 City train station when he first arrived from Hangzhou 杭州. This new acquaintance not only helped Zhang get situated in the city at the beginning, but later helped him find housing and shared job advice with him. It turned out that Zhang’s host was also a Catholic, and he took Zhang to Mass to welcome him into the Yiwu church.⁴⁶ While it is impossible to measure the hospitality of the church in any quantitative way, we should not underestimate the ripple effect that these kinds of anecdotes can have upon the wider church. As ideas and models of how to welcome the stranger spread both throughout the city and back to Catholics in the rural village, they can reorient Chinese Catholic communities from a defensive fortress mentality to a more hospitable stance.

果很多教友嚴厲而冷漠地問了一個接一個的問題『你是哪個教區的』，『你聖名是什麼』，『你辦過告解嗎』，這種謹慎和盤問彷彿一盆冷水澆到了我的頭上，讓我有些害怕和想逃離」(In 1992 when I was working in Guangdong, on one Sunday I had an urge to go to the local church to attend Mass. But the parishioners severely and coldly asked me one question after another, “What parish are you from?” “What is your Christian name?” “Have you made a confession?” This sort of wariness and interrogation was like a pot of cold water poured over my head, and it made me fearful and made me want to leave.)

⁴⁵ Ming Yan, “Waichu wugong jiaoyou xinyang shenghuo diaocha.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

ECCLESIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION:
BEING A NEW KIND OF “OTHER”

Migration and urbanization have given Chinese Catholics new challenges but also new opportunities in the church. As rural and urban communities circulate the insights gained from this experience, the ecclesiology of the church is changed—not necessarily from any formal “top down” restructuring of the Catholic hierarchy, but rather from the “bottom up” insofar as Catholics conceive of the church in terms that reflect their shifting pastoral needs and missional opportunities. I suggest that as urbanization and migration create new Catholic networks that are increasingly interwoven within the broader non-Catholic society, the church has a new opportunity to re-imagine its “otherness” no longer in terms of separation but rather in terms of advocacy for those on the fringes of society.

In fact, Catholic ecclesiology has often wrestled with the tension of the church being both “in” the world but “not of” the world,⁴⁷ stressing either participation or separation depending on the historical moment. Hence the fact that sociological factors might prompt a local church to a new self-understanding is not surprising: In the New Testament itself, the Pauline letters written to a mixed Jewish-Gentile audience often express the fittingness of engaging with and being accountable to the broader Greco-Roman society (1 Corinthians 9:19–23; 1 Timothy 3:7; Romans 13:1–6), while the later Johannine literature stresses the antipathy between the kingdom of God and “the world” that is “passing away” (1 John 17; Revelation 21:4). In second-century Rome where Christians were pressed to prove the faith’s intellectual worth, Justin Martyr wrote his *Apologies* to demonstrate how the best of Greek culture could find expression in Christian faith; yet in the fourth century when the church was blamed for the sack of Rome, Augustine of Hippo offered a more bifurcated vision of society in *The City of God*, wherein the Earthly City (comprised of those in society who were immersed in the pleasures of this world) is fundamentally at odds with the City of God (made up of those in society who have dedicated themselves to

⁴⁷ John 17:13–17.

God).⁴⁸ There is not sufficient space here to trace the church's stance towards the wider society in every time and place, but this ambiguity is evident also throughout the history of Chinese Christianity. Whether in the Ming era disagreements between the Jesuits and the Dominicans over how to approach mission or in twentieth-century responses to state persecution, a question of emphasis remains: Does the church find its *raison d'être* most in being sacred and set apart, or by transforming the world from within? Is it better characterized as an exemplary "city on a hill" (Matthew 5:14) or as the fertilizing "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), as the good seed struggling to grow up among weeds (Matthew 13:24–30) or the leaven within a batch of dough that makes it rise (Matthew 13:33)? In every chapter of church history, the theological emphasis reflects the social circumstance.

As Anthony Clark points out in his edited volume *A Voluntary Exile*, rural Catholics have long stressed the separation of church and society, tending to understand Catholic identity in terms of an opposition between the Catholic village and its surroundings. For a number of historical reasons, Chinese Catholic identity has developed with an accent on being exclusively "Other within one's own cultural context."⁴⁹ First, the European missionaries understood their work as a kind of "voluntary exile" into a foreign missionary territory. Secondly, Chinese Christians themselves have become to some extent voluntary "Others" within their own cultural context. Clark writes,

Their position in China's cultural milieu as adherents of a minority religion, one that continues to be considered "foreign" (and worse, "heterodox"), has required native believers to both justify their spiritual practices and stave off political and cultural pressures to abandon their exile and "reintegrate" into "normal" Chinese society.⁵⁰

Thus, with internal strategies of resistance built up over centuries, the dominant mode of the church into the twentieth century has emphasized the ideal "type" of the church as a self-enclosed, alternate society.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God, Against the Pagans*, Books 11, 59–19 (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).

⁴⁹ Anthony Clark, introduction to *A Voluntary Exile: Chinese Christianity and Cultural Confluence since 1552*, ed. Anthony Clark (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2014), 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

However, social circumstances may require the retrieval of an ecclesiology of the church sojourning in the world. Historically speaking, it is important to note that the Chinese church has not in fact been always and everywhere an exiled “Other” but has at times found itself a neighborly “Other.” For example, the historian Alan Sweeten has sought to demonstrate that Christianity in rural China has been characterized by not only conflict but also accommodation; in his study of Qing legal cases in Jiangxi 江西 Province, he found that Catholics and non-Catholics not only had a lot of interaction, but that their conflicts were for the most part rare and quickly resolved:

In time, Catholics and non-Catholics were often able to find a middle ground that allowed them to live peacefully together and to adjust to the fact that they were equally part of one community. . . . [The] everyday life and normal relations between people during peaceful times may be easily overlooked because they do not seem noteworthy compared to an assault on a missionary or the destruction of a church. Nonetheless, common gestures of good will and the larger historical process of accommodation must also be recognized as elements of Christianity’s presence in China during the late Qing.⁵¹

Sweeten notes the need for a historiographical corrective, lest our assumptions about the nature of Catholicism blind us to the way the church operates as an “Other” embedded in and engaged with its cultural milieu.

Moreover, as the Catholic community encounters new social circumstances, the church has an opportunity to reimagine its “otherness” not in terms of separation but rather in terms of advocacy for those on the fringes of society. There is strong scriptural warrant for defining the church’s “exile” as a kind of pilgrimage or sojourn in the world (Exodus 22:21; Psalm 39:12; Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11–17), a metaphor which holds together the fundamental “otherness” of the kingdom of God with the need to get along in the world and serve a transformative function from within it. Now, as demographic shifts make it harder for Catholic communities to continue as enclaves, and as the rural and urban churches have to work together to care for migrants who are quite literally sojourning “others” in a rapidly changing China, an ecclesiol-

⁵¹ Alan Richard Sweeten, *Christianity in Rural China: Conflict and Accommodation in Jiangxi Province, 1860–1900* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001), 195.

ogy of participation rather than separation may best reflect the pastoral challenge facing the church.

There is some evidence to suggest that current demographic shifts in China do in fact invite a new chapter in ecclesiological reflection, another movement in the ever-swinging pendulum of being “in” the world though “not of” it. For example, in his essay “Biblical and Pastoral Reflections on the Impact of Urbanization on Christians in China,” Fr. Zhang Wenxi hints at a shift towards engagement with social issues in his reflections on biblical paradigms. While he draws heavily on the narrative of exile, he does so in order to emphasize the church’s opportunity for pastoral engagement. He first highlights the Exodus story of God calling Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites through the wilderness into a homeland. In his analysis, migrants are like the wandering and vulnerable Israelites, while the church’s role is to invite them into society and community.⁵² Zhang then discusses the Babylonian exile and how, in the absence of a temple for sacrifices, the Jews collated their scriptures and developed the synagogue as a new kind of gathering space; so too, the church can develop new structures for building sustaining community.⁵³ In both images, the church walks with those migrants who are somehow “other” and outside any support networks, but the goal is not to stay separate but rather to provide a home.

This kind of theological reflection shows that the social reality of the church can helpfully inform its ecclesiology. Sociologically, urbanization and migration create sending and receiving communities, which mutually remit skills and ideas insofar as these are pragmatically necessary or useful; in other words, circumstances drive leaders and laity to develop new structures for living and operating as the church. Ecclesiologically, the church can then engage in second-order theological reflection on its nature and purpose; this helps the church be truly responsive to the reality of society while still not wholly determined by it.

⁵² Zhang, “The Chinese Church’s Response to Migration,” 188.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 189.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the demographic shifts of the last 35 years have presented a particularly difficult challenge to the Catholic Church because of Catholicism's historically rural and isolated character. On the one hand, some fear that Catholicism simply cannot make the transition and that Catholics are simply losing their faith when urbanizing and migrating. Indeed, if we think about the Chinese church as essentially a rural religion, then urbanization and migration cannot mean anything other than weakening and loss. On the other hand, a sociological lens helps show that the question is not whether rural Catholics will adjust their ways of doing church but rather how. In the rural-urban encounter, both the rural village church and the urban city church circulate social remittances and get transformed by them in the process. Of course, it remains to be seen what the net effect of these transformations will be, which ideas will come to characterize the church and which will fade away, what sort of Chinese Catholic Church will ultimately emerge, or whether various segments of the Chinese Catholic population will approve of or lament this change.

Even so, it is clear from considering "ecclesiology" from below that the rural-urban boundary is key to understanding the development of the contemporary church. In the past, this boundary was a dividing one that separated the experiences of the rural church from those of the urban church. Due to the simultaneous Reform and Opening Up and the rebuilding of the church in the 1980s, however, this boundary has become a permeable one and therefore a site of ecclesiological experimentation. As ideas about Catholicism and its role move back and forth across this boundary, the transmission generates various new forms of church that will undoubtedly shape Chinese Catholicism in the years to come.