

The Christian Mission and the Religious Other:

Multidirectional Perspectives in the Long Early Modern Period

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Missionizing is widely perceived as a form of oppressive power-relations: one side is active and hegemonic, while the other is either passive and submissive or entirely oppositional. This all-too-tidy understanding of the relationship between Christian missionaries and their religious others dovetails with the scholarly tendency to adopt a one-dimensional approach, focusing almost exclusively on Christian attitudes towards the objects of their missionary endeavors. Recent scholars of religion have begun to expose a more nuanced dynamic, revealing the impact of space and polycentricity on missionary Christianities and highlighting the role of missionary encounters in inter-cultural exchange, including, among other things, how missionizing affected knowledge transfer. The varied responses of the religious other in this relationship, beyond conversion, have yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention.

Our workshop pursues this burgeoning line of inquiry, focusing on the literary, cultural, and theological translation processes inherent to the evangelizing strategies of Christian missionaries and taking into account the agency of those whom Christians attempted to missionize. We therefore understand missionary translation as a multidirectional process: (1) Missionaries translated a wide variety of texts, images, and religious practices for the target culture, including elements offensive to the religious other (e.g., the crucifix, kneeling). (2) The local recipients of missionary literature re-appropriated the contents, images, and practices introduced by the missionaries by creatively reinterpreting and translating them into their own system of cultural knowledge. (3) Missionaries transmitted their encounters to a Christian audience in Europe, both within their religious institutions and via the publications of selected texts for a broader, interested public (e.g., *lettres édefiantes et curieuses*).

Focusing on missionary translation, our workshop opens a new vista onto the creative encounter between missionaries and the religious other, including the great majority of those who rejected conversion. We wish to investigate the manifold ramifications of these translational encounters, from agreement and conversion to conflict and rejection, changing strategies on both sides, religious syncretism, and cultural productivity. Concentrating on the Christian mission in the early modern period and the nineteenth century, we will bring together interdisciplinary perspectives from scholars whose research focuses on all the four corners of the world: Asia, the Americas and the Pacific, Africa, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe.