

Time Exposures

Catholic Photography and the Evolution of Modern China

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACGOFM	Archivio Curia Generalizia Ordo Fratrum Minorum, Rome
AFMM	Archives of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Rome
AHCM	Archives Historiques Congrégation de la Mission, Paris
APFCJV	Archives de la Province de France de la Compagnie de Jésus, Vanves
APIME	Archives of the Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere, Rome
ARSI	Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome
ASAM	Archives Société des Auxiliaires des Missions, Brussels
ASJCP	Archives of the Society of Jesus Chinese Province, Taipei
CICM	Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Scheut Fathers 聖母聖心會)
CM	Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians/Lazarists 遣使會)
CP	Congregation of the Passion (Passionists 苦難會)
DC	Daughters of Charity (聖雲仙仁愛女修會)
FDCC	Canossian Daughters of Charity (Canossians 嘉諾撒仁愛女修會)
FMM	Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (瑪利亞方濟各傳教修會)
KADOC-KU	Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Leuven
MEP	Missions Étrangères de Paris (Paris Foreign Missions 巴黎外方傳教會)
MM	Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll 瑪利諾會)
OFM	Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans 方濟各會)
OSB	Order of Saint Benedict (Benedictines 本篤會)
OSF	Order of Saint Francis (Franciscans 方濟各會)
PCC	Passionist China Collection, Boston
PIME	Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (宗座外方傳教會)
SAM	Société des Auxiliaires des Missions (Lei Mingyuan Society 雷鳴遠會)



Photographic Visions

Not long before he was killed by Boxers during the turbulent summer of 1900, the French Jesuit missionary Modeste Andlauer, SJ (路懋德, 1847–1900) wrote a letter to his family back in Europe describing the chaos and violence that surrounded him. In his letter, Andlauer describes the contents of five photographs that he had posted in a previous correspondence. Of the first photograph he wrote: “This represents the two sons of the former mandarin of Xianxian county; . . . he is now a mandarin in the sub-prefecture of Weixian, and he has good rapport with the missionaries.”¹ While the other photographs featured the mission church, Chinese seminarians, and catechists, this image showed an official whom he considered a friend in dangerous times. Even as he was anxious over his own life, he was also anxious that his family had received the photos he had sent them. The lives and works of missionaries in China were recorded in photographs that were passed through the slumbrous mail service that connected China and the West, images that represented the mission to families, religious confreres and consouers, and ecclesial officials charged with preserving and promoting the legacy of the Catholic mission that struggled to remain solvent and effective through one of China’s most troubled eras, the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Andlauer was one of thousands of Roman Catholic missionaries who transacted in the trade of images that today assists scholars recover China’s late imperial and early modern religious, cultural, and political past. Even before the eye of the scholar casts its analytical scrutiny over a photograph, the eye of the photographer has already framed her or his own intended (or unintended) representation of what was then passed to film and darkroom. As the celebrated French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004), once quipped, “It is an illusion that photos are made with the camera . . . they are made with the eye, heart, and head.”² Cartier-Bresson himself

1. APFCJV, Modeste Andlauer correspondence with family in France, April 20, 1900, GMC 59.

2. Quoted in Grant Scott, *New Ways of Seeing: The Democratic Language of Photography* (Routledge, 2020), 78.

photographed some of China's most dramatic scenes while living there from 1948 to 1949 and 1958, and for many Westerners his images constitute the bulk of the “photographic vision” of China during its transition from empire to Republic, and to Socialist nation-state.³ Missionary photographs were largely limited to the eyes of co-religionists, while Cartier-Bresson's photographs appeared more widely in Western print sources along with images derived from the cameras of secular journalists. When Andlauer mailed photographs back to his family in France, it is unlikely that he imagined scholars studying those images more than a century later to discern how they serve to represent, recover, and revise historical memories that fashioned the outlines of late imperial and modern Chinese identity. Photographic vision includes the views of those behind the camera, in front of the camera, and those who view photographs long after they were printed, preserved, and even digitized. The history and effects of Roman Catholic missionary photography in China have been largely overlooked, though recent decades have witnessed an upsurge of global attention.

A flourishing new interest in the collection and publication of historical photographs related to its past has grown in China, which has resulted in a wave of new books in Chinese bookstores featuring collected black-and-white images on such topics as “Old Beijing” (*lao Beijing* 老北京), “Old Tianjin” (*lao Tianjin* 老天津), or “Old Shanghai” (*lao Shanghai* 老上海). In part, this renaissance of attention to historical photographs of “old China” is due to the tragic loss of so many photos during the unsettled years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The destruction of the collection of photographs at Tianjin's Xikai cathedral is an example of what happened to countless collections of rare images during the Cultural Revolution. In the summer of 1966, a crowd of several thousand Red Guards climbed the façade of Xikai cathedral, suspended a large portrait of Chairman Mao above the church's main entrance, and plundered the contents of the church interior and the nearby rectory. In a series of photographs taken by one of the participants in the raid is an image of a crowd burning the books, documents, and photographs removed from the Tianjin Catholic archive. Those items are lost, but fortunately the missionaries who catalogued them also sent many duplicates to the archive of their order in Paris, the Congregation of the Mission, where scholars can access them today.⁴

Foreign missionaries outnumbered foreign diplomats and photojournalists in China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so it is in missionary repositories that we now find the predominance of historically important images of China before the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. In addition to these repositories are a large number of private collections of China photographs owned by former missionaries, or their children, grandchildren, or other relatives. Private collections have surfaced in recent decades at an

3. Michel Frizot, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: China 1948–1949, 1958* (Thames & Hudson, 2019).

4. Documentary materials and photographs related to the Xikai Cathedral in Tianjin are held at the *Congrégation de la Mission Archives Historiques*, 95 rue de Sèvres, 75006 Paris, France.

increasing rate, and some have been published. At present, nowhere are historic photographs of China being published more than in China. Among the more prolific scholars to work with and publish historical missionary photographs in China is Shen Hong, a professor of foreign studies at Zhejiang University. Not only has Shen collected and published photographs from missionary collections, but he has also published a Chinese-language book on the photographs of Harry Fowler Woods (1859–1955), who captured nearly 1,000 images of “old China” during a three-month diplomatic visit to China in 1905.⁵ The black-and-white photographs that appear in his book provide an impressive number of images depicting places and cultural vestiges of a largely forgotten empire. Still, the most commonly published images of “old China” utilize missionary photographs, and most of the books that publish them feature photos from Protestant collections. Cheng Ma, for example, published a book dedicated to photographs taken by a single American missionary family in Shandong, and Zhang Liping has published a series of books that highlight the photographs of Christian universities in China before 1949.⁶ Since English is more widely studied in China than other Western languages, most photograph books published in China presently rely on the collections of English-speaking missionaries, most of whom were Protestant. As a result, comparatively few Catholic missionary photographs have been published in China, which does not represent the reality that the large majority of images related to “old China” are preserved in Roman Catholic archives.

A modest number of books lately printed in the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong feature collected photographs from the Catholic mission in China, but published works on the whole contain few examples of older black-and-white images. In the Chinese mainland, photograph books are occasionally published during historically notable years such as during a centenary year or after a church restoration. After the restoration of Beijing’s West Church from 2010 to 2011, for example, Beijing’s Catholics collaborated with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong to publish a photograph book that included some historical images of the church’s early history, though most of the images are related to the church’s

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5. Shen Hong 沈弘, Margo Taft Stever, and James Taft Stever, *Kan dongfang: 1905 nian Meiguo zhengfu daibi-aotuan fang hua zhi xing jiemi* 看東方：1905年美國政府代表團訪華之行揭秘 [Looking east: The 1905 U.S. diplomatic mission to Asia] (Zhejiang daxue chubanshe 浙江大學出版社, 2012).
 6. See Cheng Ma 程麻, *Meiguo jingtou li de Zhongguo fengqing* 美國鏡頭裡的中國風情 [China’s traditions from inside an American camera] (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe 中國文史出版社, 2011); Zhang Liping 張麗萍, ed., *Xiangsi huaxi ba: Hua xi xiehedaxue* 相思華西壩：華西協合大學 [Longing for Huaxiba: West China Union University] (Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe 河北教育出版社, 2004); Xie Bizhen 謝必震, *Xiang piao weiqicun: Fujian xiehe daxue* 香飄魏岐村：福建協和大學 [Fragrance of Weiqi Village: Fukien Christian University] (Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe 河北教育出版社, 2004); Sun Haiying 孫海英, *Jinling bai wu fang: Jinling Nüzi daxue* 金陵百屋房：金陵女子大學 [Ginling hundred houses: Ginling College] (Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe 河北教育出版社, 2004). There are other volumes in this series by Zhang that we do not mention here, all dedicated to historic photographs of “missionary universities in China.”

restoration from its post-Cultural Revolution shell to its pre-revolution elegance.⁷ Perhaps the most ambitious Chinese press to publish historical images of the Catholic enterprise is Fu Jen Catholic University Press, now in Taiwan. In 1995, the press published a large book with reproduced prints and photographs related to the entire Christian history of China, in which the majority of images is related to Roman Catholic missionaries.⁸ While providing useful information about each image included in this book, the images are poorly reproduced and small in size. Another Fu Jen publication of historic photographs is a commemorative collection of images related to the life of the Chinese bishop of Nanjing, Paul Yu Bin (于斌, 1901–1978). This collection of images is printed on glossy paper and includes high-resolution reproductions of photos taken of Yu Bin during his life in China and Taiwan.⁹ None of the published collections of Catholic mission photographs from China mentioned here, however, attempt to portray the Catholic enterprise in China comprehensively, nor is there an English work that includes scholarly analysis of the images presented.

English-language collections of “old China” photographs have been published, though none has provided a broad range of images related to the historical works of both the lives of women and men, nor has a single collection of Catholic missionary photographs included a broad range of Catholic orders and mission locations. Perhaps the best-known English-language book on Catholic missionary images is the collection of photographs taken by the Italian missionary, Father Leone Nani, PIME (南懷謙, 1880–1935) a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions who left his native Italy for China in 1903 when China was recovering from the strains of the Boxer Uprising (1898–1900) as well as nearing the termination of its imperial era.¹⁰ Although Nani’s photographs are stunning visual examples of China’s transition from empire to Republic, they include only scant examples of Catholic missionaries from diverse orders. Other English-language books that feature historical images of China contain few samples of Catholic missionary photographs. Jonathan Spence and Annping Chin’s *The Chinese Century: A Photographic History*, for instance, reproduces a few of Father Nani’s photographs, but largely centers on describing cultural and political changes that occurred in China’s major cities during the twentieth century rather than the missionaries who mostly lived and produced images in comparatively remote areas.¹¹

Our analysis of photographs produced and promulgated by Catholic missionaries in China represents an attempt to publish rare, and in some cases recently discovered,

7. See Yu Huiying 余蕙瑛, *Shangzhu xingong jianwu: Beijing Xitang* 上主興工建屋：北京西堂 [God building His house: Beijing’s West Church] (Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong 天主教香港教區禮儀委員會, 2011).

8. See Gu Weimin 顧衛民 and Hu Yihua 胡毅華, eds., *Shitu zuji: Jidu zongjiao chuan hua quan shi tuji* 使徒足跡：基督宗教傳華全史圖集 [Apostolic footprints: A complete history of missionary images in China] (Furen Daxue chubanshe 輔仁大學出版社, 1995).

9. Yang Dunhe 楊敦和, ed., *Yu Bin shuji huazhuan* 于斌樞機畫傳 [Photo-journal of Yu Bin] (Furen Daxue chubanshe 輔仁大學出版社, 1998).

10. Clara Bulfoni, and Anna Pozzi, eds., *Lost China: The Photographs of Leone Nani* (Skira Editore, 2003).

11. Jonathan Spence and Annping Chin, *The Chinese Century: A Photographic History* (Cassell, 1996).

photographs depicting the lives and locations of missionaries who took photos of a China much changed today. When Feng Keli published a collection of “old pictures” of China in his book, *Gushi fengwu*, or “Local Scenes from the Past,” he noted the unique power of photographs to provide a “multidimensional representation of society and human lives.”¹² He also recalled that when we are exposed to images of the past, we are “renewed with a human understanding of the panorama of experiences and lifestyles of a certain period of history.”¹³ The “photographic visions” represented in this book, which came from the cameras of Catholic women and men who served as missionaries in China from roughly 1870 to 1970, provide a uniquely framed perspective of Chinese society that highlights hermeneutical impulses little touched upon in other published collections of “old pictures.” The Catholic enterprise was a distinctive project; missionaries in China were less interested in statecraft and political transformation than the physical, material, and spiritual welfare of the persons they encountered. We thus see a comparatively large number of photographs related to hospitals, charitable projects, schools, churches, and liturgies that sometimes show signs of inculturation, but mostly do not.

Another aspect of missionary photographs is that the archives that preserve the images also preserve the letters, personal items, and *objets d'art* connected to the missionaries who took the photographs or are featured in them. Thus, we are often better equipped to provide an additional view “from behind the camera,” the personal thoughts of the missionaries who looked through the lens and framed the images now extant in collections across the globe. One discovers when perusing through the archival files of certain missionaries that she or he was an avid photographer, and that her or his photos are richly narrated on the reverse sides. Some missionary photographers, or collectors of photographs, kept journals of their experiences and image-making processes in China or wrote long descriptive letters recounting events seen in accompanying photos. The result is that the photographic vision one discovers in missionary collections is conserved through the memoirs of the missionaries who wrote of what they personally saw and experienced. From the Passionist China Collection, for example, one can view poignant images of American missionary life in rural China, and see how their lives grew increasingly integrated with the diurnal activities of a China far from the stately courts occupied by the first Jesuits in the Ming dynasty.

In one Passionist photograph, we see Fathers Leo Berard, CP (1898–1973) and Cuthbert O’Gara, CP (1886–1968) with a group of Chinese peasants during an arduous journey near Chenzhou, in Guangdong province [Fig. 1.1].¹⁴ The cultural differences are easily apparent—the two Americans are wearing ivy caps while the native Chinese men wear southern turbans—yet smiling faces disclose an unmistakable camaraderie between the fellow travelers.

12. Feng Keli 馮克力, *Gushi fengwu* 故時風物 [Local scenes from the past] (Shandong huabao chubanshe 山東畫報出版社, 2008), 2.

13. Feng, *Gushi fengwu*, 3.

14. PCC. Leo Berard and Cuthbert O’Gara with Chinese during trip from Chenzhou. 1930s.

The tensions between missionaries and local Chinese described in the narratives of the Boxer Uprising seldom appear in the photographs taken by Passionists whose collected images reflect a culture of friendship more than one of conflict. Again, it is the descriptive letters preserved in missionary archives that help the viewer better understand the contents and nature of what one sees in the photographs. It is one thing to see the formal portrait of Marie-Hermine de Jesus, FMM (Née Irma Grivot 埃明納, 1866–1900) before her departure for China in 1899 without any knowledge of her interior thoughts, and yet another matter to view her image while reading through her copious letters sent home from her mission in Shanxi [Fig. 1.2].¹⁵ In one of her first letters home, Sister Marie-Hermine lamented the repressive lives that women endured in imperial China. “Poor little Chinese!” she wrote, “Women are to be truly pitied in China, even among Christians, and we cannot completely eliminate old Chinese customs.”¹⁶ The narrative behind the photograph often reveals much of what was happening within the context it was originally taken, and this comment by Marie-Hermine de Jesus tells us much of why the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary so adamantly labored to improve the situation of Chinese women by freeing them of such long-hallowed practices as foot binding, arranged marriage, concubinage, and the cultural preference for males.

Catholic missionary photographs of China are temporally framed historical and cultural realities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that may be divided into six categories: 1) “photographic visions” that disclose the visual technologies that shaped Catholic experiences in late imperial and modern China; 2) “space and environment” as a grouping of images depicting the various natural and human-made environments preserved in the enclosed borders of missionary photographs; 3) “communication” as a largely benefactor-supported enterprise of documenting and conveying humanitarian, educational, and religious activities; 4) “gender,” which widens the analytical extent of mostly male-focused photographs to include the women in front and behind the lens who helped define unique visual and social experiences beyond China’s male-dominated spheres; 5) “violence, conflict, and mediation,” three realities that marked the end of the Qing (1644–1911) and Republican (1911–1949) eras with particular force due to regime change, cultural transition, and political antagonisms; and 6) “memory and diasporic legacies,” a category that dilates on how Catholic photographs in China served to anchor forms of cultural memory that outlived the realities and people they represented. All of these categories were undergirded by the “photographic visions” that made them technologically possible and humanly creative.

The material lives of negatives, slides, and prints embody curated visions of Catholic missionaries who had access to camera technology and reveal how those visions transmogrified from the moment a missionary arrived at China until her or his later years after cultural

15. AFMM. Marie-Hermine de Jesus, FMM (Née Irma Grivot) at her departure ceremony before leaving for China. 1899.

16. AFMM. Letter from Marie-Hermine de Jesus, FMM. September 6, 1899.



Fig. 1.1

American Passionist missionaries, Fr. Leo Berard, CP (1898–1973) and Fr. Cuthbert O’Gara, CP (1886–1968), with a group of Chinese peasants during a difficult journey in Guangdong province. The American Passionists in China were among the most active photographers during their mission, and their archival repository at Boston College holds a large number of remarkable images of China during the Republican Era (1911–1949).

Gelatin silver black and white print, 1930s

Boston, Passionist China Collection



Fig. 1.2

French Franciscan missionary to Shanxi, Sr. Marie-Hermine de Jesus, FMM (Née Irma Grivot, 1866–1900) at her departure ceremony before leaving for China. Sr. Marie-Hermine served as the Mother Superior of her small community at Taiyuan and was executed by Qing troops and Boxers during the summer of 1900. She was canonized a saint on October 1, 2000.

Gelatin silver black and white print,
1899

Spokane, Whitworth University China
Christian Missions Collection

Rome, Archives of the Franciscan
Missionaries of Mary



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Catholic Photography and the Evolution of Modern China

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Cover photo: The bishop of Nanjing, Yu Bin (于斌, 1901–1978) and the bishop of Jiangsu, Simon Zhu Kaimin, SJ (朱開敏, 1868–1960) at a 1938 ceremony at Langshan Catholic Church in Jiangsu Province, with a Chinese seminarian adjusting a Rolleicord camera behind Yu Bin.

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