CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ECONOMIC MODEL OF A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY: MOPANSHAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NORTHWEST HUBEI (天主教社区经济模式研究: 以鄂西北磨盘山教会为例证)

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Abstract

By “Catholic community” is meant an area in which followers live together under the centralized administration of the Roman Catholic Church. This chapter is a case-study of the Catholic community of Mopanshan, in the mountains of northwest Hubei, and examines the economic features of such areas from the perspectives of land tenancy, tax payment and intra-community economic relations. Overall, rural Catholic communities have a high degree of economic self-sufficiency. Relations between members of the community and the Catholic Church do not operate solely on the level of faith, but also involve secular matters, including economics, and the economic relations of community members cover not only their secular life but also the consumption and expenditure associated with their religious life. In interpersonal networks within the community, conflicts brought about by this economic contradiction can sometimes be eased or resolved through faith. The economic relations and special characteristics of the Catholic community cannot be ignored in the study of the history of Chinese Catholicism.

Keywords: Catholic community; economy; model

The term “Catholic community” here refers to a particular area, in which Roman Catholics lived together and which came under the centralized administration of the Catholic Church. Several Catholic communities have figured in the history of Chinese Catholicism, among them Mopanshan 磨盘山 in mountainous northwest Hubei, Xiwanzi 西湾子 in the outer suburbs of Zhangjiakou 张家口, Weizhoudao 围洲岛 in Beihai 北海, Guangxi, and Mapengcun 麻蓬村 in western Zhejiang. In most cases, these communities were situated in remote and backward rural areas where communications were poor. As a result, the communities had a relatively high level of economic self-sufficiency, and the community members had a relationship to the Catholic Church not only in matters of faith but also
in secular (including economic) life. The clergy were the heart and soul of the community, and also the administrators of economic life and the owners of the land. Yet academia has paid little attention to the economic model of the Catholic community. In this chapter, we will conduct a case study of Mopanshan, the first Catholic community in China, and examine its economic model and particular characteristics.

**Economic Development Trends**

In the Catholic community, economic life and relationships consist principally of agricultural labor, daily life, land tenancy, tax payment and the income from and expenditure on religious activities, such as services of Mass and the living expenses of the clergy. Catholic communities have been affected by the enormous changes in the political situation in China from the mid-Qing Dynasty to the modern day, and economic development trends in these communities have been manifested differently in different historical periods.

1) **The Early Economic Model: From Utopia to Breakdown of Communal Balance**

The Mopanshan community was established by Catholic immigrants in the early years of the reign of Emperor Yongzheng (1722–1735). The immigrants purchased farmland and distributed it among Catholic followers, in this way managing to sustain the religious community.1 At that time, in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, Mopanshan was a rural area, far from the political and cultural center. The faith, beliefs and ways of thinking and living of the Catholic immigrants were distinct from those in the secular world, and life in this community was a blend of economics and faith. Because of the mountainous terrain, it was impossible for these immigrants to use animal power in farming, and all the strenuous labor in the fields had to be done by humans. But, in spite of the fact that life here was

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