

In memoriam

Rolf G. Tiedemann (1941–2019)

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Professor Rolf Tiedemann at the conference „I have called you by name.' Contribution of Chinese Women to the Church“ in Sankt Augustin in September 2014.
Foto: China-Zentrum Archives.

In August 2019, the renowned historian and expert on the history of the Yihetuan uprising (Boxer Uprising) and Christianity in China, Professor Rolf Gerhard (Gary) Tiedemann passed away (in Chinese he published under the name Di Deman 狄德滿).

Tiedemann was born in a village in Holstein/Germany as the son of the farm worker Hinrich Tiedemann and his wife Hertha (née Kroos). There he grew up in very modest conditions which were exacerbated by the effects of the Second World War. It was nevertheless possible for

him to complete his schooling and take up a commercial apprenticeship in Hamburg. After moving to the USA, he worked in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, initially also in the commercial sector. During his military service there in the 1960s, Tiedemann had the opportunity to study Chinese history, which eventually led him to Great Britain, where he earned his master's degree and spent most of his academic life. Here he also received his doctorate in 1991 with the study "Rural Unrest in North China 1868–1900: With Particular Reference to South Shandong" at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. For more than twenty years until his retirement in 2006, Tiedemann was also a lecturer on the history of modern China at the SOAS.

Apart from a few, very brief encounters in the context of conferences, the author of this obituary, like many other researchers of Christianity in China, came close to Tiedemann mainly through his work. Here we are all especially indebted to him: The existence of this field of research is in no small part his merit. Through his publications, Tiedemann

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made a significant contribution to the development of the history of Christianity in China in its various facets from a marginal topic to a recognized and extremely lively field of study within Sinology and Chinese Studies. This was due substantially to five monographs which he published as author or editor, in particular the standard reference works *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the 16th to the 20th Century* (Armonk, N.Y. 2009) and the *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. Two: 1800–Present* (Leiden 2010) – half of the entries in the extensive *Handbook* (1050 pp.) were written by himself – as well as *The Boxers, China and the World* (Lanham, Md. et al. 2007, published together with Robert Bickers), *Huabei de baoli he konghuang: Yihetuan yundong qianxi jidujiao chuanbo he shehui chongtu* 华北的暴力和恐慌: 义和团运动前夕基督教传播和社会冲突 (Violence and Fear in North China: Christian Mission and Social Conflicts on the Eve of the Yihetuan-Uprising) (Nanjing 2011) and *Xiwen Yihetuan wenxian ziliao huibian* 西文义和团文献资料汇编 (Bibliography of Documents and Materials on the Yihetuan in Western Language) (Jinan 2016).

Early on Tiedemann focused on Christian mission as an important factor in understanding recent Chinese history. This became clear already in his first published article: “A Short Note on the Archives of the London Missionary Society,” in: *Ch’ing-shih wen-t’i* 3 (November 1976) 5, pp. 86-90, highlighted the value of mission archives as sources of Sinological research. In 61 articles, which appeared in journals and anthologies, Tiedemann analysed the historical development of Christianity as a religion in China from different perspectives, including that of its indigenisation and contextualisation, especially in rural China. In his observations Tiedemann evaluated with a proven eye for detail in particular interaction and conflicts between missionaries, Christian and non-Christian population and the social elite of the Qing Empire, e.g., in: “Christianity in a Violent Environment: The North China Plain on the Eve of the Boxer Uprising,” in: Jeroom Heyndrickx C.I.C.M. (ed.), *Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Louvain 1994), pp. 138-144.

In addition to various local historical contexts, his research took into account a broad spectrum of Christian denominations – Catholic, Protestant and the Pentecostal movement – as shown in his articles “Yihetuanmin yu tianzhujiaotu zai Huabei de wuzhuang chongtu” 义和团民与天主教徒在华北的武装冲突 (Armed Clashes between Boxers and Catholics in North China), in: *Lishi yanjiu* 2002, No. 5, pp. 79-93; “Protestant ‘Missionary Cases’ (*jiao’an*) in Shandong Province, 1860–1900,” in: *Ching Feng*, New Series 8 (2007) 1-2, pp. 153-195; and “The Origins and Organizational Developments of the Pentecostal Missionary Enterprise in China,” in: *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 14 (2011) 1, pp. 108-146.

Tiedemann never regarded the history of Christianity in China as a completed field of research but always provided new impulses for its further differentiation: Not only did he point out the gaps in research, he also pioneered work to close them. In his own studies he made the change from a missionary-centred perspective to a focus on the Chinese Christians, and then finally to address within this group the specific topic of the active role of women in the history of China’s Catholic Church. These women, especially in the 18th to early 19th century, were very much present as catechists, preachers, etc., until as a

result of the Synod of Sichuan (1810) western mission societies endeavoured to contain and repress their influence. Tiedemann sketched that process in “Controlling the Virgins: Female Propagators of the Faith and the Catholic Hierarchy in China,” in: *Women’s History Review* 17 (September 2008) 4, pp. 501-520, and in “Chinese Female Propagators of the Faith in Modern China: The Tortuous Transition from the ‘Institute of Virgins’ to Diocesan Religious Congregations,” published in Piotr Adamek, S.V.D. – Sonja Huang Mei Tin (eds.), *The Contribution of Chinese Women to the Church. Proceedings of the Conference ‘I Have Called You by Name,’ September 25–26, 2014, Sankt Augustin (Germany)* (Sankt Augustin 2019), pp. 145-175, – this article was his contribution to the conference on the role of women in the Chinese Churches organized by the Institute Monumenta Serica and the China-Zentrum with the collaboration of the Philosophical-Theological Faculty S.V.D. Sankt Augustin. As a panellist there at the concluding round table, he once again presented perspectives for future research.

As an author, Rolf G. Tiedemann time and again contributed in-depth articles to the publications of the China-Zentrum and the Monumenta Serica Institute over many years: Thus he published in *China heute* 31 (2012) 1, pp. 47-56, the German translation of: “Foreign Missionaries, Chinese Christians and the 1911 Revolution,” *Tripod* 31 (2011) 162, pp. 12-34. In the different publications of the Institute Monumenta Serica we find the following articles by Tiedemann: “Christianity and Chinese ‘Heterodox Sects’: Mass Conversion and Syncretism in Shandong Province in the Early Eighteenth Century,” in: *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996), pp. 339-382; “Missionarischer Einzelgänger oder Visionär? Die Missionsmethode Gützlaffs,” in: Thoralf Klein – Reinhard Zöllner (eds.), *Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) und das Christentum in Ostasien: Ein Missionar zwischen den Kulturen* (Nettetal 2005), pp. 193-231; “The Papacy, Foreign Missionaries, and Chinese Catholics. Conflict and Accommodation between *Maximum Illud* and *Ad Sinarum Gentem*,” in: Barbara Hoster – Dirk Kuhlmann – Zbigniew Wesołowski S.V.D. (eds.), *Rooted in Hope: China – Religion – Christianity / In der Hoffnung verwurzelt: China – Religion – Christentum / Festschrift in Honor of Roman Malek S.V.D. on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Abingdon, Oxon – New York 2017), Vol. 1, pp. 383-410. Tiedemann was also willing to support the works of other authors and so wrote, for instance, the article “The Mission Political Context in South Shantung on the Eve of the Boxer Uprising in China” as an epilogue to Stephan Puhl’s *Georg M. Stenz SVD (1869–1928): Chinamissionar im Kaiserreich und in der Republik* (Nettetal 1994), pp. 275-312.

Just as important as his publishing activity were Tiedemann’s many years of teaching, especially as a professor at SOAS, during which he was able to unfold his great gift as a teacher and mentor. Tiedemann’s publications show that he saw teaching itself as the focus of his work. His monographs all appeared only after his retirement, when he had more time to write. The exchange with students was obviously so important to him that he explicitly mentions this aspect in his autobiography (<https://rgtiedemann.com/2017/04/15/min-modersprak/>).

Numerous condolences from pupils and other companions of Tiedemann confirm this. They testify that contacts with Tiedemann were often lasting encounters in which he opened up new research paths for his interlocutors with detailed knowledge of the sub-

ject and the corresponding literature. Although he was already marked by illness during his last years, Tiedemann did not allow it to deter him from sharing and passing on his knowledge to others. After his retirement from SOAS, he taught at Chinese universities, including Shanghai University (2008), Central China Normal University, Wuhan (2010) and from 2012 at Shandong University, Jinan. Together with Professor Lu Yao 路遙, the doyen of Yihetuan studies in the People's Republic of China and director of the Center for the Study of the Yihetuan Movement and the Society of Modern China, as well as with Professor Liu Jiafeng 刘家峰 he continued the critical evaluation of this significant field to date – not least as an element in the interpretation of recent Chinese history as the history of an evolving revolutionary movement.

The death of Rolf G. Tiedemann in 2019 came in a year that dealt several harsh blows to research into the history of Christianity in China with the deaths of Daniel H. Bays (1942–2019) and Roman Malek S.V.D. (1951–2019), with whom he also had a close friendship. Another great scholar has passed away, for Tiedemann's work is by no means merely a "voice from the margins," as he, in his own modesty, noted in his autobiography: it will continue to support, accompany and inspire prospective as well as established researchers in this field on their own pathways.