

THE COMMERCE OF HOLY IMAGES IN EARLY MODERN CHINA: NAVIGATING THE JESUIT DISTRIBUTION AND PRODUCTION OF CHINESE CATHOLIC ARTWORKS

Antonio De Caro^{*}

ABSTRACT During the 19th century, Chinese Catholic missionary-artists in present-day Shanghai, such as Fr. Simon Liu Dezhai 劉德齋 S.J. (1843–1912), made important contributions to the production and distribution of Chinese Catholic artworks. Aided by local orphans, Liu's crafts, and those of his religious brothers, which included paintings, statuettes, and other devotional objects, began to spread beyond local devotional places and into the global art market. In the same period, Catholic women communities in Shanghai, like the *Sœurs de la Présentation*, produced embroideries that were particularly appreciated by the European Catholic clergy and were exhibited in the Missionary Art Exhibition (*Mostra d'arte missionaria*) in the Holy See in 1950.

At the same time, European Jesuit clergymen expressed, in different ways, their desires and expectations about Catholic images to be distributed in China, their role, and their use. For instance, Fr. Valentin Hamann S.J. (1831–1914) sought to produce only 'painted images', especially colored prints, rather than 'statues', since the latter seemed too similar to local Chinese deities and, therefore, would have caused confusion among local believers. Despite those expectations, Catholic devotional statues were present in several Catholic communities, and their production, distribution, and veneration had a crucial role in Chinese Catholic art.

This paper explores the production and distribution of Chinese Catholic artworks, considering the financial, artistic, and intellectual contributions of French-led Jesuit communities in Shanghai. It also addresses the expectations and challenges of these endeavors, along with the global distribution and exhibition of the Chinese Catholic artworks created there.

KEYWORDS Jesuit missions in China, Chinese Catholic Art, Tushanwan, Xujiahui, Shanghai, Global Art History

^{*} Antonio De Caro  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7263-1707>

Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute of Art History, University of Zurich, and Research Associate at the Department of History of SOAS University of London.

1. Introduction

On February 18, 1926, Baron Giovanni di Giura (1893–1989), appointed as a Secretary for the Italian embassy in Tokyo, wrote a letter from Beijing to Fr. Pietro Tacchi Venturi S.J. (1861–1956)¹ During his tour of the city, di Giura visited the Catholic graveyard of Zhalan 栅栏 in Beijing and the remains of the Summer Palace, destroyed by Anglo-French troops in 1860. In the letter a sense of pride emerges immediately for two key figures of the early modern Jesuit missions in China: Fr. Matteo Ricci S.J. (Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552–1610) and Fr. Giuseppe Castiglione S.J. (Lang Shining 郎世寧, 1688–1766). Di Giura praises the *genio italiano*, and Castiglione's adaptation (in his words, *contaminazione*, i.e. intermixing) of the Italian Baroque style with the Chinese *stile scultoreo*. In contrast, he strongly dislikes Gothic

1 “Carissimo ed illustre Padre Tacchi, Ricevo proprio ora la sua graditissima lettera del 28 gennaio scorso e mi affretto a procurarmi il vivo piacere di conversare nuovamente con Lei sia pure, purtroppo, per il tramite epistolare. Come le scrissi in una delle mie precedenti lettere, mi recai espressamente, in compagnia di S. E. Mons. Costantini, al Cimitero di Chala [Zhalan] per visitarvi la tomba dell'indimenticabile Padre Matteo Ricci di gloriosa e venerata memoria. Secondo quanto ebbi già l'onore di scriverLe, la stele funeraria del nostro missionario trovai in perfetto stato, mentre le sue ossa dev'essere trovate nell'Ossario comune che venne, dopo il 1900, eretto nel centro quasi del Cimitero medesimo. Insieme a quella mia lettera Le spedii pure le rispettive fotografie da me prese e della stele, e dell'Ossario. Non so, dunque, se Ella vuole alludere alla stele o ad una vera e propria ricomposizione della tomba originaria; in questo secondo caso mi pare difficile potervi eventualmente addivenire, poiché, ripeto, le ossa del Padre Ricci si trovano confuse con le altre nell'Ossario comune. Accludo alla presente due altre fotografie da me prese, per il carissimo Padre Tacchi, delle più significanti rovine del vecchio Palazzo d'Estate distrutto dai franco-inglesi nel 1860. La sapiente opera italiana del famoso Padre Castiglione appare ivi, in special modo, in tutta la sua magnificenza nonché nella abilissima 'contaminazione' del nostro barocco con l'indigeno 'stile scultoreo'. Chi ha visto, come il sottoscritto, le torri e le Chiese del Cremlino, nonché il Castello Reale a Cracovia, può rendersi pieno conto di questa sovrana adattabilità del genio italiano all'interpretazione più geniale e leggiadra di qualsiasi ambiente forestiero e di qualsiasi altra anima nazionale. Chi osserva, invece, le brutte Chiese di un gotico sgraziato, e comunque sgradevole e stonante, in questo paese, non può non sorridere di disdegno alla petulante e cieca mentalità di certi Missionari, specie della Gallia, che credono di poter ancora 'conquistare' questa gente in tal modo, mentre l'allontanano, in realtà, dall'unica luce universale, ma multiforme (come sono le razze e diversi i loro colori) della nostra Santa Religione. Il buddismo è stato diffuso in Cina dagli stessi Cinesi. Non sarà certo il sacerdote gallo del Pei-tang od il missionario protestante d'Inghilterra od il quacchero americano che riusciranno a diffondere veramente e durevolmente la nostra Religione Cattolica o quella Cristiana in genere. Saranno piuttosto gli allievi indigeni dei preveggenti Missionari, soprattutto di quelli Cattolici Italiani, che attrarranno a Cristo turbe di devoti e fedeli convertiti. La prego di ricordarmi a tutti, di non farmi mancare sue carte e sempre tanto gradite nuove, e di voler sempre benedire [...] Giovanni di Giura.” Fondo P. Pietro Tacchi Venturi S. J., Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Box 45, Document 202.

architecture in China and what he perceived as French-promoted architectural projects:

“Those who observe, on the other hand, the ugly Churches of a dreadful, and by any means unpleasant and out-of-tune (sgraziato) Gothic style in this country cannot help but smile with disdain at the petulant and blind-mindedness of some Missionaries, especially from France, who believe they can still 'conquer' these people in such a way, while they actually turn them away from the one universal, yet multifaceted (as are the races and different their colors) light of our Holy Religion.”²

As a result, for di Giura, only local Chinese Catholic disciples of the European Catholic missionaries, especially Italians, will “bring to Christ vast crowds of devout and loyal [Chinese] converts.” Di Giura's gaze toward Catholic art and architecture in China echoes possibly a nationalist perception of that time, imagining, and re-inventing, the role played by early modern Jesuit missionaries, like Ricci and Castiglione, as Italian and universal *geni* in direct opposition to contemporary Gothic architecture he saw in Beijing, and elsewhere in China. Recent scholarship has shown, to the contrary, the importance of Gothic architecture in China, amidst diverse opinions, its cross-cultural role in different contexts, and provided a more nuanced understanding of Catholic artistic and architectural endeavors in China, and Beijing in particular.³ Moreover, Elisabetta Corsi has convincingly shown the relevance of other key actors, like Fr. Ferdinando Bonaventura Moggi S.J. (Li Boming 李博明, 1684–1761), among others, who were less ‘visible’ and yet had a crucial role in the contributions

2 Fondo P. Pietro Tacchi Venturi S. J., Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Box 45, Document 202.

3 Alan R. Sweeten, *China's Old Churches: The History, Architecture, and Legacy of Catholic Sacred Structures in Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Anthony E. Clark, *China Gothic: The Bishop of Beijing and His Cathedral* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019); Barbara B. Klein, Bruno Klein, and Bettina Marten, eds., *Global Gothic: Gothic Church Building in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022). For a more comprehensive analysis on Jesuit architecture in Beijing see Lianming Wang, *Jesuitenerbe in Peking: sakralbauten und transkulturelle Räume, 1600–1800* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020). See also Eugenio Menegon, “An Invisible City: Urban Life and Networks of European Missionaries and Christian Converts in Qing Beijing” in Daniel M. Greenberg and Mari Yoko Hara, eds., *From Rome to Beijing: Sacred Spaces in Dialogue* (Boston: Brill, 2024), 15–70.

of Catholic visual arts in China.⁴ Di Giura's prejudices, misrepresentations, and personal distastes provide insights into the longue durée reception of early modern Jesuit art in China since the restoration of the Society of Jesus in 1814. The 'golden' past of the *Antica Compagnia* became even more relevant for the *Nuova Compagnia* as seen in the writings of Jesuit missionaries in China, or novices eager to reach it, who expressed their admiration for previous missionaries, their erudition, and their religious fervor.⁵ The biases and prejudices of di Giura were preceded by previous cross-cultural encounters in the 19th century that echoed expectations on the role of Catholic artworks across the Qing empire.

This article examines artistic encounters between Chinese and European actors, as well as the historiographical implications that have arisen from them. It centers on the commercial efforts of Jesuit missionaries, while also mentioning other actors, in fostering Chinese Catholic art, understood here broadly as any form of Catholic-related production in China or for Chinese individuals, and their petitions for financing this enterprise. It also delves into the perception among Jesuit missionaries of Buddhist and Daoist artworks as 'idols' meant to be replaced by Catholic devotional images. Finally, it presents how some of those artworks and objects were displayed in the Vatican collections.

2. Xujiahui and Tushanwan: Chinese-Latin Education and Arts in 19th-century Shanghai

The village of Xujiahui 徐家匯 (also known as Zi-ka-wei), now part of the city of Shanghai, and the nearby area of Tushanwan 土山灣 had been crucial sites for the French-led Jesuit missions in China during the 19th century. There, French and Italian missionaries, in collaboration with other European and Chinese confreres, established several institutions that soon became fundamental for the newly restored Jesuit missions in China, including

- 4 Elisabetta Corsi, "The Drawings of Ferdinando Bonaventura Moggi (1684–1761) and the Applied Arts Workshops (Zaobanchu) at the Qing Court" in Greenberg and Hara eds., *From Rome to Beijing*, 156–81. See in particular "Only by shifting our attention from the 'greats' such as Castiglione, about whom we continue to rewrite what has already been written, and by looking at the practices of an apparently marginal community of artists and artisans, will we be able to reconsider the missionaries' contributions to the visual arts in China, not only within the confines of the court but, above all, outside it," Corsi, "The Drawings of Ferdinando Bonaventura Moggi (1684–1761) and the Applied Arts Workshops (Zaobanchu) at the Qing Court," 178.
- 5 Antonio De Caro, "Il sogno dell'indipeta rossa: Agostino Massa, Gabriele Vigliante, Nicola Miozzi e la loro littera indipeta in cinese," *Sulla Via del Catai*, Vol.16, No.29 (2023): 39–61. See also Girolamo Imbruglia, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Guido Mongini, eds., *Cinque secoli di Litterae indipetae: il desiderio delle missioni nella Compagnia di Gesù* (Rome: Institutum historicum societatis Iesu, 2022).

painting and sculpting workshops.⁶ During the same period, leading missionary figures in Shanghai, such as Fr. Angelo Zottoli S.J. (Chao Deli 晁德蒞, 1826–1902), supported the pupils' education and aimed to encourage them.⁷ Zottoli, among others, actively promoted the study of Latin in Zi-ka-wei, and established a curriculum centering on the study of both the Latin classici and the Confucian canonical texts.⁸ This was part of a broader educational system that encouraged the study of Latin literary sources, Catholic theology, Chinese literature, and artistic skills, such as sculpting and painting.

At the orphanage of Tushanwan, orphans guided by their teachers, like the painter Fr. Simon Liu S.J. (Liu Dezhai 劉德齋, 1843–1912), a talented student of Zottoli, produced

- 6 Joseph de la Servière, *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-Nan. Jésuites de la province de France (Paris) 1840–1899*. (Zi-ka-wei: Imprimerie de l' Orphelinat de Tóu-sè-wè, 1914), 2 Volumes; Wei Mo, "Jesuit Rhetoric and Language Studies in Modern Shanghai," *Religions* Vol.13, No. 12 (2022): 1129, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121129>. Wei Mo, "The Gendered Space of the 'Oriental Vatican'—Zi-Ka-Wei, the French Jesuits and the Evolution of Papal Diplomacy," *Religions* Vol. 9, No. 9 (September, 2018): 278, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9090278>. Yuezhi Xiong, *Shanghai Urban Life and Its Heterogeneous Cultural Entanglements*, trans. Lane J. Harris and Mei Chun (Leiden: Brill, 2022), Vol. 15. For an overview of the production of material culture there, see Xiaobai Chu 褚瀟白, "Lingting kunan: Tushanwan Tianzhujiao huihua yishu zhong de kongjian yishi ji qi zongjiao jingshen 聆聽苦難：土山灣天主教繪畫藝術中的空間意識及其宗教精神 [The Spatial Consciousness and Religious Spirit in the Catholic Painting Art of Tushanwan]" , *Jidujiao yanjiu* 基督教研究 [Journal of Research for Christianity in China], No. 2 (2012): 233–38; Bei Gao 高蓓, "Tushanwan Gueryuan meishu gongchang yanjiu 土山灣孤兒院美術工場研究 [A Research on 'Art Workshop of Tushanwan Orphanage.]" (PhD Diss., Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2009); Peng Yao 姚鵬, Jianping Tao 陶建平, *Fanyu Tangyan: Cong Tushanwan huaguan dao Furen huapai de yishu shijian, 1583–1941* 梵語唐言：從土山灣畫館到輔仁畫派的藝術實踐, 1583–1941 [L'histoire de la peinture catholique en Chine, 1583–1941] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2020); Helena Motoh, "Orphan(ed) Scroll: The Case of Contextualizing a Late Qing Object in a Slovenian Museum," *Ming-Qing Yanjiu* 明清研究, Vol. 24, No. 1 (May 2020): 139–58, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24684791-12340045>. For a more in-depth analysis on Tushanwan and its relevance in late Qing dynasty China, see Wei Zhang 張偉, Xiaoyi Zhang 張曉依, *Tushanwan: Zhongguo jindai wenming de yaolan* 土山灣：中國近代文明的搖籃 [The Cradle to Contemporary Civilization in China] (Taipei: Showwe Information Co., Ltd, 2012).
- 7 "Nous avons quatre dortoirs dans le Collège, aussi que vous pourrez le voir sur le petit plan que je vous en envoie; après avoir donné les Sacres Cœurs de Jesus et de Marie pour patrons tutélaires du premier et du second dortoir, je me suis empressé de mettre le troisième sous la protection spéciale de St. Joseph; le quatrième est confié à l'Ange Gabriel. Puissent nos enfants comprendre bien nos intentions, et désir de fervent dévots des admirables patrons, auxquels je les recommande sans cesse. Veuillez, mon Révérend Père, aidez-moi de vos prières auprès de ces puissants protecteurs et soutenez ma faiblesse dans le chemin qui me reste à parcourir." Angelo Zottoli's letter to Fr. André-Pierre Borgniet S.J. (1811–1862), March 19, 1859, AJPEO FCh877.
- 8 Although Zi-ka-wei had a key relevance, Latin grammar books also circulated in other areas. For instance, in the diocese of Xianxian 獻縣, later in 1929 a primer was published to teach basic notions of the Latin language, see *Exercitia de Primis Linguae Latinae Rudimentis ad usum incipientium* (Sienhsien: Ex typographia missionis catholicae, 1929).

artwork depicting Catholic subjects with distinctive Chinese features, including Marian devotional images. According to Wang Chengyi, Liu Dezhai was at the forefront of the production of religious Catholic images in Tushanwan, including the famous *Our Lady of China* (中華聖母).⁹ Despite the relatively limited available sources on the painting and sculpting workshops in Tushanwan,¹⁰ Wei Zhang sought to provide an account of the structure of the courses taught there. Drawing, calligraphy, and sketching were all part of a more holistic curriculum encompassing also the study of history and theology, among other subjects.¹¹

In a letter written in Chinese, possibly during the late 19th century, a group of Chinese pupils from Shanghai testified to the performative role of images of Our Lady for their craftsmanship: “We [...] thus do not hide our estimates and would not be presumptuous, we would like instead to humbly report the situation and discuss it with you in private. Therefore, as your humble pupils who are learning painting, we respectfully have drawn an image of the Holy Mother having our Lord in her arms and present it here [to you].” (ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Gallia, Sin. 1005, 0770).¹² In the intentions of Fr. Adolphe Vasseur S.J. (Fan

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- 9 Chengyi Wang 王成義, *Shanghai Tushanwan Yi Shu* 上海土山灣藝術 [Shanghai Tushanwan Art] (Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe, 2014), 58–64. For a much more in-depth analysis of the relevance of the image of *Our Lady of China* see Jeremy Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).
- 10 For further insights, see Hongxing Zhang 張弘星, “Zhongguo zuizao de Xiyang meishu yaolan—Shanghai Tushanwan guer gongyiyuan de yishu shiye 中國最早的西洋美術搖籃——上海土山灣孤兒工藝院的藝術事業 [The earliest cradle of Western art in China: The artworks from the Tushanwan orphanage crafts workshops]”, *Dongnan wenhua* 東南文化 5 (1991): 124–30; William Ma, “From Shanghai to Brussels: the Tushanwan Orphanage Workshops and the Carved Ornaments of the Chinese Pavilion at Laeken Park” in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Jennifer Milam, eds., *Beyond Chinoiserie: Artistic Exchange between China and the West during the Late Qing Dynasty (1796–1911)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 268–96; William Ma, “Pedagogy, Display, and Sympathy at the French Jesuit Orphanage Workshops of Tushanwan in Early-Twentieth Century Shanghai” (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2016); Julie Chun, “Tushanwan Orphanage Craft School in Shanghai: its history and artistic significance,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China* Vol. 277, No.1 (August 2017): 212–39; Liyang Shen, “Chinese Architecture Made by the Tushanwan Workshop in World Exhibitions, 1900–1945,” *The Journal of Modern Craft*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (August 2023): 45–61; Jeremy Clarke, “The Chinese Jesuits’ Role in the Art Workshops of Tuwanshan,” *Sulla Via del Catai*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2023): 63–81.
- 11 Zhang, *Tushanwan*, 26–27.
- 12 Translation by the author. All translations in this essay are by the author unless otherwise noted. I am grateful to Zhenxu Fan for her support during the translation of this document.

Shixi 范世熙, 1828–1899),¹³ a crucial model for the production of Catholic images was Fra Angelico OP (1395–1455); as Vasseur clearly expressed in a volume on Catholic images and the propagation of the Catholic faith, “to establish a painting workshop, we must readopt the tradition of Fra Angelico, which was interrupted by the Renaissance”.¹⁴ As shown by Guo Nanyan, Vasseur's constant production of images led to their continuous use “in art education and publications at T’ou-se-we” and their diffusion in different Catholic communities in China and Japan.¹⁵

The process of image-making and the distribution of Catholic images were not only intertwined with expectations about the role of those images in the missionary context. Images were also perceived as having the power to destroy local ‘idols’, contrasting their authority and replacing their religious influence.¹⁶

3. The Making of Catholic Images: Diverging Ideas on Commerce and Propaganda

Vasseur intended that Catholic art should serve to educate local Chinese individuals about the Catholic faith.¹⁷ At the same time, he and his assistants were aware of the commercial aspects intertwined with this ambitious enterprise. In an anonymous program

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- 13 For further information concerning Vasseur and his relevance for late Qing Catholic art, see Nanyan Guo, “A Flow of Christian Images from the Shanghai Jesuits to the Paris Foreign Missions in Japan: Imitation, Alteration, and Returning to the Roots,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* Vol. 10, No. 4 (August 2023): 605–39. For further information on Vasseur’s biography and his artworks see Li Dandan 李丹丹, “Qingmo Yesuhuishi Yishujia Fan Shixi: Fayin yu Tushanwan Gu’er Yuan de Tianzhujiao Tuxianji Yanjiu 清末耶穌會士藝術家範世熙：發軔於土山灣孤兒院的天主教圖像集研究 [The Late Qing Jesuit Artist Fan Shixi: A Study of the Catholic Image Collection Originating from the T’ou-Se-We Orphanage]” (PhD Diss., China Academy of Art, 2015).
- 14 Adolphe Vasseur, *L’Art chrétien populaire et description du Paroissien populaire illustré dédié à MM. les Membres du clergé* (Abbeville: C. Paillart, 1886), 62. Later, in 1907, Monsignor Celso Costantini, C.D.D. (剛恆毅, 1876–1958) praised, in his primer on Christian art for the clergy, the *Quattrocento* as the “golden century” of Christian painting, see Celso Costantini, *Nozioni d’arte per il clero* (Florence: Libreria Salesiana, 1907), 141.
- 15 Guo, “A Flow of Christian Images from the Shanghai Jesuits to the Paris Foreign Missions in Japan,” 609.
- 16 For further reflections on ‘idols’ and ‘idolatry’, see Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft eds. *Idol Anxiety* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Rebecca Zorach, ed., *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- 17 Vasseur’s works were published among many other illustrated catechistical texts, like the *Gushi canzheng* 古史參箴 [The Old Testament Stories with Commentaries] (Shanghai: Cimitang, 1885) by Fr. Shen Zekuan 沈則寬 S.J., including several images after mostly earlier European prints, see Shen, *Gushi canzheng* 古史參箴 [Admonitions from Ancient History] (Shanghai: Cimitang, 1885).

entitled *Imagerie Catholique de Nankin*, dated around 1870, the cost of image production by Vasseur was explained in detail:

“The work aims to help the poorest missions in China to spread the knowledge of [the Catholic] Religion. It does so through illustrated visual material, the collection, style, and execution of which have been adapted to the needs of these countries. Missionaries, catechists, and even Christians will find it the easiest and most popular way of explaining the dogmas of the true religion to non-Christians. It includes 120 engravings in a *in-4°*, distributed in nine manuals, each presenting the reader with a page of Chinese commentary and a colorized image. In addition, a series of large, one-meter subjects summarizes the entire Christian doctrine. The engraving, which took two years to complete, cost 160 piasters or 950 francs. This inexpensive execution helps us understand the formal condition of the work due to its affordable prices. The three prices shown correspond to three methods of execution: The 1st has simple, plain tints. The 2nd has flat colors corrected by retouching. The 3rd has a true painting (*véritable peinture*) according to the [best] artistic techniques”.¹⁸

Cahiers d'Imagerie expliquée									
		1 ^{er}	2 ^e	3 ^e			1 ^{er}	2 ^e	3 ^e
Ancien Testament	20 images	250	500	4,000	Manuel des Catéchumènes	20 images	250	500	4,000
Vie de N. S.	50 images	600	1,200	10,000	Les fins dernières	6 images	100	200	1,200
Petite vie de N. S.	25 images	300	600	5,000	Le Rosaire illustré	16 images	200	400	3,200
Passion de N. S.	16 images	200	400	3,200	Le Livre des Apôtres	14 images	200	400	1,500
Catéchisme de la religion	70 images	800	1,600	14,000					
Compendium de la religion									
Objets qui précèdent									
Grandes Images religieuses									
Création		200	400	1,500	Mauvaise mort		150	300	1,200
Trinité Couronnant la Vierge		150	300	1,200	Jugement		300	600	1,500
Nativité		150	300	1,200	Enfer		300	600	1,500
Épiphanie		150	300	1,500	Ciel		400	800	2,000
Église en Concile		300	600	1,500	Marie Sauv.		150	300	1,000

Fig. 1. Adolphe Vasseur, Price list for Catholic images, ink on paper, 1870 circa ©Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Gallia, Sin. 1004, XI, 1a–1b.

This was followed by a table including the prices for the three types of images and their respective subjects, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, including images of saints and other religious illustrations (Fig. 1).

Fr. Henri Pitot S.J. (1828–1900), who sent this program to Monsignor Adrien-Hippolyte Languillat S.J. (1808–1878) in April 1870, praised the fast production (*célérité d'exécution*) of those images in Paris, contrary to their possible production locally in China. He then suggested that Languillat actively support their production financially.¹⁹ For Pitot, pictures needed to be produced cheaply, speedily, and appropriately, and were perceived as essential tools for the diffusion of the Catholic faith in China. As will be discussed later, the purchase and commercialization of the Catholic objects, especially those produced in Europe, were of concern to the Jesuit missionaries, who feared a surge in prices as items were bought at a lower price and then resold at a higher one.

Later in 1875, Fr. Valentin Hamann S.J. (1831–1914) published an article discussing the production of Catholic images in China. The author seems much more inclined to support a rhetorical discourse, emphasizing the difference between local ‘idols’ and Catholic images. He describes the Chinese empire as “still enslaved to the devil” (*encore esclave du démon*) and in the “cult of idols” (*idoles*).²⁰ As a result, Catholic missionaries used Catholic images in China to replace those *idoles* and take “the space usurped by the devil in the [Chinese] household”.²¹ According to Hamann, the wish of the Jesuit missionaries in China was to receive painted images, rather than statues, since those were too similar to the Chinese ‘idols’.²² The purpose of this effort was twofold: “to overthrow idols, and to make those evangelized by [Catholic] missionaries accept pious images, especially those of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”.²³ According to Hamann, with the support of some pious individuals, three types of images were already produced and ready to be commercialized and distributed in China. The first one was an image of the Lord of Heaven (*Tianzhu* 天主). The second was

19 Letter from Fr. Pitot to Monsignor Languillat" (Paris, April 8, 1870), Fondo Nuova Compagnia, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Ass. Gallia, Sin. 1004, XI, Document 1r–1v.
20 Valentin Hamann, “Œuvre des images Chinoises sous le patronage de l'Archange Saint Michel”, *Les Missions catholiques* 322 (1875), 384.
21 Hamann, “Œuvre des images Chinoises,” 384.
22 This issue has been widely discussed by Zhiyuan Pan, see Zhiyuan Pan, “How Tintin Met Tchang: The Sino-Belgian Catholic Network in the Early Twentieth Century” (PhD Diss., University of Cambridge, 2021), 56–75.
23 Hamann, “Œuvre des images Chinoises,” 385.

18 Fondo Nuova Compagnia, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Ass. Gallia, Sin. 1004, XI, Document 1a–1b.

an image representing St. Michael the Archangel defeating Satan. Finally, the third image represented a guardian angel guiding a Chinese boy. The first type had an initial print of 2,000 reproductions, the second one of 10,000, and the third also consisted of 10,000 reproductions. The concern for the relatively expensive images, already shared by Fr. Pitot in 1870, is also present in the article by Fr. Hamann, who mentioned also efforts to reduce the cost of printing those images.²⁴ In 1877, in the province of Zhili 直隸, present-day Hebei 河北, these works, realized and supported by Hamann, were widespread and well-received, especially in French-led Catholic missionary contexts:

These colored images measure forty-three centimeters high by thirty centimeters wide. They depict the Lord of Heaven, as he is known in China, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Michael, the Guardian Angel, Our Lady of Purgatory, and more.²⁵

François Xavier Leboucq, who offered a description of those images, reinstated the same arguments adopted by Hamann. Those Catholic images provided “evangelical workers with a powerful tool for the destruction of idols and the cultivation of Catholic piety.”²⁶ Moreover, the cheaper cost of producing those images made them ideal for a wider diffusion in several Chinese provinces.²⁷

In the Jiangnan area, the fight against ‘evil spirits’ was an important component of the Catholic enterprise, and Catholic images played a crucial role in this spiritual competition against witchcraft and demonic possessions.²⁸ In 1859, Fr. Stanislas Clavelin S.J. (1814–1862) mentioned the presence of *possessions diabolique* (demonic possessions) which often led to a large number of conversions to the Catholic faith.²⁹ A more detailed event, which happened

24 Hamann, “Œuvre des images Chinoises,” 384–85.

25 François Xavier Leboucq, *Monseigneur Édouard Dubar et la mission catholique du Tche-ly-sud-est, en Chine* (Paris: Wattelier, 1880), 424.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 425. “Fondée par la charité et par le zèle, cette œuvre procure ses images aux Missions à un prix minime, bien au-dessous du prix de revient; elle aspire au moment où des secours plus considérables lui permettront de les fournir gratuitement aux ouvriers apostoliques, comme ceux-ci les donnent eux-mêmes à leurs catéchumènes et à leurs néophytes.”

28 de la Servière, *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-Nan*, Vol. 2, 209–10.

29 *Le missions catholiques*, No. 40 (1869), 100.

almost ten years later, provides an insight into the presence of the ‘devil’ and ‘diabolical’ images in Jiangnan. In October of that year, a non-Christian woman was visited by the devil, and although he remained invisible, his presence was immediately manifest to her. In February 1868, the woman started to experience the effects of this diabolical visitation:

She no longer ate [and] lay motionless on her bed, suffering five months of cruel torture. On the advice of her parents, a Christian was called in. He asked that all images of the devil be burned and that the patient had to believe in God and undergo baptism. The patient, her husband and children all declared their readiness to embrace Christianity. The Christian man [who assisted her] then removed the devil’s image from the family, threw it into the fire, replaced it with the image of Our Lord, then, full of faith, took the [holy] water, sprinkled it on the patient, and immediately delivered her [from the sickness].³⁰

Paradoxically, sometimes Chinese Catholic communities and Jesuit missionaries in the Jiangnan area were themselves accused of superstitious actions, especially regarding blessed olive branches kept by Catholic believers or the possession of paper devotional images.³¹³⁰ Liu Dezhai and his pupils also produced images representing hell and demons. As cleverly shown by Song Gang, in the 1887 *Daoyuan jingcui* 道原精萃 (Essential Works of the Dao), a collection of Catholic works, more than three hundred images illustrated the lives of Christ and other biblical stories.³² One of those images depicts hell: demons are eating and strangling sinners, while they burn in flames. Right after, an image of St. Michael the Archangel defeating the devil is shown. As narrated by de la Servière, stories of evil spirits were ever-present in the Jiangnan area and, at times, were meant to exploit the feelings of the local population and their beliefs in spirits and demonic presences. In the early months of 1876, in Nanjing, evil spirits were seen flying armed with scissors, cutting the tails of male passers-by and leading them to certain death, and cutting the hem of women’s dresses or the fastenings of their

30 Ibid., 102.

31 de la Servière, *Histoire de La Mission Du Kiang-Nan*, Vol. 2, 209–10.

32 Gang Song, “Catholic Images of Christ and Mary in Late Imperial China,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Catholic Church in East Asia*, eds., Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Beatrice Leung (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2022), 32.

shoes.³³ Statues, especially Buddhist and Daoist ones, also served as an important vector to convey the local authority and were perceived by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries as a key symbol of the local ‘idolatry’. For instance, Zottoli in June 1859 described different reactions among the Protestant communities, including local clergy, amidst tensions with the local non-Christian communities. In one of his stories, he mentions the tragic tale of an unnamed Protestant minister in the Jiangnan area:

A group of vagabonds, returning from a small pagoda, knocked on the door and asked for books; the [Protestant] minister refused, arguing that it wasn't the right time to give them away. But no matter how hard the poor man spurred his horse, he was hit and dragged to the pagoda, where the insolent men ordered him to bow before the Chinese idol; he obeyed, kneeling before the wooden statue, and three times brushed the dirt from his forehead.³⁴

Contrary to Hamann's preoccupations, devotional statues played a crucial role in the Catholic community of Jiangnan province and were produced in the sculpting workshop of Tushanwan by Chinese orphans with the aid of both European and Chinese craftsmen. European Marian devotional statues also set an important iconographic example for local Chinese Catholic productions. For example, as narrated by Joseph de la Servière, an oil on canvas painting representing Our Lady—following the iconographic traits of the Marian statue preserved at Notre-Dame des Victoires in Paris and produced by a local Chinese missionary-artist, Fr. Peter Lu, S. J. (Lu Bodu 陸伯都, 1836–1880)³⁵—was blessed by Monsignor Languillat in March 1868 in a chapel located on the hill of Sheshan 佘山.³⁶ Later in January 1872, the local Catholic community of the Suzhou 蘇州 district, supported by Fr. Francesco Adinolfi S.J. (Liu Yongle 劉庸樂, 1831–1874) organized a procession

33 de la Servière, *Histoire de La Mission Du Kiang-Nan*, Vol. 2, 209.

34 Extract, in French, of a letter by Fr. Angelo Zottoli S.J. to Fr. Carlo Piccirillo S.J. (1821–1888)" (Rome, June 1859), Fondo Chine, Archives jésuites de la Province d'Europe Occidentale (AJPEO), Box 877.

35 Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 101. See also David Francis Urrows, *Francois Ravary SJ and a Sino-European Musical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Shanghai* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 45.

36 de la Servière, *Histoire de La Mission Du Kiang-Nan*, Vol. 2, 177. For the image, see Thomas Coomans, "Notre-Dame de Sheshan à Shanghai, basilique de pèlerinage des Jésuites français en Chine, 1867-1935," *Bulletin Monumental*, Vol. 176, No. 2 (2018): 129–56, 134.

welcoming Anne Zhou Liushi 周劉氏, a local “neophyte” who supported ill children in the area. The ceremony involved a statue of Our Lady, which was honored by non-Christian men and women who were “burning perfumes or holding lit candles” at its passage.³⁷ The presence of Marian devotional statues is also attested to by a photograph showing the interiors of a church dedicated to Our Lady in Wuxi, located in present-day Jiangsu Province (Fig. 2).³⁸



Fig. 2 Anon. photographer, Chiesa di Tsing-yang [Qing yang Shengmu tang 青陽聖母堂], Wuxi 無錫, China ca. 1850–1900, photograph, approx. 12.5 x 10 cm ©Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome, Italy, Archivio fotografico Acquaderni A14, 40.

37 de la Servière, *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-Nan*, Vol. 2, 302.

38 I am immensely grateful to Dr. Feng Lisi (Nankai University) and Prof. Wang Meixiu (University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing) for their support in reconstructing the location of the church.

4. The Garden of the Holy Mother: The Shengmu Yuan 聖母院 and the Artistic Efforts of Chinese Catholic Practitioners

As mentioned by Zhou Xiufen,³⁹ the Shengmu Yuan 聖母院 (lit. Garden of the Holy Mother) played a crucial role in popularizing the Catholic faith in the Jiangnan area and was under the jurisdiction of the Chinese congregation of the *Sœurs de la Présentation* (Presentadines). The presence of Chinese virgins, at times supported by European sisters, underpinned a more complex religious context. As mentioned by Arnulf Camps, “In 1869 French nuns founded a Chinese Congregation, the Association of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin (Presentadines), which should ‘replace’ the virgins. While the virgins strengthened local autonomy, the Presentadines extended French ecclesiastical control.”⁴⁰

The production of embroideries at the *Shengmu Yuan* was paired with efforts to baptize dying children and support local parishes and clergymen. The officially approved regulations of the *Associatio B. Mariae Virginis titulo Praesentationis* (Association of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin) shed light on the several tasks of virgins who joined it. Divided into 33 rules, this document provides a unique insight into the expectations of female Chinese Catholic practitioners in Zi-ka-wei and their role in promoting the Catholic faith, which was far from peripheral in the eyes of the local male Catholic clergymen. The second and third rules illustrate the purposes and overarching activities of the *Associatio*:

2. The activities in which the [female] members of the *Associatio* could engage to fulfill their purpose are as follows: teaching girls in schools and educating them in piety (*pietatem*); overseeing and serving in orphanages; caring for chapels [...]; baptizing dying children of non-believers; and encouraging and instructing non-believers to embrace the [Catholic] faith, to the extent of their ability

3. Those who are admitted to the *Associatio* must be at least twenty years old, of sound physical health, of good character, educated for two years in the school of the *Shengmu Yuan*, free from any ties of marriage or engagement, and, finally,

39 Zhou Xiufen 周秀芬, ed., *Lishi shang de Xujiahui* 歷史上的徐家匯 [Zikawei in history] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2005), 140–49.

40 Arnulf Camps, *Studies in Asian Mission History, 1956–1998* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 148.

must have parents who do not object to their admission [to the Congregation].⁴¹

European travelers in the Jiangnan area also confirmed the relevance of this compound.⁴² As shown extensively by Wei Mo, the *Présentadines* played a major role in the Jiangnan area and Xujiahui. Although French Jesuit missionaries were hostile to the leading role played by female Catholic leaders there, they reorganized “the Virgins in conventual religious congregations,” re-framing those practices within their male-led method.⁴³ Those hostilities were at times the result of violations of social Chinese norms, like in the early phase of the Jesuit missions in Shanghai in 1845, when a decree issued by Monsignor Ludovico De Besi (1805–1871) forbade women from reciting Catholic prayers alone, suggesting the alternation between men and women in the church, leading to open protests by the local population.⁴⁴ Other religious orders, like the *Sœurs auxiliairices des âmes du purgatoire* (Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls) interacted with non-Catholic communities, including Protestant women, and established a lasting relationship with the wives of several Protestant missionaries.⁴⁵ Like Mo, Thomas Coomans has also provided valuable insights into the ‘gendered spaces’ in the Jiangnan area and the late Qing Chinese empire more broadly.⁴⁶ Coomans has shown, for instance, how spaces were organized and the central role played by female Chinese virgins in planning the spaces and maintaining order.⁴⁷ An interesting example of the crucial role of the *Sœurs auxiliairices* in artistic productions has been narrated by Fr. Zottoli on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his arrival in Shanghai in 1848, on August 16, 1898, sending some gifts he received there to his religious brothers in Naples, which he described in detail:

41 “*Associatio B. Mariae Virginis titulo Praesentationis*” (1869), Fondo Chine, Archives jésuites de la Province d’Europe Occidentale (AJPEO), Box 408.

42 *Les Missions catholiques*, No. 302 (1875): 130.

43 Mo, “The Gendered Space of the ‘Oriental Vatican’—Zi-Ka-Wei, the French Jesuits and the Evolution of Papal Diplomacy,” 278.

44 de la Servière, *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-Nan*, Vol. 1, 91–92.

45 Ibid., Vol. 2, 197.

46 Thomas Coomans, ed., *Missionary Spaces: Imagining, Building, Contesting Christianities in Africa and China, 1830s–1960s* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2024), 107–44.

47 Thomas Coomans, “Gendered Spaces in Catholic Compounds of Late Qing China,” in Coomans, ed., *Missionary Spaces*, 115–18.

The little bouquet of spiritual flowers offered to me by the Carmel was prepared as early as May; the brushwork is by a young girl who, due to poor health, has not yet been able to make her profession of faith, and who therefore commends herself to the prayers of this most fervent house. The image of the Savior was painted by a *sœur auxiliairice* of Shanghai; I hope it arrives there in all its purity, undamaged by the long and dangerous journey. Of the two embroideries, one is for cleaning European pens, the other is for Chinese name cards; the sample of these cards is the three characters of my name, which here is pronounced Zo-te-li [晁德蒞]. The red booklet encompasses a greeting recited to me by my former pupils from Zi-ka-wei, now fathers [*padri di famiglia*] in Shanghai—pupils from 40 or more years ago—who offered the sum of 50 scudi for a solemn Mass of thanksgiving to the Lord.⁴⁸

Female Chinese Catholic practitioners also played an important role in supporting the local Catholic community in Shanghai. The previously mentioned Marian shrine in Sheshan, dedicated to *Notre-Dame Auxiliairice* (Our Lady, the Help of Christians), and the pilgrimages there offer important insights into the leading role of those female practitioners.⁴⁹ In 1870, a lady from Shanghai donated various piasters and golden and silver ingots to the church in Sheshan. In the same period, devout women also offered gold bracelets and other expensive ornaments to the church of Sheshan.⁵⁰ The financial support was preceded by numerous miraculous events, like in the case of another lady from Shanghai who “was rescued from the clutches of death” and was able to partake in the holy communion in May 1869.⁵¹

The artistic efforts of the Chinese virgins in Shanghai set an important example for other female congregations to follow regarding the production of Chinese Catholic art. For

48 “Giubileo del P. Zottoli,” in *Lettere edificanti della provincia napoletana* (Naples: Stabilimento tipografico di Salvatore Marchese, 1899), 138.

49 Thomas Coomans 高曼士, *Sheshan jiaotang xunzong: jianzhu, chaosheng, lishi tujing* 佘山教堂尋蹤：朝聖建築和歷史圖景 [In Search of Sheshan Church: Pilgrimage Architecture and Historical Landscape] (Shanghai: Tongji daxue chubanshe, 2023); Paul P. Mariani, “The Sheshan ‘Miracle’ and Its Interpretations,” in Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Paul Philip Mariani, eds., *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 129–51.

50 Gabriel Palatre, *Le Pèlerinage de Notre-Dame Auxiliairice à Zô-Sé Dans Le Vicariat Apostolique de Nankin* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la mission catholique, 1875), 85.

51 Ibid., 36.

instance, in the 1920s, Cardinal Thomas Tian Gengxin 田耕莘 S.V. D. (1890–1967) and his mother promoted the production of “paintings [...] as well as Christmas cards, hand-colored by young women” in Nanjing.⁵²

5. The Fireplace of Idolatry: A Battle for Salvation

In Nanjing, Chinese Catholic believers discussed the appropriateness of interacting with non-Christian images and ‘idols.’ An interesting example in this regard is offered by the cases of conscience reported by Fr. Aloysius (Luigi) Sica S.J. (1814–1895) in 1870.⁵³ In the 35th case discussed by Sica, there is a practical case of a Catholic stonemason who built niches for the placement of images of Zao Jun 灶君, the Kitchen God,⁵⁴ and asked a Catholic missionary there, Marcellino, for advice on his conduct:

Nicodemus, a neophyte and stonemason, constructs houses and especially fireplaces for unbelievers. According to the Gentiles’ customs, he is required to decorate certain niches in the walls for the placement of superstitious images, especially the idol that protects the fireplace: Tsao-Kiun (Zao Jun 灶君). He does not make these niches himself, but, so as not to leave the work incomplete and thus lose payment, he suggests that his pagan associate carry out this part of the work. Some Christians are scandalized by this situation, and therefore Nicodemus asks Marcellinus, the missionary, whether this is permissible for him.⁵⁵

52 Daniel J. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush: Contemporary Christian Art In Asia And Africa* (New York: Friendship Press, 1938), 11. Virgins with Chinese features were also depicted in different illustrated Gospel scenes, not only by Catholic artists but also by Protestant ones. A fascinating case is that one of Matthew Tai (bc. 1843), a Chinese artist from Ningbo, who offered several engravings published in *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, an illustrated magazine by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a British evangelical missionary organization. For further information on the CMS, see Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, eds., *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). George Evans Moule (1828–1912) gave an account of his encounter with the artist, who was a captive of the Taiping rebels for several months in 1861. After he was baptized in 1875, Matthew showed Moule a sketchbook containing several illustrated stories of the Gospel, including one depicting five foolish virgins (Matthew 25: 1–13); see George E. Moule, “The parables seen through Chinese eyes,” *The Church missionary gleaner*, (January 1877): 11–12.

53 Aloysius Sica, *Casus conscientiae resoluti in missione Nankinensi* (Rome: Typis S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1870).

54 Yong Chen, *Confucianism as Religion: Controversies and Consequences* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 112–13.

55 Sica, *Casus conscientiae resoluti in missione Nankinensi*, 176.

Sica responds that the main cause for this action does not lie in Nicodemus, but rather, in the owner of the house who wants these niches to be made. As a result, imagining two stonemasons, one Christian and one non-Christian, the non-Christian could complete the 'superstitious' elements of the niche, and the Christian one would not be in any way affected by his action.⁵⁶ Another intriguing example highlighted by Sica is the story of Mathurinus, a Chinese Christian who stole a door and a "bronze idol" (*aeneum idolum*) from a nearby "pagoda." Overwhelmed with remorse for his actions, Mathurinus resolved to return the 'idol' to its rightful place. However, he was apprehensive about performing such an act, fearing that it might inadvertently lead him down a path of 'superstitious' practices. Sica proposes that the bronze 'idol' be returned to its rightful owner, even if this could lead the community to engage in 'superstitious' practices afterward. Similarly, since Mathurinus had already sold the door, he invited him to donate an equivalent amount of money to alleviate the suffering of the poor.⁵⁷ In another equally fascinating case, a Chinese Christian named Marcellus owned a workshop (*officina*). Among other cases shared by Marcellus, two are particularly relevant. In his *officina*, some 'superstitious' items were sold by a local non-Christian employee, who also collected revenues from them. Moreover, Marcellus lived in a house rented from a non-Christian individual, in which he found several domestic idols (*idola domestica*) and superstitious inscriptions on the doors (*superstitiosas inscriptiones in portis*) and walls, including possibly couplets, along with other images.⁵⁸ Although he wished to destroy all those 'superstitious' items, the owner forbade him and his family from doing so. For the first case, Sica suggested that Marcellus not sell those items in his workshop since he benefited indirectly from them and could have caused a scandal in his community. For the second case, Sica suggested removing any movable 'idol' and covering any other inappropriate item that could not be removed.

In addition to those cases, Sica also mentions the case of the "trade" (*negotiatio*) of various religious items, including devotional prints or paintings, crucifixes, books, likely prayer books, candlesticks, and cloths, bought from European or other merchants and then resold at a much higher price for a profit.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, for Sica, those Christians who, to

56 Ibid., 177.

57 Ibid., 61–64.

58 Ibid., 160–65.

59 Ibid., 77–79.

sell their cloths paid a part for contributing to the expenses of Buddhist or Daoist temples, were not to be troubled, as the collection of the money was done indirectly by the owner of the shop, rather than by the Christians themselves, following an old custom (*ex antiqua consuetudine*).⁶⁰

Casimir Leconte (1796–1867), in his *Notice sur le missions catholiques en Chine* (1860),⁶¹ in a copy of his work donated to Fr. Albin Leroux S.J. (1798–1869), provided further insights into those 'superstitious' elements, offering a much more critical, and Eurocentric, reception of local Chinese religious practices:

Do the Chinese have a religion? What is this religion? This subject, lofty and complex, has been approached and treated in very different ways. Serious authors agree that the learned treatises of the early missionaries, while not exhausting the topic, leave much to be desired. [...] Chinese paganism is cold, materialistic, and crude. The pagan does not believe—or at least does not know what he believes. This is the general rule. There are exceptions. In the vast Empire, in the various provinces that compose it, customs, traditions, and characters differ. [...] You, a strong spirit, would feel ill at ease there. You would be offended by the thousands upon thousands of objects encountered on all sides. Your ears would be wearied by the chanted cries and the repeated invocations to tutelary divinities of the household (*foyer domestique*). You might cry out "Superstition!" with all the force of your lungs, and yet this popular but overly credulous religion would peacefully continue its prostrations and supplications.⁶²

Fr. Agnello Della Corte S. J. (Gu Zhensheng 谷振聲, 1819–1896), an Italian Jesuit missionary in Zi-ka-wei, described the Jiangnan area as being overwhelmingly filled with 'idolatry', only comforted by the church dedicated to Our Lady built on the hill of Sheshan:

Here in Kiang-nam 江南, the hills and little mountains—especially those flanking

60 Ibid., 160.

61 Casimir Leconte, "Notice sur le missions catholiques en Chine" (1860), Fonds Chine, Archives jésuites de la Province d'Europe Occidentale (AJPEO), Box 238, Document 1.

62 Ibid., 33–34.

the Kiang 江 (river), one of the greatest rivers in the world—are all crowded with pagodas, where horrible and gigantic statues of the devil's satellites are venerated with unceasing worship. Now, in the midst of so much idolatry and so many profanations, to see before one's eyes a magnificent sanctuary erected in honor of the Queen of Heaven and Earth—ah! The heart of the poor missionary is uplifted a little and fills with indescribable sweet consolations, by which he feels both comforted and moved.⁶³

Missionary tales, often intended to 'edify' other religious brothers in Europe, like the one by Fr. Della Corte, frequently highlighted this distinction between local Buddhist or Daoist artwork, perceived as 'idols', and Catholic ones.⁶⁴ Catholic art produced *in situ* was not only praised in missionary reports and epistolary correspondence, but it was later displayed in exhibitions emphasizing its relevance to Catholic missions in China.

5. Una poesia che si vede: 19th-century Chinese Catholic art in Vatican exhibitions and collections

In preparation for the Vatican exhibition of missionary art in 1950, Celso Costantini praised Chinese art:

Painting in China has been defined as visible poetry (*una poesia che si vede*). Like in the case of Far Eastern art, it is a joy for the eyes and the soul, since it does not reproduce the truth materially but rather expresses the poetry of truth, defined by Plato as the splendor of truth (*lo splendore del vero*).⁶⁵

63 *Lettere edificanti della provincia napoletana* (Naples: Stabilimento tipografico di Salvatore Marchese, 1875), 160.

64 This was at times intertwined with other ideas. For instance, Fr. Henri Doré S.J. (Lu Shiqiu 祿是道, 1859–1931), in his monumental *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* (1911–1938) in eighteen volumes, noted that "Chinese religion", although made of multiple beliefs, has a common background amidst different religious practices, and all three main Chinese religions, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, are but one, following the principle *sanjiao weiyi* 三教為一 (the three teachings are as one). Henri Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission catholique à l'orphelinat de Tou-se-wè, 1911), IV.

65 Celso Costantini, "L'esposizione d'arte dei paesi di Missione e della Chiesa del Rito Orientale," *Arte Cristiana* Vol. 35, No. 11–12 (1948): 92–94.

As for Costantini's friend, Giovanni di Giura, the illustrious precedent of Giuseppe Castiglione marked for Costantini, together with Fr. Matteo Ripa (Ma Guoxian 馬國賢, 1682–1746) and Fr. Jean Denis Attiret S.J. (Wang Zhicheng 王致誠, 1702–1768), an example of those who "modified their Western style and learned the Chinese artistic language".⁶⁶ Moreover, in his introduction to the Chinese artworks showcased during the exhibition, Giuseppe Vacca (1872–1953)⁶⁷ provided a few insights into Chinese Catholic art and 'missionary' artworks produced in China, describing Chinese art as "unusual to the European eye".⁶⁸ In 1937, the renowned Chinese painter Luke Chen Yuandu 陳緣督 (1902–1967), as discussed in the catalogue's introduction by Costantini, provided further insights into Chinese Catholic art, attributed by Costantini to Luke Chen himself:

There is a certain difficulty in getting [Chinese] artists to engage with Christian subjects, because these are often presented within a historical and episodic framework. Yet in the past, Buddhism and Daoism had their great artists and their schools of art, thereby setting precedents that can serve as a guide for the [Chinese] Christian artist.⁶⁹

Contrary to the fears of some earlier Jesuit missionaries, who abhorred Buddhist and Daoist statues and their countless images, Luke Chen, as attributed by Costantini, seems to provide a more positive interpretation of those artworks, drawing useful artistic 'guidelines' for contemporary Chinese Catholic artists. Artworks produced in Shanghai during the 19th century were then displayed during the exhibition and were reframed as part of this cross-cultural visual context. An important example is a chasuble with Chinese motifs crafted by

66 Ibid., 93. For further insights on Costantini's reception of Chinese art see Aminta Arrington, "Recasting the Image: Celso Costantini and the Role of Sacred Art and Architecture in the Indigenization of the Chinese Catholic Church, 1922–1933," *Missiology: An International Review* Vol. 41, No. 4 (2013): 438–51.

67 Tiziana Lioi, *Viaggio in Cina 1907–1908: Diario di Giovanni Vacca* (Rome: L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2016); Federico Alpi, "VACCA, Giovanni," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2020), vol. 97, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-vacca_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ accessed on July 4, 2025; Tiziana Lioi, "Giovanna Vacca, traduttore dal cinese," *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate*, Vol. 1 No.1 (2021): 47–59.

68 Giuseppe Vacca, "L'Arte nella Cina" in *Mostra d'arte missionaria* (Vatican City: Comitato Centrale Anno Santo, 1950), 42.

69 Celso Costantini, "Prefazione" in *Mostra d'arte missionaria* (Vatican City: Comitato Centrale Anno Santo, 1950), 15. As mentioned earlier, the sentence was attributed by Costantini to Chen, but its authenticity cannot be entirely verified.

the *Sœurs auxiliatrices* in Shanghai.⁷⁰

This chasuble was only one of the many works produced in the Jiangnan area and donated to the Vatican. An earlier example is a ‘wooden box’ (*stipo cinese*) gifted in 1887 by eighty members of the Congregation of the Immaculate Holy Mother in Shanghai on the occasion of the jubilee of Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903).⁷¹ Inside the wooden box is a Chinese inscription on a patch: *butian tongjing* 普天同敬 (universal reverence).⁷² Although apparently lacking Catholic motifs, the woodwork was presented as celebrating the Holy Pontiff and the Catholic Church visually more broadly. The *fenghuang* 鳳凰 (phoenix), at the center of the composition on the lid of the wooden box (Fig. 3), gazes at the sun, representing, according to the editors of the *Esposizione Vaticana Illustrata*, the Pope who “from the Chair of the Vatican, sustains and rules the great family of Believers, inspired by the rays of the eternal Sun of justice”.⁷³ Even the birds surrounding the phoenix were interpreted as representing some of the members of the Congregation offering the gift to the Pontiff:

Among the branches of flourishing shrubs and on the ledges of rocks, there are 53 birds of various species and sizes, all intently gazing at the Fumwam [*fenghuang* 鳳凰]; they represent the offering members of the congregation, who present themselves docile and obedient out of a feeling of true affection and reverence for the Supreme Hierarchy.⁷⁴

Interestingly, in the latter example, Chinese local beliefs, featuring a phoenix,⁷⁵ were then re-framed in a Catholic context.

70 Ibid., “Pianeta con ricami su motivi cinesi (Suore Ausiliatrici del Purgatorio).”

71 *L'esposizione Vaticana Illustrata: Giornale ufficiale della commissione promotrice* (Rome: Eredi Vercellini e Gustavo Bianchi, 1887), No. 6, 44–46. The name of the Congregation is translated therein into Latin as *Shang-hai Sanctae Matris Conceptionis Congregationis amici* and in Italian as *I Congregati della Confraternita della Concezione della Madre Santa in Shang-hai*. Unfortunately, the Chinese characters in the printed version of the journal appear mostly unintelligible. Further analysis is needed to assess the accuracy of those transcriptions and romanizations.

72 Ibid., 46. This was translated by the authors of the journal into Latin as *cum toto orbe communis veneratio* and in Italian as *omaggio concorde col mondo intero*. Also in this case, further analysis of the artwork, if still extant, is needed to assess the accuracy of the transcription.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 For a more general reference to Chinese myths featuring a phoenix, see Zhaoyuan Tian, Shuxian Ye, and Hang Qian, *Myths of the Creation of Chinese* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020).



Fig. 3 Carved openwork on the lid of a Chinese wooden box, Shanghai, before 1887, photo published in *L'esposizione Vaticana Illustrata: Giornale ufficiale della commissione promotrice* (Rome: Eredi Vercellini e Gustavo Bianchi, 1887–1890), n. 6, 44 ©Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum Bibliothek, Rara; Va 493 MF.

Conclusion

After the restoration of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit missionaries between the 19th and 20th centuries popularized Chinese Catholic artworks, distributing them in China and Europe. Oftentimes, some Jesuits wrote to their European brothers about ‘idolatrous’ images, especially Buddhist and Daoist ones, attempting to substitute those with Catholic ones. Jesuit scholars further discussed the destructive power of those ‘idols’ and emphasized the role of Catholic images in converting local Chinese individuals, especially when seeking funding, aiming at the destruction of other religious images. The situation in China, especially in the Catholic enclave of Xujiahui, was far more complex. Chinese Catholic images were produced

in situ alongside others, featuring Buddhist and Daoist motifs.⁷⁶ The same presses that printed Catholic books in multiple languages also printed other works on Chinese literature, often with direct reference to Confucian scholarship.⁷⁷ Chinese Catholic artworks, as well as other Catholic artworks designed for the Chinese empire, sometimes did not follow the expectations of some of the Jesuit missionaries who produced them or collected offerings to produce and distribute them. The market of devotional images was then intertwined with local beliefs, practices, fears, and struggles. In a time of tension between various actors, Chinese Catholic images traveled along with the complex cultural background of those who produced them. More remains to be studied about the circulation of Chinese Catholic art, its production, and its commerce within and beyond Jesuit-related circles. This study offers an account of some aspects of this circulation, including expectations, fears, clashes, but also more positive cross-cultural encounters. Tales of those Chinese Catholic objects are intertwined with all those individuals involved in this commercial, artistic, and religious endeavor. More of these stories deserve to be shared and embraced, recognizing their complexity and honoring the memory of the craftspeople who created them.

76 See *Ateliers de sculpture et d'ébénisterie: Orphelinat de Zi-Ka Wei, Shanghai, Chine* (Shanghai: Orphelinat de Zi-Ka Wei, 1933).

77 Angelo Zottoli, *Cursus litteraturae sinicae: neo-missionariis accommodatus* (Shanghai: Ex Typographia Missionis Catholicae in orphanotrophio Tou-sè-wè, 1879–1882), Vol. 1–5.

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近代中國的聖像貿易 ——以耶穌會在華天主教藝術品的 製作與流通為中心

周盛羅^{*}

摘要 從十九世紀中葉起，上海的天主教傳教士藝術家——如劉德齋神父（1843–1912）——在中西合璧的天主教藝術品的製作與流通方面作出了重要貢獻。在本地孤兒工匠的協助下，劉氏與其他修會成員的作品（包括繪畫、小雕像及其他敬禮物品）廣泛用於地方性的宗教敬禮場所，並逐漸進入全球藝術市場。同一時期上海的天主教女性團體，如呈獻修女會（*Sœurs de la Présentation*），亦從事刺繡製作，其作品廣受歐洲天主教神職人員讚賞，並於1950年在羅馬教廷舉辦的“傳教藝術展覽會”（*Mostra d'arte missionaria*）中展出。

與此同時，歐洲耶穌會神父亦以不同方式表達他們對在中國流通的天主教圖像及其角色與用途上的期望與構想。例如，哈曼神父（Fr. Valentin Hamann, S.J., 1831–1914）力主只製作“繪製的圖像”，尤其是彩色版畫，而非“雕像”，因為他認為後者過於近似中國本土的神祇，可能導致本地信徒的混淆。儘管如此，天主教雕像出現在多個中國天主教團體中，其製作、流通與敬禮活動在中西合璧的天主教藝術發展中發揮了關鍵作用。

本文旨在探討晚清至民國時期中西合璧的天主教藝術品的製作與流通，重點考察由法國主導的上海耶穌會團體在財務、藝術及思想上的貢獻。同時亦分析這些努力所面臨的期望與挑戰，以及中國天主教藝術品如何進入全球流通和展覽的網絡。

關鍵詞 中國耶穌會傳教 天主教藝術在中國 土山灣 徐家匯 上海 全球藝術史

^{*} 周盛羅  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7263-1707>
蘇黎世大學藝術史研究所博士後研究員，兼倫敦大學亞非學院歷史學系研究員