

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/BSO>

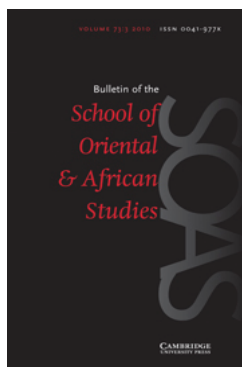
Additional services for *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



William T. Rowe: *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing*. iv, 360 pp. Cambridge, MA. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. £25.95. ISBN 978 0 674 03612 3.

Andrea Janku

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies / Volume 73 / Issue 03 / October 2010, pp 562 - 564

DOI: 10.1017/S0041977X10000613, Published online: 29 October 2010

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0041977X10000613

How to cite this article:

Andrea Janku (2010). Review of William T. Rowe 'China's Last Empire: The Great Qing' Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 73, pp 562-564
doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000613

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

new “Nestorian” inscription from Luoyang, the abbot of the monastery who has the monk-name of Xuanying had the surname of Mi (Persian for Mihr or Mithra) and his executive with an identical monk-name had the surname of Kang – both surnames being typical of Sogdian merchants. This new information certainly underscores the Iranian rather than the “Roman” links of the Church of the East in the Tang period. On this see Li Tang, “A preliminary study on the Jingjiao inscription of Luoyang: text analysis, commentary and English translation”, in D. W. Winkler and Li Tang (eds), *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters*, *Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica* Vol. 1 (Vienna and Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 109–132.

For a study of the early history of the Church of the East in China, Kordosis demonstrates a good knowledge of publications in European languages, especially of works by Paul Pelliot and Antonino Forte. He shows very little awareness, however, of important publications by Lin Wushu and many other Chinese scholars which are now listed in the bibliography section of the first volume of the proceedings of a regular tri-annual international symposium held at Salzburg in 2004: R. Malek and P. Hofrichter (eds), *Jingjiao, The Church of the East in China and Central Asia, Collectanea Serica* (Bonn: Sankt Augustin, 2006).

The Sinologist will be baffled by the many inconsistencies in transliteration of Chinese proper names and terms in Kordosis’ book, not just in citations of works of Western (especially French) scholars who use non-standard systems but in the author’s own text. The key place name *Da Qin* (Wade Giles: *Ta Ch’in*), for instance, is spelt in two different ways on two different pages (p. 116 and p. 117). In an age when most computers can handle Chinese fonts with ease, there is absolutely no excuse for Chinese characters being printed upside down as on p. 59, note 265 and p. 60, line 3 of the book.

Samuel N. C. Lieu

WILLIAM T. ROWE:

China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing.

iv, 360 pp. Cambridge, MA. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. £25.95. ISBN 978 0 674 03612 3.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000613

Everybody looking for a reliable and up-to-date introduction to Qing history will be well served with this highly welcome book by one of the doyens of the field. Rowe leads his readers through a solid chronological sequence of chapters on “Conquest”, “Governance”, “High Qing”, “Society”, “Commerce”, “Crises”, “Rebellion”, “Restoration”, “Imperialism” and “Revolution”. His explicit aim is “to provide a current counterpart” (p. 345) to Frederic Wakeman’s classic *The Fall of Imperial China* (1975), which he does by telling the familiar story from a perspective that is very much informed by what has become known as the New Qing History. Interestingly, despite the incorporation of these new insights into the character of Qing rule in China, with his choice of title (*China’s Last Empire*) Rowe is still quite close to the “failure” narrative implicit in Wakeman’s title (“the fall . . .”). A much stronger case could have been made by calling the book “China’s early modern empire”, which is what it is really about. On the surface Rowe, who was among the first to adopt the concept of early modernity to reframe the way we look at Chinese history, seems now reluctant fully to endorse the adoption of a concept

which has been heavily criticized, not least by Frederic Wakeman himself, as it “seemed to force onto China a set of Western-inspired expectations” on which “the verdict . . . is still out” (p. 5). Throughout the book, however, he clearly portrays the Qing as a “multinational, universal empire of a distinctively early modern Eurasian type” (p. 284). Yet at the same time, by identifying the “dynastic transition of 1644” as the beginning of China’s early modernity (p. 10), he also returns to the dynastic structure of Chinese history, to which the concept of “late imperial” was once proposed as an alternative approach. Although it is clear that the seventeenth century sticks out as a major turning point not only in Chinese but in world history, the fact that Manchu rule in China was akin to other early modern empires does not necessarily have to mean that whatever we may associate with early modernity in China started with the foundation of the Qing dynasty. If we are to criticize the teleology implicit in the term, its adoption in general would have to be questioned and not its application to the Chinese case.

The book starts with a concise introduction to the historiography of the Qing and its three “revisionist turns”: a social history turn, involving a “gradual discarding of the failure narrative of Qing history” (p. 4); the Inner Asian turn with its focus on racial or ethnic identities, which was the basis of the New Qing History; and, partially building on the former, the Eurasian turn, which is about locating the Qing within a new context of world and environmental history. While the focus on these aspects makes for a solid and convincing account, one wonders what a stronger emphasis on the gender approach, which Rowe calls “one of the most fruitful and exciting developments in Chinese historiography during the past several decades” (p. 5) would have done to it.

The ten main chapters are a very readable account of Qing history, with some parts of it clearly linked to earlier developments under the Ming. One example is the growing importance of commerce and global trade. Another is the spread of medical knowledge that first gained momentum in Ming times, and, most importantly, demographic growth that “resumed” after the seventeenth-century crisis (p. 91). The consequences were large-scale migration, “land hunger” (p. 92) and agricultural colonization on both the popular and the official level, spurring ecological decay as well as ethnic conflict. Paralleling these developments was the imperialist expansion of the Qing. While the reader may be surprised to learn how well the Qing did in playing “the imperialist game” (p. 71), it is obvious that they did less well in the other variant of the game that started in “April 1895” (p. 233). In this account the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–95 still forms the major watershed in China’s modern history.

This masterful synthesis of the most recent scholarship in the field should finally help put an end to some persistent myths, such as that of China’s stagnation when it was in fact one of the most important motors of the global economy, its animosity towards commerce and merchants when the state’s commitment to the livelihood of the people meant official support of the commercial economy, and the overwhelming power of a peaceful process of Sinicization when actually ethnic issues, including often violent conflict in some cases amounting to ethnic cleansing, dominated Qing politics. Likewise, to see the period of the *xinzheng* or New Policies reforms of the first decade of the twentieth century as a “truly new beginning” (p. 286), and to conceive of the rise of the concept of “public” as a “disguised form of state expansion” and thus another achievement of the late Qing empire that helped to form the basis of the modern Chinese state, should help to put an end to the failure narrative that dominated Qing historiography in the twentieth century. This book may not be as innovative in its approach as Pamela Crossley’s *The Wobbling Pivot* (2010), but it will definitely belong

to the must-read introductions for every student of Qing and early modern Chinese history.

Andrea Janku

R. G. TIEDEMANN:

Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century.

xvii, 338 pp. New York: M. E. Sharpe, for Ricci Institute for Chinese–Western Cultural History, 2009. £103.50. ISBN 978 0 7656 1808 5.

XIAOXIN WU (ed.):

Christianity in China: A Scholar's Guide to Resources in the Libraries and Archives of the United States.

(Second edition.). lxii, 798 pp. New York: M. E. Sharpe, for Ricci Institute for Chinese–Western Cultural History, 2009. £206.50. ISBN 978 1563243370.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000625

It is with the very greatest of pleasure that it is now possible to greet the appearance of a long expected volume of single-handed bibliographical scholarship of the very highest order, as well as the reappearance of a new edition of a collaborative work that has already proven its value in opening up research into the history of Christian missions in China. The first of these works, by Gary Tiedemann, admittedly puts into print but a fraction of the bibliographical knowledge concerning these missions for which the author is famous amongst his colleagues, but it does strikingly fulfil a prophecy made by the late Denis Twitchett when many years ago this reviewer first told him that Gary was to join the department where he himself had taught at one time: “He is the sort of person from whom nothing will be heard for many years, and then in retirement he will publish a bibliography that everyone will use”. In British academic life the penalties for not being heard from have since become increasingly steep, so it does immense tribute to Gary Tiedemann’s tenacity of purpose and regard only for the highest standards that nothing has been sacrificed here, and no corners cut, so that this complex and detailed work is now published not simply as a checklist of missionary organizations but as a true research guide, fully equipped with all the means necessary to help any scholar embarking on the study of the writings associated with these organizations.

Although the Russian Orthodox missions, and support and auxiliary Catholic and Protestant organizations, such as the Medical Missionary Society, are only dealt with briefly on pp. 249–54 by means of an appendix on each group, the body of the work covers with admirable thoroughness five major types of mission: Roman Catholic Religious Communities of Men, Roman Catholic Religious Communities of Women, Roman Catholic Chinese Religious Communities of Women (Associations of Diocesan Right), Protestant Foreign Missionary Societies, and Protestant Chinese Missionary Societies. Given that the list of nationalities involved drawn up on p. 315 (there are also indexes to names of societies, mission fields in China, personal names, and subjects) totals more than two dozen countries, speaking almost a score of different languages, the amount of effort put into creating this