

‘ *Sur le front...des missions* ’ :  
French-Canadian Missionaries  
in the Japanese Empire, 1921-1934

**Abstract**

The late 1920s and early 1930s was a period of violent political and military upheaval in Japan and Northern China, a simmering powderkeg which finally exploded in the Manchurian Crisis of 1931-32. In the early 1930s, there were around 80 French-Canadians Catholic missionaries living in Japan and Japanese-held territory. In Manchuria, French-Canadian missionaries were in the middle of a war zone, while in Japan, an increasingly militaristic government kept missionaries under closer supervision. Despite some recent publications on the work of French-Canadian missionaries in Japan and China, there is still a rather incomplete picture of their experiences in this turbulent period. Through recently discovered first-hand accounts of French-Canadian missionaries published in the Montreal newspaper *Le Devoir*, this paper reveals their representation of the Japanese and Chinese in the Japanese Empire in times of war and peace.

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‘ *Sur le front...des missions* ’ :  
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A recently published book entitled *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples* (2005) contains twelve articles on the Canadian missionary experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which asks new questions and applies new theoretical tools to familiar fields of research. With the promising subtitle *Representing Religion at Home and Abroad*, the book offered the hope that the (mostly French-Canadian<sup>1</sup>) Catholic missionary experience would indeed be appropriately “represented” among the diverse essays. After all, Catholics formed a third of the Canadian population in this period and were very active and zealous in the missionary field in Canada and overseas. Yet despite the book’s welcome addition to the missionary historiography, only one of the twelve articles deals exclusively with Catholic missionaries.<sup>2</sup> The co-editors acknowledge this gap by stating that “The history of French-Canadian Roman Catholic missions followed a different trajectory from those of Canadian Protestants, which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this book.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 When speaking of missionaries as a group, I prefer using ‘French-Canadian’ or the contemporary term *Canadien* as opposed to ‘Quebecers’ or ‘Québécois’ because there were at least two documented cases of Franco-Ontarians, les Révérends Pères Joseph-Louis Lavoie and Bonaventure Péloquin, proselytizing in Manchuria.

2 France Lord, “The Silent Eloquence of Things: The Missionary Collections and Exhibitions of the Society of Jesus in Quebec, 1843-1946,” in Alwyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott, eds. *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 205-234.

3 Alwyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott, “Introduction,” in Alwyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott, eds. *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 14.

This may be a convenient excuse on the part of the editors for excluding works on Catholics, although the truth is much simpler than that. It is not so much that the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French-Canadian Catholic missionaries was so different from their Protestant counterparts, it is simply – and unfortunate – that there has been a lack of scholarly interest.

This is particularly true of Catholic missionaries in East Asia. New research on the role of missionaries, imperialism, colonialism, collaboration and resistance, especially in Manchuria/Manchukuo, have re-invigorated studies in East Asian history.<sup>4</sup> Yet the role – or even the presence – of Catholicism in East Asia remains conspicuously absent. There are several reasons for this neglect. The peak of Catholic missionary activity in Asia occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, led by the Jesuit Francis Xavier's arrival in Kagoshima in August 1549. By contrast, the various Protestant denominations dominated missionary activity in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These missionaries largely came from two global powers, the United States and Great Britain, as well as from Australia and English Canada.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Thomas David Dubois, "Local Religion and the Imperial Imaginary: the Development of Japanese Ethnography in Occupied Manchuria," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 1 (Feb. 2006): 52-74; Mariko Asano Tamanai, eds. *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005); Bill Sewell, "Reconsidering the Modern in Japanese History: Modernity in the Service of the Prewar Japanese Empire," *Japan Review: Bulletin of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies*, no. 16 (2004): 213-258; Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

5 Two authoritative works on Canadian Protestants in East Asia are Alwyn Austin, *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom, 1888-1959* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) and A. Hamish Ion, *The Cross in the Dark Valley* 3 vols. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1990-1999). Also Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and Indian Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Rosemary R.

Other than France, most Catholic missionaries settling in East Asia came from French Canada and Belgium, two minnows in the international (scholarly) sphere.<sup>6</sup> Scholarly disinterest, especially for French-Canadian missionaries, is accentuated by these missionaries' late arrival in organized proselytizing activities. Although French-Canadians left for overseas mission fields as early as 1853, it was not until 1925 that the Quebec-based *Société des Missions-Etrangères de Pont-Viau* controlled its own apostolic vicariate, at a time when most other Catholic and Protestant missionary orders were cutting back from overseas work, including France-based missionary orders. Pursuing research in French has undoubtedly proved to be a barrier, but the

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Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); and Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-1969* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002). Although not technically a missionary, Caroline Macdonald went to Japan as the YWCA's emissary and became renowned for her social work in Tokyo. See Margaret Prang, *A Heart at Leisure from Itself: Caroline Macdonald of Japan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995). Agnes Wintemute Coates' was also performing Christian-inspired work in Japan: Katherine Ridout, "A Woman of Mission: The Religious and Cultural Odyssey of Agnes Wintemute Coates," *Canadian Historical Review* 71, no. 2 (June 1990): 208-244.

6 Lionel Groulx, *Le Canada français missionnaire. Une autre grande aventure* (Montreal: Fides, 1962). While a new comprehensive overview is needed, Groulx's work remains the only one to discuss the work of French-Canadian Catholics in all parts of the world, including Japan. Unfortunately, there are numerous errors, such as his misspelling of 'Ryukyu' [the old name for the islands of Okinawa] two different ways (Kyu-Ryu and Ruy-kyu), and he presents dates and figures that contradict Richard Leclerc's more authoritative work on Quebec-Japan relations (see below). The *Sessions d'Etude: Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Eglise Catholique* [also known in English as *Canadian Catholic Historical Association. Study Sessions*] devoted its 1971 issue to the *Société des Missions-Etrangères de Pont-Viau (SMEPV)* the missionary order which sent clergymen to Manchuria. Commemorating the *SMEPV*'s fiftieth anniversary, these five articles mostly dealt with the administrative and organizational aspects of the mission society. Since then, research on French-Canadian missionaries abroad has stagnated. Two recent works on Quebec's relations with Asia present a chapter or two each on Quebec's missionary contribution to Japan and China, but do not offer any new revelations. See Richard Leclerc, *Des Lys B l'ombre du mont Fuji: histoire de la présence de l'Amérique française au Japon* (Sillery: Editions du Bois-de-Coulonge, 1995); Serge Granger, *Le lys et le lotus: les relations du Québec avec la Chine de 1650 à 1950* (Montreal: VLB Editeur, 2005).

availability of research material is an even greater barrier. Protestant missionaries often bequeathed their valuable holdings to libraries and public archives, and Protestant denominations in Canada, such as the United Church, welcome researchers. Unfortunately, archives for Catholic missionary orders in Canada are not as open to the general researcher. Scholars must rely on either the various censored newsletters published by the different denominations, such as the Jesuits' *Le Brigand* or their published memoirs.<sup>7</sup>

So the Montreal daily *Le Devoir* offers us an unprecedented – and unexpected – opportunity to explore the Catholic presence in Asia. In the 1920s and 1930s, *Le Devoir* published hundreds of letters and reports from French-Canadian missionaries posted in the Canadian North, Basutoland [present-day Lesotho], Annam [Vietnam], Japan, China and Manchuria/Manchukuo.<sup>8</sup> These were not short fifty-word letters to the editor. The missionaries' enlightening contributions were long and detailed, ran the length of the page over several columns, and they explored the whole spectrum of their adventures, from the humorous to the tragic to the macabre. These published accounts from *Canadiens* abroad began in 1921 and reached a peak in the mid-1930s as *Le Devoir* devoted an entire page of their 12-page Saturday edition to the Catholic missions in China (particularly Manchuria), in a segment entitled *Sur le front... des missions*, and a half-page segment to missionaries in Basutoland entitled *Les Missions des PP res Blancs en Afrique*. As this paper provides only an introductory scope of the

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<sup>7</sup>In 2006, a member of the Vatican Archives, Giovanni Coco, published a collection of documents relating to Vatican-Manchukuo relations. Giovanni Coco, *Santa Sede e Mancukuo (1932-1945) con appendice di documenti*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> There were French-Canadians in Latin America but I did not find any letters in *Le Devoir* from

missionaries' letters and activities in Manchuria, the perspective is unfortunately (at this stage of research), one-sided.<sup>9</sup> These letters, unknown even to the many historians of the venerable Montreal daily,<sup>10</sup> represent one of the most important primary sources of information on Catholic missionaries available to scholars. These letters reveal that, despite Alwyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott's introductory comments, the "trajectory" of Catholic missionaries was not as different as they believe – yet there are also elements unique to the Catholic presence in the Japanese Empire that merit further investigation. How did French-Canadian missionaries react to the Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria in the 1930s? What kind of representation of the Japanese and the Chinese in Manchuria did the missionaries make in their letters home? To make better sense of the French-Canadians' presence in East Asia and of content of their letters, I begin by briefly exploring the historical and political context which permitted the missionaries to proselytize in Asia.

After a long absence, European imperialist powers returned to East Asia in force in the

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anyone posted there.

<sup>9</sup>While I am aware the letters would have been censored before publication, the missionaries reveal personal emotions and make strong political statements that question how closely Catholic censors monitored these letters.

<sup>10</sup> Most historians have acknowledged the Catholic clergy's vigorous support of the French-Canadian nationalist newspaper, but they focus their studies on the devout Catholic publisher Henri Bourassa's influence on provincial and national politics. See Pierre-Philippe Gingras, *Le Devoir* (Montreal: Libre Expression, 1985), 42; Robert Lahaise, "«Ce siècle avait dix ans...», 1910-1939," in Robert Lahaise, ed. *Le Devoir: reflet du Québec au 20e siècle* (Montreal: Hurtubise-HMH, 1994), 45. In the Lahaise volume, the essays on international news (Antoine Char, "L'international, un devoir au quotidien depuis 1910," 149-162) and religion (Jean-Pierre Proulx, "« Fais ce que crois ». La religion après 1960...Le déclin," 405-425) make no mention at all of missionaries. Robert Comeau and Luc Desrochers, eds., *Le Devoir: un journal indépendant (1910-1995)* (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1996) is a collection of papers presented at a colloquium in honour of *Le Devoir*.

nineteenth century. Concerned that Protestant nations such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States would close off their colonial possessions to Catholics, the Vatican regained control over missionary activities from the declining Iberian powers, Spain and Portugal. Beginning in the 1830s, the Catholic Church designated a missionary body to gain jurisdiction over a strictly delineated territory in China entitled *le vicariat apostolique* (the apostolic vicariate), which was led by a bishop or the superior of an order who thus became the Vatican's own representative. The vicariates in foreign lands were protectorates under the Church's jurisdiction but it knew it had no way of physically protecting their Catholic faithful and converts.<sup>11</sup> It needed the help of powerful Christian nations to guarantee their security. Although relations between France and the Vatican were frequently cool in the nineteenth century, the French government nonetheless guaranteed the safety of Catholics overseas, particularly in China and Japan. In Japan, French extraterritorial provisions, enforced by "gunboat diplomacy," guaranteed Catholics the "right" to proselytize beyond the treaty ports, despite the *bakufu* and Meiji leaders' anger at these activities.<sup>12</sup> In a series of treaties imposed upon the Chinese, the French forced and defended the re-introduction of Catholicism throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Drafted after the murder of a French missionary, the most important treaty was the Treaty of Tientsin (1858). Article 8 of the Treaty gave the

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Little mention is made of the pre-Qing Revolution (1960) era, let alone the missionaries' letters.

11 Claude Prudhomme, *Stratégie missionnaire du Saint-Siège sous Léon XIII (1878-1903). Centralisation romaine et défis culturels*. (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1994), 29-33.

12 Jean-Pierre Lehmann, "French Catholic Missionaries in Japan in the Bakumatsu and Early Meiji Periods," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 3 (1979): 377-400.



Chinese the freedom to choose Catholicism, while under Article 13, all Catholic missionaries could enter China with a French passport issued at any French consulate.<sup>13</sup> In the nineteenth century, Italian and Spanish nationals benefited from this provision, and in the twentieth century, French-Canadian Catholics bound for China also registered with the French Consulate.<sup>14</sup>

Similar “unequal treaties” guaranteeing the freedom of religion and extraterritorial privileges for missionaries in Japan and Korea were negotiated and enforced by European and American gunboat diplomacy. However, as Korean historian Ryu Young Dae explains it, French Catholics were among the boldest to exploit and contravene their treaty rights. When French diplomats arrived in Korea in 1886, they were empowered by their recent successes in China negotiating rights for Catholics. As he further explains, the 1886 treaty between France and Korea guaranteeing religious freedoms was more of a formality than a turning-point. He points out there were already French Catholics proselytizing illegally and clandestinely in the Korean interior before the treaty.<sup>15</sup> Soon after the treaty’s implementation, French Catholics secured the site of a future Cathedral – without Korean King Gojong’s knowledge. The Cathedral’s site occupied prime real estate in Seoul. Situated on a high hill, the Cathedral faced the palace and neighbored a shrine “holding royal ancestral tablets.” The intransigence of the French Catholics revealed itself further when they were caught buying property in the interior of the

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13 Francis Latour, “La France, le Saint-Siège et la question du protectorat en Chine pendant la Grande Guerre,” *Revue d’histoire diplomatique* 112, no. 4 (1998): 328.

14 Granger, *Le lys et le lotus*, 20.

15 Dae Young Ryu, “Treaties, Extraterritorial Rights, and American Protestant Missions in Late Joseon Korea,” *Korea Journal* 43, no. 1 (2003): 181-183.

country. The “Cathedral” episode was the most symbolic and shameful episode but the French (and other nationalities) were buying property throughout the interior, largely for missionary work and often without the consent of Korean authorities. The French missionaries proved wily and bought property under the name of a Korean convert. The Korean government decried these illegal extra-treaty activities but, beyond prosecuting the offending Korean convert (and never the foreigners), Korean authorities were unable to take a stand against the powers.<sup>16</sup>

As France took steps to protect Catholics in Asia, the First Vatican Council convened in 1869-1870. The Catholic Church in Asia was thoroughly pleased with France’s belligerence. Indeed, as Hans Waldenfels notes, when the Apostolic Vicars of China convened for the First Vatican Council, they sent a letter of thanks to Napoleon III in recognition of his country’s help in enforcing the peace.<sup>17</sup> Once the Catholic Church was satisfied that Catholic missionaries and their converts had France to protect them, the Vatican could develop a long-term strategy for East Asia, especially China. The Council accomplished many changes, none more so than in the missionary field. The Vatican centralized the decision-making process in the mid-nineteenth century which resulted in “professionalizing” the missionary enterprise. The Council reaffirmed the Church’s authority in all matters relating to missionary activity. The Vatican retained the power to send missionaries abroad, and those missionaries were operating under the Pope’s personal authority. Recruitment of the Church’s future representatives in Christian countries

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16 Ryu, “Treaties, Extraterritorial Rights,” 194-198.

17 Hans Waldenfels, “The Interaction of European Politics and Roman Catholic Missionary Enterprise in the Chinese Mission,” in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era, 1880-1920*, eds. Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison (Copenhagen: Aros, 1982), 80.

became a stringent process. The final idea regarding the “professionalization” of missionaries was the creation of “missionary seminaries.”<sup>18</sup> It is clear the First Vatican Council raised the profile of missionaries.

Promoting this professionalization and centralization of the recruitment process of missionaries, the Vatican drafted a set of directives in 1883 aimed at missionaries settling in Chinese lands. The directives were a set of measures designed to provide structure to the missionary enterprise and to influence the Chinese to choose Catholicism. It was a seventeen-point list which addressed matters that missionaries would face in China. The ultimate goal of the directives was to create an indigenous clergy. The directives ranged from the missionaries’ personal dress to baptismal rites.<sup>16</sup>

With French military and consular protection on the one hand, and the Vatican long-term strategy for success in the other, French-Canadian missionaries began making the journey over to East Asia. Soeur H  l  ne Paradis was the first French-Canadian Catholic to perform religious duties in Japan in 1898 but not until the 1920s did French-Canadians serve in East Asia in greater numbers. In 1921, when the Vatican granted a Quebec-based Franciscan order the historically significant Kagoshima diocese as their own apostolic grounds, there were only twelve French-Canadians in Japan.<sup>20</sup> The Catholic missionary movement received a big boost in 1926

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18 Prudhomme, *Strat  gie missionnaire du Saint-Si  ge*, 14-16.

16 Ibid., 201-208.

20 Leclerc, *Histoire de la pr  sence de l’Am  rique fran  aise au Japon*, 31; Richard Leclerc and Claude Roberge, “Footsteps of the Quebec Missionaries,” *Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 15 (1997). <<http://www.info.sophia.ac.jp/amecana/Journal/15-4.htm>> [Accessed 31 August 2006.]

when Pope Pius XI issued his Papal Encyclical urging the Catholic faithful to engage in missionary work in distant “pagan” lands. This moral boost encouraged a greater number of French-Canadians to join their pioneering few in Japan, Asia, Latin America and Africa.

While it is well-known that Quebec’s Catholic families would often send their sons and daughters to the priesthood or the convent, some were independently motivated to join the seminary in order to serve as missionaries. Many professed to having read or heard accounts of other missionaries, either in print or at public lectures.<sup>21</sup>

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21 In the first weekly column of *Les Missions des PP res Blancs en Afrique*, Emery Champagne recounted his first emotional and inspiring encounter with a missionary, who was on leave from his post in Africa. “La première fois que je vis un missionnaire... j’étais à l’âge où l’imagination forge ses rêves... en dehors des sentiers battus de la réalité... Ce missionnaire était un Père Blanc de retour de ses lointaines missions. Certes, il avait dans toute sa personne quelque chose d’exotique [...] Il avait su nous enthousiasmer, nous faire rire, et gonfler notre cœur d’émotion tout à la fois.” [“The first time that I saw a missionary... I was at the age where imagination drives our dreams... beyond the realm of the ordinary... This missionary was a *PP re Blanc* who had just returned to Canada from his distant mission. He certainly seemed very exotic [...] He knew how to fire our enthusiasm, how to make us laugh and he burst our hearts with emotion all at the same time.” Original ellipses, except those in square brackets.] See Emery Champagne, “En zigzags à travers la brousse africaine,” *Le Devoir*, 3 mars 1934, p. 9. Not everyone was motivated by stories of exoticism. Gustave Prévost and three fellow

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students in his seminary immediately decided to become missionaries in China after hearing about the murder of a fellow French-Canadian missionary in Manchukuo. *Gustave Prévost*: « *Vous serez mes témoins* ». Laval, PQ: Société des Missions-Etrangères, n.d.

For missionaries like Emery Champagne and Joseph Bonhomme, it was a dream come true: “Je réalise le grand rêve de ma jeunesse en allant me dépenser en pays d’infidèle.”<sup>22</sup> *La semaine missionnaire* [Missionary week] brought awareness to fellow Catholics and Quebecers of the important work they were undertaking in distant lands. French-Canadian missionaries from all corners of the globe gathered in Montreal in 1930 for seminars, public lectures and, with a view to sparking interest in foreign cultures, exhibitions of typical cultural items.<sup>23</sup> Items from Japan included a yellowed and worn seventeenth-century catechism belonging to one of the Nagasaki martyrs, which, according to reporter Tristan Pensyf, was proof of the tenacity of the Christian faith in the Asian country.<sup>24</sup> Some of the recent converts accompanied the French-Canadian missionaries back to Canada, the first contact many Quebecers had of non-Caucasian foreigners. Children were reported to dream of becoming missionaries. This 1930 *semaine missionnaire* proved so popular that it was extended for an extra three days and similar missionary awareness weeks were organized.<sup>25</sup>

For those whose missionary dreams were realized, this was truly the start of an adventure. Up to the early 1920s, French-Canadians sent to proselytize in Japan usually settled in the city of Hakodate in Hokkaido, the northernmost of the four main islands of Japan. The diocese of

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22 “I am experiencing the great dream of my childhood by working in heathen lands.” “Le sacre de S.E. Mgr Joseph Bonhomme, vicaire apostolique du Basutoland,” *Le Devoir*, 28 juin 1933, pp. 1, 3.

23 For more on Catholic exhibitions, see France Lord, “The Silent Eloquence of Things,” 205-234.

24 Tristan Pensyf, “Les plus grandes fleurs de ce brillant parterre,” *Le Devoir*, 26 septembre 1930, p. 2. See also Henri Jeannotte, “L’Exposition missionnaire de Montréal,” *Le Devoir*, 20 septembre 1930, p. 1 for a preview and a long list of the items on display.

25 “La Semaine missionnaire,” *Le Devoir*, 29 septembre 1930, p. 4.

Hokkaido was a Franciscan stronghold and Canadians were living with other nationalities. In 1921, the diocese of Kagoshima came under French-Canadian control. This diocese covered the wide area now encompassing the prefectures of Kagoshima, Okinawa, Miyazaki, and Oita in the southernmost island of Kyushu; the diocese was later reduced to the first two prefectures.

Among those to move from Hokkaido to Kagoshima was the Franciscan PIIre Urbain-Marie Cloutier (1890-1965), one of the most popular missionaries from Quebec in Japan. He was first sent to Hokkaido in 1918 then moved to Kagoshima around 1924. He remained in the Kagoshima diocese until 1938, when he moved to perform missionary duties in Peru. In 1921, PIIre Urbain-Marie took the unusual step of becoming a naturalized Japanese, changing his name to Yonekawa Masonori; at the same time, his colleague le PIIre Calixte-Gélinas also became a naturalized citizen, known thereafter as Ionekawa Adjime.<sup>26</sup> According to Lionel Groulx, a few years before PIIre Urbain-Marie's death, he was honoured by the Japanese government for services rendered to the Japanese people.<sup>27</sup>

PIIre Urbain-Marie was popular in French Canada for his published accounts, the first works on Japan aimed at a *Canadien* audience, from a *Canadien*. He first wrote *Propos Japonais* (1922) while still in Hokkaido. The book offered several sketches of life in Japan, with the inevitable comparisons between Canada and Japan emphatically highlighted. The most

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26 "Missionnaire en visite," *Le Devoir*, 2 juin 1926, p. 4. There seems to be some confusion over the exact date of the dates of their naturalization, but it would be between 1921 and 1923. Groulx, who is not careful with geographic and personal names, probably meant to write 'Masanori', which is a common male name.

27 Groulx, *Le Canada français missionnaire*, 345.

important section dealt with the importance of converting the Japanese to Catholicism and the obstacles to their successful conversion. Unlike his future works, and indeed future accounts of other missionaries, PIIre Urbain-Marie addressed some reasons why the Japanese were failing to convert. In the sixty years since the Japanese were permitted to follow the Catholic faith in peace, only 75,000 of the 60 million Japanese belonged to the “True Faith.” Why the glacial pace of conversion? Although the Japanese “compreennent et ils admettent volontiers que notre sainte religion est le plus sϕr” [understand and readily admit that our religion is the strongest], PIIre Urbain-Marie noted with disappointment that few had the courage to accept the necessary sacrifices Catholicism entailed. He believed that Protestant pastors, with their love of money and their lack of spiritual scruples, shared the blame. Japanese disaffected with the Protestant faith believed there was little difference between the two competing Christian faiths. So the possibility of winning back Japanese who had at least tried one form of Christianity was often lost. But ultimately, the problem in attracting Japanese to the Catholic faith resided in cultural and linguistic difficulties. The Japanese language was exceptionally difficult, requiring ten years of assiduous study and practice. It was impossible to effectively communicate in print or in speech without additional help. Japanese customs were also difficult to master and PIIre Urbain-Marie complained that they spoke in a roundabout way whereas Westerners tended to get to the crux of the matter. The most difficult cultural difference to overcome was the Japanese disdain for poverty. Catholics, particularly Franciscans (a mendicant order) like PIIre Urbain-Marie, who lived a life so rustic as to discourage even the poorest farmers of Hokkaido from considering joining Catholicism, were in a losing battle against their wealthier Protestant



counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1920s, PIIre Urbain-Marie was the only missionary from Japan to have his reports published in *Le Devoir*. He usually had one long letter a year, published prominently on the front page over consecutive days. All of his letters subtly mentioned some of the difficulties described in *Propos Japonais*. His letters were likely based on real events, but they verged on the fantastic. In “Ombre et lumiIIre” [Shadow and light], a six-part *histoire véridique* [true story], he presented a tale where two Japanese friends discover they are closet Christians. One discovers the other is a Protestant and immediately convinces his friend to join the Catholic faith.<sup>29</sup> PIIre Urbain-Marie addressed the competition Catholics faced with Protestants over converts, and the necessity for indigenous (Japanese) clergymen to take a greater role in attracting new recruits. Protestants adopted the same strategy as PIIre Urbain-Marie. They relied on Japanese Christians to perform the difficult task of converting their countrymen to Christianity, while the missionary would perform duties that required less fluency, such as baptismal rites. Yet a major lacuna in all the reports published in the newspaper, including PIIre Urbain-Marie’s contributions, was the reason why the Japanese ultimately accepted the Catholic faith.<sup>30</sup>

The optimism of the reports from the 1920s gave way to a more pessimistic tone in the

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28 Urbain-Marie Cloutier, *Propos Japonais* (Québec: Imprimerie Franciscaine Missionnaire, 1922), 201-218.

29 Urbain-Marie Cloutier, “Ombre et LumiIIre,” *Le Devoir*, 19-20-21-22-24-25 mai 1926, p. 5. It is worth recalling that Cloutier wrote in *Propos Japonais* that the Japanese failed to distinguish between the two competing Christian faiths.

30 Conversions seemed a little sudden and inexplicable. Many were deathbed conversions. Urbain-Marie Cloutier, “O Felix Culpa!” *Le Devoir*, 12-19-30 mai 1925, esp. 19 mai, pp. 5-6.

1930s. While the major problem PIIre Urbain-Marie identified in the 1920s was the heady task of converting millions of Japanese with so few men, he did so in a light, optimistic tone. He invited fellow *Canadiens* to join him as “la moisson blanchit” [the harvest is ripening]. Missionaries in the 1930s were, to continue his analogy, overwhelmed to be working alone in vast, ripening fields. Reports issued by various Catholic orders noted there were only a handful of missionaries against the sprawling millions of non-Christians. The stark reality was that, in 1930, there was about one Caucasian priest for every 880 Japanese Catholic and one for every 220,000 non-Catholic Japanese, the worst ratios in the (Catholic) world. Even among the sprawling populations of China, India and Africa, these three areas all boasted better – though not remarkable – ratios than what existed in Japan.<sup>28</sup>

The alms missionaries received were also greatly insufficient. The Great Depression affected the already tight finances of missionaries. While letters frequently concluded with a request for alms, or donations to help build a school or a hospital, several missionaries expressed themselves in starker terms. They pointed to their long list of expenses and the little money they had available. A nun in Koriyama complained that there were 80 million souls in need of saving but she barely had enough money to feed and clothe the poor, let alone to distribute free Christian literature or think about opening a school or a hospital.<sup>32</sup> She was embarrassed to compare the monthly stipend Anglicans and Catholics received. “Le ministre de l’Eglise

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28 Jean-Joseph [Deguire], “Souvenirs du Japon,” *Le Devoir*, 20 août 1930, p. 2.

32 Although there were more women (working as nuns) than men in Japan, very few of their letters were published. The most interesting letters came from nuns in Canton published in “Nos religieuses en Chine,” *Le Devoir*, 29-30 septembre 1925 and “Nos missionnaires en Chine,” 4 décembre

anglicane” received 250 yen; she said she received 100 yen monthly, from which she had to pay 20 yen for a cook and use the remaining 80 yen for food, clothes, heating and building repairs.

“Oh! la chose irait si bien si nous avions le salaire d’un ministre protestant.”<sup>33</sup>

The Japanese mission had few bright spots in the 1930s. News from Japan could not hide the discouraging and dangerous times French-Canadian missionaries were facing. On Christmas Eve 1934, *Le Devoir* reported the distressing news that four French-Canadian Franciscan missionaries living in Naze, on the island of Amamioshima, in the diocese of Kagoshima, had to vacate their premises in a hurry after local authorities charged them with spying. According to the press report, there seemed to be no danger to the four *Canadiens*, who were temporarily living in Kagoshima, nor was there any evident danger of persecution against Catholics.<sup>34</sup> But this latest scare served to remind missionaries in Japan and to *Le Devoir*’s readers in Canada that, since 1931, Japan was at war with its Chinese neighbours and tensions were bound to rise under a militaristic government in the home islands.

French-Canadian missionaries in Manchuria needed no reminder of the dangerous situation. The missionaries had reported rife *brigandage* (banditry)<sup>35</sup> since Rome granted the

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1925, p. 4.

33 Un enfant de Beauharnois, “Lettre d’un missionnaire,” *Le Devoir*, 14 avril 1931, p. 5. “Oh! Things would be better if we had the salary of a Protestant minister.” The irony is that Protestants also complained that their salaries were too low. Although they did receive a significant raise after the Great War, salaries and budgets once again plummeted in the 1930s.

34 “Quatre missionnaires franciscains canadiens au Japon doivent évacuer leur mission d’Amamioshima,” *Le Devoir*, 24 décembre 1934, p. 3; “Les Franciscains au Japon,” *Le Devoir*, 17 janvier 1935, p. 1.

35 The terms *brigands* or “bandits” appeared frequently in the missionaries’ letters. Scholars have

Quebec-based *Société des Missions Étrangères de Pont-Viau* the southern area of Manchuria in 1925. *Le vicariat apostolique de Szepingkai* [the Szepingkai (Sipingjie)<sup>36</sup> apostolic vicariate], named after the central city of the vicariate, was located between Port Arthur [Dalian] and Mukden [Shenyang] on the Japanese-owned South Manchuria Railway. With the Mukden Incident and the Manchurian Crisis of 1931-32, Quebec missionaries would be right in the heat of the battle. While missionaries in Japan often complained of the scarcity of financial and human resources needed to save Japanese souls, missionaries living under the new Japanese-dominated Manchukuo regime sought to save their own lives as they dodged Japanese bombs and “Chinese bandits.”

Letters and reports from missionaries in Japan failed to reveal much about the actual life they led and left an altogether too rosy picture of converting the Japanese. Despite the pleas for more recruits and money, the missionaries in Japan shared very little information about the travails of living in a foreign land. The techniques and methods of persuasion used to convert the Japanese to Catholicism were never clearly revealed. (Protestants, for example, used schools, especially for girls, as a successful launching pad for conversions.) Small snippets of their non-proselytizing activities emerged, such as attempts to purchase land from the

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established that the identity of these “bandits” in Manchuria/Manchukuo varied from group to group. For the Catholic missionaries, “bandits” usually meant Chinese Communists. However, in some contexts, when the nationality of the “bandit” was not established, the missionaries labelled marauding Japanese Kwantung Army soldiers as “bandits.” Although I am aware of the political complexities surrounding the terms “*brigand*” and “bandit,” for this paper only, I am using those words as the missionaries used them.

36 For each first instance of a Chinese place name, I am providing the pinyin form. For subsequent mentions of the same name, I am using the original French spelling of the name to remain consistent with the contemporary sources.

government, but not enough to form even a rudimentary foundation of the Japanese experience. The relative paucity of letters published, compared to those from Manchurian missionaries, is also a major factor. Across the Japan Sea, caught in the middle of a tumultuous and tense situation which finally exploded – literally – on 18 September 1931, missionaries in Manchuria/Manchukuo had a perspective that could not be reproduced on the calmer Japanese archipelago. The desire to proselytize in a battle zone as Chinese and Japanese soldiers threatened life and limb produced dozens of letters of rare historic value.

Monseigneur Joseph-Louis-Adelmar Lapierre (1880-1952) and PIIre EugIIne Bérichon were among many prolific contributors to *Le Devoir*. Assigned as the *préfet apostolique* of Szepingkai in 1929 at age 49, Lapierre wrote frequently about his experience in Manchuria.<sup>37</sup> A week after readers learned of Mgr Lapierre's appointment, Bérichon wrote of the current status of the vicariate in his pleasant, self-deprecating, humourous tone. On 18 August 1929, Mgr Lapierre blessed Szepingkai's first chapel. Bérichon warned his readers that while everyone present was proud of the chapel, "cette église n'est pas la basilique Saint-Pierre de Rome" [this chapel is not St. Peter's Basilica in Rome]. Like a proud first-time homeowner, he took his readers on a guided tour. The chapel's roof was made of mud and salt, the ceiling of papered-over corn stalks and the chapel lacked a bell, primarily due to the lack of a generous donor but also due to the weak foundations of the church. He provided interesting information on the purchase of the land, which proved exceedingly difficult for the *Canadiens*. The local

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37 "M. l'abbé J.-L.-A. Lapierre nommé préfet apostolique de Szepinghai [sic]," *Le Devoir*, 16 mars 1930, p. 3.

authorities refused to sell the land to the missionaries. The *Canadiens* convinced a Chinese priest, surreptitiously dressed as a businessman, to buy the property in his name. Bérichon explained that this course of action, deception, was necessary after the first prospective buyer was imprisoned!<sup>38</sup> This story was remarkably similar to the ones historian Dae Young Ryu uncovered in Korea. The French-Canadians were not permitted to purchase land but, thanks to protection under extraterritoriality laws, effectively stole the land from the Chinese to build their chapel while the Chinese were incarcerated.

The missionaries were not the only ones to run afoul of the law. Lawless *brigands* figured so prominently in Manchurian accounts that they were often the indirect cause of Catholic conversions. PIIre Gagnon recounted how one priest and two nuns, all Chinese, were captured by “bandits.” The wife of the “chief bandit” felt such pity and deep affection for the brave kidnapped victims that, upon their release, she promptly sought a Catholic baptism. This anecdote sounds a little like one of PIIre Urbain-Marie’s fantastic stories but other missionaries told similar tales. During a firefight between “bandits” and villagers, women and children sought refuge in PIIre Bonaventure’s safe mission. Several of the refugees adopted Catholicism on the spot, in order to escape danger. Like thrusting garlic at a vampire, the Cross warded off “bandits” from entering the mission. He was pleased at the prospect of giving Sunday mass to the newly converted and the new recruits still assembled in his mission.<sup>39</sup>

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38 EugIIne Bérichon, “Dans la Préfecture apostolique de Szepinghai [sic],” *Le Devoir*, 22 mars 1930, p. 13.

39 Bonaventure Péloquin, *Débuts d’un missionnaire* (Montreal: Impr. populaire, 1921), 127.

Pierre Bonaventure could never guess how that would discourage future missionaries. In Leao Yuan [Liaoyang], Mgr Lapierre found large numbers of Manchurian Chinese had converted since 1905 and were on the registers as having received their baptism. Presumably after the chaos of the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War or due to some personal, non-salvation-seeking motive, they had converted in panic. He lamented that: “Les Chinois, pas toujours les meilleurs, qui avaient des démêlés avec leurs voisins ou avec la justice, voulaient capter les bonnes grâces du missionnaire; on se faisait chrétien pour bénéficier de sa protection.”<sup>40</sup> The Chinese may not have understood the legal details of extraterritoriality, but they understood that Christian missions operated under their own laws. As Japanologist Donald Keene noted, the foreign powers may have presided over (and even supported) increased secularization at home, but they “were highly sensitive to attacks on their religion” in non-Christian nations.<sup>41</sup> France gave Chinese Catholic converts – in principle – the same protection as other Catholics. French diplomatic representatives in China rarely lost cases involving Catholics, whether Westerners or Chinese converts.<sup>42</sup> Some of these “pragmatic” converts soon left the Catholic Church but those that did not often quarrelled with the missionary. Mgr Lapierre explained that the Chinese expected too much of the religion. In a country where converts were rare, Mgr Lapierre used the greatest patience and diplomacy to persuade the troublemakers to better

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40 “The Chinese, not always the best ones, who had disputes with their neighbours or with the law, wanted to stay on the right side of the missionary; they wanted to convert to Christianity (Catholicism) to benefit from his protection.”

41 Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 110.

42 Latour, “La France, le Saint-Siège et la question du protectorat en Chine,” 328-329.

understand the Catholic faith and bring them back into the fold. In a memorable phrase, if he dealt with them too brusquely, he feared he would “*éteindre la mΠche qui fΠme encore*” [extinguish the still-smoking wick].<sup>43</sup> In such a public spat, the Christian foreigner inevitably lost and most Chinese abandoned the faith.

Already living in “bandit-ridden” lands and demoralized by the disappointing number of baptisms, the night of 18 September 1931 added a new misery to the Manchurian missionaries’ lives. This was the Mukden Incident, where Japanese officers staged a bombing of the South Manchurian Railway on the pretext of invading Manchuria. This culminated in the Manchurian Crisis which ended in February 1932 with Japanese control over Manchuria and the new territory was renamed Manchukuo. Where petty lawlessness prevailed before this date, the Japanese war machine gave the missionaries their greatest discomfort.

Mgr Lapierre was greatly disturbed by the turn of events. While the region was led by *brigands* prior to the Mukden Incident, he felt there had been, nonetheless, relative peace. However since 1931, he wrote in December 1933, Manchuria “*n’a connu que la misΠre et la détresse*” [has only known misery and distress] and “*la désolation.*” He could not pinpoint the cause of the continuing unrest in Manchuria (Manchukuo) but he believed it was due to provincial Chinese leaders who were refusing to accept the new Japanese leadership as “insurgents” (to use another popular word) disrupted Japanese efforts to bring order. Manchuria was in turmoil and long-time residents of China said the raping and pillaging was

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43 J.-L.-A. Lapierre, “Les Missionnaires de Pont-Viau en Mandchourie,” *Le Devoir*, 21 février 1931, p. 2.



worse than during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. The Szepingkai mission suffered badly during a siege but, providentially, it was spared physical damage. The mission was overrun by refugees begging not to fall in the hands of the Japanese. From the church tower, they could see the Japanese and the volunteer army entrenched so closely to each other, both sides could hear the other's conversations. The Japanese were also making easy work of the volunteer army. In all this misery, Mgr Lapierre provided some reassurance: God looked kindly on the Christians. The cholera epidemic that broke out killed only three or four Catholics, while the "heathens" "tombaient comme des mouches" [dropped dead like flies].<sup>41</sup>

Other missionaries published their observations but no one provided a more thorough or remarkable first-hand account of the Manchurian Crisis than PIIre Francis Lefebvre in Tungleao [Tongliao]. The priest was returning from a Sunday sermon in a nearby village when rumours of a Japanese invasion spread. Pandemonium greeted him when he arrived at the Tungleao station as news that the Japanese had taken Mukden. PIIre Lefebvre wrote that in the panic that gripped Tungleao, the residents fled for their lives and abandoned babies and the elderly. As Japanese planes flew overhead and tanks rolled into town, those who did not flee out of Tungleao sought refuge in his mission. Unlike the French Jesuit Robert Jacquinot in Shanghai<sup>45</sup> or the Nazi John Rabe in Nanking, who both famously set up safety zones for Chinese refugees during the Japanese invasion of those cities, PIIre Lefebvre never mentioned inviting refugees to seek

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41 Louis-A. Lapierre, "Nos missionnaires en Chine," *Le Devoir*, 11 janvier 1933, p. 4.

45 John D. Meehan, "The Savior of Shanghai: Robert Jacquinot, SJ, and his safety zone in a city at war, 1937," *Company Magazine* (March 2006): 17-21.

shelter within his mission. He may not have consciously sought refugees, but he did not turn them away either. In fact, the way PIIre Lefebvre described it, he was terrified of having so many people inside. The mission was so packed with hysterical refugees that the missionaries hired four guards armed to the teeth – weapons the missionaries apparently provided – to keep order *inside* the mission.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the most curious thing Pere Lefebvre did was the following: “Dans le haut du clocher de l’église, qui domine toute la ville, nous avons un poste d’observation magnifique pour surveiller l’arrivée de l’ennemi. Pour Atre reconnus des Japonais nous avons hissé trois drapeaux français fabriqués B la hâte.”<sup>47</sup> Although this admission begs the question what, if any, flag was flying before the “hastily-made French flags,” it is revealing that PIIre Lefebvre understood the power of the flag (and the resulting protection) this afforded his mission against the Japanese Army. Finally, the local mandarin asked the missionaries if he could seek refuge within their walls, which the missionaries grudgingly agreed to.

The majority of the town’s military and civilian leaders having already fled, the missionaries braced themselves for a three-sided battle. PIIre Lefebvre was first determined to keep the Mongolians out, but he mistrusted the Japanese who, on 9 October, had just blown up a section of railway to prevent the arrival of Chinese reinforcements from Jehol [Rehe] province.

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46 “ Nous avons engagé quatre gardes que nous avons armés de fusils et revolvers pour maintenir un peu d’ordre dans la cour.”

47 “ From high atop the church clocktower, which overlooks the city, we had a wonderful observation post which allowed us to locate the enemy. To be sure the Japanese recognized us, we flew three hastily-made French flags.” Francis Lefebvre, “Deux mois en Mandchourie,” *Le Devoir*, 25 février 1933, p. 4.

From the Szepingkai mission, Mgr Lapierre sent PIIre Lefebvre a letter to tell him there was nothing to fear from the Japanese but to defend the mission from *les brigands*.<sup>48</sup> But feeling uneasy about a Mongolian-Japanese alliance, PIIre Lefebvre participated directly in the war. Trying to prevent “le train blindé des Japonais de nous amener ces indésirables” [the Japanese armoured train from bringing us these undesirables (the Mongolians)], he wanted to dynamite the bridge. Finding no explosives, he burned several bridges instead. PIIre Lefebvre was equally worried about the mandarin and the remnants of his army shooting at Japanese aircraft from within the mission’s walls. He was afraid, and rightly so, that Japanese airmen would soon bomb the mission in retaliation. Soon after the mandarin’s men first began shooting at Japanese aircraft, the Japanese “warned” the missionaries the consequence of their actions by first bombing just outside the walls, then a month later, dropping a bomb inside the compound. In January 1932, the Japanese Kwantung army finally captured Tungleao and the *brigands* disappeared. The missionaries and the Chinese, seeing that “les nouveaux maîtres se montraient humains” [the new masters were seen to be friendly], welcomed the peace. Like Mgr Lapierre, PIIre Lefebvre thanked the Lord for protecting the mission and the missionaries from death.<sup>49</sup>

PIIre Lefebvre might have also given thanks to the symbolic power of the French flag.

Sustained military attacks near missions in Manchuria demonstrated that the opposing armies

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48 “ Nous recevons une lettre de Mgr Lapierre, il connait notre situation et nous encourage B nous défendre de notre mieux contre les brigands, nous assurant que nous n’avons rien B craindre des Japonais.” Lefebvre, “Deux mois en Mandchourie,” p.4.

49 Francis Lefebvre, “Deux mois en Mandchourie,” *Le Devoir*, 25 février 1933, pp. 4, 6.

understood foreigners' extraterritorial privileges. There were several striking examples of the symbolic power of missions in Manchurian communities. At the end of hostilities in January 1932, Pfrre Lefebvre returned to the top of his church clocktower. He observed that the mission had been spared from damage but beyond the eight-foot-high brick mission walls, "tout ffit saccage" [everything was sacked].<sup>50</sup> While it is not always possible to detect obvious exaggerations or falsities in the missionaries' accounts, to a Quebec audience unfamiliar with the details of extraterritoriality, Pfrre Lefebvre and other missionaries' letters clearly paint the Catholic mission as being singled out for divine protection from the ravages of the non-Christian "bandits" and the invading Japanese force. Yet Protestant missions also reported being treated kindly by the invading Japanese Army.<sup>51</sup> In his annual letter to Archbishop Gauthier in Montreal, Mgr Lapierre assured him that, despite the chronic *brigandage*, no one dared attack the mission at Tuchuan. The mission had even become the town's repository of valuables, a veritable Manchurian Fort Knox. He demonstrated the safety of the mission by telling the sad story of a heathen woman who feared "bandits" would steal her valuable possessions. One day, she decided to leave and was promptly robbed of all her possessions.<sup>52</sup> Mgr Lapierre's story also demonstrated what Edward Said would characterize as the actions of the "irrational Oriental."<sup>53</sup> As a "heathen," "an Oriental," and a woman – a dangerous combination for a Roman Catholic

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50 Lefebvre, "Deux mois en Mandchourie," p. 6.

51 Alvyn Austin, *Saving China*, 245-246.

52 Lapierre, "Nos missionnaires en Chine," p. 4.

53 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), esp. 38-40.

missionary – she could not understand that Providence protected the mission. In truth, of course, protection was much more tangible.<sup>54</sup>

The peace ending the Manchurian Crisis was reflected in the pages of *Le Devoir*. The missionaries welcomed the order and prosperity the Japanese had brought to Manchuria (now the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, although the missionaries and *Le Devoir* rarely addressed the new state by its new name).<sup>55</sup> “Bandits” were still roaming around but, thanks to the “pacification” efforts of the Japanese Army, they were a dying breed. There were several stories after 1932 of French-Canadians being captured by “bandits,” but the missionaries left their periods of captivity with their dignity unimpaired and a full stomach. After handing them the loot they desired, the missionaries fraternized with their bandit-captors. All missionaries who were captured reported being treated extremely well and kindly, sometimes lucky enough to get their meagre possessions back, and painted the surreal picture of being offered tea, cigarettes and a sumptuous feast while the other (Chinese) prisoners were beaten and tortured.<sup>56</sup>

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54 Lapierre, “Le bilan d’une rude et fructueuse année,” p. 9.

55 The missionaries praised the Japanese for their rapid modernization of Manchuria: “Pour le missionnaire qui sort d’une pauvre ville chinoise et qui tombe tout B coup dans le quartier japonais de Moukden, c’est de l’éblouissement. A voir...les nombreuses automobiles qui roulent sur les larges rues d’asphalte, on se croirait dans l’un des coins les plus distingués de la province de Québec.” [For the missionary who leaves a poor Chinese town and suddenly arrives in the Japanese sector of Mukden, it’s amazing. To see all the cars driving on asphalt roads, it’s easy to believe you are in a wealthy neighbourhood back home in the province of Quebec.] See Paul-Emile Asselin, “Vers le Jehol,” *Le Devoir*, 14 avril 1934, p. 8. The Japanese brought safety and order in Albert Cossette, “Le calme après la tempête,” *Le Devoir*, 2 juin 1934, p. 6; Thanks to the Japanese, there were fewer “bandits” roaming around in J.-Bte Michaud, “Mouvement de conversions,” 14 juillet 1934, p. 6.

56 J.-Bte Michaud, “En Mandchourie,” *Le Devoir*, 28 juillet 1933, p. 1; Damase Bouchard, “Une journée avec les brigands,” *Le Devoir*, 3 février 1934, p. 9; Eugène Bérichon, “Les brigands! Les brigands!” *Le Devoir*, 7 juillet 1934, p. 6.

Another surreal scene for many faithful was the amicable relationship between Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek [Jiang Jieshi] and the Catholic Church in China. Although French-Canadians were not likely part of this meeting, which ran from 7 to 8 November 1934, L. Morel of the Belgian *Congrégation du Coeur Immaculée de Marie* (CICM, also known as Scheutists), held a privileged meeting with the Generalissimo, his wife, seven Catholic priests and six nuns, and four Swedish Protestant emissaries in the Mongolian province of Suiyuan. Chiang, who since February of that year had inaugurated the New Life Movement, praised the missionaries for their work, asked for their further cooperation in helping raise China to its former glory and urged them to tell him what further reforms were necessary. PIIre Morel, sensing that no one else dared say anything, replied that if the assembled missionaries had been able to perform their work unimpeded, it was due to the protection and benevolence of the governor Fou-Tso-I (who was also present at the meeting). The missionaries, he added, would continue to work with the Chinese people they loved so much and the Generalissimo could count on the Christian community to be of service to the government. Chiang was pleased and Madame Chiang invited two Catholic nuns to join a committee to promote the “New Life Movement” values to Chinese women. After the couple left aboard their private Ford plane, PIIre Morel could not suppress a wry smile. How ironic that on these very Suiyuan plains, where 2000 martyrs died during the Boxer Rebellion, the leader of the Republic of China should fraternize and invite Christians to fulfill Chinese destiny. “Tout de mÀme, les temps ont changé...” [All the same, the times have changed...]<sup>57</sup>

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57 L. Morel, “Les temps ont changé,” *Le Devoir*, 9 février 1935, p. 6. Original ellipsis.

While this episode represented a high-water mark for Catholicism's prestige in China in the 1930s, letters from missionaries in Manchukuo in this decade remained ambivalent. The French-Canadians demonstrated that they had inculturated themselves into Chinese society well enough to provide weekly reports on religion, culture and traditions. They may have instinctively stressed the "heathen" character of the object of their observations, but these letters nonetheless point to a desire for missionaries to understand the people they were trying to convert.<sup>58</sup>

Despite efforts at inculturation, not all missionaries fared so well. The *Société des Missions Etrangères de Pont-Viau* in Manchukuo dealt with the loss of three dedicated men in less than a year. In November 1933, le Pire Victor Champagne died of a medical complication in Szepingkai at the young age of 32.<sup>59</sup> In August 1934, the loss of Pire Eugène Berger (34) was a particularly difficult loss. He was fluent in Chinese and both the Chinese and Japanese held him in high esteem. He returned to Montreal with Pire Calixte-Gélinas, where he died of an undisclosed medical complication shortly after his arrival.<sup>60</sup> The loss of Pire Emile Charest, age 33, to Chinese "bandits" was the most shocking. Two "bandits" entered the mission looking for money and shot Pire Charest and two Chinese domestic helpers after the missionary resisted. The same Pire Charest who had inspired Pire Gustave Prévost and others to join the

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58 See for example A.-H.S., "Le théâtre en Chine," *Le Devoir*, 6 avril 1935, p.6; L.K., "Les religions: le confucianisme," *Le Devoir*, 10 novembre 1934, p. 6; L.K., "Les religions: le bouddhisme," *Le Devoir*, 17 novembre 1934, p. 6; L.K., "Les religions: le Taoisme," *Le Devoir*, 24 novembre 1934, p. 6.

59 "Mort du R.P. Victor Champagne," *Le Devoir*, 10 novembre 1933, p. 1; "Les derniers moments du Pire Victor Champagne," *Le Devoir*, 20 janvier 1934, p. 8.

60 Clovis Rondeau, "Feu le P. Eugène Berger," *Le Devoir*, 18 août 1934, p. 6.

*Société des Missions-Etrangères* in 1934 (see note 21 above), PIIre Charest had been in Manchuria since 1926, had dedicated his life to God, was fluent in Chinese and had recently started studying Japanese.<sup>61</sup> The cold-blooded murder served to remind the missionaries that in times of war and tumult, the French flag, the Cross, the mission's eight-foot-high brick walls and their own personal qualities had made them virtually untouchable against invading forces. However, as their detained compatriots in Japan were discovering, the men of the cloth were no longer being afforded the same respect by the local Japanese authorities in Manchukuo. By 1937, during the Sino-Japanese War, when the Kwantung Army fired on British ambassador Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen's car and the American gunboat *Panay* was sunk, the flags of the Euro-American powers no longer guaranteed personal safety in East Asia.

There was one thing French-Canadian Catholics and English-Canadian Protestants could agree on: Manchuria was "the greatest missionary opportunity of the present generation."<sup>62</sup> The *Société des Missions-Etrangères de Pont-Viau* chose Manchuria as the location of its first French-Canadian-run foreign apostolic vicariate in 1925 and had considerable success for an area wracked by war, invasion, occupation, and lawlessness. By 1941, at the time of the declaration of war against Japan, there were fifty French-Canadian priests and over fifty nuns responsible for 25,000 converted Catholics (up from 2,673 in 1925). They helped establish seven government-approved schools servicing over 2000 students and 80 Catholic schools for teaching

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61 "Le R.P. Emile Charest a été tué par des bandits chinois en Mandchourie," *Le Devoir*, 15 février 1934, p. 1; Clovis Rondeau, "Tué par des bandits chinois," *Le Devoir*, 24 février 1934, p. 8.

62 A. Hamish Ion, *The Cross in the Dark Valley: The Canadian Protestant Missionary Movement in the Japanese Empire, 1931-1945*, 69.



1500 children about Catholicism and the Chinese language. They also ran successful orphanages, medical clinics and hospices for the elderly.<sup>63</sup> Local-level success also translated into macro-level politics, when Catholics in Manchuria were granted a private audience with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek in 1935 and Catholics maintained cordial relations with the Manchukuoan authorities in the 1930s until the missionaries' internment during the War.<sup>64</sup> Further research would reveal the role of the Catholic Church in the diplomatic triangle between Chiang Kai-Shek, the Manchukuoan authorities and the Catholic Church.

While the limited historiography on French-Canadian Catholic missionaries serving overseas has been content to simply mark their presence in different corners of the globe and stress the important apostolic leadership they undertook in places like Kagoshima and Szepingkai, this paper has highlighted their place in the complex web of Great Power diplomacy and Vatican politics. Based on the letters that were published in *Le Devoir*, some French-Canadian missionaries abused their extraterritorial privileges as they engaged in illegal extra-treaty activities. Thanks to protection under the French or Vatican flag, most missions and missionaries survived the Manchurian Crisis intact and alive. Ironically, the missionaries were quite upset that the Chinese exploited the French-Canadian's extraterritorial privilege for their own protection, usually from the marauding Kwantung Army. Exploring the theme of extraterritoriality has given the ordinary Chinese a voice that does not explicitly appear in the missionaries' letters.

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63 Claude Guillet, "Cinquante ans de réalisations: La Société des Missions-Etrangères," *Sessions d'Etude: Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Eglise Catholique* 38 (1971): 55-70.

64 E. Gérard, "Le catholicisme en Mandchourie," *Le Devoir*, 1 juin 1935, p. 6.

The Catholic Church's role in the Japanese Empire is an underdeveloped field. Historians have pointed out areas in need of further investigation. Hamish Ion reminds us that the Vatican, with seemingly little resistance, agreed to the Japanese government's guidelines on controversial Shinto shrine visits and on indigenizing the Japanese Catholic Church.<sup>65</sup> Alwyn Austin wrote that the Catholic Church, in the part of the twentieth century, converted the Chinese at ten times the rate Protestants could accomplish.<sup>66</sup> French Canada's historic position as both born of a French missionary venture and, later, as a conquered nation should stimulate interesting research questions about the *Canadiens*' fertile Catholic missionary activities. And availing himself of the most recently declassified Vatican documents, Gianni Valente suggests that, owing to a legal technicality, the Vatican did not diplomatically recognize Manchukuo, but that both the Chinese Communists and the Japanese leaders in Manchukuo both exploited the Vatican's rapprochement with the puppet regime for their respective propaganda.<sup>67</sup> Some of the themes raised in this paper call for more elaboration. For example, inspired by Mariko Asano Tamanoi's article on race and ethnic identity,<sup>68</sup> research should be directed towards the Quebec missionaries' attitude and perceptions of the Asians. Some priests labelled the invading Japanese "l'ennemi," while others applauded them for their "pacification" efforts and accepted

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65 Ion, *The Cross in the Dark Valley*, 87-89.

66 Austin, *Saving China*, 147.

67 Gianni Valente, "Vatican-Manchukuo, *mea culpas* are not necessary," *30 Days* 18, no. 10 (October 2005). Online edition: <http://www.30giorni.it/us/articolo.asp?id=9611> [Accessed February 2007.]

68 Mariko Asano Tamanoi, "Knowledge, Power, and Racial Classification: The 'Japanese' in 'Manchuria,'" *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 2 (May 2000): 248-276.

Manchukuo as a legitimate state. They were supposed to raise an indigenous clergy but some were overtly racist while others demonstrated fraternal links with the Chinese and the Japanese.