

The Rise of a Local Catholic Church Through Cross-Cultural Encounters in The Ordos Region (Inner Mongolia)

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[Abstract] Because of the limitations of historical, geographical, human and material resources, most of the important academic activities and accomplished scholarship are concentrated in major metropolitan universities and academies in Beijing, Shanghai, or other major cities. Archival materials and research resources are thus closely related to these locales. Yet the presence and development of Christianity and in particular the Catholic Church in China was not confined to these places.

This article, by way of a case study, will explore the historical development of a small Mongol Catholic community at China’s northern periphery from the Late Qing Dynasty until the Republican Era. It will focus on the available multicultural archival materials, the relevance and limitations of these resources regarding the writing of “A History of the Catholic Church in China.”

The second half of the 19th century saw the conjuncture of two unprecedented trends of expansion: that of sedentary Han Chinese pushing forward the frontier of settlement into Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, and that of Western powers forcing their way into China through gunboats and unequal treaties. At the forefront of the Western expansion were Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

The Sino-French Convention of Beijing in 1860 allowed the missionaries to penetrate into not only the Chinese interior or eighteen provinces of China proper, but also the Mongolian territory outside the Great Wall 塞外, where they rented or leased land, and constructed churches, on behalf of the local Christian community. The Qing considered its dependencies of Manchuria, Mongolia, and Tibet off bounds to the missionaries. In 1864 the *Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide* (SCPF, present *Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples*, CEP) at Piazza d'España in Rome entrusted the propagation of the Catholic faith in Mongolia to the fledgling Belgian Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary—*Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae*, CICM, also known as Scheut, called after Scheutveld, the Brussels suburb in which it originated.

Some Belgian Scheut Fathers developed a missionary strategy centering on land acquisition, converting Mongol pastureland into agricultural farmland. The alliance of foreign missionary activities with Han Chinese agricultural colonization turned out to be remarkably successful in attracting converts, mostly recent migrants from north China. At the same time, the expansion of the Catholic Mission caused tensions and disputes with the local non-Christian Mongol and Chinese communities, that culminated in the Yihetuan Movement (*Yìhétuán yùndòng* 義和團運動) and Boxer Uprising in 1898-1900. It also resulted in growing Qing state intervention that climaxed in the official land reclamation campaign of 1902.

Since Christianity mainly developed along the Great Wall, it did not spread deeply into the extensive area of Vassal Outer Mongolia 外藩蒙古 with its more than 200 banners that enjoyed a greater autonomy. The banner's ruling prince (*jasay* 紫薩克) governed directly its territory and people. During the Qing era, the earliest Catholic penetration occurred in Southwest Mongolia, the seven Ordos banners of the Great Temple League (Yeke juu čiyulyan, also spelled Yekhe Juu 伊克昭盟),¹ which jurisdictionally belonged to Vassal Outer Mongolia, adjacent to Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces. These banners were directly ruled by Mongol ruling princes and supervised by judicial superintendents of the Qing Court of Vassal Affairs (Lifanyuan 理藩院, often translated as Court of Colonial Affairs or Dependencies) in Shenmu county 神木 and Ningxia prefecture 寧夏 (Irgai in Mongolian, present Yinchuan in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, NHAR), together with the Manchu brigade-general of Suiyuan city 綏遠, present day Höhhot.

The sequence of events in the 1860s and 1870s had made the Ordos region an ideal place for missionary activities. The Han Chinese Muslim Uprising (1862–1877) and its suppression by Qing troops led by General Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-1885) provided a unique opportunity for the Scheut missionaries to expand into the war devastated Ordos.

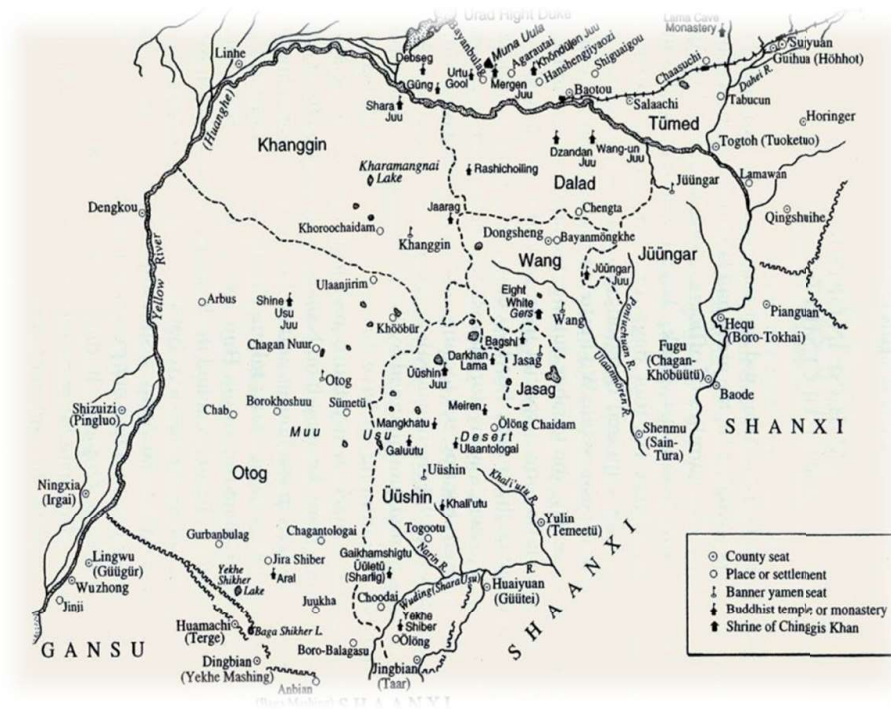
Between 1867 and 1870, the Ordos Plateau was a main battlefield between the Hui Muslims and the Qing army, assisted by Mongol troops led by Janagardi 劄那嘎爾迪 (d. 1901). The brutal warfare left the entire region in ruins. Otoγ (Otog) banner lost over half of its population, and Qanggin (Khanggin) and Üüsin (Üüshin) banners also suffered great human loss, with all the livestock either

¹ Otoγ, Qanggin, Dalad, Üüsin, Wang, Jeyünger, and Jāsay.

commandeered by the Qing troops or looted by the Hui Muslims. The combats also left many Tibeto-Mongol Buddhist monasteries demolished and lamas dispersed. The Muslim rebels also ravaged the Chinese market town of Ningtiaoliang 寧條梁, with nearly all its population slaughtered or having committed suicide.

The warfare was immediately followed by the great famine of 1876 through 1879 that swept across the provinces of Shanxi, Henan, Shandong, Zhili, and Shaanxi, caused by severe drought and back-to-back harvest failures that resulted in the demise of a roughly estimated nine to 13 million people. The famine also struck the areas outside the western pass, while producing a swarm of refugees across the passes into the grasslands. The severity and scope of the catastrophe were beyond the means of the Qing court and officials. It thus provided a chance for the missionaries to penetrate into these regions by offering relief among famine refugees and by helping to restore morale and social order. The Scheut Fathers acquired abandoned farm estates and developed new Chinese chrétientés along the Yellow River and the Great Wall.²

² See Yi Wang [Huang Yi 黃怡], *Transforming the Frontier: Land, Commerce, and Chinese Colonization in Inner Mongolia, 1700—1911* (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013), especially Chapter 5: Cultivation for Salvation: Land, Boundaries, and Christianity in Nineteenth-century Inner Mongolia; Patrick Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters and Missionary Endeavors: A History of Scheut in Ordos (Hetao), 1874-1911* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004); and Jozef Leonard Van Hecken, *Les Missions chez les Mongols aux temps modernes*, (Peiping: Imprimerie des Lazaristes / Pétang, 1949).



The Ordos Region Map, 1926

Boro Balyasun’s Catholic Mission

In February 1874, Scheut Fathers Remi Verlinden (1830-1892) and Alphonse Devos (1840-1888) undertook an expedition to the Ordos leaving from the new Catholic community of Xiyingzi 西營子 “Western Encampment”—originally called Qadan Qanču “Rock Sleeve,” later renamed Nanhaoqian 南壕塹 “Southern Moat” in present Shangyi 尚義 county. Samdadchiemba (bSam-gtan-‘dzin-ba 1816?-1900),³ a Monguor lama-convert from Qinghai province and former guide of the Vincentian Frs. Joseph Gabet (1808-1853) and Évariste Huc (1813-1860), accompanied them. They first reached the court of Janagardi in Jeyünger (Jüünger) banner of eastern Ordos,

³ Valère Rondelez (Xénia de Heering, translator), “A Faithful Servant Samt’anjimba (1816?-1900)” in Gerald Roche & C.K. Stuart, eds., *Asian Highlands Perspectives 36 Mapping the Monguor* (2015), 116-138, 301-332.

where they were welcomed. From there they headed southwest to reach Üüsin banner. In April, the missionaries crossed the plain of Boro Balyasun (abbr. Borbalyas, in Urdu dialect *boro balgasu/balgusu*), Mongolian for “grey/brown ruins of an old city,” in present Otoy Front Banner, Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR). Lying north of the Great Wall, it used to be the dominion of the Tangut people of Xixia (1038–1227), and got its Chinese name, Chengchuan 城川, from a ruined walled city of Youzhou 宥州 prefecture dating back to the 9th century.

Unknown to the Scheut Fathers, a small Catholic Han community had thrived since 1750 in Ningtiaoliang, a nearby Chinese market town southeast of Chengchuan. The Friars Minor used to visit them from Xi’an before the invasion of Hui Muslims, which reduced the Catholic community from 200 to 40 members. In July 1874, at the site of a ruined farm estate in Boro Balyasun offered by a Chinese local lay leader, the missionaries established the first Ordos Catholic Church mission.

At first, the aim was to convert the Mongols. The Scheut missionaries succeeded in converting several Mongol households by offering them livestock and free medicine. Badai, the first Mongol convert at Boro Balyasun, used to work as a day laborer hired by Han farmers before turning to the missionaries, attracted by the double salary they offered. In 1875, the Scheut Fathers obtained permission from the authorities of Otoy banner to cultivate a tract of land at Subay-yin eki east of Chengchuan, where they began to settle a number of destitute Mongol herders along with some Han Chinese households from northern Shaanxi, and provided them with livestock, agricultural tools, and seed grain. The Han migrants were registered as subordinated Mongols (隨旗蒙人). The title to the mission land was

held from the grand duke of Otoγ banner, but the neighboring Üüsin banner had claimed this land in a dispute that had festered for decades.

With the help of Samdadchiemba, the Scheut missionaries successfully converted several local lamas and a group of migrant Mongols from Qinghai. According to Bishop Joseph Ma Zhongmu 馬仲牧 (Tegüsbilig, 1919-) the 12 households of Qinghai Mongols had been converted before moving to Boro Balyasun. Because of the prestige they enjoyed among the local Mongols, the Mongolian dialect of Chengchuan became completely assimilated to the Mongolian dialect of Qinghai. During the great famine, the missionaries' relief work had attracted many Mongol and Han Chinese converts, whose number soared to 100 households at one point, but dropped sharply afterwards. Nonetheless, there were many abandoned children of famine victims on the streets of Ningtiaoliang. The missionaries kept these orphans and had them raised by childless Mongols. Thus the Mongols of Boro Balyasun were called mixed-bloods (混血兒, in Urdu dialect *alak jast' an*).⁴

This unique intersection of ethnic groups and cultures, coupled with the conjuncture of human and natural disasters, contributed to the growth and survival of the Mongol Catholic Church mission on the southwestern periphery of Ordos. By 1880, the number of converts in Chengchuan had increased to 40 households. It remains to this day the single surviving Catholic community among the southern Mongols.

The Scheut Fathers also endeavored to establish missions at locations where Mongols often gathered, such as Ejen Qoroo "The Lord's Enclosure," the memorial sacred site of Chinggis Qan (1162?-1227), and Dingyuanying 定遠營 "Encampment Pacifying the Far-off,"

⁴ Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 325-326.

(present Bayanhot, IMAR), the court of the Prince of Alašan special banner and a major monastic and trading center northwest of Ningxia. Another Mongol mission was established at Bayan Toqai in western Otoy banner. However, none of these missions would last very long. Rather, the Han Chinese missions established in their proximity all endured, such as Sandaohe (三道河 1876), Ligangbao (李崗堡 1880) and Xiayingzi (下營子 1881) across the Yellow River in Ningxia prefecture. As the Scheut Fathers soon realized, the Mongols' entrenched practices and beliefs in Tibetan Buddhism, Chinggisid ancestral cult, and the feudal-like *jasay* system created an insurmountable barrier for their missionary activities. In other Ordos banners, their presence invited such strong opposition from the Mongol upper class that they were either unable to obtain any foothold, or their missions were destroyed and their converts dispersed. The resistance of the Mongols forced the missionaries to shift their attention to the Han Chinese migrants, whose status as uprooted refugees and farmers made them more susceptible to conversion.

The first Scheut missionaries were surprised to find a network of scattered Chinese settlements in Ordos Mongol territory and even a Catholic community in the market town of Ningtiaoliang with connections up to Ili 伊犁 in Xinjiang province.⁵ The great distances between these old Christian communities made any type of close-knit ecclesiastical organization impractical. From 1874 until 1883, the CICM missionaries developed three ecclesiastical districts around fixed mission stations at the fringes of the Ordos Plateau. Their initial plan of connecting these districts with intermediate missionary

⁵ B. Gorissen, "The Most Unfruitful Mission in the World: CICM Fathers Frans and Jozef Hoogers in Xinjiang: 1895-1922" in W.F. Vande Walle & N. Golvers, eds., *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China in the Qing era (1644-1911)*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 325-342.

residences never materialized. They also envisaged the establishment of a Trappist monastery, similar to the numerous Mongol lamaseries (Tibeto-Mongol Buddhist monasteries), in the plain of Boro Balyasun.⁶ This idea was also never implemented.

The only Mongol Catholic Church mission, Boro Balyasun, was located on the Mongol-Han Chinese border along the Great Wall, where the Mongols had already been exposed to Han-style agriculture and gradually adapted to a semi-nomadic and semi-settled lifestyle. Thus the Han migration had in many ways paved the way for the missionary enterprises in the Mongol territories, as well as provided potential converts for their expansion. The success of a Mongol mission in Chengchuan was by far the exception rather than the rule. Elsewhere the missionaries encountered fierce opposition from the Mongol nobility and clergy.

Among these, the disputes with Üüsin banner from the 1870s through the 1890s were especially noteworthy. In 1876, Fr. Verlinden established a small mission in Wulong 烏龍, where he attracted some famine victims from northern Shaanxi. The foreign settlement incited hostility from local nobles and lamas, and there were incidents of the beating of converts and horse theft. The banner officials, however, simply turned deaf ears to the missionaries’ protests.

In 1878, the latter filed a complaint against the Üüsin *ḡasaḡ*, who was also the incumbent head of the Great Temple League, to the Qing Foreign Affairs Office (*Zongli Yamen*, abbr. for *Zongli geguo shiwu yamen* 總理各國事務衙門 “Office for the Administration of the Affairs of Different Nations”) via the French legation. On this occasion, the Court of Vassal Affairs informed the ruling princes of the Ordos

⁶ Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters*, 233-235.

banners that they had to abide by the Treaty stipulations and protect the missionaries and their converts. It became clear that the Treaty provisions regarding Catholicism were also valid in Vassal Outer Mongolia, the Ordos. When in 1880 Scheut Frs. Alfons Lievens (1854-1917) and Louis Roofthoof (1855-1926) entered Vassal Outer Mongolia, the Manchu brigade-general of Suiyuan city translated their safe conducts into Mongolian for the league and banner heads of the Great Temple and Ulanhabu leagues in order to protect the missionaries according to the Treaties.⁷

Meanwhile, another incident of a more serious nature occurred. A group of Mongols led by a Üüsin noble burned down the Wulong mission and dispersed the converts. He and two other nobles were also responsible for the disturbance in Otoᠢ banner, in which over 100 Üüsin Mongols looted the converts there, and occupied a tract of land that had been granted to the mission by the *jasay* of Otoᠢ banner. Following a joint investigation by the officials of the Lifanyuan in Suiyuan city, Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces in 1880, the Üüsin *jasay* agreed to punish a lama, a *janggin*, and several others for stealing horses from the mission compound, but denied all allegations about looting, the burning of the church, and harassment of converts.⁸

As stated by Fulehonga, the Court of Vassal Affairs-dispatched judicial superintendent of Ningxia in charge of the investigation, the feud between the Mission and Üüsin banner arose from an incident in 1876 in which Scheut Father Jan-Baptist Steenackers (1848-1912) shot and killed a noble Damrinjab's dog as it attacked his horse. A bitter

⁷ Sude Bilige (Sodbilig Shirnuud), ed. 蘇德畢力格主編：《准格爾旗紮薩克衙門檔案基督宗教史料》[The Archives of the Jeyünger Banner Ruling Prince's Office: Historical Materials on Christianity] (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press 廣西師範大學出版社, 2011), 5.

⁸ Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 341.

altercation ensued; the angry noble had the missionary tied up and his beard plucked, and his Mongol companion badly beaten.⁹ As Üüsin banner fell under the jurisdiction of the judicial superintendent of Shenmu county, Fulehonga urged Steenackers to report to Shenmu. The latter, however, was only ready to appear in front of a mixed court in Peking. In his report, the superintendent accused the missionary of being "heterodox" (異端) for not abiding by the Treaties and the "king's rule" (王化). In the end, the Lifanyuan dismissed the case as a trifling matter of no particular importance.

Thus the disputes ended up with the demise of the Wulong mission in Üüsin banner. It was one of those rare cases in which the intervention of the French legation and Qing high authorities were less than effective in overturning a decision made on the local level, due to the autonomy of Mongol *jasays* in administering their own banners, backed by the Court of Vassal Affairs officials who were keen to preserve the old social and political order from foreign challenge. Eventually, in the wake of the Boxer Protocol in 1901, the banner had to pay 3,500 taels of silver in indemnities for these early offenses.¹⁰

Regarding the acquisition of land, the Manchu brigade-general of Suiyuan received a communication from the Qing Foreign Affairs Office regarding the re-negotiation of the Berthemy convention in 1893 and 1895, namely that all missionaries could purchase public property on behalf of the local Catholic Church without the prior

⁹ Yang wrongly identified the missionary as Alfons Bermyn. See Yang Haiying, "Catholicism in the Ordos Today. Focusing on the life story of Rev. Joseph and his family" in K. Sagaster, ed., *Antoine Mostaert (1881-1971): CICM Missionary and Scholar* (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, K.U. Leuven, 1999), vol. 1, 205-223.

¹⁰ Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 342.

consent of local officials.¹¹ This Mongol archival evidence shows that starting from the 1880s officials of the Foreign Affairs Office and other central agencies together with local officials in the Chinese provinces did not distinguish anymore between the area of China proper, the interior provinces, and the area beyond the Great Wall, the outer provinces.

In Southern Ordos, a Yihetuan (Boxer) leader from Shanxi had established himself in Ningtiaoliang since late May 1900, where he recruited over 200 followers. However, local officials of Shaanxi suppressed them and threw him into prison. The area remained relatively quiet through July, thus allowing time for the missionaries to reinforce self-defense forces in Xiaoqiaopan 小橋畔. There a stockade had been constructed in 1895 to guard against possible attack by the Hui Muslims of Gansu province, making the church a stronghold for the fourteen missionaries—nine Scheut Fathers and five Friars Minor from Shaanxi province—and over 300 Catholics taking refuge there. On August 7 the Yihetuan attacks began upon the release of the leader. While the Yihetuan targeted mainly the Han Catholic settlements within the Black Boundary lands, the Mongols of Otoγ and Üüsin banners organized vigilante forces or round robins (獨貴龍, Mong. *duyuyilang* “circles”), burning down the churches of Chengchuan, Köber, and Shiber, destroying the homes of Mongol Catholics, and taking away their livestock and grain. The siege of Xiaoqiaopan lasted for 52 days—49 according to Western sources—from August 9 through September 29, during which time hundreds of Yihetuan, assisted by around 200 vigilantes and 300 horsemen from Otoγ, Üüsin, and Ĵasay banners, launched a series of attacks, yet the Catholics overpowered them with better weapons and tactics. In the end, the

¹¹ 蘇德畢力格主編，《准格爾旗紮薩克衙門檔案基督宗教史料》，頁 100-101。

local officials of Shaanxi disbanded the Yihetuan and persuaded the Mongol troops to return to their own banners. The church of Xiaoqiaopan remained intact, with a relatively small Catholic casualty figure of one missionary and 10 converts, as compared to the over 200 Yihetuan adherents and 10 Mongol soldiers killed in the battles.¹²

After the Boxer Uprising (1900), the Qing exacted payment from the Mongol banners through the official sale and taxation of their territory in order to settle foreign indemnities. To sell and tax plots, the state set up land reclamation bureaus (墾務局) to measure, map, and categorize some 1.5 million acres in this area. In her dissertation, Wang Yi has shown how reformist writings by Manchu and Han officials established these new institutions in order to bring the *jasays* under more direct rule. Yigu 貽穀 (d. 1926), the imperial commissioner in charge of land reclamation in central Inner Mongolia, for example, threatened the more obstinate *jasays* that they would lose their positions if they did not comply with the 1900 New Policy (*Gēngzi Xīnzhèng* 庚子新政, Mong. *Šine jasay*) reforms from 1901 until 1908. While Wang described this process of dispossession as “multiple levels of negotiations and mutual accommodations,” it eventually led to the integration of the Mongol territories into a nationalized administrative structure.¹³

Hence, the activities of the Catholic missionaries in Ordos did not meet any more opposition from Otoγ banner authorities. When on October 7, 1903, the Church—represented by Frs. Frans Van den Abbeele (1868-1904) and Johannes Braam (1869-1954)—signed a second agreement with the three Ordos banners of Otoγ, Üüsin and ǰasay regarding the compensation for losses incurred during the

¹² Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 365.

¹³ Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 381.

uprising, they agreed to a comprehensive peace treaty under the supervision of the Manchu brigade-general of Suiyuan city.¹⁴

Nonetheless, as believed by Christopher P. Atwood, “the turbulent political life of the Ordos Plateau gave no quarter to those unable to arm themselves in self-defense: banner fought banner, the people gathered in vigilante “circles” and fought the dukes and princes, bandits fought the banner militia, and the strong-men commanding the militia fought the popular vigilantes, while all resented impotently the repeated incursions of the neighboring Chinese authorities on Mongol rights and privileges. But in the multiplicity of warring parties, the missionaries fully able and willing to defend their flocks, found their opportunity. By the 1920s, they had become power-brokers in Otoy banner, collecting pastureland and soda lake leasing fees for the grand duke, mediating the periodic quarrels of the vigilante forces and the local strongmen, and enjoying both the admiration and resentment which the successful exercise of power always brings.”¹⁵

Religious Incidents (jiao'an 教案) in Ordos

The reasons for Mongol hostility towards the Catholic mission in Ordos and the small number of conversions among the Mongols are complex. According to Wang Yi, within the context of the feudal-like rule of *jasays* and high lamas in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres, the commoners (*albatu*, “persons with duty”) and serfs (*unayan*

¹⁴ Zhu Jinfu, ed. 朱金甫編《清末教案（第三冊）》[Late Qing Jiao'an] (3), 1903 年 10 月 7 日（光緒二十九年八月十六日），（北京：中華書局，1998），頁 113-114。

¹⁵ Christopher P. Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), vol. 1, 8-11.

shabinar, "followers since childhood") were personally and hereditarily bonded to the nobility (*noyad*) or monastery through various duties, including military service, corvée labor, and taxes. They could not freely depart from the banner that they were born into or the monastery to which they belonged since childhood. Indeed, the Scheut missionaries in Chengchuan often complained about the continuous harassment of the Mongol Catholics by banner officials and lamas.¹⁶

Moreover, the practices and beliefs of Tibeto-Mongol Buddhism together with the Chinggisid worship posed a major obstacle to the spread of Christianity among the Ordos Mongols. The inexperience of missionaries not knowing Mongolian and Mongol customs, their European ethnocentrism and extraterritorial privileges, often leading to arrogance and contempt for local authorities, as well as the lack of financial resources further impeded their proselytizing efforts. But it often took some specific historical conjuncture to turn the incompatibility of religious practices and beliefs into that of violent actions. Therefore, Wang Yi suggested that it was the Han Chinese encroachment of Mongol pastures that ignited the conflict of 1878, in which the Üüsin nobles not only destroyed the Wulong mission, but also proceeded to expel the converts in Otoγ banner and occupy the pastureland along the border that was disputed between the two banners. As a result, the Scheut Fathers had to give up the foothold in Üüsin banner and organized instead a Han Chinese Catholic mission, Xiaomiaopan, within the Black Boundary land.¹⁷

Several studies in the PRC and Taiwan have focused on Western influence beyond the Great Wall from 1861 until 1909 based upon Qing archival evidence in the *Jiaowu jiao'an dang* 教務教案檔. For

¹⁶ Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 342-345 and Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters*, 415-416.

¹⁷ Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters*, 256.

instance, Huang Lisheng 黃麗生 analyzed 50 religious incidents and divided them into seven different categories: incidents related to land and rent (34%), return of churches (2%), threat of litigation (8%), levies for local cults (4%), opposition to missionary activities (4%), Boxer Uprising related incidents (14%), protection against hostility from local people following the Boxer Uprising (20%), and other incidents (14%).

In the opinion of Huang, Western influence in Inner Mongolia undermined both the authority of the Qing rulers among the Han and Mongol population, as well as the authority of traditional social relations during the late Qing dynasty and early Republic. Both Mongol and Han Chinese societies were affected, as Manchu authority gradually weakened in the area. Christianity not only introduced a new religion and religious leaders, but also inaugurated a new type of Western education and knowledge. Consequently, Western missionaries subverted the authority of the traditional Qing elite.¹⁸ Within this context, Wang Yi surmised that the Christian tenets of absolute loyalty to God and egalitarianism posed a threat to the feudal Qing establishment.

Father Chang Fei 常非 (1906-1968) and Bishop Wang Xueming 王學明 (1910-1997), both Han Chinese, blamed the ignorance of non-Christians about Catholic practices and beliefs and the bias of local officials towards the Catholics for the secluded living of Chinese and Mongol Catholics in southwestern Mongolia. However, in 2001 the

¹⁸ Huang Li-sheng 黃麗生, 〈從教案問題看西方對內蒙社會的衝擊〉 [A Study of the Impact of the West upon Inner Mongolia in the perspective of the Conflicts between the Christians and the non-Christians], 《臺灣師大歷史學報》 *Bulletin of Historical Research National Taiwan Normal University*, 第十六期 (中華民國 77 年 6 月 No.16, 1988).

PRC neurologist and professor at the Inner Mongolia University, Niu Jingzhong 牛敬忠 still criticized the foreign missionaries for causing the rift between Christians and non-Christians. Since this rupture was brought about by outside forces, traditional society was unable to mend the situation. According to Niu, Christian culture and customs are incompatible with Chinese traditional culture and lore in form and content. This cultural conflict determined that the mass character of the Yihetuan movement could not be reconciled with Christianity.¹⁹

On the eve of the Nationalist movement, in the eyes of many southern Mongol and Chinese non-Christians, the Catholic Mission was regarded as a haven for many landless farmers and destitute herdsmen. The research outline of Suiyuan-Hetao (*Suiyuan Hetao zhiyao* 綏遠河套治要) published in 1924 pointed out, "In the Hetao area the Church under the undeserved reputation of spreading religion fully carries out the forceful occupation of cultivated land. It links up with local bandits, coerces the government, engages in pettifoggery, and oppresses the non-Christian people. All the troops on garrison duty are only interested in protecting the Church and its institutions. Hence, most people flock to the Church's land to escape the burden of taxes and the fear of banditry. The Church profits from it; and takes advantage of the people's weaknesses in a variety of ways to enforce obedience. She not only most ardently seeks to offer remedies but also turns the Hetao into a foreign concession."²⁰

¹⁹ Niu Jingzhong 牛敬忠 et al., 〈近代綏遠地區民教民教衝突——也說義和團運動爆發的原因〉 [A Conflict between Christians and non-Christians in modern Suiyuan region—on the reasons for the Outburst of the Yihetuan Movement] in, Su Weizhi & Liu Tianlu, eds., 蘇位智、劉天路主編《義和團運動 100 周年國際學術討論會論文集》 *Symposium of the Boxer Movement* (Jinan: Shandong University Press 山東大學出版社, 2002), vol. 1, 591-592.

²⁰ Tuimür 忒莫勒, 《建國前內蒙古方志考述》 [A critical review of Inner Mongol Gazetteers before the founding of the People's Republic of China],

From this point of view, as well as seen from the Mongol manifesto of the Inner Mongol People's Revolutionary Party (IMPRP) in 1925, the Catholic missionaries were lumped together with the imperialists—including the Chinese money-lenders, officials, and warlords—as “foreign reactionaries,” that is social figures and forces, who through their own selfish ambition stood in the way of social progress. The “domestic reactionaries” were the Mongol dukes and princes. According to Christopher P. Atwood, many Mongols in Ordos opposed the missionaries not because they were against imperialism, but because as Mongols they supported the established Tibeto-Mongol Buddhist monastic community.²¹

The pressure of Chinese migration and nationalism in the Great Temple League of southern Ordos increased after the suppression of the Boxer Uprising and the introduction of New Policy Reforms in China proper and Mongolia. The Qing high official Yigu 貽穀 intimidated or bought off the League's ruling nobility, but the commoners, lamas, and minor gentry resorted to the vigilante forces. They agitated against the corrupt Mongol higher nobility, the powerful Chinese land-merchants and Yigu's opening-up of uncultivated pastures. As a result of the Yihetuan indemnities, the Church acquired large tracts of uncultivated land as mortgage.

with an introduction by Zhou Qingshu (Höhhhot: Inner Mongolia University Press 內蒙古大學出版社, 1998), 14.

²¹ Christopher Atwood, *Revolutionary Nationalist Mobilization in Inner Mongolia, 1925-1929* (PhD Thesis, Indiana University, 1994), vol. 1, 127.

1928—A Year of Significance

By 1928, the golden age for Boro Balyasun had come to an end; and for a few months the parish priest of the mission station, Scheut Father Florent Claeys (1871-1950), felt that the days of martyrdom might have returned. Two years earlier an army of "Qaračins" 喀喇沁 had come into Üüsin and Otoγ banners. Strictly speaking, the Qaračins was one of the sub-ethnic groups in the far-eastern part of Inner Mongolia, and one of the most accomplished both in education and in monopolizing positions in the Chinese Republic's Mongol bureaucracy. The Ordos Mongols, however, used Qaračin in a broader sense to mean any one from the eastern part of Inner Mongolia, where long intermixing with the Chinese had given the Mongols a strongly sinicized cast. This group of "Qaračins" came not in the name of Peking or the Chinese Republic, but in the name of the Soviets in Outer Mongolia, where they had also enrolled a fugitive Buddhist monk and vigilante leader from Ordos, Öljeijirgal (Shin-e Lama, 1866-1929), and made him commander of the Üüsin regiment of the Inner Mongolian Red Army.

Suddenly in the spring of 1928, the Qaračin propagandists again bullied the grand duke of Otoγ into making threats against the small colony of Catholic Mongols. The mission station's chief catechist assisted the agitators from within; the catechist held a bitter grudge against the commander of Boro Balyasun station's Christian militia, and the wily Qaračins had promised him the command should they come to power. With the catechist as go-between, the new powers in the land demanded a personal interview with Fr. Claeys. The chronicler of the mission described the encounter:

“The Reds, convinced that the mission could not sustain a vigorous attack, directed all their guns on Poro Balgason; they personally visited the mission and were even led into the quarters of the missionary. With an astounding and utterly shameless insolence they insulted the priest and demanded the immediate return of the mission’s lands and of all its arms.

A categorical refusal by Fr. Claeys petrified them with shock. With a fury like erupting volcanoes, they expressed in the face of the missionary all their hatred of the Church and religion, and threatened the Mongol catechists with prison and tortures, assuring them that they would soon come with a strong army and great cannons to pound the mission into powder.

At the same time, their ally, the lama Öljeijirgal, now holding full power as the military commander of Üüsin banner, demanded that the mission station return to his control those Mongols within its walls who originally hailed from Üüsin. Faced again with refusal, he joined with the Qaračins who dominated Otoγ for a combined attack on the mission station.”²²

On June 15, 1928, the red armies of Üüsin and Otoγ appeared near the sand dunes that lay just north of Boro Balyasun. Fr. Claeys had called on all his Mongol converts wandering on the plain tending their herds to gather together in a strong place. That very day, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the native Üüsin Mongols, led by Öljeijirgal, came to blows with the Qaračin strangers, and after a brief affray, the Üüsin troops decamped back to their home banner, while the Qaračins fled west, to Ningxia, never to return.

²² Van Hecken, *Les Missions chez les Mongols aux temps modernes*, 181-184.

As stated by Atwood, in early 20th-century China, the form that revolution took of state-building was obviously related to the paradoxical weakness and growing strength of the state. The late Qing state had been historically a very weak one, compared to those of Japan or Europe, at least if measured in terms of the government's take of the total national income.²³ The late Qing New Policies had given local and provincial governments all over China a new task of more effectively policing and culturally transforming their residents, at the same time it allowed, and even encouraged, the increased involvement of local private interests in designing the plan of these new reforms. The result, as Prasenjit Duara has shown, was a government afflicted with an ultimately toxic combination of growing intrusiveness, cultural illegitimacy, corruption, and dysfunctional decentralization.²⁴ These trends, together with the warlord conflicts and the spectacular rise in banditry, drove the more responsible gentry out of local government and encouraged armed "local bullies," entrepreneurs of government who took on, for a hefty commission, the unpopular task of transmitting to the villagers the increasingly heavy demands of local and provincial government.

The southern Mongol scholar Sodbilig Shirnuud 蘇德畢力格 noted that the development of Christianity in Inner Mongolia was related to the immigration wave from northern China during the late Qing dynasty and early Republic. His study is based upon an analysis of local Mongol archives. These sources show that the Ordos Mongols were willing to rent out land to Han Chinese farmers, but not to foreign missionaries. This is confirmed by the missionary sources. Following the suppression of the Boxer Uprising by Qing authorities, the missionaries in support of the destitute Catholics demanded

²³ Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes, 1911-1931*, vol. 2, 971.

²⁴ See Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1988).

indemnities in silver. These indemnities were mainly redeemed with large tracts of Mongol uncultivated land as mortgage. Consequently, Sodbilig argues that the missionaries were instrumental in the conversion of these Mongol pasturelands into Chinese agricultural land and the transfer of jurisdiction from the Mongol banners of the Great Temple League to the adjacent Han counties of Shaanxi province.²⁵

However, on April 18, 1934, the Flemish Scheut Father Antoon Mostaert (nom-un baysi Tiyen 田清波, 1881-1971) responded to a defamatory article published in the *China Weekly Review* of 7 April 1934: “Where Imperialism Penetrates through the Church” by C.Y.W. Meng. On the one hand, Mostaert acknowledged that “the mission allowed Chinese farmers to settle on originally Mongol land and moreover it worked—in modest measure, it is true, but efficiently—towards the realization of the National Government’s plan, aiming at the Chinese colonization of Mongolia.” On the other hand, he argued that “if the mission was to cede these plots of land again, they should return them not to the Chinese authorities but to the Mongol banner, from which the mission bought [leased] them.”²⁶

In 1935, the influential lama or Living Buddha Ĵamyang Šarab 章文軒 (1887-1946) from Aral-yin sume was able to unite the *duyuyilang* in Otoγ banner. He also redeemed most of the Church

²⁵ Sude Bilige (Sodbilig Shirnuud) 蘇德畢力格, 〈天主教會與清末鄂爾多斯地區蒙旗土地關係的變遷〉[Land Issues between the Catholic Church and the Ordos Mongol Banner], in Temur Temule, ed., 特木勒編《多元族群與中西文化交流：基於中西文獻的新研究》[Multi Ethnic Groups and Sino-Western Cultural Exchange: Based upon New Research of Sino-Western Historical Materials] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press 上海人民出版社, 2010), 162-177. See also Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 351-352.

²⁶ See Patrick Taveirne, “Antoine Mostaert and the Issue of the Catholic Mission’s Property in Ordos” in K. Sagaster, ed., *Antoine Mostaert (1881-1971): CICM Missionary and Scholar*, (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, K.U. Leuven, 1999), vol. 1, 145-175.

indemnity land in Otoγ banner and the Catholic Church agreed to pay the banner an annual tax of 1,000 ounces of silver.²⁷

Father Antoon Mostaert and the Cultural Knot

Scheut Father Antoon Mostaert belonged to a generation of missionaries who came to China after 1900. Probably due to growing Chinese and Mongolian nationalism, these missionaries gradually broke away from the Eurocentric contempt for Chinese and Mongolian culture and religion that had permeated Western attitudes—Protestant as well as Catholic—toward Mongols and Han Chinese in the 19th century.

Attitudes and beliefs do change over time. One example is the unique worship of the “wind-horse” (祿馬杆, in Urdu dialect *k’ī-mori*) prayer-flags by the Ordos Mongols. The first Scheut missionaries considered these to be “superstitious flags” and demanded that Catholics abolish them. Yang Haiying 楊海英 pointed out that non-Christian neighbors considered the Mongol Christians without *k’ī-mori* heretics.²⁸ Similar to the prayer wheel, the wind-horse prayer-flag is also a Tibetan Buddhist symbol. The attitude of the Scheut Fathers towards these *k’ī-mori* prayer-flags changed over the years. One of the last Scheut missionaries in Ordos, Fr. Frans Maertens (1916-1987) was inclined to accept the *k’ī-mori* prayer-flags. But Yang does not mention the fact that Catholic converts also had to destroy the Buddhist shrine

²⁷ Yu Zhilong 余志龍、Li Juyi 李巨義編《鄂托克前旗志 *Etuoke qianqi zhi*》[Otoγ Front banner Gazetteer] (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia People’s Publishing House 內蒙古人民出版社 1995), 163; and Hecken, *Les Missions chez les Mongols aux temps modernes*, 186-190.

²⁸ Yang, “Catholicism in the Ordos Today. Focusing on the life story of Rev. Joseph and his family,” vol. 1, 205-223.

(idols) in their dwelling, and were not allowed to participate in the seasonal Buddhist festivities, such as the annual sacrificial *oboγa* (ritual cairn) festival. The Mongol Catholics abolished the offerings of sacrifice to the fire deity and the ancestors, respectively on the 24th and 30th of the 12th moon. In 1930-32, Ĵamyang Šarab forced all Mongol Catholics to establish the wind-horse prayer-flags and participate in the annual cairn (*oboγa*) ritual.

In 1956, Mostaert published his article: “Matériaux ethnographiques relatifs aux Mongols Ordos” in the *Central Asiatic Journal*, while he stayed at Missionhurst in Arlington, Virginia. For his article he borrowed some materials from Fr. Braam’s unpublished manuscript “Folklore Ordos,” which Braam had written with the assistance of Bishop Alfons Bermyn (1853-1915), Frs. Mostaert and Jozef Van Oost (1877-1969) in 1908-1909. A list of questions compiled by the editors of the ethnographic journal *Anthropos* served as a guide in organizing these materials. In 1906, SVD Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954) had founded this journal in Vienna. The manuscript was sent to *Anthropos*, but it was not accepted for publication. In 1911, Braam and Van Oost published parts of this ethnography in the French missionary journal *Missions Catholiques* (Lyon) under the title: “Au Pays des Ortos.” A similar study by Van Oost, *Au pays des Ortos (Mongolie)* was published in Paris in 1932. These ethnographic materials offer us a view of southern Ordos Mongol society through the lens of the Scheut missionaries towards the end of the Qing period.

In 1908, Mostaert wrote that his main source for the study of Tibetan Buddhism was Laurence Austine Waddell, *Lhasa and its Mysteries* (1904). Fr. Braam started to study Buddhism in 1911. He did not mention the work of Waddell, but he had read two Western books on the subject: Paul Labbé’s *Le lama en Sibérie* and the French translation of Albert Grünwedel’s 1900 work *Mythologie des*

Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei. Führer durch die Lamaistische Sammlung des Fürsten E. Uchtomskij, published in Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus and Paris, Hachette. In Braam's manuscript Part 2, Chapter 21 on religious practices one finds a rudimentary description of Tibetan Buddhism as practiced in Southern Ordos.²⁹ In the 1920s Van Oost wrote a chapter on Buddhism in his *Au pays des Ortos (Mongolie)*, in which he criticized lamas for their lack of education and moral degeneration. At the same time, he noted the religious similarities between Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity and the pervasive influence of the lamas in Ordos Mongol society.

Mostaert did not really study Buddhism in great depth, since he wanted to focus on the study of the Mongolian language and not on Tibetan or Sanskrit. In his article "Matériaux ethnographiques relatifs aux Mongols Ordos" he simply avoids the subject by saying that it is well known. Scheut missionaries in Southern Mongolia did not develop a dialogical relationship with the Tibetan Buddhist monastic community like the Norwegian Lutheran missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877-1952) in China.

Their collections of southern Ordos' folktales and songs, as well as observations on customs and taboos related to birth, marriage, illness, death and daily life have been widely used by linguists, anthropologists, sociologists and historians. A comparison between Mostaert's ethnographical notes (1956) and the Folklore Ordos manuscript (1908) shows how Mostaert gradually removed the pejorative remarks by missionaries. Mostaert, like his confreres, had no formal training either as an anthropologist or ethnologist, but his knowledge of the Mongolian spoken and written language and his

²⁹ This unpublished manuscript *Folklore Studies* is now kept in the archives of CICM-Scheut at KADOC-KU Leuven, 6529.

long-term exposure to Mongol daily life made him into an ethnographer, historian and linguist. He wrote: “Since linguistics, history and folklore are closely related and complement each other, I had to pay attention to the history and folklore of the Ordos during my linguistic studies.” For Mostaert, the key to a better understanding of Mongolian culture and religion remained the study of the local spoken and written language.

Following the confiscation of Mission/Church land by the local authorities in 1925, Mostaert left the Mongol mission of Boro Balyasun to continue his Mongol studies in Peking. In 1929 the Scheut Father Gaspar Schotte (1881-1944) wrote to Archbishop Celso Costantini (剛恒毅 1876-1958): “His [Mostaert’s] health forced him to leave the mission of Poro Balgaso [Boro Balyasun], he suffered from neurasthenia with phobia which made him fear to be alone at his mission station and having to bear responsibilities.”³⁰

Later on, Mostaert published his most important works such as *Textes oraux ordos, recueillis et publiés avec introduction, notes morphologiques, commentaires et glossaire* (1937) and *Dictionnaire Ordos* (1941-1944) at the newly established Fugen Catholic University 天主教輔仁大學 in Beijing.³¹

³⁰ CEP (SCPF) Archives, NS 1929-1931, Vol. 1007, File 251-257.

³¹ CEP Archives, NS 1926-1928, Vol. 904, File 296-297. Taveirne, “Antoine Mostaert and the Issue of the Catholic Mission’s Property in Ordos,” vol. 1, 145-175; and Taveirne, “Eurasian Cultural Encounters beyond the Great Wall: the Case of Inner Mongolia in the late Qing and early Republican Era” in Wu Xiaoxin, ed., 吳小新編, 《遠方敘事：中國基督宗教研究的視角方法與趨勢》 [*Narratives from the Hinterland: Perspectives, Methodologies and Trends in the Study of Christianity in China*] (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press 廣西師範大學出版社, 2014), 363-366.

From a Foreign Mission towards a Local Church

In Southern Mongolia, the CICM missionary medical, educational and social activities became much more urban centered, since most Church agricultural land was confiscated by the Warlords and the Republican government (since 1927).³² In 1929, in a confidential letter to Archbishop Celso Costantini, Scheut Father Gaspar Schotte wrote:

Many missionaries that I met during my visit in 1926 feared the difficulties of this work [a new Mongol mission in Ulaanbaatar], also I believe one should not start the conversion of the Mongols like one has done for the conversion of the Chinese: occupying as many stations as possible by dispersing the missionaries; but one should adopt a method more appropriate to the circumstances and the life of the Mongols.

Instead of dispersing and isolating the missionaries, one would better do by starting in the capital or its vicinities, a house where the missionaries would live in community, to dedicate themselves from the start to charitable works that will make them accepted and desired, like dispensaries, medical care and the distribution of medicines, a clinic; like works of instruction and education that young Mongols seem to desire for their utility. To these charitable works one would add the example of Christian life with the decorum of the liturgy and prayers in common, and the seeds of the word of

³² Taveirne, “Antoine Mostaert and the Issue of the Catholic Mission’s Property in Ordos,” vol.1, 145-175; and Liu Qingyu 劉青瑜 《近代以來天主教傳教士在內蒙古的社會活動及其影響 (1865-1950)》 [*On Activities and Influences of Catholic Missionaries in Inner Mongolia in Modern Times (1865-1950)*]. (PhD Dissertation, Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University 內蒙古大學, 2008).

God would be sown in all directions of the wind, through the grace of God obtained by the force of prayers and sacrifices they would certainly sooner or later blossom and bear fruit.

Life in community, the occupation with these works will avoid in part the dangers of leisure and discouragement in a mission without tangible success, the danger for Christian life and piety within the environment of a population with easy and dangerous habits.

If a first foundation of this type gives satisfaction, one could multiply it in different centers, even at a long distance from each other.

At the proper time one will call religious Sisters for similar works for females. Because of the weak density of a floating and nomadic population, evangelization must be done by creating centers where the public cult is practiced and where the inhabitants will join at certain occasions and festivals, in the manner religious life actually manifests itself in these nomadic countries. In order to test this kind of apostolic method I think it will be indispensable to call contemplative orders but I think that our Congregation will be up to the task to undertake this work with possible success through the grace of God.³³

In 1933, the vicar apostolic of Ningxia, Bishop Gaspar Schotte introduced a school curriculum of secular subjects exclusively in Mongolian, a Mongol printing press and a dispensary at Boro Balyasun. His initial ideas about the establishment of missionary or contemplative communities among the Mongols were not realized. Yet,

³³ My translation from the French original. CEP Archives, NS 1929-1931, Vol. 1007, File 251-257, Rome.

the development of a local Mongol clergy was brought to fruition. In 1937, Titular Archbishop Mario Zanin (蔡寧 1890-1958), in the presence of Fr. Mostaert, ordained Ma Yuanmu 馬元牧 (Möngkejirgal, d. 1979), a graduate from the CICM regional seminary in Datong 大同, Shanxi province, and ethnic Mongol Catholic from Boro Balyasun. His brother Joseph Ma Zhongmu 馬仲牧 (Tegüsbilig, 1919-) was ordained a priest in Sanshenggong 三盛公 (Sandaohé) in 1947 and clandestinely consecrated bishop in 1984.³⁴

Cross-Cultural Encounters in History

Whenever two or more objects collide and come into contact with each other, they always leave some traces on each other, like a scratch on a wall. This is true for the physical as well as the ideological or cultural spheres. Perhaps we should look at the history of Sino-Mongol encounters and Catholic missionary endeavours in Ordos as a textile. Nicolas Standaert used the metaphor of texturing cloth and the paradigm of interaction to interpret the history of Sino-Western cultural encounters in 17th century Ming China. Also the Church and Mission history beyond the Great Wall in late 19th and early 20th century Qing and Republican Ordos could be described with the help of the image of texturing cloth.

“The image of weaving has the advantage of insisting on the complexity of the diffusion, on how borrowing is often like the interweaving of many different threads and fibres. [...] The metaphor

³⁴ Yang, “Catholicism in the Ordos Today. Focusing on the life story of Rev. Joseph and his family,” vol. 1, 205-223; and Philip Borla, ed., *The Mongols and the Catholic Church* (Ulaanbaatar: Antoon Mostaert Center for Mongolian Studies, 2017).

of the texture allows us to look at what happens to specific fibres, but also to look at the usage, meaning, form and function of the textile as a whole. It also helps us to understand how there can be very different reactions at the same time, within the same person, or within the same geographical setting, or the same social group. [...] These can all coexist within the same textile.”³⁵

The Ordos situation during the late Qing and early Republican era was far more complicated with several cultures interacting, rather than simply Sino-Western or Sino-Mongol cross-cultural contacts. The American Presbyterian historian of mission, Stanley H. Skreslet proposed a more missionary and theological perspective, namely, the image of a river ecosystem, but it follows the same line and supplements the image of textiles.³⁶ So we may also imagine the history of cross-cultural exchanges beyond the Great Wall in Ordos as a riverine system, a great flow of ideas, events, personalities, and human encounters taking place over time. This riverine system is a kind of huge interconnected ecosystem with many different micro-environments.

According to Eugene Chen Eoyang 歐陽楨, from the perspective of comparative literature, cross-cultural exchanges have developed in two stages.³⁷ Initially, cross-cultural interactions have been two people looking at each other but each through the intermediary of a one-way mirror. The idea of a one-way mirror is that from one side, it acts like a

³⁵ Nicolas Standaert, SJ, “Christianity in Late Ming and Early Qing China as a Case of Cultural Transmission” in S. Uhalley Jr – Xiaoxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity. Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2001), 86-116.

³⁶ Stanley H. Skreslet, “Thinking Missiologically about the History of Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31:2 (2007): 64.

³⁷ See Eugene Chen Eoyang, *Two-Way Mirrors: Cross Cultural Studies in Glocalization* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

mirror and is reflecting, but from the other side, the glass is transparent: the subject in front of the mirror can be viewed by someone unseen. However, the subject could not see beyond the mirror. Subsequently, there developed the idea of the two-way mirrors, meaning that in focusing on the other reveals as much about the self. It is like looking at oneself at the shop window, seeing one's own reflection as well as the objects (or persons) behind the glass.

Nowadays, some historians focus their study of cultural contacts on the mirror itself, the in-betweenness 之間 and the periphery/frontier (邊緣/邊疆, *jecen* in Manchu) seen as center or middle ground (Mark Elliott, Richard White), which opens up new perspectives for the study of cross-cultural exchanges in the Sino-Mongol hinterland. In the opinion of Wang Yi, "it is more fruitful to conceptualize the frontier as a multiplicity of overlapping and intersecting boundaries: geographical, ecological, linguistic, ethno-cultural, ecclesiastic, and administrative. The existence of these crisscrossing boundaries in turn opens grey areas in which the smart and bold actors thrive. The Scheut Fathers were just such actors. Their advance into Mongolia was punctuated by events in the international arena as well as within the Qing Empire itself."³⁸

³⁸ Wang, *Transforming the Frontier*, 375. See also Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Mark Elliott, "Frontier Stories: Periphery as Center in Qing History," *Frontiers of History in China* 2014, 9(3): 336–360.

〔摘要〕由於歷史、地理、人力物力等資源的限制，大部分重要的學術活動和研討成果都集中在北京，上海等大都會或主要城市的重點大學和院校。故此，檔案資料和研究資源與這些地區密切相關。然而，基督宗教的存在和發展，特別是中國天主教會，並不局限於這些地方。

本文將以案例研究的方式，探討華北周邊地區從清末到民國時代的一個蒙古天主教小社區的歷史發展。它將側重於現有的多元文化檔案資料，這些資源對《天主教在中國的歷史》的寫作的相關性和局限性。

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