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Christian Iconography on Ming and Qing Chinese Porcelain: Religious Influence and Artistic Hybridization

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Abstract: Since the arrival of Christian missionaries in China through maritime trade networks, missionary activities have been changing from the 16th century to the 18th century. Christian missionaries faced numerous challenges stemming from cultural context and religious policies in China. Throughout history, various religious strategies have been employed to address these challenges. The use of Chinese porcelain to depict Christian imagery holds significant importance. The present study is focused on four representative Chinese porcelains dating from the Ming to Qing dynasties, each associated with specific phases of Christianity in China. Examining the connections between the Christian mission in China and Christian iconography on Chinese porcelain leads to the conclusion that the visual culture associated with the Christian mission in China is influenced by and reflects intercultural or interreligious dialogue with mutual understanding. In the meantime, it signifies an intricate process of interaction, appropriation, hybridization, and adaptation, through which Christian iconography gained new significance on Chinese porcelain.

Keywords: Christian iconography; Chinese porcelain; religious influence; artistic hybridization; missionaries

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1. Introduction

Since the first half of the 15th century, Portuguese Maritime Exploration gave rise to a new era of global trade and fostered extensive cross-cultural exchange among people from diverse regions. European missionaries and merchants were eager to pursue their religious and commercial endeavors, gradually encountering cultural and religious diversity in these regions. The visual representation of Christian images served as a bridge to mutual understanding and facilitated the recognition of a shared imaginary in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. As written by Pope Gregory the Great, "*Quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura*" (What writing offers to those who read it, a picture offers to the ignorant who look at it) (Chazelle 1990), missionaries utilized visual art to elucidate religious doctrines and depict the lives of the saints to their adherents and prospective converts, with the aim of facilitating their conversion.

Among these subjects with visual representation, Chinese porcelain, as a highly profitable object, in its way, shows the history of global expansion and demonstrates significant cross-cultural connections. It consistently integrates Western concepts, religious symbols, and missionary objectives with Chinese artistic techniques, aesthetic principles, and cultural identity. The Chinese porcelains are decorated with Christian iconography, illustrating how the expansion of Christian missionary activities and local religious policy had an influence on the design of Chinese porcelain, meanwhile embodying how the Chinese craftsman transformed the original Christian iconography into the "domesticated" image (Odell 2018).

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, which coincided with the several significant phases of spreading and developing the Christian religion in China, the Portuguese Jesuits and other religious congregations commissioned porcelain objects from Chinese factories,

many of which featured emblems or Christian images (Matos 2001; Welsh 2003). Christian content was incorporated into the Chinese artistic tradition through deliberate modifications, resulting in variations in the new works. The present study is not focused so much on the supposed source of Christian iconography and Chinese motifs but rather on presenting the artistic hybridization (Ginzburg 1992; Serrão 2015; Afonso 2016) and visualizing how these Chinese porcelains with Christian iconography relate to the culture context and religious policies of various historical periods.

With the study objectives mentioned above, this article focuses on examining four representative Chinese porcelains dating from the 16th to the 18th century. These pieces include a bowl inscribed with AVE MARIA (made between 1520 and 1540) from the Medeiros e Almeida Museum (Portugal), a bottle with symbols of Christ's Passion (made between 1620 and 1644) from The British Museum (UK), a saucer featuring the Crucifixion scene (made between 1662 and 1722) from the Nanchang University Museum (China), and a dish depicting John the Baptist (made between 1715 and 1725) from The Metropolitan Museum of Art (USA). These four pieces serve as case studies from the perspective of the historical exchange of art, culture, and religion. They are examined and analyzed within the framework of extensive interconnections among diverse cultural paradigms, artistic forms, religious organizations, and historical epochs.

Each section begins with a description of the porcelain, followed by an explanation of the Christian iconography and Chinese motif, highlighting their hybridization and adaptation. Furthermore, the cultural context and religious policies of the historical periods in which each piece was made are explored. Finally, a plausible connection between these pieces and their religious contexts is proposed. By adopting the historical approach, the present article primarily uses Chinese porcelain and its Christian image as historical evidence. Christian iconography on Ming and Qing Chinese Porcelain is a valuable and visible tool for understanding evangelization and religious policies in different historical contexts. Therefore, the structure adopted is to study the objects first and then examine the social, cultural, religious, and political factors that influenced and shaped the Christian iconographies to establish a direct link between the image and the history.

2. Case Studies

2.1. Bowl with the Inscription AVE MARIA from the Medeiros e Almeida Museum (1520–1540)

In 1498, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut, and on his way home, he brought several pieces of Chinese porcelain to present to his king, Dom Manuel I (Dias 2010, p. 21). Due to the king's fascination for Chinese porcelain, as soon as Portuguese merchant ships arrived in China, they ordered the Chinese porcelain decorated with the emblem of the King of Portugal. As the "first order" porcelain, the bowl shows the significance of Christianity in Portuguese trade and the interdependence of royal authority and ecclesiastical power.

The interior of the rim is inscribed with the Latin phrase "*AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA*" (Hail Mary, full of grace) (Figure 1a). The following words are based on the Archangel Gabriel's salutation to the Virgin. The exterior surface is segmented into four roundels, each depicting the coat of royal arms of Portugal, the armillary sphere of King Manuel I, a Chinese natural scene, and the sacred monogram IHS within a crown of thorns, respectively. The base bears an apocryphal six-character Xuande (1426–35) reign mark (Levenson 2007, p. 150). According to Afonso (2014), there are four additional bowls featuring variations of "Ave Maria" on the rim.

The royal Portuguese arms (Figure 1b) are depicted painted upside down, resembling a Chinese bronze bell, due to the lack of knowledge among Chinese craftsmen. It contains five escutcheons set in a cross, a border charged with six castles, and a crown decorated with three florets. The armillary sphere of King Manuel I (Figure 1c) is crossed by a band that should read the monarch's motto, but where some illegible characters appear, considering a copy of the Latin inscription—*Spera in Deo et Fac bonitatem* (Have hope in God and do good deeds). The Chinese nature scene (Figure 1d) depicts a bird next to a rock and a

flowering branch. The monogram IHS (Figure 1e) is derived from the initial three letters of "Jesus" in Greek and has been in use since at least the third century (Carvalho et al. 2016, p. 154). Furthermore, Maria Antónia Pinto Matos (2001) points out the resemblance between the monogram and the one carved in relief on the interior walls of the Jerónimos Monastery, on which the lettering in stone appears executed to simulate broken and dry twigs. According to Clare Le Corbeiller (1974, p. 15), this piece of porcelain could be commissioned by the Jesuits.

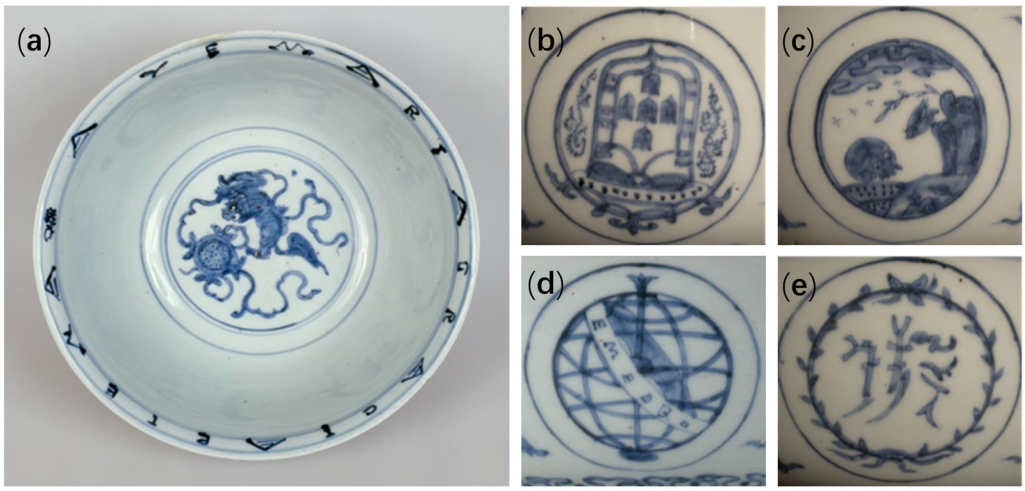

Figure 1. Bowl with the inscription AVE MARIA, 1520–1540, Medeiros e Almeida Museum, Lisbon. (**a**–**e**). Photo: Mo Guo.

The interior well depicts a guardian lion playing with a brocaded ball (Figure 1a). This style of Buddhist lion design is evident in porcelains bearing the reign marks of both Zhengde and Jiajing, as documented by Levenson (2007, p. 150). The Marian prayer was inscribed on the inner rim of the bowl, while the monogram IHS adorned the exterior surface. The representation of a Buddhist symbol was painted on the noblest and most visible part of the piece. The arrangement of the position of the motifs, to a certain extent, also reflects the significance attributed to Buddhism to some extent.

The presentation of the Latin phrase "AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA" in the alphabet also yields a peculiar visual representation. In contrast to the simplicity and regularity of the alphabet, the inscription on the rim resembles the presentation of symbols and images. It is hypothesized that the Chinese craftsmen, in the process of copying the alphabet, inadvertently converted it into symbols. Chinese characters constitute a logographic writing system, primarily employing pictographs and ideographs, whereas the Latin script is a phonographic writing system. As a result, Chinese craftsmen frequently misinterpreted Latin spellings based on their understanding.

With the exception of the additional inscription and the associated elements of the person who commissioned it, there were not many significant alterations to the original motifs on this bowl. Like the "first order" porcelain, the religious elements were less prominent, and they did not blend with other Chinese motifs, which was consistent with their religious policy during this period. There was no attempt to integrate with the local culture or religion.

The "first order" porcelain covers a broad chronology. It begins with the commercial contacts among the Malay, Indian, and Cantonese merchants established in Malacca following the conquest of this vital trading port in 1511 when the Portuguese naval officer Afonso de Albuquerque subdued the city. In the early sixteenth century, every year, eight to ten junks arrived annually to engage in trade in Malacca (Zhang 1988, p. 198). Subsequently, Tomé Pires, who would later serve as Portugal's first ambassador to China, arrived in Malacca in 1512. Tomé Pires compiled the Suma Oriental, which provided hosts of helpful information on trade opportunities for Portuguese merchants. With the arrival

of the Portuguese explorer Jorge Álvares on the southern coast of China in 1513, during the reign of Emperor Zhengde (1506–1521), the first meeting between Portugal and China took place. In 1522, the Portuguese attempted to renew trade relations with China. However, they were forcibly expelled from the Island of Tunmen, and an imperial decree was promulgated banning all commercial activities with the Portuguese. The direct commercial trade to Canton was halted, but economic activities persisted in locations outside the city, such as Malacca, Siam, and other ports in the South Seas. During the 1530s and 1540s, illicit trade activities were primarily focused in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Fujian provinces, where the Portuguese had set up provisional settlements (Canepa 2016, p. 31). The date generally accepted for the foundation of the trading post in Macao is 1557, during the reign of Jiajing (1522–1566). However, Portuguese merchants have regularly visited it since 1535 (Gomes 1966). They mainly used temporary shacks and tents to store and display their goods in Shangchuan, the largest island west of the Pearl River, in Guangdong province. Dating back to around 1590, it marks the beginning of the production of *kraakporselein*. The production of "first order" gradually ceased after 1600 due to the emergence of Dutch competition in Asia. The production of "first order" porcelain lasted almost a century. Typically, these pieces feature royal heraldry or religious inscriptions alluding to Portuguese merchants or missionaries involved in East Asian activities.

The production of "first order" porcelain occurred in three distinct phases: the period of initial contacts (1511–1522), the period of clandestine trade (1522–1557), and the period following the establishment of Macao (1557–1600) (Afonso 2014, p. 189). Portuguese individuals engaged in commercial activities and commissioned porcelain with European motifs for their own use. The pieces of "first order" porcelain bore witness to commercial exchanges and the spread of Christianity in China. In this period, there was outright persecution in 1542, and all religious communities were violently suppressed. Concurrently, the imperial government implemented the Sea Prohibition (*haijin*) policy, which prohibited its population from participating in maritime activities until 1572. Hence, Christianity and the production of Chinese export porcelain were undeniably restricted, but they endured, particularly in coastal areas. According to S. Huang (1988, p. 154), approximately 500 Portuguese individuals resided in Zhangzhou in 1541. George Mascarenhas was among the earliest Portuguese to explore Fujian, Quanzhou, and Xiamen, two coastal prefectures. The arrival of Francis Xavier in South China in 1552 symbolizes the beginning of Catholic missions in China, despite his death a few months later on Shangchuan Island before reaching mainland China. However, in his capacity as a representative of the Portuguese empire, Francis Xavier did not visit Macao but instead spearheaded the initial Christian mission to Japan.

After a short sojourn in Malacca, the Portuguese Jesuit Nunes Belchior Barreto (1519–1571) and his associates landed in 1555 on the islands of Shangchuan and Lampacau in the Pearl River Delta. "Shangchuan was characterized as a center for trade, where various goods such as silk, porcelain, camphor, copper, alum, and China-wood were exchanged for a wide range of merchandise from this land [Japan]" (Cited in Boxer 1963, p. 22). During the period of waiting for favorable winds to sail to Japan, Nunes Barreto undertook a visit to the city of Canton. In Canton, he encountered his associate Fernão Mendes in late 1555, who is known for signing a famous letter documenting this meeting. This letter represents the earliest known Portuguese document originating from Macao. Nunes Belchior Barreto holds the distinction of being the first Jesuit to arrive on the shores of Macao. Seven years later, in August 1562, Luis Fróis and Giovanni Battista Del Monte arrived in Macao, marking the establishment of the first Jesuit residence and the commencement of apostolic work (Santos 1994, p. 8). The structured organization of the spiritual militancy of the Society of Jesus was instrumental in establishing initial connections with local communities, mainly through the efforts of Estêvão de Góis, who, in 1556, traveled to Canton with the purpose of acquiring proficiency in the Chinese language. Nevertheless, the conversions of local people to Catholicism were predominantly confined to coastal regions (Carvalho et al. 2016, p. 17). Furthermore, archaeological excavations in these regions have uncovered Chinese

porcelains with Christian iconography, as evidenced by findings in Shangchuan (Wen et al. 2019), Zhangzhou, and Quanzhou.

Christianity in Macau has a long history, and the Christian heritage reflects its unique position as a crossroads of different cultures. Melchior Carneiro (1516–1583) established the Santa Casa da Misericórdia (the Holy House of Mercy) shortly after his arrival in 1569 and subsequently served as the first Bishop of Macao. Presently, the Museum of the Holy House of Mercy of Macao exhibits a collection of significant Chinese porcelain pieces featuring the sacred monogram IHS from various historical periods. In 1572, the Society of Jesus established the inaugural primary school, staffed by three priests and a brother. This event was succeeded two years later by the erection of the famous church of St. Paul of Macao (Barreto 2006, p. 137). Upon his arrival in Macao in 1582, the Jesuit Mateo Ricci commenced his mission by fully engaging with the Chinese language and culture. Typically, these pieces feature royal heraldry or religious inscriptions alluding to Portuguese merchants or missionaries involved in East Asian activities marked the inception of a new era, signifying the emergence of Roman Catholicism and the Golden Age of Chinese–European scientific exchange.

2.2. Bottle with Symbols of Christ's Passion from the British Museum (1620–1644)

Following the establishment of the first official Portuguese settlement in 1557, a significant influx of Jesuit missionaries arrived in Macao to establish missionary bases directed towards China and Japan. After 1580, following the union between Spain and Portugal and the consolidation of their colonial empires under the Spanish Habsburg monarchs, Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian missionaries, backed by Spain, commenced their presence in Macao, establishing churches and residences. The years spanning from 1580 to 1640 marked the period of the Iberian Union. The inclusion of porcelain from Catholic religious orders underscores the swift expansion of Catholicism in the East under the Portuguese Padroado during this era. The bottle (Figure 2) bearing the symbol of the Dominicans is assumed to have been commissioned by that religious order.

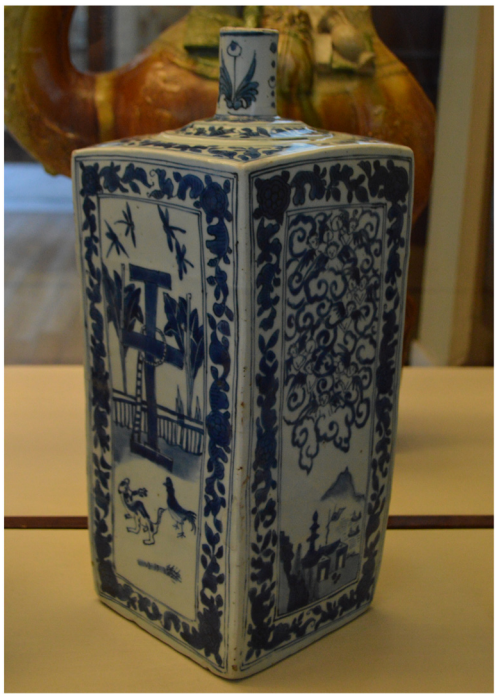

Figure 2. Square-sectioned bottle with symbols of Christ's Passion, 1620–1644, British Museum, London. (Museum no. OA 1963.5-20.7). Photo: Mo Guo.

The bottle's decoration style suggests it was produced during the Tianqi or Chongzhen period (Canepa 2016, p. 277). Two sets of identical images are depicted on all four sides of

the bottle. The two sides are painted with a cross with a crown of thorns and a ladder in a garden setting, surrounded by leafy banana plants. In the foreground, there is a whip, a cockerel, and a dog holding a lit candle in its mouth. The elements symbolically represent Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection: the empty Cross and the ladder symbolize the rescue of Jesus's body after the Crucifixion; the cockerel represents Peter's triple denial of Jesus before the cockerel crowed; and the whip symbolizes the torture of Jesus. The dog serves as the symbol for the religious order of the Dominicans, derived from the Latin origin of their name, "Domini Canes," which translates to "dogs of the Lord." The remaining two sides are illustrated on the lower part with a Chinese landscape featuring a pagoda, a Chinese dwelling, two boats, and a distant mountain. The upper portion of the landscape is adorned with cherubs engaged in playing horns or beating drums amidst auspicious clouds (known as *xiang yun*, a traditional Chinese decorative pattern representing stylized clouds), potentially symbolizing the Resurrection of Christ and his ascension to heaven (Hall 2001, p. 79). Three similar bottles can be found in the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon, the Musée Obigny-Bernon in La Rochelle, France, and a private collection in Brazil.

The scenes depicted on all four sides of the bottle are encompassed by floral borders featuring curling leaves and tendrils, which are traditional motifs commonly found in Chinese porcelain. This design is reminiscent of the patterns seen on porcelain produced in the transitional style for the Dutch market (Matos 2001, p. 30). As noted by Teresa Canepa (2016, p. 277) in her research, the creation of this sizable square bottle model likely followed the production of glass prototypes. While the *kraak* bottle's similar shape was also produced for the Portuguese market, such as the square bottle featuring a coat-of-arms associated with the Portuguese Families Vilas-Boas and Faria, or Vaz (Canepa 2008, p. 166), its overall style is more closely associated with porcelains made for the Dutch market than for the Portuguese market. Furthermore, this bottle was discovered in India (Hall 2001, p. 79).

The square-shaped bottle indicates that Chinese potters adapted their porcelain production to align with the preferences and needs of their European clientele, resulting in the creation of new shapes that mirrored European influence. Moreover, the religious elements are no longer portrayed as insignificant motifs in an unimportant position; instead, they are integrated harmoniously with Chinese motifs. The religious scene does not appear directly but rather as symbolic objects, such as the Cross, the whip, or the dog, which are depicted in a subtle and nuanced manner. The religious policy during this period may exhibit more remarkable similarities with this visual representation.

Since the initial endeavors led by Francis Xavier, Nunes Belchior Barreto, and other Jesuits, the missionaries of the Society of Jesus engaged in substantial intercultural, philosophical, and scientific dialogue with the Chinese people, with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) serving as the prominent figure.

On 24 March 1578, Matteo Ricci embarked on a voyage to Goa, India, accompanied by Michele Ruggieri, Duarte de Sande, Baltasar de Sequeira, and a coadjutor priest, Domingos Fernandes Pires. On 26 April 1582, by order of Alessandro Valignano (Visitor of Missions for East Asia from 1574 to 1610) and at the request from Michele Ruggieri, Father Matteo Ricci was sent to Macao to study Chinese language and culture (Malatesta 1994). Indeed, Alessandro Valignano, Matteo Ricci, and Michele Ruggieri were the pioneering Jesuit missionaries who initiated the new accommodation approach or adaptation to Chinese culture, customs, and language.

Several years prior, on 23 January 1576, the Catholic Diocese of Macao was established through the papal bull *Super Specula Militantis Ecclesiae*, issued by Pope Gregory XIII. The Diocese of Macao was the first diocese established in the Far East, exercising authority over Catholics of China, Japan, Korea, and the surrounding islands under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Goa. Consequently, Macao emerged as the focal point of the Catholic faith in the Far East. The activities of the Society of Jesuits in Japan and China were funded by residents of Macao. The Jesuits typically served as justices of the peace in Macao, and their

presence facilitated the establishment of contacts with the official authorities in East Asia. They are becoming increasingly essential to the port city's internal social fabric and are also a significant influence on Japanese career paths (Barreto 2006, p. 136).

Nicolas Standaert (2008) outlines the approach of Matteo Ricci and his colleagues in their religious policy, identifying four key characteristics: a policy of accommodation or adaptation to Chinese culture; propagation and evangelization 'from the top down'; indirect propagation of the faith through the utilization of European science and technology; and openness to and tolerance of Chinese values.

Since the mid-16th century, Jesuits in Asia have been gathering information on Chinese culture, recognizing the significant role of the literati in China, as they were essentially responsible for the entire imperial administration (Loureiro 2009, p. 250). Recognizing the significance attributed to the literati in Chinese society, Ricci communicated to Valignano the necessity of forsaking the attire and conduct of Buddhist monks in favor of adopting the fashion and decorum of the Confucian elite of literati and officials. It entailed growing their hair and beards, donning suitable silk garments, and wearing the distinctive tall four-corner hat, as depicted in the painting "Portrait of Matteo Ricci" by You Wenhui, housed at the Church of the Gesù in Rome, to engage with and host literati and officials (Malatesta 1994). In 1594, Ricci commenced the practice of growing his hair and beard à *la chinoise*, and in May 1595, he made his initial appearance donning the attire of the scholarly Confucian class. Ricci and his successors obscured the visual differentiation between society's religious and secular domains (Brockey 2007, p. 44). The Jesuits aimed for the widespread dissemination of Christianity throughout the country through the conversion of the Mandarin elite, officials, and even the emperor. Several prominent individuals, including Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), Li Zhizao (1565–1630), Yang Tingyun (1562–1627), and Wang Zheng (1571–1644), were converted to Christianity (Standaert 2008, p. 172). Afterward, although some Western science, art, and architecture were welcomed by the Qing court, the conversion of the Chinese Emperor did not occur.

On 24 January 1601, Matteo Ricci successfully presented "valuable European items" to Emperor Wan Li, including "a painting of Jesus, two paintings of the Virgin Mary, a copy of the Lord's Prayer, a precious inlaid cross, two chiming clocks, a gazetteer map of the world, and an elegant zither" (Y. T. Wang 2007, p. 142). Matteo Ricci held a strong belief in the miraculous power of sacred images and their capacity to facilitate conversions, thereby illustrating the function of images as a visual adjunct to Christian literature. Extensive use of imagery was employed in his preaching, with an emphasis on the necessity of images to console and assist new Christians (Levenson 2007, p. 144).

In addition, Ricci, a mathematician and astronomer, requested the General of the Society of Jesus in Rome to dispatch Jesuits with expertise in the field of science. Between 1601 and 1610, Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits, including Diego Pantoja, Gaspar Ferreira, and Sabatino de Ursis, were permitted to remain in Beijing due to their expertise in mathematics, astronomy, geography, music, and proficiency in the Chinese language and classics of Chinese culture. They gained the favor and attention of Emperor Wanli and numerous court officials. Ricci's success in converting Chinese elites can be attributed to the cross-cultural and religious interaction, resulting in the fusion of Confucian ideals with Christian values. The Jesuits recognized the importance of studying native traditions to adapt their religious message to Chinese culture. They embraced a tolerant stance toward specific Confucian rituals while rejecting Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. Matteo Ricci played a significant role as one of the founders of the Catholic Mission in China, which was under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Society of Jesus in China until the 1630s.

As defined by Luís Afonso in his article, the "Controlled Contact Pattern" characterizes the cultural encounter, with China consistently holding a dominant position in shaping relations with the Europeans. Considering the vulnerable situation in China, a nuanced approach to integrating them into Chinese culture and society was necessary. The missionaries fulfilled this role admirably. Nicolas Standaert (2002) noted that the Jesuits in China adhered to the Chinese 'Cultural Imperative', which was an inherent aspect of

the framework of religious life in late imperial China. They accommodated themselves to local values (Standaert 2002, p. 2). Matteo Ricci fully immersed himself in the Chinese cultural context, exemplifying the concept of "accommodation".

Since the 1620s, missionaries were compelled to limit their apostolic activities (Brockey 2007, p. 82) due to the repressive policy of the declining Ming state. During the 1630s, the Ming Dynasty faced a period of crisis characterized by internal turmoil and external threats to the imperial court. In the Annual Letter of 1636 from a Vice-Province, Portuguese Jesuit António de Gouvea (1592–1677) communicated to Europe that the empire had been afflicted with "miseries, hardships, and calamities" as a form of divine retribution for its numerous sins. The natural disasters and political instability during the final years of the Chongzhen reign (1627–1644) further complicated the circumstances faced by missionaries. Upon receiving the news of the defeat, the Chongzhen emperor "turned many times to Heaven, offering sacrifices and gifts to calm it", but to no avail (cited in Brockey 2007, p. 92).

From the 1630s, the influence power of the society diminished, as the Jesuits were gradually accompanied successively by the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Augustinians, and the missionary members of the Missions Étrangères de Paris. From the viewpoint of the Society of Jesus, the presence of these competing religious orders poses a potential threat to the mission they have diligently cultivated in China over the years. The Iberian Empire (1580–1640), ruled by Philippe II of Spain, who was king of both Portugal and Spain, was a period characterized by the unification of the crowns in the Iberian Peninsula. Until 1640, the Portuguese throne was occupied by three Spanish kings, after which a Portuguese king reclaimed the crown. The national rivalry between Portugal and Spain intensified the conflict between the Jesuits and the Mendicant friars. The Society of Jesus contained several divisions based on national lines.

Given that the bottle (Figure 2) featured the symbol of the Dominicans, this study primarily focuses on Dominican missionaries. By the late sixteenth century, Dominican friars were appointed to the Parián of Manila with the backing of the Spanish colonial administration. During their tenure, they established a web of connections and familiarized themselves with the language spoken by the immigrant community, predominantly hailing from southern Fujian and northern Guangdong.

Their route from Manila to Macao failed several times because of Portuguese authorities and Jesuit opposition. Macao became the non-entry point to China, especially after the Dominican Bartolomé Martínez failed attempts during 1612 and 1619. The failures caused the Dominicans to explore alternative entries, and they changed their direction and managed to enter Fujian (Borao 2018). In 1619, on his way from Manila to Macao, the wind drove Bartolomé Martínez to Isla Hermosa (modern-day Taiwan), which became the springboard to enter mainland China. In 1629, Bartolomé Martínez organized the trips to China, but he died that year in a shipwreck off the northern coast of Taiwan (Borao 2009, p. 14).

Although Macao was considered an essential conduit for missionaries seeking to enter mainland China, some European missionaries entered mainland China directly from Taiwan through the coast of Fujian. In 1632, the Italian Dominican Angelo Cocci (1597–1633) landed in a boat on an island along the Fujian coast from Taiwan and entered Fuzhou from there. Angelo Cocci was the first Dominican to bypass Macao and enter Mainland China (González 1964, p.51). He was also invited by literati converts of the Jesuits in Fujian and joined them in Fu'an in the summer of 1632 (Menegon 2003, p. 338). During the years 1631 to 1634, a significant number of Dominicans and Franciscans traveled to Fuzhou. They sought permission from Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), the missionary who introduced Roman Catholic Christianity to Fujian Province in 1625 and formed a circle of literati acquaintances in the region. Upon Aleni's refusal of Cocchi's request, a group of local baptized intellectuals established the first Dominican mission in their hometown, Fu'an (Brockey 2007, p. 103). Since then, Fu'an has emerged as the focal point of the Dominican mission in China and the location of significant advancements in mission policy and practice.

Nevertheless, the missionary approach adopted by Dominican missionaries in the Philippines was also extended to China, with the aim of eradicating all forms of idolatry and superstition without accommodating local social customs. The presence of friars in Fujian raised significant concern among the Jesuits. During the 1630s, the Jesuit missionary policy underwent a shift with the introduction of mendicant orders (Standaert 2008, p. 169).

Another significant concern during this period was the Dutch competition attempting to gain access to China. From 1624, when the Dutch first arrived in Taiwan, until 1642, the Spaniards relinquished control of the island after being expelled by the Dutch. Throughout this process, Christianity underwent a transformation into a religion with local significance. The Dominicans proclaimed a "spiritual conquest" of China stemming from the Spanish imperial endeavor. Since its shape and overall style are more associated with the porcelains exported to the Dutch, the Dutch competition can also be traced in this porcelain bottle.

2.3. Saucer with the Crucifixion Scene from Nanchang University Museum (1662–1722)

Nearly all kilns, including those in Jingdezhen, suffered severe destruction during the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty. The Rebellion of the Three Feudatories (1673–1681) had a significant impact on Jingdezhen, leading to the destruction of the furnaces. As a result, half of the kiln owners lost their property (Finlay 2010, p. 34). During the early Qing Dynasty, the *Haijin* policy imposed strict limitations on maritime trading and coastal settlement, resulting in the obstruction of Chinese porcelain exports. Therefore, almost no Christian-themed porcelain produced between 1640 and 1680 could be found (Dong 2021, p. 340). Until the middle of the Kangxi period, along with the Qing dynasty's stabilization and the gate's reopening, porcelain production and exportation were gradually restored. During the 1680s and 1690s, the reinvigoration of European trade in Maritime Asia also brought a continuous influx of ships to the shores of Fujian and Guangdong provinces in search of Chinese goods (Brockey 2007, p. 180). By the early 1690s, Chinese porcelain was resurgent with Christian themes (Dong 2021, p. 340).

The saucer (Figure 3) was produced during the Kangxi reign and depicts the scene of the Crucifixion of Christ. The Christian image is depicted in underglaze blue with rather rough line drawings. Three figures are depicted in the center, with Jesus in the middle and the Virgin Mary and Saint John standing at the base of the Cross, gazing affectionately at Jesus. It is difficult to determine the identity of the characters from their appearance. However, it can be traced in the Gospel of John. *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home* [John 19: 26–27]. However, Chinese scholars Chen (2010, p. 89) and Fan (2020, p. 73) argue that in the Crucifixion scene depicted on this saucer, the standing figures on either side are the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. The three wooden panels below are representative of the Crucifixion. Jesus is depicted as unclothed on the Cross, with a cloth wrapped around his waist. He inclines his head to the left, with his arms outstretched and fixed on the Cross. The crown of thorns is not depicted on Christ's head, and the inscription INRI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) is inaccurately transcribed. The facial features of the three figures exhibit distinct oriental characteristics, while the proportions of the torsos and limbs are drawn in a problematic manner. Nevertheless, Chinese craftsmen attempted to utilize the perspective technique without delineating the facial contours. The three figures were depicted with more plane faces, influenced by the traditional Chinese ink painting techniques (Chen and Zou 2021, p. 243).

Additionally, they appear to be wearing traditional Asian robes. These three biblical figures were domesticated on Chinese porcelain to assimilate into the local culture. Yu (2014, p. 217) asserts in his research that the porcelains depicting the Crucifixion of Christ were not created solely for the European market but specifically for missionaries in Japan and China.

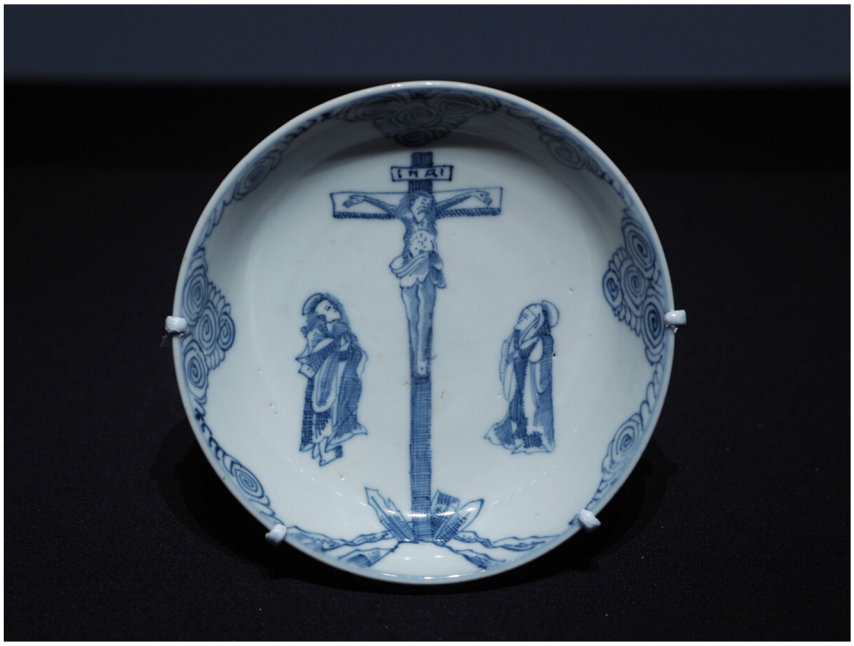

Figure 3. Saucer with the Crucifixion scene, 1662–1722, Nanchang University Museum, Nanchang. Photo: Mo Guo.

All the incongruities demonstrated on this porcelain, including the detailed depiction and the proportions of the figures, indicate that it may not have been a direct reproduction of a European print and that the design had been altered over time (Howard and Ayers 1978, p. 140). Chinese craftsmen used cross-hatching without washed tones to convey the contrast of light and dark, like the technique of Western sketching. The painting style suggests a European origin, with the motifs likely derived from a copperplate engraving design. The pattern was probably sourced from a European print of a missionary publication. Numerous Chinese porcelains feature the decoration of the Crucifixion of Christ, indicating its popularity as a subject in the early eighteenth century among religious orders in Asia and Europe. They currently can be found at the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon, the Peabody Essex Museum in Boston, Christie's Auction in London, the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, the Macao Museum, and the Guangdong Museum. The collection includes porcelain jars featuring Christ flanked by stylized tulips and leafy lotus scrolls. Le Corbeiller (1974, p. 17) observes a connection between the scrolling floral design and Chinese export embroidered ecclesiastical textiles.

The 'Crucifixion' porcelains represent the earliest instances of the depiction of Jesus on Chinese porcelain and the earliest manifestations of European print influence on Chinese porcelain design. In 1712, Father François Xavier d'Entrecolles corresponded from Jingdezhen regarding porcelain production, with particular emphasis on the Crucifixion theme. He treasured the gift received from a parishioner, which had been purchased from the Remains of a large shop and was painted with the Virgin Mary and St. John flanking the Cross, a relic d'Entrecolles valued "more highly than the finest porcelain made a thousand years ago." One of his followers informed him that a considerable amount of this same type of ceramic had been illicitly transported to Japan until the "enemies of religion" halted the traffic shortly before Christianity arrived in Jingde Zhen. This kind of commerce came to an end sixteen or seventeen years ago (that is, about 1695) (Finlay 2010, p. 21). Therefore, it can be demonstrated that Chinese porcelain depicting the Crucifixion of Christ was popular and underwent modifications over time.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the porcelain incorporates Christian elements beyond symbolic objects, as they are also depicted in narrative themes within historical scenes. This approach aims to enhance the accessibility of the Bible story for better understanding. The Holy Scripture was conveyed through Christian iconography depicted on porcelain.

The porcelain depicting the Crucifixion of Christ is a product of the intricate social milieu during the transition from Ming to Qing. It reflects the evolving religious policies of that era.

The year 1644, marking the fall of the Ming court and its replacement by the Manchu leaders of the Qing, holds more symbolic significance than merely serving as the effective date of a new period (Standaert 2008, p. 170). The violence during the dynastic transition did not impede the proselytizing efforts, and the missionary strategy remained unchanged. In 1644, the Vice-Province documented 188 new converts across all six northern residences, and the Jesuits continued to pursue political patronage (Brockey 2007, p. 110). The German Jesuit missionary Johann Adam Schall (1592–1666), also known as Tang Ruowang (汤若望) in Chinese, was recommended by Xu Guangqi and significantly contributed to the missionary efforts during this transitional period. During times of uncertainty regarding sovereignty, the Jesuits demonstrated loyalty to the ruling party. Schall was appointed to lead the reformation of the traditional Chinese calendar at the Imperial Court in Beijing. As a result of his contributions to legitimizing the new regime for Chongzhen, he secured a position at the Imperial Astronomical Bureau in 1645. Subsequently, he established a friendship with Shunzhi and secured a position in Chinese court society, which he leveraged to propagate the Catholic faith. He became a central figure in the Jesuits' endeavors in China.

Under the protection of Schall, there was little disturbance in the growth of the number of Catholics. According to Latourette (1929, p. 107), it is estimated that the number of individuals who converted to Christianity in China near the beginning of the 17th century was about 13,000, rising to 100,000 or reaching 250,000 by 1664. Due to the timely adjustment of religious policy and the loyalty of the missionaries headed by Schall to the emperors from the Ming to the Qing, the personal safety of missionaries was enhanced, and the evangelization was not interrupted by the change of dynasties. But in 1664, the Jesuit mission in China endured its most severe crisis in history, leading Jesuits in China from a period of great optimism to one of deep despair due to the events commonly referred to as the Calendar Case (*Li Yu*) and the Canton exile. Schall faced impeachment and trial after allegations brought forth by Yang Guangxian. Additionally, four Jesuits in Beijing underwent interrogation and condemnation, while missionaries in the provinces were collectively exiled to Guangzhou. Their positions were reinstated upon the ascension of the Kangxi Emperor (1661–1722), and an unexpected earthquake occurred in Peking in 1665. In 1668, Ferdnand Verbiest, also known as Nan Huairen (南怀仁) in Chinese, took over from Schall and became the principal scientist at the court, subsequently assuming the position of director of the Astronomical Bureau (Brockey 2007, p. 132). Playing a role as one of the young Kangxi's personal tutors and counselor, Verbiest gained significant influence as an official at the imperial court and ushered in a new era of missionary activities in China.

The Jesuits had established and maintained a close relationship with Kangxi. In 1675, Kangxi visited the Peking Jesuits' residence and bestowed upon the missionaries an honorific inscription, "*Jing Tian*" (Revere Heaven, 敬天 in Chinese). In 1677, Kangxi organized the ceremonial funeral for the Portuguese Jesuit Gabriel de Magalhães, also known as An Wensi (安文思) in Chinese. For more than forty years, the Jesuits ceased using the term Tian to refer to the Christian God (Brockey 2007, p. 137), and they had to disregard Chinese funeral traditions. However, Jesuits found it impossible to resist Kangxi's favor. They recognized the necessity of imperial protection and acknowledged that the only viable approach for advancing Christianity in China was to adapt their religious message to conform with the imperial political orthodoxy. In 1679, Kangxi requested the Portuguese Jesuit Thomas Pereira (1645–1708), also known as Xu Risheng (徐日升) in Chinese, and the Italian Jesuit Claudio Filippo Grimaldi (1639–1708), known as Min Mingwo (闵明我), to perform on the harpsichord and harmonium, which were presented to the emperor (G. Huang 1995, p. 21). Kangxi's openness to adopting Western culture also resulted in significant contributions from missionaries across various fields of endeavor.

In 1692, the Kangxi emperor promulgated an "edict of toleration" to legitimize the propagation of Christianity. The Jesuits regarded this as their most significant triumph while simultaneously sowing a concealed threat (Brockey 2007, p. 164). The Christian mission reached a new apogee before its eventual decline after 1705 due to the Rite's Controversy.

Carlo Tomasso Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710) was dispatched by Clement XI to China to address the issues concerning the Vicars and Kangxi. Nevertheless, his audiences with Kangxi in 1705 and 1706 resulted in significant diplomatic failures, leading to a substantial shift in the circumstances surrounding missionary endeavors in China. Tournon and the Vicar Apostolic Charles Maigrot were repatriated to Europe via Macao in 1706. During the same year, Kangxi issued a decree stipulating that all missionaries in China were required to acquire a license, known as *piao*, and to pledge their acceptance of the Chinese Rites (Brockey 2007, p. 187). The Jesuits encountered a dilemma as a result of the imperial *piao* issued by Kangxi and the *Cum Deus Optimus* issued by the Pope. The majority of them acquiesced to the *piao* and ultimately submitted to imperial authority. Yang's allegations against the Jesuits prompted concern within the imperial government, leading to a deliberate differentiation between Christian teachings and Western scientific expertise. As a result, Kangxi consistently imposed limitations on their missionary activities.

Until Kangxi's death, the Jesuits were treated in a friendly manner. Kangxi became frustrated after the Tournon's legation. However, with the advent of the Yongzheng reign, the policy of tolerance in religions took a sharp turn; Yongzheng started the proscription of Christianity, ordered the closing of all churches in the whole country, and expelled almost all missionaries, except some in Beijing. They retained their positions at court as artists or scientists instead of Christian missionaries. In the version of the Sacred Edict promulgated in January 1724, Christianity was included among the "perverse sects and sinister doctrines" (Standaert 2001, p. 564). Ultimately, the Jesuits paid the price for making the imperial power their source of protection. Since 1724, the Jesuits' activities were transferred into the shadows, which meant the complete negation of all the social and political gains they had made in China.

During Emperor Kangxi's patronage, Chinese porcelains experienced significant changes and advancements over sixty years, particularly during the Chromatic Revolution. In a letter sent to Europe, the missionary artists Matteo Ripa (1682–1745), also known as Ma Guoxian (马国贤) in Chinese, and Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), known as Lang Shining (郎世宁) in Chinese, mentioned that they were requested by Kangxi to paint with enamels in 1716. Nevertheless, they were loath to undertake this task and deliberately engineered the failure. Kangxi was eager to produce imperial-made painted enamelware, and thus, he recruited Cantonese craftsmen with expertise in enamel production and sought the participation of a Western enameller. In 1719, a French Jesuit, Jean-Baptiste Gravereau (1690–1762), known as Chen Zhongxin (陈忠信) in Chinese, arrived to work as an enameller in the Imperial ateliers. He showed a preference for using European enamel colors. The experimental stage during the Kangxi reign involved the application of a combination of domestic and foreign colors (M. C. Wang 2022, p. 27). The most exquisite pieces were exclusively crafted during the Yongzheng reign, and the *famille rose* achieved its technical zenith during the Qianlong period. Subsequently, the porcelain capital, Jingdezhen, expeditiously embraced the new color palette and revitalized its entire production system (Shih 2022). Numerous Chinese porcelains featuring the same central scene of the Crucifixion were decorated in polychrome enamels and were made during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns.

2.4. Dish with John the Baptist (Made in 1715–1725) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

In addition to the Crucifixion, the Baptism scene was the only bible scene depicted on Chinese porcelain before 1740, possibly due to the importance of this sacrament in the evangelistic endeavors of missionaries in China (Kerr and Mengoni 2011, pp. 66–69). In a report submitted by Vice-Provincial Antoine Thomas to his Roman superiors in 1703, the Jesuits' mission achieved its greatest extent. By his reckoning, there was a yearly average of

14,600 baptisms (Brockey 2007, p. 176). The number of baptized individuals is a significant indicator of the effectiveness of missionary efforts in China, representing the highest form of sacrament.

Porcelains featuring the Baptism theme were exclusively produced during the reigns of Yongzheng and early Qianlong (Dong 2021, p. 346). According to the records of museums, the earlier version of the dish was predominantly in blue and white, typically of enormous size, produced around 1715–1725. Examples of such dishes can be found in The British Museum (Inventory number 1963, 0422.13), the Mottahedeh Collection (Howard and Ayers 1978, p. 306), the Jorge Welsh works, the RA Collection, and the San Antonio Museum of Art. The later version, dating from 1725 to 1735, was characterized by overglaze iron red and gold. Porcelains painted in red enamel and gilt from this period are housed in the Dresden Porcelain Collection (Inventory number PO 7863), the Royal Museums of Art and History of Belgium (Inventory number VDN 0035), the Victoria and Albert Museum (Inventory number c.220-1931), and the Museum of Fine Arts. A dish featuring the same Baptism scene, painted in underglaze blue and gilt, was also produced during the Yongzheng period, around 1725, and is currently housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Inventory number 6787–1860).

This large dish (Figure 4), painted in blue and white, depicts the Baptism of Christ in the river Jordan. According to Krahl and Harrison-Hall (1994), Christian symbols were present on Chinese porcelain made for the Portuguese during the Ming dynasty. However, this large dish is among the earliest examples depicting a scene from the Bible.

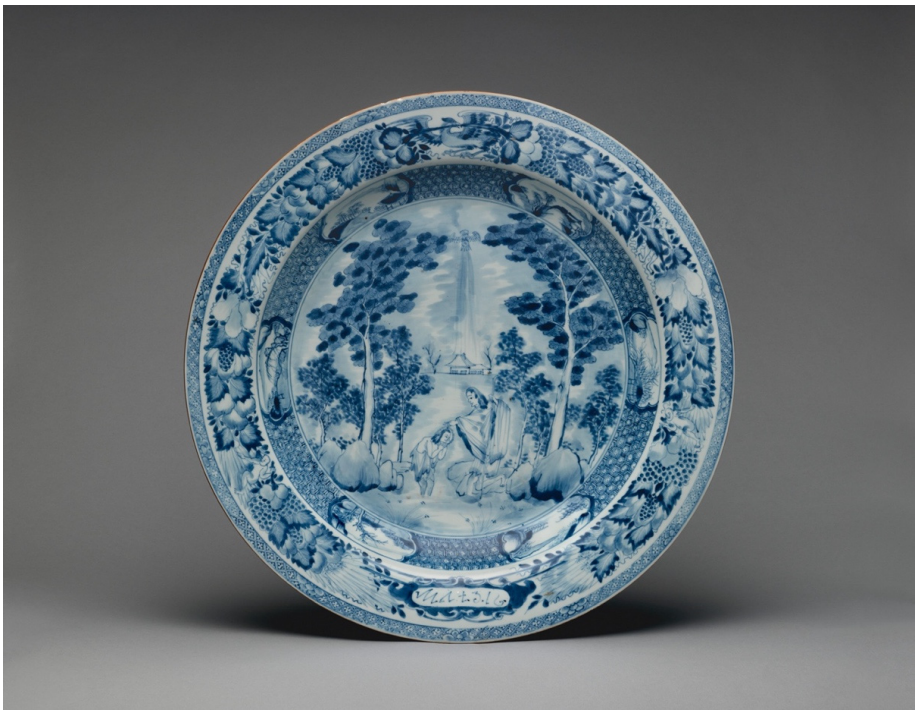

Figure 4. Dish with John the Baptist, ca. 1715–1725, China. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain.

The center is decorated with a medallion enclosing Christ and John standing in the water. Saint John, wearing a cloak that falls in folds, pours water over Christ's head, dressed in a loin cloth. In the background, a European-style house appears on the horizon, and the Holy Spirit is represented as a dove radiating rays of light in the sky. The representation reveals the artist's lack of familiarity with the subject (Ströber 2001, p. 69). In the foreground, between trees growing out of rocks, a river appears in the background, indicated by the blank space, while the background is filled with washed blue strokes. The whole picture has movement in the stillness, creating the feeling of being there for the viewer.

The central composition depicting John the Baptist and Christ in the Jordan River is based on a passage from the Gospel of Saint Matthew. "When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased'" (*Mt* 3:16–17), to which reference is made in a cartouche on the rim of this porcelain (abbreviated to *Mat.3.16*).

The *cavetto*, employed for the curved area connecting the base and the rim, is segmented into six panels and adorned with the turtleback pattern (*Guibei Wen*, 龟背纹) in the remaining space. The six panels feature delicately painted naturalistic and landscape scenes, portraying thatched cottages, houses, mountains, trees, and sampans (small boats with flat bottoms commonly used along the coasts and rivers of China and Southeast Asia). The turtleback pattern consists primarily of hexagonal prisms arranged in a honeycomb-like sequence. The hexagonal geometric pattern is initially referred to as "turtleback" in the *Yingzao Fashi* (Treatise on Architectural Methods) from the Song Dynasty.

The rounded border is decorated with stylized European-style flowers, leaves, and fruits. Four putti, depicted as plump Chinese infants, are concealed within the thick, intertwining tendrils. The upper part is painted with a large bird or an eagle grasping a flower stem in its beak. The stem extends to the sides, connecting all the flowers. The outermost edge is a thin, narrow border painted with the lozenge pattern (*Lingxing Wen*, 菱形纹).

Le Corbeiller (1974, p. 69) observes that while the subjects may have originated from engravings, the composition and border design display similar stylistic peculiarities to those found on late seventeenth-century Delft biblical plates. One such plate is a tin-glazed earthenware painted with blue enamel, depicting Jacob's dream, produced at the "De Roos" factory in Delft between 1690 and 1710 (Inventory number C.1761–1919, Victoria and Albert Museum). According to Eva Ströber (2001, p. 69), this border can be observed in a multitude of commissioned porcelain pieces. The porcelain models in question are considered European, likely Delft faience decorated with biblical scenes dating back to the latter half of the 17th century. Consequently, the inaccurate and seemingly naive reproduction by the Chinese craftsman can be ascribed to a combination of insufficient understanding of the subject and the appropriation of the motif from Delft pottery, which is frequently executed in a cursory style or sketchy fashion.

After 1740, meticulous reproductions of copperplate engravings featuring Christian religious motifs began to emerge, often adorned with borders in the fashion of Meissen porcelain or Viennese Du Paquier porcelain (Ströber 2001, p. 69). While the motifs and biblical scenes may not be entirely accurate or congruous, Chinese craftsmen have been known to repaint European motifs on Chinese porcelain, symbolizing a reciprocal exchange and shared learning. The reopening of commercial trade with Europe during the early Qing dynasty facilitated a mutual exchange of ceramics between China and Europe. The introduction of Western decoration and a hybrid pattern for the European market brought new subject matters to China and enriched the variety of motifs used in Chinese porcelain decoration (Scott 1997, p. 30).

Regarding this porcelain dish (Figure 4), it is also noteworthy that the stone depicted on the central medallion was added to the bible scene by a Chinese craftsman. The different tones of the significant color palette act as highlights and shadows, and they emulate the texture of the stones. Consequently, the image exhibits a three-dimensional and naturalistic quality. The modeling of the forms unveils the linear perspective of the composition, which further reminds us of Western approaches. This dish shows the fusion of styles as the Chinese motif and bible scene are combined with realistically modeled, three-dimensional forms arranged according to a linear perspective. This melding of styles echoes the manner established by the art produced by European Jesuits.

We can also observe a precursor of the "oriental" style that developed in 18th century Europe with *Chinoiserie*, where a European idea of Chinese style was invented and imposed. The scene depicts the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in a setting reminiscent of a Chinese landscape, complete with trees, rocky rivers, and distant houses in the back-

ground, resembling a Chinese *Shanshui Hua* (mountain and water painting, 山水画). The amalgamation of Christian imagery with Chinese motifs results from the European *Chinoiserie* trend. The Christian motif with Chinese aesthetics originated in China and likely made its way to Europe, where it was subsequently replicated by European ceramic manufacturers. Moreover, Chinese craftsmen adapted specific European motifs. These hybrid iconographies have the potential to be utilized to trace the communication between China and Europe. The process of cultural exchange, where one culture is influenced by external cultural transformation and then undergoes local progress and development, is not uncommon after the age of exploration (Dong 2021, p. 359). These porcelains were painted with Christian scenes, such as the Baptism or the Crucifixion of Christ, inspired by Dutch or English faience models or engravings. Whether they were produced for export to Europe or specifically commissioned with Chinese-style motifs for use in Asian missionary work (Howard and Ayers 1978, p. 316; Ströber 2001, p. 69), they represent significant iconographic evidence of the cultural exchange between China and Europe and the artistic, intercultural process. The painting techniques shown on Chinese porcelain are closely associated with the missionary activities of that era.

The introduction of engraving and European print, as well as the presence of European Jesuits, in China, elicited great admiration from the emperors and literati for European artistic techniques. These techniques included pictorial realism, linear perspective, portraiture, the contrast between light and dark, and optical illusion. Despite the prohibition of Christianity decreed by Yongzheng in 1724, the fervor for European artistic methods persisted, and the effort to amalgamate Western and indigenous technologies endured.

During the Kangxi reign, the imperial workshop predominantly utilized Western enamel pigments. During the Yongzheng period, a greater variety of sophisticated colors in porcelain decoration was partly attributed to the innovations introduced by the Jesuits (Nadler 2001, p. 24). In the sixth year of the Yongzheng reign (1728), Chinese artisans developed a technique for extracting enamel pigments, marking the regular integration of local production and imported materials. Yongzheng, while not as widely revered, endeavored to comprehend Western scientific knowledge to a similar extent as Kang Xi. Nevertheless, he exhibited courteous treatment towards the missionary painters serving at the court and demonstrated significant appreciation and interest in the contrast technique between light and dark. During the Yongzheng reign (1723–1735), Giuseppe Castiglione emerged as a notable missionary painter, producing remarkable results in his artwork. The masterpieces "Beauties Collection" and "One Hundred Horses" by the artist reflect a distinctive European painting style while incorporating auspicious symbolism and aesthetic suggestions from Chinese painting. It is achieved through light and dark colors to create volumetric quality and convey a sense of light and shadow. During the Yongzheng period, Castiglione established contact with Nian Xiyao (1671–1738), a painter, mathematician, and government official. Castiglione and Nian collaborated on the first Chinese-language book about the mechanics of perspectives titled "Visual Learning" (*Shixue*, 视学), which is an adaptation of Andrea Pozzo's "*Perspective Pictorum et architectorum*" (1642–1709) (Tang 2017, p. 93). Furthermore, Nian Xiyao also provided oversight for the Imperial Kiln at Jingdezhen.

When Nian Xiyao was assigned as the Supervisor of the imperial kiln, he applied Western painting techniques to porcelain, which he learned from Castiglione. In the meantime, soon after the central officials assigned by the Yongzheng arrived in Jingdezhen, they took control of imperial kilns, and the local potters gradually acquired proficiency in enamel painting techniques. These central officials had a certain level of connection with the court's Office of Ateliers (M. C. Wang 2022, p. 50). The porcelains produced at the Jingdezhen imperial kilns from 1726 to 1735 were co-supervised by Nian Xiyao and Tang Ying. Some of them decorated with Western themes and motifs were known as "Nian wares" (*Nianyao*, 年窑) (Kleutghen 2014, p. 120), and they became paradigmatic for the broader phenomenon of aristocratic taste. Like Giuseppe Castiglione, the European missionaries working at the court could not carry out their missionary endeavor under the Yongzheng's religious policy. However, Yongzheng's embrace of the Jesuits as artists

and artisans facilitated technological exchanges and fostered innovative interactions. The painted-enamel porcelains demonstrate the influence of the Jesuits, primarily in the approach to depiction, while the preferred subject matter of decorations remained Chinese. The amalgamation of the subdued yet discernible Western approach with Chinese styles emerged as a distinguishing feature of the artwork created during the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century.

After 1740, Chinese porcelain pieces featuring Christian religious motifs were meticulous replicas of European copperplate engravings. The most prevalent theme is the series depicting the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection, exemplified by a set of three Qianlong period dishes displayed in the Medeiros e Almeida Museum, as well as portraits of religious figures like Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, which can be found in various museums. The majority of these pieces are painted in enamel pigments, of which many are decorated in a black enamel known as *shui mo* (水墨, ink color) in Chinese and referred to in the West as grisaille, Jesuit ware, or *encre de Chine*. The grisaille technique represented a novel advancement in Chinese porcelain manufacturing, likely influenced by European black-and-white prints and engravings. François Xavier d'Entrecolles's letter suggests that before 1722, Chinese artisans could not produce successful grisaille-painted porcelain (Fan 2020, p. 72). The initial recorded achievement occurred in 1729, as indicated by an imperial decree stating: "No. 40, porcelain painted in ink [*shui mo*]" (Cited in Carvalho et al. 2016, p. 162). Thanks to the study by Christiaan Jörg, the origins of Christian religious scenes can be identified. The illustrations in a small Lutheran Bible by the Dutch engraver Jan Luyken (1649–1712) perfectly harmonize with the Christian decorations found on Chinese porcelains (Jörg 2002). The porcelain, painted in *grisaille* to depict the life of Jesus, not only closely resembles the original copperplate but also imbues this religious theme with a greater sense of solemnity. Consequently, this series of porcelain gained widespread popularity in Europe. Given that these items were primarily tailored and distributed in Europe, their connection to missionary activities in China is limited, but they are associated with the Dutch East India Company (VOC) (Jörg 2002). During the 18th century, the Dutch were the sole nation engaged in commercial trade with Japan. Consequently, the porcelain *en grisaille* could be utilized by Japanese converts.

3. Discussion

In the context of Christian images produced in China, porcelain stands out as the most significant source. This aspect is evident in the sheer volume of exported objects to Europe and the diverse range of iconographic and typological representations. The four Chinese porcelains examined in this article represent various phases of Christianity in China throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. The intermittent intersection of Chinese art with Christian elements is evident in these porcelain pieces.

The first Chinese bowl made between 1520 and 1540, probably during the Jiajing period, is one of the first orders of porcelain, a term generally attributed to the very first commissions of Chinese porcelains by the Portuguese after they arrived in China. In Europe, the Portuguese were the first to engage in the activity of commissioning porcelains. They were the first to directly contact Chinese merchants, so their role in missionary work is not surprising. The combination of the symbol of the King of Portugal and the symbol of Christianity is a political affirmation of the King Manuel of Portugal, to whom the Pope had granted the right of territorial, political, and spiritual sovereignty of the overseas conquests, presenting the king as the herald of Christ and Christianity in Asia.

The second Chinese bottle was made between 1620 and 1644, specifically during the Tianqi or Chongzhen period. The symbol of the Dominicans reflects the complex circumstances that arose during the sixteen years of the Iberian Union. In the 17th century, the Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian missionaries encountered the Jesuits. In contrast to other mendicant orders, Jesuit missionaries adopt a policy of accommodation or adaptation to Chinese culture. The discrepancies arose from their divergent apostolic methodologies, leading to the Chinese Rites Controversy. The shape of the porcelain also mirrors the

competitive dynamics involving the Dutch. Chinese porcelain exports underwent a transition from being commissioned by the Portuguese to being commissioned by the Dutch.

The third Chinese saucer was made between 1662 and 1722, within the Kangxi period. This porcelain depicting the Crucifixion is significant as one of the earliest manifestations of the figure of Jesus on Chinese porcelain and as an early example of Chinese porcelain design influenced by European prints. It serves as a testament to the transitional period from Ming to Qing, the flourishing of porcelain production with technical advancements, and the varying degrees of success and failure of missionary strategies.

The final dish was made between 1715 and 1725, probably dating back to the Yongzheng era. The imposition of religious restrictions did not impede the exchange and evolution of artistic expression. The Chinese porcelain features a comprehensive depiction of the Bible story at its center, while the rim is adorned with a decorative band incorporating leaf and fruit motifs reminiscent of designs found on Delftware. Despite technical imperfections and limited comprehension, the Baptism in the Chinese landscape demonstrates the fusion of the Christian scene and Chinese motifs, reflecting the influence of the European *chinoiserie* trend. The Chinese porcelain featuring a European print design with biblical motifs may have been used by local converts or exported to Europe. They probably arrived in Europe more as curiosities and as evidence of the success of the Christian mission. After 1740, a variety of decorative items, including *encre de Chine* and Jesuit wares, were made for Christian missionaries, not in China, but in Europe.

From a vertical perspective, from the first porcelain to the last, the presence of Christian iconography, the utilization of European artistic techniques, and the incorporation of religious motifs are three noteworthy aspects to consider.

The first bowl is decorated with the sacred monogram IHS on the exterior surface and the Latin inscription "AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA" on its rim. The second bottle is painted with several religious symbols, constituting a relevant religious representation on two sides. The third saucer is portrayed at the inner center of the scene of the Crucifixion. The version is simplified, yet it completely occupies the image. The final dish depicts the entire scene of Baptism. The biblical narrative is conveyed through the imagery depicted on porcelain. The evolution of Christian iconography is evident in the progression from the monogram and inscription to the symbolic elements, followed by the simplified scene, and ultimately culminating in the complete bible scene, showcasing increasing diversity and visibility.

The first bowl exhibits a complete Chinese style, evident in both its decoration and shape. The second bottle was made after its European glass prototype. The third saucer attempted to employ the perspective technique. The design of the religious scene on the last dish appears to have been derived from a copperplate engraving and European print found in a missionary publication. In addition to the Chinese missionary efforts, Western technology was also utilized to create Christian iconography.

The first bowl exhibits a scarcity of religious motifs. The traditional Chinese motif, such as the guardian lion symbolizing Buddhism, is depicted in the most esteemed porcelain section. The second porcelain is a fusion of religious and Chinese motifs. Numerous cherubs are depicted within the traditional auspicious motif—*xiang yun*. Religious motifs are seamlessly integrated with Chinese motifs in a harmonious manner. The third porcelain piece prominently features religious images, with Western figures painted by Chinese craftsmen sporting oriental facial features. In the fourth piece, the Chinese motifs have been marginalized, and the porcelain borders have also been westernized.

The Jesuits introduced European culture to China in a distinctive manner as a result of missionary efforts. Before the Yongzheng reign and within favorable social and political conditions, Christianity manifested in increasingly European characteristics.

It is also worth pointing out that in the first two porcelain pieces, the choice of craftsmen was mainly based on their inventory of traditional Chinese motifs. Even though the inscription AVE MARIA, the sacred monogram, and the royal coat of arms requested by those who commissioned were painted in the first bowl, the most crucial choice of the

porcelain craftsmen remained the guardian lion motif, a Buddhist symbol in Chinese culture. The second bottle also reflects the Chinese craftsmen's preference. They accomplished the symbol of Dominicans and did not forget to choose their familiar patterns to create, such as auspicious clouds and a Chinese landscape. Their choice or preference, in other words, is in line with their own cultural identity. Moreover, this intentional or unintentional choice promotes cultural blending and religious syncretism and creates a dynamic space for interreligious dialogue. In the third saucer and the last dish, although the religious figures were domesticated in the process of adaptation, two scenes of bible stories are presented in their entirety, reflecting the power of sacred images. When words and language became communication barriers, images became necessary missionary tools. The transmission of faith is realized through material culture, which could be porcelain, prints, or other art forms.

4. Conclusions

Porcelains have traversed various regions and cultures over time, posing a challenge in interpreting their original contexts. Due to the limited information available about the individual who placed the order and the absence of corresponding records regarding the acquisition of religious porcelain by Chinese converts, it is currently unfeasible to definitively link these Chinese porcelains featuring Christian iconography to missionary endeavors in China. Additionally, no historical evidence exists that Chinese craftsmen were Christian or knew the Bible stories. It cannot be ruled out that the religious motifs on these porcelains were extracted from other materials, such as engravings, since Christianity arrived in China by the 7th century, and different techniques, materials, and motifs to the Christian subjects were applied for missionary purposes. However, the presence of Christian iconography, the utilization of European artistic techniques, and the incorporation of religious motifs contribute to a better understanding of the spread of Christian missions and local religious policies during various periods. More importantly, they illustrate artistic miscegenation and transcultural communication.

The four pieces of Chinese porcelain emphasized in this article reveal that objects of art and material culture represent paradigms encompassing beliefs, worldviews, and discourses within a specific historical period and context. Chinese craftsmen interpret and convey a distinct religious culture through their familiar artistic expressions. Despite being commissioned by Europeans, Chinese craftsmen consciously or unconsciously adapted unfamiliar Christian iconography in accordance with their aesthetic codes, cultural ideology, and religious beliefs. In doing so, they revitalized Western religious motifs and biblical scenes. In China, Christian iconography was shaped by Chinese culture. Conversely, it is undeniable that certain Jesuits favored using aesthetic models from Chinese art to depict Christian scenes, thereby aiming to facilitate the process of conversion. This alternative strategy aligns with their adaptation policy and reflects their interest in understanding other cultures. This interaction reflected on Chinese porcelain promotes intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

This dialogue becomes tangible and visible through cultural and visual materials. In the objects, read the religious influence as much or more than in the documents. The biblical themes are not only explicated through verbal discourse but also visually depicted through images produced in China. The image may serve as a reflection of the word, thereby aiding in the elucidation of sacred histories and Christian teachings that may not be easily comprehensible through words alone, particularly for individuals lacking a background in Bible history and Christian teachings (Lopes 2017, p. 95). Additionally, Hans Belting (2001, p. 9) points out that an image is more than a product of perception. It is created as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. We live with images; we comprehend the world in images. Written materials could undoubtedly complement visual material.

Intercultural or interreligious dialogue is not simply an event; instead, it is a dynamic process that evolves over time. Nicolas Standaert (2008) suggests that missionaries in

China created a space of interaction that led to the reframing of that space wherein traditional actions and ideas are reconceived. Therefore, the focus is neither on the transmitter nor on the receiver but on what is "in-between". Chinese craftsmen and European missionaries collaborated innovatively to create a space where dialogue could take place.

The juxtaposition of symbols from two distinct religions does not indicate any potential religious syncretism (Afonso 2014, p. 192). These pieces show traces of balanced intercultural communication; in other words, Western and Eastern cultures never try to overlap each other but assimilate and coexist. In this "in-between" space, we can envision the impact of European traders and missionaries, who introduced a new wave of Christianity to China and brought diverse objects to Asia, connecting multiple regions through artistic and knowledge exchange networks. Thus, it facilitated coexistence and mutual understanding among different cultural civilizations.

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