

Nadine Amsler, *Jesuits and Matriarchs: Domestic Worship in Early Modern China*

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Jesuits and Matriarchs takes a novel approach to the history of the seventeenth-century Jesuit China missions by focusing on Chinese Catholic women's domestic religiosity, analyzing the gendered spatial relations in the Jesuits' mission and connecting them with post-Tridentine perceptions and development in Europe. Nadine Amsler draws on extensive archival resources while paying special attention to the contexts that produced these texts. To most efficiently utilize her available sources, Amsler

focuses primarily on Chinese Catholic urban households in the most culturally advanced region of seventeenth-century China—the Jiangnan region.

Amsler begins her discussion with Jesuits' adoption of the Confucian literati attire and the ways in which it shapes Jesuit social identity and masculinity. By taking a close look at the social mechanisms that drove the Jesuits' change of attire, Amsler highlights the Jesuits' negotiation between adhering to the Chinese literati class and maintaining the corporate identity of the Society of Jesus. She argues that this change of dress created a distinct literati masculinity that is a combination of the attributes of the Society of Jesus and the Chinese scholar-gentry.

Gender relations between literati Jesuits and Chinese women come to the fore in chapters 2 and 3. Amsler illustrates that the late-imperial Chinese scholarly elite's views on gender segregation were "decisive for literati Jesuits' approach toward the evangelization of Chinese women" (32). Chinese women's seclusion and its consequences for female virtuousness and chastity became a praiseworthy phenomenon in the eyes of the Jesuits, "who had witnessed the efforts of the post-Tridentine Catholic Church to enforce the cloistering of women's convents in Europe" (38). This idealized gender relation, to a large degree, rendered apparent the incompatibility of the Jesuits' literati identity and missionary vocation. However, Amsler points out that this tension was not obstructive to Jesuits' China mission but rather "produced creative solutions in priests' daily performance" (48). The Jesuits accommodated to Chinese gender sensitivities by developing means of indirect evangelization, creating separate devotional spaces, and adapting sacramental ceremonies. Amsler stresses that this tension and these workable solutions gave rise to specifically Chinese forms of women's religiosity.

Chinese Catholic women's domestic religiosity—their spirituality, communities, and networks—becomes the center of Amsler's investigation in the second half of the book. Chapter 5 focuses on women's appropriation of efficacy-based Catholic religiosity, especially as spiritual remedies for reproductive disorders, by concentrating on two Catholic intercessors—the Virgin Mary and St. Ignatius. Chapter 6 introduces a gender perspective to Chinese Catholic communities and illustrates the homosocial nature of these communities. Amsler examines the organizational and devotional patterns of women's congregations and reveals that "women's communal religiosity was predominately domestic, with the house oratory as its center of gravity" (III). Chapter 7 represents the Xu family network of Shanghai as an example of a Catholic "women's culture" and women's self-conscious and lived-out Catholic spirituality that persisted through patrilocal marriage. Chapter 8 depicts the Jesuits' cautious approach toward religiously vowed virgins and the two Catholic "convents" in Nanjing and Hangzhou initiated by Agnes Yang despite the missionaries' reservations. These four chapters, taken together, demonstrate Chinese Catholic women's considerable agency and religious autonomy without a strong priestly presence.

The closing chapter situates Chinese Catholic women's religiosity in the broader networks of the Chinese Catholic Church, principally through women's material contributions. Amsler illustrates the important role the Catholic gentry women played as patronesses of Chinese Catholicism through embroidered textiles and financial contributions to the China mission. Their sponsorship of churches across the Chinese empire, according to Amsler, indicates their strong identification with "the aim of building a Chinese Church" (150). Amsler's rendering of gentry women's role as benefactresses of Chinese Catholicism challenges the previously held assumption that

the absence of women as patrons of Chinese religious institutions was the result of restrictive property laws imposed on Chinese women.

Further, Amsler's gender perspective into Chinese Catholicism in seventeenth-century Jesuit China mission sheds new light on the understanding of women's role in Chinese Christianity, particularly on "the crucial importance of missionary masculinities and of Chinese Catholic domestic piety" (152). The most unique characteristic of *Jesuits and Matriarchs* is its situating seventeenth-century Chinese Catholicism in the broader landscape of the post-Tridentine Catholic Church to "understand Chinese Catholic communities as . . . at one and the same time, part of the Universal Catholic Church and genuinely Chinese religious communities" (155). Thus, by refusing to treat Chinese Catholic women's religiosity as an isolated phenomenon from the Universal Catholic Church, Amsler's *Jesuits and Matriarchs* is at once an unprecedented contribution to the history of Chinese Christianity and the history of early modern Catholicism, as it further complicates our picture of Chinese Catholicism and the post-Tridentine Church. Its chief attention to women's agency and religious autonomy indicates Amsler's ethical commitment to women's visibility. Finally, it proves to be a remarkable interdisciplinary endeavor of gender studies, history, religion, and ecclesiology. I do not doubt that *Jesuits and Matriarchs* will be an accessible and rewarding read for scholars and any interested readers who wish to gain new insights into women's religiosity in Chinese Catholicism.

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