

Article

The Influence of Qiu Jun on Jesuit Missionaries and Chinese Christian Texts in Ming–Qing China

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Abstract: This study explores the previously overlooked influence of Qiu Jun, a renowned mid-Ming dynasty scholar, on Jesuit missionaries and Chinese Catholic believers. Although Qiu's impact on Confucian scholars of the mid-to-late Ming period is well established, his role in shaping formalized Chinese ritual systems and Chinese Catholicism has received little attention. A closer examination of Jesuit missionaries' translation of Confucian classics and Chinese Catholic texts from the late Ming and early Qing periods reveals that Qiu's works were frequently cited, particularly in relation to the abolition of divine titles, the worship of Confucius, and the establishment of the City-god system. Qiu's responses to these issues, informed by Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang's efforts to centralize power and establish authority in both secular and religious spheres, served as key references for mid-Ming reforms. Moreover, Jesuit fathers and Chinese Catholic adherents drew on Qiu's perspectives in their writings to address various issues during the Chinese Rites Controversy. This research uncovers the profound impact of Qiu Jun's ideas on the cultural exchange between China and the West in the 17th–18th centuries.

Keywords: Qiu Jun; Jesuit missionaries; *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*; Chinese Christian texts; Confucius; city-god; Chinese rites controversy



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1. Introduction

Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–1495), a prominent scholar of the mid-Ming dynasty, served in four imperial courts and is widely considered one of the most influential intellectuals of the middle and late Ming periods. His extensive writings profoundly influenced the interpretation of Confucian classics, the study and practice of Confucian rituals, and the development of governance and early economic thought aimed at benefiting the common people. Historians consider him the “leader of literary officials in the Ming Dynasty” 有明一代文臣之宗 (Hao et al. 2021, p. 95). Scholars such as Chu Hung-lam and Lee Cheuk-yin have conducted detailed discussions on Qiu Jun's life and his significant contributions (Chu 1984; Lee 1984, 2005). However, the influence of Qiu Jun's works extends beyond the realm of the Chinese literati and has reached Western missionaries and Chinese Catholic adherents, extending beyond the borders of China. The impact of Qiu Jun's writings on Jesuit missionaries during the Ming–Qing period in China remains largely unexplored. Therefore, this article examines the twofold relationships between Qiu Jun's oeuvre and the Jesuit missionaries' Latin translations of Confucian classics, as well as Qiu's impact on Chinese Catholic texts, both of which were intricately tied to the Chinese Rites Controversy during the late Ming and early Qing periods.

2. Qiu Jun in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*

Recent research has revealed that Jesuit missionaries utilized Qiu Jun's interpretations of Confucian classics in their translation work *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (henceforth, “CSP”) (Intorcetta et al. 1687; Meynard 2011; Couplet et al. 2021). This collaborative translation endeavor involved Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628), Prospero Intorcetta (1625–1696), and Philippe Couplet (1623–1693), and stands as “one

of the supreme achievements of Jesuit accommodative scholarship in China” (Mungello 2009, p. 247). *CSP* comprises Latin translations of three of the Confucian Four Books, with the exclusion of *Mencius*. As Meynard notes, *CSP* was born out of the Rites Controversy (1645–1705), a period of internal Catholic debates and challenges to Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) and Matteo Ricci’s (1552–1610) missionary approach. In response, Intorcetta and Couplet translated the Four Books to justify their methodology (Meynard 2015, p. 18). This translation served as a dual apologia, legitimizing Confucianism to Westerners while defending Matteo Ricci’s missionary strategy. The dissemination and influence of *CSP* in Europe were significant, as it not only underscored the importance of Sino-Western cultural exchanges but also contributed to the emergence of a European fascination with Chinese culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The four-volume book *CSP* is quite lengthy, but it only mentions Qiu Jun in two instances, written as “Kieu Kium xan” (Couplet et al. 2021, vol. 3, p. 314; Meynard 2015, pp. 46, 134). Interestingly, although the translation of *CSP* was finalized in Canton, the spelling “Kieu Kium xan” is likely to be the Romanization of the 17th-century Nanjing Mandarin pronunciation of the name “邱瓊山” (Qiu Qiongshan)¹, indicating the translators’ significant connection to northern China, where they predominantly used Nanjing Mandarin. The two instances of quotation in *CSP* are as follows:

- (1) In the second section of the preface of the first volume, the Jesuit translators implicitly indicated that they could not directly read the original Four Books and needed to rely on the annotations of Chinese scholars. They expressed their attitude of not rejecting modern interpreters, especially Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582), Qiu Qiongshan, and Cham Tumco 張侗初 (Zhang Tongchu, aka Zhang Nai 張鼐, 1572–1630) (Couplet et al. 2021, vol. 1, pp. 157, 314). These three modern interpreters have close connections with the Neo-Confucianism of their time. Thierry Meynard has pointed out that the translators of *CSP* referred to Zhang Juzheng’s imperial annotated edition of the Four Books, as well as the interpretations of two Confucian scholars: Qiu Qiongshan and Zhang Tongchu (Meynard 2008, p. 140). Although Qiu Jun’s works are not explicitly referenced in *CSP*, Meynard suggests that the translators employed a methodology similar to Qiu Jun’s when dealing with the original text of the *Daxue* (*Great Learning*). Qiu Jun’s approach involved conducting meticulous historical research on the political events mentioned in the text and providing pertinent historical examples to elucidate the original text. According to Meynard: “In contrast to the interpretations of Zhu Xi and Zhang Juzheng, Qiu Jun did not explicate the classics in the order of the original text, but rather organized them thematically. As a result, identifying direct statements by Qiu Jun in *CSP* proves to be a challenge” (Meynard 2008, p. 141, note 3).
- (2) The second instance is the use of Qiu Jun’s views to criticize Buddhism, as Buddhism was a common enemy of both Confucianism and Catholicism. In the third volume of *CSP*, when discussing Buddhism and idol worship, the translators wrote:

“Annalium vero Interpres Kieu Kium xan gravioribus quoque verbis atque sententiis, nec sine quadam acerbitate, non modo sectam ipsam condemnat, sed imprimis stultitiam ac temeritatem Imperatoris mîm tí, qui eam cum monstro seu idolo Fe in Sinarum Imperium invehi sit passus”. (Couplet et al. 2021, vol. 3, pp. 41, 44)

The following is my English translation of this passage.²

“The true interpreter of the Annals, Qiu Qiongshan, with even more serious words and sentences, and not without some bitterness, not only condemns the sect itself, but especially the foolishness and rashness of Emperor Ming, who allowed it to be introduced with a monster or idol Fe into the Chinese Empire”.

In his investigation, Qi Feizhi 齊飛智 (Qi 2024) further highlights Qiu Jun’s critical stance towards Buddhism from the perspective of orthodox Confucianism, which the Jesuit missionaries exploited as a tool to confront their opponents. They leveraged Qiu Jun’s arguments to bolster their own interpretations of Buddhism. The mention of “Annalium”

in the above text implies that the translators of *CSP* referred to Qiu Jun's work *Shishi Zhenggang* 世史正綱 (*Correct Principles of Historical Succession*).

It is important to note that Qiu Jun's works, such as *Daxue Yanyi Bu* 大學衍義補 (*Supplement to the Interpretation of the Great Learning*) and *Shishi Zhenggang*, adopt a thematic organization, and there is some overlap or mutual supplementation between the topics discussed in these two works, albeit with variations in specific details. The excerpt quoted by Qi Feizhi, according to the judgment of the Chinese translator of *CSP*, should read as the following paragraph.

“Since the introduction of Buddhism into China, there has been no greater calamity brought upon us by the barbarians ... The Emperor Ming, as a human being, embraced a fatherless religion, and as the ruler of China, he allied himself with foreigners. This has caused a great disaster that will last for millions of years. The guilt of the Emperor Ming reaches up to the heavens” 此佛教入中國之始，自天地開闢以來，夷狄之禍未有甚於此者也.....明帝為人之子，乃崇無父之教，為中國之主，乃黨外夷之人。開茲大釁，以為千萬年無窮之禍。明帝之罪上通乎天矣。(Couplet et al. 2021, vol. 3, pp. 44, 157; J. Qiu 2006, vol. 6, pp. 2664–65)

This passage is a scathing critique of Buddhism, in which Qiu Jun attributes China's deviation from the orthodox Confucian tradition to the influence of Buddhism, ultimately resulting in unending calamities. Notably, this passage has been repeatedly cited in some Chinese Catholic texts. Qiu Jun perceived Buddhism as a menace to Confucian orthodoxy, and his works frequently contain harsh condemnations of the religion.

When Jesuit missionaries and Chinese Catholic scholars quoted passages from Qiu Jun's works, they rarely mentioned the titles of the books and sometimes took excerpts or made certain edits, making it difficult to determine the specific sources of the quotations.

In addition to the Latin work *CSP*, evidence of the Jesuit and Chinese Catholic scholars' recognition of Qiu Jun and his writings can be found in their Chinese works, although locating these references proves to be a challenging task. Given the historical significance of Qiu Jun and his writings during the Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as the limited previous exploration of Qiu's influence on Chinese Catholic texts, this article primarily investigates the Jesuits' incorporation of Qiu Jun's works in their Chinese writings, mostly in manuscript form. Naturally, the passages cited in these works revolve around a crucial topic: the political and religious dynamics between Catholic missionaries and Chinese adherents during the Ming dynasty, as well as the ensuing conflicts and adaptations following the introduction of Catholicism in China. Furthermore, this discussion delves into the lingering debate surrounding the Chinese Rites Controversy, thus underscoring the unique historical significance of Qiu Jun's works in shaping the influence of Catholicism in China.

3. Qiu Jun in Chinese Christian Texts

3.1. Chinese Christian Texts

The following discussion will center on Chinese Catholic texts from the Ming–Qing period, with a primary focus on volumes 9–11 of the *Yesu Hui Luoma Danganguan Ming–Qing Tianzhujiào Wenxian* 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 (*Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*), edited by Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink (Standaert and Dudink 2002). These three volumes contain 36 Chinese texts that address the Chinese Rites Controversy. At the heart of this controversy lies a treatise written by Francisco Varo, a Spanish Dominican missionary, around 1670. Varo's work, based on Thomistic theology, criticized Chinese Catholic adherents for worshiping ancestors and Confucius. This treatise was rediscovered in 1680 by Jesuit father Simão Rodrigues (1645–1704), who sought the help of Chinese scholars to respond to Varo's criticism. Rodrigues extracted certain questions from Varo's text and sent them to Chinese Catholics, including Li Jiugong 李九功 (?–1681) and Yan Mo 嚴謨, sparking a long and intense debate. The responses to these questions, which represent the Chinese voices in the Rites Controversy, were dispatched to Europe, where they were merged with letters and documents written in European languages,

forming a comprehensive dossier of evidence for defense, petition, or protest of the Roman Curia (Standaert 2012). While Varo's original work, *Bianji* 辨祭 (*A Dispute on Sacrifice*), has been lost, its essential content has been preserved in *Bianji Canping* 辨祭參評 (*A Dispute on Sacrifice: An Analytical Response*), transcribed by Li Liangjie 李良爵 (Li Jiugong's son) at Rodrigues' request, based on Rodrigues' original ideas (Menegon 2013, pp. 206–13; Standaert 1995, p. 11). Another anonymous work, *Yishu* 易書³, can be attributed to Varo and is similar in nature to *Bianji Canping*. This text incorporates passages borrowed from Qiu Jun's writings, suggesting that Varo's lost work was heavily influenced by Qiu Jun's views. In response to Rodrigues' questions, Yan Mo authored *Lishi Tiaowen* 李師條問 (*The Inquiries of Father Simão Rodrigues*), providing a detailed and meticulous response to each question. These texts, all directly related to the Chinese Rites Controversy, will serve as crucial sources for our subsequent discussion.

The discussions of Chinese rituals in these texts are deeply influenced by Zhu Xi's *Jiali* 家禮 (*Family Rituals*), with Qiu Jun's annotated and revised version, *Wengong Jiali Yijie* 文公家禮儀節 (*Wengong's Etiquette of the Family Rituals*) (J. Qiu 1474), emerging as the most authoritative version by the mid-Ming period. Nicolas Standaert's research has revealed that the funeral rituals presented in these texts occupy a state of "in-betweenness", where diverse cultural traditions from China and beyond intersect. This blending of traditions enabled the funeral rituals to serve multiple purposes, reinforcing the participants' Christian identity while facilitating their integration into the wider Chinese society (Standaert 2008, p. 230). Moreover, Standaert notes that Qiu Jun's version *Wengong's Etiquette of the Family Rituals* had become a widely recognized text among the educated elite by the late fifteenth century (Standaert 2008, p. 17).

Before embarking on the ensuing discussion, it is imperative to address several key points regarding these Chinese Catholic texts.

- (1) Manuscript Significance: Although many Chinese Catholic texts during the late Ming and early Qing periods exist in manuscript form, their significance should not be undermined. On the contrary, an interdependent network of interpretations has formed in the debates over the Chinese Rites Controversy, where the citations of passages and viewpoints are sometimes interconnected.
- (2) Thematic Composition: These Chinese Catholic manuscripts are often composed of argumentative articles or essay collections centered around specific themes. Therefore, different commentators from different generations may have varying interpretations within the same theme. This situation bears some resemblance to the works of Qiu Jun. For example, Qiu's *Supplement to the Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* is not strictly a commentary on *Daxue* (the *Great Learning*) but a reworking of its relevant entries and themes influenced by the scholarly tradition of annotations and commentaries. However, it is important to emphasize that the role of Chinese Catholic texts in quoting Qiu Jun differs from the citation of classical works by contemporary scholars. Qiu Jun's viewpoints are often used in summarizing sections. In other words, Qiu Jun's viewpoints play a crucial supporting role in the final argumentative points or leading to the concluding statements.
- (3) Historical Verification: In Chinese Catholic texts during the Ming and Qing periods, the interpretation of many works is not straightforward, and their writing style is eclectic, including fragmentary and incomplete texts. Therefore, at the beginning of the research, some historical verification is necessary to determine who compiled these documents and the specific contents they contain.

3.2. The Veneration of Confucius and the Gods: Titles and Rituals

3.2.1. "Abolishing the Divine Titles of All Gods" and the Worship of Confucius

In various Chinese Christian texts between the late Ming and early Qing periods, a recurring topic of discussion is the issue of "abolishing the divine titles of all gods". In 1371, the third year of the Hongwu reign 洪武三年, an imperial decree was issued to "abolish the divine titles of all gods" throughout the Chinese empire. The decree stated:

“Since the creation of heaven and earth until the present, the divine spirits, gathered as gods, all receive their mandates from the Supreme Deity. Their subtle and mysterious nature cannot be fathomed. How can they be subjected to the titles bestowed by the state? ... Rituals are meant to illuminate the divine and human, to establish proper titles and distinctions. They cannot be arbitrarily tampered with”. 自天地開闢以至於今，英靈之氣，萃而為神，必皆受命於上帝，幽微莫測，豈國家封號之所可加？……夫禮，所以明神人、正名分，不可以僭差。([Institute of History and Philology \(IHP\), Academia Sinica中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962](#), p. 1034)

The phrase “all receive their mandates from the Supreme Deity” is often discussed in Chinese Catholic literature. Some scholars point out that this policy “emphasizes the importance of governance and unifying the people through rituals, which are based on the principles of reverence for the divine and respect for social hierarchy, and are therefore not to be violated or usurped by those who overstep their bounds ... In this perspective, all matters are decreed by God, and thus lies beyond the realm of human criticism or arbitrary discussion”.⁴

Some scholars point out that this policy “emphasizes the importance of governance and unifying the people through rituals, which are based on the principles of reverence for the divine and respect for social hierarchy, and are therefore not to be violated or altered at will. According to this view, all things are ordained by God and are not subject to arbitrary debate by ordinary humans” ([Rong 2006](#), pp. 206–7). The ritual system of the Ming dynasty played a crucial role in standardizing names and orders. The abolition of the titles of all gods was a matter of “establishing proper titles and distinctions”. As stated in Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang’s edict:

“In order to ensure that the divine and human are properly named and spoken of in accordance with ritual, We hereby proclaim Our intentions to honor the gods through ritual”. 庶幾，神人之際，名正言順，於禮為當，用稱朕以禮事神之意 ([Institute of History and Philology \(IHP\), Academia Sinica中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962](#), pp. 1034–35)

It is further summarized as follows:

“In the mortal realm, there are rituals and music, while in the spiritual realm, there are ghosts and gods. Both realms should be respected with the same sense of ritual propriety, and only then can social distinctions be proper”. 明則有禮樂，幽則有鬼神，其禮既同，其分當正 ([Institute of History and Philology \(IHP\), Academia Sinica中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962](#), p. 1035)

Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang promoted this policy ostensibly to target the intangible deities, but in reality, it was a means to use central authority to restrain secular superstitions and other beliefs.

In the imperial decree of the third year of the Hongwu reign, it was explicitly stipulated that besides abolishing the titles of other deities, Confucius was to be revered and all his bestowed titles and historical honors retained. The emperor’s decree stated:

“... Only Confucius comprehended the essence of the ancient kings and served as the teacher of the world, benefiting future generations. His contributions cannot be compared to those who achieved merits in a specific region or era. Therefore, his bestowed titles and honors should remain unchanged”. 惟孔子善明先王之要，道為天下師，以濟後世，非有功於一方一時者可比，所有封爵，宜仍其舊 ([Institute of History and Philology \(IHP\), Academia Sinica中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962](#), p. 1034)

This passage is also found in Francisco Varo’s (1627–1687) book *Yishu* ([Anonymous 2002](#), p. 6).

The passage suggests that Confucius, owing to his exceptional achievements, surpassed the constraints of a specific time and space, and consequently, his conferred titles and ranks were preserved throughout the dynasties as a paradigm. Wang Shizhen 王世貞

(1526–1590), an official of the Jiajing era (1522–1566), responded to this by citing this passage in his works and remarking:

“The Emperor, in his desire to extol the teachings of our revered master, issued a decree to abolish the titles of all gods throughout the empire, but he exceptionally spared Confucius and declared that his conferred titles and honors, as well as those of other subordinate deities, should remain unchanged. This further consolidated orthodoxy”. 高皇帝又念無以表揚我先師之道，詔革天下神號，而獨不以及夫子，且謂所封爵及諸從祀者俱如故。至此正統而益 (Wang 2012, p. 796)

This approach further strengthened the orthodox status of Confucian thought in society, and the Ming dynasty used it to maintain the legitimacy of its political rule. It is important to note that in the third year of the Hongwu reign, not only was Confucius' title preserved, but the titles of other figures honored in associated rituals were also retained.

However, there were significant adjustments to the worship and treatment of Confucius in later years. The first adjustment was made in the fourteenth year of the Hongwu reign when statues were abolished, except for statues of Confucius, which remained untouched. Qiu Jun commented on this, saying:

“In the early years of our nation, during the 14th year of the Hongwu reign, the Imperial Academy was first established. Our sagacious ancestors, with their profound wisdom, saw through the falsehoods of the past thousand years. They eliminated decisively the idolatrous worship of images, from Confucius down, replacing the practice of making statues of other sages with the use of tablets. Alas, it was a glorious reform that ended centuries of barbaric teachings!” 國初洪武十四年，首建太學。聖祖毅然灼見千古之非，自夫子以下，像不土繪、祀以神主，數百年夷教乃革。嗚呼，盛哉！ (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 1029)

In Qiu Jun's passage, the term “夷教” (barbaric teachings) denotes foreign religions, with Buddhism being the primary target. By extension, this label also applies to Catholicism, which emerged in China during the late Ming period. Furthermore, this passage conveys dissatisfaction with the ritual offerings made to Confucian sages enshrined alongside Confucius. Although it is acceptable for Confucius, a venerable sage who has guided generations, to remain seated without rising, the other sages honored alongside him in the temple are not worthy of imperial veneration.

Qiu's reasoning was:

“If the Confucian sages are enshrined in the temple, they are either renowned scholars of the past or high-ranking officials of the contemporary era. But if the Emperor is to bow down while the ministers of past dynasties sit above, would that not be improper? I believe it would not only be a breach of ritual, but also a spectacle that is unbecoming to behold. I fear that even the spirits of the sages in heaven may feel uneasy at the sight”. 若夫從祀諸儒，皆前代之縉紳，或當代之臣子，君拜於下，而臣坐於上，可乎？臣知非獨名分之乖舛，而觀瞻之不雅，竊恐聖賢在天之靈，亦有所不安也 (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 1029). This passage is also found in Varo's *Yishu* (Anonymous 2002, p. 7)

Qiu Jun also pointed out that the statues “only have a human-like appearance, but can they truly capture the appearance of the holy sages?” 特具人形耳，豈真聖賢之遺貌哉 (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 1029). The statues do not accurately depict the appearance of Confucius himself, making it absurd to worship these non-life-like statues. He also mentioned that changes had already been made to the Wenmiao 文廟 (Confucius Temple) in Nanjing, where the statues had been removed and replaced with wooden tablets, but the Confucius temple in Beijing still followed the old system from the Yuan dynasty and had not yet made any changes.

Qiu Jun continued to explain:

“The Guoxue 國學 (Imperial Academy) is where the Emperor personally inspects, and I humbly request that we follow the Holy Ancestor's system to abolish the barbaric practices of the past ... We should uphold the great achievements of our

ancestors and continue the legacy as the descendants of the sages”. 惟國學乃天子臨視之所，乞如聖祖之制，以革千古之夷教。……仰惟我聖祖有大功於世教十數，此其一也。發揚祖宗之功烈，亦聖子神孫繼述之大者 (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 1030)

Although Qiu Jun did not explicitly propose destroying the statues of Confucius in the Imperial Academy in Beijing, he suggested following the system established by the Holy Ancestor, which entailed replacing the statues with wooden tablets. Qiu Jun’s suggestion was not straightforward. Instead, he first pointed out that destroying the statues did not imply disrespect, as these statues did not represent the real person. Finally, he requested that the emperor follow the system of their ancestors, thereby inheriting and upholding their great achievements. The emperor’s authority is, in fact, inherited from ancestors, and thus adhering to ancestral laws is a proper way to maintain orthodox rule and central power.

3.2.2. Rodrigues and Li Jiugong’s Response

In his work *Bianji Canping* 辯祭參評 (*A Dispute on Sacrifice: An Analytical Response*), Simão Rodrigues summarized and restated the aforementioned discourse. He wrote:

“The practice of making statues began with the introduction of Buddhism to China. In the fourteenth year of the Hongwu reign, during the founding of the Imperial Academy and the establishment of the Wenmiao 文廟 (Confucius temple), the decision was made to decisively remove the statues and worship them as deities, which continues to this day. However, the worship of sages comes before the statues. It is easier to replace the statues with wooden tablets, which are cleaner and more classical, a sign of royal authority. If there are those who misunderstand the concept, they may assume that there are deities residing in the wooden tablets due to the inscription of the word ‘deity’. Little do they know that the intention behind the inscription is simply to record the name and title, allowing future generations to pay their respects”. 若塑像之設，至佛教入中國始有。洪武十四年，首建太學，立文廟，乃毅然革去像塑，祀以神位，迄今沿之不廢。然則祀聖祀先，易塑像，而為木主者，以泥繪之汙，不如木主之潔，亦古典、亦王章也。若有味於理者，因題神主二字，遂謂有神棲之。孰知設主原意，亦曰記其名號，俾後人有所瞻拜耳。 (Rodrigues 2002, pp. 421–22).

This passage is a summary of Qiu Jun’s explanation, while the latter part concerning whether there are deities residing in the wooden tablets reflects Simão Rodrigues’ viewpoint. Rodrigues believed that there were no deities present in the wooden tablets during the worship rituals. Inscribing the names on the tablets is merely for the purpose of commemoration by future generations. In other words, the veneration of Confucius and ancestors by the Chinese is not a religious ceremony.

Li Jiugong, a Chinese Catholic baptized by Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) and a contemporary of Rodrigues, also referenced this passage in his work *Lisu Mingbian* 禮俗明辨 (*Clarification of Rites and Customs*), providing his own commentary. Li stated, “When Western teachers first introduced their teachings, they differentiated between right and wrong, identifying what needed to be abolished and what was permissible. For example, if they encountered a privately established idol in someone’s home, they would order its removal. However, ancestral tablets were allowed to remain unchanged” 是以西師初來開教，剖分邪正，辨其有當決去者、有無妨礙者，如見人家私立魔像，即命撤去。而祖先神主，則存仍存之，而未有改也 (Li 2002a, pp. 35–36). Li further cautioned, “Given the similar mentalities of Eastern and Western cultures, those who are closest to Heaven’s teachings (Catholicism) are indeed Confucians. Consequently, there are many similarities between these two. In contrast, Catholicism is distinct from Buddhism and Taoism, much like the clear distinction between good and evil, or black and white. As we strive to propagate this religion in China, we should elucidate the truth of Heaven’s teachings and avoid hastily dismissing the non-conformity of Confucian writings”. 蓋由東海西海心理相同，近天教者，莫如儒教。故其書之相合者多。非若釋老二氏，邪正相懸如白黑不同者此也。今欲敷教中土，當發明天教之是，並勿輕擬儒書之非 (Li 2002a, p. 46). Li Jiugong’s explanation reveals that, like Rodrigues, he rejected

the religious significance of ancestral tablets and warned Catholic missionaries not to overly dismiss Confucianism, but instead to regard it as an ally and view Buddhism as an enemy.

However, Rodrigues' statement, "In the fourteenth year of the Hongwu reign, during the founding of the Imperial Academy and the establishment of the Wenmiao, the decision was made to decisively remove the statues and worship them as deities, which continues to this day", seems to imply that the removal of Confucius and his disciples' statues occurred in the fourteenth year of the Hongwu reign. In fact, it was only the statues of Confucius' disciples that were removed at that time, while the statues of Confucius himself remained, and people were still hesitant to make any changes to them.

In his treatise, Qiu Jun offers a meticulous account of the establishment of statues. In Chapter 65 of Volume 6 of the *Daxue Yanyi Bu*, he synthesizes the views of scholars from diverse dynasties, culminating in his own authoritative perspective on the subject. He notes, "The practice of making statues did not exist in ancient times and only began with the introduction of Buddhism to China. Before the Ancient Three Dynasties, deity worship was conducted using tablets, without the need for statues. It is not surprising that this practice was adopted from an alien faith" 塑像之設，自古無之，至佛教入中國始有也。三代以前，祀神皆以主，無有所謂像設也，彼異教用之，無足怪者 (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 1029). This passage is also quoted in *Yishu* (Anonymous 2002, p. 6). The term "different religion" here refers to Buddhism. Qiu Jun's viewpoint is that prior to Buddhism's introduction, the Chinese primarily worshiped deities with wooden tablets and did not establish statues.

Simão Rodrigues, in *Bianji Canping*, referenced Qiu Jun's suggestion to remove the statues of Confucius. Rodrigues wrote, "In our Western countries, thousands of years ago, we also mistakenly believed in the true Lord of Heaven and Earth. We built temples and worshipped the Three Lights, Earth Gods, evil spirits, and ancient sages, seeking blessings and protection. However, upon hearing the Holy Teaching, we deeply regretted our past mistakes and completely abandoned such rituals, returning to the correct path. We did not dare to lightly change customs that had been passed down for a long time. Even the statue of Confucius in China, isn't it revered by generations? Yet, Qiu Wenzhuang suggests its removal" (Rodrigues 2002, p. 411). Rodrigues seized upon Qiu Jun's idea to denounce the idolatry prevalent in Chinese culture. Ironically, Qiu Jun's initial motive behind this suggestion was to reinforce Confucianism's orthodox status and condemn "foreign religions", a term he primarily used to disparage Buddhism. Nevertheless, this phrase can also be seen as a veiled reference to Christianity, opening up a broader critique of non-native faiths.

3.2.3. Qiu Jun's Successor Zhang Cong and the Institutionalization of Qiu's Ideas in the Ritual System

During the Jiajing reign of the Ming dynasty, a pivotal debate unfolded, resulting in a landmark reform that centered on two key changes: changing Confucius' title from "King" to "Teacher" and substituting his statue with a wooden tablet during worship ceremonies (改王為師、易像為主). This debate took place at the beginning of the Jiajing era and occurred concurrently with the "Great Ritual Debate" 大禮議之辯.⁵ The driving force behind this reform was Zhang Cong 張璁 (1475–1539), the Chief Assistant of the Imperial Cabinet during the Jiajing era, whose views were heavily influenced by Qiu Jun's discourse. Many of Qiu Jun's proposed reforms were officially established and institutionalized as rituals through Zhang Cong's efforts. As a result, Zhang Cong can be regarded as the successor of Qiu Jun.

It was not until the Jiajing reign that Confucius' statues were officially replaced with wooden tablets, a change based on Zhang Cong's suggestion. Commissioned by Emperor Jiajing, Zhang Cong revised the Neo-Confucian ritual book *Sili Chengdian* 祀禮成典 (*The Complete Book of Rituals and Rites*, 71 volumes). However, Zhang Cong voiced concerns about the ritual for worshiping Confucius, making a remarkably bold declaration. He asserted, "Unresolved issues persist in the rituals honoring Confucius, necessitating urgent rectification ... I respectfully draw upon the wisdom of past scholars, submitting

their views for the emperor's consideration. Furthermore, I request that the Ministry of Rites convene a collective discussion to reform the inherited practices of our predecessors. Through this process, we can eradicate the undesirable traditions that have been passed down and establish a timeless ritual that will endure for generations to come. This is my most ardent aspiration!" 其祀典尚有未安者，不可不正。……臣謹采仿昔儒臣所議，上請聖明垂覽，仍行禮部通行集議，一洗前代相習之陋，永為百世可遵之典，臣無任願望之至！(C. Zhang 2003, p. 181). Through Zhang Cong's efforts, many of Qiu Jun's reforms were solidified and institutionalized in the ritual system of the time.

As a consequence, Zhang Cong composed a total of three memorials, submitting them in succession to the emperor, collectively known as "On the Rituals of Confucius Worship 議孔子祀典". In response to his colleagues' further inquiries and rebuttals, he subsequently penned a rejoinder article titled "Questions Regarding the Rituals of the Ancestral Master Confucius" (先師孔子禮典或問) (C. Zhang 2003, pp. 181–97). Zhang Cong argued that Confucius should not be referred to as a king, stating, "If the Master possessed the way of a king, it would be acceptable, but to claim that the Master possessed the title of a king is inappropriate" 夫子有王者之道則可，謂夫子有王者之號則不可 (C. Zhang 2003, p. 182).

This idea has its roots in the work of Wu Chen 吳沉 (1342–1396), a distinguished Confucian scholar of the early Ming dynasty, who laid the groundwork for this concept in the previous generation. According to the *History of Ming Dynasty* 明史, Wu Chen had argued that "Confucius being titled as King is against propriety". Later, Xia Yan 夏衍 and Qiu Jun, among others, followed this line of thinking, and a substantial portion of Zhang Cong's argument was directly borrowed from Qiu Jun's original text (Zhang 2013, p. 3948). Following Zhang Cong's suggestion, the emperor and the Ministry of Rites accepted this idea, and in the 9th year of the Jiajing reign, they rectified the rituals, officially changing Confucius' title from "King" to the "First Teacher 先師", or the "Most Sacred First Teacher 至聖先師". Interestingly, it was in the 11th year of the Dade 大德 reign of the Yuan dynasty (1307 CE), on August 17th, that the newly enthroned Emperor Wuzong of Yuan posthumously conferred the title "Great Accomplished, Most Sacred King of Wenxuan 大成至聖文宣王" upon Confucius. This highest title was eventually formally removed during the Jiajing era under Zhang Cong's influence. The transition of Confucius' title from "King" to "Teacher" was initially pointed out by Wu Chen, elaborated by Qiu Jun, but its final implementation was secured under Zhang Cong's influence. This adjustment significantly impacted the way Confucius was worshiped. The Qing dynasty's historians began compiling *The History of the Ming Dynasty* shortly after the dynasty's founding, completing the work in the early years of the Qianlong reign, around 1739. Notably, Li Jiugong, who passed away in 1681, had already recognized Zhang Cong's contribution in this event, referring to him by his courtesy name, Zhang Fujing 張孚敬 (Li 2002c, p. 83).

Additionally, Zhang Cong advocated for "destroying statues, using wooden tablets, and abandoning ceremonial attire" 毀塑像，用木主，去章服 (Huang 1998, pp. 156–57), ideas that were also reflected in his earlier articles. In "Questions Regarding the Rituals of the Ancestral Master Confucius" 先師孔子禮典或問, Zhang Cong provided a detailed explanation for the destruction of Confucius' statues, citing three reasons: first, the erection of Confucius' statues contravenes ancient traditions and flouts ritual protocols; second, the statues are remnants of the previous dynasties, and their destruction is a way to show respect to Confucius and preserve the ancient rituals; and third, with the statues destroyed, there is no need to debate the appropriate attire for Confucius (C. Zhang 2003, p. 196). Although Zhang Cong did not explicitly mention Qiu Jun as the source in his book, most of his viewpoints were derived from Qiu Jun.

Huang Jinxing states, "Zhang Cong's memorial was submitted, and the Ministry of Rites held a conference. The majority of the conference's resolutions were based on Zhang Cong's words, and Emperor Shizong ordered their implementation, thus establishing the norms of that generation" (Huang 1998, p. 161). Huang suggests that "since the Ming Dynasty, starting from Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381), there have been intermittent discussions on removing statues and establishing tablets, but unfortunately, they were not im-

plemented. It was only with Zhang Cong that the matter was finally settled” (Huang 1998, p. 157). Zhang Cong’s suggestions eventually became part of the ritual system and the norm of the time.

Yan Mo addressed various questions about Chinese rituals in his book *Lishi Tiaowen* 李師條問 and mentioned the ritual debate during the Jiajing reign and its impact. Yan Mo pointed out, “During the ritual debate of the Jiajing reign, it was believed that Confucius valued morality over noble titles and honors. Throughout the ages, the practice of bestowing posthumous titles of kings and nobles was abolished. Only Confucius was referred to as the Holy Teacher in ancestral temples. There were two annual rituals, one in spring and one in autumn, and officials and scholars were prohibited from conducting private rituals” (Yan 2002, p. 154). Thus, following the ritual debate, the worship of Confucius was limited to two annual ceremonies, and private worship was forbidden. Confucius was no longer referred to as “king” (Yan 2002, p. 154).

Yan Mo further explained, “Ancestral worship is to honor those who gave us life, while the worship of Confucius is to honor the one who taught us. Throughout history, sacrificial rituals were expressions of reverence and respect, without any intention of seeking blessings” (Yan 2002, p. 156). Here, Yan Mo clarified that the purpose of ancestral and Confucius worship was solely to express reverence, without seeking blessings. It was a symbolic act of “worship as if present”, but the deities were not believed to actually exist or descend upon the ancestral tablets.

Zhang Cong can be considered Qiu Jun’s successor both politically and ideologically. Zhang Cong elaborated on and explained Qiu Jun’s viewpoints, which eventually gained official acceptance and became institutionalized after the grand ritual debate of the Jiajing reign. In subsequent discussions on the clash between Chinese and Western rituals, both Catholic missionaries and local Chinese believers repeatedly referred to Qiu Jun’s writings to support their perspectives.

3.3. Exclusive Worship of City-Gods

3.3.1. Hongwu Decree and Qiu’s Further Explanation

To strengthen central authority, in the third year of the Hongwu reign, Zhu Yuanzhang abolished the various divine titles that had accumulated during the Tang and Song dynasties. He also established the City-god system to create an orderly structure encompassing the realms of humans, ghosts, and deities. Upon the establishment of the Ming dynasty, in the first year of the Hongwu reign, City-gods were granted significant titles, laying the initial foundation for the City-god system. In the second year of Hongwu, the City-gods in the capital were elevated in status and bestowed with the title “Chengtian Jianguo Simin Shengfu Minglingwang” 承天監國司民升福明靈王 (The Divine King of Enlightened Spirit, Heavenly Inheritor, National Guardian, Minister of the People, Bestower of Good Fortune). City-gods in other major cities also received royal titles. The worship of City-gods was integrated into national rituals alongside mountain and river deities, with the ceremonial practices for City-gods in the capital following royal regulations. In the third year of Hongwu, ancestral worship practices were abolished, and City-gods, like mountain and river deities, were stripped of their divine titles and only represented by wooden statues, renamed as “City-god of a certain prefecture or district”.

Emperor Hongwu, Zhu Yuanzhang, emphasized the existence of “ritual and music in the Ming Dynasty, and ghosts and gods in the underworld”. This indicated a division of the world into the realms of yin and yang, where the political order of the human realm was ruled by the emperor and his officials, while the underworld was governed by City-gods corresponding to the human realm. Atsunobu Shimoshima argues that “corresponding to the ‘ritual and music’ in the social order, the ‘ghosts and gods’ were established in the underworld, providing the theoretical basis for the institutionalization of City-god worship in the Ming Dynasty” (Hamashima 1991a, p. 23). “With institutionalization during the early Ming Dynasty, City-gods were endowed with administrative characteristics correspond-

ing to earthly officials at the prefecture, prefectural, and county levels in the underworld” (Hamashima 1991b, p. 41).

This approach is rationalized in Qiu Jun’s mid-Ming work *Daxue Yanyi Bu*. In his book, Qiu Jun explains the *Zhou Li* 周禮 (*Rites of Zhou*) passage “The Grand Minister uses eight regulations to govern the capital and the regions, the first being sacrifices to control the spirits” (太宰以八則治都鄙，一曰祭祀以馭其神), by stating,

“The ruler is the master of both humans and spirits, responsible for the welfare of the people and the state. The regulations for governing the capital and the regions not only control the people but also must first control the spirits. These regulations are established laws that can serve as models. For all the large states and small countries, every capital and region, the spirits they should worship and the standards they should follow are uniformly governed from above. They cannot be overstepped or abolished” 人君為神人之主，有民人社稷之寄。凡其所以為法則以治都鄙者，不惟馭乎民，而必先有以馭乎神焉。夫謂之則者，一定之制，可以為人之法者也。凡夫天下大邦小國，一都一鄙，其所當祀之神，當秩之典，其法則皆統馭之於上焉，不可得而僭也，不可得而廢也 (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 2, p. 876)

In other words, the emperor not only wielded authority over all human subjects but also acted as the Supreme Deity’s representative in governing all spirits in the world. As a result, the City-god system was established, where various deities were reassigned and organized according to the bureaucratic structure of the mortal world. This new policy concentrated religious authority in the hands of the emperor, thereby augmenting his political power and ultimately maintaining a harmonious balance among all social classes and deities.

Following the “abolition of divine titles” decree, the anthropomorphic conception of mountain and river deities prevalent during the Tang and Song dynasties gave way to their de-personification, whereby they were reconfigured as natural entities imbued with divine power. In tandem, the government mandated the construction of City-god temples nationwide, mirroring the hierarchical order of the earthly realm. In the third year of Hongwu, a subsequent decree stipulated that “Throughout the empire, cities, counties, and prefectures should establish City-god temples, modeled after the dimensions of official buildings, with the divine master occupying the seat. If existing temples can be used, they should be modified accordingly” 詔‘天下府、州、縣立城隍廟’，其制：高、廣各視官署廳堂，其幾案皆同，置神主於座。舊廟可用者，修改為之 (Institute of History and Philology (IHP), *Academia Sinica* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962, p. 1050). This decree effectively replicated the official government offices of the earthly realm and their corresponding City-god temples in the underworld, thereby maintaining the cosmic order between humans and gods. As a result, an exclusive worship of City-gods emerged in the Ming dynasty, further solidifying the imperial government’s control over the religious landscape.

During the Ming dynasty, the emperor offered sacrifices to heaven and earth, no longer worshipping ordinary mountain and river gods. The City-god temples were associated with the earth deity, representing a series related to the “earth gods”. In Chinese mythology, there are three types of deities: tianshen 天神 (heavenly gods), dishi 地示 (earth spirits), and rengui 人鬼 (human ghosts), corresponding to the three realms of heaven, earth, and humanity. In the Ming dynasty, only the emperor could perform sacrifices to heaven and earth, and private individuals were not allowed to participate, as it would be considered usurpation. Qiu Jun believed, “Our Holy Ancestor presided over the rituals of gods and humans, using rituals, music, and ghosts and gods to govern. The roles in the realms of light and darkness were clearly defined. This is why he could harmonize with the Supreme Deity and win the favor of the four directions. City-gods and mountain and river gods are all related to the land. Therefore, the state’s sacrifices are offered to them in association with the mountains and rivers” (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, pp. 972–73). In the third year of the Hongwu reign, the deities of mountains and rivers were abolished, and as a result, the City-gods, being associated with the earth, became the most important deities in the category of earth gods. The government established a system to manage them, and they gradually evolved into local protective gods that dealt

with almost everything. City-gods belong to the category of earth gods, not “human ghosts”, and therefore, they should not be represented by statues. The Qing dynasty continued the reforms initiated in the third year of Hongwu, and in the seventh year of the Tongzhi reign, an official decree stated “The worship of City-gods is classified under the earth deities, not human ghosts. In the future, the use of titles such as duke, marquis, or count is prohibited” (Deng 1934, p. 261). Since City-gods do not belong to the category of human ghosts, statues should not be established, and titles and ranks should not be used.

The abolition of divine titles and the worship of City-gods were two different parts of an imperial decree. The main content of this decree appeared in many Ming dynasty local annals, temple inscriptions, local dramas, and literary collections, and its influence was widespread. Furthermore, this event also had an impact beyond China’s borders. Zhu Yuanzhang sent envoys to announce the “Decree on the Abolition of Divine Titles” in Annam 安南, Champa 占城, and Goryeo 高麗 (Institute of History and Philology (IHP), Academia Sinica 中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962, p. 1036), spreading the imperial decree to vassal states in East Asia and Southeast Asia.

The establishment of a unified City-god system, based on a realistic bureaucratic structure and worshipping City-gods exclusively, facilitates the centralization of power and diminishes the authority of other religious aspects. This consolidation of religious authority under central authority occurs on multiple levels. The first level involves the reduction of divine titles associated with natural features, such as mountains and rivers. The second level involves the demythologization of Confucius, who is restored to his human status as a revered teacher rather than a deity. At the third level, the emperor’s authority is further solidified, as the Son of Heaven, by directly receiving his divine mandate from the supreme “Heaven”, which is also the source from which all other spirits derive their power. This implies that all political and religious authority emanates from the transcendent “Heaven”. This concept serves as a foundation for Jesuit and Chinese Catholic adherents to articulate their beliefs in Chinese texts.

3.3.2. Chinese Catholic Adherents’ Responses

In the Chinese Christian texts of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, there are many discussions about the City-god. For example, in Zhang Xiangcan’s 張象燦 *Jiali Hejiao Lu* 家禮合教錄 (*Records of Family Rituals and Religious Harmonization*), there is a section that asks, “Why should officials show respect to the City-god? 來問官長敬城隍何義” (X. Zhang 2002, p. 297).⁶ Zhang quoted Qiu Jun’s explanation, as presented in his work “Supplement to the Interpretation of the Great Learning”, as authoritative evidence. The specific passage is as follows:

“Between heaven and earth, every object has its corresponding deity ... When a group of people gather in a place and build high walls and deep pools to protect it, there must be a deity to preside over it. This is the divine nature of the City-god ... According to the *Zhou Li* (*Rites of Zhou*), there were officials in charge of sacrificing to the people. Now, the imperial decree appointed the deity of the City-god as the inspector of the people. Perhaps there is some connection between the two. The imperial decree declares: “In the mortal realm, rituals and music prevail, while in the spiritual realm, ghosts and gods hold sway”. To govern the people in the mortal realm, magistrates are appointed, and to govern the spiritual realm, City-gods are entrusted with authority. Additionally, they are conferred the title of Inspector, and newly appointed officials are required to take an oath to these City-gods, thereby entrusting them with the responsibility of oversight. This is to ensure that those with social status do not dare to oppress the people arbitrarily”.

“夫天地間，有一物則有一神。……聚一方之民而為高城深池以衛之，必有所以主之者。此城隍之神所以神歟。……按周禮有司民之祭，今國詔封其神為鑒察司民，意或有取於此歟。制詞有云：明有禮樂，幽有鬼神。蓋置守令以治民生於昭昭之際。設城隍以司民命於冥冥之中，而加之以鑒察之名，而又俾有司到任之初特與

神誓，蓋又付之鑒察之任，使有民社者，不敢以非理厲吾民也。” (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, pp. 972–73)

There are several points to note in Qiu Jun’s passage. (1) In the omitted portion, he points out that there are no records of the City-god’s deeds in historical texts. The earliest known records date back to the Tang dynasty, but there is still not much evidence available. This same idea is also found in the book *Daming Jili* 大明集禮 (*The Rituals of the Great Ming*), which Zhang Xiangcan cites in his own book, preceding Qiu Jun’s explanation with relevant passages (X. Zhang 2002, pp. 297–99). Qiu Jun speculates that since everything in heaven and earth has its corresponding deity, a City-god must naturally have its own deity, which is the essence of the City-god. (2) Secondly, Qiu Jun explains the conferment of noble titles to the City-god in the first year of the Hongwu reign, and the removal of these titles in the third year, referring to them simply as the gods of a certain place. He also mentions the establishment of City-god temples based on the actual yamen (government offices). (3) Lastly, Qiu Jun believes that this is in accordance with ancient customs, and he cites an explanation from the *Zhou Li* (*Rites of Zhou*). Worshiping the City-god is based on the “sacrifice to the people” described in the *Zhou Li*. In addition to protecting the officials and people in the city, the City-god also has the task of supervision. All incoming officials, regardless of rank, are required to go to the City-god temple at the beginning of their appointment and take an oath to the deity, accepting the supervision of the City-god.

Zhang Xiangcan references Qiu Jun’s explanation as the basis for discussion, providing additional explanations and further analysis. (1) He points out, “In my opinion, the worship of the City-god did not exist in the three ancient dynasties. According to the references in the ‘Mingli’ (Rituals of the Ming Dynasty), it first appeared in Sun Wu’s 孫吳 time (Circa 229–280 CE) and was later passed down as a ceremonial rite. Initially, it may have been practiced in one or two places, but it became widespread throughout the country during the Song Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty, temples were established in the capital and counties” (X. Zhang 2002, p. 301). This sentence serves as a supplementary explanation of Qiu Jun’s argument regarding the origin of the City-god. (2) Secondly, Zhang explains that there must exist a City-god wherever there are cities or towns, stating, “... there are deities that protect and guard cities and towns, and this is indeed reasonable. However, the rituals must be conducted properly” (X. Zhang 2002, p. 302). He believes that there must be correct rituals for worship. (3) Thirdly, Zhang points out, “... if we look at the City-god temples today, there are numerous statues, with officials and servants depicted, creating a chaotic and impure atmosphere. Moreover, the rituals involve divination, casting lots, burning paper offerings, and making vows, similar to the methods of worshiping wild ghosts 野鬼, which deviates greatly from proper ritual ...”. (X. Zhang 2002, p. 302).⁷ According to the research by Atsutoshi Hamashima, in the mid-Ming dynasty and onwards, despite official prohibitions, many local City-god temples reinstated statues and referred to the City-god as a certain “laoye” 某某老爺, reverting it to an anthropomorphized deity (Hamashima 1995, pp. 12–13). Therefore, we can understand that in the early Qing dynasty, Zhang criticized City-god temples for having idols, likening it to worshiping wild ghosts, which is inconsistent with proper rituals.

Finally, in his summary, Zhang Xiangcan suggested that when worshiping the City-god, wooden tablets should be used to replace idols, and also declared that the City-god was a heavenly deity sent by the Lord on High (God). He stated,

“If the current remonstrance officials can submit memorials to the emperor, rectify the wrongs, and if local officials can abolish various heterodox practices, explicitly acknowledging that the City-god is a heavenly deity sent by the Lord on High, and strictly prohibiting idolatrous worship, upholding the one true Lord. By inscribing the guardian deity of the city on the wooden tablet, there will be no mistakes”. 倘今之居言路者，能題疏厘正，為郡縣者，能革去諸邪條，明正有上帝所遣之天神，肅禁禱祀，獨存一主，寫護守城隍之神，行之則庶無失也 (X. Zhang 2002, p. 303)

Zhang notes that all mundane deities are ‘sent by God’, a concept also echoed in Zhu Yuanzhang’s decree and discussed by Qiu Jun. Consequently, he recommends that the government should strictly prohibit offerings and prayers, and instead, only retain the

wooden tablet inscribed with the ‘guardian deity of the city’, which symbolizes the divine authority. The theoretical basis for this point both has a Catholic background and includes the discourse of the Hongwu decree.

3.3.3. All Mandated by the Supreme Deity and the Confucian Monotheism

In the Hongwu decree, there is a sentence: “Since the dawn of creation, the mighty spirits’ essence has coalesced into deities, all mandated by the Supreme Deity”. 自天地開闢，以至於今，英靈之氣，萃而為神，必皆受命於上帝 (Institute of History and Philology (IHP), Academia Sinica 中央研究院歷史語言研究所 1962, p. 1034). Therefore, Zhang Xiangcan says, “Since the gods are dispatched by the Supreme Deity, they do not require the earthly emperor’s official investiture” 況神系上帝所遣，豈必世主勅封 (X. Zhang 2002, p. 302). The gods are sent by the Supreme Deity, so they cannot be bestowed by earthly emperors. Similar statements also appear in Li Jiugong’s commentary on the Hongwu decree. Li mentioned, “Do not the city gods in cities and towns, and the gods of mountains, rivers, and hills in countries, owe their existence to the Heavenly Lord’s appointment to guard and protect the various nations?” 郡邑有城隍之神，天下國家有山川嶽瀆之神，此非天主所命以分衛於萬國者乎？ (Li 2002b, p. 51). Li further concluded, “Since all gods receive their mandate from the Supreme Lord, they are not subject to the authority of the state’s conferment. Oh, how majestic is the will of His Majesty! It can correct the mistakes of a thousand years” 蓋以諸神受命上主，非國家封號所能加。皇哉聖意！可正千古之謬矣 (Li 2002b, p. 52). Moreover, some Chinese Catholic texts also point out that these gods appointed by the Supreme Deity have no authority to bestow blessings upon people. Therefore, seeking blessings from such gods is mere flattery, and hence, one cannot receive blessings.

In the Hongwu decree, the phrase “all mandated by the Supreme Deity” implies that the emperor is also a minister of the Supreme Deity, who has received the divine mandate to govern the country. Consequently, the emperor is seen as dispatched by the Supreme Deity, while other deities are relegated to being mere envoys.

This unconventional interpretation, subsequently developed by Qiu Jun and other scholars, eventually gained acceptance among the Jesuits. However, this phenomenon remains linked to two viewpoints that necessitate further clarification.

- (1) This notion of deities or spirits as envoys of the Supreme Deity is similar to the concept of “angels” as messengers of God in Christianity. Chapter 16 of *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*the Doctrine of the Mean*) states, “The virtue of spirits and gods is indeed magnificent! 鬼神之為德，其盛矣乎”. In *CSP*, the translators comment, “plerumque tamen hic agi videtur de spiritibus illis seu intelligentiis quos Deus tuendis et conservandis rebus creatis seu praesides et administratos constituit, quos alibi Interpres vocat Xám-tí chixin, id est supremi Imperatoris clientes & subditos qui Planetis et reliquis Astrorum, qui Elementorum nec non regionum rerumque sublunarium curam habeant” (However, it seems that here it is mainly about those spirits or intelligences which God has appointed as guardians and administrators of created beings, whom the Interpreter elsewhere calls Xám-tí chixin, that is, the clients and subjects of the supreme Emperor, who are in charge of the planets and other celestial bodies, elements, and regions of sublunary things) (Couplet et al. 2021, vol. 2, p. 180). The term “Xám-tí chixin” comes from a Chinese classical commentator, meaning “上帝之臣” (Ministers of God). The translators of the *CSP* Chinese edition have a note that “the function of ghosts and spirits here is actually the function of ‘angels’ in Catholicism”, and the Jesuit translators believed that just as angels obey God in Christianity, ghosts and spirits in China obey the supreme God. Moreover, it is highly likely that the Jesuit translators of *CSP* got this view from Zhu Xi’s commentary on a certain sentence in the *Analects*, which says ‘all virtuous people in the world are ministers of God ...’ 天下賢人，皆上帝之臣， but the annotated edition of the Four Books by Zhang Juzheng, which was the reference text used by the *CSP* translators, does not mention the phrase “Xám-tí chixin” (Couplet et al. 2021, vol. 2, p. 182). This concept has its origins in the imperial edict promulgated by Zhu Yuanzhang during the third year of his Hongwu reign, which

exhibits parallels with the interpretive frameworks articulated by Zhu Xi, and was subsequently subjected to further elaboration by Qiu Jun.

- (2) The above unconventional interpretation also implies the existence of a singular, highest Supreme Deity. Zhu Yuanzhang's decree explained the abolition of divine titles for mountain and river deities by stating that these deities lack real power and that no emperor had the authority to grant titles to natural gods. All power derives from the Supreme Deity. Qiu Jun, when discussing the prohibition of bestowing various titles upon deities, particularly the Supreme Deity, mentioned, "The most revered of heavenly deities is the Supreme Deity. Referred to as the Supreme Deity of Heaven, 'Deity' is a term for the ruler. To address Him as Deity and further add 'Heaven,' and to add 'Supreme' above Heaven and 'Deity' beyond that, is to reach the utmost, beyond which nothing can be added. The greatness of Heaven is indescribable, the reverence of the Deity incomparable. Under Heaven and above Earth, there is nothing that is not owned by Heaven, and no affair that is not governed by the Deity ... The ruler's service to Heaven is akin to a minister's service to the ruler" 天神之最尊者，上帝也。謂之昊天上帝，帝者，主宰之稱，以帝稱之，而又加以天，天之上加以昊，帝之外加以上，可謂極至而無以加矣。天之不可名，帝之尊無以對；天之下、地之上，無一物而非天所有，無一事而非帝所主，.....夫君之事天，猶臣之事君也 (J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 664, vol. 7, pp. 3137–38). This passage appears simultaneously in two works by Qiu Jun, namely *Daxue Yanyi Bu* and *Shishi Zhenggan*. The phrase "The ruler's service to Heaven is akin to a minister's service to the ruler" echoes the notion of 'Xámí chixin' mentioned earlier. As revealed in the analysis above, Zhu Yuanzhang's concept of God has undergone a profound transformation, establishing a singular, Supreme Deity as the ultimate authority over all spiritual entities. This monotheistic perspective marks a significant departure from the polytheistic traditions that have shaped Confucian thought since the Han Dynasty. Qiu Jun's passage further develops this idea, envisioning a Supreme God who is singular, omniscient, and omnipotent—a concept that bears a striking resemblance to the Christian notion of God.

At least two Chinese Catholic texts cite this passage. The first one is from the *Rujiao Shiyi* 儒教實義 (*The True Meaning of Confucianism*) by Joseph Prémare (1666–1736), a French Jesuit missionary, and the second is from the manuscript *Shuwenzhuan* 述聞編 (*The Record of My Observation*) by Qiu Sheng 丘晟, a Chinese scholar of the early Qing dynasty (Prémare 2013, p. 645; S. Qiu 2002, pp. 252–53). Both texts use this passage to criticize Daoism and other heterodox teachings. In his work *Rujiao Shiyi*, Prémare posits that authentic Confucianism 真儒 is rooted in ancient Confucianism, which diverges significantly from Confucianism since the Han dynasty in its recognition of the true God in the Christian sense. In the concluding section of *Rujiao Shiyi*, Prémare recapitulates and revisits Qiu Jun's ideas, offering additional insight into his views. Qiu Jun championed the intellectual heritage of Tang dynasty scholar Han Yu and Song dynasty scholar Ouyang Xiu, advocating for the elimination of Buddhism and a return to ancient Confucianism, a theory known as "returning to the root" (fanben 反本/返本) (Prémare 2013, pp. 683–84). This "return to the root" theory, as articulated by Qiu Jun, is hailed by Prémare as the voice of the authentic Confucian 真儒之言 (Prémare 2013, p. 684). Consequently, it becomes clear that Prémare's idea of the authentic Confucian is the one that recognizes a unique God in the Christian sense, as revealed in the ancient classics. From this, we can see that Qiu Jun's ideas have had a crucial influence on Prémare's discourse.

Following the passage cited by the two scholars, Qiu Jun further elaborates: "A minister who disrespects the ruler faces the ruler's punishment; how can a ruler who disrespects Heaven escape Heaven's retribution? Therefore, when Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty elevated the title of the Supreme Deity during the Tianbao era, the An Lushan Rebellion ensued. When Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty conferred the title 'Jade Emperor' during the Zhenghe era, the Jurchen invasions occurred. Alas! Such consequences are truly terrifying!" 臣瀆乎君，以遭君之誅，君瀆乎天，安能違天之譴乎？是故唐玄宗崇

天帝位號於天寶，於是乎有漁陽之變；宋徽宗上玉皇徽號於政和，於是乎有黃龍之禍。嗚呼！可畏也哉！（J. Qiu 2006, vol. 3, p. 664, vol. 7, pp. 3137–38).

Qiu Jun maintained that the arbitrary conferral of titles upon the Supreme Deity was a sacrilegious act that would precipitate dynastic calamity. This novel idea, ironically, betrays the unmistakable influence of Buddhist notions of causality, despite Qiu Jun's own criticism of Buddhism as a heterodox deviation from Confucianism. Nevertheless, Qiu Jun's primary emphasis lies in the reverence owed to the Supreme Deity. Consequently, his assertion of the Supreme Deity as the sole and highest deity demands absolute reverence. These concepts undoubtedly resonated with Jesuits and Chinese Catholics in China.

4. Conclusions

Qiu Jun's intellectual legacy extends beyond Chinese scholarly circles, also influencing Christian missionaries and Chinese Catholics. A close examination of Chinese Catholic texts reveals that the quoted materials primarily focus on the Chinese Rites Controversy, particularly the decree abolishing the divine titles of all Gods and the worship of Confucius during the early Ming dynasty and its subsequent repercussions. The early Ming dynasty's abolition of divine titles for all deities entailed a re-examination of the titular honors, iconography, and ritual practices associated with Confucius, alongside the establishment of a nationwide system of City-god worship.

Zhu Yuanzhang, the Ming dynasty's founder, implemented a national City-god system and eliminated divine titles to reinforce his autocratic grip, centralize authority, and extend his control over both religious and secular domains, thereby securing the empire's long-term stability and dominance. Zhu Yuanzhang's imperial decrees proclaimed that all gods are subject to a single supreme deity, a notion that, on the surface, seemed to define the divine realm in a polytheistic and pantheistic folk culture, but in reality, reflected his authoritarian and unified political rule. Qiu Jun's writings identified this supreme deity as the 'Lord on High 上帝' (God), who is supreme and unparalleled. This view likely appealed to later Jesuit missionaries. Qiu Jun's interpretation of Zhu Yuanzhang's decree, based on ancient rituals and institutions, argued that idol worship was incompatible with ancient rituals and should be abolished, and that granting titles to Confucius was both factually inaccurate and blasphemous. Qiu Jun's ideas, promoted by Zhang Cong, were systematized and became part of the mid-to-late-Ming ritual system.

European Jesuit missionaries and Chinese Catholic scholars naturally had to respond to the official ritual system, citing Qiu Jun's works during the Chinese Rites Controversy. Furthermore, a subtle form of citation is at play. Qiu Jun's comprehensive compilations wove together ideas from diverse philosophical schools and historical periods, structured around thematic categories and incorporating commentaries from multiple eras. Notably, some Catholic fathers' Chinese texts drew upon these commentaries, occasionally omitting explicit attribution to Qiu Jun's conclusions, yet still betraying the unmistakable imprint of his quoted passages. As the complexities of the Chinese Rites Controversy and the intricacies of religious orthodoxy came under scrutiny, a constellation of scholars, comprising Western missionaries like Simão Rodrigues, Francisco Varo, and Joseph Prémare, alongside Chinese Catholics such as Li Jiugong, Yan Mo, Zhang Xiangcan, and Qiu Sheng, drew heavily upon the magisterial scholarship of Qiu Jun, whose scholarly legacy provided a rich foundation for their deliberations. In conclusion, it is noteworthy that the concept of God developed from Zhu Yuanzhang's initial discussion to Qiu Jun's further elaboration bears a remarkable similarity to the Christian concept of God. This similarity has drawn the attention of European Jesuit missionaries and Chinese Catholic scholars, who have subsequently referenced Qiu Jun's works.

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Notes

- 1 “Qiongsan 瓊山” refers to Qiu Jun’s hometown in Qiongsan, now part of Haikou City, Hainan Province. Due to the similarity of the surname “Qiu” to the name of Confucius (original name Kong Qiu 孔丘), in the third year of the Yongzheng reign (1725) in the early Qing dynasty, the Qing court ordered all individuals with the surname “Qiu” 丘 to change it to “Qiu” 邱, including Qiu Jun, to show respect for Confucius. The character “浚” is an alternative form of the character “濬”. Therefore, Qiu Jun’s name has various written forms in different eras, including “丘濬”, “邱濬”, “丘浚”, “邱浚”, “丘琿山”, and “邱琿山”. After Qiu Jun’s passing, he was posthumously honored with the title “Wenzhuang 文庄”, so he is also referred to as “丘文庄”, “邱文庄”, or “Wenzhuang Gong 文庄公”.
- 2 All translations in this article from Chinese to English are mine unless otherwise specified.
- 3 The book *Yishu* has no title, but is named after the two characters “易書” (*Yishu*) on the cover, and does not bear the author’s name. However, there is a Portuguese inscription that explains that it was sent by Jesuit Father Simão Rodrigues from Fuzhou, and is an excerpt from Varo’s writings about Chinese classics. According to Dai Guoqing’s 代國慶 research, this book can be titled *Yishu* and its author is confirmed to be Varo. Related research can be found in Dai Guoqing’s unpublished paper “*Yishu*: Wanjiguo dui Zhongguo Lixue de Yuedu” 《易書》：萬濟國對中國禮學的閱讀 (“*Yishu*: Francisco Varo’s Reading of Chinese Ritual Studies”), which was presented at the conference “Cultural Exchange between Lingnan and the West before the Early Modern Period” hosted by the Department of Philosophy at Sun Yat-sen University on 18 November 2023, and is also included in the conference proceedings “Cultural Exchange between Lingnan and the West before the Early Modern Period” (Dai 2023, pp. 189–99). Furthermore, Dai Guoqing’s paper (Dai 2023, pp. 196–97) also points out that the annotations in *Yishu* directly copied Qiu Jun’s commentaries.
- 4 The passage in Chinese reads: “強調治政統民之道本乎禮，而禮乃明神人、正名分的大經大法，不可以違背、僭差，……認為皆受命於上帝，不是凡人可以妄議之者。”
- 5 Following the demise of Zhu Houzhao 朱厚照, the Emperor Zhengde 正德 (r. 1505–1521), the 10th ruler of the Ming dynasty, who died without an heir, the throne was succeeded by Zhu Houcong 朱厚熜, a prince of the imperial clan, who would later become known as the Emperor Jiajing 嘉靖. This succession sparked the Great Rites Controversy of the Jiajing era, a pivotal event in Ming dynasty history that spanned seven years (1521–1528). At the heart of the controversy lay the issue of imperial legitimacy, which revolved around several contentious topics, including whether Emperor Jiajing could supplant his parents, the manner in which his deceased parents should be venerated, and the interpretation of the previous emperor’s will. For further reading on related research, see (You 2006; Mao 1985). For a detailed account of Zhang Cong’s claims regarding the Great Rites Controversy and his interactions with the emperor and other officials, see (Gu and Feng 2010, pp. 19–72).
- 6 The essay “Why should officials show respect to the City-god?” is found in Zhang Xiangcan’s *Jiali Hejiao Lu* 家禮合教錄. However, this book is comprised of two distinct parts: the first part focuses on family rituals, and the second part centers on the City-god. Notably, the handwriting in the first half differs significantly from that in the second half, suggesting that the two parts may have been written by different authors. This implies that the essay “Why should officials show respect to the City-god?” may not have been written by Zhang Xiangcan himself, but rather by another author. Despite this, the authorship is still attributed to Zhang.
- 7 These three sentences appear in the original text in the above order, and the original text is as follows: “愚按城隍之祭，三代以上無之。觀《明禮》所引，始見於孫吳，後代傳為祀典。其始或一二處，至宋而遍天下。明則京都郡縣而立廟矣。……城邑聚處，有神以護守之，其理誠然。但祀說必正。……若目今城隍廟，塑造多像，有吏役配匹，雜糅甚矣。又其祀如卜筮掣籤焚楮賽願等，一如祭野鬼之法，更大非禮。……”

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