

Article

From “Franciscans in China” to “Chinese Franciscans”: Franciscan Missionaries and Chinese Assistants, Priests, and Bible Translators

Raissa De Gruttola 

Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 30123 Venice, Italy;
raissa.degruttola@unive.it

Abstract: The Franciscan presence in China is one of the first expressions of the Chinese encounter with Christianity. Despite the significant number of preserved documents and archives, research on the Franciscans in China is still limited. Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly focused on the texts and activities of foreign missionaries, often neglecting the role of their Chinese collaborators and converts. The purpose of this paper is to examine the interactions between Franciscans and Chinese people from a diachronic perspective, starting from the first phases of the Franciscan presence in China during the Yuan dynasty and tracing its development through the centuries up to the 20th century. Analyzing the transformation of these interactions, this paper will outline the long and gradual evolution of Franciscan foreign missions into expressions of a local church, detecting unexplored issues such as the establishment of institutes for the local clergy or the shift in the assignment of significant tasks in the Order to Chinese members. The preliminary findings of this research underscore the necessity for further studies to fully address these complex dynamics.

Keywords: Chinese Christianity; Franciscans in China; indigenization of Catholic Church; Catholic missions in China; Franciscan missionaries



Academic Editor: Marina Montesano

Received: 2 August 2024

Revised: 31 January 2025

Accepted: 11 February 2025

Published: 19 February 2025

Citation: De Gruttola, Raissa. 2025. From “Franciscans in China” to “Chinese Franciscans”: Franciscan Missionaries and Chinese Assistants, Priests, and Bible Translators.

Religions 16: 263. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020263>

Copyright: © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In the history of Christianity in China, foreign missionaries have long been the main focus of scholarly interest. Only a few recent studies started to include the role of Chinese individuals in the missionary activities of mainly European priests and friars, uncovering precious biographies and endeavors of local Christians and non-Christians who collaborated with them. This lack of research on the topic is partly due to the fact that, with reference to Chinese people, “although they played a significant role, they were not widely acknowledged” (Hsieh 2021, p. 49). In fact, missionary reports often proclaimed the achievements and the efforts of individual missionaries, leaving little or no recognition for the role of local people who supported the foreigners in many tasks, from the daily duties in their residences to the connections with local communities, from the assistance in reaching other venues to the help in purchasing goods, and from the language lessons to the review of book translations in Chinese. The role of these Chinese actors, despite being relevant in every missionary experience, has been undervalued in the research concerning all three branches of Christianity—Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox. The present study focuses on the Catholic missions and, specifically, on the Franciscan presence in China.¹ The paper recently published by Hsieh (2021) is one of the few that directly addresses the topic and identifies the first obstacle in the field represented by the terminology. It faces

the complex question of the definition of Chinese assistants, helpers, or collaborators of the missionaries in the Chinese language and starts with the role of 16th-century literati who worked with the Jesuits as *xianggong* 相公. These individuals commonly came from Christian families and received high education; they assisted the priests in their daily and pastoral duties. However, their roles differed from those of the catechists or *chuandaoyuan* 傳道員 (catechist or preacher), or the local leaders of the different Catholic groups known as *huizhang* 會長 (leaders of the local church or congregational leaders), and belonged to a higher hierarchy of importance (Hsieh 2021).² The author provides an appendix including the names and short details of 23 Chinese assistants of Catholic missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The same terminological issue concerning the Chinese words used for Chinese people working with the missionaries is addressed by Raini (2019) who explores historiographical sources and presents the role of lay helpers and catechists. The author observes that the name *xianggong* is an honorary appellation for officials and scholars with high ranks in society and that it was also used to refer to foreign missionaries and their assistants. The difference is found when, in Dominican sources, the word indicates the priests or the traditional officials, while in Franciscan texts, it is used to mention catechists (Raini 2019, p. 111).³ From this perspective, it appears that despite their frequent omission from the records, the presence and contribution of Chinese people to the missions have always been relevant and deserve further analysis. Understanding the role of local people in the study of Catholicism in China is crucial for the discussions on indigenization and localization, making it a fundamental theme in the context of Sino-Western relations.

The purpose of this paper is to detect the role of Chinese actors in the Franciscan missions in China from a diachronic perspective, providing an overview of the contributions of Chinese assistants, helpers, and collaborators of foreign missionaries. The focus is specifically on the Order of the Friars Minor⁴ and will consider some Chinese assistants, priests, and Bible translators. Through the analysis of some exemplar cases of these Chinese and Franciscan friars, the study will trace the development of these roles over the centuries, detecting the efforts toward the indigenization of the Church in China. This was a long process, formally started in the early 20th century, but with earlier motivations and different pioneer insights that led to the convocation of the Shanghai Council in 1924, the appointment of Chinese bishops and cardinals, and the establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in China with the creation of the internunciature in 1946 substituting the apostolic delegation (Chu 2014, 2017; Ticozzi 2008; Zheng 2017). Available data show that in the 20th century, the number of Chinese friars increased and the variety of tasks they performed broadened, together with the institutes intended for and the texts regarding their education.

The paper mainly focuses on the Franciscan clergy, using as the main source of data the eleven volumes of *Sinica Franciscana* (SF), and the *Necrologium Fratrum Minorum in Sinis* (Van Damme 1978).⁵ *Sinica Franciscana* is a collection of documents written by the Franciscan missionaries in China and published between 1929 and 2006. The initiative was of Father Anastase Van den Wyngaert (1884–1954), a friar from Belgium who decided to publish the documents on the Franciscan presence in China and was the chief editor of the project and of the first five volumes published (1929, 1933, 1936, 1942, and 1954). The collection and publication plan continued up to the year 2006 and included the most relevant documents compiled up to 1813.⁶ The project to publish other volumes of *Sinica Franciscana* is still ongoing and many other documents, letters, and reports would be of precious use in this specific research field. The *Necrologium Fratrum Minorum in Sinis* is a volume collecting brief biographical data of all the Franciscans in China from the 13th to the 20th century. This last edition, published in 1978 and edited by Father Daniel Van Damme (Fan Damo 范大謨, 1911–1988), is the result of data collected from the previous

Hierarchia franciscana in Sinis; seu vitae episcoporum omnium aliorumque ecclesiae praesulum ex Ordine Fratrum Minorum in sinensibus missionibus ab anno 1307 ad 1928, cum appendice et catalogo 380 missionariorum que defuncti sunt ab anno 1579 ad dies nostros (Ricci 1929)⁷ and the following *necrologia*. To this, the *Supplementum* edited by Father Tobia Lapolla (Lai Lihua 賴利華, 1923–2013) and published in Taipei in 1990 (Lapolla 1990) is added. The analysis of the lists of Franciscans recorded in these texts reveals that, while between 1252 and 1978 the names of only 49 Chinese Franciscans are recorded (Van Damme 1978, pp. 197–225), from 1978 to 1990, the names are more than 60 (Lapolla 1990, pp. 46–53). This is the first element that shows the importance of conducting further research on the evolution of the role of Chinese people in the Franciscan missions in China. In the following paragraphs, three historical phases of the Franciscan presence in China are detected and outlined: the initial impact of the friars and Christianity in the 13th and 14th centuries, the second wave of Spanish and Italian friars, and the establishment of apostolic vicariates from the 16th to the 18th centuries with the arrival of friars from other countries, as well as the features of Franciscan presence in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁸ During each phase, the presence of local Christians, being catechists, assistants, translators, or priests, will be introduced, combining their activities with those of more researched and known European friars.

2. The 13th and 14th Century: Mongol Rulers and Papal Delegates

The first phase of the Franciscan presence in China is represented by the travels and short stay of some pioneer friars who arrived at the Mongol court in the second half of the 13th century. They were papal delegates and were the first Europeans to experience direct contact with people of Central and East Asia. These friars had the task of observing the new people they met and the unexplored territories they crossed, and once they were back to their country of origin, they were asked to edit travel accounts to record all the information collected during their travel and stay in China. In the first decades of the 13th century, the Mongol troops led by Genghis Khan (1162–1227) and his successors started their broad expansion conquering territories and people towards the west and south. They defeated resistance in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, took cities in what are now Poland, Ukraine, and Hungary, and addressed their advance towards Chinese territories. The final phase of this conquest was accomplished by Kublai Khan (1215–1294) who occupied Hangzhou 杭州 in 1276 and established the Yuan 元 dynasty in 1279 (1279–1368) over the territories of the former Chinese empire of the Song 宋 (960–1279). While the Mongol army reached European territories, the pope and the other European sovereigns were dealing with the presence of Muslims in the Holy Land and were busy organizing the Crusades. The threat coming from Asia worried everyone in Europe and Pope Innocent IV (1195–1254) took the initiative to send some delegates to the Mongol khans to collect information and propose peace. The first papal delegate to the khans was the Italian Franciscan Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1182–1252) who left Lyon in 1245 and reached Karakorum in 1246. Pian del Carpine met the khans, delivered the papal letters and messages, received the answers, and went back to Europe. Subsequently, he gathered all the features of the Mongols and their territories in the text *Historia Mongalorum*, the first European travel account about East Asia resulting from direct experience.⁹ His travel was followed by that of the Flemish Franciscan William of Rubruck (Willem van Rubroek, 1220–1293), sent to the khan by King Louis IX of France. Rubruck arrived in Karakorum between 1253 and 1254 and stayed there for some months; when he was back in Europe, he compiled the *Itinerarium fratris Willielmi de Rubruquis de ordine fratrum Minorum, Galli, Anno gratiae 1253 ad partes Orientales*. The texts of these papal envoys to the Mongol court contributed to spreading more reliable knowledge about the dreadful image Europeans had of the Mongols and prompted the pope to start sending a different kind of friars to the khans. The first was Giovanni

da Montecorvino (Ruowang Menggaoweinuo 若望孟高维诺, 1247–1328) who reached, in 1294, the new Mongol capital, Khanbaliq, or present-day Beijing, with the purpose of establishing a mission in East Asia.¹⁰ When Montecorvino arrived at the Mongol court, Kublai had completed the conquest of the former Southern Song territories (1279), so both his purpose and his interlocutors were different from those of his confreres who arrived some decades earlier. Montecorvino stayed in China for many years and sent letters to his superiors to inform them that he was baptizing local people, building churches, and translating texts to teach the Catholic doctrine and prayers (Sella 2008). The words of Montecorvino convinced Pope Clement V to send to Khanbaliq some suffragan bishops to appoint him as the first archbishop of East Asia and mark the official starting of the Catholic missionary endeavor in China. Of the seven Franciscan bishops sent to reach Montecorvino, only three arrived in Khanbaliq and accomplished their task, becoming, in turn, bishops of the newly established ecclesiastical area of Quanzhou 泉州, in present-day Fujian, and also building churches in Hangzhou and Yangzhou 揚州. The Franciscan presence in China after Montecorvino continued and the friars undertook the task of evangelization. Unfortunately, in the few documents preserved from that time, no reference to Chinese people is made. This was also due to the fact that society, during the Yuan dynasty, was divided into four classes, namely the Mongols (*menggu ren* 蒙古人), the *semu ren* 色目人 (“various kinds of people”), the Chinese *Han ren* 漢人, and the Southern Chinese *nan ren* 南人. The *semu ren* group included all those who arrived in China from Central Asia and Eastern Europe, non-Mongols and non-Chinese; thus, the missionaries also belonged to that group, as did the Muslim merchants and all the prisoners brought from the other khanates to work in the Chinese territories. It is likely that the Christian missionaries had contacts with people belonging to the Mongols and to the *semu* groups, and not with the Han or Chinese people from the south. As for the languages they learned and used, the reference is again to the Mongolic or “tartar” one, and it is not likely that missionaries during the Yuan dynasty learned the Chinese language.¹¹ Moreover, the accounts from the 13th–14th-century missions are limited and were compiled by few friars, mostly in the form of letters to the superiors. Only Odorico da Pordenone (Eduolike 鄂多立克 1286–1331) and Giovanni de’ Marignolli (Malinuoli 馬黎諾里?–1359) wrote extensive and relevant travel accounts after their return to Europe, but their aim was to depict peoples and territories of East Asia, with no references to local people or conversions. Marignolli is commonly regarded as the last friar who stayed in China during the Yuan dynasty, concluding what is sometimes called the “Franciscan century”, going from the arrival of Pian del Carpine to the departure of Marignolli (1246–1347). Less than twenty friars reached or tried to reach China between 1360 and 1579 (Van Damme 1978, pp. 257–58) due to a combination of factors, including the focus of missionary undertakings on the Americas and the self-centered attitude of the first phase of the Ming 明 government that tended to exclude foreigners.

3. From the 16th to the 18th Century: Interpreters, Language Teachers, Literati, and Helpers

The end of the first phase of the presence of the Franciscans in China coincided with the establishment of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and a subsequent interruption of the relations of the former Yuan empire with European interlocutors. The new dynasty led by the Han people would open to new exchanges only in a subsequent phase of its reign when Spanish and Portuguese trade interests were also piqued by the possibility of entering China. These two kingdoms oversaw church life in their colonies, and the Treaties of Tordesillas (1494) and Zaragoza (1529) had divided the respective territories. This placed China among the Portuguese territories, and in 1557, Portuguese merchants settled in the small fishing village of Macao. Macao was appointed as a suffragan diocese of Goa in

1576 and became a crucial stopover for the missionaries *en route* to China. While many Franciscans from Mexico were beginning their missions in the Philippines under the Spanish government, the members of the recently established Society of Jesus¹² sought entry into the Chinese empire under Portuguese protection. After the death of Francis Xavier (1506–1552) on the Chinese island of Shangchuan 上川, with the desire to preach the Gospel in China, the Jesuits also focused on entering the Ming empire. They settled in Macao in the 1560s and in Guangdong 廣東 in 1582. Franciscans, having settled in the Philippines in 1577, reached Macao in 1579. The 16th and 17th centuries were pivotal for the Franciscan presence in China, marked by the first arrival in Fujian 福建 in 1579 and the more stable settlement by Antonio de Santa María Caballero (Li Andang 利安当, 1602–1669) in 1633.¹³

On 14 June 1579, four Franciscans had left the Philippines to reach China. They were Pedro de Alfaro (?–1580), Agustín de Tordesillas (1528–1629), Sebastián de Baeza (?–1579), and Giambattista Lucarelli (1540–1604),¹⁴ and on the small ship with them, there were three Spanish soldiers, a young Chinese boy, and twelve to fourteen local sailors. The reports by Lucarelli and Tordesillas refer to the young Chinese boy as an interpreter named Juanito or Juanillo, and to the sailors as “new Christians” (Iaccarino 2022, p. 249 and note 16). On 23 June 1579, the friars arrived in Canton and were offered tea and brought to the authorities. Some days later, they celebrated the holy mass in a private house. Lucarelli describes the ambiguous proposal of the local man who hosted them for the mass:

I celebrated mass in the house of a man who told us he was a Christian and had the name Andrew. But we later understood that he was a heathen and he had given us that possibility hoping to receive something else as a reward (SF 2 1933, p. 50, translation of the author).

During the meetings with the authorities, the friars had to rely on the help of a local interpreter, who, despite being a former Christian, provided false translations of their answers to the local governors. After some months, it was decided that the friars were to be expelled from Canton, so Alfaro and Lucarelli went to Macao and the others went back to the Philippines (Iaccarino 2022, p. 250). In Macao, Lucarelli and Alfaro built the first Franciscan convent and church. In 1591, the Franciscans established the Province of St. Gregory the Great in the Philippines and China.

These references to interpreters can be regarded as the first mentions of Chinese people helping the missionaries found in Franciscan accounts. In both cases, their faith is not a remarkable element, and relevance is not given to their education or their relationship with the missionaries. Despite them seeming to only assist in linguistic matters, their names are recorded as Juanito or Juanillo and Simão Rodrigues (“Simón”).

This first troubled phase of the Franciscan presence in China in the 16th century was followed by the missionary endeavor of the Spanish friar Antonio de Santa María Caballero¹⁵ who inaugurated a different stage of Franciscan missions in Chinese provinces and is indicated as the “founder of the mission of his Order in China in the new era and its apostolic prefect” (“fundator missionis sui ordinis Sinicae in nova epocha et eius Praefectus Apostolicus”) (Van Damme 1978, p. 74). Caballero was in the Philippines from 1629 and arrived in Fujian in 1633 with the Dominican Juan Bautista de Morales (Li Yufan 黎玉范, 1596–1664); his mission is divided into three phases, the first being the initial one between 1633 and 1636; the second, when he worked outside China up to 1649; and the third one when, between 1649 and 1669, he was in Shandong and also worked as an apostolic prefect (Busquets Alemany 2023). At the same time, considering the stay of Caballero in China, Ye and Ollé (2021) identified two different generations of missionaries:

The Franciscans can be divided into new and old generations by the second arrival of Antonio de Santa María Caballero in China in 1649, because the two generations demonstrated different understandings toward China, as well as distinct

evangelization methodologies. The old generation of Franciscans followed the European-style without any adjustment, preaching in the streets and criticizing the Chinese people's beliefs and from time to time colliding with the government and the locals. On the other hand, the new generation gradually grasped the reality of this country, and they began to learn Chinese culture, as well as try various other missionary methods (Ye and Ollé 2021, p. 470).

Caballero started his missionary work in the small city of Dingtou 頂頭, where he studied the Chinese language with the teacher Tadeo Wang (Wang Dadou 王達陡) and baptized Luo Wenzao 羅文藻 (1615–1691) as Gregorio Lopez, who would work as his assistant for many years. Below are two examples of the role of Chinese converts in the Franciscan missions.

Tadeo Wang belonged to one of the Chinese families of Fujian previously baptized by the Jesuit Giulio Aleni (Ai Rulüe 艾儒略, 1582–1649) and had a certain responsibility in explaining to his student Caballero the meaning of the Chinese character *ji* 祭 “sacrifice, to offer sacrifice” as indicating the sacrifice of the holy mass. This raised doubts of superstition and idolatry in the life of Chinese Catholics for Caballero and led to a series of letters, meetings, and discussions that became the initial phase of the Chinese Rites Controversy. This was the discussion on the possibility for Chinese Catholics to perform rites for Confucius and their ancestors. These were seen as civil practices by the Jesuits but were intended as idolatry and superstition by other missionaries. The question was raised in China but the pope and religious orders in Europe were also involved. It was answered by papal documents in 1704, 1715, and 1742, all prohibiting the rites (Capristo 2013; Criveller 2014; Menegon 1997, 2003; Mungello 1994).

Luo Wenzao came from a poor non-Christian family, was baptized by Caballero in 1634, and became one of his assistants. He accompanied Caballero and other Franciscan and Dominican friars on many travels in the Chinese empire, suffering arrest, imprisonment, and expulsion with them. He was also in Macao and Manila, where he entered a Dominican convent wishing to become a friar.¹⁶ He spent his year of novitiate between 1650 and 1651 in Dingtou and was back in Manila to study theology and become a priest in 1654. In 1655, he was sent as a missionary to China, where he worked tirelessly baptizing local people and taking care of the sick. In 1674, Pope Clement X appointed him titular bishop and apostolic vicar of Nanjing; however, he declined the nomination. A second appointment came from Pope Innocent XI in 1679, and the consecration took place in Canton in 1685 from the hands of the Franciscan bishop Bernardino Della Chiesa. As a bishop, Luo chose the Franciscan Giovanni Francesco Nicolai da Leonessa (Yu Yige 余宜閣 or Xu Fanji 徐泛濟, 1656–1737) as his assistant, secretary, and eventual successor. Settled in Nanjing, bishop Luo acted with passionate pastoral care for his people, stayed open and in a dialog attitude on the Rites Controversy, “excelling as a bridge-maker” (San Roman 2001, p. 151), and never forgot his spiritual father Caballero, of whom he restored the tomb in Canton (San Roman 2001).

Involved in the start of the Chinese Rites Controversy,¹⁷ in the troubled years of the end of the Ming and the start of the Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911), Antonio Caballero continued his missionary activity in China; however, he found many difficulties in language learning and could not directly communicate with the Chinese people (Mungello 2001, pp. 9–11). Moreover, he was forced to move to Manila, Macao, and back to Manila many times in a few years. In 1648, he was appointed as the apostolic prefect of China, and the following year, he went back to Fujian, inaugurating the third phase of his stay in China. In the Van Damme *Necrologium*, the only reference to a Chinese Franciscan in this century is made mentioning a lay brother of the Third Order, Diego (*Diadacus, nationis Sinarum*), who joined the Franciscans in the Province of St. Gregory in Manila and “followed three

missionaries in Fujian in 1649, serving them and curing the sick. He was dismissed for disobedience two years later" (Van Damme 1978, p. 160, *ToA*). It is likely that this Chinese fellow was with Caballero when he returned to Fujian in 1649.

Caballero engaged in a good collaboration with the Jesuit Johann Adam Schall von Bell (Tang Ruowang 湯若望, 1591–1666) and other Jesuits in Beijing and Shandong, where Father Schall encouraged him to establish a new Franciscan mission. In October 1650, Caballero founded a Franciscan mission and residence in Ji'nan 濟南 to help the local Christians who lacked a priest for many years. He found that some favorable events in Ji'nan were signs of blessings to settle a new Franciscan mission there and started his activity of conversion and baptism of common people. While in Shandong, Caballero wore local clothes¹⁸ and highly improved his fluency in the Chinese language, so much so that other missionaries did not recognize he was a foreigner like them (Mungello 2001, p. 25). In 1665, he was arrested and expelled to Canton, where he was imprisoned and died in 1669. A reference to Chinese helpers is found in some early letters by Caballero, with negative meanings:

In addition to two Franciscan missionaries, Caballero asked that the provincial send two adolescent boys (fourteen to fifteen years old) of mixed breed drawn from the Chinese trading families in the Philippines who might serve at mass and as menservants. [...] He and Ibáñez were suffering terribly from the Chinese menservants who were expensive and troublesome and did not provide good service. The fathers had no one to cook for them and those servants who had cooked for them cooked badly [...] Caballero extended his request list to include, in addition to the two new missionaries and two menservants, a lay brother who might oversee the household and the menservants and "do the work of Martha" so that the priests would be free to preach and minister without domestic distractions (Mungello 2001, p. 24).

In this excerpt, it seems that Chinese collaborators were needed only for basic daily tasks. On the contrary, research conducted on the records of the expenses of the Spanish Franciscan missionaries in China in the late 17th century indicates that the presence of the salary of Chinese assistants was among the costs to bear in a mission, as "in addition to purchases of houses, the Franciscans had to hire assistants if they were to carry out the evangelical enterprise in a culturally heterogeneous country that is far away from the Philippines and Europe" (Ye and Ollé 2021, p. 475). The authors consider three types of assistants, namely the servants, including cooks and porters, the catechists, and language teachers (Ye and Ollé 2021, pp. 475–76). Furthermore, during his stay in Shandong and thanks to his late mastery of the Chinese language, Caballero was able to compile some books in Chinese that, according to a letter, were already completed by 1653, recognizing the important role a "*letrado chino*" had had in the edition of the volumes, as well as recording the price paid to him (Mungello 2001, p. 32). There is no certainty about the titles of the books mentioned; however, Ye (2024a, p. 6) explains:

This marked the formal beginning of Caballero's collaboration with Chinese literati in the realms of Chinese writing and doctrinal discussions. Unfortunately, he did not specify the titles of these three books. Relying solely on a few ambiguous content descriptions, it seems difficult to confirm whether they are the later-known works, namely, *Wanwu Benmo Yueyan* (万物本末约言, Compendium of the Origin and End of All Things), *Zhengxue Liushi* (正学鏐石, Touch stone of Orthodox Learning), and *Tianru Yin* [天儒印, Concordance of Divine Law with the Four Chinese Books]. [...] It appears that this method, whereby missionaries provide oral accounts, local literati draft the content in Chinese, and then missionaries revise and approve it, had almost become a fixed pat-

tern for Chinese writing among the Franciscans. Therefore, when attributing authorship to the works, it is often noted as being “narrated” (*shu* 述) by rather than “written” (*zhu* 著) by a certain missionary, indicating that the missionaries’ main role was oral narration rather than writing. However, both Caballero and later Franciscans consciously or unconsciously “deprived” the Chinese drafters of the right to attribution, even omitting mentions of their names in private letters (Ye 2024a, p. 6).

Research on the contribution of Chinese people to edited missionary works has shown that this was not a habit limited to the Franciscans of the 17th century and that it was spread and continued even among Jesuits or Protestant missionaries until the late 19th century. This reference to the role of a Chinese literatus in the work on Chinese books written by a foreign missionary, however, remains important and remarkable, as this is the first mention of the help of an educated Chinese man with a high status and receiving a certain reward for the task accomplished. The faith of the Chinese collaborator is not mentioned here.

A different case is found in the reference made to the collaborators of Pedro de la Piñuela (Shi Duolu 石铎录, 1650–1704). Pedro de la Piñuela was born in Mexico to Spanish parents and arrived in Fujian in 1676. He was also a missionary in Jiangxi 江西, Hankou 汉口 (Hubei 湖北), and Guangdong and wrote many books in Chinese, including a biography of St. Francis (Van Damme 1978, pp. 117–18). The Spanish missionary received the help of some local literati to have his texts revised, so seven of them worked on the proofreading of the *Moxiang Shengong* 默想神功 (Spiritual practice of meditation) and another one edited its annotations.¹⁹ The names of the literati who worked with la Piñuela are recorded and something is known about them:

In 1687, la Piñuela arrived in Jiangxi where he reached the peak of interactions with local literati. Among them, the most notable was Liu Ning (刘凝, 1625–1715). Liu Ning, styled Erzhi (二至), had served as the vice-rector of the school (训导, Xundao) in Chongyi (崇义) County. He was one of the Confucian scholars who converted in the early Qing Dynasty and compiled the book *Tianxue Jijie* (天学集解, Collected Accounts of Learning from Heaven). [...] Liu Ning wrote prefaces for la Piñuela’s pharmacological work *Bencao Bu*, as well as his religious work *Dashe Jielüe* (大赦解略, Brief Explanation of Indulgences), and he proofread his *Moxiang Shengong*. Meanwhile, the friar often engaged in intellectual exchanges with other knowledgeable figures. For example, literati of Nanfeng (南丰), Jiangxi, namely Zhao Shiyuan (赵师瑗, ?–?), Zhao Xilong (赵希隆, ?–?), Li Rining (李日宁, ?–?), Li Changzuo (李长祚, ?–?), and Gan Zuolin (甘作霖, ?–?), collectively participated in the proofreading of *Moxiang Shengong*. Another literatus, Wu Su (吴宿, ?–?), provided annotations for the book (Ye 2024a, p. 14).

The late phase of the Spanish Franciscan presence in China was strictly related to the Province in Manila and to the Spanish kings and also coincided with the arrival of the Italian Franciscans sent by the newly established Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, 1622). The project of the new institute was to reduce the Spanish or Portuguese influence on Catholic missions all over the world, and this was enacted through the creation of vicars and prefects apostolic. Their roles would be the administration of certain territories, similar to the task of bishops, but they would be appointed by the pope and not by the kings. More than 50 Spanish Franciscans were in China between 1579 and 1700 (Cui 2006, pp. 467–71) and, at the turn of the century, they adopted a moderate approach towards matters related to the Chinese Rites Controversy. In fact, when the examination to obtain the *piao* 票 was introduced by the emperor in 1706,

they all participated and obtained the certificate.²⁰ Nevertheless, they were also among the foreign missionaries who were forced to leave China some decades later:

After the proscription of Christianity, most of them were gradually transported to Canton. In 1732, like all other missionaries, the eleven Spanish Franciscans at Canton were expelled to Macao. Inspired by the example of their Italian brethren who in the 1720s had immediately gone underground, several of them returned secretly. [...] Due to the proscription of Christianity, the Spanish Franciscans (like other missionaries) had to go secretly from one parish to another and lived hard lives. This situation also caused a constant lack of personnel: several had to retire because they were arrested or became ill (sometimes even mentally). Moreover, new missionaries did not arrive in great numbers, because during the second half of the century Spain gradually decreased its financing of the mission, as nothing was to be gained, politically or economically (Standaert 2001, pp. 329–30).

In 1684, three Italian Franciscans arrived in Canton. They were Bernardino Della Chiesa, Giovanni Francesco Nicolai da Leonessa, and Basilio Brollo da Gemona (Ye Zunxiao 叶尊孝, 1648–1704). Upon their arrival, Della Chiesa, appointed bishop already in 1680, became the apostolic vicar of China. In 1690, the dioceses of Beijing and Nanjing were established dividing the former Macao diocese. Della Chiesa consecrated bishop Luo Wenzao who was appointed as the first bishop of Nanjing, while Della Chiesa himself was nominated bishop of Beijing. Many Italian missionaries were sent to China by Propaganda Fide in the first decades of the 18th century, and they often had remarkable roles in the field of the Chinese Rites Controversy. Among these, there were the Franciscan Carlo Orazi da Castorano (Kang Hezi 康和子, 1673–1755) and the secular priest Matteo Ripa (Ma Guoxian 馬國賢, 1682–1746). Castorano arrived in China in 1700 and collaborated with his confrere Della Chiesa, acting as a faithful papal envoy (Criveller 2024; Doniselli Eramo 2017). Ripa arrived in Macao in 1710 and worked as a painter in Beijing at the court of emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1654–1722, r. 1661) from 1711 to 1723. He had the project of opening a seminary to train young Chinese boys to become Catholic priests but was not able to accomplish it in Beijing. For this reason, in 1724, he was back in Naples with four Chinese boys (Giovanni Battista Gu Ruohan 谷若翰, 1701–1763; Giovanni Evangelista Yin Ruowang 殷若望, 1705–1735; Filippo Huang Batong 黃巴桐, 1712–1776; Lucio Wu Lujue 吳露爵, 1713–1763) and the Chinese language teacher Gioacchino Wang Yajing 王雅敬. They constituted the first nucleus of the Collegio dei Cinesi (College of Chinese Students) in Naples, approved by the pope in 1732. The college had the purpose of preparing young Chinese boys for the priesthood, teaching them Latin language, theology, and philosophy, and sending them back to China as missionaries (Ripa 1983; D’Arelli and Fatica 1999). This was a significant experience in the field of Church indigenization, education of the local clergy, and cultural and religious exchange between China and Christianity; however, it will not be discussed here.²¹

The institution of apostolic vicariates and prefectures created a new territorial situation for the missions in China; nevertheless, at the same time, the opposition of the pope to the Chinese Rites, with the subsequent indications and prohibitions, caused difficulties for the foreign missionaries in Chinese territories and a certain urgency in training local priests:

When after 1724 the first furor of the persecution had subsided, foreign missionaries, invited and assisted by loyal Christians, secretly returned to their former missions, exercising their ministry in the seclusion of private homes and under cover of night. If detected, they were arrested and usually deported to Macao, while their guides and hosts were punished with exile. Since Chinese priests

might move about with more freedom, the missionaries began to train and ordain natives to the priesthood. These were trained in the missions, in Peking or Macao, in Siam, in France and especially in the Chinese College of the Holy Family in Naples, Italy (Willeke 1948, p. 11).

These decades of hardship bore fruit in the field of education of the Chinese clergy and led to the natural and faster mingling of the foreign missionaries with local communities, despite this sometimes leading to the persecution and also the arrest of the Chinese Christians assisting the missionaries:

In this situation it is not surprising that the missionaries were incorporated into local Chinese society. The persecutions and the need to move around between the different Christian communities meant that priests often lived in the homes of the wealthier Christians, sometimes hidden in the women's inner quarters. Needing to conceal their identities, they dressed and spoke like other people (Harrison 2010, p. 521).

The government learned of the presence of other missionaries living secretly in Shensi, and later of missionaries in several other provinces. This unexpected news prompted the emperor to order a search in all provinces for foreign missionaries, their native assistant priests, their hosts, guides and other helpers in the mission work, and as a result, a great number of them were apprehended and taken to Peking to be examined and punished (Willeke 1948, pp. 165–66).

The 18th century was thus marked by this new collaboration between foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians, including both local helpers or assistants and Chinese priests mainly trained in Naples. In the context of each vicariate apostolic and its different missions, the balance between the different actors and the division of the tasks relevant to the good development of the pastoral activity could be peculiar. An exemplary situation is well summarized in the following excerpt reporting the interactions between some Italian missionaries and Chinese priests and helpers. Giocchino Salvetti (Ai Jin 艾金 or Ruoyajing 若亞敬 1769–1843) managed to reach China in 1810, and in 1815, he was appointed vicar apostolic of Huguang 湖广 (Hubei and Hunan 湖南), Shaanxi 陝西, and Shanxi 山西. Salvetti had a very open attitude toward the Chinese Rites and established good relations with Chinese Christians of his vicariate:

Salvetti's closest relations were with his staff and the Chinese priests. When two new Chinese priests arrived from Naples he commented simply that they were a more reliable source of help than Frontini [Vincenzo, 1773–1841] and he hoped that the College would send more. [...] describing the seven Chinese priests beginning with Jacobus Li (Li Zibiao 李自標, 1755–1828), 'who exercises his ministry with much more than activity, and in intelligence and wisdom outshines all others' and adding that the other Chinese priests were all fine. Such praise of the Chinese priests was not confined to Salvetti: Ioannes Guo and Jacobus Li won the respect and affection of a succession of Italians as well as being acknowledged and respected leaders of the other Chinese priests. [...] The vicar apostolic spent most of his time in the company of his Chinese staff, since able Chinese priests were usually in charge of large areas of the diocese. These men are usually called 'servants' in the mission correspondence, but that greatly underestimates their status: when speaking Salvetti referred to them as members of his household (*famigliari*). [...] Salvetti in his old age became extremely dependent on a member of his household called Giovanni Wang, who preached and advised him on confessions as well as managing the diocese's property and dealing with all Chinese correspondence (Harrison 2010, pp. 525–26).

Of course, not every vicar or every mission and foreign friar experienced the same events and open attitudes acknowledging the value of the tasks accomplished by the Chinese. For example, Salvetti's confrere and successor as vicar apostolic Alfonso De Donato (Feng Shangren 馮尚仁, 1804–1848) disregarded the value Salvetti gave to Wang, recognizing that the Chinese assistant acted as the bishop of the vicariate and Salvetti was his servant (Harrison 2010, p. 526). Nevertheless, the need to rely on the help of local people led most Italian Franciscan missionaries to establish esteem and trust relationships with Chinese Christians:

Whether it was from humility, inertia, fear, or simply long years spent living among the Chinese, many of the Italian missionaries did not share these negative attitudes. They were integrated into local society and, although they were nearly always homesick and unhappy, found friendship and support among the Chinese priests and lay leaders. There was, as in any institution, competition between different groups and it was easy for these disputes to be articulated in terms of hostility between Chinese and European clergy, even when they were primarily caused by difficult personalities or administrative weakness. Nevertheless, hostility between Chinese and Europeans was not the dominant theme, if only because the more positive a missionary's opinions were towards the Chinese the more likely he was to survive and be able to function (Harrison 2010, p. 527).

This positive and constructing situation changed after the Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860) when foreign missionaries were given more possibilities to move alone around Chinese provinces and received more financing from European charities so that they did not have to completely rely on the assistance of Chinese Christians.²² Furthermore, the Franciscan Order increased the number of countries from where its missionaries reached China, also including Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the US later, resulting in a wider variety of missionary styles and experiences, as well as sources in different languages.

4. The 19th and 20th Century: Chinese Franciscans, Martyrs, and Bishops

The establishment of apostolic vicariates and their distribution to different religious orders created a new situation in the Chinese missions that settled even more after the consequences of the Opium Wars and the spread of the principle of extraterritoriality for the foreigners. These wars improved the conditions of the presence of foreign missionaries in China and created the basis of both modernization and xenophobia, which were, in a certain sense, two sides of the same coin (Dujardin 1996, pp. 54, 71). In the 19th century, the Franciscans were assigned the vicariates in Shandong, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hubei, and Hunan, while in the second decade of the 19th century, many non-Italian provinces of the friars were already assigned to some of the vicariates there.²³ Furthermore, three business offices (*procura*) were later opened in Hankou (1920), Shanghai 上海 (1923), and Tianjin 天津 (1931) (Camps and McCloskey 1995, pp. 34–35).

Apostolic vicariates in China were originally created by Pope Alexander VII in the 17th century “in order to perform in an easier way the ordination of the indigenous priests [...] and to provide a more solid root to the Catholic Faith” (Ticozzi 2017a, p. 19). The importance of establishing a native clergy in every mission was also acknowledged by other popes in that century. Innocent XI in 1677 wrote that “if the first foreign bishop meets the difficulty of language, his successor, who would be native, will not have it. [...] They could make more conversions in a few days than foreign bishops in many years, as the experience with the Apostolic Vicars in China shows” (quoted in Ticozzi 2017a, p. 24). The

need to train local priests and to appoint local bishops was frequently addressed in following Church documents; however, it was a slow process that led to the ordination of the first Chinese priests. After Luo Wenzao, in fact, the Jesuit Zheng Ma'nuo 鄭瑪諾 (Zheng Weixin 鄭維信 or Manuel de Sequeira, 1633–1673) was ordained a priest in 1644 and was the first Chinese priest among the Jesuits. Subsequently, the establishment of a regular novitiate of the Society in China was only approved in 1672. As for the Franciscans, in the Philippines, they admitted to the priesthood Japanese candidates but not the Chinese ones. In 1639, three Chinese boys arrived at the convent of St. Francis near Manila to become friars, but there is no further news about them. By the end of the year 1700, the total number of Chinese priests was about ten (Ticozzi 2017a, pp. 48–50).²⁴ During the 18th century, other efforts were made to provide Chinese Catholics with Chinese priests and bishops. Among these, there was the issue of establishing local seminaries undertaken by different religious orders. For the Franciscans, the highest authority was still the Minister General, but if a mission was assigned to a specific province, its Minister Provincial and the related Definitorium also became high-level representatives for the missionaries in that area. Furthermore, foreign missionaries of the Franciscan Order were under the authority of a Commissioner Provincial who supervised the individual experience of the missionaries, taking care of their needs and their moral and spiritual life. Franciscan missionaries in China were also under the local apostolic vicar who had the task of administering the pastoral needs of the area (Dujardin 1996, pp. 113–15). After unsuccessfully sending some young boys interested in Franciscan life to the training convent in Manila (1734, 1762), the friars created the first group of students near Taiyuan 太原; however, only Vitale Kuo Yuanhsing 郭維塔 (1711–1778), after studying at the College in Naples, was ordained a priest. By the late 18th century, the Shanxi–Shaanxi Vicariate established its first seminary in Beijing. In the early 19th century, the friars opened a seminary in Qixian 祁縣 village serving both Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces, with ordinations occurring there in 1803, 1804, and 1810. However, the seminary faced closures due to persecution in 1812 and 1815. Bishop Gioacchino Salvetti closed it again in 1824, relocating the students to Macau. A minor seminary opened in Jinlicun 金立村 in 1835 but closed in 1839 before reopening and later serving only Shaanxi province after 1844 (Ticozzi 2017a, p. 66). In 1839, the Franciscan bishop Giovanni Domenico Rizzolati (Li Wenxiu 李文秀, 1799–1862) established a seminary near Hankou, but it was destroyed the same year. Another seminary in Wuchang 武昌 faced a similar fate, forcing students to relocate. In 1854, Rizzolati and other foreign priests were arrested and expelled to Hong Kong. The seminary was eventually reopened but faced multiple relocations due to persecution. By 1864, the Hubei seminary had 17 major seminarians and 9 minor seminarians, and by 1870, seminaries were established in Wuchang, Hankou, Laohekou 老河口, and Yichang 宜昌. When the Franciscan bishop Epifanio Carlassare (Jiang Chengde 江成德, 1844–1909) proposed a central seminary for Hunan and Hubei in 1887, the Vatican preferred prioritizing the training of local clergy within each vicariate; subsequently, Bishop Miguel Navarro OFM (Lu Huairan 陆怀仁, 1809–1877) established a seminary in Huangshawan 黄沙灣 near Hengyang 衡陽. Shanxi became an apostolic vicariate in 1844 and was divided into Northern (Taiyuan) and Southern (Lu'an 潞安, now Changzhi 长治) vicariates in 1890, both managed by Franciscans. Bishop Gregorio Grassi OFM (Ai Shijie 艾士傑, 1833–1900) rebuilt a seminary in the north, moving it to Dong'ergou 洞兒溝 in 1890 while theology students remained in Taiyuan. In 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, five seminarians were martyred and later canonized in 2000 (Ticozzi 2017a, pp. 100–3). The Franciscans played a crucial role in establishing seminaries across China, facing challenges such as persecution, relocations, and destruction, yet their efforts contributed significantly to the development of the local Catholic clergy.

At the turn of the 20th century, the number of Chinese priests was growing, and their names were finally and gradually becoming worthy of being recorded, not only among those of the Catholics killed for their faith during the Boxer Uprising. Nevertheless, there was still something that impeded the complete indigenization of the Catholic Church in China. After being part of the wide diocese of Beijing, in 1839, the Shandong vicariate was erected, and Ludovico De Besi (Luo Boji 羅伯濟 or Luo Leisi 羅類思, 1805–1871) was appointed its first vicar apostolic. He was followed by the Franciscans Luigi Moccagatta (Jiang Leisi 江類思, 1809–1891) in 1848 and Eligio Cosi (Gu Lijue 顧立爵, 1819–1885) in 1870. In 1885, the vicariate of Southern Shandong assigned to the Society of the Divine Word²⁵ and the vicariate of Northern Shandong assigned to the Franciscans were created. In 1894, the vicariate of Eastern Shandong was created and assigned to the French Franciscans; after that, in 1886, the French sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary arrived in Yantai 烟台. The first seminary in the region was opened in 1847 and, despite it often being moved to different venues between Ji'nan and Hongjialou 洪家樓, 59 priests were ordained there until 1925 when it also became a Franciscan regional seminary for Shanxi province. In 1920, there were 47 Chinese and 52 foreign priests in North and East Shandong, serving more than 57 thousand Catholics.

In 1844, the Shaanxi and Shanxi vicariates were divided. In the same year, the Shaanxi vicariate was created and later divided into Southern Shaanxi (1887) assigned to PIME²⁶ missionaries, Northern Shaanxi (1911) assigned to Spanish friars, and Central Shaanxi (1911), including the future diocese of Xi'an 西安, assigned to Italian Franciscans. In 1915 in this vicariate, there were only 8 foreign priests and 30 Chinese priests, serving almost 30 thousand Catholics. In 1932, Chinese friars established a local mission in Fengxiang 鳳翔. In 1844, the Shanxi vicariate was assigned to the Franciscan Observants from Rome, and in 1890, the Dutch friars were entrusted to the Southern Shanxi vicariate. The region had 28 Chinese priests between 1915 and 1920 and 56 foreign priests for almost 60 thousand Catholics. In 1891, the first Franciscan institute for novices was established in Dong'ergou, near Taiyuan. The friary would be the only novitiate in China for the local boys who asked to become friars until 1928.

After the split of the former vicariate of Huguang, the Hubei vicariate was erected in 1856, and in 1870, it was divided into East Hubei (including Hankou), Southwest Hubei (including Yichang) and Northwest Hubei (including Laohekou). The first was assigned to Italian friars from the Venetian province, the second to the Belgian friars from the Flanders, and the third to Italians from the Tuscany province. The missionaries from Belgium arrived in 1872, and in 1891, the vicariate of South-West Hubei was officially recognized, representing an important event for the Belgian Franciscans (Dujardin 1996, p. 89). Between 1914 and 1920, there were 81 foreign priests and 46 Chinese priests for almost 100 thousand Catholics. In 1856, the Hunan vicariate was also established and divided into North and South Hunan in 1879. The northern area was assigned to the Augustinians, and the southern one was assigned to the Austrian Franciscans (St. Leopold Province of Innsbruck). By 1914, 11 thousand Catholics were cared for by 24 priests, among which only 6 were Chinese.

The martyrdom of the Franciscan missionaries in China, particularly in Hunan and Shanxi, occurred during periods of intense anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiment. The first Franciscan martyr in China was Giovanni da Triora (Lan Yuewang 藍月旺, 1760–1816), who was executed by strangulation in Hunan in 1816. Later, during the Boxer Uprising in 1900, several Franciscans and Chinese converts were martyred. In Hunan, Cesidio da Fossa (Dong Zhexi 董哲西, 1873–1900), Giuseppe Maria Gambaro (An Shouren 安守仁, 1869–1900), and Bishop Antonino Fantosati (Fang Huaide 范怀德, 1842–1900) were brutally killed by the Boxers. In Shanxi, the Taiyuan incident saw the execution of many Catholics,

including bishops, priests, seminarians, nuns, and laity, along with many Protestants. The executions were ordered by the local governor, Yuxian 毓賢, and carried out in a public and violent manner. Among the 1900 Taiyuan martyrs, there were 29 Franciscans. Of these, eight were friars, including three bishops, four priests, and a lay brother; seven were young sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary; there were five young seminarians belonging to the Third Order; and the other nine were laymen, catechists, cooks, or servants also belonging to the Third Order (Clark 2011; Zavarella 2000, pp. 81–82). The young French friar André Bauer (An Zhende 安振德, b. 1866) entered the Third Order of the Franciscans and arrived in Taiyuan in 1899, where he studied with Chinese boys:

Given the Franciscan emphasis at the Shanxi mission on developing a native clergy, André Bauer's seminary studies were conducted alongside Chinese natives. One of his classmates, perhaps the most famous of the Chinese Franciscans, was Patrick Dong Bodi, who was also martyred at Taiyuan. Dong's entire family, his parents and three brothers, were also killed during the Boxer Uprising in 1900 (Clark 2011, pp. 128–29).

The Chinese seminarians who died as martyrs in 1900 in Taiyuan were John Zhang Jingguang 张景光 (若望); Philip Zhang Zhihe 张志和 (斐理伯); John Zhang Huan 张焕 (若望); Patricius Dong Bodi 董博第 (巴特里爵); and John Wang Rui 王锐 (若望).

In the context of the indigenization of the Church and of the Franciscan Order in China, the lives and martyrdom of Dong Bodi and his family and of the other young Chinese seminarians are remarkable (Ticozzi 2017a, pp. 103–5). Moreover, the presence of these names among the martyrs is relevant because it solved two problems. The first concerned the fact that the Chinese friars were not appointed as missionaries so they could not benefit from the advantages of their foreign confreres. The second matter regarded common clericalization of the Order that led to treating the lay brothers as inferior members of the Order so that they were often seen as servants and could not be involved in the apostolate because they did not receive theological education and could hardly become priests (Dujardin 1996, pp. 141–42). Including young Chinese seminarians among the acknowledged martyrs of China showed that their position had improved among the hierarchies of the Order and of the Church.

In the 20th century, a shift occurred from an old style of mission to a new one. The traditional way of setting the mission included direct apostolate with the main purpose of converting people; however, indirect apostolate methods concerning charity, socio-economic, or political activities were also included. After the 1920s, new reflections were being made about missions, and missionaries had a growing social awareness and interest in learning from the Protestant examples and improving the services in the healthcare and education of orphans and youth. Nevertheless, among the Franciscans, the earlier apostolic method often remained predominant (Dujardin 1996, pp. 191, 336–38).

This new awareness and the distribution of foreign missionaries across Chinese provinces characterized the situation of missions in the first decades of the 20th century when times were suitable for a fundamental turn in the management of missionary activities in China and all over the world. It was becoming evident that the European model could not be effective in other areas of the world, and the distress caused by the recently concluded World War I also led to the shortage of European missionaries willing to preach abroad. Furthermore, China itself was changing, after the end of the Qing dynasty (1911), in terms of the spread of nationalistic ideals, the republican efforts, and the deep social changes it was experiencing through events such as the May 4th Movement. Several representatives of the Church perceived the need to assign more responsibilities to the local clergy and to invest more in the education of Chinese Christians. Among these, the Vincentians²⁷ Frédéric-Vincent Lebbe (Lei Mingyuan 雷鳴遠, 1877–1940) and Antoine Cotta

(Tang Zuolin 湯作霖, 1872–1957) had a primary role, claiming that many excellent Chinese priests remained anonymous and unknown by foreign bishops or in Rome. Moreover, the same questions were addressed in 1919 by Pope Benedict XV who issued the apostolic letter *Maximum Illud*, a document “on the propagation of the faith throughout the world”, criticizing the attitude of missionaries acting as leaders of “spiritual colonies” or “treating mission area as private property”, and stressing the need to invest in the education and training of local clergy in every different country to leave them the leadership of the local churches they belonged to. The papal document drew extensively from the Chinese situation presented to the Holy See by Cotta and Lebbe (Mariani 2014).²⁸ According to the letter,

Anyone who has charge of a mission must make it his special concern to secure and train local candidates for the sacred ministry. In this policy lies the greatest hope of the new churches. For the local priest, one with his people by birth, by nature, by his sympathies and his aspirations, is remarkably effective in appealing to their mentality and thus attracting them to the Faith. Far better than anyone else, he knows the kind of argument they will listen to, and as a result, he often has easy access to places where a foreign priest would not be tolerated.

If, however, the indigenous clergy is to achieve the results We hope for, it is absolutely necessary that they be well trained and well prepared. We do not mean a rudimentary and slipshod preparation, the bare minimum for ordination. No, their education should be complete and finished, excellent in all its phases, the same kind of education for the priesthood that a European would receive. For the local clergy is not to be trained merely to perform the humbler duties of the ministry, acting as the assistants of foreign priests. On the contrary, they must take up God’s work as equals, so that some day they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people (MI 1919, pp. 14–15).

At the turn of the 20th century, many missionaries still felt obliged to represent their country of origin, and the French government could hardly ignore its interest in representing and administering the Catholics in China, while, on the contrary, the papal indications claimed that “the true missionary is always aware that he is not working as an agent of his country, but as an ambassador of Christ” (MI 1919, p. 20). The first concrete action the Holy See took to improve the Chinese situation was that of appointing the first apostolic delegate in the person of archbishop Celso Costantini (Gang Hengyi 剛恆毅, 1876–1958). Costantini arrived in Beijing in 1922 as a representative of the Holy See with the aim of avoiding interference with representatives of other countries and with political questions and only working for evangelization. Among his tasks, there was also that of identifying some Chinese priests to appoint as bishops, as there had been no Chinese bishops after the consecration of Luo Wenzao more than two hundred years before. Costantini sought to convene the First Plenary Council of China, or Shanghai Synod in 1924,²⁹ but was convinced that this could not be efficient without the presence of Chinese priests, so he created the apostolic prefectures of Puqi 蒲圻 in Hubei and Lixian 蠡縣 in Zhili in March and April 1924. The Delegate appointed the Chinese Franciscan Odoric Cheng Hede 成和德 (1873–1928) as prefect apostolic of Puqi and the Chinese Lazarist Melchior Sun Dezhen 孫德楨 (1869–1951) as prefect apostolic of Lixian so that they could take part in the Shanghai Council. The Council started on 15 May 1924, and together with the two recently appointed Chinese prefects participating as official members of the meeting, there were nine other Chinese priests, among theologians and staff members. The other 48 bishops and many other participants were all Europeans and of different religious orders. Among the most relevant decisions of the plenary council (*Primum Concilium* 1930), there were the following:

The primary purpose of any mission is to announce the Good News to people and to prepare a Church directed by local clergy. [...]

The Chinese clergy have the same rights and obligations as all other missionaries.

Chinese priests are not excluded from any office if they are worthy.

Missionaries need to speak Chinese as well as understand it (Camps and McCloskey 1995, p. 37).

To enact the point on the leadership of the Chinese Church by the Chinese clergy, on 28 October 1926, the first six Chinese bishops of modern times were consecrated by Pope Pius XI in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. They had been chosen accurately and were Joseph Hu Ruoshan 胡若山, CM (1881–1962); Simon Zhu Kaimin 朱開敏, SJ (1868–1960); Philip Zhao Huaiyi 趙懷義, diocesan priest (1880–1927); Melchior Sun Dezhen, CM; Odoric Cheng Hede, OFM; and Aloysius Chen Guodi 陳國砥, OFM (1875–1930).³⁰ Only the details of the Franciscans will be given here.

Odoric Cheng was born in Laohekou (Hubei) to a Catholic family and studied in Chayuangou 茶園溝. When he was only ten, he was sent to La Verna, in Italy, where he joined the Franciscan Province of Stigmata in Tuscany in 1894 and was ordained a priest in 1900. In 1903, Father Cheng went back to China as a missionary and seminary teacher. He translated the Rule of St. Francis into the Chinese language and edited a grammar book for Chinese people learning the Italian language. He died in Hengyang (Hunan) and was buried in Puqi in his vicariate (Van Damme 1978, p. 171).

Aloysius Chen was born in Anyang cun 安陽村 (Shanxi) to a Catholic family and entered the Franciscan Order in 1896 in the friary of Dong'ergou. He was ordained a priest in 1903 and served as the secretary of two Italian bishops. He was also a missionary and a Latin language teacher at the Taiyuan seminary. As a bishop, he was assigned the vicariate of Fenyang 汾陽 (Shanxi), where he died in 1930 (Van Damme 1978, p. 41).

The consecration of the Chinese bishops was a further step towards the localization of the Church in China, followed by the 1939 decree of Propaganda Fide *Plane Compertum* that finally permitted the worship of Confucius and the ancestors for the Chinese Catholics, concluding the Rites Controversy. In 1943, diplomatic relations between China and the Holy See were established, and in 1946, the apostolic constitution *Quotidie Nos* officially created the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in China. As a consequence, the former apostolic prefectures and vicariates became dioceses, and their administrators were appointed bishops. In the same year, Thomas Tian Gengxin 田耕莘, SVD (1890–1967), was appointed cardinal and first archbishop of Beijing (Miotk 2018).

While Chinese friars gradually adopted important roles in the Catholic hierarchy, the Franciscan Order also increased its attention towards the missions in China. In 1921, Noel Gubbels (Gu Xuede 顧學德, 1874–1950), a Belgian friar missionary in Hubei from 1903, was appointed as Secretary General for the Missions and later vicar apostolic (1930) and bishop (1946) of Yichang. In 1929, the role of a Delegate General for China was instituted and the first to whom it was assigned was the Dutch friar Gerard Lunter (Long Dean 龍德安, 1879–1968), a missionary in China from 1907. In 1933, he was appointed Secretary General for the Mission, and in 1934, Alphonse Schnusenberg (Shu Naibai 舒迺伯, 1887–1971) was nominated Delegate General for China. The German friar Schnusenberg arrived in Shandong in 1914, and as a Delegate, he encouraged the institution of regional seminaries and supported the project of the establishment of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense (*Sigao Shengjing Xuehui*).

4.1. *The Translators at the Sigao Shengjing Xuehui* 思高聖經學會

The history and features of this institute well express the process of indigenization of the Franciscan presence in China. In 1931, the Italian friar Gabriele Maria Allegra (Lei Yongming 雷永明, 1907–1976) arrived in Hengyang and was appointed as rector of the local seminary where Chinese students were trained. Despite this role, he had asked his superiors to be a missionary to China with the purpose of translating the Bible into Chinese, as he had come to know that a complete translation of the Scriptures in that language was still absent.³¹ In the first years of his stay in China, Father Allegra studied Chinese language and literature, and having already acquired a deep knowledge of biblical studies before leaving Italy, in 1935, he started the translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew language to Mandarin Chinese.³² Allegra moved to Beijing in 1941, and there he completed the translation of the Old Testament in 1944. Times had also changed with reference to the possibility of translating the Bible into vernacular languages. In fact, differently than in the translation projects of Catholic missionaries in the previous centuries,³³ Allegra received support and encouragement from his superiors both in China and in Italy. At the same time, he was aware that his solitary efforts would not have been sufficient to compile a good translation. In his autobiographical memoirs, he wrote:

As I gradually approached the end of the Old Testament, many problems arose: How could I make the revision and the literary correction? How could I present the work to the Chinese Church? I shared these doubts with some friends of mine. The majority of them suggested that, in order to finish soon, it would be enough to invite a Christian scholar who could understand my version, to correct the literary form of it. At first, I had asked to the F. Delegate only a Father to help me, but I soon realized that one would not have been enough. It was necessary to train a group of Fathers in the biblical studies, so that they could efficiently correct my version. Afterwards, they would gradually collaborate in the writing of note and introductions. In short, it was necessary to found a biblical school, or Studium Biblicum, to broaden the library, and to publish the first volume—the Psalms—as soon as possible (Allegra 2005, p. 103, *ToA*).

Allegra asked Delegate Schnusenberg to select some Chinese friars as collaborators and a venue to accomplish the project, and on 2 August 1945, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense (*Sigao Shengjing Xuehui*)³⁴ was inaugurated in Beijing. The first members of the biblical institute were Antonius Li Shiyu 李士漁 (1917–2004); Solanus Li Zhixian 李志先 (1911–1996); Bernardinus Li Yutang 李玉堂 (1913–?); Ludovicus Liu Xutang 劉緒堂 (1916–1989); and Victor Zuo Weidou 左維斗 (?–?). These Franciscans had all entered the Order at a young age and were students of theology or Chinese literature at Furen University (Furen daxue 輔仁大學) in Beijing. They came from Shandong, Hunan, and Hubei and gathered with Allegra to revise the Old Testament translation. During the first year of work, Allegra taught the friars biblical Hebrew and biblical Greek, and together, they edited the Chinese translations of the different books, working on their introductions and notes as well. On 2 August 1946, the Chinese volume of Psalms was published by the Studium Biblicum in Beijing, inaugurating a long series of publications containing all the books of the Old Testament. The activity of the institute followed the historical context in which it operated, so in 1948, the friars and the Delegate decided to move the Studium to Hong Kong. There, the publication project continued and was completed in 1954. Meanwhile, other members joined the activities of the Studium, and among these, there were both Chinese and European friars. They were Marcus Chen Weitong 陳維統 (1922–2005) from Shandong, Tarcisio Benvegnù (Niu Hanmo 牛漢謨, 1911–1969) from Italy, Conrad Li Shaofeng 李少峰 (1919–2007), Vianney Zhang Junzhe 張俊哲 (1918–2009), and Accursius Yang Henghui 楊恆輝 (1918–1998), all from Shaanxi, followed by the German Theobald Diederich (Zhai

Xu 翟煦, 1911–2008) and Joannes a Triora Peter (Bei Deyu 貝德玉 1902–1969), the Belgian Dunstanus Put (Tong Dade 童達德 1893–1974), and the Dutch Agnellus van Der Weide (Han Shoushan 韓守善 1907–1983). Subsequently, Juniper Li Zhiyi 李智義 (1922–1988) from Shanxi, Benjamin Carlos Leong 梁雅明 (Liang Yaming 1930–2001) from Macao, and Gaspar Han Chengliang (1928–2004) from Shandong completed the team.³⁵ The friars shared the respective knowledge of languages and biblical sciences and continuously discussed about the translations prepared individually or in small groups.

A significant initiative was a study year at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem to improve the biblical knowledge of the Chinese friars. This happened between 1954 and 1955 in preparation for the work on the New Testament. From 1955, in fact, the four Gospels and their paratexts were distributed among the translators that included the fathers Allegra, Benvegnù, Diederich, Chen, Yang, Liu, Li Shiyu, Li Zhiyi, and Li Shaofeng: the number of Chinese friars was double that of the European ones. The translation of the New Testament was conducted between 1955 and 1961, and three volumes were published. After the completion of this first edition of the Bible, the Studium undertook its revision with the aim of preparing a single-volume version. All the friars were involved in the activity that covered seven years of work and led to the publication of the complete Bible on Christmas day in 1968. On that occasion, Father Allegra was eager to underline that “the Chinese Bible is published only under the name of the Studium Biblicum, and not the name of one or another translator” (Allegra 2005, p. 152, *ToA*). This underlined the collective project the friar had undertaken soon after his solitary start and the importance of considering the joint efforts of the whole group of translators and reviewers. When presenting the daily timetable that the translators followed for twenty years, Allegra recalled that the work hours were systematically distributed throughout the day, and they alternated individual work and group discussions. During these discussions, every friar would present problems or doubts, and the others would give suggestions and help. Allegra noted:

We addressed every question concerning our [translation] work: one presented the problem and the discussion among the colleagues followed. [...] I cannot fail to remember with gratitude and emotion the work of my collaborating fathers. [...] I discussed questions about prophetism, messianism and the book of Revelation; Father Theobald talked about the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the prophet Amos, and the last 9 chapters of the book of Ezekiel. Father Marcus addressed the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Father Ludovicus the questions on the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, and Father Antonius the questions on the Epistle to the Philippians. Father Juniper talked about the Pastoral Epistles [1–2 Timothy and Titus] and the Fathers Conrad and Accursius addressed something about the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, Luke] (Allegra 2005, pp. 122–23, *ToA*).

In this excerpt, the relevant role and work of six Chinese friars are mentioned, together with that of only Allegra himself and Diederich, showing the prominent role the Chinese translators had in the Sigao Bible project.

Every translation activity at the Studium was recorded in detail, and preparatory notes, drafts, and different editions are still preserved today. All the translation work was accompanied by thorough documentation comprising letters, memories, reports, private diaries, and notebooks that support the reconstruction of the complete translation processes of each biblical book, as well as that of the volumes prepared and published afterwards. These documents are mainly preserved in a special section on Father Allegra in the Historical Archive of OFM Sicily Province (Archivio Storico della Provincia del SS. Nome di Gesù dei Frati Minori di Sicilia) in Palermo (Italy) and in the archive of the Studium Biblicum in Hong Kong, which was recently moved to the La Verna Building in

Kowloon.³⁶ The presence and study of these documents help to draw some conclusions. In the experience of the Studium Biblicum, the Chinese friars worked in the same position as their European confreres. While Chinese friars undertook the study of biblical subjects, the foreign missionaries had to commit to the study of the Chinese language and Chinese literature and culture. Afterwards, the activities at the Studium were assigned without distinction to all the friars, and the different tasks were always acknowledged and recognized. During the translation process, Chinese friars were also appointed for different formal tasks at the Studium or outside. Furthermore, while busy with the major Bible translation project, they were all involved in other translations, Chinese book compilations and editions, administrative tasks, and pastoral activities in the Franciscan convents and parishes in Hong Kong. After the publication of the 1968 single-volume Bible, the Studium Biblicum continued to operate in Hong Kong in the field of Catholic and biblical publishing. It often changed venue, but it is still working today, and its members are all Chinese Franciscans (four friars in July 2024). This is another element representing the complete process of indigenization of this institute.

Since its foundation, some indications have been required to regulate the activities of the biblical center. As the first Prefect (or director) of the Studium, Allegra wrote its statutes, and in the second edition, he introduced the office of the Superior of the Studium. While the Prefect would oversee the biblical work and the translation and publication program, the Superior would take care of the daily life and spiritual needs of the friars belonging to the institute. These two roles were soon assigned to Chinese friars. In 1959, Ludovicus Liu was appointed as the Superior of the Studium, becoming the first Chinese Franciscan to have an official role in the hierarchy of the institute. Liu was appointed assistant to the Delegate General for China in 1966, and three years later, he became the Delegate General himself. Liu also served as the first Vicar of the Chinese Vicary in 1971 and was Prefect of the Studium from 1977 to 1980 and from 1983 to 1986.³⁷ Also, Father Anthony Li was assigned these roles and was both Superior and Prefect of the Studium for many years. While he was the director of the Studium, in obedience to his request, Allegra started writing his autobiographical memoirs which represent a fundamental document for research on the Studium's establishment and activity.

As a member of the Studium Biblicum, Father Ludovicus Liu Xutang is another good example of the long process that led to the transformation of the Franciscan presence in China from "Franciscans in China" to "Chinese Franciscans". Liu was born in Shandong to a Catholic family and entered the minor seminary when he was twelve. He joined the Franciscans in 1935, made his solemn vows in 1939, and was ordained a priest in 1942. The same year, Liu enrolled at the Department of Chinese Literature of Furen Catholic University in Beijing, and after his graduation in 1946, he became part of the Studium Biblicum (De Gruttola 2023, pp. 50–51). Liu moved to Hong Kong with the other members of the Studium in 1948, followed by many other foreign missionaries in the following years. After working on the publication of the Bible until 1968, he was appointed as the first Vicar of the Franciscan Vicary established in 1970, and in 1976, he was assigned other biblical and pastoral tasks between China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (De Gruttola 2023, pp. 42–45).

4.2. Franciscans in Taiwan and the Establishment of the Province of Our Lady Queen of China

The nine Franciscan vicariates of 1891 were divided into 47 separate vicariates, of which only 26 remained to the Franciscan after fifty years. In 1940, nine vicariates were assigned to Chinese clergy (Dujardin 1996, p. 155). When missionaries and religious people left the People's Republic of China in the 1950s, they went to Taiwan or Hong Kong, moved to other countries in Southeast Asia, or returned to their original provinces. Forty Franciscan friars went to Taiwan and were assigned to the areas of Tainan (German fri-

ars), Taipei (Belgian friars), and Taoyuan (Italian friars from Piedmont), and many reached Hong Kong, including those working at the Studium Biblicum. The case of the reorganization of the ecclesiastical territories of Taiwan is exemplary in the context of the indigenization of the Church. The island of Taiwan underwent significant societal and territorial restructuring primarily led by the Holy See after the 1950s. This involved the transformation of apostolic prefectures into seven dioceses, bypassing the stage of vicariate apostolic. Furthermore, despite the presence of different religious orders, high priority was given to the growth of local communities rather than to the needs of the various orders, so many friars worked as parish priests and a shift in importance set the priority on the process of *implantatio ecclesiae* rather than on the one of *implantatio ordinis* (Bouwmeester and Coomans 2024, p. 95). The Belgian friar Dunstanus Put served as the East Asia Regional Superior from 1949 to 1959 and was succeeded by Ralph Reilly (Lei Yili 富益勵, 1900–1970) until 1969. The focus in those decades was on establishing ecclesiastical presence rather than merely organizational structures, with Franciscans supporting local bishops and managing parishes and kindergartens. For example, the Saint Francis High School in Neihu, Taipei, established by the Belgian Franciscans, was directed by Father Thomas Chen Peiqian 申培謙 (1927–2022). Father Chen was born in Shanxi to a Catholic family and joined the Order in Dong'ergou in 1944. He studied in Spain and Italy and worked in Singapore and Taiwan (http://www.ofm.org.tw/public/aboutus/olqc/prolist/necrologium/0712/09/0915_2.html, accessed on 28 January 2025). The biography of Father Chen represents that transition period well, when young Chinese boys entered the minor seminaries of the Order in China and, after completing their education periods in Europe, went back to Asia to continue to serve the Church and the Order. At the same time, foreign Franciscans in Taiwan served the local bishops and followed indications from their general delegate. This development was concluded when, after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), it was a suitable time to start working on the establishment of the Chinese Province of the Franciscans (Bouwmeester and Coomans 2024, p. 95).

In the late 1960s, the Minister General of the Friars and the Secretary General for the Missions visited the friars in Asia and went to Hong Kong and Taiwan as well, so that the Franciscan Vicary could be established in 1970 as *Vicaria autonoma et independente in China et Malacca*. It included Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and Singapore, except for the Hong Kong Procura and the Australian house of Singapore. Ludovicus Liu was elected Vicar and participated in the subsequent General Chapters (general meetings of the friars) in Madrid (1973) and Santa Maria degli Angeli—Assisi (1979). After six years, the new Vicar elected was Leonardo Xu Yingfa 徐英發 (1923–2003), followed by Gaspar Han Chengliang 韓承良 (1928–2004), who was a Vicar until 1989, when the Province was established.³⁸ In January 1989, Minister General Father John Vaughn (1928–2016) issued the decrees *De erectione Provinciae BMV Reginae Sinarum in Taiwan* (Establishment of the Province Our Lady of China and Taiwan) and *De electione Ministri, Vicarii et Definitorum Provinciae BMV Reginae Sinarum in Taiwan* (Election of the Minister, the Vicar and the Definitors of the Province Our Lady of China and Taiwan), appointing Father Leonardo Xu Yingfa as the first Minister Provincial and Father Gaspar Han Chengliang as the Definitor of the new Province (*Xiao Xiongdihui Zhonghua zhihou huisheng* 小兄弟會中華之後會省), and initiating a new chapter of the Franciscan presence in China where Chinese Franciscans would be the main actors.³⁹

The presence of so many Chinese friars in Taiwan and Hong Kong indicates the good results obtained by the opening of diocesan seminaries and Franciscan friaries in China in the previous decades. This is also confirmed by the number of Chinese friars included in the two *necrologia* examined here. When compared, the two texts show that a higher number of Chinese friars is included in the latter list from 1978 to 1990 than in the former including all the friars in China from 1300 to 1978. Merging the two texts, an outline of

the biographies of the Chinese friars recorded can be carried out. They were all born in one of the five provinces assigned to the Franciscans from the 1860s onward. Most of them attended local friaries and stayed in the vicariate they belonged to for missionary work. Some of them received education in Franciscan Provinces in Spain, Italy, or the US but always went back to China after their priestly ordination. Short biographies are given of the earlier recorded friars, while from the 1930s, much space is left to write about the imprisonment or torture they suffered from the communist troops. The tertiary Franciscan Francis Cheng 承 (1868–1931) is recorded as “the first victim” killed in the convent of Chayangou (Hubei) (Van Damme 1978, p. 75).⁴⁰ In the second volume, more than 30 friars are remembered on December 24 without specifying the death year as, despite the data about their birth and joining the order being recorded, no indications of their death (“nescitur dies mortis”) were available, except that they had been imprisoned or killed.⁴¹

The activity of the Studium Biblicum, the records of friars who died in the 1970s and 1980s, and the current vibrancy of the Chinese Province of the Franciscans demonstrate the successful progression toward the implantation and the indigenization of the Franciscan Order in China.

5. Conclusions

The Franciscan presence in China initiated the dialog between Catholic and Chinese cultures in the late 13th century. Documents and accounts compiled by the Franciscan friars over the centuries reveal a slow but steady development of the role of Chinese individuals in the missions. The first accounts from the Mongol empire, compiled by papal delegates, presented East Asia to Europeans for the first time based on direct experience. Giovanni da Montecorvino and the other Franciscans committed to evangelization and conversion of local people during the Yuan dynasty and likely had limited interaction with Chinese people. Nevertheless, this initial phase of the Franciscan presence in China laid the groundwork for subsequent experiences, always reflecting changes in historical, political, and cultural contexts in both China and the European religious environment.

The arrival of Franciscans in China in 1579 was facilitated by a young Chinese interpreter accompanying the group led by Alfaro. The Chinese years of the prominent Father Caballero also largely depended on local assistants. Caballero noted that Tadeo Wang was his language teacher and that a *litteratus* assisted him in writing some of his Chinese books. However, while this educated assistant remains anonymous in correspondence, criticism was often directed at Chinese helpers in charge of domestic tasks, indicating a utilitarian attitude and a sense of superiority, which was often common among European missionaries. Unlike Caballero, Pedro de la Piñuela later acknowledged the contributions of Chinese literati in revising his books, naming them explicitly.

The missionary task of Caballero is also curiously connected to the first Chinese bishop Gregorio Luo Wenzao. Luo was baptized by Caballero, entered the Dominican order, and was consecrated by the Franciscan Della Chiesa. He thus chose another Franciscan as his secretary and later successor, revealing an interesting interchange of roles and obedience actions. This relationship, wherein a Chinese individual converted by a foreign missionary eventually chose a foreign missionary as his assistant, ideally represents the exemplary path to be followed by foreign missionaries: converting local people and becoming their “servant” or leaving the missionary area once the local church is established. Unfortunately, the case of bishop Luo remained isolated for several centuries.

In the mid-18th century, the first Chinese priests educated at the College for Chinese in Naples returned to China as missionaries, interacting with their European peers. Relationships among priests varied, ranging from complete friendship and trust, as seen with Salvetti, to strong criticism and distance, as seen with De Donato. These examples high-

light that, alongside religious, cultural, and national backgrounds and education, personal inclinations played a crucial role in interactions between foreign and Chinese priests. Furthermore, the details on the seminaries established by the Franciscans in the 19th and 20th centuries well represent the efforts of the Order to invest in the local clergy more than in the Chinese Franciscans and underline the project undertaken to transform the Church in China into a Chinese Church.

The early 20th century marked a growing recognition within the Catholic Church of the need to distinguish between mission churches and local churches, aiming to transform the former into the latter and reduce the influence of foreign missionaries abroad. Catholics worldwide began to acknowledge that colonial attitudes, nationalistic arrogance, and missionary superiority were unrepresentative of Christian values and needed to be replaced by local leadership. China exemplified this issue, with events such as the issue of *Maximum Illud*, the Shanghai Council, the consecration of Chinese bishops, and the establishment of the Catholic hierarchy, paving the way for significant transformations also within the Franciscan Order in China. Among the six bishops appointed in 1926, two were Franciscans, with one trained in Italy and the other in Dong'ergou, symbolizing the transition from foreign to local education for Chinese priests.

Later, when forming a team of Bible translators, all the members of the Studium Biblicum were Chinese friars trained in biblical sciences and Chinese language and literature and educated in Chinese seminaries and friaries. The accomplishments of the biblical institute highlight the growing importance of Chinese friars in various tasks, exemplifying the successful transformation of a mission church into a local one, while maintaining the distinctive nature of the Franciscan religious order. Moreover, the dynamic between Allegra and Li Shiyu, transitioning from teacher and student to collaborators in the translation projects and later to subordinate and superior at the Studium, actualized this long-awaited development. The establishment of the Franciscan province Reginae Sinarum, still active today in Greater China, further supports the discussed evolution.

This paper has uncovered the gradual yet constant and significant development of Chinese Franciscan friars and other Chinese priests from the role of collaborators or invisible helpers to that of the main protagonists in the life of the local Church, specifically within the Franciscan Order. Future research could broaden this perspective by considering the Franciscan female experience, including consecrated sisters and laywomen, but also male members of the Franciscan Third Order and other lay collaborators, potentially uncovering new findings and research paths.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The issue of the unacknowledged role of Chinese people in the activities of missionaries is also relevant in the field of Protestant missions. This is the case, for example, of Bible translation. Since the arrival in China of the first missionary Robert Morrison (Ma Lisun 馬禮遜, 1782–1834, a Presbyterian working for the London Missionary Society, LMS), in fact, translating the Bible in Chinese had been a major concern for the Protestants. They always collaborated with Chinese assistants but seldom recognized their efforts in improving the texts they worked on and published. Morrison studied the Chinese language when still in London with Yong Sam-tak (Rong Sande 容三德), and arrived in China in 1807. In 1823, he published *Shentian shengshu* 神天聖書 (The Divine and Heavenly Sacred Writings); nevertheless, it seems that Morrison only asked for the help of Chinese assistants in the

final revision of the translated text (Zetzsche 1999, pp. 39–41). Zetzsche comments that “it is typical that, with few exceptions, the names of the Chinese translators are not mentioned, despite the fact that they played a significant role in the translation work” (Zetzsche 1999, p. 91). The feature was also shared by following translation projects by different Protestant denominations as well as by joint committees created to work on common versions. In the early 20th century, references to the Chinese teachers and assistants working on biblical projects started to be made and they appeared in some pictures of the members constituting the committees, despite their names being rarely recorded. Zetzsche well summarizes the approach of the Protestant translators to the matter: “Unfortunately, little is known about the Chinese assistants of the Mandarin committee during the OT translation. It is certain, though, that the Mandarin *Union Version* OT translation was the first missionary Bible translation where the Chinese assistants were given the same voting rights as the Western missionaries. Chinese participation in missionary Bible translation in China had come a long way from the minimal role played in the translations of Morrison/Milne, Marshman/Lassar, or Gützlaff. This had changed briefly in the relative prominence of Chinese translators under Medhurst and especially Goddard, but reverted once again to absolute anonymity under Bridgman/Culbertson, the Easy Wenli *Union Version* translators, and Chalmers/Schaub. An awareness of the growing independence of the Chinese Church, and, at the same time, a much more realistic understanding of their own limitations in the foreign language prompted the Mandarin *Union Version* missionary translators to open up the work for more participation by the Chinese translators” (Zetzsche 1999, p. 366).

- 2 One of the most known *xianggong* of a Catholic priest in the 18th century is John Xu 徐若翰 (Xu Ruohan, ?–1734), the Christian scholar who assisted priest Jean Basset (Bai Risheng 白日昇, 1662–1707) of the Paris Foreign Missions (Missions Étrangères de Paris, MEP) with the translation of the New Testament from Latin to literary Chinese. On the translation by Basset and Xu, see (Chen 2021; Hong 2021; Song 2017, 2021).
- 3 On the history and features of catechesis in China, see (Ku et al. 2008).
- 4 The Franciscan mission analyzed in this paper is limited to that of the Friars Minor (Ordo Fratrum Minorum, OFM), *Sheng Fangjige hui* 聖方濟各會 or *Fangji hui* 方濟會. The Franciscan Order was established by St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) in the years 1209–1210, and a written rule was formally approved by the pope in 1223. The Franciscan family, derived from the experience of the founder, includes three orders: a male religious order (the Friars Minor or First Order), a female monastic order (the Poor Ladies or Poor Clares or Second Order), and an order for lay people (the Brothers and Sisters of Penance or Third Order). Today, the First Order includes four different groups, namely, the Friars Minor (OFM), the Conventuals (Ordo Fratrum Minorum Conventualium, OFMConv, *Sheng Fangjige zhuyuan hui* 聖芳濟各住院會), the Capuchins (Ordo Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum, OFMConv, *Sheng Fangjige jiabu hui* 聖芳濟各嘉布會), and the Third Order Regular (Tertius ordo regularis Sancti Francisci, TOR). In 1517, the Conventuals and the Observant were separated, while in 1525, the group of the Capuchins was born, being approved in 1528. In the 16th century, many other minor reformed groups were established, including that of the Discalced or Alcantarine Friars. All the reformed branches were reunited with the Friars Minor in 1897. The papal delegates that reached the Mongol Empire in the late 13th century and all the other Franciscans presented in this paper belonged to the Friars Minor. In 1925, eight Italian Conventual Friars arrived in China and settled in Shaanxi, followed by confreres from the US (Tiedemann 2009, p. 32). In 1704, some Italian Capuchin Friars left to reach Tibet, where they stayed from 1707 to 1745. In 1922, German Capuchins were in Gansu 甘肅, followed by friars from the US and Spain, and also administering a mission in Manchuria. They stayed in China until 1953 (Tiedemann 2009, p. 31). The author is grateful to one of the reviewers of the paper for their suggestion to include references to the other groups of Franciscans and considers conducting detailed research on Capuchins and Conventuals in China in further studies.
- 5 These sources were selected to provide a comprehensive overview of the Franciscan presence in China basing the research on Franciscan official reports. A subsequent phase of the research could be that of including data derived from archival sources and Chinese language documents. The author is grateful to one of the reviewers for pointing this out.
- 6 While the first four volumes are wide and generic, covering letters and reports of different missionaries and of many decades (SF 1 1929; SF 2 1933; SF 3 1936; SF 4 1942), the fifth volume (SF 5 1954) is specifically dedicated to the correspondence of Father Bernardino Della Chiesa (Yi Daren 伊大任 or Yi Tangren 伊堂人, 1644–1721), and the sixth includes letters and reports of the Italian friars in China in the 17th and 18th centuries (SF 6 1961). The volumes from 7 to 11 include the documents on the Franciscan Spanish friars in China from 1672 to 1813 (SF 7 1965; SF 8 1975; SF 9 1995; SF 10 1997; SF 11 2006). Of these, two were published in Madrid and co-edited by the Chinese friar Gaspar Han Chengliang 韓承良 (1928–2004) (SF 9 1995; SF 10 1997).
- 7 The long title of the volume explains that it includes the biographies of the Franciscan bishops in China between 1307 and 1928 and of 380 missionaries who died between 1579 and 1928 (Ricci 1929).
- 8 The three phases were outlined considering the features of the Franciscan presence in relation to the Chinese people. For this reason, the grouping of the centuries is in some points different from the usual periodization of the history of Christianity in China.
- 9 The importance of the travel account by Giovanni da Pian del Carpine and his confreres arriving at the Mongol court in the following decades is also widely acknowledged in the vast field of research on the travel and the text by the Venetian merchant Marco Polo (1254–1324) who spent more than twenty years in China after 1271 and dictated his travel account later circulated and known

as *The Travels of Marco Polo* or *Il Milione*. On the Franciscans during the Yuan dynasty and their travel accounts, see (Andreose 2017 and 2019 and Valtrová 2010 and 2023). On Marco Polo and his book, see the recent works by (Burgio and Simion 2024 and Vogel 2024).

10 Kublai Khan (r. 1260–1294) moved the capital city of his empire from Karakorum to Khanbaliq; Pian del Carpine and Rubruck only reached the former Mongol capital of Karakorum, while the following travelers, including the other Franciscans and Marco Polo, stayed in Khanbaliq and also visited other cities. In the account of Marco Polo, a distinction is made between Cathay and Mangi, where Cathay corresponds to Northern China and Mangi corresponds to the territories of the Southern Song. The name Cathay comes from the name of the nomadic Khitan people who established the Liao 遼 dynasty (960–1125) in Northern China and the Kara Khitan khanate (1124–1218) in Central Asia. The name Mangi 蠻子 means “barbarians of the South” and was used to indicate the peoples living in the southern territories. The two names would identify China in Middle Ages texts until Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552–1610), when, in Beijing in 1582 and 1601, he knew from Muslim merchants that Beijing corresponded to Khanbaliq and China was the Cathay (Antonucci 2024, p. 363).

11 The missionaries of the Middle Ages, as well as Marco Polo, met some Nestorian communities in East Asia. The Nestorians or Siro-Oriental Christians reached China during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–906) and adapted to the local customs and law. On this topic, see (Nicolini-Zani 2006; Pelliot 1996 and Saeki 1915).

12 The Society of Jesus (Societas Iesu, SJ), or the Jesuits, is a male religious order in the Catholic Church established by St. Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) and six companions in 1540.

13 On the Franciscan friars that reached China before Caballero, see (Iaccarino 2022) and the related bibliography.

14 Father Pedro was born in Alfaro, in Navarra, Spain, and joined the friars first in the Observants and then in the Discalced. He arrived in Manila in 1578 and went to China with three confreres the following year. He died in a shipwreck (Van Damme 1978, p. 85). Augustín de Tordesillas was born in 1528 in the Spanish city of Valladolid and joined the Franciscans in 1558. After the first time with the brethren, he went back to Fujian, Canton, and Macao. He died in Manila in 1629 due to lymphatic filariasis, a tropical disease brought by mosquitoes (Van Damme 1978, pp. 181–82). Sebastián de San Francisco was born in Baeza, Andalusia, Spain, and joined the Franciscans in the province of S. Joseph. He went to the Philippines in 1578 and conducted good evangelization work there with Lucarelli. In 1579, he joined the first expedition in China but died in the port of Canton when he and Tordesillas were going back to Manila, while Alfaro and Lucarelli went to Macao (Van Damme 1978, p. 150). Father Giovanni Battista (Giambattista) Lucarelli was born in Pesaro in 1540 and passed away in Naples in 1601. After the Battle of Lepanto, during which, as a member of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual (OFMConv), he was the chaplain of the Christian soldiers from the Duchy of Urbino, he went to Madrid and joined the Discalced Franciscans. He left Spain to reach the mission in Mexico and to the Philippines, from where he arrived in Canton in 1579. He moved to Macao with Pedro Alfaro and they established the first Franciscan convent in Chinese territories after those built in the 14th century (SF 2 1933, pp. 3–11 and Van Damme 1978, p. 45). Lucarelli wrote the memoir *Viaggio dell’Indie* for Pope Clement VIII, which includes an account of his travel to China and India and the request to go back to those missions (SF 2 1933, pp. 6–92).

15 Before Caballero, other Spanish friars reached and stayed in China. They were, for example, a group trying to reach Macao in 1582 including Augustin de Tordesillas, Jerónimo de Burgos (?–1593), Martín Ignacio de Loyola (?–1612), Jerónimo de Aguilar (?–1591), Antonio de Villanueva (?–1582), Diego de San Sebastiano (?–1604), and the lay brother Francisco da Gata (?–1591); another group including Bartolomé Ruiz (?–1600), Diego de San José o de Oropesa (?–1590), Francisco de Montilla (?–1603), Pedro Ortiz Cabezas (?–1596), the lay brothers Diego Jimenez (?–1586), Cristobal Gomez (?–1589), and Francisco Villorino (?–1605), and the novice Manuel de Santiago (?–1625) was shipwrecked in 1583 in Hainan. For details on these friars, see (Capristo 2017; Iaccarino 2022 and Van Damme 1978).

16 The Order of Preachers (Ordo Praedicatorum, OP), or Dominicans, is a male religious order in the Catholic Church established by St. Dominic de Guzman (1170–1221) in 1216.

17 On the Chinese Rites Controversy, in general, see (Criveller 2012; Mungello 1994; von Collani 2019 and Županov and Fabre 2018). On the role of the Franciscans in it, see (Capristo 2013; Criveller 2014 and Menegon 1997).

18 On the choice of clothing worn during the Shandong mission, see (Ye 2024a).

19 On *Moxiang Shengong*, *Bencao Bu*, and, in general, la Piñuela, see (Corsi 2014; Meynard 2020; Rosso 1948 and Ye 2024b).

20 The *piao* was a document granted to foreign missionaries who proved to be proficient in the Chinese language and intended to follow the Ricci missionary method.

21 Antonio Caballero belonged to the Discalced Friars Minor (OFMalc). It was a branch of the Franciscan Order founded in the late 15th century, and Peter of Alcantara (1499–1562) would later contribute to its reform, resulting in the name Alcantarines. The Spanish Discalced had established the Province of St. Gregory the Great in the Philippines. From there, they reached different areas of China, particularly Shandong. The Spanish presence in China was strictly related to the historical events in Spain and Europe, so when Napoleon invaded Spain, the financing of missions was interrupted. As for the attitude toward Chinese Catholics: “[Spanish] Franciscans apparently had not realised the need for a native clergy and never trained indigenous Franciscans. In addition to this, the dependence on Spain might have been a decisive factor in the gradual decline of the Spanish

Franciscan mission in China. Nevertheless, although the Italian Franciscans, financed by Propaganda Fide, laboured under better circumstances and did not have to leave China, the general picture remains one of gradual decline” (Standaert 2001, p. 331). The Italian Franciscans sent by Propaganda Fide belonged to the group of the Strict Observance or Reformed Franciscans (OFMRef), a branch of the Franciscan Order established in the early 16th century by those friars who wanted to follow the rules of the founder St. Francis in a stricter sense. Their involvement in the missions in China was initially due to the intent of the pope to avoid sending French representatives. Some of them went underground during the proscription of Christianity in the 18th century. For further details on these issues, see (Standaert 2001, pp. 328–34 and Tiedemann 2009, pp. 18, 26). It seems that the first observable difference between the Spanish and the Franciscan missionaries during their stay in China is related to their country of origin and also to the different Franciscan experiences they chose to live. Furthermore, their presence covers different decades during which the historical, religious, and cultural context changed even according to the different provinces they were assigned to. The author is grateful to one of the reviewers of the paper for encouraging her to investigate, in more detail, the differences between Spanish and Italian Franciscans, in general, and in the field of cooperation with the Chinese, and considers conducting further research on the topic.

22 A recent study of the proscription of Christianity between the ban on the Chinese Rites and the Opium Wars considers Chinese documents and provides new insights on the issue (see Roux 2023).

23 Friars from Bavaria arrived in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Shanxi in 1725 (Standaert 2001, p. 334). Flemish friars arrived in Hubei in 1872 and Dutch friars moved to Shanxi in 1888–1890. See (Dujardin 1996 and De Kok 2007). The author thanks one of the reviewers for pointing out this issue. The specific cases of each province or vicariate are not reported in detail to provide a wider overview of the issues addressed. On Shanxi, for example, see (Cerasa 1998; Clark 2015; Gandolfi 1987, 1988; Harrison 2013 and Willeke 1991).

24 On the initiatives of the other religious orders such as the MEP or the Holy Family College established in Naples, see (Ticozzi 2017a, pp. 51–72).

25 The Society of the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini, SVD), or Verbites, is a male religious order in the Catholic Church. It was established by St. Arnold Janssen (1837–1909) in 1875.

26 The Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (Pontificium institutum pro missionibus exteris, PIME), former Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions, is a society of apostolic life and its priests do not take vows. It was founded by bishop Angelo Ramazzotti (1800–1861) in 1850 to preach the Gospel in different countries.

27 The Congregation of the Mission (Congregatio Missionis, CM) is also known as Lazarists, from the Priory of Saint Lazare in Paris where it was established, or Vincentians, from the founder St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660). It is a society of apostolic life for men founded in 1625.

28 For details on Lebbe and Cotta, and the French protectorate, see (Leclercq 1958; Mariani 2014; Tiedemann 2010, pp. 571–86 and Young 2013). The complete English text of the apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* (MI 1919) is available at the link https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html, last accessed on 10 February 2025.

29 The First Chinese Plenary Council was held in Shanghai from 15 May to 12 June 1924. It was one of the steps Celso Costantini decided to take to reorganize the Church in China and to enact the contents of the recent papal documents on the indigenization of the local churches. On Costantini and the Shanghai Council, see (Capristo 2010; Gabrieli 2015; Giunipero 2012; Lam 2008; Mariani 2014; *Primum Concilium* 1930; Ticozzi 2008, 2014 and 2017b and Wang 2010). During the occasion of the first centenary of the Shanghai Council, in 2024, conferences, events, and publications were organized. Among these is the conference “La Chiesa in Cina tra località e universalità nel 100° anniversario del Primo Concilio Cinese” (The Church in China between locality and universality in the 100th anniversary of the First Chinese Council) on 20 May 2024 at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan; the conference “100 anni dal Concilium Sinense: tra storia e presente” (100 years after the *Concilium Sinense*: between history and the present) on 21 May 2024 at the Pontificia Università Urbaniana, Vatican City; and the conference “The Centenary of the First Council for China: Primum Concilium Sinense (Shanghai Council): History and Significance, 1924–2024” on 26–29 June 2024 at St. Joseph University, Macao.

30 The six bishops all belonged to Chinese Catholic families and had received Western training as they had all entered seminaries and religious orders in their youth and under foreign superiors. They all knew Latin and other European languages and had been both teachers and educators in seminaries in China and missionaries in rural areas. These were all important factors in their choices (Mariani 2014, pp. 512–13).

31 On the long and complex history of the translation of the Catholic Bible into Chinese, see (De Gruttola 2021 and Standaert 1999).

32 The choice of the biblical text to translate into the Chinese language was a problem for a long time. The few attempts at translation on the Catholic side had always used the Latin *Vulgate* as a source text and was mostly translated into the literary language. This was the language most frequently chosen even by the Protestant missionaries who produced numerous versions of the Chinese Bible, believing the high status of the text always required a high target language. It was only at the turn of the 20th century, and

with the project of a *Union Version*, that a specific committee of translators would commit to the Mandarin translation, which became the reference version in 1919. On these themes, see (Eber et al. 1999; Kaske 2004 and 2008 and Zetzsche 1999).

33 On the Catholic translations blocked or banned by Propaganda Fide, see (De Gruttola 2021). On the questions regarding the possibility of translating the Bible into languages other than Latin, see (Fragrino 1997 and 2005).

34 The institute bears the Chinese name *Sigao* which refers to the Scottish Franciscan John Duns “Scotus” (1265/6–1308), Ruowang Tong Sigao 若望·董思高. He was an important philosopher and theologian for the Order, also known as *Doctor subtilis*.

35 These are the names of the friars who directly worked on the Bible translation, in eleven volumes or in a single volume; thus, only those who joined the Studium Biblicum before 1968 are mentioned. For the other members, see http://www.sbofmhk.org/pub/body/aboutus/a4_member/index.html, last accessed on 10 February 2025.

36 In 2023, the Studium Biblicum was moved from Hong Kong Island to Kowloon, in a building renamed La Verna, after the place in Tuscany where St. Francis received the stigmata in 1224. The friars were able to buy 13 floors (5–17) in which they distributed offices, rooms for permanent exhibitions, the volumes of the library and the archive, and the operative office of the Studium Biblicum. Some volunteers work for the cataloging of texts, documents, and objects preserved at the Studium, with the aim of making a digital catalog available.

37 For details on the Franciscan Province of China and the life of Father Ludovicus Liu, see (Chen 1990 and De Gruttola 2023).

38 In the Franciscan and other Catholic religious orders, a Province is a geographical area including a certain number of convents where the friars live and operate.

39 Xu Yingfa was appointed auxiliary bishop of Taipei in 1990, and Father Xie Huasheng 謝華生 (John Baptist Tse, 1930–2022) was the new Minister Provincial from 1990 to 1992. Details on the province are available at <http://www.ofm.org.hk/index.html>, last accessed on 10 February 2025; see also (Han and Lai 1992). The establishment of the Province Our Lady of China represents the accomplishment of the transition from “Franciscans in China” to “Chinese Franciscans”; nevertheless, research on the biographies and activities of the friars of the Chinese Province in the 20th and 21st centuries is beyond the main aim of this paper. These issues will be addressed in further studies. Some data are available at <https://ofm.org/en/an-invitation-to-renew-fraternal-life-and-mission-in-taiwan.html> and <https://ofm.org/en/the-value-of-family-and-faith-in-hong-kong.html>, last accessed on 10 February 2025. The articles report the visit to Taiwan and Hong Kong paid in March 2024 by Father Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General of the Friars Minor since 13 July 2021.

40 The record for Cheng is “15 maii 1931. In conventu Cha-yuan-kow 茶園為 in Hupei septentrionali a communistis necatus est Tertiarius oblatas fr. Franciscus Ch’eng 承, natus a. 1868, in hoc loco prima victima istius sectae fanaticae” (Van Damme 1978, p. 75).

41 Only Michel Kung (Gong Suyu 龔甦亞, 1905–1979) is recorded, after 1949, leaving the Order and getting married. He joined the friars in 1929 and was ordained a priest in 1933 (Lapolla 1990, p. 26).

References

- Allegra, Gabriele Maria. 2005. *Le memorie di fra’ Gabriele M. Allegra O.F.M., il san Girolamo della Cina*. Edited by Stephan Oppes. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Andreose, Alvise. 2017. Francescani sulle vie dell’Oriente. In *Uomini e Religioni Sulla Via della Seta*. Edited by Elisa Giunipero. Milano: Guerini e Associati, pp. 91–106.
- Andreose, Alvise. 2019. Viaggiatori e testi tra Europa ed Estremo Oriente al tempo di Marco Polo. In *La Strada per il Catai. Contatti tra Oriente e Occidente al Tempo di Marco Polo*. Edited by Alvise Andreose. Milano: Guerini e Associati, pp. 25–45.
- Antonucci, Davor. 2024. Marco Polo nella letteratura missionaria dei secoli XVI–XIX. In *Marco Polo. Storia e mito di un Viaggio e di un Libro*. Edited by Eugenio Burgio and Samuela Simion. Roma: Carocci, pp. 355–71.
- Bouwmeester, Leon, and Thomas Coomans. 2024. The Catholic Territorialization of Taiwan: Vatican Global Strategy and Franciscan Local Parishes, 1949–1960s. In *Missionary Spaces Imagining, Building, Contesting Christianities in Africa and China, 1830s–1960s*. Edited by Thomas Coomans. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 87–104. [CrossRef]
- Burgio, Eugenio, and Samuela Simion, eds. 2024. *Marco Polo. Storia e Mito di un Viaggio e di un Libro*. Roma: Carocci.
- Busquets Alemany, Anna. 2023. Santa María Caballero y la construcción del proyecto misional franciscano en China. *Hispania* 83: e032. [CrossRef]
- Camps, Arnulf, and Pat McCloskey. 1995. *The Friars Minor in China (1294–1955): Especially the Years 1925–55, Based on the Research of Friars Bernward Willeke and Domenico Gandolfi, OFM*. New York: Franciscan Institute St. Bonaventure University.
- Capristo, Vincenza Cinzia. 2010. La figura di Celso Costantini nel processo di evangelizzazione cinese. In *Oriente, Occidente e dintorni...: Scritti in onore di Adolfo Tamburello*. Edited by Franco Mazzei and Patrizia Carioti. Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli L’Orientale, pp. 279–94.
- Capristo, Vincenza Cinzia. 2013. I missionari francescani in Cina e la “Quaestio de Ritibus Sinensibus”. In *Cina e Occidente. Incontri e Incroci di Pensiero, Religione e Scienze*. Edited by Isabella Doniselli Eramo and Margherita Sportelli. Milano: Centro di cultura Italia-Asia “Guglielmo Scalise”, pp. 31–48.

- Capristo, Vincenza Cinzia. 2017. Il *padroado* portoghese e i suoi rapporti con gli Ordini Mendicanti in Cina nei secoli XVI e XVII. In *L'orientalistica a Napoli: Atti dei Convegni Internazionali: Il Portogallo in Cina e Giappone nei Secoli 16.-17. (Napoli, 12–13 Maggio 2014); Riflessi Europei della Presenza Portoghese in India e nell'Asia Orientale (Napoli, 4 Maggio 2015)*. Edited by Rosaria De Marco. Napoli: Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa, pp. 87–113.
- Cerasa, Nicola. 1998. *Breve Storia della Missione di Taiyuan Shansi Cina*. Roma: Provincia Romana dei Frati Minori.
- Chen, Weitong 陳維統. 1990. *Huainian Liu Xutang Shenfu 懷念劉緒堂神父*. Hong Kong: Sigao Shengjing Xuehui.
- Chen, Yanrong. 2021. Telling Biblical Stories in Chinese: A Case Study of Two Gospel Texts Initiated by Jean Basset. In *Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) and China from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. Edited by Ji Li. Leiden: Brill, pp. 39–63. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chu, Cindy Yik-Yi, ed. 2014. *Catholicism in China, 1900–Present. The Development of the Chinese Church*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chu, Cindy Yik-Yi, ed. 2017. *Foreign Missionaries and the Indigenization of the Chinese Catholic Church*. Hong Kong: Centre for Catholic Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Clark, Anthony. 2011. *China's Saints: Catholic Martyrdom During the Qing (1644–1911)*. Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Clark, Anthony. 2015. *Heaven in Conflict: Franciscans and the Boxer Uprising in Shanxi*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Corsi, Elisabetta. 2014. L'antidotario cinese di Pedro de la Piñuela OFM (1650–1704): Testo e contesto. *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 107: 117–48.
- Criveller, Gianni. 2012. *La Controversia dei riti Cinesi: Storia di una Lunga Incomprensione*. Milano: Museo Popoli e Culture.
- Criveller, Gianni. 2014. Il ruolo dei francescani nella controversia dei Riti cinesi. *Rivista di Teologia dell'Evangelizzazione* 18: 351–76.
- Criveller, Gianni, ed. 2024. *Un Francescano in Cina. Nuovi Studi su Carlo da Castorano a 350 anni Dalla Nascita*. Milano: Luni.
- Cui, Weixiao 崔维孝. 2006. *Mingqingzhiji Xibanya Fangjihui Zaihua Chuanjiao Yanjiu (1579–1732) 明清之际西班牙方济会在华传教研究 (1579–1732) (A Study of the Spanish Franciscan Missions in China During the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1579–1732))*. Beijing 北京: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局.
- D'Arelli, Francesco, and Michele Fatica. 1999. *La Missione Cattolica in Cina tra i Secoli 18–19: Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi*. Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale.
- De Gruttola, Raissa. 2021. Translation of the Bible, Other Religious Literature, and Indigenous Religious Texts: China. In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Catholic Church in East Asia*. Edited by Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Beatrice Leung. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–23. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- De Gruttola, Raissa. 2023. *I Francescani Cinesi e la Traduzione della Bibbia. Con Traduzione di Huainian Liu Xutang Shenfu e Testo Cinese a Fronte*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- De Kok, Jan A. 2007. *Acht eeuwen minderbroeders in Nederland. Een oriëntatie*. Hilversum: Verloren.
- Doniselli Eramo, Isabella, ed. 2017. *Carlo da Castorano. Un sinologo francescano tra Roma e Pechino*. Milano: Luni.
- Dujardin, Carine. 1996. *Missionering En Moderniteit: De Belgische Minderbroeders in China 1872–1940*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers.
- Eber, Irene, Sze-Kar Wan, and Knut Walf, eds. 1999. *Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact*. Sankt Augustin-Nettetal: Institute Monumenta Serica.
- Fragnito, Gigliola. 1997. *La Bibbia al rogo: La censura Ecclesiastica e i Volgarizzamenti della Scrittura 1471–1605*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Fragnito, Gigliola. 2005. *Proibito Capire: La Chiesa e il Volgare Nella Prima età Moderna*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Gabrieli, Christian. 2015. *Un Protagonista tra gli Eredi del Celeste Impero: Celso Costantini Delegato Apostolico in Cina (1922–1933)*. Bologna: EDB.
- Gandolfi, Domenico. 1987. Cenni di storia del vicariato apostolico di Taiyuanfu Shansi, Cina 1930–1953. *Studi Francescani* 84: 299–360.
- Gandolfi, Domenico. 1988. Cenni storici sulla Missione di Yutze (Shansi) 1930–1953: 1930–1953. *Studi Francescani* 85: 121–72.
- Giunipero, Elisa. 2012. *Il Contributo di Mons. Celso Costantini alle Relazioni tra Governo Cinese e Santa Sede: (1922–1933)*. Milano: Educatt.
- Han, Cheng-Liang 韓承良, and Li-Hua Lai 賴利華. 1992. *Zhonghua Fangjihui Sheng Jianzhi 中華方濟會省簡史 (A Brief History of Our Lady Queen of China OFM Province)*. Hong Kong: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum.
- Harrison, Henrietta. 2010. British Imperialism, French Charity and the Changing Behaviour of Italian Franciscan Missionaries in Shanxi Province, 1800–1850. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15: 519–35. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Harrison, Henrietta. 2013. *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hong, Xiaochun. 2021. The Early Indigenized Strategies Applied to the Chinese Bible Translation by Catholic Missionaries Jean Basset and Louis A. de Poirot. In *Yearbook of Chinese Theology (2021)*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 159–78. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hsieh, Chia-Wen 謝嘉文. 2021. Forgotten Assistants behind the Scenes: Assessment and Case Studies of Xianggong in the Late Ming, Early Qing Catholic Church. *Monumenta Serica* 69: 49–95. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Iaccarino, Ubaldo. 2022. Early Spanish Intruders in China: The 1579 Mission of Pedro de Alfaro, O.F.M., Reconsidered. *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9: 245–62. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Kaske, Elisabeth. 2004. Mandarin, Vernacular and National Language—China's Emerging Concept of a National Language in the Early Twentieth Century. In *Mapping Meanings. The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China*. Edited by Michael Lackner and Natascha Vittinghoff. Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 265–304.
- Kaske, Elisabeth. 2008. *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895–1919*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ku, Wei-ying, Staf Vloeberghs, Yan Rachel Lu, and Patrick Taveirne. 2008. *History of Catechesis in China*. Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute.
- Lam, Anthony. 2008. Archbishop Costantini and the First Plenary Council of Shanghai (1924). *Tripod* 28: 148.
- Lapolla, Tobia. 1990. Necrologium Fratrum Minorum in Sinis (Supplementum). Taipei. Available online: https://julac-hkbu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/852JULAC_HKBU/12512449070003409 (accessed on 28 January 2025).
- Leclercq, Jacques. 1958. *Thunder in the Distance: The Life of Père Lebbe*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
- Mariani, Paul P. 2014. The First Six Chinese Bishops of Modern Times: A Study in Church Indigenization. *The Catholic Historical Review* 100: 486–513. [CrossRef]
- Maximum Illud. 1919. English Version of the Apostolic Letter. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html (accessed on 20 September 2024).
- Menegon, Eugenio. 1997. Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans in Fujian: The Anti-Christian Incidents of 1637–1638. In *Scholar from the West: Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) and the Dialogue Between Christianity and China*. Edited by Roman Malek and Tiziana Lippiello. Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, pp. 219–62.
- Menegon, Eugenio. 2003. Christian Loyalists, Spanish Friars, and Holy Virgins in Fujian during the Ming-Qing Transition. *Monumenta Serica* 51: 335–65. [CrossRef]
- Meynard, Thierry. 2020. Franciscan Spiritual Literature in Early Qing China: Pedro de la Piñuela's *Moxiang shengong* (1694) and its Western sources. *Franciscan Studies* 78: 251–73. [CrossRef]
- Miotk, Andrzej. 2018. The historical significance of Thomas Tien Keng-hsin SVD—The first Cardinal of China. *Nurt SVD* 1: 167–87.
- Mungello, David E., ed. 1994. *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*. Nettetal: Steyler.
- Mungello, David E. 2001. *The Spirit and the Flesh in Shandong, 1650–1785*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Nicolini-Zani, Matteo. 2006. *La via Radiosa per l'Oriente. I Testi e la Storia del Primo Incontro del Cristianesimo con il Mondo Culturale e Religioso Cinese (Secoli VII-IX)*. Magnano: Qiqajon Edizioni.
- Pelliot, Paul. 1996. *L'inscription Nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou*. Kyoto and Paris: Scuola di Studi sull'Asia Orientale, Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises.
- Primum Concilium Sinense, anno 1924. Acta—Decreta et Normae—Vota etc.*. 1930. Shanghai: Zikawei Typographia Missionis Catholicae T'ou-Sé-Wè.
- Raini, Emanuele. 2019. Catechisti e capi laici delle comunità nella storia della Chiesa in Cina. Prospetto storico e documenti. *Urbaniana University Journal* 2: 97–156.
- Ricci, Giovanni. 1929. *Hierarchia Franciscana in Sinis; seu Vitae Episcoporum Omnium Aliorumque Ecclesiae Praesulum ex Ordine Fratrum Minorum in Sinensibus Missionibus ab anno 1307 ad 1928, cum Appendice et Catalogo 380 Missionariorum que Defuncti sunt ab anno 1579 ad dies Nostros*. Wuchang: Typographia Franciscana.
- Ripa, Matteo. 1983. *Storia della Fondazione della Congregazione e del Collegio de' Cinesi*. Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale.
- Rosso, Antonio Sisto. 1948. Pedro de la Piñuela, O.F.M., Mexican Missionary to China and Author. *Franciscan Studies* 8: 250–74.
- Roux, Pierre-Emmanuel. 2023. *Au Tribunal du Repentir: La Proscription du Catholicisme en Chine (1724–1860)*. Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Saeki, Peter Yoshiro. 1915. *The Nestorian Monument in China*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- San Roman, Miguel Angel. 2001. Luo Wenzao: A Unique Role in the Seventeenth Century Church of China. In *Missionary Approaches and Linguistics in Mainland China and Taiwan*. Edited by Wei-ying Ku. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 133–52.
- Sella, Pacifico. 2008. *Il Vangelo in Oriente: Giovanni da Montecorvino Frate Minore e Primo Vescovo in Terra di Cina (1307–1328)*. S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi: Porziuncola.
- SF 1. 1929. *Sinica Franciscana 1: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi 13. et 14.* Edited by Anastasius van den Wyngaert. Firenze: Collegium S. Bonaventurae.
- SF 2. 1933. *Sinica Franciscana 2: Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Saeculi 16. et 17.* Edited by Anastasius van den Wyngaert. Firenze: Collegium S. Bonaventurae.
- SF 3. 1936. *Sinica Franciscana 3: Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Saeculi 17.* Edited by Anastasius van den Wyngaert and Fabiano Bollen. Firenze: Collegium S. Bonaventurae.
- SF 4. 1942. *Sinica Franciscana 4. Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Saeculi 17. et 18.* Edited by Anastasius van den Wyngaert. Firenze: Collegium S. Bonaventurae.
- SF 5. 1954. *Sinica Franciscana 5: Relationes et Epistolas illmi Bernardini della Chiesa O.F.M.* Edited by Anastasius van den Wyngaert and Georgius Mensaert. Roma: Collegium S. Antonii.
- SF 6. 1961. *Sinica Franciscana 6: Relationes et Epistolas Primorum Fratrum Minorum Italarum in Sinis (Saeculis 17. et 18.)*. Edited by Georgius Mensaert, Fortunato Margiotti and Sisto Rosso. 2 vols. Roma.

- SF 7. 1965. *Sinica Franciscana 7: Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Hispanorum in Sinis qui a. 1672–81 Missionem Ingressi sunt*. Edited by Georgius Mensaert, Fortunato Margiotti and Sisto Rosso. 2 vols. Roma.
- SF 8. 1975. *Sinica Franciscana 8: Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Hispanorum in Sinis qui a. 1684–92 Missionem Ingressi sunt*. Edited by Fortunato Margiotti. 2 vols. Roma.
- SF 9. 1995. *Sinica Franciscana 9: Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Hispanorum in Sinis qui Annis 1697–98 Missionem Ingressi sunt*. Edited by Fortunatus Margiotti, Gaspar Han and Antolin Abad. 2 vols. Madrid: Cisneros.
- SF 10. 1997. *Sinica Franciscana 10: Relationes et Epistolas Fratrum Minorum Hispanorum in Sinis qui 1696–98 Missionem Ingressi sunt*. Edited by Antonius S. Rosso, Gaspar Han and Antolin Abad. 2 vols. Madrid: Cisneros.
- SF 11. 2006. *Sinica Franciscana 11: Misioneros franciscanos españoles en China, siglos 18.-19. (1722–1813)*. Edited by Antolín Abad Pérez, Marianus Acebal, Petrus Gil Muñoz and Raphael Sanz. 2 vols. Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae.
- Song, Gang 宋刚. 2017. Xiao renwu de da lishi: Qingchu Sichuan Tianzhu jiaotu Xu Ruohan ge'an yanjiu de qishi 小人物的大历史:清初四川天主教徒徐若翰个案研究的启示 (Small Figure, big history: A study on Johan Su, an early Qing Sichuan Catholic Convert). *Guoji Hanxue* 国际汉学 (*International Sinology*) 10: 30–57.
- Song, Gang. 2021. The Basset-Su Chinese New Testament. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*. Edited by Khiok-Khng Yeo. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 79–94. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Standaert, Nicolas. 1999. The Bible in Early Seventeenth-Century China. In *Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact*. Edited by Irene Eber, Sze-Kar Wan and Knut Walf. Sankt Augustin-Nettetal: Institute Monumenta Serica, pp. 31–54.
- Standaert, Nicolas, ed. 2001. *Handbook of Christianity in China. Vol. 1, 635–1800*. Leiden: Brill. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ticozzi, Sergio. 2008. Celso Costantini's Contribution to the Localization and Inculturation of the Church in China. *Tripod* 28: 48.
- Ticozzi, Sergio. 2014. Ending Civil Patronage: The Beginning of a New Era for the Catholic Missions in China, 1926. In *Catholicism in China, 1900–Present. The Development of the Chinese Church*. Edited by Cindy Yik-yi Chu. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 87–104. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ticozzi, Sergio. 2017a. *History of the Formation of the Native Catholic Clergy in China*. Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Centre.
- Ticozzi, Sergio. 2017b. The Catholic Church in China: The Long Path to the Normal Structure (1946). In *Foreign Missionaries and the Indigenization of the Chinese Catholic Church*. Edited by Cindy Yik-yi Chu. Hong Kong: Centre for Catholic Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, pp. 9–34.
- Tiedemann, Gary R. 2009. *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Tiedemann, Gary R., ed. 2010. *Handbook of Christianity in China. Vol. 2, 1800–Present*. Leiden: Brill. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Valtrová, Jana. 2010. Beyond the Horizons of Legends. Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia. *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 57: 154–85. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Valtrová, Jana. 2023. Struggling with Fear? Emotions in Medieval Travel Accounts about the Mongols. In *To Jerusalem and Beyond: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Latin Travel Literature, c. 1200–1500*. Edited by Martin Bauer, Philip Booth and Susanna Fischer. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, pp. 93–116. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Van Damme, Daniel. 1978. *Necrologium Fratrum Minorum in Sinis*. Hong Kong.
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich, ed. 2024. *Marco Polo Research. Past, Present, Future*. Tübingen: Tübingen Library Publishing.
- von Collani, Claudia. 2019. The Jesuits Rites Controversy. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*. Edited by Ines Županov. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 891–917. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Wang, P. Jiyou. 2010. *Le Premier Concile Plénier Chinois (1924). Droit Canonique Missionnaire Forgé en Chine*. Paris: Cerf.
- Willeke, Bernward H. 1948. *Imperial Government and Catholic Missions in China During the Years 1784–1785*. New York: The Franciscan Institute.
- Willeke, Bernward H. 1991. The Report of the Apostolic Visitation of D. Emmanuele Conforti on the Franciscan Missions in Shansi, Shensi and Kansu (1798). *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 84: 197–271.
- Ye, Junyang. 2024a. Between Spanish Franciscans and Chinese Literati in Late Ming and Early Qing: Modes of Interactions and Cultural Exchanges. *Religions* 15: 261. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ye, Junyang. 2024b. Pedro de la Piñuela's Bencao Bu and the Cultural Exchanges between China and the West. *Religions* 15: 343. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ye, Junyang, and Manel Ollé. 2021. The Economy of the Spanish Franciscan Mission in China during the 17th Century: The Funding Sources, Expenditures, Loans and Deficits. *Hispania Sacra* LXXIII: 469–81. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Young, Ernest P. 2013. *Ecclesiastical Colony: China's Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate*. New York: Oxford University Press. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Zavarella, Salvatore. 2000. *Missione e Martirio: Missionari Francescani Martiri in Cina*. Roma: Postulazione Generale dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori.
- Zetsche, Jost Oliver. 1999. *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*. Sankt Augustin-Nettetal: Institute Monumenta Serica. [[CrossRef](#)]

Zheng, Yangwen, ed. 2017. *Sinicizing Christianity*. Leiden: Brill. [[CrossRef](#)]

Županov, Ines G., and Pierre Antoine Fabre, eds. 2018. *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World*. Leiden: Brill. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.