

Kin Sheung Chiaretto Yan. *Season for Relationships: Youth in China and the Mission of the Church*. Macao: Claretian Publications, 2018. 68 pages.

Writing a book about the lived religiosity of youth is precious, and few scholars have pursued a more richly ethnographic approach vis-à-vis the Chinese Catholic youth within Mainland China. Chiaretto Yan, a missiologist, trained at Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and the author of *Evangelization in China: Challenges and Prospects*, provides a very precise and accurate account of the reality of faith for the Chinese youth in his new book, *Season for Relationships: Youth in China and the Mission of the Church*. Yan gives his readers a first-hand account of the lived experiences of how Chinese youth practice their faith in the contemporary era. This booklet is the fruit and the theological reflection of a project sponsored by the Pontifical Missionary Union in Rome. The first part gives a general overview of the challenges and prospects for the Chinese youth, and the second part focuses on the Catholic youth in China.

According to Yan, due to critical social changes like rapid economic development, urbanization, and internal migration over the last few decades, the lives of the Chinese youth are now pulled between traditional culture on the one hand and the socialist tradition on the other. They often experience a sense of fragmentation. The young people are challenged and feel pressured to incorporate their self-identity within such traditional Chinese values as Confucius' harmony, *guanxi* (relationship), filial piety, the educational system demanding huge performance, preference for male children, and the "face" culture (8-9).

With considerable evidence gleaned from his interviews and other scientific social research data, which has been included in the first part of the book, Yan provides a profound and thorough analysis of the characteristics and changing attitudes of the Chinese youth. Though all of this very taxing for them, yet these "young people are adhering to these values not only with a very positive attitude but also with ever-growing cultural confidence" (37).

One highlight of the first part is that the assertion of the traditional Chinese culture is "humanistic and tends to emphasize immanence rather than transcendence" (36). Yan sees spiritual life of the Chinese more as a life with the spirit and in a positive mood. Promoting positivism may unify and lead to oneness, the traditional conception of harmony between heaven and the human. Apparently, the Chinese can be spiritual and may not be religious (37), and the Chinese people are turning to faith as a way of fulfilling the spiritual and moral vacuum they have experienced in their culture.

In the second part of the book, Yan makes use of his field observations and qualitative interviews to underscore how the Catholic youth are facing challenges under the social, political, and economic systems. One of the challenges includes how the young Catholics live in an environment where the majority are non-Christians. In such an environment, their Christian identity often estranges them and makes them feel ashamed. In this regard, Yan sees rising opportunities for the local Churches to enhance their constant formation programs for the young Catholics by accompanying them spiritually, offering moral contribution to society, proving charity and volunteer work, and helping the young Catholics set their goals in life (63-66). Likewise, young Catholics should be encouraged to follow the life of Jesus in both vertical and horizontal relationships that will deepen their relationship with God and enhance their new relationships with others, parents, the Church, and society (67-68).

The way that Yan organizes his book demonstrates his knowledge of the Chinese culture from an “insider” perspective. Yan’s meticulous writing is an ethnographic research that can generate different theological reflections. Studying a civilization with thousands of years of history and traditions has to be contextual; Yan reminds us that even the youth population who born during the 1980s, 1990s, and post-2000s has different cultural characteristics that are impacted differently by the ongoing economic, sociopolitical, and scientific development in China. Moreover, it is important to see how the ritualistic and praxis of the faithful show a clearer meaning of what “religion” means to the youth. This study resonates what Stephen Bevans describes as Context Theology, a theology that is engaged within the context of its hosting culture. Since our lived experiences continuously change and progress, it is rather challenging to use only one model or way to reflect the ongoing theology of lived experiences; it has to be interdisciplinary. Yan’s account is one of the best diagnoses of the religious phenomena with a theopoetic perspective.

A small sample of interviews cannot generate a thorough picture of the young Chinese Catholics. However, it can create spaces to further researches, such as the comparative studies on the rural and urban religiosity of the young Catholics, cross-state studies among the spiritual practices of the young Catholics, and also an ecumenical on the spiritual life of the young Catholics, which can be a great contribution to religious studies in China. With great hope, Yan concludes his book with an emphasis that echoes at his preface, “Youth is the future. They, being agents of change, will be the ones to shape it. How China will evolve and how the Chinese Catholic Church will thrive or fail is in their hands” (ix). The first edition of this book has already been sold out; I hope the second edition and kindle version will come soon to create a stronger voice to advance the youth ministry in China.

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