

Ticozzi, Sergio. *China and the Catholic Church through Mutual Eyes*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023. pp. 166. ISBN 978-981-99-3172-9 (hardcover). ISBN 978-981-99-3173-6 (e-Book).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55997/3012pslx183br5>

Sergio Ticozzi's *China and the Catholic Church Through Mutual Eyes* is a concise yet insightful study of the historical and contemporary relationship between the Catholic Church and China. Published in Singapore in 2023, the book examines how the Catholic Church and Chinese society have recognized and influenced one another through time. Ticozzi, a scholar and member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), brings his extensive expertise in Chinese Church history and Catholic missions to the forefront of this work.

Ticozzi employs a wide range of historical documents, diplomatic records, and contemporary sources to explore the complexities of Church-State relations, as well as the unique challenges faced by Catholics in China. A notable focus of the book is the role of missionaries and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), an organization that was established in 1957 under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to control the Church in China. Through these lenses, Ticozzi offers a comprehensive overview of the Catholic Church's tumultuous journey in China, shedding light on both external and internal tensions, including the ongoing struggle between the Vatican and Chinese authorities over the appointment of bishops.

A key strength of Ticozzi's analysis is his unprejudiced and balanced approach to the subject. Rather than focusing solely on political tensions, he delves into the roots of the ongoing confrontation between imperial and republican governments and the Catholic Church. Ticozzi points out that Western society, including Catholic missionaries, often lacks a truly objective and comprehensive understanding of China: focusing solely on maintaining a pure Catholic faith while ignoring the importance of Chinese culture. He also re-examines the spiritual legacy of historical figures like the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, recognizing the limitations of his approach while offering a more pertinent assessment of his contributions to inculturation (Chapters 2–4). In doing so, Ticozzi challenges longstanding myths about the role of missionaries and advocates for a more respectful perspective in Sino-Catholic relations.

Another significant part of the book examines the delicate relationship between the Vatican and the Chinese government, with special attention given to the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the underground Church. Ticozzi

highlights the struggles of the underground Church, which remains loyal to the Vatican despite the influence of the Patriotic Church. He offers an objective portrayal of both sides of the Sino-Vatican relationship, noting the gradual improvements in relations, exemplified by the historic 2018 Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops, a development that has had a profound impact on Sino-Vatican relations.

Ticozzi's emphasis on inculturation—whereby Catholic missionaries adapt to Chinese culture—rather than the contentious political dynamics of Sino-Vatican relations, is a refreshing approach. In addressing the Chinese government's "Sinicization of Religion" policy, which aims to exert control over religious practices, Ticozzi reframes this from a political agenda to a cultural one. He highlights how Chinese Catholic leaders are seeking to interpret Sinicization through the lenses of localization and inculturation, shifting the narrative away from state control and toward the integration of Catholic values with Chinese cultural traditions.

I highly recommend this book to missionaries, Catholic leaders, and scholars interested in the Church's mission in China. Ticozzi offers invaluable insights into the opportunities and limitations of evangelization in the region, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of Chinese cultural and political contexts. By addressing the challenges of inculturation, the book offers practical guidance for Church leaders in navigating the complexities of faith-sharing within China's socio-political environment.

Ultimately, the book invites readers to reflect deeply on the possibilities for harmony and cooperation, envisioning a future where the Catholic Church can flourish within the unique context of Chinese society. With its balanced narrative and critical insights, the book serves as an indispensable resource for fostering mutual understanding and building bridges between diverse cultures and faith traditions.

Leonard Chen, OFM

