

## Article

# Apostolate through Books: The Translation Practice by Catholicism during Late Ming and Early Qing

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**Abstract:** Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties is the most fascinating chapter in the development history of Christian culture in China. Apostolate through books emerged as a prominent method of Sino-West cultural exchange during that time. Apostolate through books by Catholicism was realized by means of translation practice, leading to a notable religious influence. Based on this perspective, this paper discusses the history and connotation of apostolate through books, particularly focusing on the characteristics of apostolate through books by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. In achieving this, this research shows the translation motivation and translation effect of apostolate through books during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. Furthermore, this paper emphasizes that the translation practice of apostolate through books by Catholicism has laid a good foundation for the sinicization and acceptance of Catholicism in China, highlighting the relationship between apostolate through books by Catholicism and the sinicization of Christian culture, so as to enlighten the internationalization of religious culture.

**Keywords:** late Ming and early Qing; Catholicism; apostolate through books; translation practice; sinicization



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## 1. Introduction

The sinicization<sup>1</sup> of Christian culture in China could date back to Jingjiao 景教<sup>2</sup> during the Tang Dynasty, which occurred over 1300 years ago (Lin 1998, p. 7; Fu 2009, p. 82). The spread of Christian culture in China has undergone a historical process, from Jingjiao during the Tang Dynasty, Yekeliwenjiao 也可里温教<sup>3</sup> during the Yuan Dynasty, Catholicism<sup>4</sup> during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, to Protestantism<sup>5</sup> during the late Qing and early Republic of China. The missionary activities during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties played a significant role in the history of Christian culture in China, yielding notable accomplishments. Therefore, many researchers have been dedicated to the missionary activities in this period, including topics such as Matteo Ricci's Route (Baskind 2024; Xiao 2023; Wang 2022), the interpretation of teaching by Catholicism (Xiao 2019a, 2019b), the commutation between Chinese and Western cultures (Wang 2019a, 2019b), and others (Thurston 2019, 2020; Xu 2015). The Catholic missionary efforts during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties marked a significant departure from Jingjiao during the Tang Dynasty, showcasing remarkable advancements. This era is recognized "as the initial substantial interaction between China and the West, bridging two distinct cultures" (Xie 2003, p. 3). For example, Wang (1996, p. 114) aptly observed that "Catholicism during late Ming stands out as a captivating chapter in Christian missionary history". Research findings from various perspectives offer valuable insights into the missionary activities by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. Despite its crucial role as

a primary method of evangelization and the Sino-West cultural exchange during this period, the significance of apostolate through books<sup>6</sup> in the sinicization of Christian culture remains to be systematically studied. Therefore, the aim of Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties was primarily focused on evangelization. The presence of non-religious books brought by missionaries raises questions about the significance of apostolate through books in their missionary strategies. The definition of apostolate through books and the underlying translation motivation during that period warrant exploration. Examining the multiple books translated in that period and their influence on people and society is served as an approach to investigating apostolate through books by Catholicism. Furthermore, the lessons learned from the translation practice of apostolate through books during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties may offer insights for enhancing international religious communication.

## 2. Apostolate through Books

Christianity, the largest religion in the world, emphasizes the significant role of evangelization. To attain a successful missionary influence, it is essential to employ the appropriate approach. In the early stages of Christianity, the Society of Jesus propagated their doctrine through sermons and speeches, gathering the initial believers (Shelley 2004). Following the ascension of Jesus, his followers dispersed across the Roman Empire, disseminating the faith through oratory and debates. The conversion of Europe to Christianity between the 6th and 14th centuries primarily occurred through military conquest, diplomatic efforts, and the endeavors of monks. By the late 15th century, Western Europeans embarked on overseas expansion, leading to the global spread of Christianity (Latourette 1938; McManners 1995). Catholicism, predominantly Jesuits, conducted diverse missionary approaches to engage and integrate Chinese communities, such as presenting Western artifacts to the officials, serving in the imperial court, and apostolating through books, and so on, with the latter proved to be the most prevalent and successful method.

Broadly speaking, what is called apostolate through books is literally one of the strategies to achieve the purpose of the spread of religious teachings. Standaert (1985, p. 22) referred to missionary as “proselytizing by means of books,” suggesting that books can be used to convert an individual to become a follower. In Western culture, the word “proselytizing” implies a shift towards Christianity. Additionally, Bettray (1955, p. 181) used “Apostolat der Presse,” which means to assume the duties of missionaries by publications. From these two different expressions, it could be found that the former focuses on the relationship between missionary means and purposes, while the latter focuses more on the responsibilities of missionaries. While useful in understanding apostolate through books, the viewpoints do not cover the whole missionary practice by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. During the period, apostolate through books by Catholicism was evident in various ways: showcasing Western books to demonstrate the cultural origins of Christianity; producing Chinese writings and translating Western works to establish missionaries as knowledgeable role as Xiru 西儒; and directly spreading Christian doctrines by Chinese books. Therefore, the missionary practice by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties exemplifies the significance of books as a medium for spreading teachings and also as a means for missionaries to highlight Western civilization and self-identity construction. Consequently, apostolate through books entailed the external influence of Western books and the information of Chinese books so as to attract and proselytize Chinese people.

Because apostolate through books (Shujichuanjiao 书籍传教) was carried out silently, it is also called “Yashi xuanjiaofa 哑式宣教法” (Bernard 1936, p. 261), which was based on the term “silent preachers” (Witek 1982, p. 116). If books are “silent preachers,” this is true, but in turn, using “Yashi chuanjiao 哑式传教” to refer to apostolate through books will fall into the misunderstanding of unclear reference. At present, Chinese scholars currently prefer the term “academic missionary (xueshuchuanjiao 学术传教)” (Sun 1996; Xu 2000; Zhou 2007), a concept originating from the idea of missionaries utilizing local academic resources

for preaching (Zhu 1996). Today, Chinese scholars use “academic missionary” to describe missionary methods employed during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, focusing on attracting Chinese scholars with Western science, ethics, and religious beliefs (maybe called academic). The term “academic missionary” emphasizes the role of Western academic knowledge in missionary spread, not giving enough care to communication media. Consequently, neither term fully encapsulates the essence of Catholic missionary books.

Books have played a crucial role in the development and spread of Christianity, serving to document divine revelation, establish doctrinal standards, impart beliefs, safeguard the church, and act as a communication medium. Notably, the utilization of books as a primary tool for evangelism among non-believers emerged during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. So, this distinction underscores the significance of comprehending the concept of apostolate through books (Shujichuanjiao 书籍传教) to gain deeper insights into the translation motivations and strategies by Catholicism. Moreover, it sheds light on the process of the sinicization of Christian culture through the spread of knowledge by Catholicism.

### 3. Translation Motivation of Apostolate through Books by Catholicism

Since the late 15th century, the emergence of the new Eurasian trade route has presented a unique historical opportunity for cultural interchange between China and the West, particularly facilitating the spread of religion and paving the way for the introduction of Christian culture to the East. The Protestant Reformation in Europe during the 16th century played a significant role in accelerating this process. Seeking to expand the religious influence overseas (Li 1998, p. 39), the Western Catholic Church seized the opportunity presented by the newly accessible Eastern route to dispatch a group of missionaries to China. The study on missionary activities by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties can be approached from various perspectives, including cultural capital (Fu 2008, 2009), religious history and Chinese culture (Xiao 2019a, 2019b), and others (Xiao 2011; Wang 2022), offering a comprehensive outlook on the strategies employed during that period. This paper focuses on the method of apostolate through books by Catholicism as a starting point, delving into the assimilation strategies adopted for Confucian scholars during the Ming and Qing Dynasties to decipher the translation motivation behind Catholic book missionary activities during that era.

#### 3.1. The Fundamental Requirements of Overseas Evangelization by Catholicism

During the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, the Protestant Reformation by Martin Luther (1483–1546) in Europe was fervently pursued, resulting in the emergence of various Christian groups, breaking away from the authority of the Pope. The Western European groups, aiming to increase their religious influence and attract more followers, sought to expand their sphere of influence by establishing their own doctrines. Against this backdrop, the Society of Jesus, established in 1540 by the Spanish aristocrat Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) and recognized by the Pope, took a different missionary approach focused on gaining control over secular powers through alliances with monarchs, nobility, and aristocracy. The primary aims of the Society of Jesus included preserving the traditional feudal structure of the church, resisting European Reformation, revitalizing the Roman Catholic Church, and upholding the supreme authority of the Pope during the religious upheavals. Despite their efforts to appeal to followers and broaden their influence, the Society of Jesus fell behind other groups in expanding their reach and impact. Consequently, the Catholic Church in Europe faced challenges in gaining new followers and sought to extend its influence overseas through the emergence of the new Eurasian trade route.

During the overseas evangelization by Catholicism, the initial challenge was the language barrier and the accurate translation of religious doctrines. Language serves as a symbolic system unique to humans, facilitating mutual expressions in human interactions, aiding in understanding the world, and acting as an information conduit within cultures. The essence of religion is intertwined with language, as without it, the propagation of

religious beliefs becomes unfeasible. Christianity, in particular, aspires to spread its message globally. Consequently, Catholic missionary endeavors encounter the task of bridging linguistic and cultural gaps for effective communication and acceptance. Translation becomes imperative in fostering understanding among diverse linguistic groups, playing a crucial role in disseminating religious teachings and ensuring the vitality and continuity of faith. The paramount focus of Catholic missionary activities during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties was the language challenge, with translation efforts serving as the cornerstone for successful missionary work (Fu 2009). Therefore, apostolate through books by Catholicism has emerged as a significant method to propagate the teachings of the gospel, which not only addresses linguistic challenges but also presents a fresh approach to translating and proliferating doctrinal messages.

### 3.2. *The Process of Adapting Missionary Strategies to Meet the Cultural Context*

During the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Michele Ruggieri 罗明坚 was credited as the first to introduce Catholic teachings in China. His writing of *Tianzhu shengjiao shilu* 天主教实录 in Chinese marked one of the early efforts to bring the *Bible* to Chinese people. The portrayal of Catholic missionaries in China initially resembled monks, as highlighted by the quote “Seng sui sheng waiguo, jun renlei ye. 僧虽生外国，均人类也。(Monk was born in foreign country, also human beings.)” (Luo 2002, p. 3). It can be seen that the initial identity of Catholic missionaries in China appeared in the image of monks. In this context, the Catholic doctrine will be considered by the Chinese as an illusion of Buddhist culture. It was not until Matteo Ricci 利玛竇 adopted *Xushuchuanjiao* 学术传教, departing from the image of monks, that Catholic missionaries began to be accepted in China as *Xiru* 西儒 (Western Confucian). The transition from monks to *Xiru* 西儒 signifies a significant evolution in missionary tactics, demonstrating a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and strategic adjustments to effectively spread the Catholic doctrine in China.

The process of adapting missionary strategies indicates a strategic shift by Catholicism, which recognized the influential role of Confucian intellectuals in the governance and society of feudal China during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. By immersing themselves in Chinese culture and modifying their missionary strategies, Catholic missionaries emphasized the significance of individuals from Western civilized countries by translating Western literary works, particularly those related to science, technology, and astronomy. This process indirectly suggested that Christian culture was rooted in advanced civilizations (Ricci 2018; Bernard 1936). Moreover, through the translation of books, Catholic missionaries portrayed themselves as *Xiru* 西儒 in order to engage with the Chinese intellectual group and integrate into the societal field, thereby diminishing resistance to their missionary activities. The process of adapting missionaries underscores the effort of missionaries to satisfy the needs of social culture in China, particularly in targeting Confucian intellectuals for evangelization. As a result, the translation practice of apostolate through books initiatives served as a pivotal link in fostering mutual understanding and connections between Catholicism and the intellectual elite of Chinese society.

### 3.3. *The Significance of Books in Facilitating Religious Beliefs in China*

The academic pursuits of Western missionaries in China were not their primary aim. The scholarly books they produced were intended to be a form of missionary activities. Catholic missionaries recognized the significance of books in Chinese culture and sought to apostolate through books in China. This approach was based on several factors: Firstly, it aligned with the Chinese people's appreciation for books, which are highly valued in Chinese society for fostering knowledge and success (Ricci 2018; Ricci and Trigault 2010), particularly in obtaining the opportunity to be in politics. Secondly, exploiting the written word to convey information accurately and effectively was crucial due to the linguistic diversity in ancient China. By prioritizing written over oral communication, missionaries aimed to ensure the precise dissemination of religious teachings to achieve a more impactful missionary outcome. Through this strategy, Chinese people could absorb the Catholic

doctrine gradually through reading, leading to the eventual acceptance of religious beliefs (Witek 1982). Additionally, utilizing the strategic advantage of Chinese characters, Catholicism can effectively propagate religious teachings. Chinese characters, serving as a significant tool for the dissemination of ideas, played a pivotal role in influencing the religions of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam in ancient times. By disseminating translated religious books in China, it not only engages the Chinese populace in adopting religious beliefs but also extends the beliefs to neighboring countries, aided by the cultural influence of the Chinese context. Lastly, this approach also addresses the challenges of limited Western missionaries in China during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, where the Western missionary count rarely exceeded 150 over a span of 200 years (Zhang 2003). Leveraging printed materials enables Catholic missionaries to transcend temporal and spatial barriers, facilitating extensive religious outreach activities.

Catholic missionaries in China during Ming and Qing took into account the unique challenges of missionary activities in China. They strategically leveraged the power of books and Confucian intellectuals to promote the reading of Chinese religious books and facilitate the spread of religious information across regions. Despite varying levels of proficiency among Western missionaries, language barriers presented a significant obstacle to the oral communication of Catholic teachings. To overcome this challenge, Western missionaries turned to books as a means to convey the religious message effectively, which ensured that the communication would be more influential and profound, contributing to a better religious influence. By recognizing the importance of books in China and embracing innovative approaches, Western missionaries aimed to minimize resistance to missionary activities and foster a greater understanding of Catholic teachings.

In summary, in the process of Western religions aiming to expand their influence to the East, language and translation emerged as crucial considerations for effectively disseminating teachings. Catholic missionaries, drawing from their understanding of Chinese culture and society, recognized the significance of books in Chinese culture and the influence of Confucian intellectuals. They sought to establish a connection with Chinese Confucian intellectuals by self-identity construction as Xiru 西儒, thereby gaining the missionary strategy: apostolate through books. For example, the Society of Jesus undertook the translation and publication of 437 various books (Qian 1986), with the Franciscan Order contributing to as many as 25 works focusing on church history and teachings (Cui 2006). Despite differing opinions on Liyizhizheng 禮儀之爭 (Rites Controversy) between the Dominican and Jesuit missionaries, both groups shared their belief in the value of utilizing Chinese books for missionary purposes (Wu and Han 2008).

#### 4. Translation Practice of Apostolate through Books by Catholicism

The translation practice of apostolate through books by Catholicism involves compiling books in Chinese and selecting Western books for translation. While Western missionaries play a significant role, the focus is on compiling Chinese books tailored to Chinese readers instead of translating Western books without purpose. Translating and writing books in Chinese independently presents challenges for Catholic missionaries, as demonstrated by the involvement of Chinese Confucian intellectuals in translation efforts during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. This paper explores the translation practice during that period, specifically in the fields of natural science and technology, humanities and social sciences, and religion (Chan 2002; Du Hald 2005; Qian 1986; Xiao 2011; Xu 2006), to highlight notable books and reasons for translation motivation, shedding light on the connection between the types of books and the missionary's mission.

##### 4.1. The Books about Natural Science and Technology

The analysis of translations and writings by Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties reveals a significant emphasis on natural science and technology books. These books cover a wide range of subjects, including mathematics and physics, astronomy and calendars, geography, geology, mechanics and mining, metal-

lurgy, and biomedicine. For example, the books about mathematics and physics are those that are familiar to people, including *Jihe yuanben* 幾何原本 and *Celiang fayi* 測量法義 (collaborated by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇 and Xu Guangqi 徐光啟), *Tongwen suanzhi* 同文算指 (collaborated by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇 and Li Zhizao 李之藻), *Feilu dahui* 斐錄答匯 (edited by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌), *Jiheyaofo* 幾何要法 (collaborated by Giulio Aleni 艾儒略, Qu Shigu 瞿式谷, and Ye Yifan 葉益藩), and *Yuanjingshuo* 遠鏡說 (collaborated by Johann Adam Schall von Bell 湯若望 and Li Zuwang 李祖望). The books about astronomy and calendars are *Hungai tongxian tushuo* 渾蓋通憲圖說 (collaborated by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇 and Li Zhizao 李之藻), *Biaodushuo* 表度說 (translated by Sabbatino de Ursis 熊三拔), *Chongzhen lishu* 崇禎歷書 (collaborated by Western missionary and Chinese Confucian intellectuals), *Tianbu zhenyuan* 天步真原 (collaborated by Nikolaus Smogulecki 穆尼閣 and Xue Fengzuo 薛鳳祚) et al. The books about geography are *Kunyu wanguo quantu* 坤輿萬國全圖 (edited by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇), *Zhifang waiji* 職方外紀 (collaborated by Giulio Aleni 艾儒略 and Yang Tingjun 楊廷筠), *Xifang dawen* 西方答問 (edited by Giulio Aleni 艾儒略), *Dizhen Jie* 地震解 (collaborated by Niccolo Longobardi 龍華民 and Li Zongyan 李宗延), *Kunyu tushuo* 坤輿圖說 (edited by Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁), and *Xifang yaoji* 西方要紀 (collaborated by Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁, Louis Buglio 利類思, and Gabriel de Magalhães 安文思). The books about mechanics and mining are *Taixi shuifa* 泰西水法 (collaborated by Sabbatino de Ursis 熊三拔 and Xu Guangqi 徐光啟), *Yuanxi qiqi tushuo* 遠西奇器圖說 (collaborated by Johann Schreck 鄧玉函 and Wang Zheng 王徵), and *Kunyu gezhi* 坤輿格致 (collaborated by Johann Adam Schall von Bell 湯若望, Li Tianjing 李天經, Yang Zhihua 楊之華, and Huang Hongxian 黃宏憲). The books about metallurgy and biomedicine are *Taixi renshenshuo gai* 泰西人身說概 (collaborated by Johann Schreck 鄧玉函 and Bi Gongchen 畢拱辰) and *Bencaobu* 本草補 (edited by Petrus Pinuela 石鐸球).

The representative books about natural science and technology translated by Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties in above may not have appeared directly related to missionary aims initially, but they indeed served for evangelization. As we all know, China in late Ming and early Qing was marked by centralized feudal rule, deep-rooted social dogmatism, and internal societal contradictions, providing a fertile field for the introduction of new cultures and ideas. The translation and communication of the books about Western astronomical and mathematical physics by Catholicism represented an advanced cultural exchange, challenging traditional Chinese humanistic beliefs and paving the way for the infiltration of Christian culture into China. By sparking interest and knowledge in Western culture among the Chinese people, the translated books by Catholicism effectively provided convenient conditions for missionaries to conduct missionary activities in China, setting the stage for future missions in the history of the development of Christian culture.

#### 4.2. The Books about the Humanities and Social Sciences

In addition to the translation and publication of books about natural science and technology, Catholic missionaries also engaged in the translation and edition of many books about the humanities and social sciences. These books encompass a diverse array of subjects, such as natural philosophy, logic, language, psychology, ethics, education, management, politics, art, and music. The following provides a detailed overview of the representative books about the humanities and social sciences that were translated and edited by Catholicism: For instance, the books about natural philosophy are *Qiankun tiyi* 乾坤體義 (edited by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇), *Kongji gezhi* 空際格致 (collaborated by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌 and Han Yun 韓雲), and *Huan youquan* 寰有詮 (collaborated by Francisco Furtado 傅汎濟 and Li Zhizao 李之藻), which give Chinese people a more rational understanding of the operation of mysterious celestial bodies since ancient times. The books about logic are *Mingli tan* 名理探 (collaborated by Francisco Furtado 傅汎濟 and Li Zhizao 李之藻) and *Qiongli xue* 窮理學 (edited by Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁), which introduce the concept of Western scientific rationality to China and facilitated the interchange between Chinese and Western science and technology cultures. The books about language are *Xizi qiji*

西字奇跡 (edited by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇), Xiru ermu zi 西儒耳目資 (collaborated by Nicolas Trigault 金尼閣 and Wang Zheng 王徵), Pixue 譬學 (edited by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌), and Kuangyi 況義 (collaborated by Nicolas Trigault 金尼閣 and Zhang Geng 張賡), which provide a channel for Chinese people to understand Western language, literature, and writing style. The books about ethics are Jiaoyou lun 交友論 (edited by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇), Xiushen xixue 修身西學 (collaborated by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌, Wei Doushu 衛門樞, Duan Gun 段袞, Han Lin 韓霖, and other Confucian intellectuals), Dadao jiyuan 達道紀言 (collaborated by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌 and Han Yun 韓雲), and Qiuyou pian 逯友篇 (collaborated by Martino Martini 衛匡國 and Zhu Shi 祝石), which introduces the foundational concepts of forming relationships, navigating social interactions, and adhering to ethical standards in Western culture. The books about education are Xifan xue 西凡學 (edited by Giulio Aleni 艾儒略) and Tongyou jiaoyu 童幼教育 (edited by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌), which bring the educational principles and framework of Jesuits to China, disseminating Western scientific methodologies.

The books about the humanities and social sciences mentioned above may not have an overt connection to the missionary activities of Catholic missionaries; however, they play a crucial role in their mission in China. Confucianism has been placed in an important position of Chinese social culture since the Han Dynasty, commanding great respect for Confucian intellectuals with the image of erudite. Therefore, recognizing the reverence for erudite Confucian intellectuals in Chinese society, Catholic missionaries targeted them as potential followers, acknowledging their significant influence. Under the guidance of this missionary strategy, by translating Western books about humanities and social sciences, Catholic missionaries established the image of Xiru 西儒 among Chinese intellectuals, showcasing their knowledge in humanities and social sciences. Collaborative translation and edition led to friendships and cultural exchanges between missionaries and Confucian intellectuals, laying a solid foundation for missionary activities and fostering a favorable field for evangelization in China.

#### 4.3. The Books about Religion

Religious books constitute the majority of Chinese books translated and edited by missionaries, particularly among the works by the Society of Jesus. Out of the 437 Chinese books authored and translated by the Society of Jesus, 251 are religious books, making up 57% of the total (Qian 1986). Moreover, other missionary groups surpass this proportion in religious books. The range of religious books translated by Catholic missionaries encompasses various aspects of Catholic faith and theology. These books cater to the spiritual needs of believers and serve as a tool for preaching. In terms of classification, religious bibliophiles often categorize these books into four main groups based on the following theoretical foundations: scripture, church history, Christian ethics, and theology. Examples of books about scripture include Tianzhu shengjiao rike 天主聖教日課 (edited by Niccolo Longobardi 龍華民), Misa jingdian 彌撒經典 (edited by Louis Buglio 利類思), Tianzhu jingjie 天主經解 (collaborated by Giacomo Rho 羅雅各, Li Tianjing 李天經, and Han Yun 韓雲), Tianxue lueyi 天學略義 (collaborated by Joao Monteiro 孟儒望, Zhu Zongyuan 朱宗元, and Wei Xuelian 魏學濂), and Yuanran kuiyi 原染虧益 (collaborated by Lgnatius da Costa 郭納爵 and Lu Xiyan 陸希言), which introduce the daily readings of Catholicism, contain annotations on scripture, and offer explanations of associated religious ceremonies. The books about church history are Shengmu xingshi 聖母行實 (collaborated by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌, Niccolo Longobardi 龍華民, Giacomo Rho 羅雅各, Johann Adam Schall von Bell 湯若望, and Chinese Confucian intellectuals), Tianzhujiao shengren xingshi 天主教聖人行實 (edited by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌), Chongyitang rij suibi 崇一堂日記隨筆 (collaborated by Johann Adam Schall von Bell 湯若望 and Wang Zheng 王徵), and Shengruose zhuan 聖若瑟傳 (edited by Joseph de Prémare 馬若瑟), which serve as sources of inspiration for Christian faith, encompassing the biographies of figures in Christian tradition and the literary books of renowned Catholic individuals, both locally and internationally, known for their profound and transformative narratives. The

books about Christian ethics are *Jiren shipian* 畸人十篇 (edited by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇), *Qike* 七克 (collaborated by Diego de Pantoja 龐迪我 and Xu Guangqi 徐光啟), and *Aijin xingquan* 哀矜行誼 (collaborated by Giacomo Rho 羅雅各 and Cheng Tingrui 程廷瑞), which serve as a guide to influence individuals on how to navigate their relationship with God and their interactions with others. The books about theology are *Tianzhu shengjiao shilu* 天主聖教實錄 (collaborated by Michele Ruggieri 羅明堅 and Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇), *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (collaborated by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇, Zhang Huang 章潢, and Feng Yingjing 馮應京), *Sanshan lunxueji* 三山論學記 (edited by Giulio Aleni 艾儒略), and *Huanyu shimo* 寰宇始末 (collaborated by Alfonso Vagnone 高一誌, Li Yeran 李燁然, Han Yun 韓雲, Wei Doushu 衛門樞, and Dun Gun 段袞), which showcase the outcomes of a direct exchange between Western Christian culture and Chinese culture, encapsulating the perspective, stance, and approach of Catholic missionaries in Sino-West cultural exchange.

The translation and composition of religious books play a vital role in the missionary activities of Catholic missionaries. During the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Catholic missionaries utilized the translation of religious books as a key tool to communicate the rich history, doctrines, and practices of Christian culture to Chinese people in a comprehensible manner. Leveraging the advancements in printing technology during that era, the spread of translated religious books proved to be an invaluable asset in assisting missionaries in spreading their teachings effectively. During the translation and editing of religious books, many Chinese Confucian scholars played a crucial role, contributing to a more profound comprehension of Chinese culture for Catholic missionaries. This engagement also led to the adaptation and sinicization of Catholicism in China to align with the cultural mindset of Chinese followers, reflecting a significant integration of beliefs that aimed to resonate with the local people.

## 5. Translation Effects of Apostolate through Books by Catholicism

Details on books' compilation and translation in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties have been analyzed in Section 4. This translation practice gives apostolate through books a dual role as both indirect and direct forms of spreading Christian culture. The primary aim of apostolate through books by Catholicism is to present Western knowledge, moral virtues, Catholic faith, social harmony, peace, and cultural flourishing to the Chinese people. By establishing this positive image, Catholic missionaries hope to attract Chinese intellectuals influenced by Confucianism and ultimately achieve the goal of evangelizing in China. Subsequently, this discussion will explore the translation effects of apostolate through books by Catholicism.

First of all, the translation practice of apostolate through books by Catholicism captured the interest of Chinese scholars during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. The social crisis and cultural stagnation of that era led Chinese scholars to eagerly explore Western literature and technology. As Chinese Confucian intellectuals fell behind in fields like calendars and algorithms, the curiosity about Western knowledge grew. Consequently, enlightened intellectuals in China transitioned from disdaining to embracing the Western culture, with the translation about natural science and technology by Catholicism inadvertently aiding the spread of Catholicism. By showcasing Western advancements, Catholic missionaries piqued the curiosity of Chinese intellectuals, setting a positive foundation for missionary activities in China. Recognizing the influence of Chinese intellectuals, Catholic missionaries sought to engage with and convert them. And, Catholic missionaries translated numbers of Western humanities and social science books, thus shaping themselves into a knowledgeable image as *Xiru* 西儒, and successfully established their profound friendship with Chinese Confucian intellectuals (Ricci 2018; Xu 2010). Because of the key role of books in Chinese social and cultural exchanges, missionaries gave the translated and published books about natural science and technology and humanities and social sciences to Chinese Confucian intellectuals in order to eliminate Chinese misunderstandings of Catholicism. Therefore, it can be said that the translation practice of books about natural



science and technology and humanities and social science books has won the reputation of Catholic missionaries and is a good start for subsequent missionary activities.

Furthermore, the translation and publication of the books about philosophical theology played a crucial role in bridging the Catholic doctrine with Chinese traditional culture, facilitating the growth of Christian culture in China. By the translation of Catholic literature into Chinese, a platform was created for the convergence of Catholic teachings, Chinese philosophy, and culture. Notably, the *Liyizhizheng* 禮儀之爭 surrounding the translation of books highlights the significance of apostolate through books by Catholicism. Additionally, the translation and publication of Chinese theological books encouraged Chinese intellectuals to engage in discussions surrounding religious practices. Despite differing viewpoints, the contributions made by Chinese intellectuals in the form of literature remain valuable historical records that contribute to the sinicization of Catholicism in China. It cannot be ignored that the collaboration in translating theological books between Catholic missionaries and Chinese Confucian scholars involved deliberations on how to introduce and adapt Catholic doctrines through Chinese traditional culture so as to better adapt to the development of missionary work. For example, Catholic missionaries have conducted deliberate investigations into expressing the concept of God in Chinese to enhance the understanding of Christian teaching among Chinese people. They have engaged in discussions regarding *Yimingzhizheng* 譯名之爭 (Term Question) surrounding the translations of God, which has significantly influenced the portrayal of God in Chinese culture (Fu 2009). Despite the ongoing disputes among various missionary groups over religious power, Catholic missionaries have established a widely accepted translation of God as *Tianzhu* 天主 in Chinese, evident in many *Tianzhutang* 天主堂 (Catholic churches) in China. So, the translation and publication of apostolate through books by Catholicism contributed to the sinicization of the Catholic doctrine with Chinese traditional culture, effectively meeting the social and cultural fields of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties.

Lastly, the translation practice of apostolate through books by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties significantly impacted the connection between Chinese followers and the spread of religious teachings. In the process of the translation practice of Catholic missionaries, Chinese Confucian intellectuals and believers actively engaged in the editing and refining of books and texts. The collaborative translation practice not only bolstered the sense of belonging and cooperation among Chinese Catholic believers but also contributed to the overall identity of the faithful (Xiao 2011). For example, noteworthy figures such as Xu Guangqi 徐光啟, Li Zhizao 李之藻, and Yang Tingjun 楊廷筠, recognized as *Shengjiao sanzhuishi* 聖教三柱石 (the key proponents of the Catholic faith), embraced Catholicism following their involvement in translating and proofreading texts of apostolate through books. This underscores the significant role that apostolate through books by Catholicism played in cultivating the initial Chinese Catholic followers. In addition, the dissemination of religious knowledge is essential for guiding and inspiring believers in the spiritual journey. Apart from the teachings conveyed orally by Western missionaries, Chinese believers could acquire and share religious knowledge through reading religious books translated and edited by Catholicism. Hence, in regions without Western missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, believers leveraged the availability and dissemination of books across various parts of China to study religious books independently, thereby facilitating the propagation of Catholic doctrines within different spatial contexts.

Therefore, when examining the spread of Christian culture in China, it is evident that the translation practice of apostolate through books was not merely a passive approach but rather an impactful strategy for Catholicism to integrate into Chinese society. While it is true that apostolate through books by Catholicism faced opposition and criticism from some Chinese individuals, leading to unfortunate events, the substantial role played by apostolate through books in the historical development of Catholicism in China remains undeniable despite the challenges encountered.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper examines the definition of apostolate through books, focusing on the characteristics of apostolate through books by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. It aims to investigate the motivation behind the translation practice of apostolate through books and the translation effect of apostolate through books during that historical period. In terms of the translation motivation, it is argued that Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties predominantly adopted an adaptation approach led by the Society of Jesus so as to integrate with Chinese traditional customs and societal structures. According to the different social structures and occupations of China, missionaries regarded Confucian intellectuals as key converters. Under this missionary strategy, missionaries not only captured the interest of the Chinese people but also utilized the prestige associated with Western books to facilitate the dissemination of Christian values and religious beliefs in China.

Indeed, apostolate through books represents just one of the multifaceted strategies employed by Western missionaries, who utilize a variety of tools such as magical artifacts, illustrations, medicinal practices, and other approaches in missionary activities. While the missionary impact is a culmination of diverse methods, the pivotal role of apostolate through books during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties remains indisputable. Thus, an examination of the translation effect of apostolate through books from the standpoint of Chinese society, Confucian intellectuals, and followers allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the historical significance. Moreover, benefiting from the self-construction of Catholic missionaries as Xiru 西儒, the active engagement of people from different social strata in China who sought guidance, engaged in debates, or contributed to the translation of Western books with Catholic missionaries. Through collaborative translation practices, Catholic culture gradually intertwined with Chinese customs, showcasing a process of sinicization that effectively advanced the spreading of Christian belief in China.

It should be pointed out that this paper does not cover the printing management and statistical analysis of book distribution by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, which warrant discussion in the future. Additionally, in the process of apostolate through books, historical events opposing Catholicism in China have not been specifically addressed in this paper, not to acknowledge potential challenges. As global cultural interactions intensify, the international spread of religious culture encounters fresh challenges. By examining the translation practice of apostolate through books by Catholicism during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, this paper aims to shed light on the internationalization of religion.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Sinicization means bensehua 本色化 in Chinese, which focuses on the process by which foreign culture integrates with local traditional culture and becomes embedded in the local society. When foreign culture assimilates into Chinese society, it inevitably encounters a dynamic interplay of conflict and integration with Chinese traditional culture, ultimately giving rise to a novel cultural hybrid. This fusion of foreign and Chinese traditions not only retains the essence of the original cultures but also gives birth to unique cultural elements that reflect the local value.

- <sup>2</sup> Jingjiao 景教 (the name of the Church of the East during the Tang Dynasty) is considered to be the earliest practice of the spreading of Christian culture in China (Zhu 1997, p. 15). The English expression of Jingjiao is Nestorianism, which is erroneously known in the English-speaking world. The Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East seems to be a misnomer, as this term refers to a relatively modern church that traces its origins to the so-called Nestorian church but is not that church per se. So, the name of Jingjiao tends to be in pinyin 拼音 in this study. For more information about the origin and relations of Jingjiao, see the related literature (Wang and Fu 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> Yekeliwen 也可里温 is a transliteration of Mongolian, signifying a blessed person, a predetermined person, or someone devoted to the gospel. During the process of Christianity culture in China, there was a period of amicable relations between the Yuan Dynasty and the Holy See, marking the initial expansion of Catholicism in China. Nonetheless, the spread of Catholicism during the Yuan Dynasty primarily targeted the Mongolians in China, with teachings predominantly translated into Mongolian. Consequently, the reach of Chinese-focused initiatives across China remained restricted, and this article refrains from an in-depth exploration of this aspect.
- <sup>4</sup> During the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Catholicism predominantly comprised the Jesuits, Franciscans, and the Dominican Order.
- <sup>5</sup> Protestant (Xinjiao 新教), also known as Gengzhengjiao 更正教, Kangluozong 抗罗宗, and Yesujiao 耶稣教, is a broad term encompassing various reformed groups of Christianity that have emerged since the 16th century. Its origins could be traced back to the princes and city representatives who protested against the restoration of Catholic privileges during the German Empire Conference in 1529. Later, it came to refer to numerous Christian groups that supported the reform of Catholicism. Strictly speaking, Protestant or Kangluozong 抗罗宗 should be used to describe the groups that emerged after the Protestant Reformation by Martin Luther (1483–1546) in 1517, while Christianity is a more general term that includes Orthodox Churches, Gongjiao 公教, and Protestant (Xinjiao 新教). However, in China, Protestantism is used as Xinjiao 新教, while Zhengjiao 正教 refers to the Orthodox Church and Gongjiao 公教 refers to Catholicism (Ding 1991, p. 34).
- <sup>6</sup> Apostolate through books, Shujichuanjiao 书籍传教 in Chinese, also translated Kanshuchuanjiao 刊书传教 (Xiao 2011). Although there are differences in Chinese expressions, the focus is on the spread of Christian culture by Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties with the help of books.

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