

INTRODUCTION

Reading about the history of Christianity in China, one finds very limited materials about women playing a significant role in the Church. It is obvious, however, that both in the past as in the present Chinese female Christians had and have an important or even crucial impact on the life of the Church, even if their role was commonly undervalued in reports and neglected in research. Thus, women in the Church in China have often remained nameless.

While in the West the vital role of women in the Church has been slowly recognized in recent decades and many female saints as well as other active and dedicated women have become widely prominent, in China this is not yet the case. Due to the specificity of its history and society, the significance of female Christians has been until now overlooked and underappreciated. The names of Chinese women who are significant in the history of the Church are hardly known to the majority of the Chinese believers, in contrast to the names of Chinese men.

Many questions regarding the research on the impact of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox women on the Church in China still remain unanswered. A systematic study of the historical sources and extensive field research are both desiderata in this area. Through this publication, we hope to carry the urgency of such research more clearly into the academic world.

We are delighted to present part of the materials delivered at the international workshop “I Have Called You by Name. Contribution of Chinese Women to the Church” dealing with a variety of aspects of the historical and present role of Christian women in the Church. The workshop gathering scholars from three continents was held on September 25-26, 2014, in Sankt Augustin (Germany), and was co-organized by the Monumenta Serica Institute, China-Zentrum, Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule SVD (Sankt Augustin), Monumenta Serica Sinological Research Center and Academia Catholica of the Fu Jen Catholic University (Taipei).

In the opening contribution Ana Cristina Villa Betancourt (then Vatican Council for the Laity) introduces the present Catholic perspective on women’s role in the Church and society, based on the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Gail King (Brigham Young University, Utah, USA) presents the biography of Candida Xu (1607–1680)—a Catholic woman who spread the Christian faith in Shanghai, supported the construction of churches, and became a spiritual teacher. Claudia von Collani (Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg, Germany) analyzes images and promoted virtues of women in two missionary publications

of the 18th century: *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* by Charles Le Gobien and Jean-Baptiste Du Halde and *Der Neue Welt-Bott* by Joseph Stöcklein, with biographies of Chinese female converts for the edification of Western readers. Huang Mei Tin (Monumenta Serica Sinological Research Center, Taipei, Taiwan) describes the religious life of Chinese Christian women at the Ming dynasty Court. Li Ji (University of Hong Kong) introduces the consecrated Catholic Virgins in Manchuria in the second half of the 19th century, who had a central role in the dissemination and transfer of the Catholic faith in the region. Kang Zhijie (Hubei University, Wuhan, China) in her epoch-spanning contribution outlines the role and function of consecrated Virgins as important mediators between missionaries and female lay believers, with a public role within the communities.

The specifics of the Chinese Catholic Virgins are deepened in a historical overview by Rolf Gerhard Tiedemann (Shandong University, Jinan, PR China), pointing at their independence and status in Christian communities, including some duties of priests. Fredrik Fällman (Göteborg Universitet, Sweden) offers an insight into the history of Protestant women in China, being caregivers, missionaries, leaders in the ministry and church executive boards, preachers, and teachers. Tang Yaoguang (Handan, China) presents deliberations of the Jesuit Xu Zongze (1886–1947) about the role of Christian women in the altering Chinese society, published in the Shanghai Catholic monthly *Shengjiao zazhi*. Kwong Lai Kuen (Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy, Hong Kong) examines the spirituality of Chinese women, focusing on the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Piotr Adamek (Monumenta Serica Institute, Sankt Augustin, Germany) writes about Orthodox women in China, indispensable for the transmission of the faith and for the life of Orthodox Christian communities both in history and at present. Finally, Katrin Fiedler (then China InfoStelle, Hamburg, Germany) gives a methodological impulse to the current situation of women in the Protestant Church in China, including both emancipatory and conservative role models.

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