



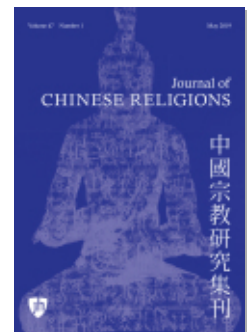
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*Konversion zum Christentum in der modernen chinesischen
Literatur* by Barbara Hoster (review)

Andrea Riemenschnitter

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The sections of Choi's book on spirits and the afterlife (approximately half the book) would have benefited from a more extensive engagement with other work on the topic. She cites Song scholarship by Patricia Ebrey, Daniel Gardner, and Dieter Kuhn, but does not mention relevant pieces such as Thomas Wilson's "Spirits and the Soul in Confucian Ritual Discourse" or Joseph Adler's "Varieties of Spiritual Experience: *Shen* in Neo-Confucian Discourse."¹ Outside of scholarship on the Song, Lee Dian Rainey's 1990 dissertation, "Life After Death: Some Early Confucian Views" (University of Toronto)² would also complicate Choi's claim that agnosticism was the "typical" Confucian position (p. 115 see also 124, 146, 195). These sources, and a robust engagement with them, would have made Choi's book more relevant to scholars working on Confucianism or Chinese religion before or after the eleventh century. Nonetheless, *Death Rituals and Politics in Northern Song China* makes a significant contribution in understanding the debates and context in the eleventh century that contributed to the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the century that followed.

MICHAEL D.K. ING
Indiana University

BARBARA HOSTER, *Konversion zum Christentum in der modernen chinesischen Literatur. Su Xuelins Roman Jixin (Dornenherz, 1929)*. Gossenberg: Ostasien Verlag, 2017. vi, 322 pp. €35.80 (pb). ISBN: 978-3-946114-30-7

Barbara Hoster's Ph.D. dissertation focuses on the conversion to Catholicism in Su Xuelin's 蘇雪林 (1897–1999) novel *Jixin* 棘心. After an introduction to the applied methods and theories and a review of the research her study is built on, a chapter on the author and her social environment offers insights into the specific historical moment that marks the birth of the modern woman writer as a social type. Hoster explains that Su was born into an illustrious family of literati officials who originally came from Anhui Province. Her grandfather Su Jinxia 蘇錦霞 was the last one in her paternal family to act as imperial magistrate. By that time, the family already lived in Rui'an County 瑞安, Zhejiang Province 浙江. The lineage stems directly from Song dynasty genius poet Su Dongpo's 蘇東坡 younger brother Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112), a prolific poet and essayist in his own right. Su Xuelin's mother Du Duoni 杜躲妮 also had an elite family background and actively supported her daughter's wish to receive higher education. Her quest for knowledge brought the adolescent girl to various private, public, and missionary institutions, before she continued her studies at Anhui First Women's Pedagogical University. Convinced that educated women had to play a crucial role in the modernization of China, Su allied with

¹ Thomas Wilson, "Spirits and the Soul in Confucian Ritual Discourse," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 42, no. 2 (2014): 185–212; Joseph Adler, "Varieties of Spiritual Experience: *Shen* in Neo-Confucian Discourse," in *Confucian Spirituality*, ed. Wei-ming Tu and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 120–148. See also Joseph Adler, "Zhu Xi's Spiritual Practice as the Basis of his Central Philosophical Concepts," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2008): 57–79.

² Lee Dian Rainey, "Life After Death: Some Early Confucian Views" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1990).

other progressive women who later became successful academics and writers like herself. Although she rejected some of its representatives' leftist thought, especially communism, the ideas of the May Fourth reform movement left a deep imprint on her personality.

Su Xuelin served as an elementary school teacher before she secretly left the country heading for the Institut Franco-chinois in France. Reaching Lyon in 1921, she began the study of fine arts, but within the three and a half years of her stay in Europe she could not obtain a degree. During this period of time, her mother got seriously ill, which tormented the young woman with feelings of guilt and remorse. Moreover, she was upset by her family's expectations that she return to China and accede to an arranged marriage. Due to health problems arguably caused by the emotional turmoil, Su spent several months in a Swiss sanatorium at Lake Lemman. Because the region's beautiful, soothing landscape looms large in both her diaries and her novel *Jixin*, several contemporary critics believed that the core concern of her writings was the aesthetic appreciation of nature.

However, Hoster clarifies in the three chapters following the biographical introduction that in her view the novel's conversion narrative constitutes the red thread, which is employed as a formula for the narrator's troubled coming of age. The adolescent girl's trials and tribulations were not only caused by her conservative family's expectations, which in many ways ran counter to her own efforts to become a new woman. In a section on national salvation (pp. 82–84) in the third chapter, Hoster explains that Su was moreover deeply affected by the lack of solutions for China's crisis and actively searched for new ideas that could spur the reform of the traditional Chinese value system, as can be observed from the in-depth discussions of a broad range of philosophical treatises and religious traditions in the novel.

The first edition of *Jixin* was published in 1929, only a few years after her return from Europe to China. At that time, Su and her arranged fiancé had gotten married despite her initial misgivings. However, by the time when the second revised version appeared in 1957, the author, while never separating on paper from her husband, had established her own independent household, earned her living as an academic teacher and prolific writer and, upon the founding of the People's Republic of China, left for Taiwan. While she was productive in both her academic publishing and belletristic writing throughout her life, *Jixin* remained the only long fictional text she ever presented to her audience. Like the author, *Jixin*'s female protagonist Du Xingqiu 杜醒秋 leaves the country to study in France, where she loses herself in an existential crisis conjuring up feelings of spiritual homelessness, erotic temptation, anxiety, guilt, and anger. Attracted by her two French mentors' strong religious belief, she starts critically to rehearse her own country's religious traditions, only to find all of them lacking in both aesthetic appeal and moral rigor as compared to her perception of the Europeans' Christian legacy. In her eyes, the French churches are more beautiful than Chinese temples, the Christian monks and nuns live more ascetic lives than their Asian counterparts, and European culture is more advanced due to the superior ethical attitude of its citizens. Yet, the protagonist's deeply rooted May Fourth rationalism, in combination with her Chinese classmates' equally uncompromising antireligious attitude, do not allow for an easy conversion. After she has joined the Catholic community, her heart still aches for peace and consolation. Hoster argues that the novel's second edition and autobiographical materials clarify that with time Su Xuelin's initial enthusiasm for the Western model weakened considerably, as she turned towards a syncretic approach.

Most critics highlight Su Xuelin's deep attachment to her mother and her love of nature, arguing that these two constants constitute the key to the autobiographical

novel. Barbara Hoster does not fundamentally disagree with these views but suggests that the novel's detailed descriptions of a female protagonist's spiritual quest and conversion to Catholicism deserve more analytical attention than hitherto attempted. Applying Lewis Rambo's³ processual model of conversion, which she explains comprehensively in the book's fourth chapter, her close reading of *Jixin* unveils a narrative structure of emotional uprootedness, bodily temptations, moral incertitude, and intellectual formation. In her view, this structure turns the novel into a prototypical religious conversion narrative.

With equal right one may argue, however, that it is a literary coming-of-age story clad in the vocabulary of religious awakening. Without mentioning the term *Bildungsroman*—one of the great literary themes of the May Fourth movement—Hoster supports the latter reading by contextualizing *Jixin* with other pertinent fictional projects, such as Buddhist writer Su Manshu's 蘇曼殊 oeuvre. In the same vein, Hoster comments on Su Xuelin's preface to the second edition, where the author openly declares that her novel deals with the intellectual formation of a young woman in an epoch of political upheaval. In particular, Su indicates the cataclysms and changes in family, society, the nation, and the world that, according to her, are mirrored in the troubles, yearnings, and hopes of contemporary intellectuals (p. 250). Indeed, the fictional protagonist Du Xingqiu is a typical representative of the tragic persona in an epoch of transition, the novel's newly written second chapter states (p. 251). Hence, Hoster offers evidence that, arguably more distinctly in the second edition than in the original text, the author locates her fictional alter ego's narrow escape from her adolescent emotional turmoil—involving sickness and even suicidal thoughts—in her own writer's self-fashioning. She finds further traces that caution against an unambiguous Catholic conversion narrative by indicating the allusion to an Islamic trope of determination when it comes to the protagonist's unfaltering struggle for higher education. When the protagonist Xingqiu threatens to commit suicide should her family not allow her to attend school in the provincial capital, her determination is compared with Mohammed's resolute spirit when he founded a new religion (p. 252).

Hoster concludes her insightful analysis by suggesting that the earlier version of *Jixin* can best be described as an individual "odyssée spirituelle" of the protagonist, whereas the later edition looks more like a fictional account of the quest for a new world view in an ideologically and politically divided Chinese nation. What is common to the successive processes of doubts and conversion in both the novel and the autobiographical writings by the same author is a focus on confessions. Hence, the difficult transition from being a female and therefore largely voiceless member of a privileged traditional household to becoming a modern, self-determined woman who claims her right to speak her mind and reinvent herself is enacted in internalized, tumultuous clashes of different secular and religious world views.

Anyone interested in understanding how this generation of brave young intellectuals delved headlong into the troubled waters of a gargantuan cultural crisis in order to bring about the Chinese nation's rejuvenation – or shall we say survival?—should find in Hoster's book much insight that reaches beyond our common knowledge about this period. This is especially true with respect to those writers who did not subscribe to the mainstream leftist, revolutionary May Fourth narrative, but rather aimed at a more conciliatory solution. With her careful, theory-based deep reading of Su's novel, Hoster brings

³ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993).

to the fore a rather unique literary approach to a woman's coming of age, illuminates the ideological crisis of early modern China, and offers a model for comparison with crisis, conversion, and confession narratives from other times and places.

ANDREA RIEMENSCHNITTER
University of Zurich

FABIENNE JAGO, ed., *The Hybridity of Buddhism: Contemporary Encounters between Tibetan and Chinese Traditions in Taiwan and the Mainland*. Études thématiques 29. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2018. 236 pp. €40.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-85539-149-6

This volume brings together eight papers generated from the project "Practices of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan," supported by the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchanges from 2012–2015. The chapters each offer insight into a different aspect of the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, and in some cases in the Kham Tibetan area within the PRC. This represents an important step forward in the scholarship on this important topic; previous works in English can be counted on one hand, with only a little more in Chinese or French.

This volume is not only the first to collect the work of scholars focusing specifically on Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, but it also moves forward the small but growing field of scholarship on the interactions between Tibetan Buddhism and the broader Chinese-speaking world. Furthermore, many of the chapters address major themes of interest to a wide audience of scholars and more general readers with interests in Tibetan, Chinese, and Global Buddhism, as well as contemporary dynamics of religion more generally. These include: transnationalism, ecumenicalism, and the tensions between seeking legitimacy through traditional transmission and efforts at religious reconstruction and innovation.

The volume takes the form of a collection of detailed, but narrow and stand-alone, case studies, rather than a definitive introduction to the current development of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, or a sustained discussion of those larger themes. Therefore, I expect that the audience for the volume will be limited to specialists already working in the intersection between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese/Taiwanese religion. Scholars may further pick and choose among the articles according to their specific interests. The following section sketches each chapter, then the review concludes with some further thoughts on the potential and limitations of the volume.

Chapter 1, by Cécile Campergue, provides an overview of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan based on a survey of lay participants and visits to temples in 2013 and 2014. It covers a variety of topics, from demographic characteristics of lay participants to political, cultural, and religious dimensions of lay people's engagement with Tibetan Buddhism and of centers themselves. Interpretation of findings is primarily done with reference to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. This chapter is in French, the only non-English chapter in the volume.

Sarah E. Frazier's chapter on the changing architecture of Tibetan Buddhist temples in Taiwan offers the only other chapter with a somewhat broad reach. Using six Tibetan Buddhist temples across the island as examples, it identifies a major shift around 1997 with the appearance of much more elaborate and "traditional" Tibetan Buddhist architecture. She argues that this effort to construct visible Tibetan Buddhist "holy lands" is motivated