

Article

The Images of Jesus in the Emergence of Christian Spirituality in Ming and Qing China

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Abstract: Images of Jesus Christ played an important role in the emergence of Christian spirituality in Ming and Qing China. Of the great many images that we know from this period, this paper introduces five of them: Jesus as infant, criminal, gate, brother, and pig. The paper unfolds the historical, anthropological, and theological layers of these images to reveal the original tension between Christian spirituality and Chinese culture. The central thesis of the paper therefore is that this tension is reflected in the images of Jesus Christ and, moreover, that analyzing this tension allows us to achieve a more profound understanding of the emergence of Christian spirituality in Ming, Qing, and perhaps even today's China.

Keywords: Image of Jesus Christ; Christian spirituality; missionary practice; local knowledge; Chinese cultural memory

1. Introduction

What would you think upon seeing Jesus depicted as a Chinese, more specifically, as a Confucius teacher? At least to Western people with no particular knowledge of Christian history, such an image would likely appear strange. Was this how Chinese people reacted to images of Jesus Christ that were presented to them in the long history of Christian missions in China? What was the image Chinese people themselves made of Jesus Christ's person? These are but a few basic questions that we can ask about the images of Jesus Christ that circulated in Ming and Qing China. This paper will have a closer look at five of them: Jesus as infant, criminal, gate, brother, and pig. The observations on those pictures are included in four case studies, which give the paper its structure. The analysis of the images will include historical, anthropological, and theological aspects to prepare the paper's central thesis that will be unfolded in the conclusion. This thesis is that Jesus Christ's images, which will be discussed hereinafter, reflect an original tension that arises when Christian spirituality is introduced in a new cultural context. Analyzing this tension will provide us with a deeper understanding of the emergence of Christian spirituality in China, especially of its difficulties, challenges, and conditions for being successful.

2. Jesuits: Jesus as Infant or Criminal (16th to 17th Century)

The Society of Jesus was one of the first missionary societies setting out to evangelize China in the Ming Dynasty. To succeed in this mission, the Jesuits implemented a policy of accommodation that aimed to fit themselves and their Christian message in the local culture. This policy started as early as Alessandro Valignani's arrival in Macau in 1578, and the Jesuits took great efforts to implement it. In the beginning, the Jesuits adapted themselves to Buddhist monks. They wore Buddhist dresses and constructed their chapels in the style of Buddhist temples. In 1583, the Jesuits Roggieri Michel and Matteo Ricci, both wearing monk robes, hung a painting of Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus in a chapel called the "Fresh Flowers Temple" (仙花寺) located in Zhaoqing ([1], p. 281). It was common

for Jesuits to enshrine Virgin Mary in their chapels because devotion to her marks one of the core characteristics of the Catholic faith. Yet, in Chinese peoples' eyes, this woman with a baby in her arms was likely to be understood as somebody else: Guanyin (观音), a popular goddess in Ming China, who was venerated, among other things, as the Protectress of Childbirth.

How much the Chinese people liked this painting was quite beyond the missionaries' expectation. Indeed, its success was, to some extent, based on the fact that it expressed the Christian spirit as family love and ethics. This suggested a kind and affectionate God who shares in the divine–human relations just as well as in the human–human relations that are of central importance in the Chinese tradition. Nevertheless, the Chinese people obviously took Virgin Mary simply as the more authentic image of Guanyin, which also originated from the West (India) ([1], p. 443). This worried the missionaries: although the image of Virgin Mary was welcomed, it risked syncretization. More important, the image of Virgin Mary was not only taken to signify Guanyin, but it subsequently became the focus of peoples' devotion while the infant in her arms was reduced to an identifying mark. The image of Jesus as an infant was apparently not pertinent enough to introduce him as the core person of Christianity. From the Chinese viewpoint, this infant was “nobody.” And though this “nobody” won wide recognition, it was just a mark that did not direct the Chinese people to Jesus Christ, but to Virgin Mary, or more precisely, to Guanyin. Matteo Ricci reacted quickly and replaced the painting with one showing the adult Jesus ([2], p. 119).

The replacement of this painting was followed by further changes to the Jesuits' missionary approach. It was the Confucian scholar Qu Taisu (瞿太素) who reminded his friend Matteo Ricci that political and cultural influence on Chinese society would come not through Buddhist monks, but the more mainstream Confucian scholars. Directing the missionary work to this particular class would therefore have a greater impact on Chinese peoples' conversion. Matteo Ricci and his colleagues altered their missionary strategy accordingly: they changed their clothing, rejected Buddhism, and began communication with Chinese Confucian scholars who, like the Jesuits, were intellectuals. This presented itself both as a chance and an obstacle for addressing the still unresolved problem of how to present God in the image of Jesus Christ.

The Confucian scholars, deeply rooted in their own symbolic tradition, were well aware of the possible cultural impacts of new symbols. They keenly realized that the Western symbol of Jesus Christ with its *sacred* implications challenged the concepts of Heaven, Earth, Gods, and Sages in Chinese culture. In Confucianism, God or Heaven is not a person, and thus cannot be visualized as such in an image. Even if there was a kind of visualization, it was not to be personalized ([3], pp. 139–60). Consequently, Confucian scholars criticized pictures showing the person of Jesus Christ, which missionaries began to distribute in the early 17th century. They immediately felt threatened by those pictures, realizing that Jesus Christ's person conflicted with the non-personified God or Heaven in the Confucian tradition.¹ To deal with this, Matteo Ricci argued in his book *Tianzhushiyi* ((天主实义), 1604) that the early Confucian concept of God was, in fact, the same as the Christian God. He thus tried to show that only the later Confucians started to identify God with the formless, depersonalized “Taiji” (太极) ([4], p. 32). One year later, he contributed four pictures to the book *Chengshi Moyuan* ((程氏墨苑), 1605), which was launched on the mainstream Chinese book market.² From those four pictures, one was still the well-known woman with her child, while the rest of them depicted Jesus as an adult ([5], p. 121).

¹ The book *A Collection of Anti-Christian Texts (Shengchaopoxieji (圣朝破邪集))* recorded many attacks and criticism of Christian pictures. Jiang De (蒋德) said in the preface of the book that “Confucian philosophy respects heaven with awe. How can there be a portrait of heaven? Even though there was, I am afraid he would not have deep-set eyes, high nose and thick beard.” ([3], p. 139).

² *Chengshi Moyuan (程氏墨苑), Ink Garden of Mr. Cheng* by Cheng Dayue (程大约), published after 1605. This was an “ink cake” album of illustrations with accompanying text, and it contains some contributions by Matteo Ricci.

Showing “the adult Jesus” already came much closer to the central meaning of Jesus Christ’s person, *i.e.*, his suffering for the sins of human beings. Still, Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits later on undertook everything possible to steer the representation of Jesus Christ back to the crucifixion, a significant symbol in the Jesuits’ Catholic tradition. The Chinese, however, perceived the person on the cross as an unpardonably wicked man. In their view, such a crucified criminal meant a rebel who challenged the five cardinal relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends ([6], p. 11, 30). It is obvious that for them an image of the infant Jesus Christ signifying human relations was much more acceptable than the image of a criminal. However, if the crucifixion was not to be presented, the salvation and resurrection inherent to this event could not be communicated in line with the Catholic doctrine. For the Jesuits, a missionary practice that refused the image of the crucifixion risked losing the uniqueness of the Christian spirit or, at least, to be suspected as unorthodox. To resolve the tension between these two viewpoints, Jesuits combined the meaning of Christ’s passion with China’s ancient memories. Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), for instance, used the story of the king Cheng Tang who had sacrificed himself to Heaven in order to save his people from a severe drought around 1530 B.C. ([7], p. 42). The story offered a perfect medium to convey the meaning of sacrifice and atonement. Another approach was to sinicize the composition of Jesus Christ’ image to alleviate the massive visual shock of the crucifixion ([8], p. 3). In regards to the forms of Christian artistic expression, the missionaries worked hard to make the paintings’ spatial shape conform to the Chinese spatial perception and assimilated their artistic perspectives to the freehand brushwork of traditional Chinese painting. Thus, step by step, while embedding their narration and artwork into the Chinese culture, the Jesuits reintroduced the crucifixion and thereby challenged the Confucian concepts of human relations. As a result, the image of Jesus Christ, being the core symbol of redemption, became increasingly prominent ([9], p. 92).

In summary, the introduction of Jesus Christ’s image to China taught the Jesuits time and again the crucial lesson that they were to balance their ultimately *Christian* mission with the insight “when in China, do as the Chinese do.” The missionary practice that followed from this lesson uncovers a remarkable awareness for Chinese culture. We see a missionary practice that gave up on the simplistic marking of religious signification and instead showed sustained efforts to account for the other culture. This included reflecting upon this practice, to realize its strengths and limits, and to change and refine it if necessary. Also, the Jesuits’ practice reveals quite a detailed knowledge of Chinese history and culture. Nothing less than such a detailed knowledge was, of course, required to deal with the significant cultural tensions that accompanied the introduction of Jesus’ image. Overall the Jesuits’ missionary practice not only achieved assignment of concrete meaning to the image of Jesus Christ for Chinese Confucians, but also more generally, it marks a decisive change in how Christianity connects with Chinese culture: it stands for the beginning of a deep inculturation of this religion.

3. Pilgrim’s Progress: Jesus as Gate (1853–1900)

Down to the present day, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* (1678) is one of the most important books of English Christian literature. At the same time, this book is one of the most popular translated novels in China from the late 19th until the 20th century ([10], p. 150; [11], p. 697). First published in Classical Chinese in 1853 and from 1865 to 1871 in Mandarin and different Chinese dialects, missionary societies throughout China in late Qing valued this book and considered it a particularly worthwhile device for preaching.³ The reasons underpinning

³ *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan has been repeatedly printed and published in China since 1853. William Chalmers Burns, Presbyterian missionary of Great Britain, was the first to translate it into Chinese. His translation appeared in three different editions during the second half of the 19th century: in Hong Kong in 1856, in Fuzhou in 1857 and in Shanghai in 1869. In 1865, Burns translated it again into the official Mandarin language because his first translation had been in classical Chinese, which resulted in quite a narrow readership. This Mandarin version also includes a number of prints and was published by the Chinese Printing Bureau in Hong Kong in 1873, the North China Publishing House in 1892 and by Xiaoshuhui zhentang (小书会真堂) in 1883. In addition to the classical Chinese and the Mandarin Chinese editions, dialect

its success in China are, however, far from obvious. Rather, they lie in a particular metaphoric rhetoric that we find in the original English version, *i.e.* the rhetoric device of Jesus as the Gate, and the sophisticated methods that were applied in the Chinese translations to make this rhetoric accessible to the Chinese culture.

Pilgrim's Progress, following the New Testament tradition, symbolizes Jesus Christ, *inter alia*, as the Gate one must pass through to attain redemption. Quite similarly to this Biblical tradition, Chinese culture connects *gate* with *way* and *truth*. Confucius says: "Who expects to be able to go out of a house except by the gate? How is it then that men do not walk according to these ways?" ([12], p. 61). The Chinese character for *way* is the same as for Tao (道): Truth. The second question Confucius rises can therefore be read together with the first one as: "Why do men not choose to pass the gate if it is the only way that leads to truth?" Against this background, the choice of the Gate as a rhetoric device in the Chinese versions of *Pilgrim's Progress* is therefore rather ideal, serving as the linchpin for converting the rhetoric of the English original into Chinese adaptations.

To be more specific, the process of rhetoric conversion includes a particular textual structure and illustration of the Chinese versions. To begin with, the Chinese translations adapted the rhetoric of the Classical Chinese version to the rhetoric of Mandarin and its dialects in order to account for non-erudite readers, *viz.* grassroots people. The translators evidently understood the importance of adjusting their account to their audience and of varying it accordingly. In line with this, the Chinese versions of the *Pilgrim's Progress* adopted a special narrative structure: the *zhanghui* novel—the main format for long Chinese novels from Ming onwards, where an enticing summary couplet heads each chapter. Those textual modifications were later accompanied by an iconic one. Two of the Chinese editions of *Pilgrim's Progress* were illustrated with Jesus Christ's symbols by using a specific and very popular local visual technique: embroidery pictures. From 1871 onwards, such pictures decorated the Cantonese version, translated by the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and from 1895, also the Mandarin version, translated by the American Presbyterian Mission Press (together they will be referred to hereinafter as the "Chinese versions").

On first view, this rhetoric conversion may appear simple, yet it was much more complex. In a nutshell, this specific conversion achieved nothing less than the transfer of the eschatological narration in the original version of *Pilgrim's Progress* into a spatial one, thereby replacing the concept of time with the concept of space. Why did the translators choose such a spatial approach? The answer is twofold: First, the traditional Chinese way to memorize things emphasizes the place where an event happened; space is essentially their mnemonic device. Second, space represents a significant sign of power in Chinese culture. If somebody—such as a general, king, or monk—was able to dominate a certain space, he would be regarded as a god. Thus, space (and not time) was and is the traditional Chinese concept for narrating and memorizing the stories of gods. For those reasons, it was crucial to transform *Pilgrim's Progress* into spatial rhetoric. Only within spatial concepts could the story of Jesus Christ as a historical person and as God be meaningfully conveyed to Chinese people.

Thus far, we have seen that the rhetoric conversion in the Chinese versions essentially relied on two elements, the narrative structure of the *zhanghui* novel and the embroidery pictures. In an illustrated *zhanghui* novel, it is the increase of spatial changes that unfolds the plot: every scene in the novel is put into a new location and accompanied by a new picture with its title referring to both the scene and the subject. In this spatial structure of the Chinese versions, the primary spatial concept is the image of the Gate. This image is turned into the center of the whole narration by replacing the dream structure of the original version. It will be recalled that the original version begins its narration not with "Pointing to the Narrow Gate"—as an illustration in one of the Chinese versions has it—but with a dream. Therefore, it is not surprising that in three illustrated English editions,⁴ we find

versions appeared by the end of Qing Dynasty like the Xiamen dialect version (1853), the Cantonese dialect version (1871) and the Shanghai dialect version (1895).

⁴ The three versions are: (1) London: George Virtue, 1845. (2) London: Ingram Cooke, 1853. (3) Chicago: R. S. Peale, 1891.

the image of a man in his dream. Using dreams to explain profound ideas in religion and theology had been quite popular in the European Middle Ages; Western readers were therefore familiar with this traditional symbol of an allegory. In the Chinese context, however, dreams indicate false and misleading information, or even the vanity of the world. In the Chinese versions, the symbolic dream therefore was omitted and replaced by an event: Christian as the main character of the story leaves his hometown to look for the Gate. The Gate marks the eternal space of the Heavenly Kingdom and passing it is followed by a series of further spatial events, which are all captured in embroidery pictures. The text and the pictures thus integrate the Gate in a central position, focusing the reader's attention immediately on the main topic: the Gate, Jesus Christ, and Redemption.

This rhetoric conversion thus centers the image of the Gate in an overall spatial structure, thereby achieving an in-depth conversion of the individual Jesus Christ as an historical being into a spatial and hence supernatural being. The Western Christian view that sees Jesus Christ as a person who changes from a temporal human being into the eternal God thus is converted into the legends of Jesus Christ, which take place in different scenes (spaces) on the pilgrimage. In the Chinese context, this arrangement allows not only highlighting Jesus' power to dominate a space, but also makes him a person that can be memorized and so become a part of Chinese culture.

Against this background, the success of *Pilgrim's Progress* in China becomes more visible. With its character as a fable, the original version of the book provided a flexible framework in which the true Christian spirit and the local culture could be reconciled ([13], pp. 286–87). The translations preserved the essential Christian message of Redemption on the one hand and intelligently accounted for local knowledge on the other. By shifting the story's rhetoric from time to space, it became not only possible to introduce the metaphoric image of Jesus Christ as the Gate, but also to memorize him in the traditional Chinese way. Moreover, the spatial rhetoric opened up a whole new Redemption discourse. In addition to its traditional eschatological version, the Christology and the Redemption in *Pilgrim's Progress* were greatly enriched through the spatial approach of the Chinese versions, since starting a Christology from a temporal or a spatial point of view clearly leads to very different insights.

I have thus far tried to explain why *Pilgrim's Progress* was so successful in China by focusing on its rhetoric of the Gate. However, there is more to the story than that. *Pilgrim's Progress* was not merely a successful book; rather, it quite literally set the path in Chinese history from "this world to that which is to come," since with this book, the trope of the Gate was deeply inscribed into Chinese cultural memory: the image of the Gate poured the Christian spirit into the Chinese culture so that the Gate henceforward would be there to knock on and to enter. Chinese people thus got the chance to activate the image of the Gate in their own cultural memory and by passing through the Gate to follow the path first taken by the apostles. After the Romans, the Germanic people and many others, it was now time for the Chinese to share in this journey, to bring Jesus Christ into their religious life, to make him a part of their living cultural memory. Though the Gate until the present day stayed a narrow one (and not only in China), this trope proved to be highly inspiring, bringing hope and joy into the human condition in China when it scarcely could be imagined worse.

4. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Jesus as Older Brother (1851–1864)

In 1851, a movement emerged in China to conquer its lands in the name of God: the Taiping Rebellion. Its leader Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864) claimed himself a Christian and—drawing on this religion—founded his own one: the Religion of Worship of God (RWG). With RWG as his religious backdrop, Hong Xiuquan would take over a vast area of southern China, establish the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and rule there for thirteen years, eleven years of which in the Heavenly Capital, today's Nanjing. At first glance, the Taiping Rebellion may look like a crusade to disseminate Christianity in China by means of war. Yet, as we shall see, RWG and Christianity were only connected with each other on a superficial level. The differences between the two are much more important. As a result, this may be not so astonishing since RWG—though it was inspired by missionaries' and local Christians'

works—originated from local Chinese recipients.⁵ A closer look at the image of Jesus Christ, which RWG produced for its religion, can explain how certain Chinese recipients formed their own version of Christian belief, blending their local culture with Christian elements.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Taiping Rebellion started with a religious vision. Hong Xiuquan claimed that he had this vision in 1837. In it he met an old man with his wife and son before the Heavenly Court. Eleven years later, in his book *Taipingtianri* (太平天日), Hong identified this old man as the Christian God and himself as the Heavenly Father's second son. Consequently, he saw Jesus as his older brother ([14], pp. 36–37). From then on, the image of Jesus as Hong Xiuquan's older brother had been declared and confirmed in almost all the important documents of RWG.⁶ From this older brother image of Jesus, we can understand how RWG conceptualized Christ's Sending, and moreover, we can realize the influence of local culture on RWG's version of Christianity.

In RWG, Christ's Sending to save the world happens not once, but again and again. The "single Sending" in Christianity is replaced by a "multiple sending" ([15], p. 518). The reasons for this conceptualization can be outlined as follows: first, the idea of a multiple sending relies on Confucian, *i.e.*, secular ideas. Confucianism provides a strong, patriarchal family ethic that suits a strong doctrine of God very well. For RWG, it seemed therefore natural to embrace an uncompromising monotheism, but equally to stress the human characteristics of Jesus Christ and to integrate him into a larger family community. Second, as noted for *Pilgrim's Progress*, Chinese culture prefers spatial over temporal concepts. The notion that God's redemption can be realized through the Sending of his Son *once and forever* thus never caught on in RWG's theology. Instead, RWG replaced this eschatological view on sending and redemption with a cycle of sendings where redemption takes place *again and again*. And such a cycle of sending is a spatial concept, structurally similar to the cycle of endless punishment (Hell). Third, the concept of multiple sendings also politically made sense for Hong Xiuquan and his generals. According to the strong imperial tradition of the divine rights of emperors, it legitimized the sending of Hong Xiuquan as the son of God and allowed him to establish his kingdom, which was not Jesus' Kingdom of God, but a secular one: the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

In juxtaposition with Chinese culture, RWG used Christian concepts like the Sending or the Kingdom of God to create a new secular concept of kingdom. In this secular concept—unlike the Christian religion—Jesus Christ was not a core symbol. His person as Hong's older brother served only as a symbol of Confucian family ethics. Thus, the interest of RWG in Jesus Christ did not relate to Redemption but to the historical fact of his identity, which supported the identity of Hong Xiuquan and his generals as the leaders of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The theology of RWG, therefore, boils down to a strong doctrine of God with a weak Christology. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Jesus Christ corresponds to the central image of the Gate, and through this image his voice can be heard clearly: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) In contrast, Jesus Christ's position in RWG may be described as such: whereas in *Pilgrim's Progress* Jesus is the Gate, he is but *one* gate opener in RWG.

It should be clear by now that RWG does not equal Christianity. Rather RWG results from an exceedingly complex interplay between the Chinese Confucian, imperial and sectarian traditions on the one hand, and the Christian ideas and symbols on the other. From the Christian tradition, for instance, RWG embraced an uncompromising "monotheism," which differed from the popular polytheism in China's folk religions. RWG's worship concepts, behavioral habits, and certain ritual systems, on the other hand, were quite similar to those of local folk religions, if not identical. Thus, as basic symbols of daily life, the various symbols of Confucian, imperial and sectarian traditions were completely blended

⁵ Among those works, the most important three are *Good Words Exhorting the Age* (劝世良言) by Liang Fa (梁发), the Bible translated by Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff, and one Chinese version of *The Pilgrims' Progress*.

⁶ See the documents on Hong Xiuquan's vision, e.g., *Taiping tianri* (太平天日) (1848), *Tianxiong shengzhi* (天兄圣旨) (1848–1849), *Fengtian zhuyaoxi* (奉天诛妖檄) (1853), *Sanzijing* (三字经) (1853), *Taipingtianguo qiyiji* (太平天国起义记) (1854), *Wangzhang cixiong qinmu qin'er gongzheng fuyinshu* (王长次兄亲自亲耳共证福音书) (1860).

into RWG's version of Christianity ([16], p. 42). For this unorthodox mixture, the image of Jesus Christ as a heavenly older brother provides a most prominent example. Although Hong Xiuquan had tried to remove all polytheistic elements from his religion and conceived himself as a Christian, the influence of the local culture never ceased. The Confucian, imperial and sectarian cultures may have often appeared in pieces, but they lived on within RWG as its deep cultural gene ([16], pp. 40–44; [17], pp. 100–18). Accordingly, in many of RWG's poetic works and gospels, the transformation of Jesus Christ's image reveals to us not so much about Christian faith, but rather the Chinese grassroots attitude towards life in the 19th century.

5. The Anti-Christian Movement: Jesus as Pig (1850–1900)

The transformation of Jesus Christ's image by RWG is dramatic; however, some anti-Christian parties took it a step further. Anti-Christian movements have a long tradition in China, dating back to the early Tang Dynasty (618–907), arising shortly after Nestorianism was introduced to China as was recorded on the Nestorian Stele in AD 781.⁷ Famous scholars in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) wrote poetic lines against Christianity ([18], p. 2061), and in the early Qing Dynasty, Yang Guangxian launched the "Calendar Case" (1666) to get rid of Christian missionaries in China completely. He also lashed out at Western paintings of Jesus Christ, interpreting them in the typical way of a Chinese literati, *i.e.*, to understand Jesus as a criminal ([6], p. 30). In late Qing, from the end of the second Opium War (1860) until the Boxer Rebellion (1900), countless anti-Christian movements took place in China [19,20]. In those movements, Chinese literati played a crucial role, especially by introducing a particularly shocking image of Jesus Christ: Jesus as a pig.⁸

The image of a pig obviously aims at conferring a disgusting character on Jesus Christ. Yet on a deeper level, we can see that once more Confucian and folkloric culture merge with the image. As noted in the analysis of RWG, the family marks a cornerstone to Confucianism and to Chinese culture in general. Central to the Chinese family tradition is, among other things, the worship of ancestors. This implies specific rituals that are still practiced in today's China before important festivals. Since the worship of ancestors conflicts with the monotheistic Christian tradition, it was strongly opposed by certain missionaries. The Catholic Church even forbade any rituals relating to this cult. Now, in one of those rituals, the descendants express their filial piety by killing a pig. The pig is offered to please the ancestors. Therefore, symbolizing Jesus as a pig meant nothing more than this: Jesus and his followers needed to be killed, Christianity to be exterminated to satisfy the ancestors and, ultimately, to defend the core of Chinese against Western culture. The image of Jesus as a pig, therefore, goes far beyond a shocking blasphemy. It functioned as a political symbol that proved to have terrifying implications.

However, the symbol's implications did not stop at a mere political level. The image of a pig was a very efficient instrument for arousing the anti-Christian rumors that had already existed for a long time in China. Due to its manifold folkloristic layers, the symbol's implications became pervasive, affecting everyone. Because of those folkloristic implications, the anti-Christian movements were finally not just a political movement laid by literati; rather, they turned it into a grassroots movement. One specific layer of the pig symbol may explicate this: in Chinese folklore, the pig is a sexual symbol ([21], p. 88), representing the crude surrender to animal lust, especially unrestricted, detestable male sexuality. In the anti-Christianity rumors, therefore, Jesus and his believers were depicted as lustful bastards who constantly seduced and had sexual relationships with women. Associating Jesus with a pig hence stimulated the peoples' revulsion on a very basic level. As a result, the image of the pig suggested

⁷ One sentence on the Nestorian Stele reads: "In the year A.D. 699 the Buddhists, gaining power, raised their voices in the Eastern metropolis; in the year A.D. 713, some low fellows excited ridicule and spread slanders in the western capital."

⁸ Jesus is depicted as a pig in Zhou Han's *Jinzun shengyu bixie quantu* (遵圣谕辟邪全图), which was printed more than 800,000 volumes in 1891 and was widely circulated in the Yangtze River area by the anti-Christian party. The British Museum keeps one original version.

Jesus Christ as opposing very essential Chinese ethical values while simultaneously depriving his symbol of its true meanings. Jesus Christ's image appeared completely detached from its origins and subject to hostile localization. It became an alien symbol that was even alien to itself, a symbol no longer transmitting any higher meaning, and serving only as the carrier of common prejudice and repugnance.

The foregoing explains why the literati chose a pig to symbolize Jesus in the anti-Christian movements. Yet, why should they run a movement under this symbol against Christianity in the first place? The answer lies in the political circumstances in late Qing. At that time, the empire's control over the nation's political discourse declined rapidly and, therefore, the traditional faith system and its institutions were no longer guaranteed by the state. This decline in power induced the literati to call upon the rural population to uphold the traditional values and to fight against *the* foreign religion that was likely to break them. Because the literati quickly realized that once Jesus Christ's symbol struck at the roots of rural lifestyle, their privileged role as officials and gentry together with the foundations of their power would collapse [22,23]. To prevent the world of symbols still under their control from overturning, and to defend their discourse power in the local region, the literati, therefore, alienated and distorted Jesus Christ's image. As a pig, they reasoned, this symbol would cease to have any significant importance in Chinese daily life.

The image of Jesus as a pig may seem like the nadir of Christianity on its ways through China. This forceful opposition was, however, not only negative for it also challenged the missionaries to engage more seriously and deeply with the local Chinese culture, to enter the lowest levels of the society, and to carefully alter the social groups' concept of the traditional authority. From this perspective, it was Jesus Christ's distortion by those who were against Christianity for three hundred years that forced the missionaries to no longer decorate Christ's image with Western culture, but to deeply reflect on its true meaning. By presenting this true meaning, the missionaries achieved the introduction of Christ's image to the very bottom of Chinese society. Only in this way could the folk community assimilate Jesus Christ's image. In fact, in a similar way to the literati's use of the pig symbol, the Christian missionaries employed a symbol of Jesus Christ that was similarly alien to itself when they entered China in late Qing: born of the Western discourse power, their initial image of Christ was a symbol of imperialism. Even today, this is still the original sin of Jesus Christ's symbol in China. The symbol could not be successfully integrated into China's cultural history without first entering the life consciousness of the Chinese people.

6. Conclusions

This article put together four case studies with some very different images of Jesus Christ: Jesus as infant, criminal, gate, brother, and pig. Those images belong to four different traditions or movements, of which one is Catholic (Jesuits), one Protestant (*Pilgrim's Progress*), one a rather unorthodox version of Christianity, if Christian at all (RWG), and one being outright anti-Christian. There is no doubt, however, that all of these cases and images of Jesus connect to a larger historical process: the emergence of Christian spirituality in Ming and Qing China. In this conclusion, I wish not to enquire into the role the different cases played in this emergence. I also do not want to suggest a particular evolutionary process by relying on those four cases or comparing them. The feature I will be interested in as the common theme underpinning the case studies is the tension that accompanies those images of Jesus Christ. The thesis therefore is that such a tension exists, that the tension is reflected in the various images of Jesus Christ we have come across, and that analyzing this tension allows us to achieve a more profound understanding of the emergence of Christian spirituality in Ming, Qing, and perhaps even today's China.

The tension revealed by the images of Jesus Christ introduced by missionaries in the Ming and Qing Dynasties exists between two different poles in the process of their enculturation: faithfulness to what the symbol of Christ originally signifies (God), especially its definitive property including the core spirit of the gospel, and flexibility of the symbol to be continually reiterated in different cultural

contexts. The reasons for this tension are twofold. First, friction is caused by the concept of incarnation. In Jesus Christ, God becomes human, “logos” fulfils “flesh”. Hence, in a missiological perspective, the gospel spirit affects the flesh of indigenous people. Their flesh becomes subject to a *new* influence that creates an original tension or sometimes, as suggested in the last paragraph of the pig case, even an original sin towards the receiving culture. This tension may be relieved over time, but it never ceases to call for responsibility. In missiology, the theological concept of incarnation goes hand in hand with an original tension. Second, and more important in the Chinese context, the tension originates in the concept of Redemption. The Gospel insists that the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ is the only gate towards Redemption, and therefore presents Redemption by Christ as a kind of vicarious atonement because no one can redeem oneself through oneself. However, in the Confucian tradition, redemption is realized through self-sanctification ([24], pp. 21–79; [25], pp. 56–69; [26], pp. 80–89). Moreover, in Chinese folk culture, especially in the sectarian traditions, deliverance is mainly fulfilled by self-efforts, such as the practice of Qigong ([27], p. 137). This notion of self-redemption clearly contradicts the Christian concept, thereby producing an original tension at a deep cultural level.

The original tension unfolds into two extremes, a vertical and a horizontal movement. On the vertical level, the path leads the Chinese culture off the beaten track. It is the path of Christ opened up by the missionaries’ efforts, whether Catholic or Protestant. However, this overture does not necessarily lead to a good end. If the missionaries failed to balance the Christian message with local Chinese culture, a rather imperialistic faith would arise. We observed the difficulties of this balancing act with the Jesuits and *Pilgrim’s Progress*. When the initiation of Jesus’ image did harmonize with Chinese culture, however, the local people were truly inspired, and something new was created, such as a *spatial* eschatology (as in *Pilgrim’s Progress*), or new perspectives on political, philosophical, and theological questions among Chinese literati. On the horizontal level, however, the original tension resolves into the Chinese culture. Here, local knowledge and preconceptions prevail over the Christian ideas. This path then follows the local expectations in Ming and Qing folk societies, in short, an earthly path and not the one of Christ: self-redemption rules out Redemption, and accordingly the folk people will not ask for Jesus Christ—the crucified God to redeem them. This is the case because traditionally, Chinese people long for an ancestral cult, as seen in the pig case, and a powerful leader that supports a paternalistic family ethic, as seen in RWG. An outright denial of Jesus Christ’s person (again the pig case) or its abuse for secular politics (RWG) does not do justice to the profound meaning his image stands for. Thus, in these two cases, the person of Jesus Christ was not only disrespected as the normative center of Christianity, but politically abused and even thoroughly alienated.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the process of enculturation depends on two sides’ efforts and their mutual respect. On one side, taking a vertical perspective and hailing the initiation of Jesus Christ in itself as a noble gesture to Chinese culture would be superficial and uncritical because a favorable “incarnation” sets much higher standards than a mere “introduction” of Christ’s images. The original tension can only be reconciled if Western centrism and intellectual pride are abandoned, and other nationalities and cultures are treated respectfully. That was the crucial lesson to learn for the process of enculturation, a lesson that holds true for the question of how to present Jesus as the personified and the crucified God (Jesuits), or of how to make him accessible in spatial concepts (*Pilgrim’s Progress*). On the other side, if the local people rejected new inspiration from Christianity simply because of some narrow-minded, arrogant nationalism and hence independently of the images the missionaries provided, they were blind to them. The images of Jesus they created instead, consequently expressed either ignorance (RWG) or arrogance (pig case). In such images there is no question about mutual respect; they rather reflect the original tension “out of control.” It seems therefore that the emergence of Christian spirituality in a missiological context does not evolve in only one direction; it’s neither horizontal nor vertical. Challenges and sufferings as well as chances and opportunities occur on both sides.

This opens up an important theological perspective on the process of enculturation: when the two sides in a Christian missiological situation meet, we find an original tension that calls for

a dialog between the two cultural traditions involved, and it is the Holy Spirit that through this dialog may transform the tension into a new creation. To be more specific, because the process of enculturation involves human beings, it is common that ignorance and arrogance may occur on both sides. Such ignorance and arrogance can be understood, theologically, as two specific forms of evil. If they occur, it is thus evil that blocks the process of enculturation; it is evil that prevents the true *inspiration* of another culture. If, however, a dialog in mutual respect for each other takes place and strikes a *balance* between the horizontal and vertical extremes, the positive potential found in the enculturation of Jesus' image unfolds. In that case, the process of enculturation becomes a productive dialog and overcomes the human and "all too human" weaknesses. Such a remarkable triumph over evil indeed reveals the power of the Holy Spirit.

Only when such *balance* is searched for and promoted may *deep* enculturation be achieved. That is to say and to show, that the normativity underlying the process of enculturation should not be essentialist. The process does not transplant a (foreign) essence of Christian faith into another culture. Rather, it bases itself on an ideal type of Christianity that constantly stays in tension with the local culture and thereby evolves in its own meaning. We observed: the way the Jesuits conveyed Jesus' image allowed the Chinese people to experience their culture as intrinsically intertwined with the Christian tradition. Connecting Christ's passion with similar stories from Chinese history serves as one example for this experience. In the case of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the flexible metaphoric text of the original version allowed for a spatial rhetoric conversion of Jesus' person as a gate symbol. The Chinese versions thereby moved beyond the simple introduction of Jesus Christ's person because they made it possible to memorize him in the forms of the local culture. Hence, they paved the way for him to become a part of the Chinese cultural memory. Against the background of the original tension I ascribed to the process of enculturation, this implies a groundbreaking transformation: "logos" (Jesus Christ) irritates "flesh" (the local culture) in the beginning of the process. Yet after having been embedded in the local cultural memory, "logos" presents itself as another option *within* the local culture even if it may continue to irritate. The image of Jesus Christ then no longer opposes local knowledge; rather, it is one form of local knowledge facing other forms of local knowledge. This is the process of *deep* enculturation.

Such deep enculturation elevates the image of Jesus Christ to a powerful eschatological symbol in Chinese history and society: embedded in cultural memory, his image is continuously present; any event in Chinese history potentially invokes his spirit. By his words, deeds in the world become questionable. Therefore, the literati in the anti-Christian movement had good reason to alienate and distort his image in order to secure their privileges and political power. Today's official policy in China is doing the same. In Chinese history and society, Jesus Christ is specifically present when he is absent. For at any time we may encounter the challenging words of (the Son of) God: why are you hating instead of loving, why helping the rich instead of the poor, why the powerful instead of the weak, why are you despairing instead of hopeful, *etc.*—in short, why have you forsaken me? The images of Jesus Christ—whether they depict an infant, criminal, gate, brother or pig—are there to remind us of the potential of his words. Therefore, following the images of Jesus in Ming and Qing China offers more than an exciting intellectual *adventure*: it points at something to come—an *adventurus*, a new Advent.

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