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Foreign Intrusion as Sexual
Seduction: Chinese Anti-Christian
Writing and Popular Disturbances
in the Late Nineteenth Century

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In November 1891, the Reverend Griffith John, a Welsh Congregationalist missionary stationed in Hankow, wrote a letter to the English newspaper, *The North-China Herald*, detailing an extraordinary occurrence. Seemingly overnight, the walls of Changsha were covered with a flurry of cartoons, painting Western Christianity as “the licentious worship of the Crucified Hog,”¹ and guilty of all manner of inhuman crimes. At the instigation of a man named Chou Han, eight men of “education, position, and influence”² funded the distribution of these cartoons, as well as more than 800,000 copies of the pamphlet, *Death to the Devil’s Religion*, which accused Christian missionaries of engaging in incredibly vile practices.

Disturbances broke out throughout Hunan Province, in which several missionaries were killed and churches were burnt. The riots and the intensely inflammatory language used in the publications led British forces, at the urging of foreign missionaries, to call for immediate action from the Chinese government, under threat of a naval attack. Of greatest concern to the missionaries, however, was how Christian missions were portrayed in the Hunan publications. Christian practices were repeatedly presented as licentious and sexually corrupted, and called for the immediate expulsion of all foreigners. Christ was referred to as “the Incarnation of the Pig,” who was put to death for acts of extreme debauchery, and practitioners themselves are presented as a sexually corrupting group, bent on the moral debasement of Chinese society (Fig. 1).

¹ Griffith John, “Letter IV, November 21, 1891,” in *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China in 1891* (Shanghai: 1892), 209.

² Ibid.

Missionaries, unable to comprehend this sudden outburst, harshly condemned the Chinese for their actions. John Archibald, in his English translation of the cartoons, quickly condemned Chinese anti-Christian sentiment as baseless and ignorant: “It is supposed by some that the antichristian writers in this land have studied the nature and claims of the religion which they attack, and that the argument employed by them is based upon knowledge and reason. No supposition could possibly be wider off the mark...Anything more false, more foul, and more blasphemous, it would be impossible to conceive; but it is exactly the kind of argument in which the scholars of China delight, and by which the mob in China is moved.”³ However, this was certainly not the first time that the Chinese had risen in revolt against foreign missionaries, whom they perceived as just one face of the oppressive imperial power of the West.

Despite the heavy condemnations of contemporary missionaries, the Hunan publications and the ensuing riots raise several questions about the nature of Chinese anti-Christian feeling. Most importantly, what prompted the sudden outpouring of this anti-foreign body of literature and to what extent was it a reaction against general foreign encroachment? What is the significance of the intensely sexual rhetoric employed by the anti-foreign propagandists? And, finally, how did this event fit into the broader context of Chinese thought and tradition?

From the early nineteenth century onward, polemical portrayals of Christianity in China often represented missionaries and practitioners as belonging to a promiscuous sect, with morally deviant practices. Along with accusations of cannibalism, the kidnapping of children, and offensive burial practices, the motif of sexual deviance became one of the most consistent stereotypes characterizing anti-Christian literature in nineteenth-century China. As imperialist

³ Anonymous, *The Cause of the Riots in the Yangtse Valley: A “Complete Picture Gallery,”* trans. John Archibald (Hankow, 1891).

intrusions into China intensified in the latter half of the century, anti-Christian writings, often distributed at the behest of local gentry and officials, linked the perceived sexual agenda of missionaries with the broader imperialist threat presented by the West. The motif of Christian promiscuity became in part symbolic of general Western exploitation of China during the late nineteenth century. This motif manifested itself most pointedly in a series of popular agitations after the Chinese defeat in the Second Opium War, ultimately culminating in the Boxer Rebellion. Though often excessively inflammatory and propagandistic in nature, understanding why anti-foreign literature of the nineteenth century so persistently attacked Christianity as sexually and morally deviant is an essential part of comprehending the narrative of Chinese resistance to Westernization, even into the late twentieth century.



Fig. 1: “The [Foreign] Devils Worshipping the Incarnation of the Pig [Jesus]”

Text in Center: “Jesus, Heir Apparent (to the throne of Judea), was a metamorphosis of the Celestial Hog. His nature was extremely lascivious. All the wives and daughters of the high officials of Judea were, without exception debauched by him. Having debauched all the concubines of the sovereign, and having plotted to seize the throne, the high officials sent up a report of his crimes in a memorial. He was then bound, placed on a cross, and nailed to it with red hot nails. He uttered a number of cries, revealed his hog form, and died. After this, he constantly entered the houses of the high officials, doing strange things and committing lewdness. The moment married women and maidens heard the Hog’s squeak, their dress would unfasten of itself, and not until he had satiated his lust would the wake up to consciousness. This is the reason why the disciples of the Hog exhort people to come and worship; it is that they may avail themselves of the opportunity to seek for gain and indulge in lust...”

Anonymous, *The Cause of the Riots in the Yangtse Valley: A “Complete Picture Gallery,”* trans. John Archibald (Hankow, 1891), 87. See also Cohen, *China and Christianity*, insert.

Modern scholarship has consistently adopted a Western-centric approach to the subject of Christianity and missions in China, in that it has viewed “the history of Christian missions in China as but one phase of the history of Christian missions the world over,”⁴ overlooking how Chinese responses and resistance shaped the narrative of Western influence in China. Missionary accounts often framed anti-Christian reaction as mere ignorance on the part of the Chinese people and tyranny on the part of the *literati*, failing to comprehend the complex traditions, cultural practices, and even linguistic usages that informed this resistance. Worse, many more choose to frame the history of missions in China purely as a persecution narrative, completely discounting the Chinese perspective and the consequences of colonial influence. Others fail to contextualize anti-Christian sentiment within a long history of Chinese opposition to heterodoxy in general. Early twentieth-century scholar Lewis Hodous identified anti-Christian sentiment as a purely twentieth century phenomenon that grew out of post-revolution nationalism,⁵ discounting the two centuries of contact that had existed between Christian missionaries and Chinese. Historian Paul Cohen, however, claims that even before the circumstances of nineteenth-century Western exploitation began, there existed a “tradition of anti-Christian thought” that greatly influenced the literature and attitudes of Chinese conservatives in the period of modernization.⁶

⁴ Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860-1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), vii.

⁵ Lewis Hodous, “The Anti-Christian Movement in China,” *The Journal of Religion* 10, no.4 (1930): 487-94.

⁶ Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 4.

This paper will examine Chinese portrayals of Christian sexual deviance, within the framework of this anti-Christian tradition. Of particular interest will be how this motif was informed by broader cultural and philosophical traditions that made Christian doctrines and practices seemingly incompatible with Chinese culture. Also under examination will be how this motif evolved within an increasingly reactionary and nationalistic body of literature, as a result of progressing Western influence in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Even before the nineteenth century, a tradition of Chinese resistance to Christianity had already been solidified, that often lent itself to sexual interpretation. Even in the early seventeenth century, when the first French Jesuit missions arrived in China, it was apparent that “the Chinese were in no mood to submit to an alien faith...For them, the completeness and therefore, the superiority of Chinese thought and culture was self-evident.”⁷ Despite the arguments for Christian-Confucian compatibility presented by scholars like Xu Guanqi, the most vocal resistance came from the Confucian ranks. A multitude of ideological considerations contributed to anti-Christian thought among Confucian intellectuals and traditionalists in China. For one, the Chinese even possessed a “well-established cultural category”⁸ with which to label alien traditions in contradiction with orthodox teachings and customs, a category that was quickly applied to Christianity upon its introduction. A variety of terms were used to designate the category of heterodoxy, but *hsieh*, the most colloquial expression used, “in some contexts has additional overtones of a supernatural, uncanny power which gains ascendancy over the individual and leads him astray; in other contexts it plainly refers to the gamut of sexual excesses

⁷ Douglas Lancashire, “Anti-Christian Polemics in Seventeenth-Century China,” *Church History* 38, no. 2 (1969): 219.

⁸ Paul Cohen, “The Anti-Christian Tradition in China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 20, no. 2 (1961): 170.

and irregularities in the sexual sphere.”⁹ One of the most influential works dispelling heterodox thought for its seductive power was the sermon of the Yung-cheng Emperor’s (r. 1723-1735), the same emperor who would in 1724 withdraw the previous edict of toleration for Christians.¹⁰ This work was based on the maxim “Destroy heterodox doctrines in order to render honor to orthodox learning,” as it appeared in the 1670 *Sacred Edict (Sheng-yü)* of the K’ang-hsi Emperor.¹¹ Deeply imbedded in Neo-Confucian philosophy, this document urged the rejection of both the White Lotus sectarians and Western Catholicism because of the power they had to corrupt man’s external influences and deceive the masses:

[They] seize upon situations involving calamity and good fortune to peddle their foolish nonsense. At first, they only entice away the wealth [of others] with the object of fattening themselves. Then, gradually, it reaches the point where they hold meetings for the burning of incense at which men and women mingle together promiscuously...The injuries worked by natural calamities and by brigands go no further than the body, but the injuries resulting from heterodox principles extend to man’s mind. The mind, in its original condition, is wholly orthodox. If [you people] will exercise full mastery over [your minds] you naturally will not be led astray...¹²

For Confucians in vocal opposition to Christian influence, the very nature of heterodoxy involved a dangerous seductive quality, something that particularly concerned them when it concerned the peasants and underclasses. This particular document would be frequently

⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁰ Admittedly, the controversy that existed between Christian missionaries and the Chinese court was not entirely confined to ideological issues, and often the inflexibility of Christian dogma led to increased conflict. The Rites Controversy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did much to complicate missionary relations with the Ming court. When Pope Clement XI condemned Confucian morality and ancestral rites for Chinese converts, the K’ang-shi Emperor withdrew his previous edict of toleration. Clement’s dogmatic and Euro-centric assertions offended many Confucian members of the court, causing the emperor to conclude: “Reading this proclamation, I have concluded that the Westerners are petty indeed. It is impossible to reason with them because they do not understand larger issues as we understand them in China. There is not a single Westerner versed in Chinese works, and their remarks are often incredible and ridiculous. To judge from this proclamation, their religion is no different from other small, bigoted sects of Buddhism or Taoism. I have never seen a document which contains so much nonsense. From now on, Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China, to avoid further trouble.” Quoted in Dun Jen Li, *China in Transition, 1517-1911* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969), 35.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The Yung-cheng Emperor, “Destroy heterodox doctrines in order to render honor to orthodox learning,” quoted in J.J.M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions*, vol.1 (Amsterdam: 1903), 244-45.

referenced and reproduced by nineteenth-century opposition literature that presented colonial Christianity as a force for deceit and corruption. After all, “when men and women mingled indiscriminately at public gatherings and peasants and artisans were enticed away from their work by the seductive babbling and obscene literature of religious imposters,” the normal order of humanity was disrupted.¹³ Heterodoxy was thus, by definition, was not just a contradiction with theological tradition, but an overt act of intrusion upon the normal course of Chinese society. The social disruption caused by heterodoxy was repeatedly stressed as a quasi-sexual phenomenon by which commoners were deceived. Thus, the evangelical nature of missionary Christianity would easily lend itself to the metaphor of a destructive and immoral sexual seduction, a characteristic that would become a mainstay of the anti-Christian polemical tradition in nineteenth-century China.

However, the issue of heterodoxy during this time period was not exclusively confined to discussions of Christianity, and accusations of social disruption of the same nature were repeatedly leveled against Buddhists, Taoists, and White Lotus sectarians, as well as Christians. What, then, was it about Christianity specifically that fueled Chinese opposition, leading up to the nineteenth century?

An essential part of the narrative of Christianity as heterodoxy was the perceived subversion of filial relationships in Christian thought. Confucian intellectuals and court officials were very early on appalled by Christian theology as it pertained to human relationships, because it seemingly subverted the traditional hierarchy and Confucian family ethics. The notion that one should regard both one’s father and one’s monarch as one’s brother, while giving respect to the heavenly father first, was seen as entirely contradictory to the Confucian Five Relationships and

¹³ Cohen, *Christianity in China*, 16.

Three Bonds.¹⁴ In reaction to the Jesuit Matteo Ricci's teachings, one mid-seventeenth century scholar expressed the horror that many Confucianists felt at Christian egalitarianism, which gave way to outright suspicion of their motives:

My father begot me, and my mother nursed me. To be filial is to love one's parents...to be loyal is to honor one's sovereign. To love one's family and to honor what is righteous are the manifestations of the nature of T'ien...Ricci only honors the Master-of-T'ien as the great father and lord of the universe...suggesting that one's family is too infinitesimal to be loved, one's sovereign too close to oneself (*ssu*) to be honored; he is teaching the world to be disloyal and unfilial...¹⁵

Christian influence was thus seen as a deliberate confusion of an essential part of Chinese society, which could potentially lead to a complete inversion of public morality.

Furthermore, because the Chinese concept of heterodoxy was not confined merely to theological questions, but to cultural practices broadly, this also contributed to the interpretation of Christianity as a political and cultural threat—something that would be most profoundly vocalized in the nineteenth century. Suspicion was aroused by the fact that the Jesuits possessed superior weaponry and technological, which they shared with the Ming court. The *P'o-hsieh chi*, “an anthology of writings exposing heterodoxy,” was the first work “to be directed exclusively against Christianity and other aspects of Western culture.”¹⁶ Compiled by Hsü Ch'ang-chih in the 1640s, it was a collection of short pieces written by Buddhist and Confucian scholars taking issue with the heterodox teachings of Christianity. Particularly after the collapse of the Ming Dynasty, and the establishment of the more moderate Qing, Confucian intellectuals recoiled harshly from the intrusion of heterodox beliefs, especially Christianity. One author, Yang

¹⁴ John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity: Their First Encounter* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983), 72.

¹⁵ Quoted in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

Guangxian, fully embodied the xenophobia and political apprehensions evinced by Confucian scholars at the time:

According to a book by [the Christian scholar] Li Zubo, the Qing dynasty is nothing but an offshoot of Judea; our ancient Chinese rulers, sages, and teachers were but the offshoots of a heterodox sect...How can we abide these calumnies! They really aim to inveigle the people of the Qing into rebelling against the Qing and following this heterodox sect, which would lead all-under-heaven to abandon respect for rulers and fathers...¹⁷

Clearly, the influence of heterodoxy was perceived by certain circles in the court to be not just a social disruption, but even a possible incitement to rebellion as well, a fear often closely associated with a Confucian understanding of human relationships, which Christianity seemingly destabilized. Yang Guangxian interpreted Christian theology as being dangerously contrary to the relationships that existed between ruler and ruled, husband and wife. After all, he observed, “Jesus was crucified because he plotted against his own country, showing he did not recognize the relationship between ruler and subject. Mary, the mother of Jesus, had a husband named Joseph, but she said Jesus was not conceived by him.”¹⁸ The complete confusion of these filial relationships, he foresaw, could lead to irreversible damage in both the social and the political arenas. Multiple official documents from the seventeenth century also reveal an imperial concern about Christian heterodoxy as a political threat, through its seduction of the masses. In an edict from 1784, the Ch’ien-lung Emperor declared: “Occidentals propagating their religion and misleading the masses are of greatest harm to the morality and the conventions of the people,”¹⁹ providing justification for further restrictions to be put upon missionaries and Chinese

¹⁷ Yang Guangxian, “I Cannot Do Otherwise (Budeyi),” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 151.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ch’ien-lung Emperor, “Imperial Edict, December 31, 1784,” quoted in Bernward Henry Willeke, *Imperial Government and Catholic Missions in China During the Years 1784-1785* (Franciscan Missions Institute, 1948), 89.

converts. Chang Po-hsing, similarly, feared that Christianity's "irreverence toward the ancestors and former sages, its elevation of God above heaven, and its indiscriminate mixing of the sexes should lead to the disintegration of public morals."²⁰

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, several themes had begun to emerge in the writings of Chinese opposed to Christian intrusion. The opposition party almost always classified Christianity as a heterodox religion, incompatible with Confucian tradition and principles. Because Christianity failed to account for the essential human relationships that guided and defined Chinese social life, it was seen as a corrupting influence that could potentially subvert proper social relationships, and cause political and cultural disturbances by preying on peasants and the underclasses. Also because of its heterodox nature, Christianity was often perceived as having a seductive nature, capable of deluding and deceiving the people into a potentially disruptive ideology. Certain stereotypical representations of Christian sexual deviance began to emerge, particularly as they pertained to gender segregation. However, during the period prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century, anti-Christian writers primarily addressed conflicts which were chiefly ideological.

The first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison, arrived in China in 1807, sparking a new torrent of missionary activity in the interior of China, despite the fact that the propagation of Christian teaching was still under official ban. A series of treaties between China and Great Britain after the Second Opium War removed many of these restrictions, and the Chinese missionary presence consequently increased. The increased presence of missionary activity, as well as Western commercial activity, brought a whole host of new conflicts to Sino-Western cultural contact. The destructive distribution of opium, Western aggression in the Opium Wars,

²⁰ Cohen, *Christianity and China*, 29.

and the often intolerant character of missionaries in the interior did little to improve the image of Western Christianity. A new breed of ethnic slurs for Westerners was developed, especially the derogatory term *yáng guǐzi* or “Western devil.” The expansion of derogatory cultural categories for Westerners represented an increased desire to firmly resist Western intrusion, and especially the heterodox teachings of Christian theology. As historian Frank Dikötter explains:

A common historical response to serious threats directed towards a symbolic universe is 'nihilation', or the conceptual liquidation of everything inconsistent with official doctrine. Foreigners were labelled 'barbarians' or 'devils' to be conceptually eliminated. The official rhetoric reduced the Westerner to a devil, a ghost, an evil and unreal goblin hovering on the border of humanity. Many texts of the first half of the nineteenth century referred to the English as 'foreign devils' (*yangguizi*), 'devil slaves' (*guinu*), 'barbarian devils' (*fangui*), 'island barbarians' (*daoyi*), 'blue-eyed barbarian slaves' (*biyan yinu*), or 'red-haired barbarians' (*hongmaofan*).²¹

It was also during this time of increased, forceful intrusion on the part of missionaries that the most virulent attacks on Christianity began to appear in China.

One of the most influential anti-Christian writings produced after the First Opium War was Wei Yüan’s *Hai-kuo t'u-chih* (An illustrated gazetteer of the maritime countries, 1844), one of the first comprehensive Chinese works examining military affairs, technology, and culture outside of China (the objective being to adopt Western technology in order to repel them.) Several essays are devoted to the “barbarian tribes, who cherish only profit and power, and indeed are as treacherous as the owls,”²² and Western religion specifically. Like many Confucians, Wei attacks several elements of Christian teaching with a typical degree of Confucian skepticism, especially the problem of evil and the Trinity, and the all-too-common hypocrisy of Christian adherents. This work is significant because it features some elements of

²¹ Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 36.

²² Wei Yuan, “Preface to *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries*,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 211.

current anti-Christian lore, for the first time compiled in a work by a respected Confucian author. Here, for the first time, a set of folk beliefs centered around the foreign religion were evolving. “All converts are supported through their lives by the foreigner and are, in addition, each provided with three payments of one hundred and thirty taels to be used as trading capital; fellow religionists of both sexes lodge together in the same buildings; pastors are notified when death approaches so that they can come and gouge out the eyes of the dying.”²³ These were common myths that came to characterize anti-Christian polemical writing in the nineteenth century.

The bloody Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), with its hybrid quasi-Christian ideology, also did little to improve the position of Christianity among the official culture. Though the Taipings were viewed as radically unorthodox by Christian missionaries at the time, who repudiated affiliation with them, the Christianity that the movement espoused embodied the catastrophic social breakdown, subversion of traditional roles, and political insurrection foreseen by the Confucian scholars of the seventeenth century. One Qing commentator in particular attacked the anti-hierarchical Christian ideology of the Taipings, stressing the danger that this posed to public stability:

“From the ancient times of Yao and Shun each generation of ages has upheld the far-reaching doctrines which magnify the relations of emperor and statesman, of honorable and humble, of old and young, fixed and irreversible...But these southern rebels, borrowing the ways of the barbarian tribes, and the religion of the “Lord of Heaven,” depose sovereigns and degrade officials, their “officials” calling every man “brother” and every woman “sister.” The farmer may not plough, but still must pay taxes; for, they say, his fields are the same “Lord of Heaven.” The merchant may not trade, but yet must pay them...The scholar must not study the Confucian classics anymore, but instead must follow the words of

²³ Cohen, *Christianity and China*, 39.

Jesus in the New Testament, treating all the morality taught in China for thousands of years as so much “swept-up dust.”²⁴

Cohen claims that the “traditional antagonism” of the educated classes in China “toward Christianity was hardened by the Taiping experience,”²⁵ and, indeed, the suspicions about gender relations and social disruption that characterized the Taiping period colored many later criticisms of Christian practice. Understandably, the Second Opium War of 1856, combined with the prolonged rebellion of the Christian-inspired Taipings, did little to improve Chinese perceptions of the West or its most obvious representatives, the missionaries.

As a response to the Opium War and the increasing threat of Western imperialism, China’s tradition of hostility towards Christianity and missionaries only worsened. As one missionary observer reported, “One can scarcely say that there is an anti-foreign *party* in China, for the fact is that so many—officials and private persons—are anti-foreign, that, where the whole is leavened, one cannot speak properly of a party.”²⁶ Even more notably, the anti-Christian literary tradition was no longer confined to abstract Confucian intellectual tracts, but expanded to encompass burgeoning anti-Christian folk beliefs. Just as Christianity had moved beyond a mere ideological presence in China, attacks on it were no longer concerned chiefly with ideology, but with the practical aspects of a very real foreign presence. During this period, attacks also became explicitly sexual.

One of the most popular pamphlets that came into circulation in the 1860s, *Pi-hsieh chi-shih*, “A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy,” was written by an anonymous Hunanese

²⁴ Tseng Kuo-fan, *T'ai-p'ing t'ien-kuo ti she-hui cheng-chih ssu-hsiang*, from the *Ch'ing-ch'ao ch'üan-shih* (Complete History of the Ch'ing Dynasty), in William Arthur Cornaby, *A String of Chinese Peach Stones* (London, 1895), 367-71.

²⁵ Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 44.

²⁶ R. Hart, “Letter to E.B. Drew, September 28, 1870,” in Hoseau Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Volume 2*, (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918),

court official, who styled himself “the most broken-hearted man in the world.”²⁷ This work contained some of the most inflammatory accusations against Western missionaries, including homosexuality, incest, and the mutilation of children, charges that would be re-articulated in an adaption, *Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines*. Shantung missionaries who translated the *Death Blow* obviously saw it as “having important political significance,” because, they believed, “it has been largely instrumental in giving rise to the vile and slanderous stories concerning foreign residents and native Christians...”²⁸

The work purports to be a summary of Christian theology and practices, the purpose being to call people to obey “the Imperial [Sacred] Edict, avoid being ensnared in the toils of this crafty sect,” and even possibly rise to violent action to expel the foreigners.²⁹ It is also very much consciously embedded in the anti-Christian tradition. The Sacred Edict is enclosed as a preface, demanding reverence from readers. Also, many of the conventional folk stereotypes attributed to Christian missionaries in Wei Yuan’s work reappear and are expanded, especially the theme of missionaries as sexually seductive and deceiving. Perhaps alluding to the hold of Western opium over Chinese addicts, missionaries are purported to give each of their victim a magical pill that makes “his whole mind confused and darkened.”³⁰ A different placard in circulation at the time claimed that during baptism, the convert is doused in a “stupefying drug” that makes him unable to escape and forces him to break their ancestral tablets.³¹ This is similar to Wei Yuan’s tale of converts who were deluded by priests into destroying ancestral tablets and adopting heterodox

²⁷ Authorship of the work is subject to prolonged scholarly controversy. See Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 277-281.

²⁸ Anonymous, *Death Blow to the Corrupt Doctrines: A Plain Statement of Facts*, trans. (Shanghai, 1870), 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

³¹ Anonymous, Quoted in Hoseau Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Volume 2*, (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918), 285-286.

beliefs. However, by the time of the *Death Blow*, this fable had evolved to require the administration of a pill, with qualities uncannily similar to opium, perhaps attesting to the strong association between Western imperial power and Christianity after the Second Opium War. This concept of Christianity as a drug-induced delusion would especially lend itself to sexual interpretation in later writings. Women, in particular, were seen as being particularly susceptible to the predatory seduction of missionaries.³²

It had also evolved to portray missionaries as not only deceptively heterodox, but deceptive and corrupt in the sexual realm as well. Though they are also portrayed as using money and mystical pills to lure in their converts, missionaries are purported to gain their power over converts through sexual means. Missionaries possessed “sexual stimulants and recipes for prolonging the orgasm,” in order to lure in new victims, and steal people’s “secret thoughts.”³³ Other practices that subvert sexual norms in extreme ways are attributed to Christian practice. Christians are particularly criticized for actions that completely undermine traditional relationships, particularly between the sexes. For example, it is claimed that everyone, male or female, who enters a chapel is made to engage in sexual intercourse with the priest, which then makes them “entirely subservient to their wishes.”³⁴ Congregations composed of both sexes allegedly met to “give themselves up to indiscriminate sexual intercourse.”³⁵ Furthermore, it is claimed that in the West, women are “superior” and allowed to divorce their husbands.³⁶ In a clear allusion to convents, it is said some daughters are not given in marriage, but kept for sex

³² For example: “When these [foreign] devils open a chapel, they begin with their female converts by administering a pill. When they have swallowed it, they are beguiled, and allow themselves to be defiled.” Dr. John on the Hunan Publications, Letter VI, December 29, 1891,” In *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China in 1891*, (Shanghai, 1892), 183.

³³ *Death Blow*, 23, 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

with the priest or to “serve T’ien-chu,” an obvious violation of the filial practice of marriage and reproduction.³⁷ Even contemporary missionaries were struck by the intense sexual imagery used in anti-Christian lore. In response to an 1869 anti-Christian pamphlet circulating in Hunan, missionary R. Hart aptly observed, “The opposition to Christianity seems to be mainly owing to stories of what priests do with female converts, etc.”³⁸

Why did this shift from ideological to practical conflict occur, and why did this shift take on such an extreme, and often overtly sexual tone? For one thing, prior to the treaties of 1844, Christian contact was extremely limited, and missionaries only resided in the treaty ports. In many cases, anti-Christian literature would appear in response to the overt attempts of mission societies, like the Chinese Inland Mission to purchase land and residences in the interior of China, for the purpose of “planting the shining cross on every hill and in every valley in China.”³⁹ In January 1862 in Nanchang, the French missionary Antoine Anot arrived to reestablish and reclaim Catholic properties lost under the imperial ban of the Yung-cheng Emperor, and was driven out by violence incited by the inflammatory writings of the gentry. Among other things, Christians were denounced for bathing together shamelessly in communal tubs and seducing converts by engaging in licentious acts with them. In August 1868, in Yangchow, missionaries openly rented a house, and placards were almost immediately posted accusing them of an assortment of vile crimes. Mob violence broke out shortly after the appearance of the placards, forcing the foreigners to flee.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 53.

³⁸ R. Hart, “Letter to E.B. Drew, October 12, 1870,” in Hoseau Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Volume 2*, (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918), 285.

³⁹ William Alexander Parsons Martin, *A Cycle of Cathay* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 226.

⁴⁰ Morse, 227.

These publications were accompanied by increasingly violent public agitation against Christians. The gentry felt particularly threatened by the incursions of the literate missionaries on their traditional status in Chinese society, and often instigated the publication of many of these tracts, as in the case of the 1891 riots in Hunan. Accusations of sex crimes proved to be a particularly effective propaganda strategy, effectively undermining the status of Christianity in China, and catering to the many suspicions commonly held. Many, as was intended, directly provoked a popular emotional response. Cohen observed that the circulation of anti-Christian polemical literature “activated suspicions, fears, and resentments which the non-Christian populace accumulated on its own through direct contact with the missionary and convert.” William Martin also observed the incendiary nature of these publications: “Most of these massacres have conformed to the original type in every particular—beginning with tracts and placards as their exciting cause, followed by studied negligence on the part of the mandarins...”⁴¹

By the time of the disturbances in the 1890s, anti-Christian sentiment had reached a fever-pitch, especially in the volatile province of Hunan. Western Christianity was portrayed as a completely malicious and sexualized movement that aimed to seduce the Chinese from correct morality, into complete depravity. The *Picture Gallery* goes so far as to portray converts wearing green hats, the symbol of cuckoldry in the Chinese vernacular. The typical conventions of Christian seductive power, including magic potions, the deceit and defilement of women by priests, and the wanton sexuality of Christian congregations were firmly solidified by this time. The 1891 incident in Hunan, though not the first anti-Christian disturbance was especially worrisome to missionaries in the Province, who took care to translate many of the anti-Christian

⁴¹ Ibid., 445.

polemical works in circulation at the time. Dr. Griffith John's correspondence contained a translation of Chou Han's sheet tract, *Heresy Exposed in Respectful Obedience to the Sacred Edict* (1890), along with other articles and letters in translation from the *North-China Daily News* and the *North-China Herald*. This incident in particular is one of the most well-documented in English, because it was the most incendiary. Clearly, many missionaries in the interior at the time feared that the Chinese were on the point of insurrection. Dr. John reported of "A broadsheet, roughly printed on thin paper... is being freely circulated among the thousands of students at Nanking. On the top is a picture of a Christian Catholic Church with the motto, 'No distinction between male and female,' and there are four other illustrations showing foreigners engaged in performing the horrible acts described in the text."⁴² The included document, in translation, goes into particular detail on the marital and sexual practices observed in the Roman Catholic Church, claiming that, "When they [Roman Catholics] marry, they use no go-between and make no distinctions between young and old. Any man and woman who like may come together, only must first do obeisance to the bishop and pray to Shangti. The bride must invariably first sleep with the spiritual teacher, who takes the first fruits of her virginity... When a wife dies another may be had. When a father dies, his son may marry the mother who bore him. When a son dies, his father may marry the son's wife; and even his own daughter. Brothers, uncles, and nieces may intermarry promiscuously."⁴³ Highly incendiary cartoons that employed similar accusations, as in the *Picture Gallery*, were also spread throughout Chang'sha that illustrated the deviant and perverted abuses of Christians, the debauched nature of their practices, and the danger they posed to Chinese society as a whole, alongside documents demanding the immediate expulsion of the foreigners from China. The English editor of the *Picture Gallery*

⁴² Dr. John on the Hunan Publications, Letter VI, December 29, 1891," In *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China in 1891*, (Shanghai, 1892), 182.

⁴³ Ibid.

aptly perceived this connection that the anti-Christian gentry drew between foreign intrusion and the sexual machinations of Christian missionaries: “By taking a narrow view some regard the present movement as exclusively anti-missionary....It is both of these, and a great deal more; it is antiforeign.”⁴⁴

Anti-Christian resistance took on a variety of forms in the period of Western colonization. Some of the myths and stereotypes that came to characterize anti-Christian writing were the result of simple translation errors, xenophobic resistance, or a lack of cultural communication, an understandable result of first-time contact between two widely divergent cultures. However, Chinese lore, as employed in the polemical writings of the nineteenth century, sought to contextualize resistance within the Confucian concept of heterodoxy. Above all, the Chinese perceived Christian practices and doctrine as necessarily in conflict with traditional teaching, relationships, and values. By fact of Christianity’s status as heterodoxy in the Confucian worldview, the intrusion of missionaries into China was seen as inevitably disrupting the cultural and moral order of society. From the beginning, Christian influence was classified as a danger to the traditional social order, which, through the subversion of the filial roles, could lead the Chinese away from orthodox thinking and into moral corruption. The concept of Christianity as a disruptive force in China, that seductively drew people away from their traditional practices and morality, easily lent itself to sexual metaphor. As direct contact with missionaries increased throughout the nineteenth century, resistance and suspicion of Christianity manifested itself in much more aggressive rhetoric, that often adopted sexual overtones. Missionaries represented the most recognizable, and often the least tolerant, face of Western imperialism. In the aftermath of the bloody Christian-inspired Taiping Rebellion, the

⁴⁴ Archibald, *The Cause of the Riots in the Yangtse Valley*, 23.

ruthless exploitation of China through the opium trade, and the collapse of the treaty-entangled Qing, it is anti-Christian Chinese perceived Christianity as yet another tool for Western exploitation and trickery. The perceived sexual agenda of the foreign missionaries was, thus, linked to broader imperialist threats from the West, and used to incite popular agitation to repel the foreigner.

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