Anthony F. Clark, ed.

A Voluntary Exile: Chinese Christianity and Cultural Confluence since 1552,
Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2014. Pp. 236. Hb, \$75.

This collection of essays on the history of Christianity in China over some four hundred years is always thought provoking, sometimes iconoclastic, and—as a result of taking its focus from what the editor calls “the so-called Ricci method”—has more coherence than many other such gatherings. Perhaps other readers may feel—as I did initially—that we have had quite enough recently of Matteo Ricci, fascinating character though he was. Strangely enough, the result was not only to encourage a reappraisal of what Ricci stood for, but even to challenge the very notion of a “method” developed, exploited, contested, and abandoned by the missionaries to China.

Some of the ideas fathered on Ricci by contributors to the volume include: cultural accommodation, a “top down” approach to Christian mission, the imposition of a Christian view of history, and a “deliberate and calculated Christianization” (94). These are vague notions, none of them fully fleshed out, precisely defined, or located either in Ricci’s own actions and writings at the turn of the sixteenth century, or in their alleged later application or rejection. Nor is the immense missiological contribution of the Jesuit visitor Alessandro Valignano more than hinted at.

The most convincing exposition is that of the sole Jesuit contributor, Michael Maher, who demonstrates that there was no “Ricci method” at all, but simply an application of a characteristically Jesuit spirituality and theology to Chinese conditions of the late Ming period. Maher treats this synthesis under three headings: an optimistic view of human nature (exemplified in Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*); the Greek and Latin classics (a product of Renaissance Christian Humanism); and the Jesuit vow of obedience. To these, Ricci added his own personal gifts, nicely consonant with those of the ideal Confucian *zhunzi* or “gentleman.”

Each of the volume’s contributors adds, in very different ways, to our understanding of the “cultural confluence”—or more often dissonance—of the missionaries and the Chinese. Eric Cunningham’s reappraisal of Francis Xavier’s quixotic but misguided efforts in Japan is timely, but hardly relevant to China, where the problem was hardly ever “gaunt, wild-eyed Spanish preachers” (24). Cunningham rightly castigates both modern historians, who laud the non-religious aspects of the Jesuit missions while tacitly applauding its failure, and “ecclesial historians,” who deny its failure. But the causes of that failure are much more complex than it would appear seen solely through Japanese glasses. The Jesuit “top-down” policy was neither exclusive nor aimed primarily at the conversion of networks of influ-

ential officials. Rather it sought, successfully for a while, protection (or at least benign tolerance) of a suspect foreign and technically banned religion.

When that protection was withdrawn, as Robert Entenmenn's examination of a 1754 Sichuan incident demonstrates, missionaries and native Christians alike suffered. They were pejoratively lumped in with White Lotus rebels, but their real offence, as seen in the records of the proceedings, was against filial piety, in their condemnation of ancestor rituals.

Thomas Reilly examines the great mid-nineteenth-century "Christian" Taiping rebellion, but shows little knowledge of the immense literature on Taiping religion. His thesis is basically that of Joseph Levenson from half a century ago: namely, that the Taiping movement was revolutionary in attempting to restore a monarchy based on divine right that was at odds with imperial ideology. The argument fails, however, to link the Taiping "Heavenly King" with "Ricci's strategy of identifying Christianity with China's ancient faith that sustained the rebels' religious zeal" (77). There is no demonstration of any familiarity on the part of the Taipings, given their exclusively Protestant origins, with the works of the early Jesuit missionaries.

The remaining chapters—all valuable in their own right—deal with the twentieth century, from the Boxer Rebellion to the late republic. However, the "Ricci method" becomes ever less relevant in the complex geopolitical contexts of this period (and reference to it consequently ever more perfunctory). Anthony Clark, by focusing on the murderousness of Governor Yuxian, misses an opportunity to examine the popular support for his actions and its roots in Chinese folk religion. The Manchu regime had abandoned its suspicion of such popular agitation—and was soon to pay the price.

Lydia Gerber's brief but much needed reappraisal of the work of Richard Wilhelm, a German missionary who refused to perform baptism and used his school to promote Confucianism, rather than Christianity, raises some fundamental and necessary questions. What, for example, does it mean to be a "missionary" in modern China? Curiously, Gerber does not present Wilhelm as a latter-day Ricci, a comparison that might have proved extremely illuminating.

The final chapters on "Catholic and Folk Religion" in the republican period (Liu Anrong) and "Church-State Accommodation" in the Peoples' Republic (Joseph Tse-he Lee) are necessarily even more remote from the Ricci paradigm. Each does have something to offer, although each also presents its own problems.

Liu's study is based on interviews with elderly people, about their beliefs and practices from over sixty years previous. The intervening experience of revolution, social change, and party propaganda must necessarily distort such memories. Terminology is also interpreted univocally: for example, *Lao Tianye*

(I assume that common expression lies behind “Old Man Heaven”) is taken to indicate Chinese folk religious belief, and then contrasted with the Christian God. Social scientific investigation of religious belief is notoriously difficult and not yet fully developed in China—in fact, it is probably impossible under present conditions. Nevertheless, such local studies are valuable.

As Joseph Lee reminds us in his masterly survey of Christianity in China today, the one generalization that is possible is that church-state relations vary enormously throughout China. “Generalizing about ‘Chinese Christianity’ only makes sense at the conceptual level because there is no typical pattern of Christianity in any locality” (175). Recent events suggest that a new and newly hostile central religious policy is emerging, but Lee’s summary based on ten years of serious fieldwork nicely summarizes the post-1978 era. Perhaps Christianity has missed its new Ricci moment.

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